

## *Cine-Excess 13* **Delegate Abstracts**

**Alice Haylett Bryan**

**From *Inside* to *The Hills Have Eyes*: French Horror Directors at Home and Abroad**

In an interview for the website *The Digital Fix*, French director Pascal Laugier notes the lack of interest in financing horror films in France. He states that after the international success of his second film *Martyrs* (2008) he received only one proposition from a French producer, but between 40 and 50 propositions from America: “Making a genre film in France is a kind of emotional roller-coaster” explains Laugier, “sometimes you feel very happy to be underground and trying to do something new and sometimes you feel totally desperate because you feel like you are fighting against everyone else.” This is a situation that many French horror directors have echoed. For all the talk of the new wave of French horror cinema, it is still very hard to find funding for genre films in the country, with the majority of French directors cutting their teeth using independent production companies in France, before moving over to helm mainstream, bigger-budget horrors and thrillers in the USA. This paper will provide a critical overview of the renewal in French horror cinema since the turn of the millennium with regard to this situation, tracing the national and international productions and co-productions of the cycle’s directors as they navigate the divide between indie horror and the mainstream. Drawing on a number of case studies including the success of Alexandre Aja, the infamous *Hellraiser* remake that never came into fruition, and the recent example of Coralie Fargeat’s *Revenge*, it will explore the narrative, stylistic and aesthetic choices of these directors across their French and American productions. As such, in some cases it will engage with the director’s reasons for accepting or refusing projects, and their decision to either retain the freedom of the independent market or enter into the world of the big-budget horror franchise.

**Brooke Engerman**

**“Is it Future. . .or is it Past?”: Deconstructing Nostalgia in *Twin Peaks: The Return***

Within American popular culture, nostalgia is ever pervasive and rather impossible to avoid as callbacks to the 1990’s are reaching an unprecedented high. The media landscape seems to reward and indulge these yearnings, as evident in the sheer number of recent reboots of 90’s television shows. This saturation suggests that as a society, we have a proclivity for nostalgic longings. However, through the examination of *Twin Peaks, The Return* (2017), I seek to explore an alternative presentation of a reboot’s relationship with itself and its audience through its marked rejection of the toxicity of societal nostalgia. Unlike its fellow television reboots, *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) avoids the common narrative structure of placating audiences with the narcotic-like indulgence of nostalgia. Rather, *The Return* subverts and dismantles the original *Twin Peaks* (1990), very literally eradicating the original elements from its 1990’s iteration. This striking deviation, when analyzed through a deconstructive lens, suggests that creators Lynch and Frost have deliberately avoided the *Twin Peaks* of old—and the popular reboot structure—in order to caution viewers against the pitfalls of a society concentrated on nostalgic gratification. Within my analysis, I trace the etymology of nostalgia and its role within American culture—and how societal nostalgia is often weaponized as a tool for political demagoguery—as well as specific scenes within *The Return* which seemingly illustrate the creators’ warnings against mass nostalgia. Within these instances, *The Return* challenges viewers to confront their own desires for nostalgia—and in many cases, their disappointment—when it is ultimately not delivered. Through the intricate manipulation of language and imagery, Lynch and Frost plant the seed for their audience’s nostalgic desires to only later convict those who were guilty of wishing to partake in nostalgia without considering the societal implications of this regression. Although nostalgic

thoughts on a personal scale may not be considered harmful, I believe that Lynch and Frost's awareness of the broad cultural impact of their show's revival—coupled with their awareness of political manipulations of societal nostalgia—resulted in their decision to utilize their artistic platform to caution their wide viewership of the potential dangers of nostalgic regression. Through the systematic deconstruction of the uncanny, false nostalgic signals, the implications of societal nostalgia, the three Coopers, and Lynch's historic distrust of language, I believe *The Return* establishes itself as an inherently deconstructive text which encourages its viewers to forfeit their own desires in order to promote the postmodern understanding of social progress.

**Eddie Falvey – see Jonathan Wroot's panel abstract**

**Alex Fitch**

### **The Subterranean Other**

Subterranean humanoids who hold up a dark mirror to humanity have been a presence in horror and Science Fiction since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, since the appearance of the Morlocks in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), filmed twice in 1960 and 2002. With humanity separated into a more aesthetic feeble race above, and more brutal below, these roles were later reversed in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970) and *Day of the Dead* (1985) with humans hiding underground from humanoid apes / zombies respectively, on the surface. Over the last quarter century, such creatures have appeared in horror films including *C.H.U.D. [Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers]* (1984) and its sequel (1989), plus *The Descent* (2004) and its sequel (2009). Documentaries such as *Dark Days* (2000) show that there are now entire communities living underground, who have a homeless and marginalised status, at the fringes of society. On television, the TV movie *The Night Strangler* (1973) found an immortal killer in a subterranean city beneath Seattle, and the second season of *Les Revenants* (2015) reveal a town's resurrected dead to be actually shapeshifting humanoids from beneath the surface of the Earth. These titles vary in terms of how political their message might be. Jordan Peele's latest film *Us* (2019) continues his look at African American roles in society in the modern day, following *Get Out* (2017), and also invokes different time periods to show the safety and othering of black people in different decades. As such, with a finale critiquing the legacy of 1986's Hands Across America initiative (designed to help and empower members of society left behind), *Us* reimagines the subterranean humanoid as an indistinguishable double from ourselves, a creature that exists in a parallel world to our own, with no freedom or education. This paper will examine the varying fortunes of the 'Chud', and how each iteration in popular entertainment comments on the time and place of their production.

**Lesley Gabriel**

**“I don't think it's really fair that God gets to choose what we look like on the outside, do you?” An exploration of excess, body modification and the monstrous feminine in *American Mary* (2012, Jen and Sylvia Soska)**

The characters in *American Mary* (2012, Jen and Sylvia Soska) occupy a morally ambiguous hinterland, and through the course of the film make decisions that further distance them from mainstream society. In modifying their bodies (or in Mary's case being responsible for the modification of bodies) these women have transgressed boundaries, straying beyond the boundary of mainstream society into the realm of the abject. Body modifications transport the body from its “clean and proper” (Kristeva, 1982) state and into new erotic possibilities, some of which may seem unpalatable to others (Attwood, 2015). This paper will explore the concept of the monstrous feminine in *American Mary* via the writing of Barbara Creed (1993)

and Julia Kristeva (1982). The three main female characters Mary Mason, Ruby Realgirl and Beatress offer fascinating insights into different facets of the figure of the monstrous female; not just the literal castration performed by Mary, but the acts of resistance through extreme body modification embodied by Ruby and Beatress. As Sweetman (1999) observes, the modified person can experience a greater sense of control of their body by opting to change their outward appearance through modifications such as piercings and tattoos. This is particularly pertinent to *American Mary*, the ending of which suggests society will restore social order through punishment of the modified (female) body.

### **Amy Harris**

#### **‘Grave Matters’: The invisible women behind contemporary British horror film**

This exciting and original paper highlights women’s previously undervalued work in contemporary British horror cinema through an exploration of their creative responses to an industry which privileges, and is dominated by, men. Taking an industrial and critical approach to women-led horror, this paper encourages reflection upon the presumed masculine landscape of UK horror. By unearthing the long and diverse history of contemporary Brit-horror that predates better-known films, such as *Prevenge* (2017), this paper starts by presenting a filmography between 2000 – 2018. The filmography shows that there are many unique experiences of woman directors which offer distinct responses to the stark diversity problems in the British film industry. These films have, until now, been overlooked in academia. Utilising striking statistics on funding and distribution opportunities made available to women in the UK (Cobb, 2015) and the broader industrial context of the British film industry after the “fall” of Hammer horror (Walker, 2015); alongside a close-textual analysis of *Egomaniac* (Kate Shenton’s directorial debut, 2016), this paper will also examine how gendered experiences of filmmaking can offer a valuable commentary of the misogyny of the industry. This paper contends that *Egomaniac*’s reflexive plot lends itself to a broader analysis of women’s precarity within Britain’s film industry. In line with Sara Ahmed’s work (2010), this paper argues that Shenton’s feminist rage, played out through a series of horrifying and humorous events, highlights the collective unhappiness felt by women working within an industry that continues to ignore women’s valuable contributions to the horror genre.

### **Janne Heine**

#### **Excessive Colors in Iranian Cinema: A *Dragon Arrives* by Mani Haghighi**

Playing with reality and fiction was a common mode in the art of Abbas Kiarostami, *the* master of Iranian cinema, whose cinematographic poetic influences are still present in younger Iranian films of the post-Kiarostami age. Naturally, recent Iranian films are not simply copying Kiarostami but modifying his aesthetic and narrative strategies which have been compared to Italian neo-realism. A prominent and modified aesthetic style in recent Iranian cinema turns out to be magic realism which forces the audience to look beyond realistic details and accept dual ontological structures of the film, in which the natural and the supernatural or the explainable and miraculous co-exist. (Arva 2008, p. 60) While Kiarostami’s cinema is mainly described as silent, slow and realized in naturalist colors, Mani Haghighi, one of the most popular contemporary Iranian directors, realizes rather loud, fast and extremely colorful films. Haghighi’s *A Dragon Arrives* (2016) which competed at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2016 is one of the outstanding examples presenting a new and radically unconventional Iranian film aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> Haghighi’s film refers to genre modes known from horror and thriller pretending to tell a detective story based in a spectacular desert landscape. The film is extremely colorful, loaded with sounds and an unsettling cinematic excess causing an intensive film experience. Especially the loud color

composition (dominated by red, orange and yellow) in Haghghi's work is calling the audience's attention due to shifting focuses and perspectives. Fredric Jameson distinguishes between color and glossiness pointing out the ability of color to separate objects from each other. (Jameson 1986, p. 312.) I would like to expand this theory claiming color's ability to separate moving and still objects from each other exhibiting a hybridity of the colorful film image which refers in the example of Haghghi's film as well to its hybridity of film genres as to the hybridity of reality and fiction. The excessive color composition - or according to Christine Brinckmann the orchestration of color (Brinckmann 2014, p. 33) - supports hesitancy, disorientation and paranoia by creating a new and exciting world shifting constantly between the unknown and the familiar. The aesthetic experience of excessive colors privileges experience over knowledge during the film's reception and is a central element for the uncanniness of the magical realist image. (Arva 2008, p. 80)

### **Adam Herron**

#### **Times Square Strip: Queer Reclamations of Space in 1970s Hardcore Features**

Writing on the relationship between sexploitation cinema and the cultural geography of New York City in the 1960s, Elena Gorfinkel proposes that while the frequent use of location shooting in this mode of production was often based on economic necessity rather than artistic choice, 'footage of specific historical locations has a force both synchronically and diachronically, with a peculiar capacity to stand on its own and sometimes to exceed the frames of the films' thin narrative directives' (2011: 57). Connections between porn production and urban landscapes would continue into the 1970s, surviving the transition from implicit scenes of sexual activity in softcore to explicit scenes of excess in hardcore pornography features. In addition to documenting historical locations, independent filmmakers such as Jack Deveau, Jerry Douglas and Pat Rocco would also capture the zeitgeist of sexual liberation in the seventies, shooting in genuine cruising spots such as the porn theatres of Times Square. This paper will utilise two case study films—*The Back Row* (Jerry Douglas, 1973) and *A Night at the Adonis* (Jack Deveau, 1978)—to trace the representation of historical sites in New York City within the fictional narratives of hardcore pornography. Whereas other scholarly work has previously considered Times Square as a sexual space (Senelick 1991) and spectatorship in the context of all-male adult theatres (Capino 2005), my own intervention seeks to emphasise the importance of cinema histories in mapping the cultural geography of urban landscapes, with the porn theatre constituting a site of queer reclamation in the contexts of sexual liberation and gentrification.

**Joe Hickinbottom –see Jonathan Wroot's panel abstract**

### **Lars Holmquist**

#### **Sex, Saunas and Suicides: Seeing Sweden through the Lens of Exploitation Film**

For international cinemagoers, the word "Sweden" was once synonymous with risqué, taboo-breaking movies, and in the 1970s, terms such as "Swedish nymphets" and "Swedish housewives" were used as a draw on cinema posters for films starring actresses like Christina Lindberg and Marie Liljedahl. But the "Swedish" stamp went way beyond actual Swedish exports. Any blonde actress, such as France's Brigitte Lahaie, could be advertised as "Swedish" in continental productions. Many films were given Swedish-tinged names, for instance Ray Austin's *Virgin Witch* which was retitled *The Black Mass of the Swedish Virgins* in Italy. There was even an outfit in Japan producing "Swedish Porno" (*Sueden Poruno*) solely for the domestic market, using flown-in actresses and brief location shoots in Stockholm. But where did this start? The roots can be traced to two key films. First, Ingmar Bergman's *The Summer with Monika* (1953), which was bought for the US market by

exploitation king Kroger Babb and re-titled *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl*. Babb devised a head-spinningly hyperbolic advertising campaign, including slogans such “No man could ever hope to satisfy her lust for love” and “The Devil Controls her by Radar”. Second, Luigi Scattini’s *Sweden, Heaven and Hell* (1968) which became a massive international hit, with its depictions of skinny-dipping blondes, saunas, swinger parties, drug-addicts, and the world’s (supposedly) highest suicide rate. These two films, along with other exports such as *I am Curious Yellow*, served to create and solidify the image of Sweden for the next decades. This highly visual talk will showcase items from the author’s personal collection of worldwide Sweden-themed exploitation film posters from countries including USA, UK, Italy, France, Germany, Australia, Japan, and more. Together this will create a unique insight into how a country can be viewed through the lens of cinema advertisement, creating an impression that is surprising for, and often even at odds with, that of the country’s own inhabitants.

### **Neil Jackson**

#### **Before the Cults: Exploitation Cinema Goes To Hull and Back...**

The examination and evaluation of viewer demographics, responses, and exhibition sites has figured prominently in much of the expanding scholarship on cinema audiences. This has provided much in the way of valuable insight regarding the multifarious experience of collected *and* collective viewers. Such approaches have informed our knowledge of the processes and choices undergone by audience members, as well as their relationship to individual films, franchises, genres, and stars. Furthermore, this has provided multi-layered insights into the idiosyncratic habits and first-hand experiences of individuals, enhancing our understanding of everything from audience interaction with global screen media phenomena to localised media controversies. This paper addresses an area that has not yet figured prominently in a particular sector of audience studies: the original theatrical promotion of global exploitation films in the UK. This centres on a period before they became embroiled in controversies over access on home video formats, and before they were enshrined as arcane or paracinematic ‘cult’ audience objects. In particular, it will centralise the use of archival research which highlights local newspaper advertising/listings in a specific UK city, and how these films were disseminated, branded and promoted long before the concept and study of cult audiences gained any significant grounding as an academic discipline. It also considers the identity of a particular local cinema (The Regent, on Anlaby Road in Hull, UK) as expressed through these listings, and how it informs our perception both of the films which were projected within its walls, and the audience that gathered there to watch them. Such an approach demonstrates that local newspaper listings evinced an eclectic range of cinema-going options to the viewer-consumer, from which a clearer idea emerges of the identity, status and value ‘cultified’ films originally had through their very visible place within the promotional space of the local press. Films now fenced off as belonging to specialized or minority tastes circulate on these pages using promotional discourses that might today seem beyond the ideological pale. However, they also provide a fascinating snap-shot of how they were part of a common promotional lexicon in a previous cinematic epoch, in which the cinematically despised achieved a form of equivalence with its respectable alternatives.

### **Lorna Jowett**

#### **Katharine Isabelle and Canadian Horror’s Timeless Bitches**

Katharine Isabelle is variously described as a ‘modern day scream queen’ (Gagne 2015) a ‘low budget muse’ (Castillo 2015) and ‘something of a cult icon’ (Hatfull 2015), and is best known for her iconic character Ginger Fitzgerald (*Ginger Snaps* 2001) who features in a 2017 list of ‘19 Terrifying Female Horror Movie Villains...’ (*Bustle* 2017) and *Vulture*’s ‘Best Female-led Horror Films of All Time’ (2017)—though Mary Mason (*American Mary*) should

be a close second. These characters are conjured for audiences when Isabelle features, as she has done in the last 10 years, in some new horror production exploiting the intertextuality of casting common to horror and fantasy genres, from *Hannibal* (2013-2015) to supernatural teen drama *The Order* (2019-). Isabelle prefers independent and/or Canadian productions, something that may have affected her visibility: 'She's my favourite actress,' director and collaborator Sylvia Soska comments, 'but because she's Canadian, I feel like people forget she exists' (in Reed 2013). Horror is by no means the staple of Isabelle's career and she emphasises that she is a working actor, taking a variety of roles. Yet she also observes that 'horror movies have provided me with the best, most interesting characters—really cool, smart, interesting, darkly funny women, who I haven't found in a lot of other places' (in Fordy 2015). Gender stereotypes in horror and the inequalities of the film and TV industries are key contexts framing this analysis of Isabelle's career. One of Ginger's most frequently cited lines is, 'A girl can only be a slut, a bitch, a tease, or the virgin next door' (*Gingersnaps*). This paper argues that Isabelle's career is indicative of a (slowly) changing climate for female actors in horror film and television, particularly in terms of opportunities to work with female writers and directors to develop multi-dimensional female characters who challenge stereotypes by being, in Isabelle's own words, 'timeless bitches' and 'badass motherfuckers' (in Gagne 2015).

### **Tanja Jurkovic**

#### **Life and Death of a Porno Gang (Đorđević, Serbia, 2009): Understanding violent communication in the Balkans through the medium of film**

In recent years, a wave of new extremism in film appeared in the Balkans, most notably Serbia, changing the way the rest of the world sees this territory. *Life and Death of a Porno Gang* (Život i smrt porno bande, Đorđević, 2009), is one of the prime examples of this change. Less known, but equally extreme as *A Serbian Film* (which influenced the idea of it in the first place), *Life and Death of a Porno Gang* can be said to be more Serbian than *A Serbian Film* claims to be, in terms of the message these two films are trying to send about the poor state of Serbia and the suffering of its people. The story follows a young filmmaker Marko, who wants to make films that matter, but his aspirations turned out to be unrealistic in the current political climate in the state, so he turns to porn industry. Although it brings him money, the rules of the porn industry restrict his creativity and vision, so he sets out on a tour around Serbia's rural parts, with a team of local porn stars, to create the first pornographic theatre in Serbia. After a traumatic event, Marko and his posse get an offer from a German journalist to make snuff films on the side, because there is a huge market for it outside of the Balkan region. They accept, and that is the moment their journey into degradation starts, leading them in unknown, dark directions. Even though extreme violence is very present in this film, the film also follows political changes in the 2000s in Serbia: the overthrowing of Slobodan Milošević, the country's president at the time, subtly criticizing the politics and the state of the country. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on violence, which explores the general opinion that violence is the only way of communication in the Balkans.

### **Suphi Keskin**

#### **Becoming-animal through Sufistic Themes: Supernaturality in Reha Erdem's *Kosmos* (2009)**

The presentation explores the supernatural healing ability and bilocation of *Kosmos*, the leading character of fantastic art-house film, *Kosmos* (2009) of award-winning Turkish director Reha Erdem through Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible, molecularity and expressive ability of enunciation. Whereas Erdem metaphorically represents his leading role's molecularity with his healing ability functioning

through swallowing invisible ill parts, he grants him to form linkages through inarticulate voices, including bird-wise singing and to howl like dogs with the townspeople he recently arrives. Cosmos de-stratifies and de-segments the hierarchical structure through his enunciative ability that transgresses the statement-order structure of the language. The formulation of the director displays that creating a new mode of expression is still possible through particularly by becoming-animal as Kafka did through becoming-insect. Erdem employs supernatural powers as tools for de-segmentation of the social apparatus and highlighting the possibility of new ways of communication. Except for his communicative potentiality, Kosmos' supernatural powers display the aspects of miracle workers in Sufism; and *Kosmos* opens up the path for drawing parallels between Sufism and the Deleuzian concept of becoming-imperceptible. This presentation elaborates the representation of supernaturalism in art-house cinema through Deleuze and Guattari's concepts by correlating it with the Sufist themes.

### **Donna Kozloskie**

#### **Post-Millennial Aesthetics of Horror: What Are We Afraid Of?**

Horror movies are an act of collective processing. Audiences watch these films to face the scariest of the unknowns, unknowns that are often rooted in the dark recesses of reality. The anxieties of the Millennial generation brought forth bloody aesthetics of plagues and zombies (*28 Days Later*, *World War Z*, *Twilight*), a collective apocalypse caused by human interaction in the dawn of the digital era, an era itself of equally terrifying proportions (*Paranormal Activity*, *Blair Witch*). In looking closely at thematic and stylistic trends in the last decade of horror the budding terrors of a growing generation emerge, greatly influenced by the changing experience of film watching. The fear of the collapsing environment is evident in the crude edges of folk traditions and inhuman cults (*Midsommar*, *The Witch*, *Suspiria*). The conflict between outsider and insider presents itself with isolated shells cracked open by social consciousness and new-found wokeness (*Us*, *Get Out*, *Babadook*, *A Quiet Place*). Big Tech's dread-inducing presence also lingers with the continuation of twitching pixels and surveillance (*V/H/S*, *Searching*). An edgy self-awareness, like a post-irony wink, soothes and reminds that it is all just a dream, or maybe a nostalgic memory from another time (*It Follows*, *Cabin in the Woods*, *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*, *IT*). As these trends materialize, the collective act of film watching is receding. Film semiotics and gaze are quickly adapting to new spaces and viewing platforms; social media warps the way our shared processing unfolds. The aesthetics of post-millennial horror are controlled by the individual experience as each viewer grapples with their own personal identity, looking for their place in a new, scary, unknown global collective.

### **Valeria Villegas Lindvall**

#### **Gore galore: Gigi Saul Guerrero's Latina monsters**

This paper follows up and presents my collaboration for *Women Make Horror*, a book edited by Dr. Alison Peirse (University of Leeds) and forthcoming with Rutgers University Press. The piece focuses on the work of Mexican-Canadian filmmaker Gigi Saul Guerrero, co-founder of Luchagore Productions and also an important member of the up and coming generation of young female horror filmmakers, that also aligns the Soska Sisters, Jovanka Vuckovic and Issa López, among many more. I concentrate on three of her short films with Luchagore (*Día de los Muertos*, 2013; *Testament*, 2014 and *Madre de Dios*, 2015) in order to approach Saul Guerrero's fashioning of the Latin American female monster by means of the reconciliation of Mexican cultural particularities and the stylistic resources of horror. To this end, I approach this figure through the form of the bleeding slit as a recurrent motif that connects these three narratives. Here, I develop a dual framework within feminist theory. On

the one hand, I recuperate the image of the slit as a marker of sexual difference in order to revisit the affordances of corporeal feminism and its critical intersection with psychoanalysis (Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 1985; Harrington, 2018). On the other, I address the limitations of such scopes by advancing the pertinence of decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2008; Segato, 2013, 2016) as a critical tool to unpack the monstrosity allotted to the Latin American female body showcased in Saul Guerrero's work. I argue for these films as a site of negotiation of national identity and also as a corpus of work that evidences the transgressive potentialities of Latin American female monsters, allowing them to vindicate their oppression through spectacular gore and excess and, in passing, affording an invaluable opportunity to tackle the consequences of coloniality in the contemporary articulation of the monstrous, racialized female body.

### **Ethan Lyon**

#### **Dying of Fright, or, what Horror films can tell us about the autistic experience**

Despite horror cinema's problematic tendency to utilise disability as a metaphor for threats to the social order, the genre's emphasis on concepts of Otherness, mental instability and the lived experience of terror suggest that the horror film may be fertile ground for discussing autism. Autism is a developmental disability that affects an individual's sensory processing. Individuals with the condition, including myself, describe their primary emotions as being 'anger, sadness and fear', three emotions heavily prevalent in horror films. Using phenomenology, sonic theory and soma-aesthetics, I shall demonstrate how horror films can evoke the sensations experienced by an autistic individual and convey them to an audience. I shall discuss a scene from *Isle of the Dead* (Mark Robson, 1945), where an arguably autistic character experiences an actualisation of their worst fear, and explore how the film depicts this through sound and editing. *Isle* is one of the films Val Lewton produced during his tenure at RKO, and thus blends a number of horror tropes with Lewton's famed ambiguity to create atmospheres of confusion and sadness. My aim is to demonstrate that through empathetic cinematic technique, horror films have the power to communicate the potency of the disabled experience. Pain, either physical or emotional, is a sensation that we all experience in our lives. It therefore has the power to break down the barriers between abled and disabled. Ableism, like any form of discrimination, stems from an inability to empathise with the disabled person due to the belief that they have no shared frame of reference. Yet I hope that my research will not only demonstrate how horror films can elucidate the autistic experience through the shared understanding of pain, but also serve as a model for future analyses of disability in cinema.

### **Shellie McMurdo**

#### **'Whatever happens, this story needs to be told': Ti West as post-millennial horror auteur**

After beginning in no-budget/low-budget filmmaking, Ti West rose to the status of genre darling with the release of *House of the Devil* (2009), a satanic panic 80s period piece. The film was received positively and critics clamoured to compare West's filmmaking style to both Alfred Hitchcock and John Carpenter, with it being suggested that West was a new master of 'slow-burn' horror, a term West professed to 'hate' (Adams, 2010). With the subsequent release of *The Innkeepers* (2011) and *The Sacrament* (2013), similar attempts were made in the press to align West with the short lived 'mumblegore' and 'deathwave' movements respectively, and these were again rejected by the director. This paper will position West – who writes, directs and edits all his films – as a distinctive horror auteur, and will begin by outlining the elements of West's films that have been highlighted as central to his style. It will then move on to chart West's career from its low-budget origins, to his

various collaborations and the critical attempts to categorise his filmic output, before moving on to *The Sacrament*. Which Eli Roth termed as West's 'first mainstream film', and which is to date, his last feature length work in the horror genre. As a grim reimagining of the 1978 Jonestown Massacre, *The Sacrament* addresses historical actuality by creating an often violent and explicit visual accompaniment to a real-life horror without visual referent, but in doing this West was criticised as using a traumatic event for the sake of entertainment, with the film being dismissed as 'neo-exploitation'. It is the intention of this paper to address this and reframe *The Sacrament* as a key entry into West's oeuvre which demonstrates his subversive ability to straddle the line between the margins and the mainstream.

**Laura Mee**

**Kindred Spirits: Lucky McKee's representations of gender, sexuality and sisterhood**

This paper brings together analyses of films co-written and directed by Lucky McKee—including *May* (2002), *Sick Girl* (2006), *The Woman* (2011), *All Cheerleaders Die* (2013) and *Kindred Spirits* (2019) —linking their representation of female characters and the connections between women, key themes of this filmmaker's work. Women feature prominently in McKee's films, many of which focus on sympathetic female outsiders or monsters and their relationships with other women, and he has been celebrated as a creator of female focused or feminist indie horror. However, some critics have decried his films, and accused him of faux-feminist approaches with characters that perpetuate female stereotypes and revel in misogynistic gendered violence while claiming to empower the women upon whom that violence is levelled. Furthermore, he has been criticised for creating 'faux-feminist' characters which embody bisexual and lesbian stereotypes to monstrous effect. While acknowledging the potential for this interpretation (as a result of a thoughtful approach to gender and sexuality which is nonetheless sometimes represented in the camp caricatures of McKee's aesthetic), I argue that McKee employs female sexuality, and notably female bi- and homosexuality, as part of a radical approach to interrogating patriarchal heteronormativity and its inherent violence. Queer women directly confront a violent, controlling father in *The Woman*, reject homophobia and matriarchal norms in *Sick Girl*, and seek revenge against a misogynistic high school football team in *All Cheerleaders Die*, while *May* addresses both the Othering of queerness and the delegitimation or erasure of bisexual identity (Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell 2009). McKee's films, rather than demonising queer women's identity for the sake of monstrosity, instead demonstrate the complex thematic significance of gender and sexuality in contemporary American independent horror cinema.

**Tamao Nakahara**

**Gender Boot Camp: Non-Binary Approaches to Joe Dante's *Small Soldiers***

Although most writers discuss how *Small Soldiers* critiques - through parody - US policies, militarism, the glorification of violence, and global capitalism, there is an overlooked element in plain sight: how the film works to unravel the construction of gender binaries. Through the metaphor of computer programming, the film displays character journeys that go from living within their cultural programming to discovering that their "natural" behavior is only the result of ideology. The comedy, about intelligent robot-dolls and their human friends, shows how the dolls and people challenge what they were "programmed to do." When gender and other battles literally arrive in the characters' suburban American living room, the victim-assigned dolls rise up and the female-assigned human beings destroy the tools of their disciplining to lead, protect, and delegate tasks to the other characters. These scenes present diverse bodies in leadership positions and break from the recurrence of figures marked as white, male, and heteronormative in commanding roles (presidents, CEOs, and sergeants).

The limited writing on *Small Soldiers* and its director, Joe Dante, often includes the word, “anarchy,” an auteurist legacy with Frank Tashlin, and confusion about whether the films are horror comedies, satiric parodies, and for children or adults. In the context of playfully disordering and circumventing hard categories around gender, race, human/non-human, I argue that camp discourses place the film within a longer cultural history of non-binary representations. Examining Dante’s attention to Susan Sontag, discourses around Dante as auteur who risks confusion (of taste, genre, and implied readers), and the director’s exploitation origins within the structures of Steven Spielberg’s production company, this paper will show how Dante employs the “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” as an act of confusing naturalizing practices to reveal that the *actual disorientation* resides in disciplined categorization such as gender binaries.

**James Newton**

### **Post-Apocalypse Now: The Unsolvable World Building of George Miller**

Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland against the backdrop of both crumbling institutions and the rebuilding of societal structures, George Miller’s *Mad Max* (1979, 1981, 1985, 2014) series explicitly invites political interpretations. *Mad Max Fury Road* in particular, attracted a popular reading among critics and columnists as a ‘feminist’ film due to its foregrounding of female characters, and a story of subjugated women fighting back against patriarchal male oppressors. However, much of this writing about the series, which conforms to Bordwell’s delineation of explicatory and symptomatic analysis, relies on surface level interpretations of the material that focuses on simple binaries and signifiers of personal identity. A class-based analysis of *Mad Max* instead reveals immutable contradictions contained in these more common interpretations. The ‘world’ of *Mad Max* details a far more complex society that disturbs the more overt dynamics between hero and villain, good and evil, and the interplay between the ‘patriarchal’ and the ‘feminist’. The world Miller concocts is unsolvable as regards the simple ‘political’ understandings film analysis can provide. The central political question when examining the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic landscape in which *Mad Max* takes place is; what is the status of leisure and pleasure in a society that lacks new commodities, and where a 21<sup>st</sup> Century understanding of the division between work and leisure is absent? Commodification, materialism, and fetishism, all integral to the spread of 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism, are present in *Mad Max* and its sequels, yet the economic system which supports these behaviours is not. What conclusions can be drawn by focusing on this aspect of the series, as opposed to the other multiple ways it has been understood (such as an analysis of its study of gender roles, as a genre piece, as national cinema, or as a hero narrative etc.)? This paper seeks to explore the world building of director George Miller, a filmmaker whose individuality, revealed through eclectic career choices, has marked him as an independent voice that is unique in both Australian and Hollywood cinema. The paper considers what interpretations of the material within the *Mad Max* films tell us about contemporary real world political and social structures, but also how it challenges the notion of ‘political’ interpretations within the discipline of film studies.

**Christopher Parr**

### **The Problem with Prestige: Critical and Audience Reactions to Independent Prestige Horror**

The term “prestige horror” has previously been applied to lavish studio productions featuring star performers, such as *Wolf* (Nichols, 1994) and *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Coppola, 1992), that have attempted to legitimise the genre. Over the past few years, however, the term has been applied to a spate of independently produced horror films that have set themselves apart from mainstream offerings by either subordinating their horror elements to a broader thematic

or political purpose, such as *Under the Shadow* (Anvari, 2016); or else eschewing the more bombastic genre conventions altogether, such as *The Witch* (Eggers, 2015). Also known as art horror or post-horror, these films have come to be distinguished by the striking discrepancies between critical and audience reactions, being reviled by “average” cinema goers despite receiving glowing reviews. This paper explores the possible reasons for these discrepancies by examining professional reviews, user reviews, box office figures, and audience reaction metrics for three prestige horror films and comparing them against the same for three studio produced horror films. *The Witch* and *The Conjuring 2* (Wan, 2016) will be used to examine how prestige horror often disavows the traditional tools of the genre, and how this can impact on audience engagement. Marketing, and specifically the problems related to selling unconventional horror films to conventional horror audiences, will be explored with *It Comes at Night* (Shults, 2017) and *Annabelle: Creation* (Sandberg, 2017). *Hereditary* (Aster, 2018) and *The Nun* (Hardy, 2018) will be utilised to elucidate how prestige horror prioritises theme and how this can complicate audience reaction to narrative. Through a comparison of these texts and their critical and audience reactions, this paper seeks to determine what it is that sets this recent trend of independent prestige horror apart from the rest of the genre.

### **Amanda Reyes**

#### **Re-B.O.R.N.: Challenging Ageism in Ross Hagen’s Grade Z Cinema**

Sociologist Kenneth F. Ferraro defined the term ageism as, “Prejudice and discrimination against older people based on the belief that ageing makes people less attractive, intelligent and productive.” These beliefs, widely shared in Western society, are rooted in a cultural ideology seeking to dismantle a power structure for ageing adults. Cinema upholds common stereotypes about growing older, portraying aged characters as dissatisfied with life, or resorting to extreme antics to maintain youth. Or, they are simply forgotten, rendered invisible, and unnecessary. The horror genre is not immune to this. According to a 2016 study by industry consultant Stephen Follows, the average age of the lead in a horror film taps out at 38. Unlike the B movie cinema prior to the late 1970s, when Vincent Price, John Carradine and others ruled the drive-in circuit, the genre continues to scale its core viewership towards much younger ages, alienating an important audience. Character actor Ross Hagen (1938-2011) felt the effects of growing older in a profession that deemed him irrelevant, and set about creating his own filmmaking mini-empire, built on zero budget direct-to-video genre productions, such as *B.O.R.N.* and *Click! The Calendar Girl Killer*, where he envisioned himself as not just the hero or the villain, but also the director, writer and producer. Recognizing that his core fanbase was growing older alongside him, Hagen worked with familiar actors from his past exploitation days (Hoke Howell, Nancy Kwan, and his wife Clare Pollan who often co-produced), while also discovering new talent, such as Gregory Scott Cummins (*Bosch*, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*). His productions were intergenerational, but can ultimately be viewed as a metaphor for the vitality that can be found in growing older. Hagen’s blueprint subverted mainstream stereotypes, rejecting cultural norms. I seek to make Hagen’s work more visible, and to trace through current trends, such as casting the seventy-something Lin Shaye as a lead in the *Insidious* series.

### **Martin Ricksand**

#### **The Valkyrie of the Wasteland – The Fictional Truth about Imperator Furiosa and Gender in *Mad Max: Fury Road***

*Mad Max: Fury Road* received large amounts of both praise and criticism because of the very same factor: the fierce, strong, and independent female lead, Imperator Furiosa. One critic considered the film to be “unambiguously and unapologetically feminist”, and several others noted Furiosa’s prowess to the detriment of the eponymous male protagonist. In this paper, I

counter such claims and argue that feminist critics presented simplified interpretations of a more complex matter. I show that their readings display a deficient understanding of the philosophical concepts of truth *in* fiction and truth *of* fiction respectively, and that they do not sufficiently acknowledge the crucial distinction between them. I explain that the concept of truth in fiction does not legitimize a straightforward feminist reading of *Fury Road* when it is analyzed “on its own terms” (without any preconceived conceptions). The film's fictional content pertaining to gender is not as “straightforward” and simplistic as the critics make it out to be. I show that when feminist critics focus on the story from an “external” perspective – analyzing themes, motifs, symbols, and other properties that can only be acknowledged by a spectator but not the fictional characters themselves – they reach their conclusions through a selective use of fictional truths and, possibly, by ascribing a higher importance to these than the film really allows for. Finally, I argue that my criticism can potentially be applied universally, indicating that this particular misunderstanding may be emblematic of similar interpretations of other films.

### **Daniel Sheppard**

#### **Sex and Death in the Gay Slasher Film: or, When Fisting Goes Wrong...**

Queer Horror, as defined by Darren Elliott-Smith, describes film and television texts that are ‘crafted by male directors/producers who self-identify as gay, bi, queer or transgendered [*sic*] and whose work features homoerotic, or explicitly homosexual, narratives with “out” gay characters’ (2016, p. 2). Marketed as the first ‘all gay slasher film’ and celebrated in gay horror fan communities, Paul Etheridge’s *Hellbent* (2004) is one of the best known examples. As Claire Sisco King writes, however, ‘it cannot be taken for granted that a “gay film” is inherently queer’ (2010, p. 252). She problematises any queer reading of *Hellbent*, arguing that the film assimilates representations of gay masculinity in heteronormative terms, ‘playing it straight’ as not to alienate a minority heterosexual audience. The aim of this paper is to firstly further King’s reading of *Hellbent*, to theorise that the film assimilates representations of gay sex and death to avert an explicitly homoerotic affective response. Although the film is written and directed by the openly gay Etheridge – making the film, by Elliott-Smith’s definition, Queer Horror – this theorisation takes into account the prominent role of *Hellbent*’s heterocentric production team and their exclusive casting of straight actors. Consequently, this paper examines how Drew Bolton’s *Killer Unicorn* (2018) addresses the heteronormative configuration of the ‘gay slasher’ to then radically subvert the formula. Here, *Killer Unicorn* intricately associates gay sex with death in ways that are not assimilable, set in a queer subcultural BDSM community that advocates fetishes aplenty. Starring, written and produced by José Daniel Álvarez, this paper argues that *Killer Unicorn* adopts a politically radical ‘gay/ze’ which relies on a very specific homoerotic affective response, inviting a subculture of gay audiences to call the gay slasher their own.

### **Kanwal Jit Singh**

#### **The Validation of a Traumagenic Mental Disorder in Split: Subverting the Mainstream Superhero**

Manoj Night Shyamalan is known to create fantastic imagery in his films and the genres in which he excels are Supernatural and Horror which are also the favourite breeding ground for Cult films. Shyamalan’s film, *Split* (2016) prominently reflects the working style of the director, which is nonconformist with mainstream and subscribes to the intensely personal perspective of his various protagonists. The film, is a part of trilogy starting with *Unbreakable* (2000) and finishing with *Glass* (2019). In *Split* Shyamalan has used Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) to subvert the mainstream mechanisms of creating an alternate narrative or suspense while using DID, focusing more on causes than the actions.

Shyamalan has taken a giant leap of faith by showing acquisition of supernatural powers by the protagonist in *Split* because of his angst and trauma. Shyamalan establishes the character as suffering from mental illness and transforms him into a superhero without any hallowed motives besides displaying him perpetrate horrifying incidents of violence which shatters the audience's notion about existing superhero universe. Films like *Fight Club* (1999), *Secret Window* (2004) and *Raising Cain* (1992) used DID identities to advance the main character's criminal desires. The identities are plot devices and only that. In *Split*, a similar phenomenon occurs as well, where the different identities are used to create suspense, plot twists, and horror—the essential elements to a Shyamalan thriller film. However, *Split* goes beyond its genre and undertakes depicting dissociative identity disorder as a genuine and valid mental illness as well. It denies the claims that DID is an iatrogenic disorder or an epiphenomenon of another disorder and affirms trauma as a potential cause of this very real mental illness. (Wang, 2017)

### **James Lawrence Slattery**

#### **Imminent Queerness: Temporal Excess in the Works of Jenkin Van Zyl and Ryan Trecartin**

This paper will focus on works by contemporary video artists Jenkin Van Zyl and Ryan Trecartin. In their works, Van Zyl and Trecartin can be seen to employ excess in their characters through ludic, absurd drag aesthetics, their obliterated narratives that are highly fragmented both spatially and temporally, their sound design which layers and distorts speech, diegetic and non-diegetic sound, and their erratic editing and rhythmic structures. By implementing excess in these various areas, both artists disturb classical narrative forms and thus undermine typical trajectories of desire. Through their multifaceted frames of excess, Van Zyl and Trecartin create video works that are often shown in gallery spaces loop with no clear indication of beginning and/or end. Spectators are bombarded with information that is registered imminently as action is not dependant on a cause and effect logic. With reference to Todd McGowan's work on capitalism's temporal logic of the future (discussed in *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets*, 2016), and Jack Halberstam's work on the "loop" as a model for queer time (discussed in *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2011), Van Zyl and Trecartin's works can be understood as critiquing hetero culture and capitalism simultaneously through a formal rejection of the impossible fantasy of a satiating object of desire. Whilst the works operate outside of realist or naturalist aesthetics, they do not employ fantasy in the sense that they do not present lacking subjects who are subsequently fulfilled. Thus, these works articulate and embody queerness, not understood as a posturing of identity, but by showing figures breaking out of capitalist and heteronormative temporal logic through subversive subjectivity rendered by excessive forms of time and space in the moving-image format.

### **Iain Robert Smith**

#### **De-Westernizing Cult Cinema Studies: The Case of Indian Exploitation Auteur Kanti Shah**

To date, discourses of cult and exploitation cinema have primarily centred around the West, with a particular emphasis upon Anglo-American cinema and fandom. Even when cult scholarship has expanded to include non-English language films from other national traditions (Hunt 2003, Imanjaya 2009, Martin 2015), their status as 'cult' still largely derives from their fan reception in the West. Even when we are studying cult cinema from a more global perspective, therefore, we are nevertheless continuing to use the fandom in the West as the primary marker of cult status. Moreover, while there has been a growing discussion of the role of exoticism within this transnational cult fandom, we need to do more to interrogate the

largely unacknowledged ways in which whiteness has framed and constructed this cult discourse. This paper attempts to redress this balance by focusing on the growing fandom for cult cinema within India itself, specifically focusing on the cult surrounding exploitation director Kanti Shah. Celebrated as the Indian equivalent of Ed Wood and Roger Corman, Shah is a director of low-budget independent films and is best known for his late 1990s and early 2000s work featuring faded Bollywood stars such as Dharmendra and Mithun Chakraborty. According to Jerry Pinto, the Indian ‘educated middle class’ were ‘not supposed to like Hindi cinema’ (2006: 201), but ‘now that we are all comfortable with kitsch, we can celebrate the worst aesthetic excesses of Hindi cinema’ (2006: 202). Focusing in particular on the online fandom surrounding Indian exploitation cinema, this paper uses the cult of Kanti Shah to interrogate the assumed West-centrism of cult discourse, and to examine the suitability of the term for understanding films and fandoms outside of the US and Europe.

**Thomas Sweet**

### **Going Back Into the Water: *Jaws* and the Shark Exploitation Film**

The release of *Jaws* (1975, Spielberg) heralded a watershed moment in cinema history, becoming massively financially successful, and effectively being the first summer blockbuster. As with any trend that becomes popular, there are imitators who wish to capitalise on the audience recognition that the original product created. Exploitation films – so called because they aim to financially exploit the public’s fascination with a topic – have existed for decades, and exist for a wide variety of topics, but the release of *Jaws* led to the creation of a distinct new subgenre of exploitation film: the shark exploitation, or ‘sharksploitation’ film. In *Jaws*, Spielberg took a Hitchcock-esque approach to suspense, keeping the shark largely off-screen, and focusing on character development, in order to build viewer anticipation. In sharksploitation films, such as *Great White* (1981, Castellari), the presence of the shark – a creature that symbolises pure excess – is in of itself the cornerstone of the film’s marketing. These films market themselves on the idea that there might be scenes of excessive violence and gore caused by the shark attacks, and the promise of the taboo sight of a human being eaten alive. As well as exploiting the primal desires and fears of the audience, shark exploitation film exploits the cultural memory of *Jaws*, while often adding increasingly absurd gimmicks to the cinematic shark, in order to attract an audience. Killer sharks and shark attacks have remained a source of cultural fascination with the public for the last several decades, and have been featured in films ranging from independent films such as *47 Meters Down* (2017, Roberts), to mainstream studio releases like *The Meg* (2018, Turteltaub). This paper explores the depiction of sharks in films, and why shark exploitation films have retained a consistent appeal with audiences.

**Jonathan Wroot, Eddie Falvey and Joe Hickinbottom**

### **New Blood: Critical Approaches to Horror**

This forthcoming edited collection, to be published by University of Wales Press, consists of new writing on horror screen media since the beginning of the 21st century. This volume provides original scholarship that will critically engage with some of the more interesting directions in which the genre has moved in since turn of the millennium. Contributors include new and established scholars who shed light on the genre in the time that has elapsed since the last “state of horror” collection. It is certainly the case that horror has remained a highly popular genre, recently illustrated by an unprecedented level of critical attention. Due to a popularity that is not only critical but commercial, as seen in the box office returns generated by *It* (2017) and its sequel, it is clearly high time for a new collection that is entirely focused on some of the genre’s multifaceted and multifarious developments in the new century. *New Blood* provides critical investigations of the horror genre across these two significant decades

and, in doing so, sheds light on major industrial shifts and contexts and questions relating to genre, beside the evaluation of significant individual texts through a series of tightly focused and diverse case studies. This panel will showcase the editors' current work and contributions – ranging from independent horror, to the work of Takashi Miike, and low-budget independent Japanese horror filmmakers.

**Gabriela Zogall**

**Performing the Monstrous Feminine: Potentials and Problems of Using Genre Film Aesthetics in Audio-Visual Research**

Maila Nurmi, a bondage model, reached fame in 1954 as the iconic, gothic femme fatale Vampira and the first horror host on US American television. Vampira embodied uncontrollable sexual empowerment and challenged the image of the 1950s perfect housewife. Sheri Holman describes her as “the touchpoint of postwar male desire and anxiety” (2014: xvii). Rejecting to be controlled by a male society and her employers, however, it was male anxiety that led to the end of *The Vampira Show* only a year later. Christine Rogers points out the double standard women face in society and argues that “[u]nder patriarchy women are constructed as nurturers, compliant wives and mothers, the moral touchstones of society, and women who disrupt these gender expectations,... pay dearly for their rebellion” (2012: 103). Vampira is a woman who paid a high price for her rebellion against patriarchy. This paper will investigate the horror genre as a genre associated with masculinity and the controlling male gaze and explores Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's question “what happens when... the woman directs” (2018: 42) a horror film? This presentation highlights my experiences, as an audio-visual researcher, of producing a performative documentary film as a PhD thesis. The film's centre is the investigation of shifts in representations of supernatural female antagonists in American horror films. However, this paper discusses the use of tropes and aesthetics associated with the horror and gothic genre, as well as it discusses my choice to perform as the film's presenter in the disguise of a monstrous female inspired by Vampira. These stylistic choices aim to extend Paszkiewicz's question to “What happens when the woman directs” and performs? and explore the difficulties of controlling the gaze as a female researcher, filmmaker and performer.