Monsters, Meat and Meta; An artist's guide to making a friend of the horror genre

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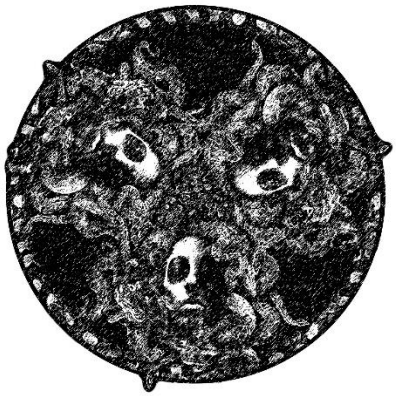

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Abstract

This exegesis focusses on the ways in which theoretical understandings of the horror genre have provided the conceptual and material basis for the creation of artworks within a practice-led, visual arts research project.

Defining the horror genre is one of the primary problems posed by this avenue of research, given that a concrete and agreed-upon definition of the horror genre remains elusive. The supremacy of film within contemporary horror often leads to the assumption that the two are synonymous, and therefore distinct from the visual arts. In addressing these problems, this research asserts that the horror genre is one that readily traverses disciplines, drawing upon scholarship that implicitly or explicitly alludes to disciplines outside of film, as well as addressing artworks, art movements and artists that engage with the concepts set out in these works of scholarship. It posits that horror's thematic concern may provide the conceptual basis for visual arts practice, and that visual arts practice can readily and affectively engage with these concerns, demonstrating this through the creation of two and three dimensional artefacts that employ these themes.

This paper begins by addressing the problems of defining the horror genre, before moving to a discussion of the forms and functions of horror's monsters. It then discusses horror's victims and the fears and prejudices they embody, before addressing the tools and techniques horror narratives use in pursuit of their affective intentions. The paper then details the primary methods and methodologies used throughout this research, providing an exposition of how theoretical understandings of the horror genre have driven and directed my own studio practice and the resulting research artefacts.

Declaration

I declare that:

This exegesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree of diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contribution by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publication, is clearly acknowledged.

Signed _____

Jess Taylor

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Introduction

"Horror has a face… and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends"

- Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, Apocalypse Now (1979)

The history of the horror genre can be broadly understood as the history of human anxieties[1]; as such, themes of evil, otherness, destruction, death and deviance are central to the genre's texts and artefacts. While the pursuit of a singular definition of horror has proven to be problematic, in part because it spans literature, film, and visual arts[2], numerous scholars have nonetheless attempted to define the genre and its appeal, focussing on the nature of horror's 'monster'[3], its victims[4], and the emotions wrought by it[5]. Subsequent definitions have explored its ability to exploit our desire to live vicariously through all powerful protagonists[6], or conceived of horror as a manifestation of our fear of ourselves and our place in the world[7]. Horror has been conceived as a means to confront repressed desires, express taboos, or transgress social norms[8]. It has been lauded for its ability to allow the viewer to confront the unknown, presenting them with a series of objects of curiosity made possible by the horrible and fanciful possibilities of horror fiction[9]. It has been identified as a genre that evokes the voyeuristic and sadistic gaze, tapping into aspects of both sadism and masochism, and whose relationship with women and their routine victimization has been examined and dissected. Horror, like pornography, has attracted both aesthetic and thematic critique, as well as moral panic and calls for censorship. It is a genre that, whist often hilarious or absurd, aims to

[1] Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*, Short Cuts (London: Wallflower, 2000).
[2] This point will be elaborated on in the chapter 'Genre Wars'
[3] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Pp 14-27
[4] Grodal speculates that the defining feature of the horror narrative is the experience and plights of the human protagonists, and how these characters navigate the horrific situations they find themselves in (Torben Kragh Grodal, *Moving Pictures : A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1997). Page 249)
[5] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*; Grodal, *Moving Pictures : A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*.
[6] Daniel Shaw, "Power, Horror and Ambivalence," *Film and Philosophy*, no. Special Edition on Horror (2001).
[7] This fear of ourselves manifests in the ability of horror to offer a sort of catharsis, and the notion that 'human beings are rotten to the core' and we know it, thus accounting for our enjoyment of the genre (J. Grixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty (Routledge Revivals): The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (Taylor & Francis, 2014). Page 86
[8] Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002).
[9] Noël Carroll, "Why Horror?," ibid.

affect, defined eponymously by the emotion it wishes to evoke, and one that contemporarily errs towards a form which is explicit, visceral and bodily[10].

Visual artists have long understood the affective potency of the horrific, demonstrated through numerous depictions of myths, monsters, martyrdom, as well as the ravages of war and disease. Contemporary artists such as Douglas Gordon, Mike Nelson and Roy Ananda have directly responded to or otherwise appropriated horror's narratives, while Gothic sensibilities have experienced a resurgence, evident in exhibitions such as *Neo Goth: Back in Black*[11] and *Dark Dreams, Fluorescent Flesh*[12], and in the works of local artists such as Mary-Jean Richardson and Julia Robinson. Despite this, the visual arts remain largely neglected by horror scholarship, which is instead dominated by analysis of film and literature. It is the opinion of this researcher that this is both a shame and an oversight. Not only are few of horror's thematic concerns explicitly filmic, there are also many artists who work with the horror genre's themes, and a great number of artworks that rival its affective intensity.

This research seeks to identify ways in which contemporary artists might make a friend of horror, that is, how they might successfully engage with the thematic concerns of the horror genre within studio based practice. The research is dictated by a practice-led research methodology in which theory both generates and is generated through practice; as such this research is focussed upon understandings of horror that have leant themselves to exploration within a studio based visual arts practice, and the insights and methods that have emerged from this process.

I am drawn to the horror genre for many reasons, but one of its primary appeals is its ability to be multi-faceted, contradictory and capricious. At its best, it is profoundly affective and psychologically challenging, tapping into unexpressed fears and scaring the shit out of its viewers[13]. This document is divided into three broad sections; Monsters, Meat and Meta, with each reflecting the dominant heads of horror that I have grappled with, the theoretical understandings of them that have emerged, and the ways in which these understandings have

[10] Philip Brophy, "Horrality - the Texuality of Contemporary Horror Film," *Screen* 27, no. 1 (1986).
[11] Craig Douglas, "Neo Goth: Back in Black," *Artlink* 28, no. 4 (2008).
[12] Mimi Kelly, Adrian Martin, and South Australian School of Art. Gallery, *Dark Dreams + Fluorescent Flesh : 17 February-13 March 2009* (Adelaide, S. Aust.: South Australian School of Art Gallery, University of South Australia, 2009).
[13] Paraphrasing Phillip Brophy (Brophy, "Horrality - the Texuality of Contemporary Horror Film." Page 5.)

influenced the studio practice. This document will then discuss the methodology used throughout this research, and the specific studio methods used to create the research artefacts.

Genre Wars





Figure 1: Salvador Dali with his version of the vagina dentata (George Platt Lynes, *Salvador Dali,* 1939, Gelatin silver print with applied pigment) (left). **Figure 2:** a still from *Fright Night (1985)* showing Amy, the vampire, evoking the vagina dentata.

One of the primary purposes of this exegesis is to provide a theoretical and historical understanding of the horror genre through an exposition of significant works of horror scholarship. As this research is situated within the discipline of visual arts, two problems emerge, firstly, the dominance of film theory within horror scholarship and the eminence of horror film, and secondly, the twin problems of ambiguous understandings of the terms 'horror' and 'genre'.

Addressing the first problem, there is no question that horror film is the most prevalent contemporary manifestation of horror. One reason for this is that the term 'horror' as applied to fictional works was if not coined, then embraced in the 1930s to describe early 'horror pictures'[14]. A more substantial reason for the dominance of horror film within the genre is the genre's focus on affect and narrative, and the ability of cinema to serve these aims. While most scholars cite the Gothic novel as the genesis of the horror genre, cinema and its technological wonders in large superseded the written word in terms of affective intensity. Furthermore, film is able to enable horror's cultural status as a form of entertainment; it exists as a social activity in the cinema, and is readily accessible in easy to digest formats.

Because of this dominance of film, analysis of horror film is one of the primary tools used by scholars to define the genre. Thus, much of this exegesis addresses theories housed within the discipline of film studies, although it is my intention to demonstrate the potential applications

[14] David Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror, (*New York: Penguin, 1993) Pp. 113-209.

of these theories to disciplines outside of the cinematic. Furthermore, I assert that many of these theories draw upon and analyse non-filmic texts and artefacts in building their arguments[15] or draw upon films that have literary or theatrical origins[16], and that the significance of plot or narrative motifs to such theories readily transgresses any lines we might wish to use to separate horror's various disciplines[17].

Scholar Noël Carroll in his influential 1990 text 'The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart' defined horror as a "major source of mass aesthetic stimulation"[18] which included literature, film, and music videos. Contemporary scholars such as Paul Wells and Viktória Prohászková also extend the horror genre beyond film, discussing folklore (Wells) and video games (Prohászková)[19]. Chris Meyers and Sara Waller refer specifically to visual arts when discussing the horror genre[20], while peer reviewed academic journals such as *Horror Studies* (Intellect Books, UK) unequivocally position the horror genre as inclusive of "film and literature, music and dance, to fine art, photography and beyond"[21]. While this exegesis explores varying definitions of the horror genre, this broader definition of a genre not tied to any particular creative discipline forms the basis of the terms' use throughout this exegesis.

Malleable understandings of horror also complicate the research, and differentiating between the horror genre and objects of horror is vital. Noël Carroll's differentiation between 'art-horror' and 'natural-horror' is useful for these ends: Carroll defines the former as the emotional response instilled in the audience of horror narratives or images, whereas the latter

[15] Barbara Creed, for instance, discusses the motif of the vagina dentata with particular attention given to its prevalence in primitive cultures and Surrealist art, as well as the mythical Sirens and Medusa, the famous Gorgon beheaded by Perseus, in building her case that the monstrosity of female monsters is constructed in specifically gendered ways. (Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Popular Fiction Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993). pp. 1-7).

[16] Creed's analysis of *Carrie* in her text 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection' is one example, as is Linda Williams' discussion of films with literary or theatrical origins such as '*Phantom of the Opera'* and '*Beauty and the Beast'* in her text 'When the Woman Looks' (ibid. pp73-83), Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks" in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich, In Focus--Routledge Film Readers (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).)

[17] Such as the menstrual motifs that appear in Stephen King's *Carrie* and its filmic counterpart, or the points at which the woman is rendered passive by beholding something terrible in William's examples, both of which occur in film and literature/theatre.

[18]Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Page 1

[19]Viktória Prohászková, "The Genre of Horror," *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 2, no. 4 (2012).

[20] Sara Waller and Chris Meyers. "Disenstoried Horror: Art Horror without Narrative." *Film and Philosophy* Special Horror Issue. 2001 pp. 117-126

[21] http://horrorstudiesjournal.com/index.html

refers to the emotion evoked when witnessing or experiencing real-life events[22]. For Carroll, the horror genre is concerned with art-horror: horror that is fictional or contrived.

While engaging with multiple definitions of the horror genre might seem problematic from an academic point of view[23], scholars such as Andrew Tudor argue that it is necessary, as the horror genre lacks the coherency necessary for a singular definition, instead employing a range of definitions specific to contexts and audiences[24]. Tudor is particularly critical of the obsession with identifying the defining feature of the horror genre, stating that every suggestion has proven itself so broad as to be useless[25], and that the average consumer of horror lacks the "neurotic critic's need to define a particular genre" [26], referring to genre much more loosely[27].

Complicating this is the problem of defining 'genre'. Tudor notes that understandings of genre are rarely explicit or unanimous; as such, horror fans will be able to identify the genre they enjoy and name texts that they situate within it, but are less likely to have an articulated and agreed upon criteria these texts must meet. This suggests that genre is a series of texts and artefacts from which similarities are ascertained and used as the basis for further classification, and presents the problem of the authenticity of the initial texts and artefacts that one uses to define the genre.

Another way to consider genre is as a series of texts united by their common narrative pattern. After all, we struggle to "imagine a Western in which the hero loses the climactic gun fight or an office romance in which the mousy stenographer loses out to the predatory blonde"[28]. However, this is still dependent on selecting that archetypal structure, falling prey to the same dilemma that faces the previously discussed approach to genre.

It may be argued that a genre is instead an evolving ideological process of classification and discourse. This has been the approach of scholars so far; the history of horror is written and

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[22] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Pp. 12-13

[23] Scholar David Russel is particularly critical of this very tendency within horror scholarship (David J. Russel, "Monster Round-Up," in *Refiguring American Film Genres : History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). page 233 252)

[24] Andrew Tudor, "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002). (pp. 53-54)

[25] "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre," *Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (1997). Pp. 455-456.

[26] "Genre and Critical Methodology," in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (University of California Press, 1976).Page 119-120

[27] *Horror, the Film Reader*. Page 15

[28] Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1963)., page 28

rewritten, texts and artefacts included or excluded, and understandings of the present are imposed on the past. This would see genre as a structure with which creators interact to create their artefacts, and which is shaped by those artefacts and the understandings of them generated by different contexts and audiences.

Approaching genre as an ideological method of classification allows viewers to place texts and artefacts within the horror genre that contradict those laid out by scholars or vice versa without one perspective invalidating the other, and counters the notion that genres adhere to particular ideologies (the horror genre as misogynistic, for example)[29]. Furthermore, it makes allowances for the tendency of the critic or viewer to take a single period of horror as indicative of the genre as a whole, or to fall prey to generational prejudices[30], as such understandings would represent singular voices within a wider discourse. Such an approach addresses the dominance of the Western point of view in horror scholarship, positioning specific cultural understandings as partial rather than prescriptive points of view[31], and allows this research to position horror scholarship as an ongoing discourse from which a contemporary understanding of the genre can be gleaned. It is the very nature of the genre that this understanding will shift and evolve, and that the text and artefacts produced by this research be considered voices within the discourse that consequently defines the horror genre.

[29] Richard Maltby and Ian Craven, *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (Blackwell Publishers, 1995). page 121

[30] Such generational prejudices are evidenced by those that suggest the artefacts and texts of their own youth belong to a golden era, and everything after this is indicative of decline. This generational prejudice is documented by Paul Wells in the text "From Blair Witch to Beezlebub", which also provides context to how such prejudices shape how the horror genre is defined. (Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*.)

[31] While this research focusses predominantly on Western horror scholarship, there are many scholars who demonstrate the impact of specific cultural understandings upon horror films; Valerie Wee discusses the influence of Western cultural narratives upon English language adaptions of Japanese horror films (Valerie Wee, "Patriarchy and the Horror of the Monstrous Feminine: A Comparative Study of Ringu and the Ring," *Feminist Media Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011).), while chapters five through seven in the text *Digital Horror* deal specifically with non-western horror films and the cultural anxieties that these films explore. Mary Ainslie's chapter ''Welcome to the Reality Studio': Serbian Hand-Held Horrors' is particularly compelling, providing cultural context for the now infamous *A Serbian Film.* (Mary Ainslie, "'Welcome to the Reality Studio': Serbian Hand-Held Horrors," in *Digital Horror : Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon*, ed. Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).)



Monsters

When one thinks of monsters, what images are conjured? Maybe your mind jumps to film, recalling vampires and werewolves, zombies and serial killers, or to painting, summoning images of demons, gorgons and grotesqueries from times past. Perhaps you recall the works of contemporary artists such as Mike Parr and Orlan who transform their visages temporarily or permanently into fantastic images of monstrousness, or the real-life antagonists who find their stories retold through the work of artists such as Banks Violette. Maybe one dredges up images of Matthew Barney's man-beast hybrids, or the perverse, juvenile mannequin-monsters and undead Nazis of Jake and Dinos Chapman. Perhaps you imagine something of your own invention; abject, evil, sadistic or impure.

Horror's fictional monsters, whether fantastic or mundane, bear an allegorical, metaphorical, or indexical relationship to the fears of the societies which birth them. As such, numerous scholars posit that monsters are the defining characteristic of the horror genre and the key to understanding horror's cultural function

The following section discusses the form and function of 'the monster', drawing upon significant works of horror scholarship in order to identify the dominant fears and anxieties conducive to the creation of monsters. If horror narratives are, as Wood suggests, our "collective nightmares"[32], private fears translated into public contexts, stripping the monster of its metaphorical skin will reveal the social and psychological conditions that permit something as loathsome as it to exist.

[32] Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s." Page 30

Monster as Paradox



Figure 3: Jess Taylor, *This Is Mercy (1-4),* 3D printed gold steel, 2016.

Perhaps one of the easiest ways to make a monster is to take a man, take something else, and suture them together. Scholar Robin Wood draws on psychoanalytic theory, positing that 'the monster' is a manifestation of that which society oppresses or represses made sympathetic and is therefore an ambivalent figure[33], discussing the 'divided monster' as a combination of "contradictory dreads"[34]. Wood extends on the opposition characterised by the monster to suggest that horror itself is concerned with oppositions; the opposition between normality and the monster, good and evil, as well as oppositions within the monster himself. That horror is characterised by binary difference is echoed by scholar David Russel, who defines horror films as "centred around its monster character, and the conflict arising in the fantastical and unreal monster's relationship with normality".[35]

Wood posits that this opposition is echoed not only in the nature of the monster, but in the ambivalent response of the viewer, borne out of the monster's ability to horrify and delight. Wood discusses the ability of the monster to invite the moral condemnation of its audience whilst expressing their repressed desires to defy oppressive social norms as an integral quality of horror's monsters and thus the genre itself[36]. Horror's fantastic narratives are thus less concerned with escapism than they are a mechanism to confront repressed desires[37].

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[33] Ibid. pp.28-22

[34] *An Introduction to the American Horror Film*, Comm 2085 : Screen Genres and Media Hybrids ; Reading 09.01 (1984). Page 179

[35] Russel, "Monster Round-Up." page 252)

[36] Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s," in *Horror, the Film Reader*. Page 32

[37] Ibid. Page 21

Noël Carrol, in the text "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre" is similarly concerned with the ambivalent viewer response to the monster, asserting that horror audiences are drawn by the tendency of the monster to violate conceptual categories, embodying or evoking two things which ought to be separate[38], generating both disgust and fascination[39]. The monster is impure, an object of curiosity that must be understood or otherwise sublimated, usually through death, to maintain logic and reason. Carroll cites the form of the horror narrative, which is often predicated upon the protagonist coming to understand the monster through investigation, but argues that the fantastic nature of the monster can elicit a greater curiosity than more mundane antagonists. While elsewhere Carroll examines the emotional effect of horror narratives, he asserts that curiosity, rather than horror, is the genre's primary appeal[40], positioning the monster as fictional and fantastic.



Figure 4: Jess Taylor, *This Is Mercy (1),* 3D printed gold steel, 2016. A paradoxical monster goes about transforming her victim

[38] This embodiment falls under two broad classifications; 'fusion figures', which are figures whose identities comprise of contradictory elements (such as Frankenstein's monster, zombies and so on), or 'fission figures', which are figures comprised of two contradictory identities who share the same body (such as the werewolf, for whom the wolf is a separate identity to their human selves. (Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Pp. 43-48)

[39] Noël Carroll, "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre" in *Horror, the Film Reader,* ed. Mark Jancovich (London; New York: Routledge, 2002). Pp. 32-35

[40] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Page 187

Although Wood and Carrol differ in their analysis of the monster's primary function, both identify the monster's ambivalent nature, as well as its ability to inspire ambivalence in horror's viewers, as a primary characteristic. Common across these paradoxical monstrosities is the element of humanity; if, as Paul Wells says, the monster is only scary by its proximity to humanity[41], then the corruption of the whole human body that renders one a monster represents the ultimate in uncomfortable closeness. It is no surprise that this corruption and the resulting monster is so often framed as abject; it is demonstrative of a failure or inability of the human to rid itself of that which threatens the whole.



Figure 5: Jess Taylor, *Monster Time (detail),* digital image, 2017. One splits into two through an abject process of boundaries rupturing.

While many creatures that are both this-and-that are classified as monsters, the simple collision of opposites is seldom enough to make a monster[42]. Rather, such monsters are granted a power that threatens not only the social and natural order, but the wholeness of the body, through violence and death, or through their infectious potential. The paradoxical monster is almost always an entity transformed, suggesting that we are not as impervious as we might like to believe[43].

[41] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*.Page 47.
[42] One could categorise a mermaid as an unholy union of opposites, and at the very least an object of category-defying curiosity, and yet for the most part we find them wonderful.
[43] Jack Morgan, "Toward an Organic Theory of the Gothic: Conceptualizing Horror," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 3 (1998). Pp. 63-64.

The monster as paradox opens up a variety of possibilities for the visual artist. There is the obvious way to create a sense of monstrousness, that is to combine the human form with something else, whether that be beast, machine, death, or so on. However, the core of the monster as paradox is its ambivalence; in combining these two things, one must seek to create something that hovers between the two. The monster as paradox suggests ways in which a visual artist might seek to affect their viewers; by evoking ambivalence. The monster as paradox is often both pleasing and repulsive, expressing the viewer's secret desires and attracting their condemnation, it invites inquisitiveness, it's nature and possibilities unknowns that the viewer might conjure.



Figure 6: Jess Taylor, *Woman as Witch,* digital image, 2017. The woman as one with nature.

Monster as Other



Figure 7: Jess Taylor, *Saturn Devouring His Son (detail),* 3D printed plastic, table, frame, digital photograph, 2016. A monstrous mother (left). **Figure 8:** Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son,* oil mural transferred to canvas, 1819–1823. (right).

The research has embraced ambivalence as one of the primary characteristics of the horror monster. However, while the paradoxical monster arrives at a monstrous state through a transformative process, the state of the monster as Other is innate, expressing a fear of the Other located in reality[44]. The monster imagined at the beginning of this section may have been many things, but it was likely *not like you*. Whereas the paradoxical monster allows room for misfortune, the monster as Other is far more divisive; the viewer is placed in opposition to the monster, irrevocably different to it.

The foreigner as Other is one iteration of this breed of monster, predicated upon a white, western protagonist with whom the audience is intended to identify. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and its unofficial filmic adaptation *Nosferatu* (1922) can be read as an unholy union of living and dead, an expression of our fear of disease and its spread, and of a fear of the European 'old world' and its mythic qualities[45]. Invasion narratives, proliferated during periods of war, increased immigration and political upheaval, similarly reflected fears of an Other "invited into the agencies of American progress"[46], providing narrative justification for the monster's actions whilst similarly demanding the audience defend their way of life.

[44] Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s", *Horror, the Film Reader*. Pp. 27-28.
[45] Stacey Abbott, "Nosferatu in the Light of New Technology," in *Horror Film: Creating and Marketting Fear*, ed. Steffen Hantke (United States of America: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).; Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. Pp. 44-45,
[46] *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. page 62

Scholars have also explored monster as Other defined by class lines; a bourgeois vampire that the working class must annihilate, by race; King Kong as emblem of fearsome black masculinity, or by queer sexuality; the lesbian or effeminate vampire. Harry M. Benshoff provides a thorough exposition on the notion of the homosexual as monster, drawing upon the precedent for homosexuality to be seen as a monstrous condition[47]. Benshoff contends that horror lends itself to queer readings not only because of its preoccupation with otherness and deviation from normality, but also because of its obsessions with sex and death[48]. Benshoff asserts that the monster is both sexual and sexual inhibitor, embodying a dysfunctional sexuality that results not in life but its inverse[49].





Figure 9: Jess Taylor, *Fuck Machine* (detail), 3D printed plastic, table, 2017 (left). **Figure 10:** Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare* (1781), oil on canvas (right), an unsettling evocation of unrequited lust.

One of the most significant areas of horror scholarship in relation to this research explores the woman as Other. The most significant of these texts is Barbara Creed's 'The Monstrous Feminine', in which Creed utilises Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection to construct the monstrous-feminine as a tool for examining the representation of women, particularly female monsters, within the horror genre[50]. Creed asserts that the woman is both abject and monstrous, due to her status as Other, her biological functions, and her tendency to violate

[47] Harry M. Benshoff, "The Monster and the Homosexual," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002).
[48] Ibid. page 94
[49] Ibid.. Page 94.
[50] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*.

categories and boundaries[51]. Her sexual difference suggests castrating potential to the male. She creates life, expands with it and expels it, her boundaries not rigid but permeable. Kristeva defines the abject as that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules"[52], and therefore must be cast out for order to be maintained, lest the abject threaten life itself[53]. The monstrous woman threatens (masculine) order and identity, necessitating that she be cast out. Horror narratives are therefore the means for the male viewer to renounce the feminine, acting as a "cultural axiom that men frequently express their dread of women through violence"[54].



Figure 11: Jess Taylor, *Woman as Witch,* digital image, 2017. The boundary between woman and nature blurs.

While significant, Creed's text at times falls prey to the assumption that the typical horror viewer and thus the archetypal horror protagonist is male. Brigid Cherry's text 'The Female Horror Film Audience: Viewing Pleasures and Fan Practices' successfully challenges this assumption[55].

[51] Creed discusses the monstrous abjection that exists "at the border between those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not", as well as the abject monstrousness of unnatural sexual desire and resistance to normality. ("Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002). Page 71)

[52] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror : An Essay on Abjection* trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). page 4

[53] Ibid. page 3-4

[54] Casey Ryan Kelly, "Camp Horror and the Gendered Politics of Screen Violence: Subverting the Monstrous-Feminine in Teeth (2007)," *Women's Studies in Communication* 39, no. 1 (2016). page 99

[55] The first chapter of Brigid Cherry's thesis provides a thorough account of horror film spectatorship, including the percentages of female viewers. (Brigid Cherry, *The Female Horror Film Audience: Viewing Pleasures and Fan Practices* (University of Sterling, 1999). Pp. 4-40), while her article "Refusing to Refuse to Look" provides a more succinct account of female spectatorship of particular horror narratives and the specific pleasures and concerns of female horror spectators ("Refusing to Refuse to Look," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routeledge, 2002).



Figure 12: Jess Taylor, *All Due Restraint, 3*D printed plastic, table, frame, digital photograph, 2016 (detail). Female brutality takes centre stage.

At the core of monster as Other readings is the notion of deviance from the norm as necessarily evil. The monster as Other explicitly engages with ideas of sexuality as a potential source of deviance, offering fertile ground for the artist. Barbara Creed provides many ways in which the female body can be construed as monstrous, emphasising the importance of abjection, and positioning the monstrous-feminine as a result of social, rather than personal, othering. The monstrous-feminine, and a wider look at women and their treatment within the horror genre, suggests that masculine action can make a monster out of a woman where it might make a hero of a man, illuminating the very narrow confines of appropriate feminine expression and sexuality that exist societally. These narrow confines of acceptable female expressions can be challenged and monstrousness can be attained through the radical act of a woman stepping outside of these confines.

Monster as Consequence



Figure 13: Jess Taylor, *Nothing Like a bit of Fear to Make a Paper Man Crumble,* digital print, 2017. Modern technology makes a monster.

The previous two sections have in part dealt with the 'what' of the monster, yet the horror narrative is just as concerned with the 'why', not only why the monster exists in terms of its narrative function, but why it exists within the narrative universe, where it came from and what drives it.

Scholar Paul Wells tracks the birth of the horror narrative not back to the Gothic novel, as suggested by scholars such as Carroll[56], but to fairy tale and folklore. The monsters of fairy tales are vengeful and capricious, often either enacting violent reparations for the slights of the protagonist, or exploiting their naiveties[57]. Digressing from Paul Wells' fairy tale origins of horror, instead beginning with the widely accepted Gothic-novel conception, the notion of the monster as consequence is explicit[58]. Mary Shelley's '*Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*' (1797–1851) is the earliest significant narrative of a trend that explored anxieties relating to the ethical conundrums and frightful possibilities posed by scientific progress, in which the monster is "a physical manifestation of the consequences of

[56] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Page 4

[57] Interestingly, in the case of such fairy tales as 'Beauty and the Beast', monstrousness itself is the punishment for wrongdoing.

[58] Whether that be through tales of monsters called forth or made possible by progress, such as Dracula and Frankenstein's monster.

misconduct… (a tragic) anachronism of certain tools and technologies in the wrong hands at the wrong time"[59].

It is in this blamelessness that the monster began to symbolise not evil, but misfortune, affording audiences the opportunity to see themselves in the monster. The monster was granted a tragic awareness of their nature, evoking a strong ambivalent response in the viewer[60] seldom matched by horror's protagonists[61]. Monsters like Frankenstein and King Kong became metaphors for the downtrodden, their "doomed pursuit of happiness and beauty"[62] emphasising the difference between utopian cultural narratives and life's harsh realities.

While many monster-as-consequence horror narratives are predicated on concerns of scientific endeavour or moral failings, changing understandings of the position of men and women within society also inspired monstrous narratives. In the 1950's, women and objects aligned with femininity or domesticity became enormous, overwhelming the male protagonist, threatening the patriarchal status-quo, and helping to "delineate the limits of what it is to be a man, and accelerate the redefinition of the status and position of women"[63]. Contemporarily, male anxiety surrounding the place of women the female desire to challenge that which oppresses her is encapsulated by the femme castratrices, or castrating women. Defined by C. R. Kelly as women driven to monstrous vengeance[64], the castrating woman and woman as giant both present the monstrous woman and a consequence of a society that has kept her underfoot[65].

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[59] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. Page 48

[60] Paul Wells discusses Christopher Lee's Dracula, which was perceived as "romantic, heroic, fascinating, highly dangerous, savage, but tormented, agonised, sad" (ibid. Page 67), while a cursory glance at contemporary fandom surrounding horror monsters reveals an audience for whom the monster is often terrible and compelling.

[61] Harry M. Benshoff draws on Richard Dyer's work on stereotypes to state that the hero and heroine are "painted in broad brushstrokes – while the villains and monsters are given more complex, "novelistic" characterisations" (Benshoff, "The Monster and the Homosexual." page 97; Richard Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes," *The matter of images : essays on representations* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993).) Monsters therefore offered complexity that viewers were if not attracted to, intrigued by, and which made the heroes of horror stories often seem dull in comparison (Richard Dyer et al., "Dracula and Desire," *Sight and Sound* 3, no. 1 (1993). Page 11).

[62] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*.page 51

[63] Ibid.page 63

[64] Kelly, "Camp Horror and the Gendered Politics of Screen Violence: Subverting the Monstrous-Feminine in Teeth (2007)."

[65] Kelly states that the film *Teeth* is therefore an atypical femme castratrice narrative as the woman's castrating power is borne not out of sexual violation by a monstrous male, but an evolutionary response to a monstrous environment. (ibid. Page 99)





Figure 14: Jess Taylor, *She Blots Out The Whole World,* 3D printed plastic, table, 2017. (left). **Figure 15:** Francisco de Goya, *The Colossus,* oil on canvas, 1808-1812

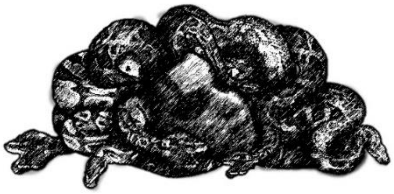
The understanding that a monster might be both pitiful and repulsive adds another dimension to the monster, and most starkly invites sympathy and sorrow. The monster as consequence provides an interesting conceptual framework for the visual artist in its demonstration of how the form of monstrousness might be used to express the anxieties and hopes of society; if we wish to make a monster, we need only look at what is around us.



Figure 16: Jess Taylor, *Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto Yourself,* 3D printed plastic, table, 2017



Figure 17: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith And Holofornes,* oil on canvas, 1620-1621. The strong female subjects, and Gentileschi's own suffering at the hands of men and her quest for justice speak to the fear and hope that women might rise up against that which oppresses them.



Dead Meat

Now, conjure a corpse. Is it whole, unblemished; a long sleep? Or is it ruptured, gaping and putrefying? Do you imagine bodies defiled and strung up, the disasters of war, or do you imagine something more sentimental, more beautiful? Do you imagine they died peacefully, like Ophelia slipping beneath the water, or did they die like Holofornes, held down, throat slit?

Horror's protagonist is often a potential victim with whom we are often meant to identify, for whom we feel fear, and through whom we feel fear[66]. Their identity as potential corpse (until perhaps they become one) is the dominant method by which horror constructs fear and anxiety; the viewer tends to want the protagonist to avoid becoming a corpse, or fears bearing witness to the horrific ways in which the monster might aid in that transition. Even outside of a focus on narrative horror, violence, death, decay and the corpse are integral to horrific depictions and the fulfilment of their affective intentions. The horror genre is as dependent on its victims as it is its monsters[67].

The following section is again divided into three, beginning with an exploration of theory relating to the body under threat and the way that horror treats its victims, before entering a discussion of the unreliability of the body as a recurring thematic concern of the genre. It will end with a discussion on the most abject consequences of horror; the corpse.

[66] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Page 31
[67] Grodal, *Moving Pictures : A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*. Page 249

The right side of death; the gaze and the body under threat



Figure 18: Jess Taylor, *The Found Body (detail),* digital print on glass, silver paper, 2016.

An enduring criticism of the horror genre remains its tendency to victimise women, while the prevalence of sexual violence as a narrative device and the sadistic and voyeuristic gaze imposed on female bodies within horror film would have some label horror as a misogynistic genre[68]. While argument can be made for the fact that most viewers appreciate such narratives for their subversive qualities, the eminence and sexualised nature of the victimisation of women within horror narratives suggests that the *female* body under threat is a central focus[69], resulting in a robust discussion of the gaze within horror film, exploring whom the gaze is made for and whom it is supposed to be turned upon.

Linda Williams argues that the sadistic gaze within horror film is one that is founded on the subjugation of women[70]. Williams defines the act of looking as an inherently masculine action of desire and control, which women are either denied or punished for exercising. To

[68] Indeed, while the victimisation of its protagonists is primarily used to frighten of horrify, titillation is not outside of the horror genre's aims, demonstrated by the emergence and popularity of exploitation horror from the 1950s onwards. (Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*.page 64)

[69] While not feminist in intent, Eli Roth's *'Hostel'* films (2005 & 2007) turn the focus to the male body, providing a contemporary example of horror that challenges the norm of female suffering as spectacle. Maisha Webster states 'Both Hostel films rely upon the male body for its bodily hysteria and excesses. More significantly, the films mock the ideals and anxieties about the penis, and its owner, to such a degree that they seem nearly feminist in intent." (Maisha Wester, "Torture Porn and Uneasy Feminisms: Re-Thinking (Wo)Men in Eli Roth's Hostel Films," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29, no. 5 (2012). Page 387)

[70] Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002).

see is to desire, and desire is the realm of men; it is for this reason that the virtuous woman was often figuratively if not literally blind[71]. In Williams' account, female viewers are expected to identify with the female protagonist, or the monster, both of whom share her status as Other and both of whom are victimised. Williams asserts that through the horror narrative the curious or desirous gaze of the woman becomes masochistic,[72] and suggests that horror's dominant gaze is not one women are intended to command.

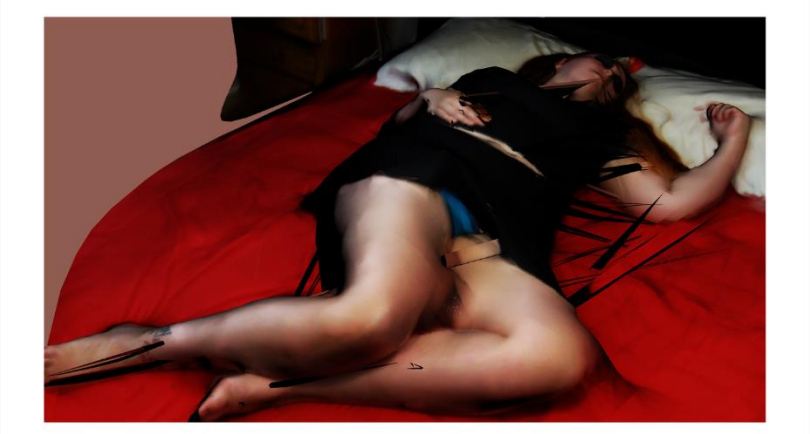


Figure 19: Jess Taylor, *Vanity Loves Me,* digital print, 2017. A passive woman permits a voyeuristic experience.

The gaze and the pleasures of voyeurism are central themes in horror's analysis and narratives. Scholar Laura Mulvey asserts that cinema's gaze is a sadistic one, derived from mastery and the aloof, critical distance film is able to place between viewer and viewed[73]. Scholars Claire Sisco King and Joshua Gunn, while acknowledging the sadistic pleasures of voyeurism, assert that masochism is equally important, pointing to the voyeuristic pleasure and anxiety evoked through an illusion of proximity and lack of control experienced by the viewer[74]. These contrasting views and horror's tendency to adopt the antagonist's viewpoint

[71] Ibid. Page 61
[72] Ibid. Page 61
[73] In her text, the viewed is the woman on screen, and the distance is provided by the fact that she cannot return the gaze, her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and the viewer's nature as an 'invisible guest' Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Vsar 2014 : The Moving Image: Film, Art and Theory ; Week 03 / Week 05 Reading 02 (1989).page 25
[74] Claire Sisco King and Joshua Gunn, "On a Violence Unseen: The Womanly Object and Sacrificed Man," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 2 (2013).204

or direct the gaze at the victim has led to complex and often contradictory states of viewer alignment and identification[75].

While Williams adds a necessary account of horror from the female viewer's point of view, Carol J Clover addresses the possibility for cross-gender identification from the male viewer. In the text "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film", Clover explores the slasher subgenre as one in which the female protagonist's triumph "depends on her assumption of the gaze"[76]. Clover asserts the female is feminine in her victimhood and becomes masculinised through the process of becoming the hero; conversely the monster is feminized by her. Slasher films therefore offer the male viewer the masochistic pleasure of identifying with the female protagonist while reaffirming their own masculine superiority.

A deviation from Clover's Final Girl is the femme castratrice, which, according to Kelly, challenges the masculine-sadistic gaze by "inviting spectators to disavow the perspective of the male victim and identify across genders with the avenging woman"[77]. While the femme castratrice may be understood as monstrous, sent to "menace phallocentric institutions attempting to control women's sexual agency"[78], it is the male victim who is portrayed as the real monster of these narratives. The monstrousness of the femme castratrice is what enables her to combat a culture of gendered violence and re-establish the moral order destabilised by men[79]. However, the femme castratrice is ambivalent, drawing attention to the threat of female sexual agency whilst similarly using gendered sexual violence as moral justification for narrative violence, powerful only after violation. The femme castratrice simultaneously reifies and destabilises gender violence and norms, controlling the sadistic gaze and making the male her object.

[75] As T S Kord notes, visual alignment, familiar experience and moral alignment often contradict, and so visual alignment cannot be seen as synonymous with identification; we may be made to view a film or read a novel from the antagonists point of view, but ethically, our allegiance may be with their victim. (T S Kord, "Gangs and Guilt: Towards a New Theory of Horror Film," *Cultural Dynamics* 28, no. 1 (2016). Page 78)
[76] Carol J Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," in *Horror, the Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002). Page 84
[77] Kelly, "Camp Horror and the Gendered Politics of Screen Violence: Subverting the Monstrous-Feminine in Teeth (2007)." page 87
[78] Ibid. page 88
[79] Ibid. pp. 98-99



Figure 20: Jess Taylor, *Monstrous Feminine,* print on timber, 2017 (left). **Figure 21:** Caravaggio, *Medusa,* oil on canvas mounted on wood, 1597 (right). The might (and consequences) of the woman returning the gaze.



Figure 22: Jess Taylor, *He said I could never be filled (detail),* 3D printed plastic, table, 2017 (left). **Figure 23:** John Everett Millais, *Ophelia,* oil on canvas, 1851-1852 (right)

Within visual art specifically, there exists a rich canon of dead, women under threat, demonstrating the use of representations of female suffering as an affective vehicle. The many imaginings of Ophelia in death or the moments preceding it have been of particular

interest; *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais (1851-1852) is a prime example of the pairing of female suffering with beauty and signifiers thereof[80].

Works such as Rosemary Laing's *A dozen useless actions for grieving blondes* (see figure 25) draw upon this canon. Captured in moments of distress and anguish, Laing's women are divorced from context, inhibiting any catharsis they might provide. The performative and theatrical nature of Laing's work draws attention to the mechanics of her imagery, and is both affective and alienating, subverting the use of images of women suffering as an emotive tool.

The body under threat has been a particularly rich area of investigation. Concepts of voyeurism and the sadistic gaze are compelling areas for the visual artist to explore. By considering the viewer's interaction with an artwork and the multiple ways in which the viewer might come to see it, one can begin to evoke or subvert notions of voyeurism and the sadistic gaze. As a female artist who exclusively uses her own image, exploring the ways in which the female gaze can subvert or imply power relations either within an artwork or between the viewer and the subject of the artwork has been particularly fruitful.





Figure 24: Jess Taylor, Portraits *of Monsters (detail),* lenticular print, 2017. (left) **Figure 25:** Rosemary Laing*, a dozen useless actions for grieving blondes #9,* type C photograph, 2009 (right)

[80] Lynn Alexander, "Hearts as Innocent as Hers: The Drowned Woman in Victorian Literature and Arts" in *Beauty, Violence, Representation*, ed. Lisa A Dickson and Maryna Romanets, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).

"I am simply not here": would-be corpses and the unreliability of the body

"The devil is instinct"

– George A. Romero

The horror genre is not only preoccupied with the human under threat, but the *body* under threat; flesh, tissue, bone and blood teetering on the knife's edge between living and visceral, bodily destruction. Paul Wells asserts that horror configures "the body as the key site of ideological and creative struggle"[81]. Thus, the threat of death is not just the threat that one would cease to exist, but indexically related to greater psychological fear of things that have the capacity to "destroy our individual or collective systemic order"[82]. Horror's deaths are a consequence of a system failing to right itself. Prolific horror-writer Stephen King states:

> It is not the physical or mental aberration itself that horrifies us, but rather the lack of order these aberrations seem to imply.[83]

However, the horror genre goes to great lengths to show us these 'aberrations'; thus, I would suggest that the viewer's fear of aberration is two-fold, arising from an intellectual understanding accompanied by a visceral physical reaction[84]. In fact, this visceral reaction may be understood as a tool by which the intellectual reaction is magnified.

Such aberrations are founded on anxieties of the fallibility of the human body. At its conception, the horror genre was often illogical and anti-rational[85], a tendency ingrained by the influence of Freud, psychoanalytic theory and the recurrence of themes of the subconscious, repression and the uncanny, and by the tendency for scholars to cite Surrealism as a predecessor or relative of the genre[86]. Surrealist imagery often depicted the transgression of bodily boundaries or the collapse of bodily and spatial forms, employing optical tricks and

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[81] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. Page 83

[82] Morgan, "Toward an Organic Theory of the Gothic: Conceptualizing Horror." Page 70

[83] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (Pocket Books, 2011).page 41.

[84] Noel Carroll suggests that the emotion of horror has both bodily and cognitive dimensions, supporting this assertion. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Page 24

[85] Gothic literature "takes up the super-structure of myth and the process of fairy-tale and configures them on a form which is a direct reaction to the age of enlightenment, adopting a fervently anti-rationalist stance"(Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. page 38). While this anti-rationalist stance was common across Gothic literature, Fred Botting notes that male writers of the gothic (most often aristocratic) were more able to embrace irrationality and transgress social boundaries in their work, whereas female writers, who were often middle class, were more likely to interrogate social boundaries and rationality rather than overstep them. (Fred Botting, *Gothic*, The New Critical Idiom (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996). Page 39)

[86] One might assert that the relationship between horror and surrealism is much more indistinct, one need only witness the deformed and distorted bodies in the works of the surrealists, the cutting of the eye in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), and the reference to Matthew Lewis's Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796) in Andre Breton's Surrealist manifesto to bear witness to the commonalities between the two.

invention and relying heavily on motifs and psychoanalytic readings to convey meaning, thus sharing commonalities with horror's own imagery, while its preoccupation with the unconscious saw multiple thematic cross-overs.





Figure 26: Jess Taylor, *This hurts (me more than it will ever hurt you),* digital print, 2017 (left). The body ruptures, penetrating and penetrated by its surrounds. **Figure 27:** Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *Un Chien Andalou (still),* film, 1929 (right).

Much recent horror is concerned with the breakdown and fragility of order, expressed through motifs of bodies that fail, betray, rupture and putrefy. Paul Wells discusses the films of directors such as Polanski as demonstrating the "deep unreliability of the body and mind"[87], whereas directors such as David Cronenberg explored the fallibility of the body through a preoccupation with the body as material[88]. Horror film continually addresses the connection between the unreliability of the body and the fragile nature of order, exemplified through the zombie[89] and torture porn[90] subgenres, while artists such as Stelarc explore the possibility of augmenting the fallible body in ways that are often disturbing, if not monstrous.

[87] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. page 83.
[88] Steven Shaviro, "Bodies of Fear: The Films of David Cronenberg," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[89] For many, zombie films such as Romero's *'Night of the Living Dead'* (1968) are affective not only for their animated corpses and the vulnerability of humans when faced with the infectious and almost indestructible living dead, but for their dystopic undertones. In these narratives, the "petty feuding" of the survivors and their "almost wilful misunderstanding" of each other is a central theme, the dissolution of social bonds mirroring the corruption of the body. (Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. Page 82)
[90] The torture-porn subgenre and its recent popularity can be read as a reaction to 9/11 and the War on Terror. Rather than positing a dystopic future in which survival is dependent on social bonds, film series like *'Saw' (*2004-2017*)* and '*Hostel*' (2005-2011) are individualistic, positioning survival as a privilege, not a right. Reeling from an event which took the lives of hundreds indiscriminately, it suggests that life can be earned, asking what *you* would be willing to do to survive. Such films suggest that trauma offers redemption, that torture is the penance that the immoral either pay or succumb to.

The unreliability of the body acts to extend the previous discussion on the body under threat, and suggests points of comparison between abject or paradoxical monsters and the unreliable body; both represent corruption of the body and its boundaries. Whereas monstrousness positions this as a source of power, the corruption of the victim's body is antithesis to this, leading not to new, terrible life, but to death. Within a wider exploration of the horror genre's central themes the potential juxtaposition of these related forms of bodily corruption offers rich terrain, giving the artist a multitude of ways in which aberration and agency might coalesce.



Figure 28: Jess Taylor*, The Flesh is as Sacred as it is Profane,* digital print, 2017. A body borne from technology, an aberration.

Corpses

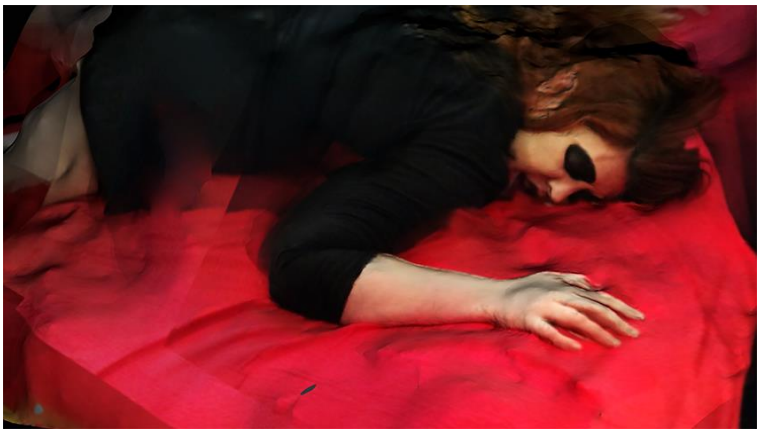

Figure 29: Jess Taylor*, The Flesh is as Sacred as it is Profane,* digital print, 2017. The digital body broken down.

Inevitably within the horror narrative, someone will make the transition from living to dead, from human to corpse. While horror is by no means the only genre to offer its audience an encounter with death, it is singular in its obsession with body parts, viscera, and death as an abject process.

The corpse as life's abject end-point has fascinated artists; art history is overflowing with paintings of violence, war and martyrdom that include the corpse, from Caravaggio to Goya and beyond. More recently, the corpse itself seeps in, as is the case with Joel-Peter Witkin's photographed tableau of body parts, or Andres Serrano's *The Morgue* (1992), a series of photographs of the deceased. Expanding the corpse to not only refer to the human brings to mind Damien Hirst's preserved carcasses in works such as *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) or the ritualistic and controversial performances of Hermann Nitsch, while Andy Warhol's depictions of car crashes or the electric chair drew attention to physical apparatuses of death.

To this end, not all evocations of the corpse need be abject; Susan Sontag discusses depictions of tuberculosis in her essay 'Illness and Metaphor', stating that the aesthetic qualities of the disease allowed artists to blur the lines between death, disease and beauty[91], while Edgar Allan Poe asserted that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic subject in the world"[92]. The advent of photography saw the rise of the post-mortem photograph which imbued the corpse with sentimentality, evoking the material body

[91] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (London: Allen Lane, 1979).
[92] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Philosophy of Composition*, Ebooks @ Adelaide (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2013).

without abjection. This is particularly pertinent for depictions of the dead or dying woman. As Leigh Summers notes:

> …while these depictions rendered illness softly 'romantic' their subjects were also clearly positioned as objects of sexual desire. The representation of the beautiful dead woman, noted Dijkstra, was a favourite device of nineteenth-century artists, one, which allowed them to portray, an 'animalistic female sexuality' that was at once tantalizing and tamed, safely transmogrified to the realms of the transcendental and the spiritual.[93]

Evoking sexual desire through depictions of the dead woman recurs throughout horror's texts and artefacts, founded on a broader connection between sex and death and the physicality of both[94]. While Freud might have positioned sex and death as antithetical to one another[95], Bataille saw the two as necessarily intertwined, stating:

> In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation…. The most violent thing of all for us is death which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being."[96]

The erotic potential of violence remains one of the horror genre's dominant concerns. While films such as Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* series (1987-2011) exemplify the sadomasochistic drawing together of eroticism and brutality and the mutability of flesh across genders, most of the horror genre is more specific about which bodies should act as a site of sexualised violence[97]. Perhaps Alfred Hitchcock said it best when he stated:

> I always believe in the following advice of the playwright Sardou. He said, "Torture the women!" The trouble today is that we don't torture women enough.[98]

Though this advice might relate more strongly to the body under threat within the horror genre, it underscores horror's preoccupation not only with sex and death, but with the aesthetics of excessive acts upon the body, the most extreme of which is the corpse[99]. Numerous artists have addressed the eroticisation and aestheticization of bodily trauma upon

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[93] Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2001). page 124.
[94] Encapsulated in the popular French phrase for orgasm; 'le petit morte', or 'the little death'.
[95] Categorising sadism and the sacrilege of the body as a death-instinct (as opposed to 'normal sexuality', a life instinct) (Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C. J. M. Hubback, International Psycho-Analytical Library ; No. 4 (London ; Vienna: International psycho-analytical press, 1922). See chapter VI pp 54-79)
[96] Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (New York: Walker, 1962). Page 16
[97] Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film." Page 77
[98] Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius : The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* ([New York]: Da Capo Press, 1999).page 483
[99] Thematically, this has ties to notions of gendered violence in horror; the idea that certain weapons are phallic, and that violent, life-ending acts such as stabbing are often read in terms of masculine penetration upon a female (or feminized) form and thus aligned with heterosexuality.

the female form, amongst these are Mimi Kelly (see Figure 31), Bianca Barling and Monika Tichacek.





Figure 30: Mimi Kelly, *Untitled (pink) #2*, C-type print, 2009 (left). **Figure 31:** Jess Taylor, *Vanity Loves Me,* digital print, 2017 (right), aestheticized bodily corruption.

While the connection horror makes between brutality and the erotic often manifests in the form of aestheticized bodily trauma or sexually titillating corpses, horror's texts and artefacts often suggest that there is a connection to be made between the two in terms of the bodily intimacy they suggest. Joel Black states:

> Killing and coitus are pre-eminently private acts, intensely personal experiences… because they impart a wordless kind of knowledge mediated by the body. The carnal knowledge shared by lovers, or by murderer and his victim or witness, does not involve the communication or discursive meaning between two discrete individuals, but a communion at the instant of death between bodies that are no longer distinct from each other.[100]

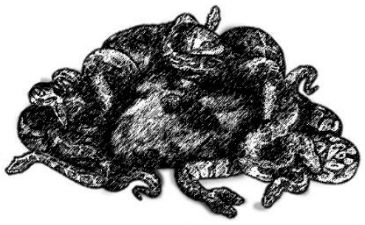
While I suggest that the intimate murder is a tired and problematic trope, it nonetheless highlights horror's ongoing preoccupation with the dangerous limits of human desire and the perversion of natural impulses. The corpse presents opportunities to address the viscera of the human body and the materiality of death, while the sexualisation of female passivity and of the female corpse, the aestheticization and sexualisation of bodily trauma within the horror genre, and the notions of intimacy tied to murder and death present more complicated potentials to the artist. How does one evoke an intimate experience with a passive body that

[100] Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). page 121.

does not merely titillate the viewer or reiterate the female form as site of voyeuristic pleasure? How does one emphasise the aestheticization and sexualisation of the female corpse and her sites of bodily trauma in order to bring attention to this cultural impulse? How might her passivity place the viewer in the role of aggressor or voyeur, and how might this exchange be mediated by their discomfort rather than her victimisation? These are the questions that arose in the studio during the research.



Figure 32: Jess Taylor, *All You Have To Do Is Ask,* Virtual reality environment (screenshot), 2017. An array of passive bodies stretch out before the viewer, ready to be traversed.



Meta

Learning and Screaming; a discussion of horror's audience

In the text "Learning to Scream", Linda Williams frames the horror genre as an affective genre which directs the responses of the viewer[101], echoing the sentiments of scholars such as Noël Carroll who argued that horror teaches its viewers how to respond. Williams centres her discussion on the fact that the experience of watching horror is one we are able to vividly recall, recounting watching *Psycho* for the first time and spending most of it with her eyes closed. I remember the first time I watched *Saw* with my eyes wide, remembered the surge of adrenaline as I realised what horror could be: a puzzle, a riddle, a euphoric ride.

Psycho had what Tom Gunning has described as the attraction of pre-classical cinema, more akin to a rollercoaster ride than focussed on the absorption of a classical narrative[102]. Such horror relies on tension and release; it is visceral, kinetic, fast paced. Williams draws on reviews that state that *Psycho* caused 'unprecedented screaming'[103], asserting that *Psycho* was one of the first film to be watched consistently start to finish, heralding the beginning of cinema as an orderly pastime[104]. Thus, while we might take for granted cinema's ability to direct its viewers, *Psycho* suggests that the materiality of horror's texts are integral to their ability to dictate the viewer's affective experience, often in novel and profound ways.

While Linda Williams frames her discussion of an affective experience of horror and I respond in kind, there is much to be said for the affective potential of the visual arts; visual representations of objects of horror have a long pedigree in the European tradition of painting, most notably in the works of artists such as Goya or Hieronymus Bosch, or in individual works that drew upon grisly and violent texts, such as Caravaggio's beheaded *Medusa* (1597) or Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith And Holorfornes* (1620-21).

However, Edmund Burke's exposition on the sublime and the massive influence that this had on the visual arts created a divergence from understandings of horror, offering the potential

[101] Linda Williams, "Learning to Scream," *Sight and Sound* 4, no. 12 (1994).
[102] Tom Gunning, "'The Cinema of Attraction[S]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde'," in *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam, NETHERLANDS: Amsterdam University Press, 2006). page 311.
[103] Williams, "Learning to Scream." Page 15
[104] Ibid. page 15

for images to evoke in viewers the exquisite pleasures of terror[105]. Conceiving of the sublime as an aesthetic engagement with that which overwhelms or exceeds the viewer's grasp[106], Burke's exposition shares similarities with understandings of horror that hinge on affect, yet differs in fundamental ways. The sublime object cannot be sublimated or conquered in the way that the horror object might be, the sublime experience is one of fear or awe resulting from a confrontation with that which is beyond imagining and understanding[107]. Burke's sublime and the resulting artistic output was predicated on expansive evocations of terror; in fact, this understanding of terror as mentally expansive provided the basis for early distinctions between terror and horror, thus placing the two in opposition[108].

Regarding the affective potential of the visual arts, I offer an experience of an artwork; Peter Booth's *Painting 1982*. Just as with my enlightening and overwhelming experience of *Saw*, I can recall vividly my reaction to it: I was nine, and before it I stood transfixed in the gallery as people walked past, unaware that they were privy to the catalyst of one of my most recurring nightmares. This was no sublime expansion of the soul or awakening of the faculties, but a profound shutting down of the mind, a baffling fear. I could tell none of it was real, and yet I was certain the end of the world would look like this. I hated it for its grotesque painted surface and certainly felt stupid for fearing it, but more than this I realised that *this* is what art could do.

Returning to the "Learning to Scream", two things become apparent; that the horror genre is one with primarily affective intentions, and that it directs its viewers experiences. Visual art has this affective potential, and is well versed in directing the experience of its viewers, suggesting ways in which its artefacts might be interpreted or engaged with. It is this simple similarity between the horror genre and art practice that is perhaps the most important for the artist to consider.

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[105] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, World's Classics ; (New York, N.Y.: Bartleby.com, 2001).

[106] Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (Florence, GB: Routledge, 2013). Pp. 7 – 8.

[107] Whereas the experience of horror results from a terrible confrontation with what one can comprehend or come to comprehend, which is horrific.

[108] Gothic writer Ann Radcliffe asserts that terror itself is a source of the sublime due to its uncertainty and obscurity which "expands the soul", thus aligning terror with the apprehension or anxiety that results from not being able to fully perceive or comprehend threats or potential threats (Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *The New Monthly Magazine* 16, no. 1 (1826).). She differentiates this from horror, which through its explicit displays of atrocity, freezes the faculties, and in which fear results from an acute understanding of that which is fearful.



Figure 33: Peter Booth, *"Painting" (1982),* oil on canvas, 1982

(Instant) Gratification

"*I enjoy it. Take your aesthete's taste to purer things. Kill them swiftly if you will, but do it! For do not doubt, you are a killer, Louis!"* *– Lestat, Interview with a Vampire*

"I wanna gorge on human blood not because some fucking Bible tells me to, but because I like it. It's fun! It makes my dick hard!" *— Russell Edgington, True Blood*






Figure 34: Francisco de Goya, G*rande hazaña! Con muertos! (An heroic feat! With dead men!),* plate 39 from the series known as Los Desastres de la Guerra (The Disasters of War), etching, 1810-1820 (left). **Figure 35:** Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Great Deeds Against the Dead,* mixed media and plinth, 1994 (centre). **Figure 36:** Jess Taylor, *Mindless Self Indulgence,* 3D printed plastic, table, 2017 (right).

While a great deal of horror scholarship is preoccupied with the idea that the genre might reveal some great truth about our collective psyche, it is still a genre considered as juvenile and tasteless by many. Much horror scholarship is derailed by a preoccupation that horror's juvenile tendency towards instant gratification is one of the genre's great ills[109], while the emotion of horror is routinely contrasted against terror, the *intellectual's* breed of fear[110]. It is interesting to note that a genre often seen to express repressed desires shies away from the idea that instant gratification is one of its central concerns, given Robin Wood's claim that repression is the postponement of gratification[111]. Noël Carroll also acknowledges the physical dimensions of horror[112], which is reflected in the emphasis given to horror's affective attributes in much of the genre's marketing[113], suggesting that horror is in part a base pursuit. Still, even the base pursuits say something about our human nature, and this section is devoted to exploring the relationship of horror's audience to the genre, beginning

[109] Tudor, "Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre."
[110] Stephen King is one of many to categorise the horror genre as one of instant gratification.
[111] Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s."page 27
[112] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*.
[113] Joan Hawkins, "Sleaze-Mania, Euro-Trash and High Art: The Place of European Art Films in American Low Culture," in *Cutting Edge : Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

with a discussion of the genre's tendency towards humour before venturing into a discussion of horror's eponymous effect.



Figure 37: Jess Taylor, *STR8 2 HE11,* white ink on glass, velvet, frame, 2016. Humour and horror intersect.

Suggesting that horror and humour are intertwined may seem odd, and yet, as author Stephen King states, "it stops being humour and starts being horror when the victim stops being somebody else and starts being you"[114]. Both horror and comedy can be considered "body genres", defined by Linda Williams as those genres which "privilege the sensational."[115] Joan Hawkins, in the text "Cutting Edge: Art Horror and the Horrific Avant Garde" states:

> The operative criterion here is affect: the ability of a film to thrill, frighten, gross out, arouse, or otherwise directly engage the spectator's body[116]

It is therefore no wonder that horror is often compared to either comedy or pornography; all three seek to elicit physical responses, so their success seemingly rests on their ability to evoke the desired physical outcome. According to Williams, body genres achieve this through a lack of aesthetic distance which allows the viewer to directly and viscerally feel the emotions the text wishes to impart[117], weeping, screaming, becoming aroused, and otherwise mimicking what they are shown[118]. The emphasis on the physical in all three genres has

[114] Cited in Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. page 53.
[115] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991).
[116] Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge : Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Page 4
[117] Film bodies Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." page 144
[118] Hawkins, *Cutting Edge : Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde*.Page 5

meant that they are often seen as lacking intellectual depth, instead privileging involuntary reactions which bypass rational thought[119]. Jake and Dinos Chapman are two of a bevy of artists who privilege the physical reaction for entirely this reason. For these provocateurs, the honesty of the involuntary physical reaction is preferable to an articulate intellectual response that may conform to the artists' ideas or individual's ego.

While both comedy and horror privilege the sensational, the explicit incorporation of humour into horror profoundly shaped how the horror genre was experienced, expanding the genre's concern beyond the emotion of horror and heralding an objective or distant experience of the genre's texts and artefacts[120]. Still, horror's incorporation of humour and status as body-genre is not entirely synonymous with its tendency towards instant gratification (although gratification is often physical). Rather, horror's tendency towards instant gratification is intertwined with the explicitness that the genre entails, testament to the enduring legacy of the horror/terror binary[121]. Paul Wells states that the strength of films such as *The Blair Witch Project* is its return to suggestion and allusion, demonstrating that "the most persuasive horror is the one suggested in the mind"[122]. Of course, the most explicit horror still has elements of suggestion, but this works in conjunction with the horror that is shown, a point that director Terrence Fisher found vital;

> I know that its popular and fashionable to say that the unseen in the most scaring, I don't believe this! I believe the seen to be the most scaring thing I can think of and the first movement of the Frankenstein monster coming to life was one of them - and that was just a twitch of the hand.[123]

Stephen King, in the non-fiction text 'Danse Macabre' places terror, horror and revulsion as the three aims of the horror text, each with their place and role to fill[124]. The unknown might offer the feeling of terror; knowing will transform this either into relief or horror, wherein the latter is as potentially effective as its predecessor. In its explicitness, the horror genre is generous, giving the viewer what they want – certainty – and weaponizing it as an affective tool.

[119] Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." page 143
[120] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. Page 54
[121] It is in this, the terror=implicit/horror=explicit dichotomy that the legacy of Burke's sublime is apparent.
[122] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. Pp 108-109
[123] Alan Frank, *Horror Films* (London ; New York: Hamlyn, 1984)., page 67
[124] King, *Danse Macabre*. page 26



Figure 38: Jess Taylor, *All Due Restraint (detail),* 3D printed plastic, table, frame, digital print, 2016. Fifty figures united in a dense, detailed scene of violence. One bludgeons another with a severed arm.

Considering horror's tendency towards gratification and explicitness is vital for the visual artist engaging with the genre. Aesthetically, this is perhaps one of the core ways in which the artist might channel the horror genre into a visual art practice, by revelling in terrible detail and unambiguous violence, by giving when one has the option of withholding. Considering horror's tendency towards gratification necessitates that the potential for the artwork to affect its viewers in physical way be considered. Furthermore, the place of humour within the horror genre must be considered, both as a dominant convention within contemporary horror, as a method of impacting viewer identification, and a way of eliciting an ambivalent response from the viewer.

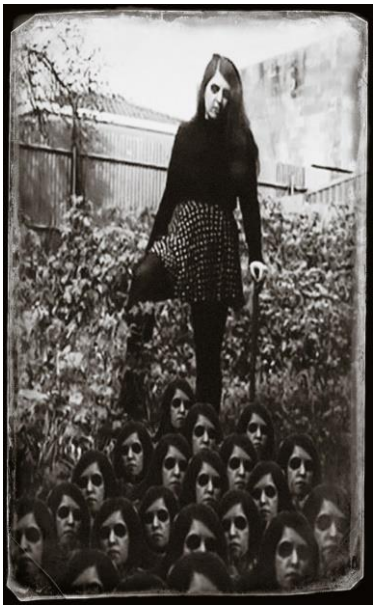


Figure 39: Jess Taylor, *STR8 2 HE11,* white ink on glass, velvet, frame, 2016

Affect; tricks and tools of the trade



Figure 40: Jess Taylor: *Can You Suffer Like I Suffer? (still),* video, 2017. The materiality of video asserts itself.

If one accepts that affect is borne out of both content and delivery, understanding the horror genre as an affective genre requires consideration of horror's favoured media and their specific qualities. This forms the crux of Phillip Brophy's text "Horrality – The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films". Written in 1983, the text refers to what Brophy terms a "golden period" of horror film, employing the term "Horrality" as a contraction of horror, textuality, morality and hilarity to signal the defining aspects of these films[125]. Brophy highlights the genre's affective intentions, describing it as a genre that refers to itself and "plays with its viewer".[126] Brophy acknowledges the "growth of special effects and cinematic realism"[127] as integral to the affective intensity of these texts, acknowledging that contemporary horror is visceral, bodily, and explicit in its depictions as a result.

Paul Wells, in his text "The Horror Genre: From Beezlebub to Blair Witch", reaffirms the inextricable connection of medium to thematic concerns within the genre[128], citing the rise of stop-motion animation and the technical expertise of particular model-makers as integral to the realisation of many creature and invasion narratives [129]. Furthermore, he signals viewer interaction as central to the horror genre, reiterating the importance of humour, irony,

[125] Brophy, "Horrality - the Texuality of Contemporary Horror Film."
[126] Ibid. Page 5
[127] Ibid. Page 5
[128] Wells too discusses the rise of the body horror genre in the 80's, citing Mondo films and the cannibal subgenre as a driving force (Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. page 78)
[129] Ray Harryhausen's is one such artist, whose stop-motion animation was crucial in the creation of plausible prehistoric monsters and instrumental in the destruction of apparently 'real' landmarks." Ibid. Page 61

pastiche, and gimmick[130]. Both Brophy and Wells assert that medium has the power to both impart and direct ideas, rather than being merely that which is used in the service of an idea, which is echoed in the methodology employed over the course of this research.

While Brophy and Wells isolate a degree of realism as central to the subgenres they describe[131], the horror genre has been instrumental in pursuing means of verisimilitude and emotional affect that arise from an acknowledgement of media rather than its erasure. German expressionist films such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), often seen as predecessors to contemporary horror films, favoured abstraction over narrative, using highly stylised sets that revealed "interior states and supernatural vistas"[132] rather than emulating familiar spaces. Jesus Franco's films of the 70s and early 80s were a model of incoherent cinema, "utterly preoccupied with the possibilities of the medium"[133], and as early as 1980 horror filmmakers were exploiting the documentary format to position their narratives as having occurred in the viewer's reality[134]. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, in her book 'Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality' discusses Orson Wells' *War of the Worlds* radio drama as another example of the use and acknowledgement of media and its specific authority to construct verisimilitude in a way that did not provide an immersive experience[135]. Found footage horror films from *The Blair Witch Project* onwards have engaged with the materiality of specific recording media in order to construct verisimilitude, from super-8 film to surveillance cameras to websites, podcasts and twitter accounts[136].

[130] Ibid. pp. 32-35
[131] Wells discusses technical expertise that was able to realistically simulate the destruction of significant monuments in order to have that destruction be affective, whereas Brophy discusses the advancement of special effects that allowed guts, blood and gore to appear more real than ever.
[132] Wells, *The Horror Genre : From Beezlebub to Blair Witch*. page 71
[133] Ibid. page 71
[134] *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) is an early and notable example, the belief inspired by the documentary-style film enhanced by contracts signed by the actors whose characters were killed in the film that prohibited them from appearing in films for one year following its release. Filmmaker Ruggero Deodato faced court charges for the murder of the actors until they were contacted to prove they were still alive.
[135] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014).37-41
[136] Ibid.

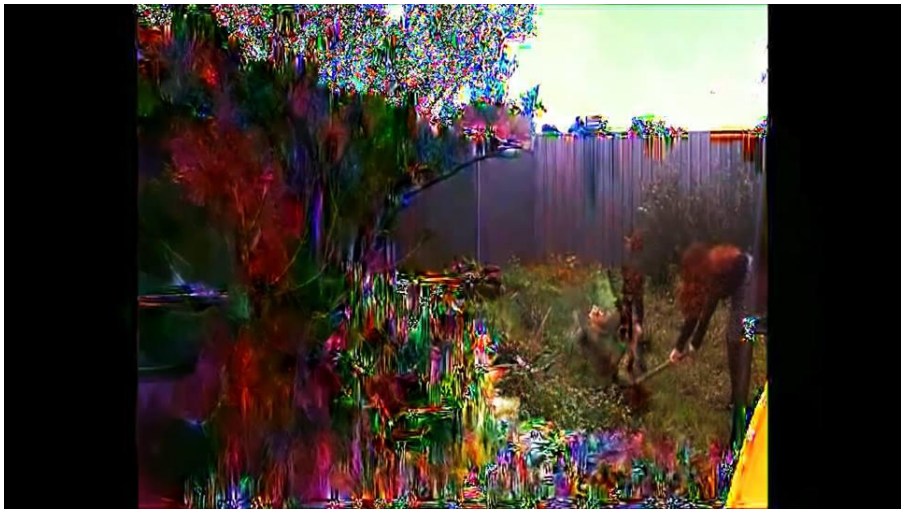


Figure 41: Jess Taylor: *I Can Suffer, I Can Suffer, Stay With Me (still),* video, 2016. When data is removed, the moving image begins to fall apart, sites of stillness decaying and pixelating.

This shattering of immersion and the acknowledgement of the text as text rather than narrative is in part what the integration of horror and humour catalysed, and yet the tendency towards gimmickry to achieve this has its own implications. Spanning much of the genre's history[137], the inclusion of gimmicks within the horror genre has been used by creators in a variety of ways, from encouraging a light-hearted response from the viewer[138] through to positioning texts in more serious ways[139]. More recently, *Marble Hornets (*2009-2014), an expanded narrative comprised of a podcast, a twitter account belonging to the protagonist, and a YouTube channel appearing to belong to the antagonists, allowed viewers to piece together the narrative at their own leisure and in their own configuration, interacting with the protagonist and seemingly assisting him in his quest to solve the mystery whilst also being privy to his mental deterioration as the narrative progressed. It is not that contemporary viewers are fooled by such tricks, but that they make the decision to engage, and that their experience of the text and the text is itself facilitated and shaped by these tricks.

[137] The horror films of the 1950's and 1960's are particularly well known for their gimmickry, with accounts of vibrating chairs, life insurance and vomit bags that accompanied the films widely acknowledged.
[138] I doubt the plastic vampire fangs handed out during the first release of *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* inspired any real terror in the audience, nor any actual belief in the undead; rather they acted to engage the viewer.
[139] *The Blair Witch Project* is perhaps the most famous example, wherein missing person posters were distributed, posts made on various forums and a website set up documenting the disappearance of the film's protagonists and the artefacts recovered from their last known location, while films such as Cannibal Holocaust sparked genuine concern for the actor's wellbeing.



Figure 42: Jess Taylor: *Portraits of Monsters,* lenticular prints, 2017. The prints transform as the viewer moves before them, their movement dependant on their ability to solicit the viewer's engagement.

Using the material reality of specific media or supplementary artefacts to foster a connection between viewer and text or artefact is particularly relevant to the visual artist. The horror genre is an example, if not of the viewer's thirst for such gimmickry, then of the ease with which one might be able to direct their experience through offering both mental and physical interaction with artefacts. Horror creators have approached this in a variety of ways, from overt physical interaction with objects, to interaction with supplementary sources of information, through to more subtle cues within the text itself that position it in relation to the viewer and inform their understating of the text. All of these strategies are available to the visual artist and suggest a way of making artefacts wherein viewer interaction is emphasised and directed.

Of course, a great many artists utilise interactive mediums in their practices[140], and consider the viewer's response. However, the overt direction of the viewer's experience is something different, exemplified by the work of artist Gregor Schneider. Immersive, sparse, and intensely emotionally charged, Schneider's spaces must be physically navigated by the viewer. Schneider acts a director, using "scenery and spatial suggestion to affect the viewer in a particular way and to lure him or her into a given situation"[141], allowing the viewer to confront the 'phenomenology of their own biological and psychological patterns of behaviour'[142].

[140] In this category I would include things such as artist's books that must be read or sound works that require one to pick up and wear headphones, as well as interactive performance works and responsive installations.
[141] Gregor Schneider, Anita Shah, and Susanne Titz, *End* (Köln ; London: Walther König, 2010). Page 63
[142] Ibid.

This is fundamental in '*Die Familie Schneider'* (2004), a work comprising of two duplicate houses that the viewer must navigate. Uncanny by definition, the constraints of the work and its overt doubling shift its immersive potential[143], acknowledging its artifice while remaining affective. Work such as Schneider's are foremost invitations; the viewer must willingly submit to the experience the artist wishes to subject them to[144].

While Schneider is one of many artists who encourage or demand viewer interaction through their artworks, he is an exemplar of the tensions between artistic authority and viewer autonomy, and the potential for these tensions to create entirely different experiences for the viewer. Viewer accounts of navigating Schneider's spaces are particularly rich[145], indicating that providing agency, however constrained, might encourage an eagerness to engage, echoing approaches employed by horror films that successfully invite viewer interaction. Furthermore, works such as Schneider's reveal the potential for interactive works to underscore the voyeuristic tendencies of the viewer, a powerful strategy for engaging with the horror genre's sadistic gaze and potentially problematic voyeuristic tendencies.

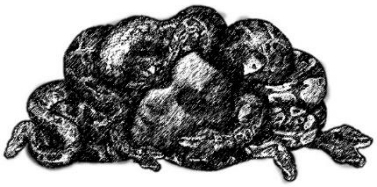


Figure 43: Jess Taylor, *All You Have To Do Is Ask,* Virtual reality environment (screenshot), 2017.

[143] that viewer's book to explore the work in pairs, that they have a set time to explore the house, that they are explicitly aware that it is an artwork and not an actual set of houses

[144] Much of Schneider's work can be seen as an exercise in constraining viewer autonomy and directing physical experience in this way; indeed, to varying degrees, large scale installation works can seen as directing the viewer. Artists such as Mike Nelson and Callum Morton have been known to create immersive, uncanny installations that, to varying degrees, control the viewer's experience, however there is something more cruel about Schneider's, a pervasive feeling of dread to his works that made them more relevant to the research.

[145] Richard Dorment's article "A very special kind of fear", which appeared on the Telegraph website is one such account of the work (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3625006/A-very-special-kind-of-fear.html), as is James Westcott's article (James Westcott, "Gregor Schneider and the Flattering Performance Installation," *TDR (1988-)* 49, no. 4 (2005).)



Methods and Methodology

Research Methodologies

A practice-led research methodology, defined by Linda Candy as one that is 'concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice'[146] has been the primary research methodology used throughout this project. Barbara Bolt, in the text "The Magic is in Handling", discusses a type of double articulation that is central to practice-led research, wherein "theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory"[147]. This has required a close reading of relevant texts and artefacts relevant to the research to occur alongside and inform practical material experiments within the studio, while also necessitating that the form and direction of the written research is shaped by the studio experiments. Bolt articulates that the purpose of practice-led research is to create an "understanding that originates in and through practice"[148], and emphasises the role of the exegesis as playing a "critical and complementary role in revealing the work of art"[149]. Bolt states that "through the vehicle of the exegesis, practice becomes theory generating"[150].

A similar methodological approach is that of hermeneutics, with its emphasis on interpretation. Hermeneutics posits that artworks are not merely representations, separate from the real world, but are part of it, allowing that which is within the world to actualize or present more fully[151]. Artworks are autonomous entities that have an open dialogue with evolving themes and concerns[152]. Thus, artefacts have been generated in response to an engagement with literature and artefacts pertaining to the horror genre, but have also acted to reveal how the dominant concerns of the genre are developed or altered through the research. Artefacts have acted to present specific strategies of creative practice most suited to engaging

[146] (Linda Candy, *Practice Based Research: A Guide,* CCS Report: 2006-V1.0 November, (University of Technology Sydney, 2006).
[147] Barbara Bolt, "The Magic is in Handling", in Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010). Page 29
[148] Ibid. page 30
[149] Ibid. page 31
[150] Ibid. page 33
[151] Paul Smith, Carolyn Wilde, and Inc ebrary, *A Companion to Art Theory*, Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies ; 5 (Oxford ; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002). Pp 441-442.
[152] Ibid. page 440

with horror's concerns, and the concerns of horror that emerge as offering greatest potential for the visual artist.

The hermeneutic approach also conceives of the artwork as the fluid sum of its interpretations that, while aesthetically finished, will never be complete, as it may always generate new interpretations[153]. This focus on multiple, and perhaps limitless, interpretations of a work is also implicit in Jonathan Crary's text "Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century" and the realm of reception theory. While both reception theory and hermeneutics state that visual objects must be studied in the context of the viewer and their subjective response[154], the hermeneutic approach also emphasises the role of the practitioner and the need for a high level of self-awareness for their own interpretive assumptions[155].

Another facet of the research that informed the methodology was that it involved an engagement with both high and low culture, given that the research is located within the visual arts whilst engaging with an often low-culture genre. I sought to marry these two disparate worlds of influence through a number of strategies, the most apparent of which was my direct appropriations of well-known artworks (such as in the work *Saturn Devouring His Son)*. This same logic informed works wherein I attempted to marry or render horror's themes with the palette or aesthetic qualities of artists working with similar themes[156], and in the titling conventions of my works, which often referenced or directly quoted horror films or other pop-culture sources[157]. The purpose of these references was not to alienate the viewer (a concern of mine given horror's perceived 'niche' nature), but to add a subtle layer of knowledge to the works that some viewers would be able to recognise and decipher, making room for a range of subjective responses to and interpretations of the work reliant upon the individual knowledge each viewer might bring to it.

It is a combination of the above research methodologies that has given shape to the research, dictating the ways in which the dominant concerns of the horror genre have been ascertained,

[153] Ibid. p 443
[154] Jonathan Crary, "Techniques of the Observer," *October* 45 (1988).
[155] Smith, Wilde, and ebrary, *A Companion to Art Theory*. Pp 445-446.
[156] This is the case in works such as *Portraits of Monsters* and *Vanity Loves Me*, which emulated the colours and sensibility of works by female artists such as Rosemary Laing and Pat Brassington
[157] Key examples are the works *He Smashes His Fists Against The Posts And Still Insists He Sees The Ghosts* and *Nothing Like a Bit of Fear to Make a Paper Man Crumble*, both of which take their titles from quotes from *IT (2017)*, and the work *Fuck Machine,* which takes its name from the title of a song by electropunk group Mindless Self Indulgence that, like the artwork in question, pokes fun at sexual desire.

the necessary initial step of the research project. However, this is not to say that this step was an isolated one, completed before the commencement of material experimentation and artefact production. Rather, the ascertainment of the horror genre's dominant concerns was a journey, undertaken in unison with material experimentation, with each trail connecting and overlapping, the steps of one directing the course of the other. Thus, practice generated theory and theory generated practice, theory directed the energies of the researcher within the studio, and the artefacts directed the energies of the researcher at the desk.

The acknowledgement and value placed upon the subjective has been a necessary emphasis, drawing attention to the fact that both practice and theory are mediated by the subjective researcher. While the ability of the horror genre (and its texts and artefacts) to shift in meaning across contexts and audiences is emphasised, the viewer's role in actualising their affective response to the work is given paramount importance, and their responses and the research in its entirety is positioned as a fraction of those voices present in an ongoing dialogue.

Studio Methods



Figure 44: Jess Taylor, *All You Have To Do Is Ask,* Virtual reality environment (screenshot of construction), 2017

The primary methods of production within this project have been digital methods used to represent or capture the world; photography, video, 3D modelling and photogrammetry. This research project has engaged with a range of photo and video editing techniques, printing processes, as well as 3D printing, digital rendering, and virtual reality technology. My interest in working with digital production methods is a response to horror's anxieties surrounding the digital and technological, as well as a way of evoking a sense of fantasy rooted in reality that is central to my understanding of the horror genre. While evoking the abject or the grotesque through human trace or signalling the unconscious through the subjectivity inherent in processes that foreground the maker's hand is perhaps the road more travelled[158], artists such as Orlan, Alexa Wright and Linda Dement create works in which monstrousness is conveyed or created through the use of technology[159]. These three artists present distinct approaches to evoking the horrific through the use of technology. By using technology to convey very real images of the body being opened up, transgressed or reconfigured in the case of Orlan's operation-performances, themselves enabled by medical technology, which were relayed via satellite. By using technology to reconfigure or augment the body, or to create fictitious images of the reconfigured, distorted body as in the case of Alexa Wright's digitally manipulated photographs. By introducing something corporeal,

[158] Artists such as Louise Bourgeois have traversed this, as have, to various extents, the Surrealists and Expressionists.

[159] Rachel Gear has an article that goes into greater detail regarding connections to be made between feminism and female bodies, technology and the monstrous. (Rachel Gear, "All Those Nasty Womanly Things: Women Artists, Technology and the Monstrous-Feminine," *Women's Studies International Forum* 24, no. 3 (2001).)

visceral and bodily into technology and thus 'contaminating it', as is the case of Linda Dement's digital programs. As the horror genre is foremost fictional, and given my own ethical problems with creating works which might seem to convey real acts of violence, the two former approaches to the intersection of horror and technology dominated my making strategies. Thus my studio methods can be crudely divided into uses of technological methods of representing the world to create, falsify or orchestrate evocations of the horror genre, or attempts to corrupt or contaminate technology to reveal something horrific therein.





Figure 45: Jess Taylor, *This Is Mercy (3),* 3D printed gold steel, 2016 (left). **Figure 46:** Jess Taylor, *Panopticon (detail),* Lenticular print, timber, 2016-2017 (right)

The first method of using technology in the service of the horrific is most apparent in digitally manipulated works, whether they be photographs, animations, or 3D printed sculptures. The majority of these works emerge out of a rather crude process in which technology allows one to cut, disfigure and suture forms together, reconfiguring and duplicating bodies and objects at will. The same processes of digital manipulation can be employed to unite multiple bodies, whole or otherwise, within a singular pictorial or physical space; thus, technology becomes the mediating force that allows bodies to come together, to inhabit the same space, and to enact scenarios impossible in the real world. This process encompassed the use of *Photoshop* in photographic works, while free programs such as *Blender* and *Meshmixer* were used to manipulate 3D models of my own body to make 3D printed sculptures[160]. That I define the digital manipulation process in which I partook as crude is of relevance, processes were employed not in the service of realism, but to align the

[160] The model of my body used in these works is a scan of myself that has been rigged (a skeleton of sorts is attached to the model, allowing me to pose it). Each print generated using this technique is derived from a single model.

works with the fictional and fantastic quality that is at the core of my understanding of the horror genre. Furthermore, such processes were often expedient, allowing me to experiment with combinations and configurations of forms and ideas, creating multiple variations of an artwork at the digital stage from which a singular work was selected to be printed and refined.

This method saw vast applications across the research. It is this method that was used to create *This Is Mercy*, my mediation on the paradoxical and pathetic monster, as well as in my imitation ambrotype series *STR8 2 H311* that engaged with the intersection of hilarity and horror referred to by Brophy while drawing on Victorian trick photography as evidence of a longstanding human interest in the macabre. It is this process of digital manipulation that was used to create the lenticular prints of *Panopticon,* the violent fantasies brought into the suburban space playing out in each panel undercut by obvious evidence of the rudimentary and familiar image editing techniques used to create each animation.

The duplication inherent in this process also provided specific ways of responding to horror's themes. In the work *All Due Restraint,* I was able to pose and print my form fifty times, creating a battle scene in which duplicates of myself stab, bludgeon and die with abandon. This work foremost responded to the excessive and explicit nature of horror cited by scholars throughout the research, while the manner in which it was realised – figurine sized 3D prints on a table with a backdrop behind them – spoke to the imaginative and interactive nature of horror, the mass of figures inviting a curious and inquisitive gaze. The tactility implied by these figurines led me to experiment with different 3D printing materials and processes available within Australia and abroad, such as the metal used in *This Is Mercy,* as well as porcelain, which was excluded from my final body of research artefacts.

Digital manipulation also enabled my appropriation series by allowing me to disfigure and duplicate figures as required to recreate various artworks[161]. As I examined visual arts' violent canon, I saw potential to select works to appropriate that would be transformed by this act. Thus, *Saturn* became the monstrous mother/monstrous-feminine, *The Colossus* became enormous, a woman overwhelming the natural order, and *The Nightmare's* heavy masculine sexuality depicting female passivity transformed into mocking femininity. A female figure is

[161] Including the works *Saturn Devouring His Son, He said I could never be filled, She Blots Out The Whole World, Mindless Self Indulgence, Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto Themselves,* and *Fuck Machine.*

inserted into *Ophelia*, bearing witness to a culture which commodifies and sexualises her passivity and suffering, *Judith and Holofornes* is revisited as an ode to female brutality, while *Great Deeds* foregrounds the female body as a site of violence and draws upon the artistic canon of utilising or regurgitating images, forms or motifs.

The second method is conveyed in my exploration of glitch, which can be commonly understood as errors and interruptions in electronic transmissions that nonetheless do not compromise the systems in which they occur. Sean Cubbit in the article simply titled 'Glitch' positions glitches such as CD stutters, dead pixels, as "artefact(s) of the materiality of the medium… Glitch is the evidence that control is never complete"[162]. The glitch in technology has commonalities with methods of making that foreground the materiality of the artefact, as well as with the horror genre's use of recognisable modes of representation to achieve verisimilitude or otherwise engage the viewer, given their emphasis on materiality or material artefacts[163]. Furthermore, that glitch is evidence that the "control is never complete" speaks to the lack of control inherent in fear, and in horror's broader themes of collapse, of things that take away our control, go against our will, or agencies that overpower our own.





Figure 47: Pynchy, *Nellie Bly,* Digital Image, 2015 (left). **Figure 48**: Felix Rothschild, *h u m a n . a f t e r . a l l _ - 229*, digital image, 2017 (right).

[162] Sean Cubitt, "Glitch," *Cultural Politics* 13, no. 1 (2017).
[163] By this I am referring to found footage horror and the use of supplementary story telling within the genre, the prevalence of abstracted and unreal environments and interiors, as well as the prevalence of the pseudo-documentary format and the use of gimmicks within cinema, for example.

Glitches can be created or curated; they can result from intervention and active attempts to corrupt data, as is the case in the work of artists such as Felix Rothschild and Pynchy, or can be the result of existing errors and shortcomings of technology, as is the case in Peder Norrby's documentation of warped landscapes in Apple Maps or Kyle F. Williams collection of disturbing Google Street View glitches.



Figure 49: Peder Norrby, *Houses throwing up trees, Barcelona,* iOS Map Glitch, 2012

The created glitch is evidenced in my datamoshed[164] video works *I Can Suffer, I Can Suffer, Stay With Me* and *Can You Suffer Like I Suffer,* in my databent[165] 3D models, renders of which can be seen in the series *This Hurts (Me More Than It Will Ever Hurt You)* and *Vanity Loves Me,* and in glitched photographic works such as *The Found Body.* Programs and processes used to create glitches vary, and were mostly found through engaging in online forums dedicated to the craft. For example, a specific version of the program *Avidemux* containing a bug which allowed users to remove vital pieces of data from video files was used to datamosh videos, while the data of 3D models was corrupted using a text editor. This process was employed to express various conceptual concerns resulting from the research; in the *Suffer* videos, glitch allowed me to foreground materiality as a way of creating excessive violent spectacles, while its use in the renders of 3D models acted to rupture the body and

[164] Datamoshing broadly refers to methods of breaking the fundamental structure of a video file's data in order to combine two or more segments of video; resulting in ghosting, pixilation, pixel dragging and other digital artifacts.

[165] Databending is the process of corrupting or editing the data of a media file using software designed for other types of media file; in my case by opening 3D files in text editors, reconfiguring or shifting parts of the data, exporting it and then attempting to open the reconfigured file using 3D programs.

introduce abjection into my digital creation processes. The created glitch also resulted in other photographic works; the work *Monster Time* comprises of stills from datamoshed videos, selected at moments where my face is doubled, ruptured or melting, while *Woman as Witch* takes this same process to reflect on the writings of Barbara Creed, creating phantom women at one with the natural world. *Portraits of Monsters* similarly uses datamoshing, taking short sequences of video in which my form transforms and ruptures to create lenticular prints. These prints which will move only in the presence of a viewer, allowing the viewer to control and manifest monstrous transformations through their movement.

For each glitch method explored, the process is roughly the same. First, raw data in the form of photographs, videos, or photogrammetry scans were gathered and prepared. For instance, datamoshing is dependent on having two or more video segments, and so video files have been fragmented into multiple parts, whereas photogrammetry scans had to be compiled, cleaned up and converted into a format suited to the process of databending. This data then underwent the intended glitch process of corruption, resulting in a new set of data. This new set of data was often infinitesimally different from the original data, and so of little use, or corrupted to the point that it ceased to be recognisable or functional. Within these two poles, a middle ground of functioning data exists that I then had to mine for instances that were visually appealing and that spoke to the ideas put forth by the research. Thus, while in most cases the processes of glitching are relatively quick, they require a massive output if the artist is to have a sufficient sample size from which to select engaging artworks. For instance, *Figure 50* is one of many renders of the 63rd corruption of a single piece of data, the third piece in series of four, and my second of four series of photogrammetry scans. The videos depicted in *Figures 40 and 41*, and other works involving datamoshing, were more dependent on ordering video fragments in a way which would yield suitable results, and have similarly been selected from dozens of instances of me experimenting with the order of these fragments that yielded functioning pieces of data.

While such glitches are initiated by the artist, a high fail rate and the difficulty in predicting the form that these interventions visited upon the data would take situated the process outside of the artist's absolute control. Rather, I have come to see the created glitch as the result of a conversation between artist and technology, in which technology has its own agency. Where the artist has total agency is in the process of curating what they are given, and it is this that I have used liberally.



Figure 50: Jess Taylor: , *This Hurts (Me More Than It Will Ever Hurt You),* digital print, 2017

The curated glitch appears in works such as *Nothing Like a bit of Fear to Make a Paper Man Crumble, He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts*, and the series *The Flesh is Sacred as it is Profane*, all of which isolate the failings of photogrammetry programs when attempting to capture 3D models of existing objects. *Autodesk Remake* was used due to its free license and easy to use interface, although experiments using *3DF Zephyr* and scanning using as *Xbox One* camera were also undertaken over the course of the research. In these instances, a sincere attempt was made to use the programs for their intended purpose, with glitches or distortions arising through serendipity. In some cases, it was possible to attribute these glitches to previously unconsidered factors with a degree of confidence[166], while in other cases I can only speculate as to why the models did not turn out as intended[167]. In either case, these glitches were captured to be presented to the viewer, indicative not of a corruption of technology, but of the spectre of collapse, abjection, monstrousness that lurks within it. While the curated glitch differs from the created glitch in that it is not initiated by the artist, it is similar in that the process of curation reinstates the artists agency. In some cases, the photogrammetry scan was too distorted to be useful or visually appealing, and so was discarded. I then took multiple renders of each remaining scan before selecting those that would become prints, with many renders not making the cut and many scans not represented in the final group of prints. That some of these scans were intriguing as virtual three-dimensional objects and yet fell flat as two-

[166] This is the case in the glitches in photogrammetric scans of my backyard; photogrammetry is intended to be used on solid, stationary objects, and so it is likely that it was unable to deal with the shifts in the trees from the breeze, the objects visible through their branches and so on.

[167] This is certainly the case is the series "The Flesh is Sacred as it is Profane"; I have no idea why I appeared to have lost limbs or had my face caved in, given the relative accuracy of previous scan generated from the same process and of the same subject matter and space.

dimensional renders lead me to experiment with colour 3D printing, a process I was unable to create successful artworks with within the time constraints of the research, but I nonetheless believe has potential within my practice.



Figure 51: Jess Taylor: *He Thrusts His Fists Against The Posts And Still Insists He Sees The Ghosts,* digital print, 2017

Further to my interest in digital making techniques and the correlation between digital technology and horror was the notion that the research artefacts should attempt to bridge the distance between themselves and the viewer. The subjectivity of perception and sight, and the horror genre's reliance on its viewers engagement with its texts and artefacts in order to be an affective genre had been foregrounded as integral parts of the horror genre early on within the research. Horror's tendency to activate the process of engaging with its narratives through tactile gimmickry and supplementary storytelling, the genre's aspirations and ability to direct the viewers' emotional and physical response, theories of the gaze, voyeurism and the distance or lack thereof that have shaped the research all became integral to my understanding of horror's dominant concerns and conventions. The necessity that the research artefacts position the viewer as an active entity was explored through a use of optical devices, such as the view master used in *Woman as Witch*, and other interactive media, such as lenticular prints in which the viewer's movement and changing perspective causes the prints to become animated. Interactivity was central to further experiments during my candidature, such as a variation of the work *The Found Body*, in which the viewer was presented with a slide projector loaded with slides depicting the (fictional) discovery of a body, and in research that went into the function and creation of early optical devices, such as the Mutoscope and stereoscope. Such experiments were discarded during the research as not of relevance, although they may rear their heads again within my practice in the future.

Instead, many of the works evoked the relationship between viewer and artefact more subtly, through sculptures with qualities and scales that evoke familiar tactile objects, such as figurines, and through large scale photographic works that dwarf or overwhelm the viewer. Both the scale and materiality were carefully considered to align with the conceptual concerns of each work; the work *Nothing Like a Bit of Fear to Make a Paper Man Crumble*, a work reflecting on the agency resulting from monstrousness (and inverse counterpart to the passivity depicted in *The Flesh Is Sacred As It Is Profane* was scaled so that the figure approached my own height, giving it a sense of humanity, while other databent renders were scaled so as to reveal the detail arising from the corruption they underwent. Most were printed on gloss paper, a material that lends itself to the precision and depth of colour one would see on the screen where they were created. The exception to this was the series *Vanity Loves Me*, which was printed on watercolour paper to enhance the richness and softness of the flesh, taking its cues from other depictions of women wherein these qualities of the female body are emphasised.



Figure 52: Jess Taylor, *All You Have To Do Is Ask,* Virtual reality environment (screenshot), 2017

My exploration of the relationship between viewer and the subject of artworks are encapsulated within my engagements with virtual reality technology, facilitated by the university's resources. I initially engaged with virtual reality to offer viewers another way to experience my 3D models, experimenting with various models, scales and script writing before realising the potential for such technology to create fictional worlds and environments. I then engaged with online forums dedicated to those unfamiliar with the processes involved, building and rebuilding environments using different combinations of models, photographs,

and free to use gaming assets, navigating them myself to assess their functionality and ability to articulate the concerns of my research. The resulting work consists of an environment comprised of images and photogrammetric scans of my body, scaled to enormous sizes, that the viewer can navigate using virtual reality equipment. Created using the game engine *Unity*, it is what gamers might consider a "walking simulator", that is, an environment one can explore without the overarching narrative or goal that characterises most video games. This is an important distinction, as the technology was approached not in the pursuit of realism or engaging gameplay – the metrics by which one might normally measure a game – but from a position of how the technology can be used in the service of the conceptual concerns arising from the research. *All You Have To Do Is Ask* was created as exploration of the tensions between voyeurism and agency; the faces on its walls watch the person who traverses the bodies below, gargantuan faces loom out of the darkness, the gaze emphasized by the torch illuminating where it is directed. It is an experience mediated by the agency of the viewer, both as they traverse the terrain and when they placed the virtual reality headset on their head, but ultimately ruled by my decision to allow them this opportunity to interact with virtual facsimiles of my body. It is an experience that occurs in the gallery; the viewer might be alone in the virtual environment, free to do as they will, but in the gallery, there is always the potential that they become the object being watched.

In addition to digital technologies, the research artefacts have been influenced by a Victorian aesthetic, necessitating the use of found objects or various woodworking techniques and reflecting the influence of the Gothic and the Victorian era on the horror genre. Artefacts employing both digital technology and a faux-Victorian aesthetic attempt to marry new and old, borrowing from visual languages foreign to their processes, thus occupying ambivalent and ambiguous spaces, datamoshed images are rendered painterly, plastic and steel imitates more precious materials and more crafted objects, and old objects are falsified using cotemporary means. Furthermore, the faux-Victorian aesthetic locates the works within the domestic space[168], these are things that we live with, comfortably or uncomfortably, reflecting a genre that can be both terribly fantastic and disturbingly mundane.

[168] That it is in the Victorian era that we began to understand the subjective nature of our perception and its physiological and psychological dimensions is also no coincidence

The Black-eyed Girl



Figure 53: Jess Taylor, *STR8 2 HE11,* white ink on glass, velvet, frame, 2016

Eyes are central to the visual arts, and to the horror genre, not only as they are the organ with which we perceive artefacts and texts, but also as the gaze, who is exercising it and how they are exercising it are core thematic concerns of both art and horror. The representation of women across the visual arts and the horror genre, and complex notions of agency, objectification, voyeurism and desire encapsulated in the gaze further underscore the relevance of the eyes. Artist Owen Leong uses prosthetics or digital methods to blacken his figures eyes, rendering them "unflinching, resistant and unknowable"[169]; I use make-up to render myself both unseeing and skull-like. Blacking out the eyes has been a convention of my practice well before this research, borne out of my desire to sever or inhibit the empathy and emotion eyes so easily convey, refusing to return the gaze and thus locating it within the viewer[170]. Over the course of the research a more thorough understanding of the gaze, particularly as outlined by Linda Williams, solidified this decision, allowing the blacking out of my eyes to challenge and subvert the objectifying gaze and notions of agency and desire therein.

The fact that I am the black-eyed girl is also integral. Self-portraiture has a long lineage within visual art, with artists such as Cindy Sherman and Madison Bycroft adopting or performing various roles across their work. Using my own image has been a core tenant of

[169] Tracey Clement, *Owen Leong looks long and hard at The Unflinching Gaze,* Art Guide, 2017, http://artguide.com.au/owen-leong-looks-long-and-hard-at-the-unflinching-gaze

[170] Indeed, my earlier work was very much focussed on the idea of viewer responsibility when viewing images of violence.

my work previous to this research, allowing me to foreground my own subjective involvement with my subject matter within the work. Using the figure, and particularly the figure in moments of action (slumped, attacking or being attacked) imbues the work with a strong narrative quality, aligning the work with a predominantly narrative genre. Many of the works are presented as frozen moments – Saturn in the process of devouring his young, or faces midway through rupturing – which, like the film still, offer the viewer the opportunity to construct narrative; to imagine or wonder at what preceded these moments, and what follows.

Within this research, my own likeness is used exclusively, extending on my previous predilection whilst allowing me to sidestep the ethically muddy waters of subjecting another's likeness to depictions of horror and necessitating that I perform the role of victim, perpetrator and witness to the horrific acts I replicate, often all at once. The repetition of the black-eyed girl is an undeniable signifier that these acts are simulated, self-inflicted and self-contained. The moral panic generated by the horror genre is complicated because horror's texts and artefacts are not real, yet affective, likewise, the fiction implied by the black-eyed girl is intended to complicate readings of work that addresses occasionally confronting subject matter whilst explicitly referencing its maker.

Paradoxically, the use of my own likeness exclusively is a restriction that allows a breadth of freedom. Once the possibility of victimising another is negated, my likeness holds the potential to act as a vehicle to express something intensely personal, or conversely, to become a motif, character, or the every-woman. I have found that the limitations of working with only one's own image, and the processes of duplication and intervention I undertake to overcome these limitations within the work, create distance between one's likeness and their sense of self. It is this distance that allows the black-eyed girl the conceptual scope she has; she is divorced enough from 'Jess' that she can fulfil roles I might find damning, uncomfortable or unflattering, while being closely related enough that she grounds the work within my own subjectivity. As a woman and an artist, the black-eyed girl encapsulates my own duality and my belief in the duality of man; that we are capable of great tenderness and love, heart-rending sorrow, unspeakable anger and brutality. The line between me and her is not clearly drawn, and yet, I suggest, it never is between us and the fictions that we see ourselves in.

Conclusion

When Colonel Walter E. Kurtz declares that "horror has a face" in *Apocalypse Now*, he does so to stress the importance of befriending horror, lest you make it your enemy. I would instead say that the horror genre has many faces, and that befriending the horror genre offers the artist the opportunity to enrich their practice through an engagement with a genre both enduring and affective, resulting in the creation of compelling artworks.

The artefacts generated during this research demonstrate the specific ways in which I, as a female artist working with predominantly digital methods, have responded to the horror genres dominant concerns. Likewise, this exegesis has focussed upon works of horror scholarship that lent themselves to articulation within my own studio practice. While this research is grounded within my own practice, it is my intent that this document suggests strategies of working with horror to artists more generally, and that it operates as one voice in the discourse surrounding the horror genre and the role of visual arts within it.

I knew horror was a contradictory and capricious beast, and this research has given me greater appreciation for how little it cares for rules and order. Ambivalence finds itself in the monster and in the viewer, abjection and excess everywhere, and the complex relationship between the gaze and agency encapsulated in corpses and monsters and the people that look. My own artefacts often straddled sections of this research, seemingly created in response to particular theories of horror, yet revealing multiple, contradictory dreads to me in hindsight. Now, at the end of my two-year battle, I can see parts of the beast only briefly engaged, and terrible expanses I have yet to explore.

A monster so heavily augmented with weapons that she would be unable to move, plans to build a mutoscope, a series of 35mm slides of a glitched crime scene, photogrammetry scans of debris, countless models and videos and photographs have all found themselves in a collection titled "Failures and Future Plans". I cannot yet tell which category these abandoned, half-finished or just-started works fall into, but I intend to find out, buoyed by the potential demonstrated in this body of research. Likewise, there are countless works of horror scholarship being written, numerous voices being added to the discourse of the horror genre. The beast continues to shift and evolve, and I look forward to adapting to it, creating work which shapes and reflects this enduring genre.

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Appendix: Complete list of Research Artefacts

This Is Mercy (1-4). Gold 3D printed Steel. Dimensions Variable. 2016.



Panopticon. Timber, Varnish, Lenticular Prints. 110cm x 75cm x 75cm. 2016-2017



All Due Restraint. 3D printed plastic, table, twine, digital print, found frame. 90 cm x 100 cm x 50 cm. 2016



Portraits of Monsters. Series of 15 Lenticular prints mounted on acrylic, 13 cm x 13 cm, 2017



Monster Time (1-6). Series of digital prints. 45cm x 30cm each. 2017



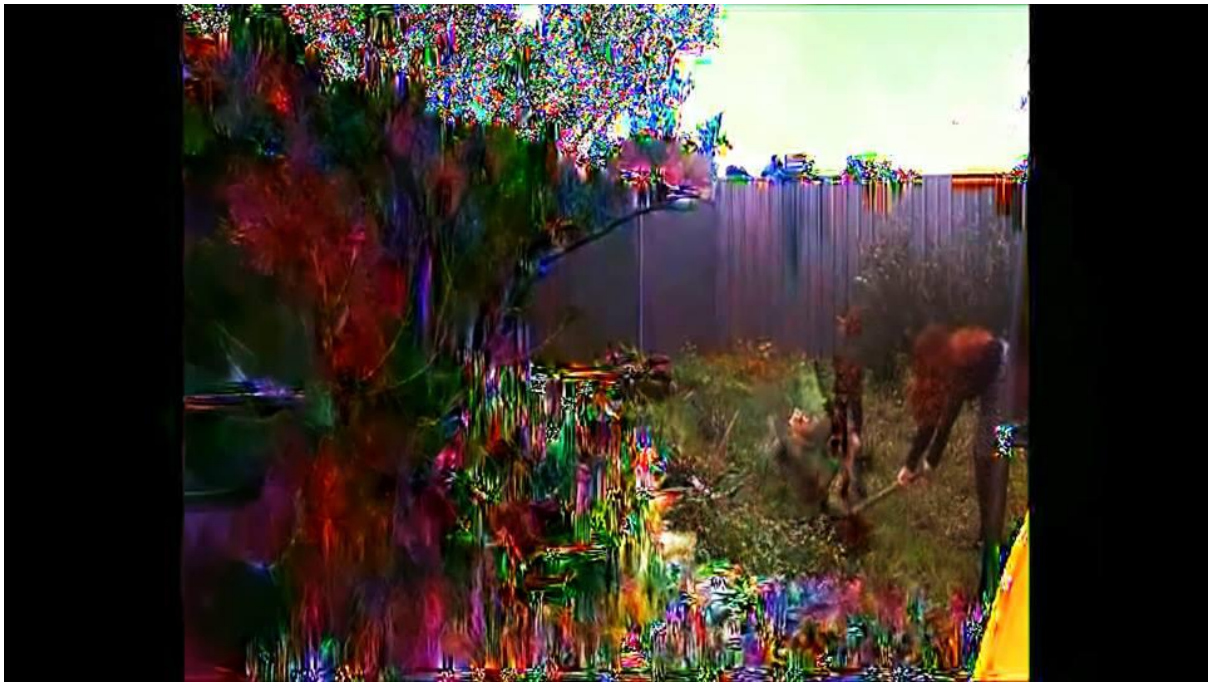
STR8 2 HE11. White Ink, black velvet, found frames. Dimensions Variable. 2017



The Found Body. Black ink, silver paper, found frames. Dimensions variable. 2016



I Can Suffer, I Can Suffer, Stay With Me. Video. 4:20. 2016



Can You Suffer Like I Suffer. Video. 24:20. 2017



Woman As Witch. View Master, View Master Reel with seven stereoscopic images. 10 x 11 x 10 cm 2017 (below shows View Master and stereoscopic image pairs)











Saturn Devouring His Son. 3D printed plastic, table, frame, digital photograph, 150 x 75 x 40cm. 2016.



She Blots Out The Whole World. 3D printed plastic, table, 2017. 85 x 40 x 40cm.



Mindless Self Indulgence, 3D printed plastic, table, 2017. 85 x 40 x 40cm



Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto Yourself. 3D printed plastic, table, 2017. 115 x 35 x 35 cm.



He said I could never be filled. 3D printed plastic, table, 2017. 70 x 40 x 40 cm.



Fuck Machine. 3D printed plastic, table, 2017. 75 x 35 x 35 cm.

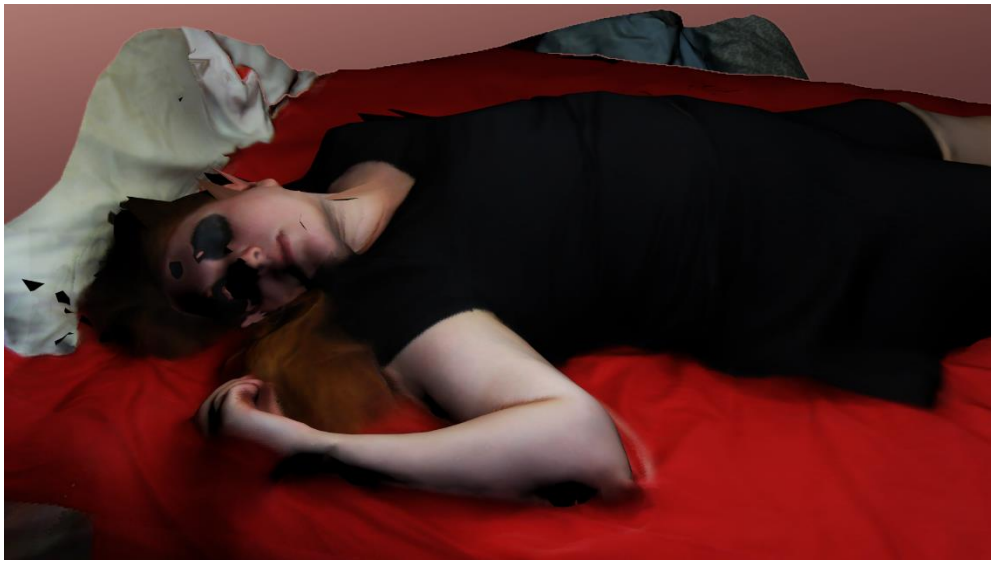


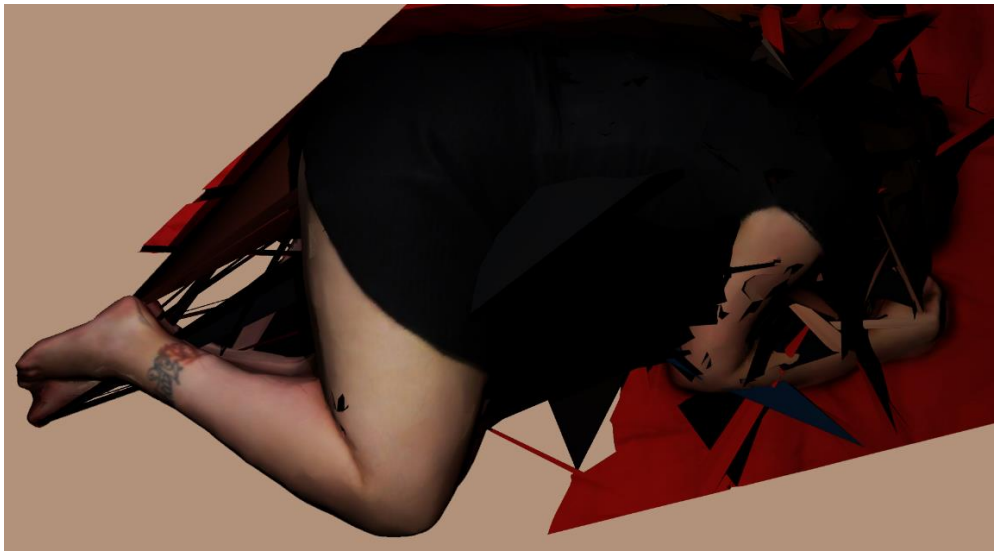
Vanity Loves Me (1-6), digital print, 2017. 57 x 77 cm each













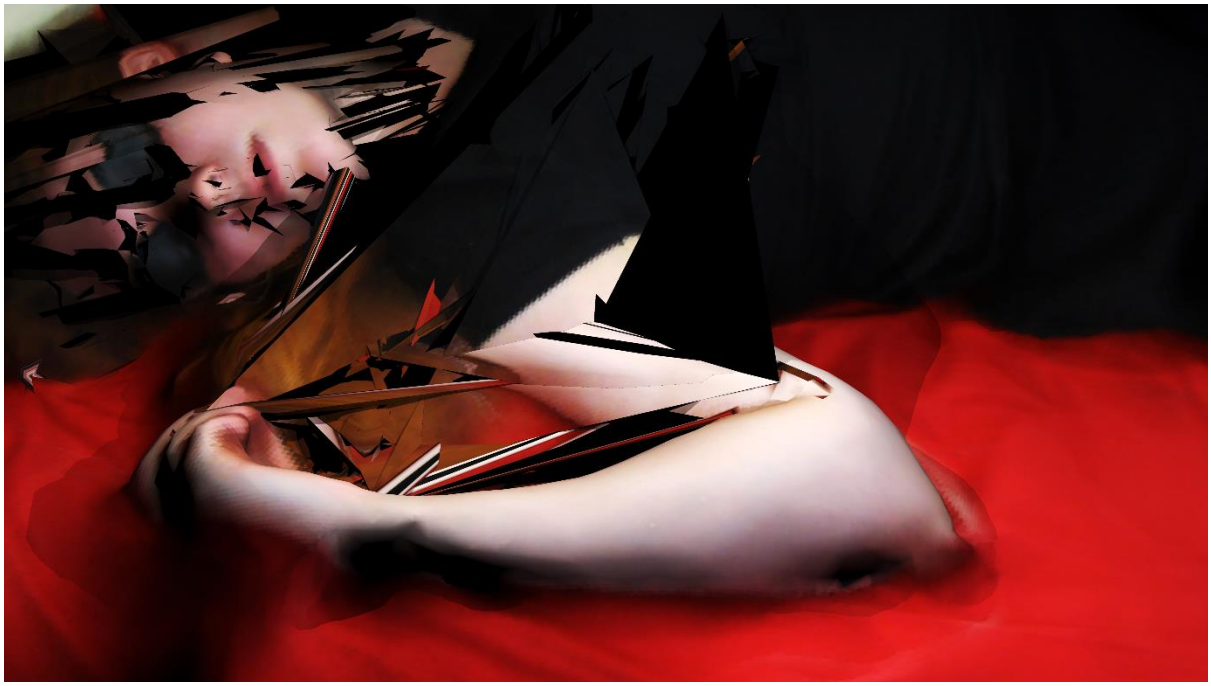
This Hurts (Me More Than It Will Ever Hurt You) (1-5). Digital prints, 2017. 75 x 133.3 cm each



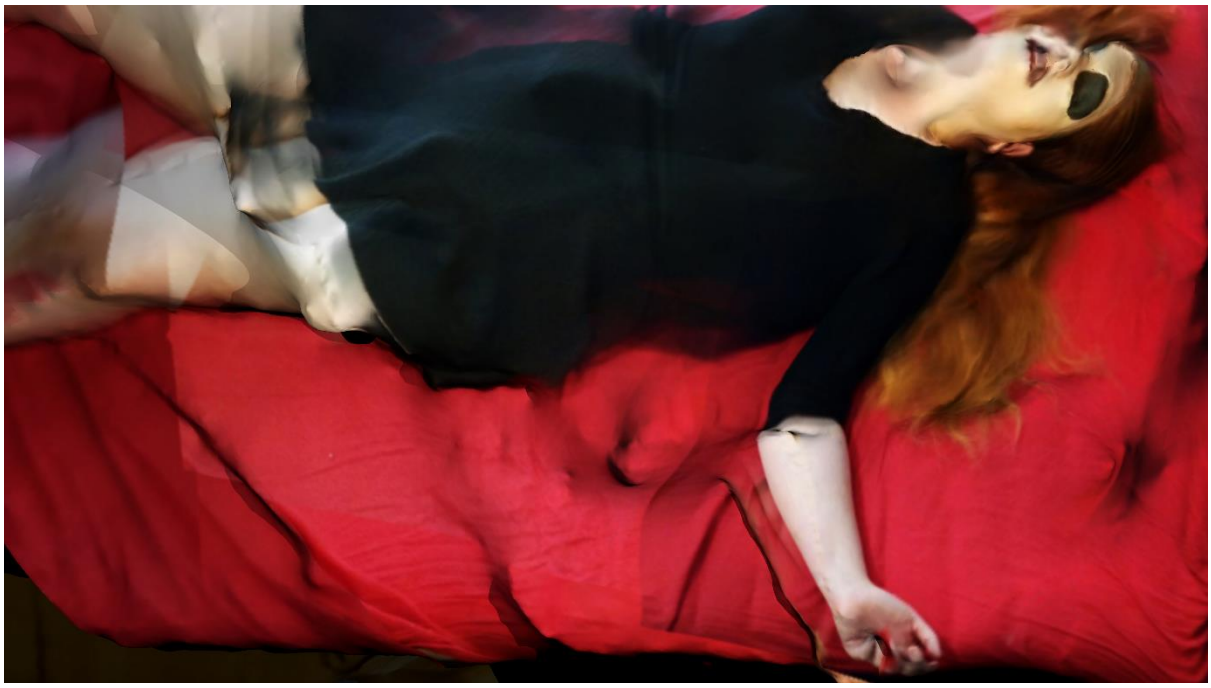








The Flesh is as Sacred as it is Profane (1), digital print, 2017. 177.8 x 100 cm.



The Flesh is as Sacred as it is Profane (2), digital print, 2017. 177.8 x 100 cm.



The Flesh is as Sacred as it is Profane (3), digital print, 2017. 177.8 x 100 cm.



He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts., digital print, 2017. 100 x 120 cm.



Nothing Like a bit of Fear to Make a Paper Man Crumble, digital print, 2017. 200 x 300 cm.



All You Have To Do Is Ask. Virtual Reality environment, Oculus Rift, Dimensions variable. 2017.
(below is screenshot of the environment)

