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# The Reflection of Contemporary Anxieties in the Contemporary French Horror Cycle

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Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a proliferation of a certain kind of film in contemporary French cinema. They are films that are challenging to watch, often pairing graphic sexuality and brutal violence, incorporating imagery traditionally belonging to horror and pornography cinemas. There have been ongoing debates as to whether they actually say something or if they simply aim to provoke the spectator. There is no doubt that the spectator is provoked: accounts of people feeling nauseated and leaving the theatre to vomit have been recorded at the screenings of films such as *Irreversible* (2002, Gaspar Noé) and *In My Skin* (2002, Marina de Van).<sup>[1]</sup> However, more than simply creating bodily responses in spectators, the directors of these films are also concerned with intellectual provocation as they attack the foundational principles of the French Republic and force the spectator into confrontation with their own prejudices and belief systems.

Out of these films that combine elements of horror and pornography, a strand of horror blossomed to become a new wave in French filmmaking in and of itself. Horror, regarded as a 'low genre', was not considered worthy of critical exploration in France until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So this new strand of horror breaks from the cinematic tradition of France by engaging with genres never before considered as critical. Although the first horror film ever made is considered to be the three-minute-long *The House of the Devil* (1896, Georges Méliès), those made afterwards are not necessarily horror films per se, but rather contain elements of horror. Considered "generically peripheral"<sup>[2]</sup>, *Diabolique* (1955, Henri-Georges Clouzot), *Eyes Without a Face* (1960, Georges Franju) and *Possession* (1981, Andrzej Żuławski) appear in most lists. Looking at the scarcity of this historical background demonstrates the fact that it is only in the post-2000 period that France began to produce its own horror cinema.

The horror in recent French horror cinema is grounded in everyday, immediate social environments, as opposed to fantastic evil forces threatening existence. Connecting cycles of horror film surges with historical context, where socio-political developments lead to social panic, which is then reflected in cinematic tendencies, has been exemplified in the works of Sigmund Karacauer, as well as Mark Jancovich. Martine Beugnet allocates the horror film tropes present in the films as being "simply the irreducible echo of the inexcusable suffering that takes place in our reality, the manifestation of that which remains in 'excess' of

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historical and moral reasoning”. [3] As a matter of fact, it is exactly the events that France is unable to ‘face’, unable to ‘deal with’, that defy the ideals of French national identity that these films engage with. From gender relations, to the discussions of same-sex marriage which defy French universalist ideals, to the status of immigrant French nationals, the films bring to the surface anxieties that, if unleashed, would shake the very foundation on which France is built. As a result then, the films cannot be separated from their socio-cultural context. This context will be laid open in this article in order to comprehend the discourses in circulation and how they translate and are challenged in the films, as well as how the films themselves have an adversarial relation to the contemporary culture and society. In addition, textual analysis will demonstrate how the films’ audio-visual components strengthen the experience and reception of these discourses.

### **Theories of horror**

Genre films reflect society’s values and enforce the status quo. When talking about the horror genre in particular, what needs to be added is that this genre, in addition to society’s values, also reflects its fears. The horror film aims to play on spectator’s primal fears, where a disturbing ‘other’ force threatens the status quo. The monster of the horror film, whatever form it takes, is the projection of the anxieties present in dominant ideologies and norms. These anxieties come to the surface, in what Robin Wood calls the return of the repressed; that which civilization has tried to repress and oppress but which comes out into the open. Wood states that the core of the horror film is “our collective nightmares [...] in which normality is threatened by a monster”. [4] Indeed, Charles Derry also states that horror films are about “issues that are often painful for us to deal with consciously and directly”. [5] Despite horror films addressing society’s shared fears and cultural anxieties, spectators still flock to these films. Thus, there is a pleasure and fascination in facing these fears. Horror allows for an opening where the values and concepts of one’s culture can be challenged, questioned and put under threat. Furthermore, certain desires, unacceptable in reality, can be fantasized about, only to be safely contained by the end of the film, firmly re-establishing and re-confirming social norms.

### **France at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: creating “the other”**

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the French people were in a state of disenchantment. The latest attempt by left-wing governments to make a change worthy of re-invigorating faith in an alternative political system failed dramatically. The socio-economic gap widened, leading many to blame the hypocrisy of the left-wing government. Max Silverman summarizes the debates on culture and society as caught between “a

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profound nostalgia for a golden age of culture and national unity and an extreme rejection of the hierarchies that characterized that age”.[\[6\]](#) Indeed, this enchantment is also evident in the extensive voter abstentions in the 2002 Presidential elections.

With strict measures on migration imposed by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, the tension within the nation rose rapidly and exploded in the riots of 2005 where cars were burned as well as public buildings, symbols of state power.

Urban riots were not new in France, but the riots of 2005 were “a collective revolt against state violence that lacked any form of collective organization and whose members were not politicized”.[\[7\]](#) The rioters came from working class families, impoverished by mass unemployment and insecurity.

Instead of responding to the problem of *fracture sociale*[\[8\]](#) by looking at their root causes, far-right politicians saw Sarkozy’s approach as an opportunity to further discriminatory agendas, going as far as suggesting in parliament that the citizenship of rioters should be revoked. Furthermore, Prime Minister de Villepin declared a tightening of the control on immigration. These measures were protested, with many stating that they would lead to greater scrutiny and mistrust of immigrants, stirring up racism and further polarization.

Some have argued that these riots forced France to face itself and slowly start to accept the fact that the Republican model was not functioning as ideally as hoped for and that “its integration paradigm had become a cover for the denial of its institutional racism”.[\[9\]](#) On the other hand, others have argued that the riots did not demonstrate the failure of the republican model and its integration policies, but that on the contrary, the riots should be interpreted as “the manifest evidence that most of the frustrated men feel entirely French and that they simply want to be accepted by the Nation, and more prosaically, to be part of a modern consumerist society”.[\[10\]](#) Thus it is the failure to put ideals into action and translate what is on paper into applied policies, as opposed to the rejection of these ideals that caused outcry.

François Hollande won the elections of 2012, making him the second left-wing President of the Fifth Republic after Mitterrand. This win came after seventeen consecutive years of centre-right-wing rules. However, despite the presidency of a left-wing politician, his agenda has barely differed from the previous governments. Furthermore, police brutality against the people has not decreased, while terrorist attacks have been on the rise. As a matter of fact, measures proposed by the ‘socialist’ government after the November 2015 terrorist attacks were to remove national identity

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from citizens who were loosely connected to any terrorist activity. This type of policy was previously proposed by governments of the right, suggesting that the current left-wing government is unsure about on what political steps to take after the terrorist attacks in the capital.

In this context, the horror wave of France insisted on engaging with that which the French government has preferred to keep in the dark and ignore. France firmly stands by ideals that were decided over 200 years ago, as opposed to facing the problems of their socio-economic reality. Certain progressive steps such as discussions surrounding parity and legalising same-sex marriage lead to many debates, especially with regards to the basis of French identity and the meaning of universalism[11] in this context. France is traditionally a patriarchal society where women have always been set up as the other of men. It is man who defines woman, relative to him, not regarding as an autonomous being. Man is the point of reference, the point from which meaning is constructed. Women's traditional role was to be fertile and to be a submissive wife. In France gender roles are strongly codified and powerfully naturalized. Women had to struggle for their rights because there was no sign of any progressive political action to change or diversify the roles allocated to them. The discussions surrounding parity were considered preposterous because they engaged in the politics of difference, which defied the principles of the Republican ideology of universalism. However, the aim of feminists in prompting this discussion was formulated on the basis of universalism. Indeed, arguments for equal representation had nothing to do with essentialism or about what women could bring to French politics; the sole argument was a universalist one. They searched for ways to expand the notion of the individual in Republican terms, so as to include differences, where French universalism could transcend differences of sex, and not be simply synonymous with 'male'. They pushed for an understanding that 'human' entailed a 'duality' - male and female - and that both should have equal rights in representing the very humanity that they constitute. A parallel approach was undertaken during the debates regarding same-sex marriage; but a vast majority of the population were outraged and called on representatives to support traditional family values. Protests around the nation with slogans such as "A father and a mother: it's hereditary" demonstrated how in such moments, the darkest, most separatist thoughts, and the lack of tolerance towards any kind of difference, made themselves evident. Thus the horror wave in France can be seen as a response to "France's increasing renunciation of the possibility of relation, revolution or community reborn".[12]

## **The films**

These anxieties over Republican identities are clearly engaged with in

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films such as *High Tension* (2003, Alexandre Aja), *Them* (2006, [David Moreau](#), [Xavier Palud](#)), *Inside* (2007, Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo) and *Martyrs* (2008, Pascal Laugier). The films bring to light anxieties in relation to 'the (racial) other', sexuality and religion. These French horror films do not safely tuck away anxieties and re-establish the status quo: instead, something about them lingers on. The spectator is left with an uneasy feeling as opposed to pure thrill, which is generically expected. The traces of a reality repressed manage to escape the cracks.

One of the first examples is *High Tension*. The film can be categorized as a slasher film, but holds a twist in the plot that breaks slasher film conventions. However, this break, although innovative as a choice because it plays with spectator expectations, holds disturbingly conservative implications with regards to the perception of family structure and homosexual desire. Thus, the film uses slasher film tropes such as the jump scare, indestructible killer and insane asylum, yet breaks with the moral framework set up historically by the subgenre.

The film tells the story of Marie and Alex, who are two female university students, heading to the French countryside, where Alex's family lives. On the night of their arrival, a man dressed in a mechanic's suit and driving a rusty old truck, comes into the house, kills Alex's father, mother and little brother, and kidnaps Alex. Marie manages to evade the killer and follows him in order to save Alex. However, it is revealed that the killer is a figment of Marie's imagination: she has been doing the killings all along. Her desire for Alex repressed, she is finally defeated, and locked up in a mental hospital. In the opening sequence of the film, Marie is pictured in a mental hospital, recounting the events to a camera. The story of the film is told by her point of view, as a flashback. Thus, the whole film and the events unfolding are about her subjective experience of them. "Are you recording?" is the question she asks, before the film delves into the story. From the outset, the story comes from her mind. The binary opposites of the horror film - the monster and the norm - here, reside within the same person, co-existing in the same body, where there is a metaphysical struggle between man's rational and animal instincts.

In her study on the modern slasher film, Carol Clover states that there must always be two oppositional figures: the female hero (the Final Girl) and the male killer. Marie is set up as the Final Girl of the film. The Final Girl is the last woman left in the slasher film. She confronts the killer after everyone else is eliminated. She often has masculine traits and becomes a male surrogate: "she is a boyish girl (making it possible for the mainly young adolescent and male fan base able to identify with her) of the horror film, even named something like Stevie or Will or Stretch, but a girl nonetheless".<sup>[13]</sup> Despite, the Final Girl destroying the killer by the

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end of the film, it is not enough for her to be considered a hero in conventional terms: Clover identifies the Final Girl as the victim-hero because throughout the film, she, and thus the spectator, has been chased and hurt. She has screamed, run and seen friends and family being killed. Then, at the last minute, she manages to kill this person who has caused so much terror.

In the case of *High Tension*, Marie is the character with whom the spectator is made to identify from the outset. She is set up as heroic and smart. Traits identified by Clover with regards to the Final Girl are also clearly depicted in Marie's character and appearance; Marie has short hair and an athletic look. Furthermore, she is also not interested in men, unlike Alex. Alex teases Marie for acting "that way" with men and if she continues that way she will "end up alone". Marie calls Alex a "slut" for running after men. Yet, Marie's sexually non-active stance and masculine traits have less to do with the sexually non-active Final Girls of the 1970s slasher films, and more to do with a new element added in in *High Tension*: her lesbian desires for Alex. The film clearly indicates that Marie likes Alex 'more than just a friend'. Alex is placed as the object of Marie's desire, as Marie watches Alex showering, shot from Marie's point of view. After this scene, a scene of Marie masturbating is intercut with the members of the family sleeping, directly linking Alex's naked body in the shower to the awakening of Marie's desire. Furthermore, her masturbation is also intercut with the killer's truck slowly approaching the house. Marie's climax is correlated with the killer's arrival: as Marie comes, the killer comes through the door of the house.

The revelation that the killer is a figment of Marie's imagination is, although an innovative device for the slasher film, problematic. The expected Final Girl is actually the killer. These two different characters merge into one: Marie is both Final Girl and killer. When she becomes the killer, Alex is transferred from victim to Final Girl. The film plays with the assumption of the horror film, where a male is allocated to the active role of the killer and the female is linked to victimhood. Here, evil is allocated to both sexes, where Marie embodies both the masculine and the feminine. The monstrous is not clearly allocated or defined. Furthermore, this leads to a betrayal in the relationship created with the spectator, for whom Marie was the point of identification. This revelation leads to the realization that the gruesome murders that have been witnessed from the outset of the film were carried out by Marie, the one person the spectator had identified with from the outset.

What is problematic in the revelation is the form this externalization of Marie's repressed lesbian desires for Alex takes: this desire is represented in the form of a crazed, bulky and dirty mechanic killer. She is never able to kill him because she is unable to repress her urges. He

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keeps coming back. The film assigns evil to both genders, and instead of creating the duality of the slasher film between the sexes, it creates duality by pitting the normative family structure against non-hetero-normative desire. The title of the film is a reference to this: the tension caused by same sex desire and the contradiction between this kind of desire and the established hetero-normative order. This tension referred to in the title is also demonstrated in the *mis-en-scène* of the film. Alex's family household is portrayed as dark, claustrophobic and eerie, whereas the world of female bonding is illustrated in bright colours, with the sun hitting them as they drive along the French countryside, accompanied with music, giving a sense of freedom. This world cannot survive within the order of things. The normative sexual world of the family is portrayed with stereotypical activities allocated to the family members: the mother is taking down the laundry as she also deals with her young boy, while the father works away in front of his computer. This set up suggests that Marie's murderous rampage is an attack on all normative sexual roles forced upon her by French society. Thus her (lesbian) desire destroys (literally kills) the nuclear family one by one. She literally decapitates (separates the head from the body) the father; the 'head' of the family in this order.

The twist ending and revelation however lead to many questions, which are left unanswered by the end of the film. The narrative plausibility is put under scrutiny at this point: but what should not be forgotten and thus gives a reason to these unanswered questions is that from the outset of the film, the spectator is given Marie's story. It is Marie who is telling the story which the spectator has just witnessed. The gaps in narrative are simply the subjective interpretation of Marie, who at this point, is locked up in a mental hospital. There is no solid ground from the outset on which to rationally base the events unfolding. This in and of itself is the very thing that leads the film to be progressive in terms of its formal innovations, which Matthias Hurst describes as an "[e]xplosion of gross violence combined with the implosion of narrative logic literally deconstructs the genre".[\[14\]](#)

Furthermore, at the end of the film the 'monster' does not die; the monster is not killed. It is merely, 'put away', until 'further notice'. Thus this 'homosexual' threat to heteronormativity remains. This kind of conclusion, to a film made in 2003, trying new things with the formulaic slasher film, demonstrates the conservative nature of the films within the horror film genre. Aja's take on non-heterosexual desire as something that needs to be suppressed at all costs or else it will destroy the foundation of modern society, is step back in terms of the message it delivers and in contrast to the formally innovative choices he has made

*High Tension* reworks genre codes and conventions in order to bring to

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the surface the assumptions of the normative patriarchal ideology that lie at their base. However, although the film brings to the surface these assumptions, the film is not critical of them and instead reaffirms these norms by relegating those that do not fit into them to the margins. In this sense, the subversion of generic expectations stays superficial, as it re-instills the status quo, thus in line with the traditional horror film.

The film *Inside* directed by Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo, is also a slasher film that pushes the limits of onscreen use of gore. In the same vein as *High Tension*, the role of the protagonist is transferred to someone else, taking the film to a whole new place, confusing the polarities of good and evil. But more importantly, *Inside* uses the horror genre in order to represent political events of France, specifically to the riots in the suburbs of Paris of October 2005.

*Inside* is the story of Sarah, who, having lost her husband four months prior in a car accident, is now heavily pregnant and home alone on Christmas Eve, preparing for the birth of her child due the following morning. During the evening a stranger comes knocking on her door, asking to use her phone. Sarah does not let her in, but this does not stop the stranger from breaking in. Her aim is to steal Sarah's baby at all costs.

The blood-drenched aesthetic of the film is introduced in the opening sequence, where a car accident has taken place and a blood-soaked Sarah (the red of the blood in contrast to her white clothing) turns to her equally blood-soaked husband, who is motionless. Blood dripping from her chin, she hugs her pregnant belly. This opening sequence is followed by the opening credits, to which red, bloody textures and layers serve as background. Abject images enriching this aesthetic shortly follow, with a nightmare scene serving as an excuse for Sarah to be seen vomiting litres of white liquid. Furthermore, the interior of Sarah's house is dark, claustrophobic and with a red hue throughout, creating a womb-like atmosphere. The title, in this sense works on several different layers. "À l'intérieur", meaning inside, refers to the inside of the house, as well as the inside of Sarah's womb. There is constantly a threat from the outside to both of these insides, starting from the car accident at the very beginning. Before the accident is shown, there is a shot of a baby sleeping happily inside its mother's safe womb. All of a sudden its sleep is disrupted by an abrupt shock coming from the outside that physically jolts the baby. The film forces the limits of borders, to the point where the body's interiors literally become exterior.

This threat to the inside from the outside works on several different levels; the directors also use it as a social commentary in the film. There is a constant reference to the riots of October 2005. Sarah's friend Louise

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is happy Sarah is not working “what with everything that is going on out there at the moment”; Sarah’s boss Jean-Pierre is on the phone talking about the “burning cars and the whole fucking mess in the suburbs”. A news report on the events unfolding can be heard on the television in Sarah’s house. This situates the film in a specific time period of France, and does the very thing horror films set out to do: talk about social anxieties. This anxiety is in relation to those living within the walls of Paris and how the riots in the Parisian *banlieue* affect their security inside these very borders. This threat, unlike *High Tension*, is not contained. The unnamed stranger manages to steal the baby from Sarah’s stomach as she herself performs a C-section (the inside of the body exposed to the outside). However, before this occurs, there is a surprise for the spectator, just like with *High Tension*, destabilising the clear-cut distinction between good and bad. A flashback, cued by the stranger’s voice-over, takes the film back to the opening car crash. This time, the accident is given through the perspective of the other car, revealing that the stranger, also pregnant, has lost her baby as a result of this accident. Thus, the reason and the character’s motivation for the murderous rampage that has unfolded are finally given: the need to collect a baby that the stranger feels is rightfully owed to her.

Although not contained and managing to destroy whatever is inside, this threat from without is not evil without its reasons, suggesting perhaps a step back when discussing the unrest in the *banlieue* as well, as it might entail that those living in the *banlieue* share some of the blame for their situation. However, this destabilization in the character identified as evil from the outset creates a void, and leads to the obliteration of those who are good. This ending is unnerving and unleashes an anxiety within the spectator because they are all of a sudden aligned with the character that was designated as evil, forcing identification with the ‘other’. Justice, in the conventional sense, is denied, but what is designated as evil is forced to be questioned.

Another film in the surge of horror films that uses the riots in the *banlieue* of Paris as events to suggest that the country is literally being torn apart from the inside is *Frontier(s)* (2007, Xavier Gens). This film is about the racial tensions within France, and talks about this through references to Vichy France in order to criticize the Sarkozy government as a continuation of that same mentality. Like *Inside*, the aim is to show violence, and thus gore becomes a key feature. Furthermore, by referencing the riots, the film solidifies Carroll’s argument regarding horror film cycles appearing in times of social stress.

The social commentary in *Frontier(s)* is more obvious than *Inside*. Gens states that his idea for the film came from the events of 2002, after the presidential elections in France, where Jean-Marie Le Pen was able to

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make it to the second round. Gens remembers it to be the worst day of his life.[15] In the film, this extreme right-wing party actually wins and takes power. The collapse of the social order forces racial others to flee the city, which they have barely left previously. The five friends hit the road; Yasmine is pregnant and her brother Sami is dying at the hospital after being shot at by a police officer. In the countryside, they stop at a motel, which is run by the neo-Nazi Von Giesler family. Hereon after, they fight for survival before becoming meat to the cannibal family. None of them survives, except Yasmine, who ends up surrendering to the police, whom she was escaping initially. Thus her fate is left under threat and ambiguous.

The use of stock footage of the actual riots of 2005 in the introduction to the film, explicitly situates the film within the context of the political unrest that had taken over France just two years prior the film's release. These images highlight police brutality and, in the soundtrack, reference the recent elections and the rise of the far right. The stock footage is followed by the opening sequence of the film, where a similar chaotic and brutal environment is portrayed, making it barely possible to make out the difference. Thus, there is a direct link made between contemporary events and the filmic world. Furthermore, the use of hand-held camera from the start situates the spectator within the action, creating an immediacy and direct relation to the events unfolding in that specific environment. The rough, tense and anger-fuelled relationship amongst the five characters - Yas, Sami, Alex, Farid and Tom - upholds the chaos and immediacy of the setup. Not until they leave the city does the pace slow down. But of course this is not for long. Abject images of animal guts and vomit-like liquid food are introduced inside the motel; this is only the beginning of the ensuing bodily dissections. Fast cuts are used to pick up the pace as Tom and Farid try to escape the motel after being held at gunpoint, as spectators try to understand the motives behind the violent attacks. It is soon revealed that the Von Giesler family eats humans and aim to create a new ethnically pure race. The Nazi reference is hard to miss, with Nazi paraphilia around the motel, and the fact that the Father Von Giesler speaks German.

But more importantly, their presence is no different than the newly elected government of the time. Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential win during the 2007 elections legitimized his separatist and polarizing policies that he implemented as Interior Minister during the previous government.

The government is considered legitimate, because they are elected through democratic means. In this context, the Von Giesler family is representative of the xenophobic fascism ruling over the country. Thus, the film is a reflection of France's memories of the past, which it wishes to erase, but keeps coming back in various forms because they are not dealt with face on and are rather swept under the carpet.

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Yasmine is Clover's Final Girl in the film because she "alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued or to kill him herself" .[16] Her fear soon becomes her strength, as she not only discovers the bodies of her friends, but also those of the numerous other victims of the Von Giesler family. Even though the Von Giesler family is killed off and Yasmine escapes, her safety is in no way assured. She surrenders to the police, who are blocking the road. If the argument is that the Von Giesler family is the personification of the elected right-wing government, then Yasmine's surrender only means more oppression for her to face. She is in the hands of the very forces from which she was escaping to begin with, and who killed her brother Sami. At the beginning of the film, their escape is contextualized through the following phrases uttered by Yasmine: "[s]omeone once said that all people are born free and equal in front of the law. The world in which I live in is exactly the opposite. Who would want to be born into a world ruled by chaos and hatred?". It is this kind of world that Yasmine returns to, there is no safe space, and the spectator is left with this open ending as to what fate awaits the pregnant Yasmine.

### **Conclusion: The future of horror in France**

The rise in the number of horror films since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century signals a new form of exploration in French cinema that was not present before. The reasons for this can be tied to the cultural mood in France, and, for that matter, the world, where intellectual questioning is no longer enough and a direct confrontation with fears on an emotional level provides the shock that one is faced with on a day-to-day basis. Hence, the spectator physically feels the terror faced in contemporary culture, and cannot leave it behind in the darkness of the cinema hall once the film is over. Andrew Tudor calls this kind of horror film "paranoid horror" because these films do not have clearly marked binaries and their narratives rest unresolved, reflecting an unsafe world. They do not safely contain the powers that terrorize the status quo and leave a sense of unease, suggesting the possibility of a spiralling out of control even after the end of the film. Thus, if such films have proliferated in France at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and have been able to find spectators, then they have responded to specific cultural anxieties with regards to the other - whether it be the sexual other or the racial other - that are very much on the surface and cause for concern. Seen as a threat and only temporarily contained, politicians play on these concerns in order to forward racism and xenophobic agendas, in the name of keeping France's cultural identity.

Today, films using excess as a visual style and mixing genres in order to confront spectators, have started to appear in other national cinemas. What is important to explore is whether or not these films, like in France,

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come from similar feelings of *malaise* or are just a mimicry of a trend that can be commodified. French horror cinema had actually attained the status of being an alternative to Hollywood horror, both in terms of box office success as well as transforming the genre by playing with generic expectations and thus, its relationship with spectators. In the post-2010 period however, this practice has been abandoned. Although horror films still continue to be produced within France, many of the horror film directors have continued their careers in Hollywood, making remakes of classic horror films. In contrast, the films they had made in France had been bringing new vigour to the genre and they had become recognized names within European horror circles. Alexandre Aja's project following *Haute Tension*, though staying within the horror genre, was the Hollywood-financed remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), while directors of *Them* David Moreau and Xavier Palud have directed an American remake of the Hong Kong horror thriller *The Eye* (2008). On the other hand, 17 year-old Nathan Ambrosioni made a splash in the horror arena, with two feature horrors *Hostile* (2014) and *Therapy* (2016). The same applied for Bustillo and Maury, who have continued their horror collaboration with *Among the Living* (2014) and *Livid* (2011). French cinema is nowadays incorporated into Hollywood more than ever before. Instead of becoming a strong alternative, Hollywood has integrated French filmmakers and artists, as French cinema has internalized Hollywood conventions within its own structure. The possibilities that occurred in cinematic expression in the 2000s were abandoned in post-2010. Since it has been argued that the films are a response to their socio-economic context, then this abandonment can also be related to the events that have unfolded on a national level. French politics has not faced the foundation of its errors; each attempt to do so, has brought out the underlying darkness of the apparent tolerance and open-mindedness that France likes to parade itself as having. This is especially the case in crisis situations, where polarizing and exclusionary politics have been the immediate responses to problem solving. One of the longest lasting problems in France regarding the French *banlieue* prevails; there is still no social activity to resolve the problems. The state has disappeared from these regions, and instead of finding solutions, has aggravated the problems, by bringing measures that would further alienate the predominantly Muslim citizens in the region. Measures such as the burkini ban on French beaches is not a situation to the problem that visible minorities face because they do not address and acknowledge their lives and lifestyles and do not incorporate their realities in a new conception of Frenchness. Thus, it can be argued that since the attempts made by filmmakers in the 2000s failed to create a change, a loss of fate in a new configuration of French identity that would encompass and include citizens coming from other backgrounds, has led them to search elsewhere for hope.

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## Notes

[1] Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy*, 59.

[2] Allmer et al., "Section Introduction", 91.

[3] Beugnet. *Cinema and Sensation*, 26.

[4] Wood, "The American Nightmare", 31.

[5] Derry, *Dark Dream 2.0*, 21.

[6] Silverman, *Facing Postmodernity*, 6.

[7] Mauger, *L'émeute de Novembre*, 82-83.

[8] This is a term that is utilized in France to designate the division amongst members of society based on social class. The term implies a division where certain members - in essence those living in the *banlieue* - are excluded from society due to their low level of income, education, and so on.

[9] Fassin, "Riots in France", 2.

[10] Canet et al., "France's Burning Issue", 272.

[11] French universalism can be defined in opposition to particularism, universalism sees human nature impervious to cultural and historical differences; identical regardless of culture or history.

[12] Asibong in Fox, "Auteurism, Personal Cinema, and the Fémis Generation", 215.

[13] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, x.

[14] Hurst, "Subjectivity Unleashed", 111.

[15] "Horror's New Frontier(s)"

[16] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 35.

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## **Filmography**

*Among the Living* (2014, Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury, Aux yeux des vivants)

*Diabolique* (1955, Henri-Georges Clouzot, Les Diaboliques)

*Frontier(s)* (2008, Xavier Gens, Frontière(s))

*Eyes Without a Face* (1960, Georges Franju, Les Yeux Sans Visages)

*High Tension* (2003, Alexandre Aja, Haute Tension)

*Hostile* (2014, Nathan Ambrosioni)

*In My Skin* (2002, Marina de Van, Dans ma Peau)

*Inside* (2007, Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo, À l'Intérieur)

*Irreversible* (2002, Gaspar Noé, Irréversible)

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*Livid* (2011, Alexandre Bustillo, Julien Maury, Livide)

*Possession* (1981, Andrzej Żuławski)

*Martyrs* (2008, [Pascal Laugier](#))

*The Eye* (2008, David Moreau and Xavier Palud)

*The Hills Have Eyes* (2006, Alexandre Aja)

*The House of the Devil* (1896, Georges Méliès, Le Manoir du Diable)

*Them* (2006, David Moreau, [Xavier Palud](#), Ils)

*Therapy* (2016, Nathan Ambrosioni)