FILM & HISTORY

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Hart, Adam Charles. *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

With the wave of a mouse, I can navigate streaming platforms with almost endless archives of horror movies and television shows. From the same screen, I can play horror video games, browse ghost story message boards, or even watch reaction videos to any of the aforementioned media on YouTube. In the digital media landscape, where the boundaries separating medium form are largely obscured, how can a theory of horror exist if relegated only to the cinematic medium? In *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media*, horror scholar Adam Hart theorizes a new mode of horror spectatorship, one based in the cross-medial consumption habits of twenty-first century audiences, players, and browsers. This mode of spectatorship is centered less around narrative or aesthetics and more around a "direct visceral stimulation" (Hart 7) of the consumer's body. Where previous theoretical analyses of horror have tended to restrict discussion to one medium, Hart's theory considers the horror ecosystem more broadly, drawing on movies, video games, YouTube videos, internet gifs, as well as their marketing materials. In so doing, Hart presents an expansive theory of horror spectatorship and consumption in the digital era.

The first section of the book explores Hart's notion of sensational address, or the tendency of horror media to "directly stimulate" (Hart 22) viewers. The sensational address is an expansion upon Linda Williams' canonical theory of body genres, referring to the tendency of certain genres (namely horror, pornography, and melodrama) to evoke physical, bodily responses from audiences. In this vein, "horror organizes its style as much around the address of the body of the spectator as it does the narrative or diegesis" (Hart 27). Hart discusses how this theory is complemented by the work of Christian Metz, whose theories of spectatorship center around the notion that the spectator understands their distance from the diegesis of a film, thus leading the spectator to a deeper understanding of the filmic setting than the characters on screen.

The combination of Williams' theorization of horror's bodily address with Metz's assertion that horror spectators are aware of their distance from the text is then explored through texts that explicitly address audiences, namely the trailer for *Saw 3D* (Kevin Greutert, 2010) and the highly popular slew of horror video game reaction videos on YouTube. These texts offer spectators some level of self-conscious mastery over horror, an awareness of how fun being scared can be.

In his second chapter, Hart explores two seemingly oppositional modes of horror: the cheap, low-culture jump scare and the newly emerging class of high-culture art-house horror. He begins with a discussion of screamers, "horror films or games in miniature, condensing the horror experience to a single, shocking jolt that can be endlessly replayed and reposted" (Hart 59). Screamers largely embody Hart's theorizations of contemporary digital horror in that they are meant to be mastered and then shared; the infrastructure of the platforms where screamers are housed encourage sharing, allowing consumers to inflict the brief terror of the screamer on another unsuspecting spectator.

In supposed contrast to the jump scare, Hart discusses the emergence in the 2010s of "elevated" horror films, which are marketed as privileging "suspense and atmosphere over shocks and horror" (Hart 82-3). While perhaps lighter on jump scares than their mainstream counterparts, Hart argues that films like *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, 2014) and *The VVitch* (Robert Eggers, 2016) are still heavily reliant on formal elements native to the sensational address. Hart concludes his section on horror spectatorship with a discussion of Killer POV, or "a subjective moving camera shot without a reverse shot to reveal the wielder of the look" (Hart 89). While originally seen in slasher films of the 1970s and 80s, Hart argues that this

mode of subjective cinematography is particularly germane to contemporary horror video games.

The second section of the book centers around another key denizen of the horror genre: the monster. Hart attempts to "triangulate" (Hart 138) two established though largely conflicting theories of horror: Noel Carroll's theory of monstrosity and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. While Carroll's work places monsters - beings that violate binaries such as dead/alive, human/animal, et cetera - at the center of horror, Kristeva argues that horror succeeds through abjection, or the "[transgression of] the boundaries between subject and object … It's associated with wounds and bodily fluid, with slime and decay, but also with formlessness and instability" (Hart 138). Taken on its own, Carroll's theory excludes texts like *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock 1960), *Halloween* (John Carpenter 1978), and *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), all of which are central to the horror canon. A close reading of *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell 2015) provides a clear application of these theories: "the individual embodiments are less important than the always shifting, unstable relationship between It and Jay, and between It and the viewer" (Hart 155). While the horror of *It Follows* is centered around monsters in the Carrollian sense, the true terror manifests in the formless and ever-changing nature of It.

In the final chapters, Hart returns to theorizations of spectator identification, this time focusing on what he identifies as integrated horror, a mode "structured around a familiarization with or normalization of the inconceivable" (Hart 214). This is largely achieved through a turn toward the internal and moral processes of horror characters, including monsters. Integrated horror, Hart argues, is particularly adaptive to the medium of horror television, wherein longform narratives prioritize character development. Series like *American Horror Story* (2010 -) and *The Walking Dead* (2010 -) present complex human characters forced to grapple with impossible moral quandaries. While full identification with these characters is not necessarily encouraged, the monsters of these texts cannot be so neatly categorized as good or evil as to alienate spectators from them completely. *The Walking Dead: The Game* serves as a further example of integrated horror, wherein players are forced to make a series of distinct ethical choices, all of which lead to the eventual death of the protagonist. Throughout the game, players are encouraged to sympathize with characters as they take at times morally reprehensible actions in the interest of self-preservation.

Hart closes by discussing the genre as it stood in 2017, a year the cinematic genre met immense critical and commercial success with *The Shape of Water* (Guillermo del Toro, 2017), *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017), and *It* (Andrés Muschietti, 2017). This trifecta, he claims, is largely representative of Hart's horror theorization in that each film presents monstrosity, an exploration of abjection, and an abject monster, respectively. Hart also suggests that the next level of horror may exist in virtual reality, as "VR implies a direct address and a first-person camera" (Hart, 223). However, as the medium is still in its nascent stage, it is difficult to substantially theorize how horror VR will develop. While broad in scope, Hart's project succeeds in providing an analysis of the genre germane to cross-medial modes of horror consumption and spectatorship.

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