Scary Business: Horror at the North American Box Office, 2006-2016

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Despite horror films representing business ventures intended to turn profit, box office analyses of the genre have remained rare in scholarly literature.[i] Our study attempts to fill that gap through an examination of 117 horror films that reached the top 100 in domestic grosses in the North American film market from the years 2006 to 2016. The eleven-year timeframe of the study encompasses a period of monumental change in Hollywood film production, one where the average budgets for blockbuster films have routinely exceeded $100 million (and even $200 million)[ii] and one where Hollywood's major studios have jettisoned or significantly downsized their specialty units that have often handled genre productions such as horror.[iii]

Our analysis will, in part, decipher the role horror films play in this new production environment. In contrast to other box office assessments of horror, which end before 2011, we find a steady reliance on possession and supernatural horror films, many of which can easily obtain a PG-13 rating. We also see the growth of a new model of low-budget genre production as exemplified by Blumhouse Productions. Finally, we register a slight dip in the production of queues of studio distributed horror films. Our discussion proceeds by first elaborating upon our data and methodology. We then set the stage of the study by briefly outlining the industrial and social context that deeply informs the production strategies of mainstream horror films, which will be followed by a quantitative overview of the films in our dataset. Next we offer summative synopses of the major content trends that emerged and conclude by speculating on the shape of horror to come.

The study is significant for horror scholars not least because the trends receiving the most academic coverage (e.g., torture porn, vampire, and zombie films) in fact turn out to constitute a fraction of horror films finding mainstream release and success. While academic scrutiny of these and other trends is warranted, it is also important to be mindful of what films in the genre are the most successful and to understand the reasons behind their popularity. Our study also has general relevance to film scholars in that it tracks how one of Hollywood's most enduring, yet undervalued, genres has been handled in a new social and production environment.

Data/Method

Our assessment of horror at the North American box office draws from several sources of data. Box office totals and rankings are taken from Box Office Mojo (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/), which tabulates the performance of every film receiving a theatrical release in the United States. In order to to classify films, first as horror, and then by subtype of horror film, we consulted reviews and articles about the films in *Variety* (the leading trade publication in film), the *Los Angeles Times* (headquartered near the hub of film production), and the *New York Times* (the largest national newspaper).[iv] This technique resulted in the identification of ten subtypes of horror – action horror, historical, home invasion, monster, slasher, supernatural, thriller/psychological, torture porn, vampire, and zombie.

Given the substantial overlap of horror film subtypes, it can be argued that several films in our dataset are cataloged arbitrarily (or erroneously). However, as Peter Hutchings observes, such points of contention are "unavoidable" as there "can be no fixed once-and-for-all list of horror films,"[v] much less an inarguable list horror film subtypes. Moreover, we are confident that the subtype labels that emerge from our analysis capture actual and meaningful categories. The frequencies of these films are summarized in the table below, which will be the order in which they are presented in our discussion. As a top-down perspective of horror cinema, our study necessarily excludes analysis of many significant horror films that fall below the threshold for inclusion such as *It Follows* (2014) and highly regarded international films like *The Babadook* (2014). Also, we do not consider found footage or remakes to be separate subtypes of horror. Both are worthy of deeper examination, but neither emerged as a distinctive subtype in our sources. Instead, they were used to specify a horror subtype (e.g., a slasher remake, a found footage supernatural film). Finally, as a summary of box office trends, it is beyond the scope of this article to unsheathe the broader meaning and cultural work performed by these films. We leave this important work to other scholars. We leave this important work to other scholars.

Table 1: Horror Films by Subtype, 2006-2016

	N	%
Supernatural	46	38.5
Thriller/Psychological	16	13.7
Action Horror	11	9.4
Slasher	10	8.5
Vampire	9	7.7
Zombie	7	6.8
Torture Porn	6	5.1
Historical	5	4.3

Home Invasion	4	3.4
Monster	3	2.6
	117	100

Industrial and Social Context

The look and content of modern horror films have been underwritten by several shifts in the logic of film production as well as a number of diffuse social changes. Perhaps most notably is what industry scholar Thomas Schatz has labelled Hollywood's transition into the "conglomerate era."[i] Under this auspice Hollywood's major studios have become subsumed into larger corporations where filmmaking comprises a small amount of their parent companies' profits. Across the nineties, Hollywood's major studios either acquired successful independent companies or launched their own semi-autonomous independent divisions.[ii] This restructured the business of filmmaking into three distinct production tiers: 1) blockbuster productions with expanding budgets targeted toward mass, global audiences, 2) specialized, modestly budgeted, genre faire, most notably horror films, emanating from the studios' semi-autonomous divisions, and 3) truly independent film production, usually operating on shoestring budgets.[iii]

Within this system there had existed three significant mini-majors (smaller companies that compete with the production values of major studios): Lionsgate, Summit Entertainment, and Relativity Media.[iv] These companies "carved special niches for themselves by releasing mid-range and sometimes offbeat pictures"[v] which included many horror films that were considered too risky or too excessive for even the majors' subdivisions (e.g., Lionsgate's *Saw* films, Summit Entertainment's adaptation of the *Twilight* series [2008-2012], and Relativity Media's *Zombieland* [2009]).[vi]

As the timeframe of this study progressed, major studios began to scale down or phase out the specialty units that often handled horror films. This process, which culminated in 2009, entailed a slight dip in the production queues of mainstream horror films and, therefore, resulted in a reduction of horror films reaching the top 100 in the North American box office (see table 2). The decline in output would be more noticeable were it not for the sudden arrival of Blumhouse Productions in 2007, the production company behind *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and the company that accounts for just under 18 per cent of the films in our database after signing a first-look deal with Universal (more on this below).

Table 2: Number of Horror Films Reaching the Box Office Top 100, 2006-2016

Industrial dynamics are not the only factors influencing horror film production. Indeed, while we do not specifically build on scholarship that links shifts in the content of horror to broad, widely felt social stresses, we draw from it to help make sense of why some horror films have become incredibly lucrative and why some subtypes dominate in the timeframe considered. Two sociopolitical events are widely agreed to have shaped horror film productions in the period under discussion: the attacks on September 11, 2001 and their aftermath, as well as the 'Great Recession' of 2008.[i] Both events produced large-scale and widely-felt anxiety over issues of security and safety. Arguably, horror films that managed more or less overtly to tap into such anxiety were perceived as particularly relevant and effective by audiences looking for an emotionally rousing movie experience.

Cultural critics have attempted to trace the influence of 9/11 and its aftermath on popular culture, including horror films. Wheeler Winston Dixon, for instance, claims that "the arts" in the years following 9/11 "have been transformed into a mirror of the fear, death, paranoia, and uncertainty that now pervades American existence."[ii] In the eyes of Angela Ndalianis, this has provided fertile ground for "a new kind of horror film that is not only dark and vicious in the worlds it depicts but which is also socially aware and critical of the cultural context that gave birth to it" by "incorporating iconic events and images – collapsing buildings, the destruction of cities, torture, war – into its generic structure."[iii] To give two examples, scholars have seen the aftermath of 9/11 as significant to the rise in the popularity of zombie cinema in the early-2000s given that the imagery associated with the zombie apocalypse so closely resembled news scenes of the attack.[iv] Likewise, the growing fear of terrorism and ambivalence toward the Bush administration's use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" has been viewed as the driving force behind torture porn.[v] However, these subtypes reached the zeniths of their popularity just prior to the starting line of this study and petered out within its scope. This suggests that something else took over as the most prominent topical force informing horror productions.

Following the aftermath of 9/11, the recession of 2008 is assumed to have had a significant effect on horror film production. Several scholars have argued for a causal link between the Great Recession and the rise of supernatural horror films. Craig Ian Mann, for instance, posits how the Great Recession "has been the cause of an extraordinary amount of misery, particularly for a demographic facing a future in which the milestones that should punctuate and enrich a lifetime – finding a job, buying property and starting a family – are ever harder to reach."[vi] This bleak new world which offers new generations the potential for "a lifetime of economic struggle"[vii] has been the animating force of many of the films that appear in our dataset. The aftereffects of the crisis are viewed as providing the tinder for haunted house films, especially those focusing on foreclosure and repossession.[viii] Meanwhile, the growing division of the haves and have nots has informed the narratives of a cluster of home invasion films such as *The Purge* series (2013-).[ix] Commentators have already speculated that the rise of Donald Trump will inspire future horror films.[x]

The combination of industrial and social forces touched upon above helped to sire a heterogeneous collection of horror films that reached mainstream success. Despite this diversity, our data show that two types of horror films are particularly prominent in the period under discussion: supernatural horror films (accounting for 38.5% of output) and thriller/psychological horror (accounting for 13.7% of output). We discuss the basic quantitative trends below.

The Shape of Horror, 2006-2016

In their study of horror films at the box office, Blair Davis and Kial Natale note that "there is a significant market among American audiences for most horror films" and that "many subgenres earn a remarkably similar average amount at the box office."[xi] Our study, more or less, replicates this finding. In terms of overall averages, the budgets for films in our dataset averaged just under $30 million while the domestic gross was roughly $65.5 million. By comparison, Neil Terry and others reported budgets of just under $27 million and domestic grosses of just over $45 million for horror films in the years between 1978 and 2010 (adjusted for inflation).[xii] In other words, while profits have significantly increased, budgets have only moderately done so. Table 3 shows the basic quantitative overview of the 117 horror films of our sample.

Table 3 Quantitative Overview of Sample

Subtype	Total	Budget	Domestic Box Office	% PG-13	% Remake	% Sequel
All	117	29,973,405	63,628,824	40.2	17.9	35
Supernatural	46	16,285,109	52,221,840	46.7	13	30.4
Thriller/Psychological	16	26,533,333	50,194,461	50	31.25	6.25

Action Horror	11	66,136,364	51,259,892	27.2	9.1	54.5
Slasher	10	22,010,000	46,927,125	10	80	40
Vampire	9	72,777,778	194,715,664	88.9	11.1	36.4
Zombie	7	61,942,857	75,156,050	28.6	0	57.1
Torture Porn	6	11,100,000	53,502,589	0	0	83.3
Historical	5	27,600,000	37,992,342	50	25	0
Home Invasion	4	7,750,000	67,061,725	0	0	50
Monster	3	19,333,333	49,456,288	66.6	0	0

Table 4 shows the relation between average budgets and domestic box office across the study. The drop in production costs witnessed in the latter part of the sample can be attributed to the conclusion of several high-cost franchises such as *The Mummy* (1999-2008) and *Twilight* and rise of Blumhouse Productions, a company that has, in part or in full, supplied twenty-one films that appear in our sample. Where the average budget of their films was $4.9 million with none exceeding $10 million, the average box office was $55.6 million. The company has arguably revolutionized the art of the low budget horror production for the 21st century.

Table 4: Average Budgets and Average Box Office

With the emerging centrality of Blumhouse Productions in horror productions, it is important to briefly consider the company's operating logic. Ostensibly, the firm performs the function once served by studios' specialty wings, but with a much lower price tag. Blumhouse Productions was founded in 2000 by Jason Blum, a former Miramax executive. Its first great success was *Paranormal Activity*, which raked in an astounding $107.9 million domestic box office on its paltry $15,000 budget. Film budgets are "reverse-engineered"[1] at $5 million (sequels are often produced at $10 million, but never higher), meaning the budget is set low enough that the film can at least break even if fails to receive theatrical distribution.[2] In 2014, the company renewed its first-look deal with Universal until 2024.[3] The deal allows Blumhouse to greenlight any film provided it meets the $5 million budget requirement (formerly $4 million) and is a horror, science fiction or thriller film.[4] The "Blumhouse Model" keeps costs low by recycling crew across multiple productions,[5] withholding the salaries of most creative personnel until the film makes money,[6] and utilizing similar narrative templates.[7] Directors are given creative control over their films. However, Blumhouse only releases films if senior staff deem them worthy of investing the necessary "$20 million or $30 million needed to release them in theaters."[8] No film is guaranteed a release and there exists "a sizable batch of finished movies that have not been released even on-demand."[9] As always, however, the dynamics of production continue to change. Significant shifts in the logic of horror film production can be seen on the horizon. As we briefly discuss in the conclusion this could have profound implications for future horror films.

Approximately two-fifths (47 out of 117) of the horror films in the sample acquired a PG-13 rating. While this rating comprises a minority of the films in the genre, it is important to note that since the implementation of the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings system in 1968 the vast majority of horror films had been rated R.[10] This began to change in the late-1990s as more horror films downplayed the genre's "more extreme characteristics in order to avoid alienating audiences"[11] Since then, the PG-13 rating is seen as necessary for the genre to reach a wider audience, and was viewed as a fundamental ingredient in the success of many otherwise low-key films like *Mama* (2013).[12] Average budgets for PG-13 horror films are significantly higher ($37.4 million) than R-rated films ($25.1 million) as are box office returns ($81.6 million versus $51.5 million). This finding corroborates prior studies.[13] For its part, Blumhouse Productions mostly stays within the R-rated model, with two-thirds of their horror films receiving the rating.

Perhaps no other genre is more prone to sequels, reboots/remakes, and derivative retreads of successful formulae than horror. In the years just prior to this study's timeframe, Bernice Murphy, for instance, argued that the genre had experienced long decline in its critical edge and creativity in storylines. For her, each new year witnessed "a formula-reliant, remake, and sequel oriented line-up."[14] It, thus, comes as no surprise that a large number of films in our database were either remakes/reboots (17.9%) and/or sequels (35%). Sometimes these categories overlapped as in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (2006), *The Grudge 2* (2006), *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008), and *Halloween II* (2009). As well, more than one-sixth of our sample were literary adaptations, whether of novels as in the *Twilight* series or *The Woman in Black* (2012) or a graphic novel such as *30 Days of Night* (2007) or *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008).

Horror Trends

Below we provide brief snapshots of each horror film subtype that appeared in our sample. Given the sheer volume of films in the sample, it is unfeasible to provide the in-depth discussion necessary to leverage the complex meanings of each. Accordingly, our commentary is only summary.

Supernatural Horror Films

Supernatural horror films strongly dominate our dataset, both across the time frame and in each individual year. This diverse category includes horror films about such phenomena as ghosts (*The Forest*, 2016), haunted houses (*Haunting in Connecticut*, 2009), demons (*Sinister*, 2012), psychokinesis (*Carrie*, 2013), and possession (*The Last Exorcism*, 2010). Moreover, the release pattern for this subtype was relatively consistent across the course of the study. Nearly every year saw the release of between four and six supernatural horror films. Roughly 13 per cent were remakes and almost one-third (30.4 per cent) were sequels. Significantly, Blumhouse Productions produced over one-third of supernatural horror films (34.8 per cent).

Supernatural horror films are an attractive investment, costing roughly half as much as other horror films ($16.3 million) and returning only slightly less than average at the box office ($52.2 million). Close to half of these films (44.7 per cent) garnered a PG-13, which is higher, but not significantly so, than the rest of the data. Nearly one-third (30.4 per cent) were sequels with the *Paranormal Activity* series (2007-2015) representing the most notable franchise. The subtype includes a few remakes, including international remakes like *The Eye* (2008) and domestic remakes such as *Poltergeist* (2015). One of the major points of difference between the current crop of supernatural horror films and those of the past, is the lack of book adaptations.[15] The only supernatural horror book adaptations in the sample are *The Rite* (2011), loosely based on *The Rite: The Making of a Modern Exorcist* (2009), and a remake of *Carrie*.

Supernatural horror continues to be one of the genre's most enduring subtypes, in part, because of humans' evolved tendency of "overattributing agency to inexplicable events and an intuitive dualism, that is, our innate tendency to view humans as consisting of material as well as spiritual selves."[16] Additionally, supernatural horror's status as the most popular subtype in terms of volume can also be seen as a function of its ability to tap into anxieties over the mounting precariousness of the middle class as mentioned above. Supernatural horror films found tremendous popularity in the period under discussion because of a cultural and psychological climate particularly hospitable to such films, which could be produced relatively inexpensively, most notably by Blumhouse Productions. In sum, the subtype is topical, resonates with our psychological hardwiring, and is economical.

Thriller/Psychological Films

Thriller/psychological horror films constitute 13.7 per cent of our dataset. Such films share appeals with mainstream suspense films and tend to focus on psychotic individuals[17] like in *The Boy* (2016) or rationalized yet monstrous threats as in *The Crazies* (2010). Unlike supernatural horror films, thriller/psychological horror films do not subvert or challenge a rationalistic or secular world view, even though many such films are implausible, depicting highly unlikely events or offering sensationalistic, exaggerated portrayals of violently psychotic individuals. Films of this type are slightly cheaper than other subtypes ($26.5 million) and return moderately less ($50.2 million). Half of thriller/psychological films were rated PG-13, a figure higher than the sample average.

The subtype was released inconsistently across the sample frame, with two-thirds playing in theaters prior to 2011. Close to one-third were remakes including *The Stepfather* (2009) and the aforementioned *The Crazies*. Three films in this subtype were literary adaptations, including *1408* (2007), *Hannibal Rising* (2007), and *Shutter Island* (2010). As of 2015 Blumhouse Productions has become active in thriller/psychological horror films with *The Gift* (2015) and *The Visit* (2015) and more recently with *Split* (2016) and *Get Out* (2017).

Significantly, recent entries have performed better than those appearing earlier in the sample. For instance, *Snakes on a Plane* (2006) only made $34 million on a $33 million budget. *Hannibal Rising* made back just over half ($27.7) of its $50 million budget. Meanwhile, *Super 8* (2011) raked in $127 on a $50 million budget, and was the second highest grossing horror film of that year (second only to *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1*, 2011). True to form, Blumhouse Productions' *The Gift* and *The Visit* returned $43.8 million and $65.2 million respectively, on their $5 million budgets. The performance of *Split* and *Get Out* could help to underwrite further investment in the subtype.

Action Horror Films

Action horror films such as the *Underworld* series (2003-) and the reboot of *The Mummy* franchise (1999-2008) centralize sequences of action over the more brooding aspects of horror. As Adam Charles Hart puts it, "these films use themes, characters, and imagery from the horror genre to tell action-adventure stories."[18] The subtype came to fruition in the late-1990s with early examples including *Blade* (1998), *The Mummy* (1999), and, arguably, *Resident Evil* (2002), which is catalogued as a zombie film in this analysis. The subtype makes up 9.4% of the films we analyzed and is the only subtype whose budgets ($66.1 million) outpace domestic profits ($51.2 million). Roughly one-quarter (27.3%) of action horror films were rated PG-13, and over half (54.5%) were sequels.

The budgets of action horror films are second only to vampire films, but are the least consistent subtype. While *The Mummy* films returned steady, if diminishing, profits, there are many busts. To cite a few examples, the heavily hyped *Grindhouse* (2007) made $25.4 million against a $67 million budget, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012) took in $37.5 million on a $69 million budget, and *R.I.P.D.* (2013) grossed an anemic $33.6 on a bloated $130 million budget.

Despite the subtype's lacklustre track record, much is currently being made of Universal Studio's attempt to resuscitate it. In addition to *The Mummy* (2017), there are plans for new Invisible Man, Wolf Man, Van Helsing, Creature from the Black Lagoon, and Bride of Frankenstein films. Early press reports suggest these films will jettison their original gothic trappings and will, instead, rely on action and adventure as chief selling points. Should this gambit work, it would have profound implications for future horror productions.[19]

Slashers

Slasher films, comprising 8.5 per cent of our sample, feature solitary killers stalking (usually young) victims. The subtype is largely assumed to have crystallized in John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), despite debate on its prior origins.[20] Since the slasher's first cycle (1978-1981), the subtype has experienced spouts of popularity, including in the mid-1980s, the mid-1990s, and arguably in the mid-2000s.[21] Apart from *Cabin in the Woods* (2012), which references earlier slashers and horror films at every turn, all the slashers in our dataset are sequels (40 per cent), as in *Scream 4* (2011), or remakes/reboots (80 per cent) like *Halloween* (2007) and *My Bloody Valentine 3D* (2009).

As in the past, slashers carry remarkably cheap price tags ($22 million), nearly two-thirds the budget of the average horror film to reach the study's threshold for inclusion. At $40 million, *Scream 4* touts the biggest budget; most of the rest of the sample were produced for less than half that amount. Interestingly, slasher films perform well domestically (averaging $46.9 million at the box office), but often struggle overseas (averaging only $27.8 million). Industry reporter Nicole LaPorte suggests that gorier films including slashers and torture porn get hung up on international ratings boards, thereby cutting into potential profits.[22] Indeed, only one slasher, a remake of *Prom Night* (2008), received a PG-13 rating.

While there was a steady stream of slasher releases of one or two a year across the study's timeframe, no film in the subtype made it to the final three years of the database (2014, 2015, and 2016). More recently another attempt to reboot *Friday the 13th* was jettisoned.[23] However, a fan-produced sequel to the original *Halloween* series, *Halloween: The Night Evil Died*, is scheduled for a late 2017 release. Additionally, the *Halloween* franchise is slated for another reboot by Blumhouse Productions in 2018.

Vampire Films

While Dracula may be "the second most portrayed character in film behind only Sherlock Holmes",[24] vampire films constitute only 7.7 per cent of our sample, over half of which were films from the *Twilight Saga*. Accordingly, box office averages, in this case budgets of $72.8 million and returns of $194 million, reflect the dominance of this series. However, the inclusion of *Twilight* films in this study is not without debate. Much like action horror films use characters from horror films and insert them into action-adventure narratives, the *Twilight* series also features classical horror monsters (vampires and werewolves), but they do so in the service of a teen-oriented romance plot, not primarily to elicit fright reactions in their audience. Hence, in the new millennium, the vampire's cinematic role seems to be relegated primarily to paranormal romance films about teen love.

With the vampire catered toward teen romance, it is not surprising to note that nearly all films in this category received a PG-13 rating. Only *30 Days of Night*, which was adapted from a graphic novel of the same name, was rated R. In addition to all the *Twilight* films, *I am Legend* (2007) and *Dracula Untold* (2014), very loosely based on Bram

Stoker's book, were also novel adaptations. The latter film is also the last vampire film appearing in the sample. Vampires do not stay dead for long, especially given their profitability. There are strong rumors of adding new films to *Twilight*[25] and Dracula will, no doubt, be part of Universal's attempt to upscale its monster series.

Zombie Films

Although much has been made of zombie cinema's entry into the cinematic spotlight, the subtype constitutes only 6.8 per cent of the films in our sample. While it could be argued that the events that propelled the subtype to the forefront have ebbed in the face of fears relating to the Great Recession, it is important to note that the *Resident Evil* series (2002-2017) has foregrounded the nefarious corporate activities of the Umbrella Corporation in latter installments,[26] thus offering plotlines that dovetail into the climate of the recession.

A better explanation can be found in the economics of the subtype. The average budget for a zombie film in our sample was $61.9 million, more than double the average film in our dataset. Meanwhile the average box office was just above $75.1 million, or moderately more than the average film in our dataset. This data, however, is skewed by *World War Z* (2013) which, at $190 million, possesses the largest budget of any horror film, ever. When this film is removed a more problematic picture emerges. The average budget ($40.6 million) is still significantly more than the sample average ($30 million), but the box office returns of the subtype ($53.9 million) are less than average ($65.5 million). Only *World War Z* and *Warm Bodies* (2013) nabbed PG-13 ratings, which were the top and third highest performing zombie films (*Zombieland* was second).

Several key underperformers have likely tempered decisions to pursue the subtype. George Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005) failed to make the top 100 (it ranked 112th), making only $20.7 million on its $15 million budget. A similar fate befell *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016) which returned $10.9 million on its $28 million budget, good enough for 132nd. The zombie has simply been too inconsistent to be a primetime player in the new era of horror.

Torture Porn

Films in the torture porn subgenre—films dwelling on innovative, excruciatingly graphic depictions of bodily violations and physical pain—derive from an old cinematic tradition of graphically disturbing films but erupted into the mainstream with the release of *Saw* in 2004.[27] Only making up 5.1 per cent of the films in our sample, the subtype has erroneously been lauded (or castigated) as the face of modern horror. Within the parameters of our study, which misses the first two *Saw* films, the subtype was incredibly profitable, earning an average of $53.5 million per film on budgets of $11.1 million. However, the entirety of our sample consists of *Saw* sequels, which experienced diminishing returns, and *Hostel* (2006); no other examples of the subtype made it to our list.

In addition to diminishing returns of its flagship franchise, torture porn films also experienced some notable flops and public controversy. *Captivity* (2007), though sporting a $17 million budget and a distribution deal with Lionsgate, turned in only $2.6 million at the box office, placing it 207th. That same year *Hostel: Part II* (2007) made only $17.6 million on its $10.2 budget, which placed it at 117th (the original made $47.3 million on a $4.8 million budget). As with slashers, torture porn films were often held up by international film boards.[28] Even though no torture porn has made the top 100 at the North American box office since 2010, *Saw: Legacy* (2017) is set for an October 2017 release.

Historical Horror Films

Historical horror films, often called period horror, are films whose narratives occur prior to the 20th-century, but which do not contain figures otherwise associated with other subtypes (e.g., vampires, mummies). Within academic literature the subtype is most associated with the heyday of Hammer Films.[29] Examples from the United States are relatively rare, but Davis and Natale's analysis included big-budget films like *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *From Hell* (2001), and *The Village* (2004) that pulled in an average of $82.3 million at the box office, making the subtype the most profitable they analyzed.[30] The films in our analysis contrast sharply, with budgets averaging $27.6 million and the box office averaging $38 million. The films that made it to our analysis were *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), *The Woman in Black*, *Crimson Peak* (2015), *The Woman in Black 2: Angel of Death* (2015), and *The Witch* (2016), which was only 4.3 per cent of our sample.

Home Invasion

To paraphrase Michael Fiddler, home invasion films entail a breached domestic setting violently defended by its inhabitants.[31] Only four films (or 3.4 per cent) of this subtype made our analysis: *The Strangers* (2008) and all three *The Purge* (2013-2016) films. All four films were made cheaply with the $10 million budget of *The Purge: Election Year* (2016) being the highest. As well, all four films were incredibly profitable with *The Strangers*' $52.6 million box office being lowest. A fourth installment of *The Purge* is scheduled for a summer 2018 release.

Monster Films

Monster films, or creature features, hit their peak in the 1950s with films like *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955), and *The Giant Claw* (1957). In recent times, however, the subtype has faded from the mainstream. Steffen Hantke points out that the monster films still perform well on the straight-to-video and TV-movie market.[32] With titles like *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* (2009), *Sharktopus* (2010), *Sharknado* (2013), and *Lavalantula* (2015), the more absurd the better in this market. One might question whether such fare can meaningfully be labelled horror. With mainstream releases, Davis and Natale found that the subtype had lackluster returns that averaged $22.3 million.[33] Our sample only included three monster films, or just 2.6 per cent of the dataset – *The Mist* (2007), *Cloverfield* (2008), and *Krampus* (2015). Collectively these films cost between $15 million and $25 million to make and earned between $25.6 and $80 million. Another *Cloverfield* film will be released in late-2017.

Conclusion

This study contributes to a growing scholarly literature demonstrating the value of a quantitative, production-oriented approach to horror cinema. By analyzing a large dataset with the aid of descriptive statistics and market analyses, we have been able to identify overarching content trends that are difficult or impossible to spot from a bottom-up perspective focusing on individual films and their aesthetic qualities, which has been the most common approach in academic horror film study since its inception.

Through our analysis of top-grossing horror films in the North American market, we have found that the horror film genre is as lucrative as ever. Budgets have only moderately increased in the period 2006-2016 as compared to the period 1978-2010 (going from an average of $27 million to an average of $30 million), whereas profits have significantly increased (from an average of $45 million to an average of $65.5 million in domestic gross). We have also identified a substantial dominance of supernatural horror films in the timeframe. This dominance cannot be solely ascribed to topical resonance, but also results from the fact that such films are particularly attractive from a production perspective: supernatural horror films cost only about half as much to produce as other types and return similar box office. This has made the film type particularly attractive to emerging low-budget production companies such as Blumhouse Productions.

At the same time, we have demonstrated the relative weak position of film types that otherwise have received extensive treatment in the scholarly literature (including zombie, vampire, and torture porn films). The trends we identify, then, are explicable when seen in their social and industrial context. The rise of a new model of low-budget horror film making, as well as a cultural ecology particularly receptive to certain kinds of horror, help explain the prevalence of horror films that tap into extant social anxieties with roots in an evolved fear system and which have proven highly lucrative to low-budget filmmakers. Even in a rapidly and fundamentally changing production climate, horror retains its central place because of the genre's unique ability to let us meaningfully engage with our deepest fears.

Our study also allows us to make tentative predictions for the future of horror films. With the success of *Split* and *Get Out*, the "Blumhouse Model" will continue unabated. The company is scheduled to release no less than eight additional horror films for the remainder of 2017 (i. e., *Amityville: The Awakening*, *Creep 2*, *Delirium*, *Insidious: Chapter 4*, *The Keeping Hours*, *Prey*, *Stephanie*, and *Sweetheart*). Most of these new efforts will continue to focus on supernatural horror. However, in a recent interview Jason Blum stated, "I consider 'Split' a Blumhouse 2.0 – a new act in the company."[34] It is too early to tell what, if anything, is meant by this statement. In addition to Blumhouse Productions' ongoing efforts, the biggest change in the horizon of horror will be Universal's attempt to build a cinematic universe around its classic monsters akin to the Marvel Cinematic Universe.[35] As noted above, Universal is heavily invested in the long-term prospects and viability of this production logic. Accordingly, we tentatively predict that the future of mainstream horror will follow two production strategies: the streamlined Blumhouse Model that specializes in supernatural films and the upscale Universal Model that will use classic monsters in the service of high adrenaline action plots.

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[2] The $5 million is the money required for the film to break even, should it not receive a wide release.

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[8] Masters, "Jason Blum's Crowded Movie Morgue."

[9] Ibid.

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[11] Stacey Abbott, "High Concept Thrills and Chills: The Horror Blockbuster," in *Horror Zone: The Contemporary Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. Ian Conrich (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 35.

[12] Andrew Stewart, "H'wood's Fear of Success," *Variety*, January 28-February 3, 2013, 53.

[13] Davis and Natale, "The Pound of Flesh which I Demand," 45-47; Terry, King, and Walker, "The Determinants of Box Office Revenue for Horror Movies," 13; Terry, King, and Patterson, "Vampires, Slashers, or Zombies," 103.

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[16] Mathias Clasen, “Monsters Evolve: A Bio-Cultural Approach to Horror Stories,” *Review of General Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2012): 226.

[17] Brigid Cherry, *Horror* (New York: Routledge 2009), 5.

[18] Adam Charles Hart, “Millennial Fears: Adject Horror in a Transnational Context,” in *A Companion to the Horror Film*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 334.

[19] See e.g., Kwame Opam, “How Tom Cruise’s *The Mummy* will Launch a Marvel-like Reboot of the Universal Monsters,” *The Verge*, December 5 2016, accessed March 20 2017, http://www.theverge.com/2016/12/5/13848462/the-mummy-universal-monsters-cinematic-universe-explained

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Nicole LaPorte, “Horror Hits Have Higher Hopes,” *Variety*, December 26-January 1, 2005/2006, 9.

[23] Borys Kit, “‘Friday the 13th’ Reboot Shut Down (Exclusive),” *Hollywood Reporter*, Feburary 6 2017, accessed March 22 2017, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/friday-13th-reboot-shut-down-972644

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[27] Pinedo, “Torture Porn,” 345-346.

[28] LaPorte, “Horror Hits Have Higher Hopes,” 9.

[29] Peter Hutchings, “The Amicus House of Horror,” in *British Horror Cinema*, ed. Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley (New York: Routledge, 2001), 131.

[30] Davis and Natale, “‘The Pound of Flesh which I Demand,’” 48.

[31] Michael Fiddler, “Playing *Funny Games* in *The Last House on the Left*: The Uncanny and the ‘Home Invasion’ Genre,” *Crime Media Culture* 9, no. 3 (2013): 282.

[32] Steffen Hantke, “The Return of the Giant Creature: *Cloverfield* and the Political Opposition to the War on Terror,” *Extrapolation* 51, no. 2 (2010): 235-236.

[33] Davis and Natale, “‘The Pound of Flesh which I Demand,’” 49.

[34] Jason Guerrasio, “How the Company behind 2 of the Year’s Biggest Movies is Blowing Up the Hollywood Playbook,” *Business Insider*, March 1 2017, accessed March 24 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/blumhouse-productions-get-out-split-2017-2

[35] Opam, “How Tom Cruise’s *The Mummy* will Launch a Marvel-like Reboot of the Universal Monstersur,” *The Verge*.

[i] The attacks on 9/11 refer to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon on September 9, 2001. The ‘Great Recession’ refers to the global financial crisis in the years 2007-8 which led to a global economic downturn.

[ii] Dixon, *Hollywood in Crisis or: The Collapse of the Real*, 4.

[iii] Angela Ndalianis, “Genre, Cultre and the Semiosphere: New Horror Cinema and Post-9/11,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2015): 135, 137.

[iv] Todd K. Platts, “Locating Zombies in the Sociology Popular Culture,” *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 7 (2013): 547-548.

[v] Isabel C. Pinedo, “Torture Porn: 21st Century Horror,” in *A Companion to the Horror Film*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 345.

[vi] Craig Ian Mann, "Death and Dead-End Jobs: Independent American Horror and the Great Recession," in *Popular Culture and the Austerity Myth: Hard Times Today*, ed. Pete Bennett and Julian McDougall (New York: Routledge, 2017), 176.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] James D. Stone, "Horror at the Homestead: The (Re)possession of American Property in *Paranormal Activity* and *Paranormal Activity II*," in *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film, and Television: Twenty-First-Century Bust Culture*, eds. Kirk Boyle and Daniel Mrozowski (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 51-65; Tim Snelson, "The (Re)possession of the American Home: Negative Equity, Gender Inequality, and the Housing Crisis Horror Story," in *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*, eds. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 161-180.

[ix] Dixon, *Hollywood in Crisis or: The Collapse of the Real*, 13-21.

[x] Chuck Bowen, "Is it Time for a Horror Movie about the Evils of Donald Trump?" *The Guardian*, July 5 2016, accessed March 9, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/05/donald-trump-horror-movie-they-live-john-carpenter.

[xi] Davis and Natale, "The Pound of Flesh which I Demand," 47.

[xii] Terry, King, and Walker, "The Determinants of Box Office Revenue for Horror Movies," 10.

[i] Thomas Schatz, "The Studio System and Conglomerate Hollywood," in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, eds. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 14.

[ii] Schatz, "The Studio System and Conglomerate Hollywood," 29-31; Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium*, 133-148.

[iii] Thomas Schatz, "New Hollywood, New Millennium," in *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*, ed. Warren Buckland (New York: Routledge, 2009), 24-29.

[iv] Lionsgate merged with Summit Entertainment in January 2012. Relativity Media filed for bankruptcy in July 2015 and was purchased by the Singapore-based Yuuzoo in October 2016.

[v] Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium*, 144.

[vi] Cf., Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium*, 144-148; Alisa Perren, "Last Indie Standing: The Case of Lions Gate in the New Millenium," in *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond*, eds. Geoff King, Claire Molloy, and Yannis Tzioumakis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 109.

[i] For previous box office analyses of horror films see, Blair Davis and Kial Natale, "'The Pound of Flesh Which I Demand': American Horror Cinema, Gore, and the Box Office, 1998-2007," in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 35-57; Neil Terry, Robert King, and Jeri J. Walker, "The Determinants of Box Office Revenue for Horror Movies," *Journal of Global Business Management* 6, no. 2 (2010): 10-19; Neil Terry, Robert King, and Robin Patterson, "Vampires, Slashers, Or Zombies: Opening Weekend's Favorite Box Office Monster," *Journal of Business and Economics Research* 9, no. 2 (2011): 95-105.

[ii] Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Hollywood in Crisis or: The Collapse of the Real* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 39-40.

[iii] Tino Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2013), 133-148.

[iv] This method has been used in prior analyses of content trends see, Tino Balio, "Hollywood Production Trends in the Era of Globalisation, 1990-99," in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Steve Neale (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 165-166.

[v] Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film* (New York: Pearson 2004), 9.

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