

When the Woman Shoots: Countering the Horror Film Canon in the Archive

By

Anne-Marie Desjardins

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Department of Cinema Studies

New York University

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Abstract

The film Canon has been marginalizing individual works for far too long by claiming authority over the multiplicity of histories that exist within the cinematic artform and replacing it with one linear history that promotes dominant modes of discourses in favor Caucasian male-driven productions. This falsely shapes the public's understanding of the medium, which should instead serve as a reflection of the socio-political realities of a given time and geography. The horror genre, specifically, has obliterated the memory of female works from its corpus entirely. The goal of this research is to break the gendered boundaries of the horror film canon by proposing an intervention, whereby women filmmakers will be inscribed into the history of the genre. The result is a discussion of the role of the archive and, by extension, education, preservation and curation as gatekeeper, cause and symptom of the social limitations of our access to film histories. This is complemented by a curated series, which puts theory in dialogue with practice.

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Introduction

Upon the release of the most recent title from the *Halloween* franchise, *Halloween* (David Gordon Green, 2018)¹, Jason Blum, the founder and CEO of Blumhouse Pictures, a prominent production company that has been making horror films for over a decade, addressed a question pertaining to its lack of films made by women by stating the following : “There are not a lot of female directors period, and even less who are inclined to do horror.”² Following an immense amount of backlash, the producer has since rectified his statement. The media took to this by publishing lists of horror films made by women as an attempt to prove him wrong. However, the majority of these lists only contained titles from the more recent years, from roughly 2000 leading up to 2018. Similarly, in October of the same year, IndieWire released a list entitled “100 Best Horror Movies of All Time”³. Within 100 film titles, only six of them were made by women and only two of them were released before the year 2000. The fact that the majority of these six titles were made more recently should not lead to the belief that we now live in a world where women filmmakers are taken more seriously within the horror film production. In 2018, *Variety* released a specific contemporary “best of” list entitled “The 20 Best Horror Films of the 20 Last Years”⁴. It should come to no surprise, at this point, that only one of these films was made by a woman: *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, 2014)⁵. In fact, when asked to name horror film titles

¹ *Halloween*. Directed by David Gordon Green, 2018.

² Nyren, Erin. “Jason Blum Says He's Meeting With Women Directors After Claiming 'There Aren't a Lot'.” *Variety*, Variety, 18 Oct. 2018, variety.com/2018/film/news/jason-blum-women-directors-meet-there-arent-a-lot-1202984000/.

³ Blauvelt, et al. “The 100 Greatest Horror Movies of All-Time.” *IndieWire*, IndieWire, 23 Oct. 2018, www.indiewire.com/2018/10/best-horror-movies-all-time-scary-films-1202012183/.

⁴ Gleiberman, Owen. “The 20 Best Horror Films of the Last 20 Years.” *Variety*, Variety, 25 Oct. 2018, variety.com/2018/film/spotlight/20-best-horror-films-of-the-last-20-years-1202977075/.

⁵ *The Babadook*. Directed by Jennifer Kent, 2014.

made by women, it appears that most people find it difficult to come up with just one, regardless of their expertise within the field of cinema or outside of it. With this in mind, a multitude of questions arose and became the framework for this research:

- Who are the women who directed horror films throughout history?
- Why are we unable to account for them?
- How is a Canon shaped?
- What role does the archive, and by extension, curatorial practices and education have in its formation?

The goal of this research is to address these questions and to break the gendered boundaries of the horror film canon by proposing an intervention, whereby women filmmakers will be inscribed into the history of the genre. The result is twofold: a curated series and a discussion on the archival practice (through education and curating), as gatekeeper, cause and symptom of the social limitations of our access to film histories.

We must remember that the Canon and all of its moving parts is a living organism that we as individuals who contribute to it must continue to question. This is a symptom of a cycle that exists within the field of moving images and that informs and is informed by its many moving parts. It may be that the terms “Canon”, “essential cinema” and even “Film History” need to be revised when working towards an idealistic hub of knowledge that is more inclusive of a multitude of identities. In fact, by doing so, we might understand that the scope of works that make up the artform extends well beyond what has been written about and made accessible to viewers and is far wider than anything one individual could explore fully. We then might understand that there is not one, but a multitude of histories, that continue to evolve as the term

“cinema” shifts and extends into other realms. Indeed, this shift and hopeful tendency to remove ourselves from an authoritative language over the medium, one which contributes to social injustice and false historical knowledge, might allow us to accept that we will never be perfectly inclusive in our presentation of works; whether as curators, programmers, directors, scholars, or archivists. However, being aware of such disparities and teaching others to question authoritative language and presentation of histories within an artform might make us all more knowledgeable and that much more accurate in our renditions of the medium. As such, it is important to look back on the Canon as we know it and understand the disparities offered by these terms in order to propose a multitude of counter-cans and create interventions on the one-track history that most of us have been taught to accept. The horror Canon will be observed through the lens of four different spheres that intersect and are both symptoms and causes of the canon: Part 1 of the research will explore the horror canon and its erasure of women through different aspects of preservation, as an expansive term. The first chapter, “Education” will examine academia as a symptom and a cause of canon formation. Chapter 2, “Preservation” will address the historical filtration and social injustices that occur as byproducts of archival practices, identifying the making of databases as counter-archives. Chapter 3, “Access” will offer an overview of current gender disparities on streaming platforms, using *Netflix* and *Shudder* as case-studies, as well as an examination of restoration as canonization. Chapter 4, “Curation” will identify the shift in the term and its practice as a starting off point for a reflective analysis of the making of *When the Woman Shoots: A Horror Film Program* accompanying this research. Finally, Part 2 will describe the program by presenting the reasoning behind the selection of each film for the program.

Given the nature of this thesis, which pertains to women filmmakers and their exclusion from the horror genre canon, the surnames and names of the directors of films that are referenced will be placed in parentheses after the title of a work; ex. *The Monster and the Girl* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1914). It is to be noted that this is another standard method of identifying works which should be questioned, as it falsely gives authority of the film product over to one individual; when we should be reminded that the work is a team effort. However, in the case of readdressing a Canon, this method permits the emphasis to be placed on the director and their gender, which I invite you to pay attention to this throughout your reading.

Part I. The Horror Canon and its Erasure of Women

Chapter 1: Education

Academia as a Symptom and a Cause of Canonization

Within the practice of film criticism, some films have to be chosen to write about, excluding the others through inevitable consequence. This is directly influenced by the decisions to produce, distribute and market a film, which has its own sets of biases and implications. Their critical success then gets them visibility and nominations during high-profile award ceremonies, and thus ensue the politics of Hollywood. In her publication in *Cinema Journal* entitled “The Politics of Film Canons”, Janet Staiger states that similarly, in academia, certain film titles are favored and used to support arguments within theoretical writing⁶. Professors and scholars make

⁶ Staiger, Janet. “The Politics of Film Canons.” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1985, p. 4., doi:10.2307/1225428.

decisions every day to support the thesis of their ideas and statements with film titles, film directors and a corpus of given works, which are not unrelated to the influence of a film's visibility and critical coverage. This also includes references to other academic sources who, in return, do the same. This cycle creates a pool that elevates the "importance" of a film based on its visibility in this esteemed realm. When writing about specific genres, the selection of works that are referenced becomes more specialized and more limited in terms of the films that continue to be recycled through these cycles. To pull just one example from the horror genre, one of the important publications that discusses the genre and contributed to bringing value to it as an artform is Stephen Prince's book, "The Horror Film."⁷ Prince refers to three pioneering works of horror on the very first page of this book to introduce the early starts of on-screen horror depictions. The works in question are: *The Haunted Castle* (Georges Méliès, 1896)⁸, *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley, 1910)⁹ and *The Werewolf* (Henry MacRae, 1913)¹⁰, all of which were made by men. In fact, in this very first page, which attempts to outline the popularity of the genre from 1896 to the early 2000s¹¹, roughly 29 film titles are referenced, not one of them made by a woman. This is what is meant by the decisions to include or exclude certain titles in scholarly publications having a social impact on the understanding of the genre. Prince is not the only scholar who, while writing important works on the genre, has excluded women from its history.

⁷ Prince, Stephen. *The Horror Film*. Rutgers University Press, 2004.

⁸ *The Haunted Castle*. Directed by George Méliès, 1896.

⁹ *Frankenstein*. Directed by J. Searle Dawley, 1910

¹⁰ *The Werewolf*. Directed by Henry MacRae, 1913

¹¹ Prince, 1

In addition to this, as previously stated, these decisions are oftentimes influenced, whether indirectly or not, by film criticism, media coverage and awards. These films are selected based on a given criteria; whether aesthetic, technical or social. In an earlier occurrence of writing about the canon through literature, Charles Altieri proposes that one of these evaluative criteria is a film's success at providing individuals with a means for self interpretation; a contribution to the social good.¹² Staiger revokes this idea in a powerful quote:

“Thus, selective choices based on criteria supposedly for the good of society end up being canons supportive of the interests of a hegemonic society, not necessarily in the interest of all segments of that culture or other cultures. Claims for universality are disguises for achieving uniformity, for suppressing through the power of canonic discourse optional value systems. Such a cultural “consensus” fears an asserted “barbarism” and a collapse into the grotesque and monstrous, because it recognizes the potential loss of its hegemony. It is a politics of power.”¹³

In fact, this politics of power is of utmost importance when discussing the economic forces that run our society in favoritism of the male gender. As Claire Johnston points out in her work entitled “Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema”, in a society and specifically a field that is dominated by the presence of men who have a large influence on film production as well as the canonization and henceforth understanding of cinema, “the characteristics of art termed “universal” are more adequately defined as those reinforcing the socialized dominance of the “masculine”.”¹⁴ Staiger takes this idea further by stating that this reinforces the cultural and economic dominance of one gender over the other.¹⁵ This is specifically true to the horror genre, of which women have been erased from its history. Are we to assume that the intention for “social-good” is to continue to have men

¹² Staiger, 10

¹³ Staiger, 10

¹⁴ Staiger, 17

¹⁵ Staiger, 17

hold power over horror, and to keep women within the confines of their on-screen role of “victim”? This dominance in masculinity that not only exists in production but taints our understanding of the genre, also creates a social imbalance in its trends of portrayal of women. Linda Williams and a multitude of scholars have explored the relationship of women with their onscreen representations. In her influential piece, “When the Woman Looks”, she analyzes the gaze of women spectators of horror films, who are given the option to face their representations as defenseless victims of rape, murder and fear or see themselves more accurately in the depictions of the oftentimes misunderstood monstrous. This lack of material to identify with, Linda Williams argues, gives them no option but to look away.¹⁶ This gender imbalance that was so practiced through the cycle of canonization that the woman as a victim became formulaic of the genre. This is only to say that the films that we choose to promote have an impact on further production trends and on our understanding of the genre, which more importantly serves as a vehicle for societal reflections.

Similarly, a vast portion of scholarship about the horror genre identifies its inception to the credit of the early works of Universal, such as *Frankenstein*, creating not only a Canon of early works but a masculine lineage that is accepted as the ultimate verity. In his chapter *Shadow Souls and Strange Adventures: Horror and the Supernatural in European Silent Film*, as part of Stephen Prince’s anthology *The horror film*, Casper Tybjerg quotes Roy Kinnard’s words on the subject in *Horror in Silent Films: A Filmography, 1986-1929* as follows:

The horror film as a genre was officially born in the early sound era, on November 16, 1931.

On that date, Universal Pictures released their now-classic production of *Frankenstein*... It was

¹⁶ Williams, Linda. “When the Woman Looks.” *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, by Keith B. Grant, Univ. of Texas Press, 1996, pp. 17–37.

such an unqualified hit that it literally created a new type of movie --the horror film-- and was the first picture to be referred to as such.¹⁷

Kinnard is not the only one who reinforces the idea that the beginning of onscreen horror as a genre coincides with these releases; thus existing as of 1931. However, this notion is simply false; horror has been alive in entertainment realms for far longer than 1931. Attesting that one title marks the birth of a given genre recalls the same kind of authoritative and subjective language that is used throughout the cycle of canonization. To state that *Frankenstein* marks the start of the horror genre, first, is to deny the work's literary history, which, as many of these horror films credited as the first markers of horror cinema, is owed to women writers. In this case, Mary Shelley penned *Frankenstein* over 100 years earlier¹⁸. It also denies other forms of entertainment that included horror elements (for example, Le Théâtre du Grand Guignol¹⁹), other types of non-narrative film elements, the countless number of films that have been lost or are not accessible to the public, and the history of horror outside of one's own small fraction of the world. Some might argue that this claim is based on the film's presentation of formulaic tropes of the horror genre that continued to be followed and to thrive for years to come. While formula is important, I will reiterate that to state that something marks the beginning of a movement or a genre implies that we have the authority to do so, this authority being the knowledge of every existing film element ever made. Supporting this case, Tybjerg states the following: "Looking at

¹⁷ Tybjerg, Casper. "Shadow Souls and Strange Adventures: Horror and the Supernatural in European Silent Film." *The horror film*, edited by Stephen Prince, Rutgers University Press, 2004, p.15.

¹⁸ Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, 1797-1851. *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus : the 1818 Text*. Oxford ; New York :Oxford University Press, 1998. Print.

¹⁹ Peirron, Agnes. "Grand Guignol History." *Grand Guignol* , www.grandguignol.com/history.htm.

the films of the silent period from the perspective of later formulas may, however, obscure trends and common features that connect the silent-era pictures to each other.”²⁰

Furthermore, the contribution to imbalance is illustrated in the vocabulary that is used to present Canons. The authoritative tone that is employed is one that suggests truth and does not leave much space for interpretation; words like “essential”, “best”, “must-see”, “top” and “first” of all time, only to name a few. Jonathan Lupo touches on this in his publication “Loaded Canons: Contemporary Film Canons, Film Studies and Film Discourse”, by describing the effects of the “best films” lists by critics and filmmakers²¹ and box-office successes as significant players in the canon formation. Surely, these lists are informed by the masculine cycle of production and output described above. The lists that are published today and pertain to new-releases must be more inclusive in their representation (both in terms of identity of filmmakers and visibility of a film) and be more attuned to their publication’s politics of power. However, what is most pertinent to this research are the false-truth effects of the lists that look back at history and provide the public with titles that they claim are the ultimate, the essential and the must-sees of a genre’s entire history. Indeed, history in itself is exclusive and should rather be framed as one of many histories. This one, very specific, masculine and “ultimate” list creates an illusion of truth; one that disregards the multitude of realities and cultures that expresses themselves with the use of cinema. Even more importantly, when these lists are created today, they lack to address an important factor and something previous scholars have omitted from their work: the question of access.

²⁰ Tjyberg, 16

²¹ Lupo, Jonathan. “Loaded Canons: Contemporary Film Canons, Film Studies, and Film Discourse.” *The Journal of American Culture*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2011, p.223

Chapter 2: Preservation

Addressing Social Injustice in the Archives

While the archive may not be the first to come to mind when thinking of aspects of canonization, it is very much part of the cycle and is important to consider. Perhaps it is the very fact that we do not think of it as a top contender of Canon-building that makes it so important. The archive, both conceptually and institutionally, most often presents itself or is received as an objective representation of a given history. An archival mission, regardless of the institution, can be summed up to collecting, preserving and making accessible cultural and historical documents to the public²².

But much like the previously mentioned notion that any Canon inherently creates marginalization, the archive is not inclusive of every moving image work ever made; it too, requires a selection process. One reason for this is that archive's struggle with limited space, both physical and digital. A distinction is made between the two, but it is to be noted that digital should also be considered materially in the archive as it demands floor and shelf space and hardware. Archives also deal with budgetary restrictions that create many hurdles for institutions. They oftentimes struggle to get funding and even the institutions that are more wealthy in this department are limited in terms of how much they can save. In addition to overall funding, many archives function on a grant basis. This means that archivists need to apply for grants and lobby for certain works to be saved over others, making a case for their cultural and historical

²² "Archival Program Administration." *Society of American Archivists*, www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section/1-archival-program-administration.

significance in order to defend the need for funding. As a result of this, many works get pushed to the side and risk obsolescence because they do not meet the acquisition criteria for the archive, who is limited in its resources and perhaps cannot find appropriate funding for it.

We, as consumers of culture, tend to take the “archive”, in its conventional meaning, as ultimate truth; the objective representation of history and a given cultural heritage. But again, “history” and “heritage” are not one thing and are not linear; they are multiple and constructed on human perception and understanding. As noted by Michel Foucault in “The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language”²³, the archive is “that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existences and specifies them in their own duration”²⁴. In other words, it shapes our understanding of history based on what the archive includes and excludes. This is referred to by Uricchio as “historical filtration”²⁵ and is expanded on by Kendrick as follows:

“a process by which the archival selection criteria determined by a period’s dominant social formations shape and delimit our access to the past.”, as Uricchio describes it²⁶ “This privileges dominant modes of discourse (or, in the case of films, dominant trends in filmmaking and film scholarship) and marginalizes other discourses that are deemed unworthy of being preserved.”²⁷

In other words, the selection process of an archive that is very much informed by a politics of power influences the use and re-use of material through the many different spheres that make reference to it, ingest it and present it to the public. Because of the inherent forces that rule the

²³ Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984 Author. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Pantheon Books, 1972. EBSCOhost, proxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsasp&AN=edsasp.ASPS10021789.soth&site=eds-live.

²⁴ Foucault, 129

²⁵ Uricchio, William. “Archives and Absences.” *Film History*, vol. 7, no. 3, Sept. 1995, pp. 256–263. EBSCOhost, proxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=khh&AN=31273201&site=eds-live. p.260

²⁶ Uricchio, 260

²⁷ Kendrick, 134

archive (most often, budgetary, institutional, bureaucratic and ideological in nature) as well as its struggle to be prioritized within the institution that it lives in (when it is not its own institution), works that adhere to dominant modes of discourse of the time will be privileged for preservation over works that stray away from this. This should only serve as a reminder that the archive, in its many forms (as an institution, online repository, etc) is always run by humans, who have their own sets of predisposed knowledge and biases. The people who are charged with this selection process are the gatekeepers of knowledge, and should work towards a flexible notion of the term “history”, one that reflects plurality and diversity. Caroline Frick explains this as follows in her book, “Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation”²⁸ :

“Contemporary cultural theorists largely approach and critique archives as sites of power that employ a perceived, naive belief in adherence to objectivity, despite transparent absences and gaps amid collections. Archivists, however, share this concern, remaining acutely and forever concerned over what has been lost and the areas that their collections will never cover.”²⁹

Regardless, the act of selecting works to include in a given collection excludes the works that are not, and our job is to make sure that we are conscience of this when consulting an archive or working within it. Furthermore, the archive’s ability to provide public access to the material can also contribute to marginalization, when not properly exercised. This is problematized by the employment of overt policies which restrict access to material, or the limitation to access caused by geographic proximity³⁰ to physical archives which restrict access to material to onsite visits. While access should be a priority within the mission of a given archive and institution, it is not always achievable for oftentimes budgetary reasons that stunt the process of digitization.

²⁸ Frick, Caroline. *Saving Cinema : The Politics of Preservation*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2011. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=631631>.

²⁹ Frick, 12

³⁰ Kendrick, 124

Another reason for this is that material held in an archive is considered to be important and that beyond the duty to provide public access is an overruling mission: that of preservation. If a work or object is deemed too valuable and fragile for someone to consult, their request to do so will be denied. This is mostly the case with non-digital materials. Again, it is to be considered that digitization adds another layer of selection and, by extension, marginalization to the process. Works are prioritized for digitization based on demand, importance, condition and budget. If a work is not digitized, then access to it is made more difficult and therefore, history undergoes another layer of filtration for the public. Additionally, an archive cannot lend a print for screening or use a print for public exhibition if the copyright has not been cleared for it³¹. Sometimes, the rights have been lost entirely, stunting the accessibility to the material and preventing them from leaving the shelf. This is another obstacle that archives face, especially considering their mission to provide access to material.

The Database as Counter-Archival Practice

Problems of inclusion within archives have led to ingenuous counter archival practices that don't necessarily preserve the physicality of a work, but rather the memory and access to it. In her publication "Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History"³², Vicki Callahan addresses these new spaces that offer a different historical perspective by revisiting the term "expanded", used within the cinematic practice and at times identified as a genre in itself, and

³¹ Bosma, Peter. *Film Programming : Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives*, Columbia University Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central,

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1974611>. p.83

³² *Reclaiming the Archive : Feminism and Film History*, edited by Vicki Callahan, Wayne State University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3416553>.

suggesting that it grows out into formats such as the online archive, interactive media, etc.³³ The point of her argument is that these new approaches to methodology would provide a displacement of homogenous, linear histories. As such, spaces devoted to addressing and cataloguing the memory of marginalized groups of identities and works can be referred to as expanded-archival practices. An example of this type of practice that represents an answer to exclusionary archival methods is that of the database creation, which has proven to be a way in which people have reclaimed the archive and provided visibility and access to material that otherwise might be forgotten or pushed to the margins. Callahan supports this by highlighting that the database's capability to produce unexpected relations through its search engine function would further research possibilities and create new permutations of knowledge through its assembly.³⁴ Perhaps the most important feature of a database is its transformative effects on the archive, which shifts from its rather permanent iteration of a singular history influenced by dominant modes of discourse and into a dynamic agent of change.

Additionally, the thematic grouping of identities that are marginalized within the film canon, which shapes our understanding of history as a filtered reality, gives them power to rise together and reclaim their place in the artform. The database offers a counter-narrative to the one that is commonly presented as the ultimate truth, one that we are taught to accept.

*Cut-throat Women*³⁵, is an example of an expanded counter-archival practice that uses the database to create a space and resource in which women who have contributed to horror films are brought together in one hub of knowledge. This project was started by Sonia Lupher and will

³³ Callahan, 5

³⁴ Callahan, 6

³⁵ Lupher, Sonia. "The Database - Cut-Throat Women." *Cut-Throat Women*, www.cutthroatwomen.org/the-database.

serve as a tangible case-study for this research. The goal is to analyze the present architecture of the database, highlight foreseeable problems and suggest an optimized schema, which will then be delivered to Lupher as a contribution. The following is a diagram which best describes the present architecture of the database (Figure 3: Cut-Throat Women Database Diagram)

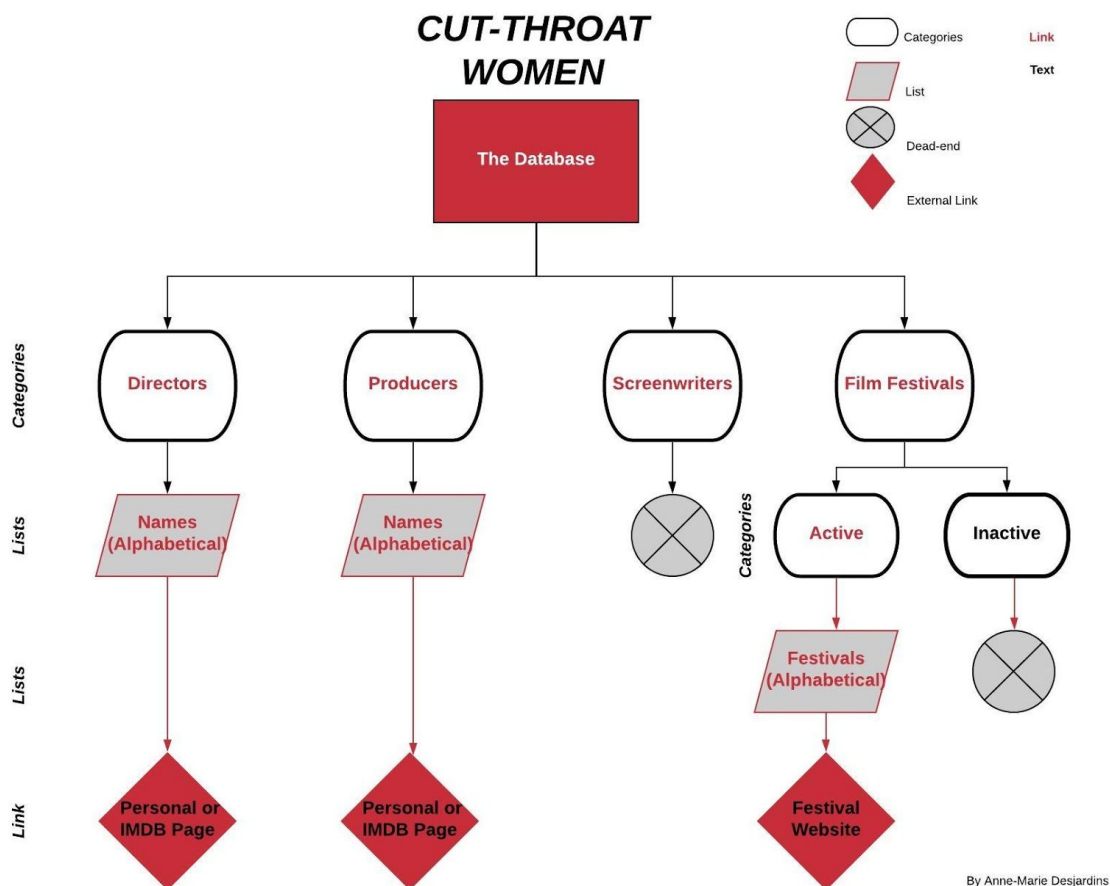


Figure 1: Cut-Throat Women Database Diagram, by Anne-Marie Desjardins

As illustrated above, once a user clicks on the database tab of the *Cut-Throat Women* website, there are four main categories pertaining to women in horror film to choose from. Respectively, Directors, Producers, Screenwriters and Festivals. The red font suggests that a user can click on

the category or title, which serves as a link to open another page in the website. The black font, on the other hands, represents the categories or titles that cannot be clicked on.

If a user clicks on “Directors” or “Producers”, the path that ensues is roughly the same: the second tier of information organization opens up to them. This manifests itself in the form of a list of names of women directors or producers, depending on the category that was chosen, organized alphabetically by the person’s last name. A user can toggle through letters to reach the person that they are looking for. Most of the names on these lists are clickable and link to the person’s IMDB or personal page, which is illustrated in the diagram as a red diamond. The font, here, is in black as it no longer is part of the integrated database function. In other words, the link leads to a third party server, leaving the *Cut-Throat Women* webpage. The category of “Screenwriters” should very well act in the same way as “Directors” and “Producers”, leading to an alphabetically organized list and linking to third party pages. However, it currently says “coming soon” and therefore, is a dead-end. This is illustrated by means of a grey circle with an X through it. Finally, the “Film Festivals” category is different from the other three categories. When a user clicks on it (illustrated by means of a red font), they will be brought to another category page, which is shown on the diagram using the “category” rounded shape with a black outline. The two categories to choose from are “active” and “inactive”. As illustrated, only “active” serves as a clickable link (red font). “Inactive” is a dead-end, which is indicated with the grey crossed out circle. Once a user has clicked on “active”, they will be directed to a new list page, in which festival titles are listed alphabetically and serve as links to their respective third party pages on the web, much like the lists of directors and producers were.

While this is an admirable database that currently serves its purpose well in terms of assembling lists of information, there are specific foreseeable problems with it. The following diagram (Figure 4: Cut-Throat Women Database Diagram Problems) revisits the first one, highlighting the problematic areas in blue.

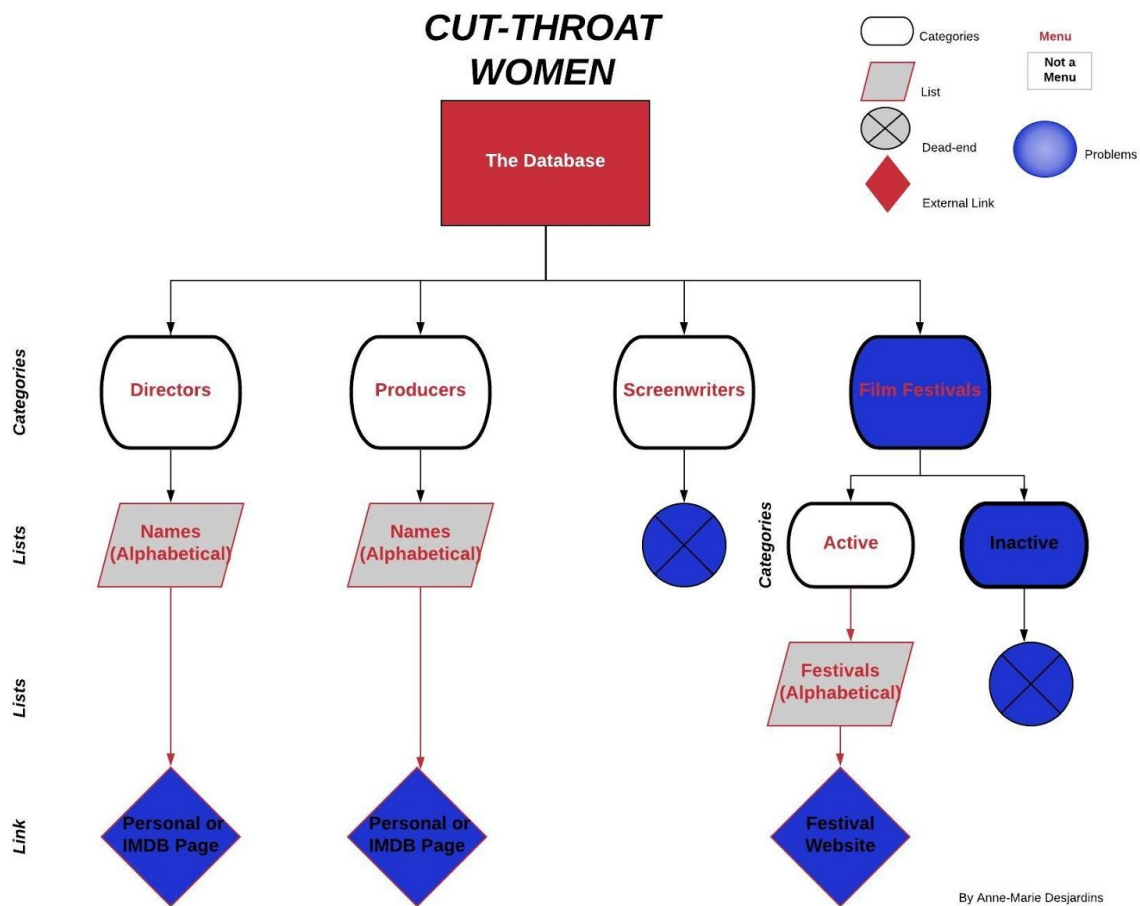


Figure 2: Cut-Throat Women Database Diagram Problems, By Anne-Marie Desjardins

As illustrated, the areas in blue present current or potential issues. To begin with the first tier, that of categories, the main problem is that it mixes both entities and events, which confuses the *theme* of women in horror with the specific *contributions of* women to horror films. In other words, “Directors”, “Producers” and “Screenwriters” refer to women’s roles within horror film

production; they are entities. “Film Festivals”, on the other hand, is an event. While this is not a significant issue, it may be desirable to make a category tier before this one, where a user can choose between “roles” and “events”. That way, when both categories expand and include more roles (ie, cinematographers, for example) and more events (Wikipedia Edit-a-thons, specific programs, panels, etc), then the database will be less messy and more user-friendly.

Within the second tier, the main problem is that it has not been updated yet. The screenwriter list needs to be added to its appropriate category, and the “inactive” list, under the category of “film festivals” also needs to be updated.

Finally, the biggest foreseeable issue with this database is its heavy reliance on links. During correspondences on the matter, Sonia Lupher has mentioned that the database currently includes around 650 names on it. This means that there are also around 650 links to keep track of on the database. This would involve a constant check to make sure the links are not broken and that the websites in question are still up and being updated. While IMDB is currently a source that is consulted a lot, it does not systematically contain true information. It sometimes wrongfully lists co-directors or omits to list them when they exist, does not have faithful runtimes and sometimes even has faulty release dates. Beyond this, we cannot trust that artists will update their webpages for the rest of their lives. It may be that they get too busy and prioritize other things, omitting to update their website with their most current works and making it out of date. Or, they may very well stop making films all together and take down their web page. This leaves the database with broken and inexistant links, or with links to pages that are out of date. That said, this use of and heavy reliance on links needs to be rethought.

The problems highlighted above are not without solution. In fact, what I will propose will demand a decent amount of work at the beginning, but will then ensure that the database feeds off of itself. This will further be explained. The following is an optimized database diagram, which explains these suggestions. (Figure 5: Cut-Throat Women, The Optimized Database)

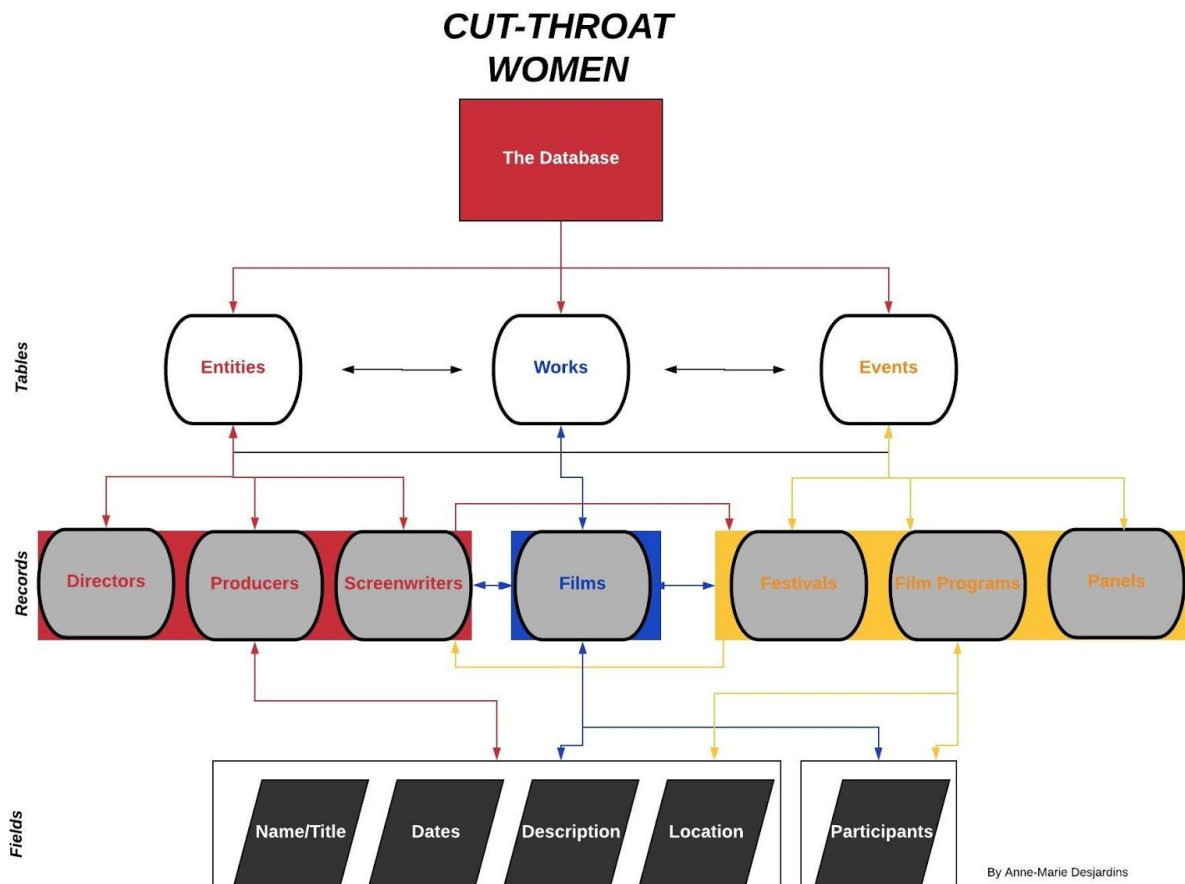


Figure 3: Cut-Throat Women, The Optimized Database. By Anne-Marie Desjardins

The idea, here, is that the database contains three types of main categories, or tables, as they are referred to within the database. Each table has its own color representation: “entities” (red), “works” (blue) and “events” (yellow), which each have their own sets of records as described in the diagram. These records are based on the preexisting categories set forth by

Lupher and add a few new ones to create a very basic database model. They are expressed as rectangles in the colour of their respective table. It is to be noted that there should be more record types as the database grows. For example, “entities”, which refers to people, only currently includes “directors”, “producers” and “screenwriters”, but it may be that with time, “cinematographer” or “editor” would be added.

“Work” refers to the object in question. In this case, the database is only concerned with moving image works. As such, the only record type of “work” is “film titles”. As of yet, the database does not contain such a category, which is a crucial part of the information pertaining to women in film.

Finally, the “events” table contains three preliminary record types: “festivals”, “film programs” and “panels”. Each of the record types contain specific fields for data entry. All record types contain the following fields: Name or Titles (depending on if we are referring to a person or a work/event), dates (lifespan for entity, release date for work and occurrence date for event), description and location (place of birth for entity, production location for work and occurrence location for event). Additionally, the events and works should contain a field for participants. It might be that with the nature of the database, the participants would only be women. Regardless, the point of this new model is that relationships can be created between entities, works and events, linking records to each other and allowing for immediacy to information.

That way, if someone were to click on, say, Stephanie Rothman as an entity, they would be able to see the works that are tied to her name. (See Figure 6: Stephanie Rothman Diagram, below).

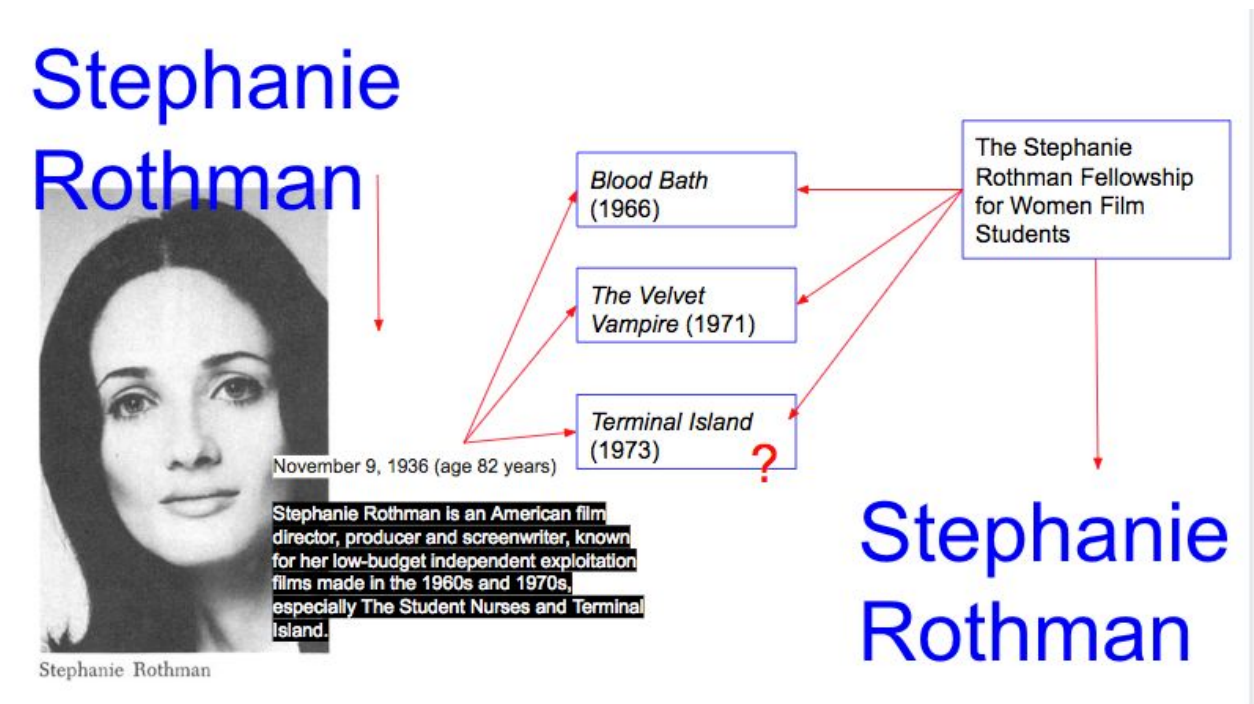


Figure 4: Stephanie Rothman Diagram. By Anne-Marie Desjardins

Searching for Stephanie Rothman would give a user the option to open her entity page, which would have a description for her and would also show her relationships to works and events. Considering the nature of this database, it would be understood that it only includes works that are made by women, under the guidelines that are listed (as director, producer or screenwriter, as of now), making it acceptable that Stephanie Rothman's entire corpus would not necessarily be on the database. However, this is where it gets tricky, as the question of "what constitutes horror" must be addressed. By defining "horror" and delimiting the genre, we are, in some ways, paradoxically creating a canon of works within this database, which is supposed to be countering this very issue. In the same sense, by including works that broadly contain horrific elements, without setting specific guidelines for inclusion, we are also offering an expanded

understanding of the genre, beyond industry criteria and popular modes of representation. This is not something that should be solved, but serves as a reflection on this methodology. Other relationships might include events that Stephanie Rothman is included in; here, the fellowship named after is used as an example. Each “work” or film title would include relationships with entities (so, Stephanie Rothman, here, and a screenwriter or producer if they happen to be women) as well as relevant events. This is circular and provides visibility to more marginalized works, entities, and events; strengthening the database. The simple relationship between entities, works and events would provide a base knowledge that would be good enough as a starting point if Lupher did not want to tackle writing up descriptions yet. These considerations are crucial to the preservation of databases and by extension, the preservation of this given history. The fact that this database is born out of a response to marginalization makes it all the more crucial that it be considered as a long-term project, with long-term goals and preservation tactics.

Chapter 3: Access

Gender Disparity and the Streaming Platforms

As Staiger states in her publication in 1985, “Between 1915 and 1960, the United States alone produced 20,000 feature-length narrative films for commercial distribution. Other countries such as Japan and, recently, India have exceeded the output of the United States”³⁶. The rise of digital technologies only multiplies these numbers, with moving images becoming a more accessible medium to work in. In 2013, the BFI stated that too many films were being

³⁶ Staiger, 8

released each year, with close to 700 films having been released in British cinemas that year.³⁷ In 2018, an estimated 871 movies were released in North America alone³⁸, and who knows if this accounts for more obscure or independent releases. These 871 titles are only true to one part of the world, and do not include other big industries such as India and China. That said, what Staiger states in 1985 is only more accurate today with digital technologies multiplying the outstanding number of films being produced each year: “In purely practical terms, a scholar of cinema cannot study every film ever made and by extension, an archive cannot preserve every title. Selection becomes a necessity and with selection usually comes a politics of inclusion and exclusion. Some films are moved to the center of attention; others, to the margins.”³⁹ With this in mind and the fact that the film count is rising each year, now so more than ever, there is a need for filtration and selection. That said, it is of utmost important that we consider the implications of what films we as individuals in the field choose to include and exclude, which will have a direct impact on preservation, education and finally, canonization.

The turn to digital has made material accessible online and through streaming platforms in one’s own home. While this is an opportunity for entertainment, access to material is also a means for education. Streaming platforms are often presented as databases, making their curation of titles invisible to the general public, and presenting lists as authoritative fact. As such, it is important that we examine the different platforms, their targeted public and overall mission, as well as the titles that they choose to include and the ones that are omitted.

³⁷ Clark, Nick. “Too Many Films Are Released Each Year, Says British Film Institute.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 24 July 2014, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/too-many-films-are-released-each-year-says-british-film-institute-9626850.html.

³⁸ “Movie Releases in North America from 2000-2018 | Statistic.” *Statista*, 2019, www.statista.com/statistics/187122/movie-releases-in-north-america-since-2001/.

³⁹ Staiger, 8

Netflix

Netflix was chosen as a first platform case-study because of its global popularity, the fact that its target audience is very broad and that it does not specialize in one genre. The framework for this analysis is: how does it organize and present information to its users and what is the representation of women directors within the horror film genre? The goal for this is to understand what this means in terms of canonization and access.

To begin, Netflix does not have the organizational capability to show one list view of all films that are listed as “horror”. Instead, they have a multitude of categories under the horror genre, each comprised of 40 titles that are then recycled and repeated throughout the lists. The categories in question are, respectively: Popular on Netflix, Trending Now, Asian Movies, Independent Movies, 20th Century Period Pieces, Thrillers, NX: Super-Powered Sci-Fi, Fantasy and More, Dark Movies, Supernatural Horror Movies, Action and Adventure, Chilling Horror Movies, Scary Suspenseful Movies, Violent Movies, International Horror Movies, Suspenseful Movies and Goofy Comedies⁴⁰. There are no descriptions that accompany each category for viewers to better understand the seemingly arbitrary method of organizing titles. In fact, we are left on our own to demystify the reasoning behind having one category entitled “Suspenseful Movies” and another, “Scary Suspenseful Movies”... Who is evaluating the level of fright and determining the cut off for something that goes beyond being “suspenseful” and into being “scary suspenseful”? That aside, within all these categories, there does not seem to be a Canon-centric list; one that would be identifiable through the use of terms such as “essential horror” or “best of horror”, to only name two examples.

⁴⁰ “Horror Movies.” *Netflix Official Site*, www.netflix.com/browse/genre/8711?bc=34399.

One category that loosely relates to this research is “Popular on Netflix”, which is a separate category from “Trending Now”. Something to keep in mind is the consideration of how things are declared as popular or trending on streaming platforms. It might be that “popular” is a calculation based on total views, whereas trending is based on highest views within a certain timeframe. Regardless of the distinction between the two, the word “popular” refers to a high number of views and sheds a light on what Netflix users in the US have been watching within the horror genre. Within the 40 titles, only 4 are directed by women: *The Invitation* (Karyn Kusama, 2015)⁴¹, *Raw* (Julia Ducournau, 2016)⁴², *The Open House* (Matt Angel and Suzanne Coote, 2018)⁴³ and *Evolution* (Lucile Hadzihalilovic, 2015)⁴⁴. One thing that these films have in common is their release dates, which all range within the last five years.

In the horror subsection entitled “Independent Movies”, of the 40 films, there are simply no films directed by women. Again, Netflix does not provide a description for each category, leaving us to wonder what they constitute as “Independent” production.

Another problem that arises is that there is an additional geography based category for horror films: “Asian Movies”. This information organization creates metadata biases. Additionally, there is a category titled “International Horror”, which makes the “Asian Movies” section all the more questionable as it leads to the assumption that everything on Netflix, aside from this category, is American. This is not the case, as in the independent movies list alone, there were Spanish and Nigerian films, to only name a few. So, why have an international category at all? Putting every country in asia in one separate category from the rest of the films

⁴¹ *The Invitation*. Directed by Karyn Kusama, 2015

⁴² *Raw*. Directed by Julia Ducournau, 2016

⁴³ *The Open House*. Directed by Matt Angel and Suzanne Coote, 2018

⁴⁴ *Evolution*. Directed by Lucile Hadzihalilovic, 2015

that are not organized by continent and having an “international” category that is not defined creates a North American gaze. Whether you are aware of this or not as a Netflix user, you are being told and taught through this information organization that North America is the canon; it is the standard. The way in which information on streaming platforms is presented to us is in fact subjective, the danger is that attempts are made to make this subjectivity invisible.

On the topic of subjectivity, Netflix uses an algorithm to collect data from its millions of users. This data has the ability to enlighten us on the viewing experience; for example, by revealing which films are simply too scary to finish. This is based on the notion that if a viewer stops playing a title after having watched 70% of it, it is probably because of the scare factor being too high⁴⁵. However, this data collecting mechanism is not all good. On the topic of subjectivity, Netflix makes many attempts to eliminate the human trace by use of this algorithm. In an article written in 2018 by Josefina Blattmann entitled “Netflix: Binging on the Algorithm”, Blattmann declared the following:

“More than 80 per cent of the TV shows and movies people watch on Netflix are discovered through the platform’s recommendation system. That means when you think you are choosing what to watch on Netflix you are basically choosing from a number of decisions made by an algorithm.”⁴⁶

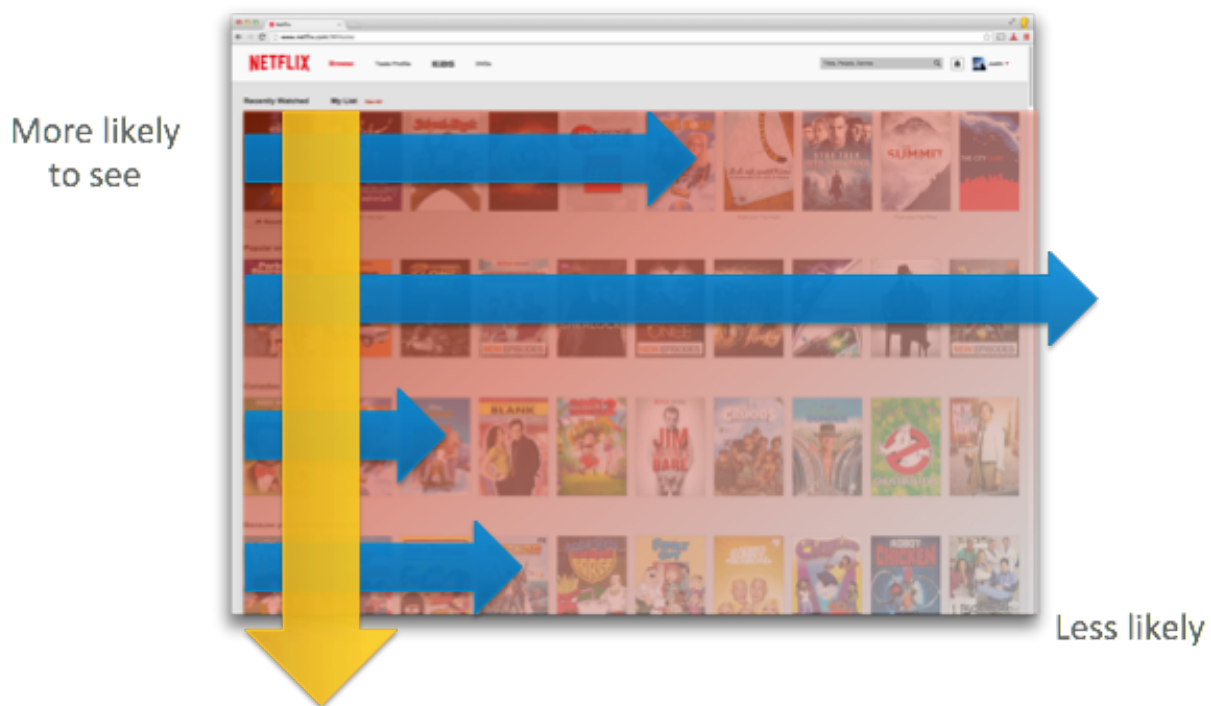
However, the use of an algorithm does not mean the elimination of subjectivity. Netflix uses algorithms to collect a significant amount of data per user to determine what kind of viewer we are based on what we watch and click on, the time of day that we watch certain

⁴⁵ Marr, Bernard. “Netflix Used Big Data To Identify The Movies That Are Too Scary To Finish.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 18 Apr. 2018, www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/04/18/netflix-used-big-data-to-identify-the-movies-that-are-too-scary-to-finish/#52d161c13990.

⁴⁶ Blattmann, Josefina. “Netflix: Binging on the Algorithm.” *UX Planet*, UX Planet, 2 Aug. 2018, uxplanet.org/netflix-binging-on-the-algorithm-a3a74a6c1f59.

titles at and the sequencing of our watching habits.⁴⁷ So, the subjectivity here does not belong to a human with a curator function, but rather to our own sets of biases and preferences. They also pair our personal habits to other viewers' who have similar patterns as ours and use their actions as well to suggest titles to us.

These titles are organized in a strategically to reflect the way in which we search for something to watch. They use “rows” hierarchically, fully aware that the rows at the top are most likely to be engaged with more as they are the first rows that a user sees. (See Figure 7: Netflix Row Structure)



⁴⁷ Blattmann, np

Figure 5: Netflix Row Structure. (Blattmann, Josefina. "Netflix: Binging on the Algorithm." *UX Planet*, UX Planet, 2 Aug. 2018)

In addition to the hierarchical structure of the rows, users are more likely to scan vertically than horizontally, something that the Netflix algorithm takes into account. So, all this considered, as a person carrying my own set of taste that is informed by what I have been taught, then Netflix is arguably preventing me from venturing outside of this predetermined zone of comfort. By extension, my own set of biases and understanding of moving images as an artform will continue to feed itself by informing the algorithm, which in return, will show me similar titles with similar sets of biases. Much like the cyclical function of the canon, the cycle of access with Netflix is one that is self-informed by viewing habits that have been exclusionary from the start. Netflix is therefore contributing to the marginalization of titles in a way that was born with technology. This is not even considering the disparities that exist within the collection of titles that Netflix offers, which was demonstrated earlier through the horror genre as having far less titles made by women than by men and collapsing cultures into boxes. If we cannot fix our viewing habits from the start; whether that is via our education, access to materials, curated biases, etc, then streaming platforms that use algorithms similar to Netflix will never change the detrimental effects of canonization based on information presentation. Claiming that streaming platforms are an opportunity to broaden our limited views of film through their rich technological access is thus simply false.

Shudder

While Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu and other more popular platforms try to open their net to a wide scope of genres and viewers, we are in an era in which niche-streaming services are made to exist. In fact, in 2016, Shudder launched publicly and described itself as “the only premium streaming service for both the casual and super fan of thrillers, suspense and horror”⁴⁸. Shudder presents a variety of horror, thriller, science-fiction and more intersections of each genre for 4.99\$ (US) a month.

Amongst the multitude of “collections” (which are in fact, curated streaming series) that Shudder offers to its viewers is one that is named “A Woman’s Touch”, which is meant to celebrate the women filmmakers of horror. The introduction to this collection is as follows:

We know there's no such thing as “a woman’s perspective on horror”, because the twisted and unique views included in this collection are as diverse as the women who offer them. From vampires both real and imaginary, to doppelgängers and collisions with the afterlife, this collection has it all. Identity crises, demonic domestic issues, phantasmagoric romance, the horrors of motherhood and feminist interpretations on the giallo all make an appearance. These films don’t shy away from tough and personal themes. More importantly, these blood-splattered gems are sure to satisfy your cravings for powerful voices and thought-provoking horror.⁴⁹

From this introduction, it is clear that the curator(s) want to present women’s work as something that is not unique to gender, but that is one with the horror genre. In fact, they highlight the diversity of the material. However, the list predominantly contains titles ranging within the last ten years, with the exception of the 1997 title, *Office Killer* (Cindy Sherman, 1997)⁵⁰. So, are we

⁴⁸ “About Shudder.” *SHUDDER*, www.shudder.com/about.

⁴⁹ “A Woman’s Touch.” *SHUDDER*, <https://www.shudder.com/collections/watch/a-womans-touch/49144>

⁵⁰ *Office Killer*. Directed by Cindy Sherman, 1997

to believe that women only started making horror films in the 2000s? In addition to this, if efforts are being made to render gender invisible in terms of appreciating horror film for what it is, then why make a separate category for women's films at all? The answer to this, for most people, would be to push to the forefront works by women who, due to a history of inequality, have been forgotten or very little seen. Alternatively, it might be that placing films within a women's category could in fact reveal that some films that the public have seen were made by women, without viewers having the knowledge of it. However, in this case, separating women into their own category and only including contemporary titles seems ornamental.

To prove the contradictory basis of this, amongst the multitude of Shudder categories is a curated series entitled "Shudder Essentials", which is advertised as follows:

"There are some movies you've got to see. Foundations of horror. Haunting classics. New school gems. These are the films from which spring series and subgenres. These are the monsters, killers, spirits, towns and tales that captivate our fear. These are Shudder essentials."⁵¹

In other words, this category presents itself as the Canon of horror film, one which is essential for any fan, whether knowledgeable or new to the genre. The use of the word "essential" is authoritative and declares agency on what *should*, *absolutely* and *necessarily* be seen at the forefront of any genre. Ranging from *Nosferatu* (F.W Murnau, 1929)⁵² to *The House of the Devil* (Ti West, 2009)⁵³, this section presents a comprehensive list of 27 titles, only one of which is made by a woman. This specific title is *Ghostwatch* (Lesley Manning, 1992)⁵⁴ and is a

⁵¹ "Shudder Essentials ." *SHUDDER*, www.shudder.com/collections/watch/shudder-essentials/92032.

⁵² *Nosferatu*. Directed by F.W Murnau, 1929

⁵³ *The House of the Devil*. Directed by Ti West, 2009

⁵⁴ *Ghostwatch*. Directed by Lesley Manning, 1992

television movie made for the BBC, which bends the notions of the genre, taking on the form of “horror mockumentary”.

Keeping in mind that streaming platforms are curated, it is important to turn to the individual(s) and investigate the voice of authority and, by extension, the phenomena of gatekeeping culture. In the case of Shudder, and particularly this list of essential horror cinema, the curators are two men: Sam Zimmerman and Colin Geddes⁵⁵. While this does not inherently mean that whatever they decide to do will be exclusionary, it shines a light on curating and its own gender disparity. What can we learn from having women and individuals who identify with minority groups curate our digital consumer platforms? By extension, what have we been losing out on?

In an interview with *Inverse* magazine promoting the launch of Shudder as a new streaming platform in 2016, the two curators pitched it as follows:

“We’re trying to go and get those films that someone told you about and you’ve never been able to find,” Zimmerman says. “Shudder should be a resource for people who want to get into sub-genres.... Why not become the place for people to learn about and see these movies that aren’t available.”⁵⁶

This statement, while expressing an admirable intention that addresses problems with access to material, the previous analysis of their platform showed that they do not have a significant presence of women directors; especially in terms of titles that are not available. That said, they are presenting themselves as a platform that tries to counter popular representations of the horror genre, but in doing so, are still contributing to the marginalization of women from the genre.

This double-edged sword complicates the nature of their canonization. While this is a problem,

⁵⁵ Hutchinson, Sean. “Two Horror Experts Are Leading Fans Down a Bloody Path.” *Inverse*, Inverse, 30 Aug. 2016, www.inverse.com/article/20388-shudder-horror-streaming-service-netflix-mainstream.

⁵⁶ Hutchinson, np

they have most recently made another effort to include the topic of women in the horror genre to their platforms with the addition of a new podcast “She Kills”, which consists of interviews with contemporary women who work in horror behind and in front of the lens. While this is important promotion for women in contemporary horror filmmaking, it fails at addressing their history.

This is something that a niche platform should not gloss over; if all popular and more general-audience platforms fail at including women in their canonized lists and more broadly, their library as a whole, then the niche platform is our last resort.

As has been proven, though not without raising the many issues of representation, more titles are available to us today by means of streaming platforms. However, one important aspect is lacking from what the archive can offer us: that of material authority. With rare exceptions, movies on these platforms are altered in quality to adhere to certain standards, whether it be aspect ratio, compression, commercials that interrupt the flow of experience, etc⁵⁷. One answer to this has been the advent of film restoration. The following section will consider the ethical implications of restoration practices in terms of preservation and canonization.

Restoration as Canonization

The practice of restoring a film goes well beyond that of the advent of technology allowing us to digitize film elements and make give them a higher resolution and quality than they arguably ever were in. Restoration is also a method of reactivation. It permits a film to enter a new lifecycle, one that is contemporary and allows for society to revisit the film or discover it for the first time with new sets of politics and belief systems, as well as a different understanding of aesthetic qualities. Sometimes, this reactivation is simply a celebration of a title that has

⁵⁷ Kendrick, 124

already seen wild success and that has never ceased to exist within a common understanding of the Canon; for example, the restoration of *2001: a Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)⁵⁸.

While this specific title had a successful theatre run, this is not the case for all restorations. Some restorations go straight to DVD and Blu-Ray or are only made available on streaming platforms.

One of the most successful restoration companies, *The Criterion Collection*, is perhaps the best case study for analyzing the ethical implications of film restoration as a contributor to our understanding of film history through its selection and access to titles. The Criterion Collection, over the years, has become somewhat of a mythical household name for cinephiles who have rejoiced in discovering titles through their mission to restore them. In fact, the company has not only been restoring popular titles but revisiting history using their cinephilic platform to propose works from around the world for their fans to see; creating a sort of Canon on their own terms, by the assumption that whatever they release successfully reaches some undetermined higher-standard of cinematic value. Of course, with each title, they release a booklet, special features and one of a kind cover-art; a cinephile's dream of collectible treasures. It is safe to state that the Criterion Collection has not only created its own film Canon but along with it, its own "preservation" culture and cycle of reactivation. But, as has been established, every list and every canon assumes some kind of exclusion. The question then, as put forth by James Kendrick, is:

"If Criterion has established itself as a legitimate archive of films that are so deemed, does it then possess the ability to extend legitimacy to more questionable films? In other words, does inclusion of a film in the Criterion Collection automatically legitimate it as important in the eyes of video collectors and film scholars?"⁵⁹

⁵⁸*2001: a Space Odyssey*. Directed by Stanley Kubrick, 1968.

⁵⁹

This is a question that is only becoming more important to ask ourselves as the company enters the world of streaming with their new Charter platform in April of 2019.

With every release, the Criterion Collection privileges one title by not only selecting it and giving it the Criterion seal of approval, but also by tracking down the best possible elements for their digital transfer.⁶⁰ By sourcing the original elements, the Criterion Collection assures that the quality of their release is also superior to any viewing experience that might have been experienced up until then, creating a sort of mythos around their branded titles. Additionally, as Kendrick puts it, these titles are given “the Criterion Treatment”⁶¹. This term is used to describe the extratextual additions to the release of Criterion titles. Often sourced from archives, libraries, collectors, filmmakers or cast and crew members’, this extratextual information gives a new insight on the film and allows for our fresh contemporary eyes to understand its production context better. Their accompanying booklets also frequently include written essays or interviews by academic film scholars, giving the release yet another high-art seal of approval. As Kendrick notes: “(...) each individual addition to the collection is automatically inscribed with a signifying layer of authority.”⁶² Needless to say, these elements, while great for the at-home viewer and film fanatic, contribute to the creation of yet another film Canon.

Considering their influence within this cycle of reactivation and especially as it is aimed towards cinephiles, it is important to analyze their releases and their impact. For the purpose of this research, the Criterion Collection horror film releases were examined. The result that

Kendrick, James. “What Is the Criterion? The Criterion Collection as an Archive of Film as Culture”. *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 53, no. 2/3, 2001, pp. 124–139. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20688361. p.125

⁶⁰ Kendrick, 133

⁶¹ Kendrick, 134

⁶² Kendrick, 134

appears under the “horror tag” of their website is 43 titles.⁶³ Amongst the 43, only one of these is made by a woman. The film in question is *The Lure* (Agnieszka Smoczyńska, 2015)⁶⁴, which, it is important to note, is one of their more recent releases within this genre. The 42 other titles are less contemporaneous and all made by men; tracing a history of horror that neglects the presence of women and reinforces this idea that the genre is inherently masculine and devoid of female filmmakers.

For the purpose of this research, it is important to note that the horror film genre has and continues to be perceived as a low-brow genre; one which seldom achieves this high-art standard that is worthy of praise. Horror titles rarely ever make it to award ceremonies, with the recent exception of Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017); although these award ceremonies are not without their own sets of ethical problems pertaining to exclusion. However, the horror genre is demonstrative of a given society’s fears and anxieties at the time of a film’s release, proving great historical value.

Additionally, some of the most experimental and ingenious filmmaking is born out of horror and exploitation films. Oftentimes controlled by producers and investors, directors felt trapped within the confines of certain expectations and demands. That said, many great artists turned to exploitation or adult films to exercise artistic freedom; which is of great preservational worth. In return, the exploitation films present a stimulating case study for preservation. At a 2017 Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies⁶⁵ presentation on the preservation of genre film, Joe Rubin of *Vinegar Syndrome*⁶⁶, a film restoration and distribution company, explained that the

⁶³ “Shop.” *The Criterion Collection*, www.criterion.com/shop/browse?genre=horror

⁶⁴ *The Lure*. Directed by Agnieszka Smoczyńska, 2015.

⁶⁵ “The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies.” *The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies RSS*, www.miskatonicinstitute.com/about/

⁶⁶ “Vinegar Syndrome – Cult Film Preservation and Releasing.” *Vinegar Syndrome*, vinegarsyndrome.com/

popularity of exploitation films came to be as a response of independent theaters to the high cost of mainstream films and the fact that they could not compete with multiplexes. However, because of strict censorship laws, projectionists would oftentimes splice out explicit scenes or segments and show the films censored. Many exploitation films today are in the hands of collectors; who presumably have different versions of the film, with segments cut out. If the film does exist in its originally intended form, the ethical question is: how should it be restored? From a preservation perspective, the answer would be to restore it to the version that people saw in theaters, even if that means that it is a censored version. However, there is also value to providing access to an original version, which can make us better understand issues of the time.

The following is a case study that illustrates the ethical considerations of film restoration all the while tying it to the mission of inscribing women to horror film history. This case study is fictional and only being used to demonstrate the complexity of ethical issues, by taking it further than questions about the original, which are nonetheless valid and should be taken into account. The film in question is *Humanoids From the Deep* (Barbara Peeters, 1980)⁶⁷. *Humanoids* is a slasher that follows a small seaside town's fight against an invasion of sea creatures born of genetic mutations. It received quite a bit of attention when it first was released, mostly because of a few shocking scenes and the fact that it was directed by a woman. However, the film's director along with its main actress, Ann Turkel, were very vocal about the struggle they faced during production and their disdain for the final product.

It is said that after completing the shoot of *Humanoids*, the producers looked at the rough cut and declared that it was lacking sexuality and action.⁶⁸ Peeters was then told that there would

⁶⁷ *Humanoids From the Deep*. Directed by Barbara Peeters, 1980.

⁶⁸ Knipfel, Jim. "Humanoids from the Deep (1980) Review." *Den of Geek*, 12 Jan. 2013, www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/humanoids-from-the-deep/48374/humanoids-from-the-deep-1980-review.

be reshoots, which she would not be responsible for, but that she would be consulted on. The producers brought in a male director, Jimmy T. Murakami, who did the reshoots as told and did not consult Peeters. Her protests went unheard and Murakami remained uncredited while she kept the director title for a film that she no longer approved of. A headline for the Los Angeles Times article written by Andrew Epstein released on May 8th, 1980 read “Added gore and sex have left “Humanoids” director Barbara Peeters frustrated and mad”⁶⁹. (see Figure 2: Humanoids From the Deep Press in the Los Angeles Times)



Figure 6: Humanoids From the Deep Press (Los Angeles Times)

⁶⁹ Epstein, Andrew. "'HUMANOIDS' HAYWIRE, WOMEN SAY." Los Angeles Times (1923-1995), May 08, 1980, pp. 3-h4. ProQuest, <http://proxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/docview/162791881?accountid=12768>.

In the LA Times article, Peeters and Turkel are quoted stating that the “replacement of acting with action, the large amount of blood, guts and gore, and especially the tits and ass” were the factors that frustrated them about the final product⁷⁰. On the topic of sexuality, Peeters, who had then shot multiple exploitation films, namely, *Summer School Teachers* (Barbara Peeters, 1974)⁷¹ and *Bury Me An Angel* (Barbara Peeters, 1971)⁷², stated the following:

“I’m not opposed to shooting nudity. I’ve shot nudity before but only when it was integrated into the story. I’ve never shot rape or violence toward women, or things that would be mean or degrading. I’ve shot a lot of B movies and I’ve stayed away from rape. If I was ever to shoot it I would do it as ugly and unsensual as rape is.”⁷³

This was in reference to specific rape scenes that were added to the film. Beyond being worried about what women and feminists would think when they saw the film, Peeters states that she intentionally did not shoot an abundance of gore, nudity in violence so as to avoid an R rating for distribution, knowing that certain theaters would not play R rated films, proving concern for access to the work.⁷⁴ Turkel states that she signed onto the film not only because of the appeal of working with a woman director but to use the horror platform to address important social issues, which lends itself well to the genre. Here, the issue that she found in the script was a reflection on “ecology of pollution from the world with chemicals”⁷⁵. She felt, at the time, that the message had been lost with the added gore and sex, which she compares to “a bad porn movie”. Peeters was told she would have to pay money to have the credits changed and get her name removed from the film. So, it lives on today as a product of sexist production and

⁷⁰ Epstein, 4

⁷¹ *Summer School Teachers*. Directed by Barbara Peeters, 1974

⁷² *Bury Me An Angel*. Directed by Barbara Peeters, 1971

⁷³ Epstein, 4

⁷⁴ Epstein, 6

⁷⁵ Epstein, 5

marketability of violence against women. It is a testament both to the genre and to a history of women horror filmmakers.

The ethical issues are, should a restoration be made with Barbara Peeters' directed approval? This, of course, would fail the test of originality because no public ever saw the pre-reshoot version. However, is it owed to Peeters and Turkel to revisit the film and make a version that they agree on accessible to the public? The trouble with this is that it is nearly impossible to retrace exactly what the intentions were during production in 1979, and we cannot know whether the materials from the original shoot still exist. Beyond that, *Humanoids From the Deep*, the 1980 version, does exist. It is part of film history, of the slasher genre and of a corpus by women directors. So, how do we deal with it, knowing the injustices and sexism that quite disturbingly arose from it? Beyond restoration, it is important to consider how a film such as this one should be shown in the context of a screening, or whether it should be shown at all. Both restoration and programming create a reactivation of film, in this case, the reactivation of something that promotes violence against women and neglects its female filmmaker. However, not screening it infers censorship and represses history, when we should learn from it and face it. What should be admired and reinforced about this is that both the director and lead actress put their careers on the line to speak out about the production and their disapproval of its release; something that rarely happens. By ignoring the film, we also ignore this important part of history that surely provides contextual information for the production climate of slashers in North America at the time, and the courage of two women battling misogyny onscreen and offscreen. In the L.A Times article, Peeters is described as disappointed towards the reviews of the film, which critique her first as a woman, and then as a director. The writer of the article,

Andrew Epstein, uses the following line from the Variety review as an example: “Irony of the entire production, which will confound feminist-minded critics is that a female director was behind one of the more woman-degrading pix to come down the pike in some seasons.”⁷⁶

Barbara Peeters’ provides some insight as follows “It seems to be built in the business that a woman director is reviewed, criticized and looked at as a *woman* director. I don’t remember seeing anywhere where a man is criticized for putting male sexuality back 50 years.”⁷⁷ Her comments on the matter in 1980 are important today, as they reflect an issue that is still present. Therefore, an answer to the ethical dilemma of the exhibition of this film would be to screen it followed by a presentation of this production history and a Q&A with Barbara Peeters and Ann Turkel. This specific case-study, which includes a complex production history, was used as a point of reflection on professional practices such as restoration and curation, which, as agents in the reactivation of history, have a duty to contextualize works both in terms of production histories and socio-political, ethical concerns.

Chapter 4: Curation

Upon reflection, it is arguable that the previous sections along with their sub-headings and respective categories of Education, Preservation and Access, could have really been organized in any way. Restorations could have been under the umbrella of both education and preservation, and curation could have been a subset of streaming platforms or an integral part of education. This is only to name two examples, but is useful to prove that canonization is and always will be a cycle. This only illustrates that everything that we do as key players in the study

⁷⁶ Epstein, 5

⁷⁷ Epstein, 5

of moving images contributes in some way or another to exclusionary outcomes. We need to think beyond our own preferences which are informed by our identity, and question the history that has been taught through the many different platforms that motion pictures exist in and continue to evolve through.

Several revisionist approaches arise within the framework of canonization studies. One of them is to revise the selection criteria of works to include titles that have previously been marginalized by the male practice⁷⁸. Another is to reconsider the practice of canonization entirely on the notion that any type of canon formation leads to exclusion.⁷⁹ What I am proposing is an intersection of both of these models. While the practice of canonization should be reconsidered, better understood and its ethical questions taught and discussed within the boundaries of education, it is important that we do not let the works that were marginalized die. As such, we must construct counter-cans and make them accessible to a broader public, re-activating and activating a past that was left behind and giving voices to these filmmakers and their works. Without which, eliminating the canon would be pointless. It is to be noted that exclusionary effects in any canon simply *cannot* be avoided. While our counter-cans and narratives will be important, they will never be perfect. This is why our language pertaining to the canon needs to be revisited and should provide a space for discussion. This practice could be called “the revisionist open counter-canon”.

⁷⁸ Staiger, 17

⁷⁹ Staiger, 18

A Shifting Term and Practice

Film Curatorship is the final practice involved in the contribution to film canonization that will be analyzed. First, let us define the term “curation”, as it pertains to film. According to Paulo Cherchi Usai: “the art of interpreting the aesthetics, history and technology of cinema through the selective collection, preservation and documentation of film and their exhibition in archival presentations.”⁸⁰ This definition serves well for the traditional intention of curation, that is, within the museum setting; bridging both archival competencies with the art of thematic selection that has the ability to create dialogues with the socio-political realities outside of the museum walls. However, the term “curator” has shifted in the past years. Caroline Frick notes this as follows:

The centrality of curation, connoting leadership and expertise in the cacophony of contemporary players involved with preserving and creating access to any kind of moving image, mirrors a larger societal trend within the United States.⁸¹

In fact, the term “curation” has been adopted as a trend-word in digital social networking websites. This “larger societal trend” decentralizes the meaning of the word and removes it from the museum, which, in return, has also been expanding in terms of more experimental practices that detach themselves from the at times high-brow connotations born from the White Cube, that sometimes transcends social elitism. Today, the word “curator” is used on the quotidian. A 2009 article in the New York Times written by Alex Williams addressed this:

The word “curate,” lofty and once rarely spoken outside exhibition corridors or British parishes, has become a fashionable code word among the aesthetically minded, who seem to paste it onto any activity that involves culling and selecting.⁸²

⁸⁰ Frick, 141

⁸¹ Frick, 141

⁸² Williams, Alex. “On the Tip of Creative Tongues.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 2 Oct. 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/10/04/fashion/04curate.html.

Following the detachment of the curator from a profession that is practiced in the museum, to the disdain of perhaps many, today, any person can deem themselves the curator of their own wardrobe, the art in the living room or their playlists. However, this is simply to prove that “curating” has become a buzzword of sorts, one that suggests a false sense of high-brow creativity that can be boiled down to a trend.

That said, if we consider curating as shifting contemporary practice, it arguably is involved in all the previous sections that are part of the cycle of canonization listed above. Indeed, within the sphere of education, a professor of film, in a traditional sense, selects films to be taught and screened in their classes, as well as pieces of criticism or scholarly resources to be read. Conscious decisions should be taken to include a wide net of representation in everything that is chosen. Beyond this, the academics and critics who are being referenced come with their own sets of film selection, article selection, etc. All of this, weighing onto our understanding of film a linear history.

Curating *When the Woman Shoots, a Horror Film Program* : A Dialogue Between Theory and Practice

If we consider the definition of curating as the conscious selection and exhibition of films in dialogue with each other and the socio-political contexts of the time, then, the film program that I created as both a complement to this research and a response to the marginalization of women from the canonization of the horror genre became an exercise in curation, existing in the shifting definition of the term. It thus seems that the best, or most compelling way in which to

approach the politics of film curation is to apply the theoretical findings with the many ethical questions that I myself have encountered when exercising the practice of creating a film program. As such, the following is an exploration of the politics of film curation through the practice of creating a counter-canon for exhibition. As you will soon discover, this is not a claim that the program that was born from this research is the proper way to exercise film curation as a counter-approach to canonization. This chapter, and arguably, this entire thesis, positions itself in a state of questioning and conversation, rather than in statement. Additionally, it is a personal account of one person's subjective attempt at coping with the film canon. The hope is that through conscious decision-making and through addressing problems, we may discover more about the practice. In fact, it may be that the most effective way of countering the canon is to be transparent about our doubts and subjectivity. This will demand some unlearning, as most of us are taught in education systems to write affirmatively, claiming truth and authority over entire genres, mediums and theories. It is our exposition to these types of publications and presentations that create a false sense of history. This is not to say that we should publish, present, or exhibit doubtfulness and uncertainty. What is suggested, instead, is that we become assertive about our human-ness; about the fact that no history is ours alone and that we cannot pretend to have authority over an entire medium's existence and the complexities of its interactions with the public in a given socio-political state. We should, instead, present what we know and address the way that authoritative language is a tool for marginalization.

When conceptualizing this program, I thought of many different avenues, all leading to an ethical roadblock that would perhaps neglect the overall issue of canonization that has been discussed throughout my thesis. When the idea to propose a counter-canon of horror cinema

made by women arose, I was advised to choose a region to focus my research on. As such, my initial thought was that it might be most effective to revisit the male-centric canon that I was taught and inscribe women to it, offering a counter-narrative to what is commonly taught. This would mean a Euro-American-centric program, which is already a significant part of the exclusionary trends of canonization. Struggling with this decision, I held onto it for quite some time with the argument that the production environment in which the horror films that we know and list as “essential” in many contexts; be it educational, evaluative or existing within access or reactivation realms, were production environments that women existed in as well. The statement that women were there making horror films too, in the same places as these men who we know so well, was too important to move away from.

Once I began to assemble potential titles, I realized that perhaps this seemed too self-motivated; that I was basing this important statement off of my own identity package. I also realized that my findings included a list of majoritively white women. If anything, this only brought back Janet Staiger’s statement about the canon being inevitably exclusionary; by extension, any list, no matter its intention, is exclusionary as well as is it is nearly impossible to see and know about every film of a given genre, regardless of any degree of expertise.

Additionally, upon reflecting on the politics of canonization, I came to the conclusion that a more ideal model of list creation, in an attempt to avoid the term “canon”, should be expanded to a more global definition -- one that simply considers the artform, beyond its country’s politics and aesthetics trends. This, by no means, suggests that films should be stripped from their production contexts, as horror films specifically have the power to reveal societal fears and anxieties in conjunction to their country’s historicities. This serves as a reflective statement on

the process, but it is to be noted that the program does not claim to be globally inclusive, by any means. Once again, the purpose of this program is an exercise in countering a narrative as an intervention on the methods in which we are taught and brought to an understanding of the cinematic artform; an understanding that informs and motivates our consumption, preservation, and curation of the elements; regardless of our roles within the cycle of canonization.

In this case, I wanted to limit my film selection to horror films made by women up until 1985. This was based on the fact that “canons” oftentimes exclude contemporary films made in the last decade, as though they need to have passed a sort of test of time to be included as worthy titles. There also recently has been more media attention on contemporary horror films made by women. While the same, rather limited amount, of titles always come up, I found that there was a significant lack of representation of earlier films throughout these types of lists. In fact, following Jason Blum’s statement about the inexistence of women desiring to direct horror film⁸³, many people and popular websites published lists of films to prove him wrong. While some of these lists included older titles, most of them started with *Pet Sematary* (Mary Lambert, 1989)⁸⁴ and skipped a decade into the early aughts to include the likes of Karyn Kusama, Ana Lily Amirpour, Jennifer Kent and Julia Ducournau, for their films: *Jennifer’s Body* (Karyn Kusama, 2009)⁸⁵ *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014)⁸⁶, *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, 2014)⁸⁷ and *Raw* (Julia Ducournau, 2016)⁸⁸. So, my mission was to find out more about the earlier occurrences of women directing horror before *Pet Sematary*. This would thus

⁸³ Nyren, np

⁸⁴ *Pet Sematary*. Directed by Mary Lambert, 1989.

⁸⁵ *Jennifer’s Body*. Directed by Karyn Kusama, 2009

⁸⁶ *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*. Directed by Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014

⁸⁷ *The Babadook*. Directed by Jennifer Kent, 2014

⁸⁸ *Raw*. Directed by Julia Ducournau, 2016

become more of an archival project. Peter Bosma defines this type of film curating as follows in his book “Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives”⁸⁹:

A film curator can “choose to focus on screening film heritage. But what corpus of film heritage can a cinema curator choose to screen? This depends on what is generally accepted as belonging to film heritage and it is also limited to what parts of film heritage are still available. Film archives play a decisive role in both cases”.⁹⁰

Here, Bosma suggests that heritage, a word oftentimes tied to history, is a category of motivation in which a curator can choose to base their practice. He supports this by positioning the practice as one that is contingent upon an understanding of what constitutes film heritage. This brings forth Urrichio’s concept of “historical filtration”⁹¹. In this case, by a rather subjective set of evaluative criteria, the curator must select what constitutes film heritage. Beyond this, what is film heritage? This definition varies widely depending on who and where you ask this question. We must also face the fact that there is a possibility that any film can be part of any “heritage”. Bosma answers the question of heritage in his chapter stating that essentially everything related to film, in its broadest sense should be considered as heritage: from all available film material (television, video, photograph and movies), whether educational, art or amateur, to the devices in which the moving images have been captured and the paraphernalia associated to a film.⁹² However, he emphasizes that with the instance of curating, he is only referencing film material itself, through the criteria that it has to have been made more than five to seven years ago, which is when it would have exceeded its lifespan as consumer good.⁹³ Perhaps a better way to frame

⁸⁹ Bosma, Peter. *Film Programming : Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives*, Columbia University Press, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central, ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1974611

⁹⁰ Bosma, 82

⁹¹ Urrichio, 260

⁹² Bosma, 82

⁹³ Bosma, 83

this type of practice, then, is “archival curating”. This relies on the fact that the archives have already gone through this filtration process, no matter how much an archivist may struggle with these preservation limitations, and that therefore, any film in an archive is worthy of being shown as a predecessor to the artform. Additionally, it avoids the misuse of the slippery term that is heritage.

However, the use of the term “archival” suggests a material existence, whereas much of film “heritage” is made up of titles that no longer exist in any physical form. As Bosma states “a significant percentage of film heritage is lost by irretrievable decay or neglect, especially from the period of early cinema”⁹⁴. This is something that has had to be kept in mind throughout the quest for horror films made by women, especially considering that one of the homes for women to direct horror in was exploitation cinema. The notion that this was considered to be low-brow cinema, and, to some degree, still is considered that way, means that the fight for preservation is and has only been more dire. The idea of censorship playing a part in the exhibition practice of this film was covered in a previous chapter, along with the consequential ethical questions of what to preserve: the original product or the version that was shown? Beyond this, we are left to face the fact that there very well might be a number of horror films produced by women that have disappeared and are considered “lost”. This only reinforces the idea that authoritative languages pertaining to film history cannot possibly be true, as part of history is lost. This is an important consideration for curation, as you cannot accurately present a portrait of history if that is a goal with presenting a film program.

⁹⁴ Bosma, 83

Bosma goes on to describe the importance of audience consideration; whether a program is created for theatre and consisting of new releases, whether it is curated for a museum setting or other, with strict artistic intent in mind or whether both are in at play.⁹⁵ In the case of *When the Woman Shoots*, the programme is being constructed before even having found a home. That said, audiences have little, if at all, been much of a consideration. It is agreeable that the nature of the programme fits into the artistic curating category more-so than the theatrical box-office intent described by Bosma. However, the absolute goal for a curator should not only be to provide intellectually stimulating, diverse and entertaining programmes for viewers who are already knowledgeable on the topic or consider themselves to be “cinephiles” as it may be, but to broaden the scope of audience and affect viewers who may not be aware of the specific genre or issues at stake. That said, any programme should have marketable value, especially one that has revisionist intent. The horror genre is one that lends itself well to this issue, as it has the ability to attract a wide net of viewers and therefore, transcend socio-political messages through conventions of fright and promises of high-thrills. This is why most recent horror releases such as *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017)⁹⁶ and *Hereditary* (Ari Aster, 2018)⁹⁷ saw so much box office success. With *Hereditary*, the release of a falsely fast-pace, action-filled trailer successfully reeled in an audience seeking high-thrills. What ensued instead was a creeping, slow reach into internalized family fears: the loss of a child, a mother’s incapability of loving her child, and the eternal guilt that one feels towards elderly parents. The walls of the home become the architecture of fear, which are quite literally mirrored by the horror-filled miniatures that the main character devotes her life to creating. Horror is one of the few genres that has the ability to

⁹⁵ Bosma, 52

⁹⁶ *Get Out*. Directed by Jordan Peele, 2017

⁹⁷ *Hereditary*. Directed by Ari Aster, 2018

appeal to any type of crowd and result as any one thing. It can be used as high-art and cheap thrills. Here lies the strength of this programme. It might work best as a Halloween programme in a given theatre, where the audience will be in the mood for horror films even more so than usually. This would also provide the opportunity to counter the canon in a setting which generally only reinforces it. Bosma suggests a “scorecard” to start off from and customize for a personal curatorial strategy. This scorecard includes:

- **Popularity**, which pertains to the ability to achieve a match between the supply of films and demands of the audience
- **Social Engagement**, which demands that a programme be involved in fulfilling a social/political purpose to the audience.
- **Diversity of Audience**, which refers to the ability to reach a wide scope of viewers.
- **Diversity of films**, which is self explanatory.
- **Uniqueness**, “focusing on offering films that have the greatest possible degree of rarity, unveiling films which are rarely seen or which are unjustly unknown and forgotten.”
- **Excellence**: “presenting the highest artistic quality of cinema, measurable in degrees of craftsmanship, or innovative style.”⁹⁸

With *When the Woman Shoots*, the first five points are considered and included in a hypothetical scorecard. However, the point of excellence should be revisited, as it seems to be contentious in its evaluative approach to quality. In fact, these standards are closely tied to that of the canon formation, which is something that is actively being avoided, here. It should be noted that any programme or exhibition of art is inevitably tied to some degree of subjectivity, including evaluative sets of standard informed by individual precedents of the curator or programmer. However, this measurability of success should not be tied to aesthetic excellence, but rather the ability of a given work to use aesthetic tools to demonstrate social engagement and stimulate its

⁹⁸ Bosma, 52

viewers intellectually. This is achievable through many different aesthetic styles and genres. That said, the scorecard for this programme would be:

- **Popularity:** the use of the horror genre's marketable appeal to reel in audiences.
- **Social Engagement:** the goal to counter the genre's canon, inscribe women within its history and provide access to titles that have had little attention in the past.
- **Diversity of audience:** the use of the horror genre to attract audiences with different backgrounds and taste, the appeal that a programme such as this one may have to cinephiles and people who want to see more films by women directors and the opportunity of seeing titles projected on film. The diversity of audience will also be expanded and focussed on more once a venue has been chosen for this programme.
- **Diversity of Films:** While the diversity of films that Bosma refers to is being reached in terms of representing different horror genre waves and stylistic components through history (from surrealism to exploitation, slasher, zombie and television), it is important to add the diversity of representation of women to this. This aspect is unfortunately not being reached as best as it would like it and is something that I would like to either expand on in a larger program or revisit.
- **Uniqueness:** to re-use Bosma's description of this point, this program's main purpose is to unveil films which are unjustly unknown and forgotten.
- **Excellence:** The success of a given work at using aesthetic tools to demonstrate social engagement and stimulate viewers intellectually.

While this thesis has focused on film as a medium, the practice of curating film should not be separated from the practice of curating exhibitions. It is the case that both practices have been

put in separate boxes, as though film were one thing and all other types of art were another.

Perhaps this follows the trend of film not being considered a legitimate artform within art history and museum practices. In some ways, film has been marginalized from these disciplines.

However, the role of a curator should be similar in both cases. I am certain that Peter Bosma's scorecard, detailed above, resonates with many curators who exist in the museum realm. As the art of moving images expands as a practice, along with the shift of the term of curator, both should consider each other in these decentralized spaces. As such, curatorial theory from museum practices will be brought into this reflective analysis. Maura Reilly introduces the framework for her book "Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating"⁹⁹ as follows: "how can we get people in the art world to think about gender, race, and sexuality, to understand that these are persistent concerns that require action?; how can we all contribute to ensuring that the art world becomes more inclusive?"¹⁰⁰ This framework is very much in line with how the archive and its related subfields have been analyzed throughout this thesis. Curating, regardless of its definition, is the point of the cycle in which access is pushed to the forefront, through different iterations of exhibition (streaming platforms, galleries and museums, film theatres, film festivals, etc). While only one contributor to the canon formation, this makes it a crucial point of the cycle.

Reilly brings forth the notion of "the curatorial activist", who has devoted their career to marginalized visual culture.¹⁰¹ While she creates a category and a term for this type of practice, it is arguable that curatorial activism should be exercised by any curator who's function, in any given institution, is to exhibit works of art as an ensemble, creating stimulating new dialogues

⁹⁹ Reilly, Maura. *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*. W W Norton & Co Inc, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Reilly, 21

¹⁰¹ Reilly, 22

between the works, the artists when there are more than one, the audience and the space and time. This should not be a type of person, but rather a requisite for any job. Activism is only one term to sum up the should-be preexisting duties of a curator.

Reilly argues that with the revisionist approach, one that has been exercised here “a fundamental binary opposition is retained, which means that the Other will always necessarily remain subordinated”.¹⁰² While this is an important factor to consider, I would refute by stating that it is important for marginalized groups to have their own distinctive platform in order to properly be given the attention that they deserve. Of course, they should also be included in any type of program, to begin with, but if the aim is to provide access to films or artworks that have been excluded because of sexist or racist practices of the past, then they should be allotted the opportunity to have the light be shone on them and strictly them. However, Reilly’s point is one that is equally valid. Different people will have different opinions about the revisionist practice.

The idea of a relational approach occurred to me when reflecting on the program that I had conceived: “A relational approach to curating, then, is interested not in a monologue of sameness, but in a multitude or cacophony of voices speaking simultaneously.” (Reilly, 30) This is borrowed from the work of Ella Shohat, who suggests multiplicity and kaleidoscopic notions of time instead of linearity in terms of historicity, as it is taught in the classroom and here, by extension, in exhibition. Reilly explains this approach as follows: “In this type of exhibition, for example, contemporary 'Aboriginal art' would not be considered as Aboriginal art but as contemporary art, and would be exhibited alongside art from Japan, the USA, Argentina, Africa,

¹⁰² Reilly, 25

and so on-with no hierarchical implications.”¹⁰³ That said, while the undertone of curatorial activism is the same as previously mentioned, the focus on marginalized groups shifts, removing marginalization as part of the identity of the artists and instead, focusing solely on the art. While this may seem idealist, it is conceivable that the fact that the artists in question have been marginalized contributes to their artistic identity. Erasing them from the work, in other words, might erase an important part of the art itself. In fact, practicing relational curatorial approaches as an answer to marginalization is a political statement that addresses the systemic issues of representation in the art world and therefore, considers the identity of artists into the dialogue of the exhibition as a consequence. Until we reach a point where our practice is inclusive of all identities and demonstrate egalitarianism, then, we cannot erase marginalization from the identity of artists.

As such, *When The Woman Shoots* is a program that uses an approach that we will refer to as “the revisionist open counter-canon”, as described within this thesis. This is an attempt to revisit the exclusionary practice of canonization, to provide access to films that have been neglected in the past, and to celebrate the horror genre, one that has very falsely be coined as masculine, from the lenses of women. This is not a claim that this approach is the best one, but it is mine. It is important to state this, as I do not want to make the practice of curating seem objective. This is also why I have chosen to bring in the personal use of the word “I”, which I have always been taught is not proper academic practice. While I hope that this program will allow for people to be entertained, stimulated intellectually and to learn, it is not the ultimate

¹⁰³ Reilly, 30

truth, it is not representative of history. It is simply the presentation of one portion of many histories, and it is *my* intervention.

Part 2: *When the Woman Shoots*: A Horror Film Programme

The goal of this programme, as it is supposed to complement the research and writing of this thesis, is to present six titles, which are representative enough of a variety of movements and stylistic approaches to horror that could serve as *one* historical overview of the genre. This is an ambitious feat that, again, will inevitably be exclusionary in its practice. The following is a detailed program plan, which is separated by the title of each selected work. Each title will be followed by a reasoning for including the film in the program¹⁰⁴.

The Seashell and the Clergyman (Germaine Dulac, 1928): Curating Sound for Silent Nightmares

¹⁰⁴ It is to be noted that what is presented, here, is only the information that is pertinent to the research on the topic and therefore, does not include programming logistics such as print location and selection, rights, budget, venue, and more.



Figure 7: *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (Germaine Dulac, 1928)

It is agreed upon that Alice Guy-Blaché, a household name of women film pioneers, can be considered a key player of early horror filmmaking, with titles such as: *Turn-of-the-Century Surgery* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1900)¹⁰⁵, which is a very short film (estimated 2 minutes) in which a surgeon uses macabre tools to conduct surgery on a patient. This recalls the style of horror-entertainment that predates the moving image genre in France, that of Grand-Guignol; a theatre in Paris' Pigalle area that put on “gruesome, faux-blood-splattered shows year-round for decades”¹⁰⁶ from around 1897-1962. Guy-Blaché also notably directed *The Pit and the Pendulum* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1913)¹⁰⁷, which is an adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's story of the same name, *The Monster and the Girl* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1914)¹⁰⁸ and *The Vampire* (Alice

¹⁰⁵ *Turn-of-the-Century Surgery*. Directed by Alice Guy-Blaché, 1900

¹⁰⁶ Cosgrove, Ben. “Grand Guignol Photos: Madness, Torture and Murder on a Paris Stage.” Time, Time, 14 Oct. 2014, time.com/3881193/grand-guignol-photos-madness-torture-murder-on-paris-stage/.

¹⁰⁷ *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Directed by Alice Guy Blaché, 1913

¹⁰⁸ *The Monster and the Girl*. Directed by Alice Guy-Blaché, 1914

Guy-Blaché, 1915)¹⁰⁹. While Guy-Blaché's success as a director is undeniable, it seemed that attention should perhaps be given to another woman director of the silent era. Of course, finding silent horror films of the time made by women as well as locating them and actually screening them before selecting any for a program is not an easy feat, and would have benefitted from being its very own research project. However, along with Guy-Blaché's films were a few other titles made by women that I would return to once the rest of the program was complete.

With my films selected, after a long period of reflection, I returned to the silent films with the feeling that my program would not be complete if it did not include something from the silent era. It also occurred to me that up until this point, the titles that I had selected from my longer list, while varying in their stylistic approaches to horror, were linear narrative films. As such, I decided to include *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (Germaine Dulac, 1928)¹¹⁰, which not only is a silent film demonstrating early pioneering works by women that explore horror, but it is also a surrealist film that experiments with the medium and shifts the boundaries of conventional storytelling. This would also be an opportunity to answer the question of "What is Horror?", which was very much part of the framework for the research of film titles for this program. In fact, it may be that this film has not most popularly been categorized within the horror genre. Written by Antonin Artaud, a well-known dramatist, poet, actor, and theoretician of the surrealist movement¹¹¹, the screenplay follows a priest's frustrations as he fantasizes about a general's wife. Struggling against his own eroticism, he has strange visions of death and lust and we are subjected to his subconscious mind and into a nightmarish-scape. As he stalks this woman

¹⁰⁹ *The Vampire*. Directed by Alice Guy-Blaché, 1915

¹¹⁰ *The Seashell and the Clergyman*. Directed by Germaine Dulac, 1928

¹¹¹ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Antonin Artaud." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 28 Feb. 2019, www.britannica.com/biography/Antonin-Artaud.

through different settings, crawling on the floor and hiding behind buildings, chasing her down in a field and eventually following her into a Church where he strangles the general, who's head splits in two, one cannot help but wonder: is the clergyman an early iteration of the murderer in the slasher film? A man, who, crippled by his psychosexual desires, subjects young women to his mental demise, stalking them and chasing them down out of obsession and compulsion? Could it be that *The Seashell and the Clergyman* is just an early iteration of this male aggressor, and that we simply happen to be bypassing within his fever dreams, rather than existing in the world that he later becomes an intruder in?

With curating silent films, what is perhaps the most important exhibition consideration is that of the film's sound. This is also a point which can be debated, as it can be very challenging to retrace the exact type of musical accompaniment that was originally exhibited with the film. *The Seashell and the Clergyman*'s imagery is incredibly haunting, and the music accompanying it has the power to completely ruin it or enhance it. The British Film Institute released a restoration of the film which included the silent version along with three different scores composed by Pascal Comelade, Thomas Koner and Iris ter Schiphorst, respectively.¹¹² The Pascal Comelade version is available on youtube¹¹³ and includes heavy string plucking. While this adds to the angst of the plot, it distracts from the oneiric flow that Dulac has created, with most of the comments on the platform suggesting to turn the sound off to better enjoy the restored film.

¹¹² "The Seashell and the Clergyman ." *BFI Film Forever*, shop.bfi.org.uk/seashell-and-the-clergyman-the-coquille-et-le-clergyman-la.html#.XJfEMxNKjI

¹¹³ Kesidis, Mike. "The Seashell and the Clergyman 1928 (Restored Full Movie)." YouTube, YouTube, 18 Aug. 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=ypseXIQVaF0&t=1209s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypseXIQVaF0&t=1209s).

Many contemporary attempts have been made to revisit the film's sound and offer different takes. In London in 2012, artist Imogen Heap performed a live accompaniment to the film that was specially composed for the occasion, with a choir of 30 performers.¹¹⁴ The Film Society of Lincoln Center had a special screening of Germaine Dulac's films, which were each accompanied by the live performance of Leila Bordreuil, "a Brooklyn based cellist and composer from Aix-en-Provence, France. She works in the realm of Noise music, improvisation, New Music and sound-art."¹¹⁵ Another notable musical accompaniment version that has been played live is by Steven Severin, who was in the band "Siouxsie and the Banshees" until 1996 and now is known for his work as film composer and silent film accompanist. In 2009, he released an album entitled "music for the silents"¹¹⁶, which included electronic accompaniment for *The Seashell and the Clergyman* and which he performed live in 2010 in L.A and New York. Because this program is being conceived before finding a location for it, the budget and space is unknown at the moment. However, the screening of *The Seashell and the Clergyman* would be accompanied by live music, ideally by someone from the city the program will unfold in who specializes in noise music as the two latter artists do, and who has the capacity and knowledge required to accompany a film projection.

¹¹⁴ "The Journal: IMOGEN LEADS CHOIR AS SILENT SEASHELL FINDS A VOICE." Journal, The (Newcastle, England), 23 Feb. 2012. EBSCOhost, proxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsnbk&AN=1443F2E25D569AD8&site=eds-live.

¹¹⁵ "Germaine Dulac Program 1: The Seashell and the Clergyman, La Folie Des Vaillants, and Three Shorts." *Film Society of Lincoln Center*, www.filmlinc.org/films/germaine-dulac-program-1/.

¹¹⁶ "Music For Silents The Seashell & The Clergyman (2009), by Steven Severin." *Steven Severin*, 15 Nov. 2009, stevenseverin.com/album/music-for-silents-the-seashell-the-clergyman-2009.

Of course, it should be addressed that this screening would present a version of the film, rather than attempting to stay as true to the original exhibition as possible. However, with the proper choice of musical accompaniment, the film's oneiric and at times horrific qualities would be met with and even perhaps enhanced. While a debatable choice, the programming of silent films offers the opportunity to present musical accompaniments is vast. Here, it seems that it would be appropriate to choose music that mirrors the film by stretching the boundaries of conventions and transcending into subconscious streams. The screening of such a film would benefit from this type of music more so than conventional piano accompaniment.

The Twilight Zone, S5 E25: *The Masks* (Ida Lupino, 1964): The Significance of a Television Show and its Only Episode Directed by a Woman



Figure 8: The Twilight Zone, S5 E25: *The Masks* (Ida Lupino, 1964)

The *Twilight Zone* (1958-1964) continues to be one of the more influential television shows operating in the science-fiction and horror genres. Both are often tied to one another, and there exists a large overlap in their distinctive concentric circles. The show is known for using these genres as a vehicle for social commentary, which is something that has always been the case with Horror, but that arguably was not so explicitly explored on television, which was incredibly popular in the American home at the time. Today, the show continues to have influence and be celebrated, with themed conventions and a reboot led by Jordan Peele in the works¹¹⁷.

Out of its five seasons and 156 episode run, the show only had one episode directed by a woman: *The Mask* S5 Episode 25, by Ida Lupino¹¹⁸. The episode is set in New Orleans on the night of Mardi Gras, in a dying man's mansion. His family unwillingly visits him, making little efforts to conceal their greed and discontent. The man informs them that they will only obtain their inheritance if they do one thing for him: if they wear peculiar-looking masks until the clock strikes midnight. "Unbeknownst to them, each mask reflects their ugliest, but most prominent characteristic"¹¹⁹.

It felt important to include this episode to the programme considering the show's significance and that with television production, the director is oftentimes made invisible, or is less promoted than they would be with a film. Additionally, that fact that only one of these episodes was directed by a woman makes it all the more important to highlight. Even without the significance

¹¹⁷ Crucchiola, Jordan. "CBS Is Developing New *Twilight Zone* Series for All Access With Jordan Peele." *Vulture*, Vulture, 2 Nov. 2017, www.vulture.com/2017/11/cbs-developing-new-twilight-zone-series-with-jordan-peeel.html.

¹¹⁸ "The Masks." *The Twilight Zone*. CBS, 20 March.1964.

¹¹⁹ Busch, Caitlin, and Samantha Ladwig. "Why Ida Lupino Was Such a Groundbreaker for Women in Sci-Fi." *SYFY WIRE*, SYFY WIRE, 5 Feb. 2018, www.syfy.com/syfywire/why-ida-lupino-was-such-a-groundbreaker-for-women-in-sci-fi.

of Ida Lupino directing the episode, it stands out as a great one because of the visually striking imagery as well as the very humanistic fear that lingers beneath it: the theme of projected selves versus true selves¹²⁰, along with the power of death. This theme, along with the release date of the episode (1964) led to its pairing with *Blood Bath* (Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill, 1964)¹²¹. The running time of *The Masks* is approximately 25 minutes, which lends itself nicely as a first part of a screening, which will be followed by *Blood Bath*, which is approximately 60 minutes. With its complex production history, it is to be noted that there has also been an extended version of *Blood Bath* that was released for Television, making the parallels between the two films more significant.

Blood Bath (Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill, 1964): A History of Reshoots Leading to the Involvement of a Woman

Blood Bath was selected, not only because it is a beautiful and underseen film, but because of its convoluted production history. Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill share credit for this film, but they did not work together. As most “Roger Corman” productions go, this was a recycled film that involved reshoots and many different creative minds taking turns with the film. The following is a description of the different versions of the film that led to Rothman’s involvement.

The first version of *Blood Bath*, or rather, the beginning of its production history, can be traced back to *Operation Titian* (Rados Novakovic, 1963)¹²². Corman is said to have invested in

¹²⁰ Kooyman, Ben. “The Twilight Zone: ‘The Masks’ (Ida Lupino, 1964).” *Senses of Cinema*, no. 88, Sept. 2018, p. 1. *EBSCOhost*, proxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f3h&AN=132351429&site=eds-live.

¹²¹ *Blood Bath*. Directed by Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill, 1964.

¹²² *Operation Titian*. Directed by Rados Novakovic, 1963

this Yugoslavian crime-mystery production with the intention of adding English as a spoken language to make it more “American”. Having recently wrapped up *Dementia 13* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1963)¹²³, he sends actors William Campbell and Patrick Magee alongside Francis Ford Coppola, who was to oversee the shoot¹²⁴. The film is mostly concerned with solving the case of the murder of an old man and the theft of his knock-off art masterpiece.¹²⁵ The runtime of this initial version is listed as being around 95 minutes¹²⁶.

Corman, who was not pleased with the final result of *Operation Titian*, had it re-cut and rescored to create *Portrait In Terror* (Rados Novakovic, 1965)¹²⁷, which ended up being around 80 minutes¹²⁸ and recycles what was already shot.

Still unhappy with the results of the second version, *Portrait in Terror*, Corman called in who had worked as Corman’s apprentice and on the screenplay of *The Terror* (Roger Corman, 1963)¹²⁹, to create a marketable horror film out of what was already done and some reshoots. Hill relocated the setting to a bohemian art scene, where the murderer is an artist who murders the women that he paints and then dips them into wax. A contemporary dancer tries to get involved romantically with the artist and murderer, who struggles to fight the urge to kill her.¹³⁰

However, once Hill’s rough-cut was finished, Corman brought in Stephanie Rothman to rework Hill’s version. Rothman cut down the *Operation Titian* footage significantly; only

¹²³ *Dementia 13*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 1963

¹²⁴ “Blood Bath Blu-Ray.” *Arrow Films*, arrowfilms.com/product-detail/blood-bath-blu-ray/FCD1302.

¹²⁵ Remer, Justin. “Blood Bath (Includes Operation Titian, Portrait in Terror, Track of the Vampire) (Blu-Ray).” *DVD Talk*, 27 June 2016, www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/70631/blood-bath-1966/.

¹²⁶ Arrow Films

¹²⁷ *Portrait In Terror*. Directed by Rados Novakovic, 1965

¹²⁸ Remer

¹²⁹ *The Terror*. Directed by Roger Corman, 1963

¹³⁰ Remer

keeping a total of four scattered minutes throughout her version of the film. She is said to have added about 30 minutes of new footage, which turns the artist and murderer into a shapeshifting vampire. Jack Hill was very vocal about his disapproval of this addition to the storyline. While his version (the rough-cut) was never published on its own, what we know of today is *Blood Bath* (Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill, 1964), which merges his work with hers.

Finally, an extended version of *Blood Bath* was made for television and called : *Track of the Vampire*. This 80 minute version adds footage with different actors and confuses the plot of *Blood Bath* entirely.

So, there are four existing versions of this film: *Operation Titian* (Rados Novakovic, 1963), *Portrait In Terror* (Rados Novakovic, 1965), *Blood Bath* (Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill, 1964) and *Track of the Vampire*.

For the scope of this program, only *Blood Bath* (Stephanie Rothman and Jack Hill, 1966) version is selected. However, as the three other versions are important in the timeline of the film's history as well as an understanding of Stephanie Rothman's involvement, there will be a side installation, which will project the four versions simultaneously. The location of this installation is to be determined once the main program finds a home, as it depends on whether the venue is capable of housing such an installation. If it is not, then there will be a separated event that tackles installation based work as a complement to this program.

Velvet Vampire (Stephanie Rothman, 1971): Exploitation and Vampires



Figure 9: *The Velvet Vampire* (Stephanie Rothman, 1971)

The Velvet Vampire (Stephanie Rothman, 1971)¹³¹ is used as an example to show more of Stephanie Rothman's work, which becomes muddled in the versioning of *Blood Bath*. While it can be screened on its own, as it is an enjoyable piece of exploitation cinema that is rather beautifully shot, it also serves as a good complement to *Blood Bath*, and an exercise at identifying her signature within the patchwork of a film.

In fact, while different in style, Stephanie Rothman is said to have been the one to add the "vampire" element to the story. With *Velvet Vampire*, while still applying the vampire trope as a central element to the movie, she displaces predator and victim across gendered boundaries. The predator is no longer a man, it is a beautiful woman. The victims are no longer strictly women. While she begins to only prey on men, the central story revolves around a couple. She inserts

¹³¹ *The Velvet Vampire*. Directed by Stephanie Rothman, 1971

herself in their dreams, fulfilling bisexual fantasies and proving that everyone can be a victim to lust, leading to death.

Additionally, as was previously highlighting, exploitation cinema was an opportunity for artists and, specifically, women, to exercise filmmaking and experiment with the artform more freely. Because it was considered to be a low-brow outlet, even more so than horror film in its general terms, it presents preservation issues as well. However, because many artists turned to this, it has become an important case-study in finding women who operated within the horror realm and an important point of revival.

Messiah of Evil (Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, 1973): Arthouse Zombie Revival



Figure 10: *Messiah of Evil* (Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, 1973)

Messiah of Evil (Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, 1973)¹³² is the zombie film title of the program. In fact, it bends the zombie genre with psychiatric fears and a pre-giallo look. It is a

¹³² *Messiah of Evil*. Directed by Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck, 1973

collaborative effort between the married couple (Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck) whom many know as the writers of *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973)¹³³. While Huyck is later credited for directing several films, *Messiah of Evil* is the only one for which Gloria Katz shares credit.

Messiah of Evil follows the story of a woman who drives to a small seaside town (Point Dune) after receiving a series of troubling letters from her reclusive father, who lives there. Committed to discovering the truth about her father's developing madness, she meets a trio of strangers who are there to "investigate a local legend known as "The Blood Moon", a curse that has transformed the inhabitants of the town into a terrifying horde of blood-thirsty maniacs."¹³⁴

Most people have seen this title on either VHS bootleg copies or poor television renditions of it. *Code Red* has since released a restoration of this title, which restores it to 2:35 anamorphic size. Below is a comparison of both a generic VHS version of the film alongside this restoration (Figures 11 and 12).



Figure 11: *Messiah of Evil* VHS Version

¹³³ *American Graffiti*. Directed by George Lucas, 1973

¹³⁴ "Messiah of Evil (Code Red) (Blu-Ray)." *DiabolikDVD*, www.diabolikdvd.com/product/messiah-of-evil-code-red-blu-ray/.



Figure 12: *Messiah of Evil* CodeRed Restoration

While the restoration is superior in quality and allows for the perception of more information, which otherwise had been erased or obstructed by cropping and poor quality, it removes certain parts of the previously circulating version that were deemed too campy. One of these parts is the opening song. While the argument of campiness is agreeable, one cannot deny that this song is nonetheless part of the film and of its history of viewership experience. Alterations such as these ones are part of a wider debate pertaining to restoration.

The curatorial question, here, is which version of the film should be shown? There are three options: A VHS quality version, a print or a DCP of the restoration. The VHS quality would cater to a nostalgic desire to maintain widespread experience. On the other hand, the restoration might succeed better at not only reactivating the film but activating it for a new audience who might appreciate it more for its image quality. However, I am opting for a film print of the title on the basis that it will be of better quality than the VHS version and that it will be closer to the original intent of its production, addressing both a crowd that might have seen it in the theater and maintaining the parts that were cut out of the new restoration.

Slumber Party Massacre (Amy Holden Jones, 1982): Revisiting the Gaze in the Slasher Film



Figure 13: *The Slumber Party Massacre* (Amy Holden Jones, 1982)

The slasher film follows a set of predetermined tropes. Said to range from the years 1974 to 1986 ¹³⁵, this subgenre is best described as follows by Isabel Cristina Pinedo in her publication, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* :

“A masked or hidden (largely offscreen) psychotic male propelled by psychosexual fury stalks and kills a sizeable number of young women and men with a high level of violence. The killer’s rage derives from a traumatic childhood experience (...). Although both women and men are killed, the stalking and killing of women is stressed. After a protracted struggle, a resourceful female usually subdues the killer, sometimes kills him, and survives.”¹³⁶ (Pinedo, 72)

¹³⁵ Pinedo, Isabel Cristina. *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*. State U of New York P, 1997. *EBSCOhost*, proxy.library.nyu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsmzh&AN=1997035669&site=eds-live. p.72

¹³⁶ Pinedo, 72

This resourceful female is commonly referred to as “The Final Girl”. As is the case, the final girl is usually a conventionally smart, “average” looking brunette who is virginal and does not partake in the common preoccupations of her teenage peers. Less interested in her looks and romantic pursuits, she either babysits or studies instead of partaking in whatever the doomed night’s activity may be.

The Slumber Party Massacre (Amy Holden Jones, 1982)¹³⁷ clearly inscribes itself within the slasher genre, appealing to and casting teenagers as central characters, released in 1982 and having a psychosexually driven male murder the teenagers. What is perhaps most interesting and contrary to Pinedo’s description, is that this male figure is not masked. His face is shown very early on and has no distinct features that might induce nightmares in the viewers. He is an average man who is neither tall nor short, has salt and pepper hair that sometimes looks brown and other times silver, and is dressed in jeans and a jean jacket. This killer’s only threatening feature is the giant phallic weapon that he holds up in front of the girls’; a metaphor that is not too subtle for representing the epitome of the masculine gender: the penis. (See Figure #: *Slumber Party Massacre Murderer and Weapon*)

¹³⁷ *The Slumber Party Massacre*. Directed by Amy Holden Jones, 1982



Figure 14: Slumber Party Massacre Murderer and Weapon (*Shout! Factory*)

His lack of distinctive features and ambiguous age places him within the basin of any average male; as though taking the slasher up another notch and declaring that serial killers are not masked, monstrous looking men. The threat of man is everywhere and anyone can be a monster. This is mirrored throughout the movie, when we as viewers are forced to question the intentions of the various males against the backdrop of a horror film. Can the male neighbour, who's attitude towards the young women borders on creepy, be trusted? The two young voyeur male characters who

The most redeeming characteristic of this film as a slasher is the way in which it addresses the final girl trope. Even in 2019, as a viewer who has seen many slashers and knows that only one girl survives; usually the conventionally smart brunette who has not presented

herself as a sexual being, this film makes it difficult to predict who this character will be. On the note of sexuality, all the girl characters are shown nude very early on within the film during a gym shower scene. The way in which they look at each other and the framing of their bodies (slow pans up and down their backsides and gazes at each others breasts), suggests an inherent sexuality in each and every one of them; canceling out the possibility of a virginal final girl. During the sleepover, they are all dressed skimpily. The only one who is fully dressed is the neighbour, Valerie, who, though invited to the sleepover, sits it out after hearing the other girls gossip about her pretty looks. In fact, this character is very much aware of her looks, applying makeup to herself and her younger sister. It is also made clear that she collects PlayMate magazines; dismantling the virginal quality that had since been crucial to a final girl. In the end, though multiple young women and men do get killed by this murderer, it is a question of “final girls” and not just one. Together, they survive the attacks of the serial killer and bring him down.

So, this slasher, directed by Amy Holden Jones and written by Rita Mae Brown, revisits the subgenre’s tropes to complexify gender and present a counter-offer to what murderer and final girl consist of. This shift is subtle enough that it remained palatable to its viewers and producers then. In other words, they do not remove the marketable sexuality that thrives within the genre, instead, they augment it and use it as a tool to confuse the gaze. The shower scene consists of slow pans of the women’s body, which at first, in part due to a trained eye, may seem to reflect the gaze of the male viewer as well as that of the male serial killer. However, when two of the girls begin to stare at each other from either ends of the shower in a way that is charged with sexuality, it becomes more difficult to understand for whom the female body is showcased.

One thing becomes clear; it is not reflecting the serial killer's gaze. Additionally, the violence is not diminished; fair share of chopped off heads, gutted eyeballs and hanging corpses are showcased. It is the masterful subtlety of the altered gender dynamics at play in Slumber Party Massacre that both make it a crucial title to include in this series.

As a closing note on the program, the logistics of it were settled outside of the scope of this work. This involved locating the prints and rights, estimating a budget, writing program notes and pitching this program to a venue.

Conclusion

To conclude, the program that was outlined above is an attempt to take action and put into practice the theoretical framework explored within the scope of this work, which was born out of a perceived lack of female representation within the horror film genre's canon, a term and notion which demands a redefinition, a shift in its politics of power, or perhaps an obliteration altogether. The titles that were selected, though pertinent and illustrative of the arguments brought forth in the scope of the work and the topic at hand, are self-informed by my personal identity and motivated by a predefined education, both formal and social. It is not without its own set of flaws, but I argue that nothing can be. It is important, however, that we become more comfortable stating that our work is a subjective expression, it is not an absolute and timeless truth, it is one presentation of a perception of a given history. In our workplaces, we must become aware of disparities such as this one and make conscious efforts to promote a diverse set of works as best as we can.

Perhaps the most important realization throughout this process was the interchangeability of each chapter, which revealed that canonization is in fact a cycle that feeds off of its different moving parts and is not hierarchical. The decision to produce and market certain films over others dictates visibility, film criticism, award ceremonies and press coverage. The latter of which, affects academia in that scholars will choose to include certain titles to write about and to reference; excluding other films from their corpus. The more films get written about within a specific subject, the more they continue to be, as scholars reference other works by scholars that have their very own sets of references. This creates a pool that elevates the “importance” of a film based on its visibility in this esteemed realm, which then gets poured into education, where a professor selects certain titles over others to be shown in support of any given argument. This shapes future professionals, who will bring these predispositions into their workplace and make their own sets of decisions. In the archive, which, it should be highlighted, is always run by humans who have their own sets of predispositions influenced by socio-political realities and education, a selection process of film titles is necessary due to restrictions in staffing, budget and storage (both digital and physical). This creates a historical filtration in that the archive presents itself as an authoritative figure over the given subject that they specialize in. These limitations then restrict access to film titles; as they influence the selection of works for restorations, digitization and reactivation, which determines digital availability for streaming platforms. I have found that curating, in its shifting practice, exists at every stage of this non-linear cycle. It is also, perhaps, a starting point by which we can counter the constructions of canons and work towards a plural definition of history, which is more egalitarian in its representations and perhaps

less definitive in its claims and language, as we have learned that no one can truly claim authority over the medium, its materiality and the incredible wealth of works that it has to offer.

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