Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality

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With the recent boon in horror cinema over the last few years, Daniel opens by saying that horror is alive and well and makes it clear that his goal is to "explore the transgressions" (1) of the genre's boundaries. He's interested in the affective modalities that are used to scare audiences, make them squirm in their chair and bring about bodily unease. His overall question is how have modern horror films achieved this while also evolving into new forms that shake the line between screen and spectator? Alongside this, he outlines four explorative avenues that will satisfy his academic curiosity over the course of nine chapters:

1. The inception of found footage.
2. The move into streaming horror, (such as YouTube).
3. The rise of independent horror games.
4. The implementation of virtual reality.

With this there is a clear timeline of significant horror evolution that Daniel wishes to explore. He begins in Chapter One with a discussion on the affective nature and philosophical underpinnings of horror as a genre, drawing upon Noel Carroll's classic text on the subject –

The Philosophy of Horror (1990) – before moving onto a discussion of the psychological and neurological aspects of horror's effect. Here he explores the complexities of how horror cinema creates the sensations the genre is known for, including some Deleuzian theory to employ the language that befits such a complicated debate.

Each following chapter is prefaced with an italicised short passage that describes a horror scene written from Daniel's own perspective. It's an odd choice for a serious academic text, but it shows an element of autoethnography and reveals that horror is a passion of his, not just a studious interest. These passages also foreshadow the discussion that is about to take place and allows him some non-academic creativity before a return to the more scholarly language.

Chapter Two discusses the found footage genre, mentioning but then disregarding Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze as not an appropriate theoretical frame for this book. Naturally, he talks about *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) as the source of the found footage genre, but only after discussions on *The Ring* (2002) as an example of horror's attempts to do away with the safety of the screen. Daniel sees the popularity of found footage as being in line with the ubiquitous nature of smartphones and cameras over the years, and even an insistence that the success of *The Blair Witch Project* can be attested to audience's love of reality TV.

In Chapter Three, he refers back to Carroll and horror cognition. In this section, he uses *The Blair Witch Project* and *Willow Creek* (2013) as case studies for the analysis of the camera and its operator (actor) and how they create authenticity with their unreliable shots and non-static framing. Here Daniel evaluates specific scenes with a firm grip on textual analysis. With emphasis on the "empty frame" (64), Daniel insists that horror arises from audiences scanning the scene for potential threats using *Paranormal Activity* (2006) to enrich

the idea that the static camera utilises dread as the centre for horror potential: "What separates dread from direct horror is that dread resides in the future, in the possibility of what may be seen or heard" (67).

In Chapter Four, Daniel switches to the denser language employed in the Introduction and first chapter. He refers back to Deleuze (and Guattari) in relation to the flux of spectatorship and the complex notion of molar (which "corresponds to the rigid segmentation found in hierarchical or bureaucratic institutions" [80]) and molecular (which "corresponds to the fluid, intersecting characteristic of unconscious micropercepts, unconscious affects, rarefied divisions" [*ibid*]) in which all bodies exist. Daniel asks who is the spectator in the film: the camera or the audience? It's a more complex chapter and without prior knowledge of Deleuze and Guattari's work on cinema, the subject matter can feel difficult to unpack.

Chapter Five shifts back to Daniel's more accessible writing style with a subject that explains empathic viewing in found footage horror. He looks at how audiences identify with film characters, asking questions such as: How can we empathise with characters in found footage when we rarely see their faces? He springboards off Murray Smith's (1995) three levels of audience/character engagement (recognition, alignment, allegiance) and theory of mind to explain how we emotionally relate to others, including characters on-screen. However, he theorises that this mirrored cognition is not viable in found footage and instead utilises Panksepp's (1998) SEEKING-EXPECTANCY system to explain how audiences seek information in order to find out more and watch the frame for potential dangers. This, to Daniel, explains how spectators of found footage engage: by watching out for threats for their own survival, thus helping audiences to emphatically relate to the situation.

Chapter Six considers new media horror with a lean towards viral YouTube videos. Using *Suicidemouse* (2009) and *11bx1371* (2009), Daniel refers to such videos as "post-

cinematic horror shorts" (121) and seems intrigued by debates that surround their validity,

arguing for a kind of visceral intensity at the heart of these videos, in which distortion and

decay add to the affect. He then explores the audio of these shorts (which are also distorted),

noting that it is through the lack of grounded narrative and the increase in visual decay that

forces the spectator to focus on the sound. Audio, he argues, is not in harmony with the

visuals within these mini horror clips; if anything, it is at odds with it stating that it's this

which creates unease in our "bodily response" (126).

Continuing with new media horror, Daniel examines the online video sensation

Marble Hornets and the film *Unfriended* (2014) within Chapter Seven. He delves more into

the medium through which horror is viewed, using Elsaesser and Hagener's four screens of

cinema: the cinema itself, the TV, the computer and the smartphone/tablet. He argues (along

with Ingrid Richardson) that with the implementation of the third and fourth screens, we

cease to be "lean back" spectators and are now "lean forward" users (137). He uses this to

argue how *Unfriended* takes place within a computer screen and the increased bodily

experience in found footage when the cameras are attached to the characters rather than just

being held by them. Here the reader will begin to see the evolution from found footage to

new media horror forms, evidenced by Daniel's retracing of the filmic concepts employed by

Deleuze.

Chapter Eight is where Daniel examines horror games. This is the shortest chapter and

for that reason, it seems almost out of place. There is a sense of progression that flows from

found footage horror, to new media horror, to first person horror games, yet the book would

have benefitted from additional video game talk, especially as they are not mentioned before

or after. Having said that, Daniel still incorporates the ideas deftly, transposing what the

reader has learned about embodied horror cinema onto gaming (with references to

Marginalia [2014] and *Anatomy* [2016]), running his ideas through Bernard Perron's theories.

Finally, the book culminates in a discussion on virtual reality. He brings together the previous chapters in terms of embodiment and the relationship between spectator and screen, so we understand how these tie in with this new technology. It does, however, feel a little obvious at times. Those who have some knowledge of VR films (even if they have not seen any themselves) will race ahead of Daniel's argument that a horror film which utilises virtual reality headsets has a stronger affect on spectators, that the reduction of the frame creates a more immersive experience and the 360 degree visuals enable a more realistic (and more unnerving) embodied feeling. What is interesting is how Daniel then asks what the future could possibly hold for VR horror. How will directors pave the way for new methods of not only immersing spectators, but also engaging with them in real time? And in the conclusion, he asks what are the ethical implications of this? Clearly, this is a topic for another book.

Overall, *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms* creates a neat timeline of how horror has changed over the last couple of decades, while discussing the deeper methods and philosophical musings behind horror in which the language can shift from one moment to another. It does mean that one may have to swim through some of the sludgier passages, but ultimately, the reader will come up for air with a finer appreciation for the genre.