
Letter from the Editors

By Connor McMorran and Sarah Smyth

Most often heralded by film festival buzz, each year a new horror film finds itself branded by magazines and critics as ‘the scariest film of 201X’, or something to that effect. Regardless of such absolutisms, by looking at the films which have received such attention, it is possible to witness the materialisation of a new canon of horror - *It Follows* (2014, David Robert Mitchell), *The Babadook* (2014, Jennifer Kent), *The Witch* (2015, Robert Eggers), *Don't Breathe* (2016, Fede Alvarez). At the time of writing, this canonisation has already occurred twice within 2017, first for *Get Out* (2017, Jordan Peele) and most recently with *Raw* (2017, Julia Ducornau). This recognition has elevated the horror genre in public perception, creating certain films into cultural events which must be experienced, regardless of any prior interest in the horror genre. Recalling conversations about these aforementioned films, phrases such as “I don’t really watch horror, but...” or “Usually I don’t like horror, but...” are common, and notable in their attempts to distance the viewer from any wider association with the horror genre. The canon may have elevated the prestige of horror, but that same canonisation separates these films from the genre in a wider sense, making them ‘acceptable’ to engage with. This is not a comment on the quality of the films themselves, each in their own way deserving of their status, but rather to say these works inform the contemporary common understanding of horror without, for the most part, any wider frame of reference.



Effective horror on a budget: *They Look Like People* (2015)

In truth, the horror genre today is thriving with variety, on a level similar to the 80s and early 90s. Super low-budget films such as *They Look Like People* (2015, Perry Blackshear) and *The Interior* (2015, Trevor Juras) far surpass their limitations through solid narratives, interesting ideas, and effective manipulation and distortion of the human body through lighting and framing. Similarly, relatively larger budgeted films such as *Resolution* (2012, Justin Benson & Aaron Moorhead), *Mr Jones* (2013, Karl Mueller), *Jug Face* (2013, Chad Crawford Kinkle), *Spring* (2014, Aaron Moorhead & Justin Benson), *We are Still Here* (2015, Ted Geoghegan), *I am Not a Serial Killer* (2016, Billy O'Brian), *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* (2016, André Øvredal), and *The Void* (2016, Jeremy Gillespie & Steven Kotanski) display a wide range of styles and approaches to the horror genre, from Lovecraftian hybrids and cults to inter-dimensional or extraterrestrial antagonists to vengeful spirits to isolation, cabin fever and warped mental states. While these films don't receive the recognition they deserve, they nonetheless find audiences through VOD and streaming services. New directors also find a place within the current wave of anthologies, harking back to a time honoured tradition of horror - from Amicus productions like *The House that Dripped Blood* (1971, Peter Duffell), and *Tales from the Crypt* (1972, Freddie Francis) through to cult classics *Creepshow* (1982, George A. Romero), *Tales from the Hood* (1995, Rusty Cundieff) or *Trilogy of Terror* (1975, Dan Curtis) and right back to *Friday the Thirteenth* (1933, Victor Saville). What differentiates contemporary anthology films from these earlier versions, and indeed from the unjustly over-looked *Trick 'r Treat* (2007, Michael Doherty), is their lack of common vision maintained through a single director. In anthology films such as the *V/H/S* franchise (2012-14), *Southbound* (2015), *Holidays* (2016), and *XX* (2017) multiple directors each create a short film built around a specific theme. The results, as expected, vary but these films also facilitate a breeding ground for new directors to proliferate within the horror genre. Through these anthologies, as well as their own feature works, directors such as Adam Wingard, Ti West, and Karyn Kusama have come to be significant names within the contemporary horror space, while lesser known directors such as David Brucker and Roxanne Benjamin, the latter of which has thus far only directed for anthology films, are able to make a name for themselves. At the same time, the anthology film allows directors who usually work outside of horror to engage with the genre, such as Joe Swanberg's *The Sick Thing that Happened to Emily when She was Younger* from the first *V/H/S* anthology.

Given the proliferation of horror throughout the 2010s thus far, this issue of *Frames* was created in order to take stock of such recent developments, voices, and emergences in order to better position our understanding of the genre as it currently exists. At the same time, this

issue seeks to highlight and discuss potential avenues through which the horror genre might journey in the near future. One of the most notable holdovers from the previous decade of horror has been that of the found-footage framework. While films during the late 80s and 90s such as *UFO Abduction* (AKA *The McPherson Tape*, 1989, Dean Alioto), later remade as *Alien Abduction: Incident at Lake County* (1998, Dean Alioto), *The Last Broadcast* (1998, Stefan Avalos & Lance Weiler), and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez) initiated an interest in the potentials of such an approach, the second boom of found-footage films which formed the dominant mode of horror during the late 2000s has maintained a strong influence over lower budget filmmakers. The legacy of *Paranormal Activity* (2007, Oren Peli) is not its numerous sequels of varying quality but instead films such as *Afflicted* (2012, Cliff Prowse & Derek Lee), *The Borderlands* (2013, Elliot Goldner), *As Above So Below* (2014, John Erick Dowdle), *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (2014, Adam Robitel), *Creep* (2014, Patrick Brice), and films portrayed through the computer screen, such as *The Den* (2013, Zachary Donohue) and *Unfriended* (2014, Levan Gabriadze). In his article for *Frames* Duncan Hubber examines the found-footage film through a refreshingly different lens, paying attention to the role of the diegetic camera within these films, particularly the role it plays in framing and visualising sites of historical trauma. Madelon Hoedt opens up the potential range of the found-footage aesthetic by looking at its use within the medium of video games, particularly the *Outlast* franchise, discussing the role that player agency has in altering the commonly associated tropes of the filmic approach towards the found-footage style. The technological possibilities of horror are further examined by Merinda Staubli's article on virtual reality (VR) technologies, which explores the potential shifts in how horror media will be created in the future, paying particular attention to the defining aspects of VR technology, namely its claustrophobic hardware and 360-degree immersion in a virtual world.

While this introduction thus far has highlighted many works which exist within the more independent strands of the horror genre, it is important to point out that the mainstream horror scene is also experiencing a period of renewed interest and popularity. Perhaps the greatest evidence for this can be found in the works of James Wan, who has largely enjoyed financial and somewhat critical success since *Saw* (2004), as well as his more recent franchises *Insidious* (2011 -) and *The Conjuring* (2013 -), and the numerous productions by Blumhouse which have reaped significant financial earnings despite low-to-mid budgets. Exploring the mainstream horror scene in the United States over the past decade, Todd Platts and Mathias Clasen provide a much-needed examination of the industrial trends and cycles, highlighting the significant role of possession and supernatural horror films in the current market, which desires PG-13/12A rated films for maximum potential profits. Also

examining contemporary mainstream horror, through a comparison between *Poltergeist* (1982, Tobe Hooper) and its remake (2015, Gil Kenna), Paul Doro argues that horror has largely lost its interest in employing horror to tackle contemporary social issues, abandoning the strong social commentary found in canonical works by the likes of George A. Romero, John Carpenter and Wes Craven. Moving slightly away from the mainstream, Joni Hayward deftly avoids the more obvious allegories present within *It Follows* and *Don't Breathe* and instead argues that these films, through their setting and use of space, provide strong examinations into current economic anxieties of post-recession America. Exploring the opposite end of the spectrum, Evelyn Deshane explores the representation of transgender people in the horror genre through Israel Luna's low budget *Ticked-Off Trannies with Knives*, in particular, its place within the slasher and rape/revenge sub-genres of horror and how Luna's film interrogates prior use of transgender characters throughout the genre.



Zombies abroad: *I am a Hero* (2015)

Internationally, horror is also experiencing a renewed interest. Last year saw two horror films from South Korea, *Train to Busan* (2016, Yeon Sang-Ho) and *The Wailing* (2016, Na Hong-Jin), receive significant theatrical releases internationally, while the aforementioned *Raw* has brought with it a revived acknowledgement of European horror. As always with foreign language horror, issues remain with regard to availability and translation. Just as the numerous vampire films from Spain and Italy during the 60s and 70s remain unfortunately hard to obtain, contemporary horror such as the inventive Japanese zombie film *I am a Hero* (2015, Shinsuke Sato) or the recent Italian giallo *Francesca* (2015, Luciano Onetti) also suffer from a lack of exposure and thus fail to find the audiences they deserve. Though not entirely belonging to foreign language film, Matthew Melia explores how the films of Peter Strickland, in particular *Berberian Sound*

Studio (2012), exist within a range of cultural and film references, combining theatre, art cinema, and horror, more specifically the use of the scream. Şirin Erensoy returns to the cycle of French horror films produced during the 2000s in order to understand how contemporary French horror interrogates contemporary fears and anxieties, in particular crises of identity. Agnieszka Kotwasińska highlights the potential for low budget, foreign language films to find audiences through film festivals in her article on *The Lure* (2015, Agnieszka Smoczyńska), highlighting a potential problem of such exposure through an exploration of the film's socio-political commentary, which has largely been overlooked by Western reception of the film thus far.

The range of films and topics discussed within this issue stand as a clear example of the wealth of potential not only for the horror genre, but also studies into the horror genre. Even with the diversity of films discussed in this issue in terms of budget, country of origin, aesthetic approach, or narrative content, this issue is only able to provide a brief snapshot of the multiple interesting approaches or avenues currently being pursued by the horror genre. As the horror genre will undoubtedly grow during the tail end of this decade, so too will its presence in the independent, mainstream, foreign language, and technological spheres of both the film and video game industries. The future of horror is therefore a multilayered one, influenced by audience reception, socio-political events, and approaches to visualising horror in equal measure.