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## **Reaching Beyond the Screen: A Study of Affective Horror**

### **Abstract**

Sound design and cinematography contribute to how we react to a horror film, creating a mood and an atmosphere designed to affect us as viewers. These elements can be utilized separately to engage certain senses and emotions of distress, as well as together, in order to cause a more intense affective response in the viewer. Some things can touch us in a physical way as if it is happening to our own bodies, which is especially true in horror film, where violence, jump scares and destruction of the body are prevalent elements.

In an effort to separate gender from horror, we discuss the differences between various films and video games in relation to affect theory. Gender and horror seem to go hand in hand for the most part, especially due to the American slasher film featuring teenagers engaging in morally questionable behaviour, and subsequently being punished with terror and death.

We discuss the three *Thing* films spawned on John Campbell's short story "Who Goes There" in relation to the zeitgeist and the anxiety of the times, looking at how these aspects are conveyed in each film, and how they develop over time, as both society and technological advancements changes. One film even seeks to explain what happens before the original, as a prequel, attempting to give the viewer a better understanding of the creature and the characters, which is common in American cinema.

The two *Ring* films, namely the original Japanese version and the American remake one, are vastly different in almost every aspect, everything from visual and aural expression, cultural themes and implications and even colour schemes of the films. They signify the beginning of the J-horror trend in the early 2000s, which refer to a wave of American remakes of popular Japanese horror films, mainly based on folklore and ghost stories. The

ambiguity of Japanese horror stands in stark contrast to the preference for clearness and rational explanations in American horror, which these two films bear resemblance of, respectively. In terms of this comparison, we find it important to discuss the gendered mechanisms employed in the films.

Changing the medium, we look into video games, specifically survival horror games, but the kinds that stick out from the norm. We discuss cinematic video games, which play out as a horror movie, in which the player can influence the direction of the narrative in crucial ways, and finally, a horror simulation, in which the player is reliant on being stealth and patient in order to survive. How does agency and the lack thereof affect the player's experience? Some think virtual reality is the future of horror games, but that may not be the case at the current state technology.

## **Introduction**

Movies and video games mobilise particular affective responses in viewers and these affective responses may help explain why horror as a genre crosses modes and forms remains popular among cultural consumers. Our cases, the *Thing* films, the *Ring* films and *Alien: Isolation* and *Until Dawn*, although different in form, national and temporal context, and medium, showcase similar employments of affective strategies from the producers' side, and through reception analyses of these strategies, it becomes clear that both the intended and unintended elements—such as sound, visuals, narrative structure etc.—rouse affective responses in the viewers.

Horror media has come a long way from its humble beginnings, and contemporary horror has seen the rise and fall of many tropes and conventions. Between alien invasions, radioactive mutants, witches in the woods, abominable monsters, psychotic killers, and vengeful spirits, the spectrum of horror spans far and wide. Early horror films were rudimentary in their execution, but as time has passed, the technology and scope of horror has become more and more sophisticated, which in turn has created films that are more realistic, fantastical and exciting for the audience. Similarly, the divide across space also bears great significance in what the term horror encompasses. Americans have different expectations and traditions with horror film that the Japanese do not – and vice versa. Nevertheless, horror also transcends the media of film – into the world of computers and videogames, where the player

is the main proponent of the horror in the sense that the game only continues if the player wants it to. This not only creates a deeper immersion with the horror we see on the screen, but potentially opens up many new possibilities that film simply cannot contend with, such as direct influence over narratives and the opportunity for the audience to immerse themselves deeper into the narratives. It is with this mind-set we approach our examination of affect in horror, taking into account the different contexts. We have previously worked extensively with gender representations in horror films, mainly based on Barbara Creed's idea of the Monstrous Feminine, which in broad terms concerns itself with the imagery of birth and motherhood in horror. The Monstrous Feminine examines the woman in horror as a symbol of abjection by virtue of her reproductive capabilities, and the struggles that men in horror must face in order to overcome the woman's terrible powers. During our last project, we looked at three types of female monsters; the vampire, the werewolf, and the witch. In addition to this, we used Julia Kristeva's theory of the Abject, which deals with the problems of female bodily fluids in horror, as well as the boundaries of the female body.

Outside of these, we have also worked with various other gender specific approaches to the medium of horror in other projects. For our master's thesis, we thought it interesting to expand our repertoire, moving away from these older theories, and look at different, more recent approaches, namely affect theory. This is an approach which is still being formulated today, continuously evolving with new studies, and encompassing a vast array of different topics and directions depending on which theorist you choose. We have chosen to primarily use Xavier Aldana Reyes' which focuses mainly on the corporeal aspect of affect, namely how horror can connect and bridge the gap between the on-screen bodies and the audiences' bodies. Refraining from looking at horror through the lens of gender-theory may reveal some different and interesting perspectives on what influences horror aside from gender, especially since horror is a particularly visceral genre.

## **Methodology**

Based on three case studies, we analyse horror conventions in relation to affect theory. First, we look at *The Thing from another World* (1951), *The Thing* (1982), and *The Thing* (2011), comparing them to each other and the time in which they were made. Then we compare the Japanese *Ringu* to the American *The Ring*, looking at how they are different in

terms of visual and auditory representation, how these techniques cause affective reactions, and how they contribute to the viewer experience. Lastly, we move into the game category, looking at the way horror games are constructed and to what effect, namely *Alien: Isolation*, and *Until Dawn*. This is interesting because it tells us how agency changes the horror experience,

Initially, we were interested in the tendency to do remakes of horror films, how these evolve from the original and why different choices are made in producing the remakes.

The *Things* are interesting because they are adaptations of the same short story, produced over a long period of time and they are all of American origin. They differ sufficiently in aesthetic presentation despite being made in the same sphere. Here, we focus on how the films induce affect in their respective time period and how it is influenced by technological advancement. We noticed some peculiar characteristics in the Western and Japanese horror, specifically the genre called J-horror, in which the remake is almost an exact replica of the original, but with Western actors and values. We decided to compare *Ringu* and *The Ring* in order to discover what is so distinct in the scare devices employed in Japanese horror in contrast to American horror and to what effect. Despite both *Things* and *Rings* being in the film category, we found that they have different enough premises and intentions to warrant an analysis, without getting too repetitive. Due to the nature of Japanese culture and its ties to tradition and patriarchy, we include a discussion of gender representations in the *Ring* films in relation to how these can affect the viewer.

When discussing horror's development over the years, it is relevant to include games, since they are gaining more popularity in contemporary time, even moving into the virtual reality arena. We discuss the game *Until Dawn* and how it relates to the American slasher movie, but with a twist, and compare it to *Alien: Isolation*, in terms on how they affect the player, due to their specific gameplay, respectively. *Until Dawn* plays on some well-established conventions, while *Alien: Isolation* essentially makes the player as passive as possible in a game, heavily relying on stealth and strategy, and in a way violating the point of playing a game rather than watching a movie. We are interested in exploring how agency, or the lack thereof, can emotionally affect the player, since films and games inspire different expectations in the viewer or player.

We decided that to cover all three areas of horror, we needed to divide the thesis into relevant sections. An introduction to Affect theory prefaces all three cases, as we have used those concepts throughout. We work with Xavier Aldana Reyes' affect theory, using his concepts to identify the types of affect in each case in order to examine how they are employed. We analyse each case in the same way, namely, based on a description of four chosen scenes from each, in order to determine whether their specific characteristics as films or games play a part in how the viewer/player is affected.

## **Affect Theory**

When looking at films, which are non-contemporary, it is intriguing in terms of analysis to examine what events have transpired at, or around, the time of the film's conception. Any significant political or cultural happenings may have had a hand in shaping the narrative, even if only at a subconscious level. Affect can then help us decipher why certain elements of certain films were deemed frightening, disturbing or taboo in the temporal space of the film's release.

e will be using affect theory to analyse our films. Affect is a term that spans a wide array of different ideas and thoughts on how products of culture can impose certain feelings and moods upon its recipients. In terms of film, the musical scoring, scenery and lighting, just to name a few things, can help affect how the viewer perceive the events that are transpiring on the screen.

In his book, *Horror Film and Affect – Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership*, Xavier Aldana Reyes' proposes three distinct aspects of affect that, each in their own way, can establish certain reactions in the viewer; emotion, such as dread or threat; cognition, which requires a reflection on the content; and somatics, which is pure, bodily reaction. He differs between *cognitive emotions*, which require more context to be affective, and *affective responses*, somatics, which are more akin to automatic reflexes (Reyes, p. 6), or even *somatic empathy*, which is identifying with the intradiegetic body to the point where the viewer experience it as their own, regardless of the character's personality (p. 185). Furthermore, he perceives the *startle-effect*, more commonly known as the jump scare, as the most prevalent, purest form of emotion elicited by horror films, and argues that it proves how affect does not have to be connected to "deep psychology", in order to be effective (p. 51).

Reyes' seeks to link horror and affect to the corporeal reactions that occur in the viewer when confronted with horrific scenes of abjection or pain. A lot of affect theory is based on psychoanalysis and other mind-driven approaches, but Reyes emphasises how the body is its own agent, that is capable of being instinctively affected, without necessarily having to understand or reflect on the underlying message - as he says, "it is not necessary to understand the political messages in *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) to be cinematically affected by the film", which is to say that the body is its own entity, capable of reacting and being somatically affected, regardless of the cognitive aspect (Reyes, p. 15). He defines affect as "a language that describes the way Horror films do things to viewers and their bodies", clearly distinguished from "rational and cognitively engaged emotions" (Reyes, p. 5). He draws on several established theorists, such as Carl Platinga, according to whom "moods, reflexes, mimicry, and felt physiological and bodily responses are affect, while fear, suspense, and pity, for example, are emotions" (Platinga, p. 57). Reyes contests this definition, stating that "moods are more complex than mere bodily response and fear is a complex emotion often made up of various concerns and, at times, a mixture of these and of bodily responses", which is why he attempts a hybrid definition of the two (Reyes, p. 6).

Because my approach entails a de-gendering of images of abjection, this means that the nature of affect needs to be theorised regardless of the gender or sexuality of the viewer and characters, and rather in terms of viewers' acquaintance, tolerance and enjoyment of images of abjection" (Reyes, p. 71).

Reyes focuses on the Darwinian idea that "Horror is elicited by observing scenes of torture and pain", and that representational, basic images could "encourage a sense of threat connected to our corporeal vulnerability and capacity to read images as conducive to pain, harm or imminent death". Reyes seeks to contrast certain "problematic gender-centred models of representation, which, despite their significant work in highlighting the ways in which the female body is portrayed as monstrous in Horror, run the risk of essentialising gender and reducing the female body to its maternal qualities", specifically referring to Laura Marks' male gaze, Carol Clover's *Final Girl*, and Barbara Creed's *Monstrous Feminine* (Reyes, p. 70). The latter emphasises how monstrosity in terms of female monsters is tightly connected to their reproductive abilities, drawing on three aspects of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, namely "its preoccupation with borders, the nature of the feminine body, and, crucially, the mother-child relationship (Reyes, p. 12). Reyes proposes that instead of viewing "how the teenage female or the maternal body are portrayed as monstrous", we see the

abjection as the *fearful disgust* connected to “images of the damaged and bleeding body” (P. 71), as “Horror’s interest in representation is usually more coloured by fear and the elicitation of physical discomfort”, namely the way in which the body is used to generate affect, rather than the gender of the body in question (p. 72). Kristeva’s theory of abjection speaks of the corpse as most abject as it expels the self, and thereby transgresses borders and disturbs identity, which meets definition of abject – however, Reyes reads it slightly differently, stating that “Abjection allows for an enjoyment of images of abjection that need not derive from a strictly social or cultural understating involving all human beings or premised on speculative ideas about the loss of the self that seem difficult to ground in phenomenological or empirical terms” (ibid).

Heavily influenced by Julian Hanich’s work on phenomenology in horror, through which Hanich has managed to “both reinstate the importance of the lived body and made a case for the turn to cinematic effects as a way of reading meaning into film” (p. 8), Reyes points out how “It would be difficult to argue that we feel horror film with our muscular systems in a conscious way [rather] what’s at stake, then, is not whether Horror uses the body in its narrative or cinematographic intent but how the body in Horror (the anatomies onscreen or diegetic bodies) are employed in order to produce affect” (p. 13).

“Advocating for a more open and corporeal understanding of affection as fearful disgust encouraged by the moment of encounter with the wounded, bleeding or otherwise exposed body, I proposed that abjection is an important part of the representational work of affect. The broken body on screen can have an almost direct and instinctive effect on viewers by appealing to the human ability to understand and project sensations of pain and corporeal distress” (Reyes, p. 194)

The primary objective of horror is to “build somatic pathways” with the audience in order to affect them physically or mentally, as “the Horror film is source of negative affect that does everything it possibly can to connect the viewer with the victim and simulate moments of vulnerability dependent on corporeal intelligibility, particularly of the results and effects of pain” (Reyes, p. 196). There are several filmic techniques, that can help facilitate this connection and create an affective experience that will scare and frighten the viewer, as moods and atmospheres can be created or provoked “not just through music, lens filter effects, camera angles, lighting or performances, but through the cumulative effect that a series of narrative moves can have on viewers” (p. 7). For Reyes, the main goal of horror is to

create a corporeal allegiance with the fictional bodies we see on screen, building “somatic pathways” between the bodies of the viewers and the victims, and the Horror film is particularly well-suited for this task (p. 197). It is important to distinguish Horror’s ability to “articulate social and cultural anxieties” from its ability to affect, since “some Horror is misogynistic; some Horror is feminist in its intent and message; other Horror is ambivalent or does not express gendered views at all or purposely” (Reyes, p. 70). Furthermore, horror does not affect all viewers the same way, as a number of variables can influence the effect, spanning over emotional, cognitive, and somatic responses, depending on the viewer’s subjective circumstances and fears, not to mention the general zeitgeist. Reyes Points out how Horror audiences are “often quite knowledgeable and savvy”, which makes it harder to scare them by use of overused formulas and “contemporary anxieties or industrial stresses”; rather, Reyes suggests an affective-corporeal approach, acknowledging that “creating Horror, generating a sense of vulnerability in threat, requires recycling and renewal of the cinematic elements and compositions” (p. 133). Emotion and cognition are not as different as they seem, rather the line is blurry and consequently, they are “clearly intertwined and work together to create an emotional-affective canvas that is often difficult to separate into its constituents. However, an awareness of which filmic experiences “require cognition and emotional input” can help determine the specific reasons for a scene being scary or creating somatic empathy, as well as why a scene might fail in this (Reyes, p. 134).

### **Cinematography**

Before delving into analysing the specific examples from each movie or game, we start with a brief section on the significance of camera techniques and other technical aspects in relation to the affective responses in the viewer/player. This introduction to film making will be relevant as we describe the way the scenes are filmed and examine how it plays into affect, and we elaborate on the concepts in each case.

Mise-en-scene, which refers to everything in a scene, is important for the impression of the film. Everything has meaning, because everything has been planned and chosen specifically, be it clothes, furniture, framing or something else. An example of this is the way *Ringu* is mostly earth tones, and *The Ring* is tinted blue. The reason for these terms Furthermore, this is added in post-production. Horror cannot settle for telling a story, it is important to relate an experience. Horror films like to get the viewer to identify with the antagonist using “subjective camerawork like perspective shots, tracking shots, wide shots

that take in the entire atmosphere of a scene, and extreme closeups that reduce the world to a single person's single emotion, usually terror" (Horton, np.)

Angles can help tell the story and influence how a character is seen and often directors will use angles to convey a character's or an element's importance in a scene. Bird's eye view means the camera is placed above a character and it is considered dramatic ; high angle is usually used to "draw attention to the importance of the environment or setting for a scene" (InPoint, n.p.).

The camera can move in different ways, which have different effects on different people, for instance panning horizontally or vertically is used to survey surroundings; the tilt frequently "mimics the sight of the character in point of view shots"; zooming "enlarges and reduces proportion of the Night"; tracking moves the camera left and right, usually on a track, and it is mainly used for following the character across the frame; dolly is used to give the audience "the impression of approaching someone or something with the character", in contrast to zooming, where the object "seems to be propelling towards the camera", which can help create a sense of urgency (InPoint, n.p.)

Furthermore, the framing, which is how the camera is positioned is important. Both wide and tight frames can create anxiety - a wide frame will usually create a safer atmosphere, but it can also leave an uncomfortable amount of space around the subject, making them seem small and isolated (Sipos, p. 84). Seeing from the victim's POV "can heighten tension and fear by increasing audience identification", as it puts us in the story and "helps audiences experience scary events first hand (Sipos, p. 84). Often POV creates empathy, but that is not always the case. Furthermore, "Some frames unnerve because they are ambiguous. We are uncertain as to whether we are seeing events from someone's POV, or are witnessing them objectively" (Sipos, p. 83). Seeing from the victim's POV "can heighten tension and fear by increasing audience identification", as it puts us in the story and "helps audiences experience scary events first hand (Sipos, p. 83).

There are fundamental differences in the way Western cinema and Japanese cinema play out their scenes, as American horror narratives like to place a lot of emphasis on descriptions or visuals of the monster's appearance, whereas Japanese narratives are focused around a character's state of mind - in film, this is achieved by long lingering shots following "the characters' expression as they are confronted with the source of fear" as seen in *Ringu* and several other J-horror films (Marak, p. 200).

## The Things

### The Thing from Another World

*The Thing from Another World* is very much a product of its time. The 1950s saw the rising threat of the communist Soviet Union and the potentially world-ending Cold War. “The film (...) sets the tone for many of the alien-invasion films of the 1950s, in which the alien invaders were consistently associated, in one way or another, with the Soviet threat” (Booker, p. 291).

No doubt, the people of America felt increasingly unsafe by the unchecked, and to some degree, unknown power of the Soviet Union. This was also represented in science fiction films as “Historians have stressed the connection between 1950s science fiction and Cold War fears of the atomic age and the threat of communism. These fears took the form of invading aliens and creatures transformed by radiation” (Lucia, Grundmann, and Simon, p. 390). If the 1951 *Thing* is to be seen as a personification of the threat of Soviets and communism in general, then it stands to reason that its traits must have some relation to that same threat. The *Thing* sucks or drains its victims’ blood in order for its seedpods to grow and eventually grow more *Things*. This is a parallel to how:

“Soviet citizens and (even) Party members in fact only imperfectly embody the official ideal of the New Soviet Man. Since the (Soviet) Party is the major route to success, individuals will enter the Party for less than altruistic reasons. In these people remain the urgings of private needs as opposed to State needs, feelings of resentment against the external control with which they have not fully identified, and a desire for self-serving, irresponsible, narcissistic gratification” (Klugman, p. 77)

They would often disregard the principles of communism and drain the lifeblood and livelihood from the people they governed for their own benefit, much like the *Thing*. The threat of an unknown entity appearing from the cold of the North Pole, infiltrating an American base and killing off its inhabitants in a gruesome manner also mirrors the fear of the Soviet forces invading America. Another central point of the film is the struggle between two of the main characters: Captain Patrick Hendry and Dr Arthur Carrington. The former is the leader of an air force contingent sent to the outpost to investigate the crashed spacecraft. The latter is the head of the resident research team. The two oppose each other in that Hendry’s motivation is to kill the *Thing* because he sees it as a threat to them and humanity

as a whole. Carrington, being of scientific mind, wants to study the alien creature. He believes the Thing to be a superior being, whose mind is not clouded by emotions. Inevitably, Carrington's position turns out to be futile, and Hendry concocts a cunning plan to ensnare and kill the Thing.

The framing of these two central characters, and their struggle of power, is one that is central to the film. We, as viewers are meant to stand on the side of Captain Hendry, as “[He] (...) is more moderate (and human), and his common-sense view is that the invader must be killed to protect humanity; a position that the film clearly supports, preferring Hendry over the extremist Carrington” (Booker, p. 291). Carrington symbolises some of the fear that Americans had about scientist and technology in the 1950s; namely that they were driven by motivations that did not necessarily took the concerns of ordinary people to heart. Forfeiting compassion and being driven by pure logic, much like the Thing is perceived to be by Carrington, was also something people associated with the Soviet threat (Booker, p. 291).

What this tells us is that the audience is most likely to empathise with Hendry, who becomes a stand-in for the common citizen. The reasoning for this is that Hendry is the one who asserts himself over Carrington's plan of madness to communicate and reason with the obviously hostile Thing. While he has no hard evidence to support this notion at first, it becomes increasingly clear as the film moves on – first when it kills and drains a dog of its blood, and later two of the scientists meet the same fate. His contrast to the cold and calculating Dr Carrington is stark – Hendry is also part of a love plot, which shows us that he is exactly opposite to Carrington, who believes the thing to be superior as a plant, unclouded by emotions – especially sexual ones.

### **Ex 1: It Escapes - 34:08 – 37:26**

In the first scene, we see one of the crewmembers of the station sit guard at the frozen block of ice containing the Thing. We hear the dogs howling and barking from outside and the music holds a single, lingering note. Suddenly, we see a shadow appearing over the back of the man sitting guard. The music swells and grows more chaotic, signalling that something strange is approaching. The man slowly turns and is visibly shocked at what he sees, gets to his feet and draws his pistol and fires six shots at the creature as he withdraws from the room. The creature growls, presumably in pain. He rushes to alert the others, his panic clear from

his dishevelled speech. As the situation is clarified, Hendry goes to the storage room to find the block of ice halfway melted with a giant, human-shaped imprint within it. Suddenly, a rush of wind blows open a door, and the howling winds of a storm is heard. As the crew peer outside into the raging storm, they see the Thing fighting several dogs. Eventually, the creature runs off and a few of the crew runs out into the blizzard to inspect the aftermath of the fight. It turns out that the Thing managed to kill at least two of the dogs, and that the dogs managed to bite or rip off one of the lower arms of the creature.

This scene shows us the physical prowess and superiority of the Thing, as it easily overpowers several large dogs, and this happens only moments after being frozen solid in a block of ice, and being shot several times. Conventional weapons such as guns seemingly do no damage to the creature whatsoever. Severing the limbs of the monster also serves no purpose, as the arm the Thing loses in this scene comes back to life after absorbing the blood it was covered in. The Thing can also regenerate lost limbs, as we can see that in later scenes it is not missing any appendages. We also hear the fearsome, howling screams of the Thing as it is shot. Cleverly, we are not shown the creature at this time in the film, but rather we only see its shadow initially, and a few moments later its silhouette as it is fighting the dogs outside the camp. This helps build a mysterious aura around the creature as something not human, yet still having the overall silhouette of a human. All of this starts to paint a picture of a creature, which at first glance might seem somewhat human-like, but all of its other qualities makes it clear that it is anything but human. The sheer strength and resiliency of the Thing makes it a fearsome antagonist, which will prove to haunt the crew throughout the film in many ways. The camera remains still in most of the scenes, resorting only to slight zooms and panning whenever the characters move across a room.

While we are not treated with a full visual confrontation with the Thing, we do get to live vicariously for a moment through the man sitting guard. The score swelling up and becoming chaotic as the man faces the Thing causes a sudden startle-effect in the viewer, and as the guard turns around and faces the Thing, it causes an somatic affective response as we can see the fear painted in his face. We will see throughout the film that this chaotic and sudden score will become a significant part of the film's portrayal of the Thing.

**Ex 2: Suspicions - 37:26 – 43:37**

We see the entire crew of the station standing around the limb that was torn from the Thing. The music fades away, slowly. The scientific staff have an understandable interest in the composition of the hand, and the Thing is revealed to resemble a plant-based organism. As Carrington explains how the creature likely functions based on plant-life as we know it here on earth, it becomes clear that he has more than just an academic fascination with the creature. This is especially highlighted in his words: “On the planet from which our visitor came, vegetable life underwent an evolution similar to that of our own animal life, which would account for the superiority of its brain. Its development was not handicapped by emotional and sexual factors”. Here it is hinted that he feels that humans and their emotional wiles are not to his liking, mirroring the outlook on scientist shared by many in the 1940s and 50s. Moments later, this notion is directly spoken by Carrington, when they discover the seedpods in the Thing’s hand: “Yes, a neat and unconfused reproductive technique of vegetation. No pain or pleasure as we know it. No emotions. No heart. Our superior, our superior in every way”.

Not long after this, the hand begins to move, further emphasising the inhuman nature of the Thing. The reason for this is that the arm has ingested the blood of the dogs, which it was covered with. At this, the score begins to return, a noticeable change from a long scene consisting of only dialogue. The music is again, strangely eerie, cementing the connection of the Thing with something unnatural. This prompts Captain Hendry to go and find the creature. At this, Carrington implores Hendry to consider that they might be able to reason and communicate with it: “(...) remember it’s a stranger in a strange land. The only crimes involved were those committed against it. It woke from a block of ice, was attacked by dog, shot by a frightened man”. While Carrington’s words in this scene do not fully compare to his later ones, we are already introduced to the idea of a man whose motivations lie beyond the concerns for the safety of his fellow men. There is a budding adoration in his appreciation for the Thing’s composition, both physically and what he presumes about its mentality. This portrayal of the scientific mentality found in Dr Carrington mirrors what Booker describes as being the societal view of scientists at the time of the film’s release (p. 291).

Again, camerawork is not the focus of these scenes, following the simple task of following the characters, which are in focus, or speaking. Nothing in the way it moves through the scene helps portray the cognitive emotions of the scene. The fear stems from the

Thing's arm, mostly, but also from hearing Carrington speak so vividly about this creature, which could overpower any single man.

### **Ex 3: Attack - 49:54 – 52:14**

One of the scientist standing guard in the station's greenhouse come lumbering through the door, obviously hurt and confused. As the scientist falls, the camera cuts to a medium shot of everyone as they catch him. We hear from the doctor that two of his colleagues were "hanging from the beams upside down, their throats were cut", a gruesome mental image, which we are not confronted with. Hendry gathers a few men to go investigate, and as soon as they open the door to the greenhouse, they find the Thing waiting directly on the other side of the door. At this moment, there is a blast of music, designed to startle the viewer along with the full view of the Thing, now seen clearly for the first time. Quick to react, Hendry slams the door on the creature's arm, and as he does so, the Thing starts howling and groaning loudly again, the noise it makes triggering another startle, yet also making the viewer feel uneasy since the sound the Thing makes is clearly designed to sound otherworldly. It soon withdraws, as does the score, and the crew then proceeds to block off the doorway to keep the Thing from entering the base from the greenhouse.

This is the first time we get a proper look at the Thing, albeit a short one. There are several, small hints in this encounter, which tell us a lot about the fearsome nature of the Thing. Firstly, we are able to see a glimpse of the full upper body of the monster, and we can tell that it has managed to regenerate the arm it was missing earlier. Another important clue is the connection between the state of the two bodies found in the greenhouse, and the regenerative abilities of the Thing, as was hinted at in the previous example, the Thing is nourished by blood, and can evidently regenerate and heal itself by ingesting it. Not only this, but as we learn later, the blood it drains from its victims is not only used for its own sustenance, but for the seeds it has planted in the greenhouse as well. We are once again reminded of the physical abilities of the Thing, as it strikes the doorframe and takes a large portion of it off, sending large splinters of wood flying everywhere. We also get to hear the strange wailing of the Thing again, once more enforcing the idea that it is not human in anyway outside of its physical form.

**Ex 4: Concerns - 53:29 – 57:19**

This scene takes place in Carrington's office, where it is revealed that he has been conducting some appalling experiments, cultivating the seedpods, which were retrieved from the Thing's severed hand. To do so, he has been using the blood, which was on storage for emergency purposes. As his notes on his project are read aloud, it becomes clear that Carrington's colleagues are incredulous. He leads them to another area of his office, where the experiment is taking place. The camera cuts to a view inside the small room, and as Carrington turns on the light, the same eerie music, which is usually reserved for the Thing starts playing again. This could be a way to trigger cognitive emotions in the viewer, as they might expect the Thing to appear, but it also creates a connection, subconsciously, between Carrington and the Thing, as they share the same musical theme now.

Not only does this further implicate Carrington and put his motives into question, it also draws a parallel between the Thing and Carrington, almost as if they are one and the same, since they perform the same actions, and Carrington, still not fully aware of the ramifications of his actions, is helping the Thing invade the planet.

His colleagues question his motives as well, suggesting that growing more Things may be a dangerous pursuit, since just one of them can easily overpower them, and shrug off anything they do to it. One of the other scientists also expresses concern over Carrington's lack of sleep, suggesting that he may not be entirely of sound mind. There seems to be a general concern over the motives of the Thing spreading amongst the scientists, as they pose the question that "aircraft came here, not just to visit the Earth, but to conquer it? To start growing some kind of horrible army. Turn the human race into food for it". To this, Carrington explains that he does not concern himself with threats or enemies, as "There are no enemies in science, only phenomena to study. We are studying one". His belief that the Thing is a being, which exists on a higher level both morally and intellectually, and thus cannot be capable of ill intent, begins to worry even his fellow scientists. Seeing as how Carrington is a Nobel-prize winning scientist, and arguably the most intelligent person on the base, his unwillingness or incapability to acknowledge the Thing as a threat not only to the people immediately around them, but humanity as a whole, tells us that we should regard scientists with a certain amount of scepticism. Scientists, in the universe and time of the film, are viewed as humans that often have no compassion, and puts their science above any humane issues that science might come across.

**Ex 5: Fire - 1:00:45 – 1:04:32**

The crew discuss how to dispose of the Thing, should it come inside the base. One person suggests dousing the creature in kerosene and setting it alight. Their reasoning is that, since the Thing is not unlike a vegetable, cooking it might be effective. This solution is put to the test almost immediately, as the Thing is drawing closer. They can tell this by the fact that the Thing is radioactive, and they have been monitoring its movements with a Geiger counter. As this Geiger counter starts picking up the radiation from the Thing, the score sets in again, slowly building in anticipation of the Thing's arrival.

When he enters the room, they spring into action, splash him with kerosene, and shoot him with a flare-gun. The Thing starts howling and lumbers across the room, swinging his arms wildly, but retreats after just a few moments. The score builds to a tumultuous high as the Thing is aflame in the middle of the room, and disappears with the creature. The aftermath is severe, as the room has been almost entirely scorched. Setting the Thing on fire means potentially risking their own lives as well, and while it did have much more effect than anything else they have tried up to this point, it still did not kill it.

This scene shows us the two general schools of thought amongst the crew. The scientists, in particular Carrington, feel that the Thing is a creature of reason, and are actively studying and examining it. Meanwhile, Hendry and the less scientifically inclined members of the crew are discussing any means with which they can kill it. This divide between the two camps of the crew mirrors the view of the society at the time of the film's release. Scientists were often viewed as cold and calculating with little regard for the consequences of the science they pursued.

We get to see the resilience of the Thing come into play again, and it is very impressive and imposing. While the fire did have more of an effect than pure physical damage in the form of bullets and the bites of dogs, the Thing still managed to survive, and as we see later, recover completely. The ingenuity that comes with using fire against the creature also turns out to be quite a positive idea for the Hendry and his side of the crew, since they later improve on this idea to make a weapon, which they use against the Thing in their final confrontation. Their first encounter as it unfroze made it clear that dismemberment or penetrating it with bullets, and this second one clues them further onto what can finally kill

the Thing. While their initial plan is to use kerosene once again, but one of the crewmembers suggest using electricity, setting up a trap, which will conduct high amounts of electricity into the Thing, provided they can lure it to the correct spot. The score is again used as a way of signalling the presence of the Thing, and the more discordant and loud the music becomes, the nearer the Thing is.

### **Ex 6: Killing the Thing - 1:13:20 - 1:16:40**

This final scene is the final confrontation between the people of the station and the Thing. Just before this scene, the trap was set up, and they are now awaiting the arrival of the Thing, which only moments before has turned off the heating system of the base, meaning that the crew will freeze to death in short time. The Thing appears at the end of a hallway, smashing down the barricades that were put in place. As he advances towards them the score seems to mirror the movements of the Thing. Only seconds after the Thing appears, the power is cut, rendering their plan to electrocute the creature useless. It turns out that Carrington is the culprit behind this as he is desperate to stop the other members of the crew from killing the Thing, which he still believes to be highly intelligent and benevolent. Hendry and his men quickly dispatches of Carrington however, and turn the generator back on in time for the plan to be viable. As they slowly lure the Thing down the narrow corridor, Carrington suddenly springs forth, approaching the alien to say:

“Listen I’m your friend, look I have no weapons. I’m your friend. You’re wiser than I. You must understand what I’m trying to tell you. Don’t go any farther, they will kill you, they think you mean to harm us all. But I want to know you, to help you, believe that! You’re wiser than anything on Earth, use that intelligence. Look at me and know what I’m trying to tell you, I’m not your enemy, I’m a scientist! I’m a scientist who is trying...”

It is at this moment that his delusions about the intentions of the Thing are finally dissuaded, as the Thing violently swipes at Carrington, hurling him aside. Again, the score underplays the action on screen, calming down as Carrington tries to reason with the Thing, but comes back with a force similar to the mighty swing of its arm.

As he lumbers on down the corridor, Hendry stands at the ready to spring the trap, and when the timing is right, it immediately proves effective. The Thing is incapacitated, and it

only takes a few moments of the high-intensity electricity to kill the alien for good. When they finally cut the power, all that remains of the nearly invincible Thing is a pile of smouldering ash. The score builds until the Thing stands right in the middle of the trap and is electrocuted. As it writhes and squirms, we reach the height of the cacophony, and as the creature slowly diminishes, so too does the underlying score, until they both fade into nothingness.

### **The Thing (1982)**

John Carpenter's *The Thing* from 1982 is a film about a group of people working at Outpost 31, an American research station. Right at the beginning of the film, a dog arrives at the station, followed shortly by a Norwegian helicopter. It turns out that the dog is a shapeshifting extra-terrestrial being, and that it has been wreaking havoc at the Norwegian base, only to escape and run off to the American outpost. The Thing turns out to be extremely hostile, and nearly kills off everyone. The film deals with paranoia and mistrust among the men of the outpost, as no one can be sure that the Thing has not taken over one or more of the others. The film was very poorly received at its release, and the reasoning for this can, at least in part, be traced to a change in the societal and political climate of the time of its release.

At the beginning of the 1980s, politics and culture were changing. The 1970s were marred by the Vietnam War and Watergate, and paranoia and conspiracy theories were not uncommon. This decade also saw many conspiratorial films such as *The Conversation* (1974) and *All the President's Men* (1976). When Ronald Reagan came into the office of the White House in 1980, a change began to come about in the cultural mentality (Addison, p. 156). Culture of course began to mimic reality, and such films as *First Blood* (1982), featuring the now archetypal John Rambo, who, amongst others, became iconic characters of the decade. *The Thing* did not portray this type of main protagonist in R.J. MacReady, who is instead a morally ambiguous man. As opposed to the action heroes of the 1980s, MacReady is more a product of the 1970s mentality. He is tasked with fighting a 'system', which is being corrupted by the alien creature; much like the system was being corrupted by dishonest politicians in the 1970s. As Addison puts it: "John Carpenter's nihilistic film sputtered and sank because of its harsh story world did not mesh with the cultural moment" (p. 164). Nevertheless, it did go on to become a cult classic years later. One reason for this may well

have been because that same sense of paranoia, which seems to have inspired the film, has to some degree, become part of the cultural mentality once again in recent times, perhaps as a reaction to the increased feeling of paranoia spurred on by our society being increasingly under surveillance (Addison, p. 164).

The societal connections that can be made with the film's narrative are part of why this film remains effective today. The other reason is that the film, while dated, is still an audio-visual horror that avoids becoming parody or camp, as many slasher films have become, for example. The effects are still valid and convincing, and the narrative is practically timeless. In recent times, this film has gained a cult following, and has been re-evaluated by many, as it now sports an 83% rating from critics and 92% from audiences on the review aggregate website Rotten Tomatoes

### **Ex 1: Animal Instinct - 28:08 - 33:01**

The Thing, in this case disguised as a dog, has been locked in the kennel with the station's other dogs. It lies in the middle of the kennel, oddly still and stiff, compared to the other, real, dogs. The real dogs soon start growling and barking, baring their teeth at the Thing, obviously sensing something is amiss with this new arrival, and it is not long before we get to see one of the many malformed and visceral forms of this alien creature. We hear it hiss slightly, before blood oozes from the muzzle of the dog and its face splits into four, as tentacles sprout from the entire body of the former dog. Large, arachnoid legs spring forth and the dogs, increasingly panicked, howl and yelp, one even biting at the fencing in hopes to escape. The Thing then sprays some sort of slime onto one of the dogs. All throughout this, we hear the dogs barking as if in panic. The Thing emits a sound, which can only be described as a hissing noise, yet it has a decidedly unnatural quality to it.

Then we cut to Clark, the dog handler, approaching the kennel. As he walks down the hall, a low, droning sound plays. The dogs, who were yelping loudly before have gone quiet. As he slowly opens the door to the now pitch-black room, one dog suddenly fly out at him with a loud howl. Another runs away in the other direction, equally in panic. Sprawled on the floor, he notices the long tendrils of the Thing violently flailing around inside the cage, the noise of the Thing returning once more.

Cut to MacReady, who is in the kitchen. He hears a noise, very faintly. It almost sounds like the howling wind outside the base for a moment, but then we hear something almost like screaming, presumably from the dogs. He then pulls the fire alarm to rouse everyone. The alarm is a constant, piercing sound that is a clear sign of danger. Everyone arrives at the kennel, and MacReady approaches the Thing, which at this point has transformed into a fleshy dog-looking creature. There is no more hissing, but the wails of the dogs are still there, accompanied by the same droning tone. As MacReady and the Thing lock eyes, it lets out an almost pained scream. One dog is covered in greyish green slime and is soon enveloped in a myriad of tentacles, all coming from the Thing. MacReady shoots the Thing and the remaining dogs in the kennel, and as he does so, the drone cuts out completely. There are screams and howling from the dogs as everything is being shot at. Childs arrives with a flamethrower as the Thing spawns two large arms and morphs into a completely new form, and as the arms stretch upwards we can almost hear them growing. It reaches the ceiling and punches through, trying to escape. And as it pulls its body upwards, the Thing makes yet another noise, almost like a chattering sound, but again, very unnerving in its nature. As the Thing is set on fire by Childs, it interestingly does not make any noise, but stays completely silent as the score returns, playing a mysterious melodic composition, which transcends into the next scene.

This is the first time we see the horrific nature of the Thing and its abilities of assimilation and transformation in action. The visuals are incredibly vivid and imaginative, yet believable. At this point however, the most frightening aspect of the alien creature has still not been fully revealed; that it can perfectly imitate and hide inside *any* living organism. We know from this scene that it can mimic a dog, but the other dogs were quick to sense that something was not right with the creature. The shock and horror of the visuals and sound design in this scene serves as a fitting introduction to what is ultimately the Thing's last resort, total offensive transformation. As we see later in the film, it much prefers hiding, and will only act in this way under certain circumstances. The visual effects are, to this day, hailed as some of the most convincing and well-made of the genre of horror, and the reason for this is the amount of work that was put into the effects. Navarro explains in her article that "for 14 months of production, Bottin and his team worked around the clock, many of whom never had a single day off during that time". This work was solely special effects, and outside of this was the additional branches of the production. This amount of work and dedication to

special effect is something that, according to Navarro, unheard of today, where many things are easily solved with CGI, and plays a great part in what makes the film so great (Navarro).

The sounds of the Thing are, similar to the visuals, completely fantastic and out of this world, yet somehow fitting and believable. The spectacle that is the Thing is created with such care as to not cross over into a territory where it becomes campy and unconvincing, and performs the task of reinforcing the cognitive affect of the scene. As the droning sound is slowly rising in volume, so does the expectation of something happening. At the same time, there is something unnerving about the sound itself, which begs some sort of conclusion or at least continuation. It is, in its own right, a somatic element of the film which helps generate tension in the viewer.

### **Ex 2: An Alien Lifeform - 34:13 - 34:54**

In this short scene, Blair has just finishes performing what might be called an autopsy on the Thing the crew fought in the kennel. Based on his findings, he surmises what the abilities of the Thing actually is: “an organism that imitates other lifeforms, and it imitates them perfectly”. It is at this point that the crew are starting to get worried, although it is not until a little while later that the full realisation sets in amongst them. The idea that this creature could potentially infect their dogs and hide inside them, without being able to be detected is a frightening notion. The manner in which the Thing does this is equally terrifying too: “When this thing attacked our dogs, it tried to digest them. Absorb them. And in the process shape its own cell to imitate them”. This would suggest that the process is slow and painful, since digestion usually takes a long time. This is also corroborated in the notion that they find the Thing in mid-assimilation, as Blair mentions: “We got to it before it had time to finish”. One of the central themes of this film is the feeling of paranoia that permeates everything throughout Outpost 31, and we get a small taste of it here, only a third into the film.

Odell and Le Blanc describe Alfred Hitchcock’s now famous argument about suspense versus surprise, where two scenarios are presented. An imagined scene plays out, where people are sitting around a table, which has a bomb hidden underneath: “In one film the audience is unaware of the bomb, in the other they are not” (p. 40), which means that the first scenario, there is no suspense as the scene plays out, until the hypothetical bomb

explodes, becoming an element of surprise. It is short and sudden. The second scenario will play out entirely different, as the audience will continuously wonder if, and when, the bomb will go off, creating suspense instead. What is interesting, and indeed so effective, about Carpenter's film is that both elements come into play at certain times. We know that the Thing can suddenly and aggressively transform into something grotesque, providing an element of surprise, but it also hides and remains unseen for much of the film, keeping the audience in suspense as well. According to Odell and Le Blanc, this combination is in many ways the perfect combination for a horror film (p. 40).

### **Ex 3: Infiltration - 45:30 - 48:23**

Fuchs and MacReady meet in a Snowcat to discuss what is happening to Blair, the outpost's resident biologist. Fuchs reads to Macready from one of Blair's notebooks about his findings on the Thing, and as he does so, a low, droning sound begins to play. Fuchs explains to him that not only is Blair acting extremely erratically, but his notes reveal that the Thing they killed in the kennel has not been successfully exterminated; "There's still cellular activity in these burned remains, they're not dead yet". We cut to Windows entering a storage room, where he expects to find Bennings, but instead is met with bloodied, torn clothes; this shot is seen from Windows' POV. An ominous melody begins to play, and as he turns, we see Bennings, again from Windows' POV, covered in slime and tentacles, twitching in a chair in the corner of the room. As the camera cuts to Bennings' writhing body, the score increases noticeably in volume until we cut to MacReady and Fuchs again, where total silence follows.

Windows runs out to inform Fuchs and MacReady of what he has seen, and as they run back inside, the droning tone fades into existence again. They find that the Thing has escaped, but MacReady sees a figure silhouetted outside through the broken window, stumbling away. The same blaring alarm as in the kennel scene starts up. They chase after it and quickly catch up to the Thing. As it lumbers on, it falls to its knees, and the crew surround it. The score intensifies once again as they surround it. Huddled over in the snow, it is initially hard to see whether the transformation was finished or not, but as MacReady exclaims that "it isn't Bennings" it straightens up and faces him, revealing two disfigured arms, bloodied and incomplete. The Thing lets out a haunting scream as it looks at MacReady

with a dead look on its face. Then there is a cut to a POV from the Thing as it looks around at all the people staring at it. The score evolves further into an unsettling tone of synths and church organs. They knock over a barrel of fuel and set it alight, and the Thing screams the same, haunting scream once more, before the scene ends abruptly.

What is important about this scene is that it shows the nature of the Thing; that it prefers to hide rather than have a confrontation. Had Windows not burst in while the Thing was assimilating Bennings, it could have hid among the other humans, undetected, but since it was discovered in mid-transformation, it decided to halt that process, escape, and presumably hide until such a time as it could find a new form that would not arouse suspicion. We must assume that since the Thing was interrupted halfway through its consumption of Bennings, it was in some way unable, or unwilling to attack the other members of the crew, since it only wailed and screamed as it was caught. Regardless, the Thing is very much interested, and capable of, hiding as a human being, as well as animals. The reasoning for this could be read as a few things, but the most likely is that it wants to spread across the Earth, and that it is unable to, given its currently remote location in Antarctica. The notebook that Fuchs reads from to MacReady also hints at this; “It could have imitated a million lifeforms on a million planets. Could change into any one of them at any time. Now it wants lifeforms on Earth”. Why it wants lifeforms from our planet is unknown, and is part of the mystique of the Thing as a creature, since we cannot, at least with complete certainty, say that it is either malevolent or benevolent. In its own perspective, it might be a saviour or collector of sorts. This notion also relates to something shown in the next scene we will be examining.

Neither we, nor the character knew up until this scene, that the Thing could imitate human beings. The creature was already frightening enough in its own right, by virtue of the fact that it could transform almost immediately into these grotesque forms. Now that we know that it can imitate humans, the fear it inspires in the audience becomes two-fold. Firstly, it is a gory horror-monster such as we know them; a strange alien being with an incredible propensity for killing humans. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it can also prey on another kind of fear – the fear of not knowing where, and in this case also *who* the monster might be. This makes every character and being in the film potentially the enemy, which creates incredible fear and paranoia not only between the characters in the film, but us as the audience as well. The score is used in these scenes as a way of emphasising what is

happening on the screen, as the characters approach the Thing, the unsettling music increases in volume, as well as growing in complexity. Adding to that the horrific noises that the Thing itself produces, this becomes a truly chilling sequence. We also get a few POV shots, which puts the audience right into the action as if it is seen through their own eyes. Interestingly, we also get to see from the POV of the Thing, as it looks around at its assailants, standing tall over it in a circle. This forces the audience to identify with the Thing as we view these strange beings looking down at us. This is not something the viewer necessarily wants to do, as based on the evidence presented so far, the Thing is a deeply hostile and antagonistic being. This creates an unsettling feeling for the viewer, and puts them on edge in terms of how to feel about the protagonists.

#### **Ex 4: Who is Human? - 56:09 - 57:34**

In this scene, the crew discuss a few things regarding how to deal with their current predicament. They have no communication or means of transport, making them essentially stranded at the outpost. Copper suggests that they “hole up till spring, wait for the rescue team”, which MacReady immediately disagrees with, since the Thing is still at large. His argument is that by the time spring comes all of them could have been taken over by the alien creature. Childs then poses the question; if a human was imitated perfectly by the Thing, is there any way to tell? Copper then tells that he has been thinking about that very question, and may have come up with a test to show if anyone has been taken over by the Thing. By taking uncontaminated blood from their storage, and mixing it with a sample of blood taken from each of the members of the crew, they hope to tell if anyone is infected.

The focal point of this conversation is two-fold. First, there is the question of the Thing, and that the crew need some way to know whether it has taken over any of their fellow crewmates. The subplot of not knowing who might be a Thing drives the paranoia throughout the film and is one of the main proponents of what makes this film so genuinely terrifying. Childs states it clearly; “If I was an imitation – a perfect imitation – how would you know if it was really me?”. The other side of this question is one that is not really touched upon in the film, but one that ultimately finds its way into the minds of the audience. What happens to you after the Thing assimilates and imitates you? Since the process that takes place replaces all your cells with identical ones, does this mean that it replicates your

experiences and your consciousness too? Do you still exist inside the Thing's copy of you, or do you cease to exist when it absorbs you? Regardless, we get to see that the paranoia has indeed set in amongst the crew, and that counter measures to the Thing have been set in motion.

### **Ex 5: Desperation - 1:03:10 - 1:04:30**

MacReady is sitting in his tower, recording a message on his cassette deck. He speaks about the threat the crew is facing. The contents of his speech is bleak to say the least. The reason MacReady is recording this tape is that he wants to leave a record of what has happened, in case they all perish. "I'm gonna hide this tape when I'm finished. If none of us make it, at least there'll be some kind of record. Storm's been hitting us hard now for 48 hours. We still have nothing to go on". The outlook is grim, and the possibilities of anyone surviving seems incredibly small. Even though the Bennings-Thing was destroyed, it seems that there is still at least one more creature loose in the outpost. This is hinted at when MacReady mentions that a pair of shredded long johns was found. The nametag, however, was missing. This also serves as a possible way to identify who might have been taken over by the Thing.

In just a few short sentences, MacReady tells us of the perils that they face. Not only is there a murderous alien organism loose, there has been a storm raging outside for two days, and everyone is extremely tired. Our human protagonists find themselves in what can only be described as they worst conditions imaginable. The strain this puts on everyone is reflected in the suspicion that everyone seems to garner for each other. Everyone is extremely paranoid and fearful that the person next to them might at any moment reveal themselves to be a Thing. Every one of these factors exacerbates the circumstances even further, making everyone more irritable, paranoid, and tired. It would seem that if the Thing does not manage to kill the people of Outpost 31, they are highly likely to slip into some form of insanity by the time the rescue team arrives. MacReady finishes his recording with: "There's nothing else I can do. Just wait", which speaks volumes of their predicament. There is nothing they can actively do to increase their chances of survival, except wait and see what the Thing will do.

Throughout this scene, the camera focuses almost solely on MacReady, but he is not framed centrally. At the beginning, the camera also peers outside of the room he is in, into a

hallway, which is much more brightly lit than his room. As the camera moves to the right and puts MacReady in the middle of the frame, this hallway outside is still kept in view. We then cut to a close-up of the cassette deck, at which point the droning Thing-sound starts, and then back to a medium close-up, looking slightly down at MacReady, with the hallway floor in view once more. As the scene ends, the camera cuts to viewing MacReady through the door from the hallway looking into the room, almost as if someone or something is out there, observing him.

All these moves seem to suggest to the viewer that something is going to appear in the hallway, as it is as much a focal point as MacReady himself is, being framed equally with the main antagonist of the film, and standing in such contrast to the darkened room in which he sits. The suggestion is clearly that MacReady might have been visited by a Thing, but since it is never shown on camera, we cannot know if this ever happens. In any case, there is a clear expectation that something will happen, given the score and the camerawork. The subversion of this expectation means that we cannot even trust the film itself to tell us the whole story, and that is mirrored in the narrative.

#### **Ex 6: The Test - 1:19:06 - 1:26:36**

After altercations with several Things, there is only a handful of people left alive. After witnessing the head of the Norris-Thing detach from its body and act as its own individual entity in a previous scene, MacReady forms an idea. His theory is that every part of the Thing is its own individual organism. You can split it into an infinite amount of parts and each part would act as a singular organism. Compare this to humans where a severed leg will not suddenly spring to life when severed from the body. MacReady supposes that if they draw blood from everyone, they can test it to see who is a Thing: “You see when a man bleeds, it’s just tissue. But blood from one of you things won’t obey when it’s attacked. It’ll try and survive, crawl away from a hot needle, say”. As he is explaining this, the camera slowly moves across the room, giving us a medium close-up of all the people in the room, sans MacReady. It gives us a chance to study their expression and potentially decipher their thoughts. We see a very close shot of MacReady heating the wire at the front of the flamethrower, focusing on the thing what will expose the Thing.

Palmer, Garry, and Childs are tied to a couch to keep them in place; Nauls is in a chair beside them. The wire goes into Windows' blood, again a very tight shot is used here, and immediately after it cuts to a medium close of Windows, showing clear signs of relief, as there is no reaction whatsoever. He then tests himself, with the same result, and the same sequence of shots. Copper and Clark, who at this point are both dead, are tested next, and both tests are negative. Childs expresses his feelings that the test might not be effective and his disdain for MacReady. Garry echoes this sentiment.

Next is Palmer, and this time the test is conclusively positive, as the blood in the dish suddenly springs to life with a shriek as soon as the hot wire touches it. Now exposed, the Palmer-Thing begins shaking violently in the couch. Blood pours from its eyes and the face and eyes bulge horribly. It eventually frees itself from its bonds and attacks and kills Windows. MacReady manages to set the Thing on fire, marking the first noises the Palmer-Thing has made. It bursts through a wall, escaping outside, but MacReady quickly follows and throws a stick of dynamite at it to finish it off. The next two tests reveal that Nauls is still human, and so too Childs. Childs' relief is palpable, and he is quick to demand they release him from the couch. It is clear that he has no intention of sitting next to Garry, the final person to be tested, in case he should turn out to be a Thing too. Garry's test is also negative, however, and he expresses his displeasure with the current situation quite simply: "I know you gentlemen have been through a lot, but when you find the time, I'd rather not spend the rest of this winter TIED TO THIS FUCKING COUCH".

This scene portrays the pinnacle of the paranoia in the film, and we finally get some concrete answers as to who the infected people are. It is clear that the whole ordeal that led to this moment has taken its toll on everyone, and blame is being thrown around like a hot potato amongst everyone. Everyone's suspicions and misgivings are either confirmed or denied, the humans can breathe easy for a while. This is however not the end of the paranoia and uncertainty, as we will see by the end of the film. This is also the first time that the humans have a certified way of fighting the Thing, or at least to identify who is a Thing. While this scene does have its gory moments, what is most prevalent is the feeling of paranoia as we see each character's fate being decided as the blood samples are tested one by one. We see that some, Windows and Nauls in particular, are very nervous, almost as if they have no idea what the outcome will be. An interesting choice was made in terms of the score in this scene, as there is none, quite simply. The score, previously has been used to signify the

imminent appearance of a Thing, but here there is no such clues given. Not only does this build onto the mistrust the viewer has with the film, as these rules seemingly do not apply for all occasions. It also increases the shock-value when the Thing *does* appear, since no warning was given.

### **Ex 7: Acceptance - 1:39:12 - 1:42:07**

After having blown up the Blair-Thing, an amalgamation of Blair, Nauls, and Garry, we see the aftermath; a dark night over the frozen wastes, illuminated only by the fires of destruction. MacReady comes into frame, staggering, covered in a blanket with a bottle of Scotch in his hand. The ominous score slowly builds. He finds a place to sit down, and a figure appears behind him almost immediately. Not immediately recognisable, it steps forwards and into a beam of light, revealing that it is Childs. They share a few words about what happened, MacReady asking where Childs has been while he, Garry, and Nauls were facing off against the Blair-Thing. His answer is "Thought I saw Blair. I went out after him, and got lost in the storm". At this, MacReady gives a slight chuckle, almost as if in disbelief. They discuss what to do, and Childs asks "How will we make it?", to which MacReady answers "Maybe we shouldn't". At this point, it has little significance whether or not either of them are a Thing, since they will freeze as soon as the fires of the outpost die down, and as MacReady puts it: "If we've got any surprises for each other, I don't think we're in much shape to do anything about it". MacReady hands the bottle of scotch to Childs, who takes a long draught. As he finishes, MacReady gives a wry smile, almost knowingly. The scene cuts to a wide shot of the outpost in flames, and the film is bookended by the same musical score which can be heard in the introductory scene.

The genius of this scene is that it does not give in to the traditional Hollywood standards of resolving all plotlines completely and neatly. We are left in the dark about what eventually happens with Childs and MacReady, and whether either of them were a Thing. The impact of this ending is keeping in style with the whole film's narrative about paranoia and uncertainty, and while we may surmise certain things from the looks and behaviour of MacReady in particular in this scene, nothing is explicitly stated. Keeping the main plot of the film open-ended can be both a good or bad move, but in a film, which deals primarily with ambiguous characters and plot elements, it does play to the film's strengths. The visual

spectacle of the entire outpost having gone up in flames is not to be denied. It carries a lot of significance that all this destruction has happened in the pursuit of ridding the outpost of the Thing. Not only that, but the human sacrifices made for the same reason tells us that the creature is an extremely dangerous entity altogether. *The Thing* itself has been described by Carpenter himself as “The study of the effects of fear on a human being” (Odell & Le Blanc, p. 40), which is a very apt summation of not only what the Thing can do, but what it symbolises.

### **The Thing (2011)**

2011's *The Thing* is a prequel to John Carpenter's 1982 version of the same name. It was directed by Matthijs van Heijningen. The film follows a group of Norwegians and Americans stationed in Antarctica, and portrays the events that led up to the 1982 film. The Norwegians discovered the spacecraft in the ice, and the Thing some distance from it. They manage to take the Thing out inside a block of ice and bring it back to their camp. It eventually breaks loose and start ravaging through the camp, killing and sowing seeds of mistrust amongst the station's residents. This eventually leads to the demise of everyone except an American woman named Kate, whose fate is left uncertain.

The film was, much like the 1982 version, not very well received at release. The film holds a 35% rating from critics, and 42% from audiences on Rotten Tomatoes. Whether it will receive a cult following like its predecessor remains to be seen, but currently, it has a much lower rating than its predecessor does. Thematically, this film takes a bit from both the 1951 film, as well as the 1982 one.

### **Ex 1: Arrogance - 17:49 - 20:49**

As the scene starts, a faint score can be heard. It fades away as Kate and Halvorson start discussing whether or not a tissue sample should be taken from the Thing, frozen in the ice. Kate argues against it, with several poignant arguments, yet Halvorson will not hear of it. Outside the storage area, he approaches Kate alone, and tells her “in the future, don't contradict me in front of those people again”. This tells us quite a lot about the character, in that he does not relate to the “common” people of the outpost, who are merely manual labour

workers. Adding to this, he feels that he possesses some sort of superiority over Kate, even though she is a scientist like him. Of course, the attempt to retrieve the tissue sample from the creature does not happen without complications. As the drill nears the Thing inside the ice, it suddenly cracks and the drill-bit plunges deep into the Thing. This action may inadvertently initiated the process of the Thing waking up and thawing itself from the ice, possibly due to the contact with the outside world has activated the Thing somehow, or simply due to the fact that there now is a crack in the ice, making it that much easier to shatter. In either case, it is not unlikely that taking a sample of the Thing's tissue has spurred on the awakening of the creature. As the sample from the Thing is placed in the small glass dish, we can hear a faint droning noise, which quickly fades away again.

Much like in the first film, we see a clear divide between the characters. Not only are there a gap in educational levels within the crew of the outpost, leading to Halvorson's feelings of superiority, there is also a divide between nationalities, as Kate's group is American, while the majority of the crew is Scandinavian. There are, in other words, plenty of potential pitfalls, which could lead to biased decision-making as the crisis unfolds later in the film.

The score is used sparingly, but still suggests, much like the 1982 film, that it is used to build tension in scenes of importance, especially scenes including the Thing.

## **Ex 2: Search and Destroy - 23:08 – 32:59**

Jameson exits the bathroom, and looks towards the common room, where everyone the Norwegians are singing a local song, and general festivities are had. As he peers in down the other end of the hallway, towards the room where the Thing lies frozen in the block of ice, we hear a slightly jarring sound. We see a quick cut to a paw, desperately pawing and biting at the fencing on its cage. We go back to Jameson entering the room where the Thing is. There is no trace of the Norwegians singing to be heard, only a faint, unsettling score. Jameson goes approaches the block of ice, and we can only see its general shape through the block of ice. Peder has in the meantime snuck in behind him and gives him a scare, and there is a loud blast of instruments as Peder shouts "Boo!" This is a simple startle, an effect often used quite heavy-handedly in modern horror films. As Jameson is heading out of the room,

the Thing suddenly bursts out of the ice and jumps up through the roof of the building. This is again a startle, and there is an even louder cacophony of both the creature's roaring and orchestral chaos. Jameson runs to the common room where everyone is still partying and warns them that the Thing is loose, which they at first think is a joke. As they realise that Jameson is in fact not kidding, they go to examine the storage room. Realising Jameson was not joking, they split up in small groups to search for the Thing. Halvorson makes a point to say "be careful, we don't know what condition it's in", as if to warn them not to destroy or damage his important scientific discovery.

We see that something has broken in to the kennel, and there is a large pool of blood in the room, meaning the dogs may already be compromised. Outside, two of the Norwegian crewmembers, Henrik and Olav, are searching for the Thing when they hear strange noises close by. As they examine these noises more closely, they come upon the Thing hiding under a building, presumably weakened from having just woken up from the ice. We hear it groaning and clicking softly, corroborating the idea that it has not resuscitated completely yet. They raise their voices and the Thing shoots out a long tentacle that pierces Henrik and draws him to it. A dramatic and hectic score starts at this point, since the action has picked up. Olav calls for the others, and as they reach the Thing, Carter immediately starts shooting at it. Peder joins in quickly, despite Halvorson's objections. The Thing screeches and groans from the multiple bullets hitting it, then breaks through the floor of the building, and Carter and Jameson are quick to throw some flammable liquid under it, and lighting it, to hopefully kill it that way. The Thing drops back down onto the ground, and they rush to extinguish the fire. As this is going on, Carter and Halvorson share some disdainful looks.

In the aftermath of this, everyone is noticeably depressed, underlined by the melancholy yet slightly eerie score, and as they discuss what happened to Henrik, Halvorson says: "Yes it's horrible. It's a horrible tragedy. We're all shocked at what happened to Henrik. But with due respect we need to examine the remains, before it all disintegrates". Jonas obviously thinks that referring to Henrik's body simply as remains is extremely callous, as he retorts: "Hey, that was a man, not remains!". Halvorson clarifies that he did not refer to Henrik, but rather the Thing. Already here we see that Halvorson has taken a noticeable interest in the alien creature. He justifies his lack of remorse with: "I'm sure we're all aware of the importance of this discovery. This may be the first and only time mankind has been visited by an alien lifeform, and as scientists, we're obliged to study it". Peder is less

enthusiastic, as he evidently is of the belief that Halvorson's insistence on taking a tissue sample from the Thing played a part in it breaking free from the ice.

Carter shares Peder's sentiment, suggesting that they destroy the creature. Already, we see a division beginning to form between certain individuals in the outpost – those who wish to study and preserve the Thing and those who wish to destroy it. The struggle between these two parties is what creates much of the drama throughout the film. Unlike its 1982 counterpart, this film not only displays the Thing, and those replaced by it, as threats, but also people, who are selfish, arrogant, callous, or petty. They instantly become a detriment to the survivability of our protagonists. Halvorson appeals to Edvard, the man in charge of the camp to side with him, saying “Edvard, this is why you called me”, suggesting that he is not there to mourn or care about dead people; he is there to perform his craft, studying the Thing found in the ice. This paints a clear picture of Halvorson as the main antagonist to those who wish to survive, since we know from previous instalments there is no chance to survive if the Thing also lives. His ignorance, wilful or not, to acknowledge this fact is why Kate and the others who eventually side with her, cannot, and should not trust him.

### **Ex 3: Dissection – 33:00 - 38:14**

Halvorson, Kate, Edvard, Juliette and Karl stand over the body of the Thing, the same unsettling score present. As they split it open, they find Henrik's upper body encased inside it in “some kind of amniotic sac”, and when they ponder what the Thing was doing to his body, Halvorson suggests that “It appears it was absorbing him, some type of digestion. It's fascinating... It *is* fascinating”. This idea is gruesome, but it seems as though Halvorson is untouched, and explains why he feels the needs to repeat and emphasise his words, almost as if he tries to make the others see past the horror of their fellow human lying dead, half absorbed in front of them. As they continue to dissect the Thing, Kate discovers a titanium plate inside the belly of the beast, next to Henrik's slightly translucent, but still intact arm. Adam explains that these are used to reinforce broken bones, and Karl confirms that Henrik broke his arm the year before and had such a plate put in his arm to mend it. Kate is puzzled as to why this piece of metal is suddenly not inside Henrik's arm, where it should be. As the camera zooms in on Henrik's half-digested face, we hear the score swell up just before the cut to a new scene, almost as if something is about to happen.

Kate senses that something about this is not adding up, and we see her next in the lab, looking at a sample of Henrik's tissue through a microscope. Clearly taken aback by what she sees, she prompts Adam to take a look as well. As we look through the microscope along with Adam, he and Kate discuss what is happening. Henrik's cells are not dead, even though his body clearly is, along that of the Thing. The alien cells are seen entering the human cells and transforming into a perfectly match one. As we see the cells move around under the microscope, we hear more of the unnerving score building in the background. Adam is unsure how to describe this phenomenon, but Kate pits it quite bluntly; "They're imitating him". As this line is said, the score comes to its climax, accentuating the revelation of her conclusion.

This is the first time we, and the characters in the narrative, learn that the Thing is not dead yet, and that it can absorb and imitate presumably any organism it comes into contact with. Of course, since this film is a direct prequel to the 1982 film of the same name, it should come as no surprise to anyone who has watched that film. Still, this changes the dynamic of the film going forward, since everyone now could be a potential threat. Halvorson, for example, took a sample of tissue from the Thing earlier. Any number of the people who were present at the autopsy of the Thing and Henrik's presumed corpses were exposed. The score is of an eerie nature, but unlike in the 1982 film, it is much more present at all times. Rarely do you get a scene solely with diegetic sounds in this film, and that diminishes the affective potency of the score, as it becomes more a backdrop for the film in itself, as opposed to the signifier for the Thing it was in the 1982 iteration.

#### **Ex 4: Realisation – 43:26 – 53:55**

The crew are planning to go to the nearest base in a Snowcat to get help. Halvorson is arguing with Edvard about his intentions, since bringing in people from the outside might mean that they have to give up recognition for being the first people to find an alien organism: "Listen to what I'm saying to you. Edvard, it's absolutely insane to bring people into this from the outside. We'll lose what we've found". Edvard objects to this, saying that they have gone far beyond that point, meaning that Edvard actually has the people of that station's well-being in mind, quite unlike Halvorson, who seems mostly concerned with earning the recognition that comes with their discovery.

Kate interrupts them; saying that she thinks no one should leave the station, and tells them all of what she saw in the microscope previously. During this whole scene, the camera

has a distinct shake, making it clear that the camera was handheld, or at least made to look that way. This could symbolise several different things. Firstly, there is the passing on of information to the entire crew about the Thing's capabilities. However, the crew seemingly does not accept this information, at least not completely. The shaking does not reflect them being shaken by what Kate says. Another thing it could represent is the struggle of power between Kate and the others, or perhaps the screen-shake is there to tell the viewer that something is amiss in this scene.

She tells them that she believes that the Thing can, and probably already has, replicated a person on the outpost. She also tells that she found dental fillings in the bathroom, next to a puddle of blood. She explains that the Thing cannot replicate inorganic materials, such as these fillings. When she returned later, the blood had been cleaned up, suggesting that there is at least one Thing still in the camp who went and covered up the signs of someone having been turned into a Thing. At this, the score reaches the peak of its crescendo, only to fade away with a mysterious melody playing as if to suggest to the audience that there *is* a Thing among them, but we have no idea who it is.

As everyone leaves the common room, Juliette, the only other woman on the station remains behind. She confronts Kate and tells her that she may have seen something that could help them, specifically Colin coming from the bathroom with some type of rag or towel, as if he had been in there to clean up the blood. They cannot speak freely however, as Colin is standing in a room across the hallway packing a bag for the trip they are about to go on. Kate once again states that it is very important they no one is allowed to leave, and Juliette confides in her that she knows where they keep the keys for the vehicles. All throughout this, the camera's shaking is present, but as the scene cuts to both of them going to the room where the keys are, it becomes steady once again. All this camera-work is creating cognitive affect in the viewer, since it unsettles the eye, making the scene itself seem as if something has, or is about to go wrong. In this scene, it might rather be a case of misdirection, because as Kate is rummaging through a drawer, we hear strange noises from behind her. When she turns around, we see that Juliette is undergoing a gruesome transformation right before her eyes. Unlike the 1982 *Thing*, this transformation is rather quick, and the Thing does not make the same, distinctly alien sounds either. The sounds it makes are still extremely effective, but do not carry the same quality of a creature in desperation and pain. Similarly, there is not much warning to be found in the score, as it only picks up in intensity as the camera cuts to a

view of the Thing over the shoulder of Kate. When it attacks, the score becomes chaotic and violent, much as the creature itself.

Kate manages to dodge the Juliette-Thing and runs away, down the hall, where she tries to warn Karl about the danger. Karl, however seems frozen in place, and is attacked and killed by the Thing. Luckily, Lars comes to the rescue and sets the Thing alight with a flamethrower, and as it burns, we hear its screams of pain. These howls are much more human in their nature, compared to the 1982 film. They are still effective in somatically affecting the viewer, but less so than in the scene where the Bennings-Thing is burned alive for example. The corpses of both the Thing and Karl are taken outside and burned.

As everyone stands around this bizarre bonfire, with the grotesque Thing burning right in front of them, Kate once again tries to explain the dangers and tactics of the Thing: “It attacks its prey, copies it perfectly, and then hides inside it. Waiting”. She also explains that under no circumstances can any of them leave, as they may well be aiding the Thing, by taking it to more civilised areas, thus helping it spread. She likens the thing to a virus and together with Adam comes up with a plan. They must isolate the Thing, then kill it. Halvorson suggests that they expose their “uncontaminated blood to the cells of the creature” which “might create a reaction... of some kind”. If this test works, they can single out and eliminate anyone who has been taken over by the Thing.

In this scene, we get our first real account of what the Thing can do. Kate has cleverly figured out a simple way to identify that not everyone in the outpost is who they seem to be. Yet, no one seems to pay much attention to this. Halvorson even gives Kate a snide remark in the common room as she finishes her explanation, almost as if he blames her for riling everyone up. It is clear that neither Edvard nor Halvorson care much for her troubles at this point. Only Juliette, Kate’s only female companion in this frozen wilderness, seems to heed her words. Whether the Thing knowingly chose to take over Juliette to make the chances of gaining Kate’s sympathies that much greater is hard to say, but it does seem a highly odd coincidence that the only other woman in the outpost turns out to be a Thing, especially at a time where Kate needs a confidant. The Thing does know to manipulate and play theatrics when it needs to. It is clear that it singles out Kate immediately because she is the biggest immediate threat to it. Just as she tells the others later, it lures its prey away to a secluded place before it strikes. Interestingly, Halvorson has no objections to the test at this time. Although he could be plotting to tamper with the results of the test if the outcome is

unfavourable to him – again, Halvorson seems mostly concerned with getting the proper credit for finding the Thing. It may even be he who burns down the lab in the following scene, although we are not privy to this information.

**Ex 5: Mistrust - 58:39 - 1:05:01 / 1:06:20 – 1:06:46**

The lab is on fire, destroying the tests, which Halvorson and Adam were working on. Jonas and Peder rush in to extinguish the flames. After this has been done, a wild discussion starts. There is wild speculation and blame being tossed around, specifically at Adam, who was working in the lab shortly before. Colin in particular seems intent on blaming Adam, spouting lines such as “You were in there with it, you were the last one” and “You just don’t want us to know the truth”. Kate tries to defuse the situation by suggesting an alternative method of testing everyone. Since the Thing cannot replicate things such as titanium plates and dental fillings, they can at least rule out some people by checking whether they have fillings in their teeth or not. This suggestion is not too popular, as this will unrightfully out some as potential threats, while others get to go free. Kate uses Lars as an example, and luckily for him, he has metallic fillings in some of his teeth.

She goes around the room to Jonas and Peder, both of whom are cleared. When she comes to Adam, he protests: “So I’m gonna get killed because I floss?” Kate explains that she is not looking to kill off anyone, simply to eliminate some potential threats. Adam eventually obliges, and is shown to not have any fillings. He is the first to be separated as a possible threat. Halvorson then quips to Kate: “You know as well as I do, there are too many variables”, and refuses to open his mouth, simply stating that his teeth are porcelain. Colin is next to join the rejects, although he does at least open his mouth. Since a lot of doubt has been cast on Colin, coupled with his characteristics of being somewhat ominous in the looks he gives and the way he generally behaves, the score swells especially as his teeth are checked. He does not have any fillings, so the build-up is not completely unfounded, although we are not given an answer as to his fate until the events of the 1982 film, where it is revealed that he took his own life, meaning he was not a Thing.

Last is Edvard, who as if in protest simply walks over to the rest of the unverified persons. Kate sends Lars and Jonas to go outside and bring in the two Americans, Carter and Jameson so they can check them for fillings as well. As they head out, Edvard and Halvorson converse in Norwegian and Danish, respectively. Edvard simply says “Smart girl”, and

Halvorson answers “Yeah”. Edvard then states that “Now she’s in control”. While Lars and Jonas are outside, fetching Carter and Jameson, Halvorson addresses Peder directly, also in Danish: “Peder. The threat isn’t in here. It’s out there. The Americans are the real enemy”, and Edvard echoes in Norwegian: “He’s right, Peder”. Kate realises what they are trying to accomplish, speaking in their native tongues, and quickly tells Peder that “Whatever they’re saying right now, it doesn’t matter. You can’t trust them”. It is clear that Halvorson and Edvard are trying to keep Kate from listening in on them talking. What is more interesting is the rift that this signifies between Kate and the people on her side of the room, versus Halvorson and the people on the other side of the room. While Kate and Halvorson have been butting heads throughout the film, the divide has never been as obvious as it is here. Halvorson explicitly outing the Americans as “the enemy” clearly shows us that his allegiances lie elsewhere, as this accusation means that he foregoes any precautions about who might be a Thing, and simply tries to pit his fellow Scandinavians against them in an Us versus Them scenario.

Again, in this scene, the camera is noticeably shaky, and again it happens in a scene where doubt is being cast in every direction. Nothing comes of it, as the tension is broken by the Americans breaking into the building, but it is clearly a technique used to emulate the rising tension and uneasiness present in the narrative. These scenes use cognitive affect, since the audience have to decipher the clues themselves, as well as speculate which of the remaining characters might be Things. The score and the shaking camera also plays off this, again since no concrete reveal is made just yet. The shaking cam gives us a hint that someone or something is not quite right, and Colin is made scapegoat by the sudden swell of the score as he was checked. As we later learn, this notion was once again a piece of misdirection.

As we learned earlier in the film, Halvorson is almost solitarily concerned with the scientific importance of them having found an alien organism. He shows little regard or remorse for Henrik’s death early in the film, and this sentiment does not seem to leave him even as the Thing starts rampaging across their camp. Kate’s test is not 100% conclusive, but it does shave off about half of the potential threats. Halvorson, concerned as he is with conserving a specimen of the Thing, realises that this outing of potential Things reduces his chances of getting such a specimen. He is certainly smart enough to realise that this plan is as good as any they can have at that moment. Since Halvorson wants a specimen, he actually wants to create chaos, even at the expense of the lives of his fellow humans.

In certain ways, he is quite alike Carrington from the 1951 film, except for the fact that Halvorson's motivations are ultimately more selfish. Halvorson wants recognition, as we can surmise by his hesitation to bringing in people from the outside, who will potentially take "what they have found" from them. Carrington was not this selfish, he simply believed it was wrong to kill the Thing because it had no ill intentions, and that humanity could learn a lot from it.

#### **Ex 6: Full-scale Attack - 1:10:14 - 1:14:48**

After an altercation, Edvard has been knocked out, and is carried by Jonas and Colin. As they go to put him on the couch, the arm of his that is slung over Jonas' shoulder falls off, becomes a creature of its own, and attacks him. He struggles with it, and it eventually latches onto his face, Edvard's body begins to shake violently, and a tentacle bursts out of his chest, flailing around the room wildly. Adam tries to escape, but he is tripped by it, and it pierces his abdomen shortly thereafter. Jameson tries to shoot it, but the tentacle punches a hole in his chest too. Edvard's other arm scuttles off, and the main body of Edvard sprouts a new set of arms and legs, goes over to Adam, and starts to melt onto his body, creating an entirely new monstrosity. Kate sets fire to Jonas, whose face is now horrifically disfigured by the Thing attached to him. Jameson succumbs to his wound, and Kate burns his body as well.

We are finally treated to some clear answers about who is the Thing. As Edvard's arm comes off, the score sets in, but does not reflect the sudden change in narrative intensity. We hear the Edvard-Thing roar horrifically, perhaps one of the most convincing and terrifying we get to hear throughout the film. The scene begins quite calmly, but as the action begins to unfold, the camera becomes a lot more active, shaking, as the creature reveals itself and attacks. This scene also shows us the voracity of the Thing in this film, as it suddenly decides to attack Jonas and the others, and escaping in the confusion. Again, the Thing is clever and highly capable, but does prefer to hide and assimilate its prey in peace.

#### **Ex 7: The fate of Kate – 1:31:16 – 1:35:05**

After having been inside the spacecraft of the Thing and killing it off, Kate and Carter make it back outside the ice-cavern. They take a rest, and plan to go to a Russian station, which is around 50 miles away. A soft and uplifting score is faintly heard, and slowly gains

volume, cognitively, this signals to the audience that any and all threats have been dealt with. It sets up an expectation, which is subverted only a handful of seconds later, when Kate seemingly notices something about Carter as they are getting into the Snowcat. She makes the excuse that she is going to put the flamethrower in the back, but instead she puts it on. Returning to the door of the Snowcat, she says “You know how I knew you were human when you showed up back at base?” At this, the score changed mood, turning more melancholy and sombre. She then reveals that his earring gave him away, seeing as how the Thing cannot replicate inorganic matter. Carter reaches for his right ear, which prompts an almost saddened reaction from Kate, who says “it was your other ear”. She then readies the flamethrower and points it at Carter, who starts protesting, telling her to stop. Kate’s expression goes from sad to determined, and Carter’s scream of “NO!” does not deter her from sending a blast of fire into the cockpit of the Snowcat. Carter goes up in flames, and we hear not only his voice screaming in pain, but also the distinct roar of something decidedly not human. It is clear that Kate’s suspicions were justified, and she gets into the other Snowcat and stares into the dark night. During this scene, the camera starts off with a little shaky, but nowhere near as noticeable as in previous instances. Only when the suspicions starts forming in Kate’s mind do they become more apparent, and again this is a somatic signal, which for once is not a misdirection, as it is made clear that Carter *was* a Thing

Kate’s fate is left uncertain, but there is no immediate threat that suggests that she could not eventually find her way to the Russian base. It should be noted that the film’s writer, Eric Heisserer, has stated in an interview that his original draft had Kate’s ultimate fate very clearly described. He explains how Kate and Carter followed Halvorson to the ship in a Snowcat, but Halvorson is on foot. They use most of their fuel getting to the ship, and decide to siphon the remaining fuel from the Snowcat to the flamethrower, since they are determined to kill off the Thing. Afterwards, Kate kills Carter using the remaining fuel and the Snowcat at once, leaving her no possible way of escaping. Faced with this, she starts crying and walks off into the darkness (Heisserer, qtd. in Dickson).

This is not the ending we got in the film, because as Heisserer said; “(...) what I gave them doesn’t help in terms of growing a franchise” (qtd. in Dickson). According to Dickson, the climate amongst the film studios today does not really cater to the kinds of film that *The Thing* from 1982 is, where the story is less focused on action and the spectacular. Instead, the types of horror films we get is often remakes of older films, much like this film was originally supposed to be, had it not been for the people making the film having too much

respect for Carpenter's original *The Thing*, comparing it to painting a "mustache on the Mona Lisa" (Collura).

Compared to the 1982 film's ending, this one leaves very little to the audience's imagination. The end credits display Lars and Matias chasing the remaining Thing, disguised as a dog, to the American outpost, as we see in the intro of the 1982 film. Provided the audience has seen that film, there is no jeopardy involved in whether or not the Thing survives. The film does leave Kate's ending open, but whatever happens to her, she is safe from the Thing, and it is extremely unlikely that she herself is a Thing, since it would make no sense for her to kill both Halvorson and Carter if they were all Things.

## **The Rings**

Here, we examine how spatial and cultural influences affect the same narrative, namely in the context of Japanese and American cinema and how this affects the viewer.

The Japanese rendition *Ringu* (1998) and the American *The Ring* (2002) follow largely the same story arc. Both are based on or inspired by the novel *Ring* (1991) by Koji Suzuki; both are centred around a cursed VHS tape displaying seemingly random, yet unsettling, images in quick succession, that shortens the viewer's life span to 7 days; both feature a female journalist as the lead character, who has to uncover the mystery of the tape before time runs out for herself and her child; both have a well-dwelling ghost of a girl as the culprit. This chapter explores the temporal, as well as the technical, differences between the two films, and how these differences affect the horror experience.

While there are many similarities between *The Ringu* and *The Ring*, what is interesting is the way they differ from each other, specifically, how these differences carry elements from the nationalities and cultures they come from, namely Japan and America. The original Japanese *Ringu* is rather subtle in everything from storytelling, to visuals and score, where the American *The Ring* is everything but, as it utilises the startle effect, CGI technology, and a linear narrative, which will be elaborated on in this chapter. Starting with an account of Japanese cinema tradition and moving on to American, we analyse both films in relation to affect, and conclude on our findings, before delving into the third case study of horror games.

*The Ring* made \$250 million in box office and signifies the beginning of what is known as J-horror, which is essentially American remakes of Japanese horror films, which, apart from the aforementioned *The Ring*, includes *Ju-On* (2002) becoming *The Grudge* (2004); *Kairo* (2001) becoming *Pulse* (2001); *Honogurai Mizu no soko kara* (2002) becoming *Dark Water* (2002) (Thompson). They have the personal hauntings of vengeful ghosts in common, as well as treacherous technology and innovative sound design. However, the hype of J-horror was short-lived, already on decline by 2005, when torture porn, or the mutilation film, took its place, beginning with *Saw* (2004), soon followed by *Hostel* (2005), and by 2007, torture porn and found footage was the most popular subgenres in horror – meanwhile, the Japanese audience remains captivated by the *Kaidan* films, and recently even made *Sadako vs. Kayoko* (2017), a hybrid between two popular J-horror films, namely *Ringu* and *Ju-On*, pitting their respective ghost children against each other (*ibid*). We will preface our analysis with a short summary of *Ringu* and *The Ring* to create a basis for the parallels between cultural phenomena and the cinematography of the films.

*Ringu* features the journalist Reiko Asakawa, played by Nanako Matsushima, who investigates the death of her niece Tomoko, after she finds out Tomoko and three of her friends died on the same night, at the same time, with their faces distorted in fear, precisely one week after watching an ominous video tape. Reiko enlists the help of her clairvoyant ex-husband, Ryuji Takayama, played by Hiroyuki Sanada, to help her solve the mystery, after their son Yoichi inadvertently watches the tape. In a race against the clock, Reiko and Ryuji follow the clues to Izu Oshima Island and discovers the tape's connections to the psychic woman, Shizuko Yamamura, who was accused of being a fraud when she predicted a volcanic eruption 30 years earlier and eventually killed herself jumping into a volcano. Ryuji learns that Shizuko's daughter Sadako psionically created the tape as her revenge. Sadako was more powerful and sinister than her mother, and consequently even more of a pariah, eventually murdered by her father and thrown into a well. At the very last second, Reiko and Ryuji finds Sadako's tomb and set her free.

In *The Ring*, we follow the reporter Rachel Keller, played by Naomi Watts, who is investigating her niece Katie's death on her sister's request. Rachel discovers that three of Katie's friends died in bizarre ways simultaneously with Katie, and she catches word of a mysterious video that is thought to be the catalyst. Rachel goes to the cabin where Katie and her friends first encountered the tape containing what appears to be unrelated, disturbing

images. She makes a copy for her video analyst ex-boyfriend, Noah Clay, and asks him to help her solve the puzzle. Their son Aidan, who is spiritually inclined, gets up one night and watches the tape. Rachel experience strange occurrences after watching, such as nightmares and nose bleeds, and she manages to follow the clues to Moesko Island, where she uncovers how Anna Morgan, who raised horses, adopted a baby, Samara, and soon after started experiencing visions. Samara had the ability to etch images into her surroundings and in people's minds, which she used to torment people and animals, eventually causing Anna to throw herself off a cliff. Rachel and Noah follow the clues to Samara's watery grave and set her free.

### **Japanese Tradition and American Convention**

Film Scholar Valerie Wee, argues that the two *Ring* films serve as “‘road maps’ to the underlying attitudes and values that structure their respective cultures’ evolving treatment of horror and the supernatural”, and she points out how the fragmented images in the cursed videos differ from each other, reflecting the complex processes to consider when doing a “cross-cultural adaptation that involves commitments to absorbing and retaining textual and aesthetic elements from the original text, while upholding culturally distinct aesthetics and perspectives” (Wee, p. 42).

The vengeful female ghost called ‘yurei’ is a popular culprit in some strains of Japanese cinema, however, cinema itself is the youngest of three art forms, namely folklore, classical art forms including *nó* and kabuki theatre and cinema, which means that the latter is more or less directly influenced by the already established art forms. The Japanese Kaidan, or supernatural ghost story, often feature “innocent women who are victimized and brutally murdered by men” after which their spirits return to “wreak vengeance on their murderers, and in some instances, on society as a whole”, as is the case here (Wee, p. 44).

*Ringu* draws specifically on three famous ghost stories, namely ‘Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan (Ghost story of Yotsuya)’ in which Iemon murders his wife Oiwa and she returns to haunt him, driving him to kill his new wife and father-in-law, and eventually is killed by Oiwa, after which she finds peace; ‘Bancho Sarayashiki (The Story of Okiku)’, in which the maid Okiku is murdered and thrown down a well by her samurai master, subsequently haunting him and driving him mad; and ‘Kuroneko (Black Cat)’, in which a woman and her

daughter-in-law are raped and murdered by a samurai, causing them to return as demon cats, killing every samurai in their paths (Wee (2011), p. 153).

Narrative is a bit more loosely considered in Japanese aesthetic tradition, as they favour ellipses and subtlety, which is a prominent feature in *Ringu*, in which narrative coherence give way, and emphasis is placed on “the emotion of fear and a mood of anxiety/insecurity founded on ignorance and the inscrutability of the supernatural [which] reflects the Japanese aesthetic commitment to exploring ideas and possibilities that extend beyond what is known” (Wee, p. 47). Mimesis is a Japanese concept which revolves around the symbolic representation and suggestion of what’s inside, rather than a realistic rendition of the exterior (Wee, p. 47). In accordance with Reyes’ understanding of affect, this ambiguity lends itself to a cognitive affect, as it requires knowledge of the story and perhaps Japanese culture in general to have a real impact.

The cursed video has clear references to popular Japanese ghost stories, a link that is further emphasised as the woman combing her long, un-bound, black hair displays as a yurei, and the similarity between Sadako’s death being thrown into a well and Okiku’s demise in the well-known ‘Bancho Sarayashiki (The story of Okiku)’. This intertextuality goes beyond the film’s often ambiguous narrative, an ambiguity that is also reflected in other parts of the video as well as the larger narrative, for example when it is indicated that Sadako might have a supernatural origin (Wee, p. 48). Furthermore, the seven-day delay between watching the tape and death is never explained, and neither is the origin of the tape or its actual connection to Sadako. This ambiguity plays a big part in *Ringu*, and is a deliberate choice that can be “related to the Japanese Buddhism-derived aesthetic concept mujō”, meaning leaving things unfinished (Wee, 48). This technique then encourages the viewer to complete the images “according to their own subjective aesthetic preferences” (ibid). The concept is also used within the film as a lot of contrasting spaces are presented as a whole, which will be elaborated on in the coming section. Duality is very prominent in Buddhism, and this idea appears many times throughout the film, mainly through opposites, such as “the combination of light and dark in a single image, or the positioning of a complex, three-dimensional image against a flat, empty space [reflecting] the Japanese aesthetic tradition that values balance above all else’ (Wee, 49). In Western horror, plot points and villains tend to be justified and explained to the point where we understand them and Japanese horror leaves a lot to the imagination, which lets it haunt our minds long after the film is over, leaving the viewer to

fill in the blanks with their own fears for a personal experience. J-horror often show long, uncomfortable scenes, where nothing really happens, usually accompanied by long silences, except when the score is used to build anticipation and mood. Contrarily, American cinema tends to rationalise occurrences and make the narrative very clear and coherent, for instance, when Reiko picks up the phone after watching the cursed tape, she hears the sound from the video, but when Rachel picks up, a hoarse voice croaks “7 days” into the receiver. In accordance with the preference for realism, Hollywood is committed to the goal-oriented protagonist and the clear, rational “cause-and-effect progression culminating in neat narrative closure” (Wee, p. 53). Furthermore, there is a constant timer in *The Ring* letting us know, not only which day it is, but how long is left before time runs out and the curse descends, whereas *Ringu* it only notifies us of the day, leaving the viewer in the dark in terms of progression. Both of these methods help build suspense, but they are designed for very different audiences.

### **Soundscapes**

The contents of the cursed tape differ between the two films, yet both play on audio and visuals to elicit somatic responses. Since the tapes are silent, the sound design plays a significant role in how they affect the viewer. There are two main ways sound is used to elicit somatic responses in horror, either by building atmosphere or tension, or by being sudden and abrupt, startling the viewer (Renée, n.p.). Furthermore, the brain reacts differently to seeing something scary and hearing it, as sound information travels about a million times faster than sight, and therefore affects the reflexes quicker. This mechanism is an evolutionary primal defence against predators, designed to help us survive facing a lion, for instance, which is why animal sounds – and nonlinear sounds in general – are often employed, although in a distorted and manipulated way, in horror (Fratzolas, n.p.).

Sound engineer Tasos Fratzolas points out in his TED talk “The Beautiful Lies of Sound Design”, how all sound, even the kind that seems authentic, is actually fake and added in post-production. For example, frying bacon sounds convincingly like rain; breaking celery or frozen lettuce pass for bones being broken; stabbing a knife into cabbage sounds like a punch; releasing crunched Saran wrap sounds like inhaling a cigarette (Fratzolas, n.p.). Using these sounds are more real to the viewer’s perception than recording the actual sounds

of these scenarios, and this creates an illusion of immersion, in which the sound successfully “[lives] in the world of the story” (Fratzolas, n.p.). Furthermore, unnoticeable sounds can affect the viewer somatically and make them feel unsafe, which is another element often used in horror films, for instance, when we see a person walking alone on an abandoned street, it builds anticipation that something is about to happen.

Composers often seek to use recognisable sounds in unnatural contexts, which unsettles by seeming off, and thereby encourages a sense of fear in the listener (Zarrelli, n.p.). Infrasound is particularly unsettling, as it can be felt, but not heard, and it exists at 19Hz and below, where the human ear can only hear from 20Hz. Infrasound occur naturally, during earthquakes, avalanches, storms, and other natural phenomena, which are inherently dangerous to humans, so despite the inability to physically hear the infrasound, it can terrify us to our core (Zarrelli, n.p.). Director Gaspar Noe used a sound registered at 27Hz in *Irreversible*, his avant-garde thriller turned horror due to the “intense violence, raw camera angles and disturbing imagery”, as the characters represent and indulge the worst of human behaviour (Zarrelli, n.p.). This frequency consists of a “queasy range of pulsing textures” and is designed to “overwhelm the senses and inhibit other sensory input”, which serves to induce anxiety in the viewer”; the auditory equivalent to a victim being blindfolded, having their senses stolen (Wilson, p. 38).

Other fear-inducing sounds that often occur in horror are screaming, especially women screaming, and deep rumbling noises or high-pitched squeals, which serve to put the brain in a state of fight or flight (Zarrelli, n.p.), and of course, silence. Silence fills us with dread because there is no information to analyse, and it is unnatural, as there is always sound around us, at the very least the blood rushing through our skulls. Silence is an illusion used to convey that there is no dialogue, but silence does not actually exist, even in film, where sound designers use ambience to give off the sense of silence, as ambience is unique to location and can give off clues whether the character is in an urban or industrial setting, for instance (Fratzolas, n.p.).

Often the sound design will include a specific sound dedicated to indicating the monster or villain approaching, such as the alien’s clicking noise in *Alien* (1979) or Kyoko’s death rattle in *The Grudge*. These sounds often appear off-screen, so-called acousmatic sounds, which helps create tension, as the source of the sound is not apparent (Fratzolas). The nature of the background noise is important, as it can place us geographically,

atmospherically, as well as tell us about the physicality of the characters and determine their distance to the dangerous element (RocketJump Film School).

### **The Japanese Ring**

Getting back to the cursed tape, in *Ringu*, the tape is 58 seconds long, featuring only black and white images and clips, and starts with a long, silent shot of clouds sliding over night's sky, framed in a circle in the middle of the screen, leaving everything around it in darkness. It is unclear whether we are looking out of something or into something. Next, an Asian woman is combing her hair inside a mirror or frame on the left side of the image, leaving the right side empty. The mirror disappears for a millisecond, during which it is replaced with the same type of mirror frame on the right side, containing a shadow figure in a white dress, immediately cutting back to the woman, who is now looking in the direction of the figure, as if she is seeing it. The figure is merely a flash, but definitely resembles a Kaidan girl, who is seen in a full shot, wearing a white dress/tunic, similar to a burial shroud, with her face obscured by her long black hair. There is an underlying sound similar to a rusty swing grinding on its frame, making the viewer feel uneasy, as industrial sounds often have negative connotations. A thick shadow lays diagonally over the top edge of the right side, similar to if it was a page in a book, and the next shot is of an actual page, where the letters or words are gyrating around on it. It seems that the same millisecond is running on a loop for a few seconds, before it cuts to a full shot of people crawling on the ground, accompanied by a loud humming noise, similar to what traffic would sound like from under water. At this point, the disjointed sounds and seemingly random images make for a creepy atmosphere, creating cognitive affect in that it is hard to figure out what is going on and how the images are related, while they are increasingly unsettling in nature.

Next, the tape cuts to a man standing in the left side of the screen, in front of the ocean, which takes up the whole frame. The man is pointing to the left, off screen, and similar to the letters, it seems that the same short clip is playing on a loop, while the rusty, grungy sound intensifies, building suspension and anticipation in the viewer. Furthermore, the clip has a longer duration than the previous, which indicates it is important. The sound gives way to a deafening silence, as an extreme close-up of an eye fills the screen. The eye blinks rapidly, before a wide shot of a desolate forest with a well takes its place, staying on

the screen long enough that you begin to wonder if there is something you are supposed to see, which is unsettling, and lastly it cuts to static, leaving the viewer to try and find coherence and meaning in what they just witnessed. Immediately after the tape finishes playing, the phone rings, its sound cutting violently through the silence, causing the character to jump, and as a result, the viewer follows suit, as they are affected somatically. The unsettling nature of the images, along with the eerie score shifting between loud noise and silence also have a somatic effect on the viewer.

In *Ringu*, just like light and dark, and filled and empty spaces, the natural and the supernatural worlds coexist “reflecting the Japanese belief in the existence of the occult, spirit world, and the acceptance that spirits cross the permeable boundary separating the spiritual and physical realms, a view embraced by dominant Japanese religions, including Buddhism and Shinto” (Wee, p. 50).

This attempt to see past the physical world is represented in especially through one of the images in the video, namely the man that seems to be looking over the ocean with a towel covering his head. This image is significant because it has absolutely no connection to what we learn of Sadako’s past, its ambiguity further enhanced as the image later in the film transcends its pixel prison and enters the material world, in an effort to help Reiko realise how she can save her son, Yoichi. The way it stands out and does not fit in anywhere in the story is unsettling. However, its composition and aesthetics are similar to Nihonga, a “particular form of traditional Japanese prints and paintings where space is deliberately flattened out”, in that the sea appears to be closer to the camera than the man in the towel, there is no horizon, and the perspective of both the man and the sea should be different, was it actually a real scene (Wee, p. 50). These incoherent visual aspects make the image appear flat and artificial, despite the attempt at depth, and essentially suggests that the figure cannot exist in the reality of the image even though he clearly does, which again “reflects the Japanese openness to, and acceptance of, the irrational, the impossible, and the incoherent alongside the logical, the rational, and coherent, which is a distinctly Buddhist view” (ibid).

Supernatural forces are not considered inherently good or evil, but in line with the Buddhist view, has the potential for both, which is also depicted in several earlier Japanese films concerning the supernatural. Spirit, ghosts, and demons can coexist with humans without harming anyone, usually, until they are wronged. Here, *Ringu* deviates slightly as it implies that Sadako, allegedly, had evil tendencies even before she was murdered and had a

reason for revenge. She used her abilities to kill, in contrast to her mother, who used her psychic abilities to save lives when she predicted a natural disaster that was sure to claim several. This depiction of Sadako as inherently ill-natured may be a reference to modern Hollywood horror tradition, in which the paranormal is generally considered only evil, while it is also a way to keep the duality and balance between good and evil in Japanese tradition. This is also seen when Sadako's ghost penetrates the barrier of the digital world in the video to kill Ryuji, while the man in the towel emerges from the film to help Reiko save her son (Wee, 51).

This dualistic compulsion reaches the larger narrative as well, contrasting “the existence and actions of a destructive and murderous father, Ikuma” and the “existence and actions of protective fathers, including Ryuji and Reiko's own father” (Wee, p. 51). Furthermore, Sadako using modern media to send her message and the relation to the media being the single event that culminated in Sadako's murder, as she killed the reporter that harassed her mother at a press conference.

While the film clearly has a lot of ties to long-standing Japanese aesthetic and cultural traditions, there are also elements of a modern avant-garde concept, in which Japanese cinema borrow and include trends from other countries, intertwining them with their own traditional ideas, resulting in a hybrid of sorts. One such element is the opening scene, in which Tomoko and her friend discuss a cursed video tape, moments before Tomoko dies mysteriously, which is a common trope in the American teen slasher film. Reiko depicted as “the sole (female) investigator who recognizes a threat”, as well as her surviving the ordeal, “resonates with the slasher film's Final Girl, even as the failure to contain and neutralise Sadako's rage echoes on the continuing survival of the evil force or monster of many post-1960s American horror films” (Wee, 52). The final girl is a term coined by Carol Clover in her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), which refers to the stereotypically innocent, generic female character, who then survives the mayhem, often as the only one, and by someone else's sacrifice or a lucky strike. According to Clover, the final girl is “the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and her own peril (...) She alone looks death in the face, but she also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him (ending B)” (Clover, p. 35).

Another scene depicting “the complex negotiations between traditional Japanese horror and Western influences” is when Sadako steps out of the digital world to exact revenge in the physical one. At this point, Reiko and Ryuji have already found Sadako’s corpse and set her free, and seemingly broken the curse, which makes her appearance and the fact that she breaks the boundary between the real and the artificial digital world scary in its own right, as the scene appears realistic and in real-time. Sadako becomes abjection, transcending borders and eliciting fearful disgust in both Ryuji and the viewer. The lack of cuts and background noise makes the scene seem both mundane and realistic, and therefore somatically affective and terrifying – this could be anyone’s living room, perhaps even the viewer’s.

### **The American Ring**

The tape in *The Ring* is significantly different from the one in *Ringu*, both in duration, with 1.26 min., and content.

First, we see the shape of a ring, over the score of a low-frequency white noise, screechy sound. Then the shot shifts to white noise, before the screen is taken over by an extreme close-up of water tinted dark red. The foamy red water creates connotations to blood and a lot of it, which is disturbing because there is no context to this seemingly vast ocean of blood. Next, we see a wide shot of a lone chair sitting in the middle of an empty room, the chair glitching briefly before cutting to an extreme close-up of a comb going through black hair, which initially seems unsettling due to the ambiguity of what it is. However, the next shot of a white woman, slightly smiling, and combing her dark hair in a mirror, helps make the connection to the comb. The mirror is distinctly placed in the right side of the screen, leaving the left eerily empty. She combs for a few seconds before a screechy sound accompanies a momentary cross cut to the same mirror, now on the opposite side of the screen, leaving the right side empty. This time the woman is switched out with a Kaidan-esque girl who appears to be floating and fades into darkness, and there is a cut back to the woman on the right, now looking in to the left as if she is seeing the girl. These shots are seen in quick succession, which causes uncertainty on whether the girl was there at all. This crosscutting suggests a connection between the girl and the woman and that they are

occupying a shared space. During this scene, the only thing that changes is the mirror flipping and changing contents, accompanied by a child humming a melody in the distance.

Next, we see a male figure in the window of a house, which further suggests that the girl and the woman live in that house, probably with the man. The view is angled so we seem to be standing on the ground, looking up at the second-story window, point of view from a child's perspective. The man is standing so far to the left in the window, which he almost appears to be peeking out. Coupled with the mirror scene, we are led to think that the girl is somewhat distanced from the man and the house, standing outside and looking in.

We see a wide shot of a stormy cliff and an ominous fly crawling across the shot as if over a static image. The fly introduces an abject element in that it should not be able to crawl over the shot while it is being filmed, which is unsettling. The next shot is a close-up of a mouth with a tentacle-like object coming out of it, or going into it, while we hear a loud sound similar to liquid being poured. It is soon replaced by a loud, high-pitched screechy sound, along with indiscernible shapes, that appear to be organic and wet, which adds to the alien feel, before cutting to the same ring we saw in the beginning, only now it takes the shape of a half moon, making it appear like we are looking out of the well as it is opening. We see a burning tree, and immediately cut to a close-up of a finger pressing down onto a nail, penetrating the finger and causing to lift the nail off, again with the high-pitched screech, causing rising dread in the viewer. The visual of the finger being mutilated is enough to create a somatic response, but the screech is causing further disturbance. The chilling, screech continues loudly over a full screen of writhing maggot, and a full screen of some other writhing organic mass for a rather long duration, and does not end there. Cut to an asymmetrical close-up point of view shot of a chair and a table, as if the viewer is sitting diagonally across from the empty chair. On the table is a glass of water, and as the chair is pulled out by no apparent source, a giant centipede comes skittering out from under the table and off in the direction behind the chair. The clinical, empty room with the chair, ties into the previous chair we saw.

Next is a full shot of what appears to be a goat limping behind a barn door, and then an extreme close-up of a seemingly terrified horse eye, still accompanied by the screech, causing associations with animal cruelty, causing fearful disgust in the viewer. The loud screech persists over the next several scenes. On to a close-up of a box containing seven twitching, severed fingers. Cut back to the burning tree, this time for a longer duration, then

to the indiscernible wet organics, and quickly on to the woman from the mirror, the screech stops. This time we see her sitting in front of it from the back, as if looking over her shoulder. She turns and looks at us, breaking the fourth wall, and bringing us into a spectator role. Next, a shot of the house again, similar angle and view, but this time the window is empty. Seeing the window again, different from last time, makes us wonder what the connection is to the story. Who is the man, and why is he now gone? Next, a wide shot of the chair from the beginning, now floating upside down and spinning. We see a wide shot of a tall ladder leaning against a wall in the middle of the image, casting its shadow almost symmetrically, but slightly off. Cut to a full shot of dead horses laying spread across the shore, with the waves splashing on them. Then back to the cliff, this time with the woman standing on the edge, seen from behind, as if we are there watching her. The view zooms in, as if taking a few steps towards her, as she throws herself off the cliff. As she falls, we see the ladder from a similar view falling, and the well closing again. The ladder landing on the ground, making us connect the image with the woman dying. Next, a wide shot of a misty, barren forest scene, with a well in the middle. Long shot. From the fourth wall break and over the spinning chair, the ladder, the dead horses, the fall and the forest, all we hear are crickets, emphasising the emptiness. The silence is abruptly broken by white noise, indicating the video is over.

These last several images are shown in quick succession, and the return to previously seen elements helps tell a story, albeit a disjointed one. Seeing the same images in different context lets the viewer try to fill in the blanks themselves. The cross cutting increases tension and makes the story more dramatic, leading us to believe something awful has happened to the people and animals in the video, potentially by paranormal interference. Aside from the fragmented, disruptive nature of the images, there are a number of discrepancies that cross the border to the unnatural and abject. The writing, wet, organic masses induce a somatic response, as it bears connotations to the bleeding body and entrails. The mirror is viewed straight on, which would make the camera visible, but it is not, thus stripping the mirror of its normal reflective qualities. Furthermore, we see the woman inside the mirror, rather than in front of it, until later when she is seen sitting from behind and turns to look at the viewer. The girl on the other hand, appears as if in a painting more than a mirror. The fly appears out of nowhere and crawls over the image. Various images are composed asymmetrically or slightly off, which creates an atmosphere of unease.

Where *Ringu* prides itself on being subtle and ambiguous, *The Ring* kicks up the dramatic flair, both in visual representation and sound design. Even in the video, there are several shots meant to disgust us, such as the mutilated finger, the tentacle going down someone's throat, the severed, wiggling fingers, all abject and affective. They create somatic pathways and make us feel it in our own corresponding limbs, while we wince and recoil in horror at the thought of having our own digits severed. The loud, high-pitched screech overlaying most of the video is deeply unsettling, and serves to blind our hearing, making the silence that much more tense in contrast. The fly plays an important part as it transcends the screen before Samara even does. While Rachel and Noah are looking closely at each frame of the video, Rachel manages to pick the fly off the screen, and as she is pondering the peculiarity in front of her, she gets a nosebleed, which is an often-employed signifier of paranormal interference in American horror. As in *Ringu*, elements from the video start to appear in reality, such as the ladder and the burning tree, however, the way the two films handle these appearances are quite different. *The Ring* is obvious in showing us the connection to the tape, by reminding us of the corresponding scene, as Rachel and Noah piece together Samara's story. *Ringu* leaves it unresolved whether we actually saw a given element in the video, which makes the viewer question their memory.

The difference in the available technology during the making of both films sets them apart visually as well as aurally. *Ringu* tends to keep to an ambient diegetic score throughout, and due to the subtle nature of the narrative, being based on the kaidan traditions, the jump scares are kept at a minimum. Furthermore, there is hardly any viscera or gore, except at the very end where Reiko holds Sadako's corpse in the well, as it starts to disintegrate and the skin melts away from the skeleton. It sounds visually disturbing, but the accompanying soft, melodic score, creates an atmosphere of tragedy, and achieves an emotional connection and empathy with Sadako's untimely demise. Contrarily, true to the conventions of the American slasher horror film, *The Ring* is quite CGI driven, and tend to go for ominous background noise to build tension and suspense, and more than once, to startle and shock the viewer. There is little redemption offered to Samara, as she wreaks havoc on the world as a relentless force of evil. Furthermore, there are more brutal scenes in *The Ring*, such as the iconic contorted scream face of the victims and Samara herself. Samara is enhanced with CGI, glitching as a hologram, and when we get to see her face, it is grey and wrinkled, resembling an orc. Fully rendering and showing the face takes away some of the Kaidan-esque mystery and thereby some of the terror, not to mention that it is overdone to the point where she

barely looks human. That is not to say that the way she comes at Noah, escaping the screen, dirty and wet, leaving a trail of water in his studio as he scrambles to get away, is ineffective or boring. Contrarily, the scene is rather severe, as we see Samara walk out of the TV, determined and unstoppable, as Noah initially stares frozen, before he panics and cuts himself, as Samara stomps towards him, a glitching nightmare, relentless and out for blood - literally. In stark contrast to *Ringu*'s low key, realistic, no-cut shot, *The Ring* makes a spectacle of Noah's demise. Cross cutting lets the viewer be both victim and villain as the distance between the two decreases. Noah's blood trail, and the way his body is mutilated by the glass, is the most somatically affective part of the scene, even more so, because blood is very sparse in the film in general, and in *Ringu*, there is none at all.

*Ringu* is content with showing the victim being startled, and their face freeze as their death is merely implied. When Tomiko dies, she feels the hairs on the back of her neck stand up, indicating there is a presence with her, and slowly, suspensefully turn around, sees something, and gets scared - the image freezes and switches to negative colours. Katie approaches her room, the doorknob is dripping water, and she grabs it, turns the knob, pushes the door open and sees Samara rising from the well on her TV. Camera cross cuts and she screams the contorted death scream. Before Rachel wakes up to find Aiden watching the tape, she has a vivid nightmare of Samara grabbing her arm and leaving real life marks and before Reiko wakes up to find Yoichi watching, a subtle voice in the room is speaking to her. The former seeks to be excessively violent and visceral. In the Japanese version, there is a preference for indicating what happens, without really showing anything, whereas the American version makes sure to show us every gory detail, leaving little to the imagination. The films also have interestingly different aesthetic expressions, as *Ringu* is generally cast in soft, beige, warm tones, and *The Ring* has an eerie, harsh, cold blue tint over most of the film, both fitting for their version of the story, respectively.

Both the Japanese and the American tape manages to establish an impending threat, which is the most important emotional state in the horror experience, and dread if one of the most significant emotions, which "premised on the possibility of external harm" seeks to make the body of the viewer one with that of the victim, either by using point of view shots, indirectly, through use of music and mood, or directly through the startle effect (Reyes, p. 195).

## Gender Dynamics

Despite Reyes' overt aversion to the gender discussion, we find the gender dynamics of the films relevant in terms of cultural and affective influence. Building on feminist scholars Clover, Creed and Kristeva, we analyse how gender plays a part in the narrative as well as in the way the film's affect the viewer.

Viewers who are not familiar with Japanese culture and Kabuki drama, may conclude that Sadako is "the personification of evil, a deadly, inexorable, female force intent on haunting and destroying innocent individuals out of a desire for revenge", which may be too simplistic when considered in relation to the Japanese kaidan and a historical and contemporary context of Japanese culture and literature (Wee (2011), p. 153). Like the women in these stories returning to avenge their untimely demise, Sadako, who is brutally murdered by her father following an ambiguous event, where she may or may not have killed someone, come back to haunt the living and require her story to be shared. It is an interesting metaphor for breaking the silence of domestic abuse. According to Japanese belief, men are entirely superior to women and children, but this means they have the responsibility to protect the ones beneath them. In these Kaidans, the women, otherwise adhering to their roles of being submissive and kept, are betrayed by the men who are supposed to protect them, and therefore justified in their rebellion against the patriarchal forces.

Sadako allegedly kills a male reporter who harasses her mother at a press conference meant to test her abilities, after her mother has already demonstrated her gift, and Ikuma, the father, does nothing to come to his wife's aid. It is indicated, not proved, that Sadako kills the reporter, but if she actually does, it can be perceived as an act of standing up for her mother, while her father, the man with the responsibility to do so, fails this task. Following the event, Ikuma bludgeons Sadako with an axe and throws her down a well, based on nothing but suspicion, and from this perspective, Sadako's revenge is not unprovoked; in fact, it is condoned and empowering for the female subservient character. As women in Japanese society has achieved more agency, joined the workforce, and increasingly defy or reject traditional roles of being subordinate wives and mothers, there is a heightened masculine anxiety, which is expressed through women becoming increasingly 'other' and demonic in cinema and fantasy literature, and particularly the horror film (Wee (2011), p. 155).

It is important to remember that Sadako only acted after her father, who is the authority figure, failed to do so. Furthermore, it is worth noting that “Shizuko and Sadako’s respective reactions to the press event showcases the disparity between the traditional, patriarchy-respecting female and rebellious one (Wee (2011), p. 156). While Shizuko stays quiet and submissive in response to the reporter’s criticism, Sadako seemingly retaliates against the oppressive patriarchal norms. Shizuko and Sadako represent two opposing constructions of femininity, namely *musume*, which refers to a woman who is dutiful and powerless, and *shōjo*, which refers to a woman who is free and self-serving (ibid).

Regardless of Sadako’s role in the tragic event, Ikuma’s choice to murder her, causes him to emerge as “a tyrannical force that is both judge and executioner” and consequently, “a murderer who has relinquished his social, familial and patriarchal responsibilities by exposing his wife to public humiliation and then killing his daughter”, which, according to the tradition of Japanese ghost stories, justifies Sadako’s subsequent haunting (Wee, (2011), p. 156). Sadako is continuously portrayed as both victim and villain, which furthers the interpretation that she is representative of an unconventional type of femininity and her refusal to be defined or contained, both metaphorically, in that we cannot establish her role, and physically, as she transcends the tape she haunts. Furthermore, unlike her predecessors, she cannot be neutralised easily.

Reiko and Shizuko represent interesting gender dynamics, as well. Reiko is the female adaptation of the male protagonist, Kazuyuki Asakawa, in the novel. Reiko is a divorced single mother with a job, which distinguishes her from “the traditionally idealized, domestic, Japanese woman and align her with the ‘problematic’ new generation of Japanese women whose rejection of traditional, patriarchal ideals is responsible for provoking contemporary Japanese masculine anxieties” (Wee (2011), p. 157). While Reiko seems to be the opposite of Shizuko, who is presented as demure and submissive, the way a Japanese woman should be, the general narrative undermines Reiko’s rebellious agency and independence, by leaving all the mystery-solving to Ryuji, leaving Reiko as the side-kick. Reiko frequently raises her voice to a high-pitched whine, while she begs Ryuji to move the investigation along, and Ryuji, in contrast, seems calm and level-headed. Even Reiko’s effort to appease Sadako’s bloodlust by laying her to rest fails, and Reiko escapes death by the efforts of others and a bit of luck, in true *Final Girl* fashion. However, it is worth noting, that while Shizuko appears a traditional female character, the indication that she may have conceived Sadako with a sea-

demon, gives her an unruly edge and makes her position more complicated in terms of the musume or shōjo categories.

Gender struggles in the American context is different from that of the Japanese; where the latter focuses on male anxieties due to the patriarchy crumbling in the face of more independent women, the American version focuses on the inherent link between the feminine and the monstrous, coding “the female as a malign force that is closely associated with the unnatural, the mysterious and the irrational, while equating the male with the benign, the rational and the logical” (Wee (2011), p. 158). The Japanese tradition tends to portray women as submissive until the men betray them, after which they are justified in their monstrousness, whereas the American tradition has a tendency to draw parallels between motherhood, femininity, monstrosity and death.

As discussed, *Ringu* seems to explore the consequences of a failing patriarchy, drawing a more varied image of the Sadako character as both victim and villain, but ultimately has a somewhat sympathetic view of her cause. However, *The Ring* makes sure to cast both Anna and Samara as “irrational, unnatural and destructive (female) forces”, with little redemption for either (Wee (2011), 159). Anna is infertile, pining after a child, and eventually adopts Samara, who seemingly torments her with visions of terrible things. Anna pays the price for motherhood, and in an attempt to undo her defiance of nature, she suffocates Samara, throws her down a well, and subsequently commits suicide. However, Samara did not die and thus was trapped in the well until she died. Richard Morgan, on the other hand, seems to have been unaffected by Samara’s abilities, and appears to be trapped between two females, his wife and his adoptive daughter. Richard is at a loss, and decides to send both mother and daughter to a psychiatric facility, “a patriarchal institution founded on reason, logic and science”, which reveals that Samara feels compelled to commit evil deeds, again, casting her as inherently monstrous (Wee (2011), 160). Richard remains a calm male figure, while the female forces are at war and end up destroying each other. Anna’s desperate desire to fulfil her role as a mother ends up consuming her family, leaving death and destruction in its wake. Richard lives the rest of his life bitter and resentful, albeit in peace from Samara due to his inexplicable immunity from her wicked influence, until the day Rachel seeks him out and reveals that Samara is still raging, causing him to commit suicide as well.

*The Ring* is committed to explain everything clearly in the narrative, right down to the seven-day interval between watching the video and dying, which is due to Samara having survived in the well for seven days; Samara using the digital media as a conduit for her revenge, which is because she had a television as her link to the outside world when her adoptive parents isolated her in their barn; Samara's ability to "transfer her thoughts and visions onto film/videotape" is explained on the tapes recovered from the psychiatric facility, which in turn explains the disjointed images on the cursed video. All things that are only alluded to or indicated in the Japanese *Ringu*, and serve to "highlight the narrative's adoption of, and adherence to, the rational, patriarchal mind (Wee (2011), p. 160). Samara becomes the image of all that is disruptive, evil, and irrational, and she is even more terrifying due to her power reaching beyond the grave. She cannot be neutralised or defeated, and as a consequence becomes an image of the abject, which is that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules", and thus "disturbs identity, system, order" (Wee (2011), p. 161). Samara intrudes on her mother's mind, where she "shatters [it] and dismantles Anna's maternal identity" (Wee (2011), p. 161). Samara cannot be reasoned with or contained, even in death.

Rachel initially seems like the opposite of Samara and Anna, protecting her child from harm instead of harming him. However, she is also the one who endangers herself, Aiden, and Noah by bringing the tape into her home, another portrayal of the irresponsible, "ambiguous and potentially dangerous female figure" (Wee (2011), p. 162). The ending establishes Rachel as a monstrous mother, in that she helps Aiden copy the tape to pass on to some unsuspecting victim who will be sacrificed in his place. Contrarily, Reiko "reinstates and acknowledges the power of the patriarch" as she asks her father, who is already old and running out of days, to sacrifice himself for her son (Wee (2011), p. 162). This distinction between the two films, suggests that "motherhood, whether in destroying or protecting the child, can be potentially amoral, destructive, and deadly" (Wee (2011), p. 162).. Both Reiko and Rachel are images of an unruly, independent woman, and both endanger their families, which suggests that their role in society is too overwhelming to also be good mothers. However, while *Ringu* emphasises the cause of evil being the rejection and defiance of social structures and norms, regardless of gender, *The Ring* presents the evil force as being inextricably linked to unruly femininity, threatening the rational patriarchal order.

Similarly, different youth cultures are represented in each film, namely through the scene with Reiko and Rachel, respectively, speaking to a group of their deceased nieces'

friends. In *Ringu*, Reiko overhears some students talking about the mysterious tape, all dressed in their formal school uniforms. The girls reluctantly tell Reiko what they know of the tape, seemingly due to the fact that she is older than they are, and requested something from them, which alludes to the Japanese focus on respect towards superiors. In *The Ring* on the other hand, Rachel approaches Katie's group of friends at the wake, and they make no effort talking to her, in fact, they are dismissive. They are absentmindedly smoking and speaking amongst themselves, when Rachel pulls out a smoke, and in an effort to level with them and gain their trust, she offers a story about her and a friend getting high in college, indicating that maybe that is what Katie and Becca were doing, but she is interrupted by a young guy telling her it is about the tape, which makes the girls fill her in of Katie's secret boyfriend. These two scenes are very similar, in that both Reiko and Rachel get information about the tape from their late niece's friends, however, the differences in the interactions are representative of general attitudes in Japanese and American society. Japan values tradition and social etiquette, whereas America is more focused on individuality and freedom, even between generations.

The roles of the fathers in both films are also interesting. Ryuji and Noah are both absent fathers in their son's lives, not greatly concerned with taking part in it. Ryuji, who is a university professor is ambitious to the point where he puts his work before his family, which, combined with Reiko's agency may have caused the marriage to end. Noah is a video analyst, not very ambitious and happy living a non-committed life. His own father was not around, and he indicates that Aiden was somewhat a mistake he and Rachel made when they were young. He is not a factor in Aiden's life beyond helping with the tape. Noah may be an image of the vicious cycle of broken fathers begetting broken sons, which is a common concept in Western societies.

## **Ringu**

### **Ex 1: Negative – 05:55 – 08:17**

Long shots and creative editing helps to set the mood of the film. Tomoko and Masami has just discussed the allegedly cursed tape and the boy Tomoko has been with when the ring of the phone cuts through the air. The sound is very loud and there is no background music, making the scene seem mundane and relatable, which induces a sense of anticipation

in the viewer. The camera traces the girls as they run down a spiralled staircase, and it appears as if the camera is watching them from the first floor. The next scene is so underexposed that we can hardly make anything out, except the shape of a door in a brown room. The camera still follows the girls and it nears the door as Masami pulls it open and runs out of the shot while Tomoko is right behind her calling her name. There is a sense of urgency, which contrasts the shot itself as it is one long dolly shot following the girls. The camera moves slightly, making it seem like the viewer is in the room with them. Tomoko stops outside the door, looking towards whatever is on the other side of the wall, making it seem as if we are watching from the hall. The way Tomoko pauses in front of the camera further builds the dread since anything could be lurking.

Next we see an over the shoulder shot from behind Tomoko while Masami is in profile view, facing the phone. Both girls are watching it intently as it rings again, and Masami reluctantly puts the receiver to her ear. After a few seconds, she starts laughing while handing the receiver to Tomoko, who slowly takes it. Soon after she is laughing too and the camera cuts to a full shot of the two girls from the opposite side as Tomoko collapses to the floor while talking on the phone. This shot is full of contrast, as we see the girls laughing after the false scare from before, while the shot is still underexposed and a third of the screen is covered by a black door, behind which anything could be lurking. This creates emotional response, as we expect there is to be a threat, which continues to build on our sense of dread. Masami slides down to sitting as well and the girls look at each other laughing as Tomoko reassures her mother everything is fine. After she hangs up she tells Masami that her parents will be late, and the girls laugh while they talk about how silly it was of them to be scared of the phone and Masami threatens to tell everyone at school. The scene is interesting because despite the girls laughing at their predicament, the atmosphere seems looming, the silence in the house suddenly sinister.

Masami leaves and Tomoko gets up and walks toward the kitchen, the camera follows her around as she grabs a glass and heads to the refrigerator. Next we see a close-up of Tomoko with her head behind the door, as loud cheering breaks the silence. Tomoko slowly peeks over the door with a startled expression and the camera cuts to an over the shoulder shot from behind her, putting the viewer in her shoes. The scene is underexposed, only lighting up the foreground where Tomoko stands, leaving us staring into uncertain darkness. Tomoko closes the door and slowly moves towards the festive sound of a ballgame, which

seems intrusive over the silence. The camera follows her from behind into the entrance to the living room until the TV comes into view, before it cuts to a worm view medium shot of Tomoko's wary expression, giving the impression the TV is watching her. The TV, which is the only light source in complete darkness as Tomoko walks down the steps and grabs the remote to turn it off. She walks back out and passes us, walking out of the frame as the camera cuts to an over the shoulder full shot of the kitchen as she walks into the frame and grabs a bottle on the counter, pouring herself a glass. While "facial expressions offer potent displays of emotions and to a large extent are universally understood"(Shimamura), context is important for the way we perceive emotions. Studies have shown that what precedes the expression will affect how it is understood by others, for instance a face that goes from smiling to neutral seems slightly grumpy, whereas a face going from angry to neutral seems to smile subtly (Shimamura). Furthermore, a neutral face prefaced by a picture of food will appear hungry, meaning viewer makes subconscious associations between the expression and the context, even when nothing indicates a connection. This could be an explanation for why we perceive Tomoko as scared or on edge, even though her face does not give much away.

Next we see a slightly low angle medium shot of her face, seemingly relaxed, but visibly tensing up as we hear an unnatural hissing sound like that of a live wire followed by the hum of a TV. The camera lingers on Tomoko as she tenses her shoulders before it cuts to a close-up from behind her, seemingly the POV of the antagonist breathing down her neck, and as she turns her head to face the noise, she gasps and the image turns to a negative black and white print, which stands in contrast to the colour shots, as well as making her look hollow and ghostly. Is it a very strong image, indicating her demise, and while the film has primed the viewer for a startle, it does not deliver, which means the feeling lingers. This scene creates a mild form of somatic empathy, making the viewer tense up like Tomoko, as they can easily relate to hearing noises while alone at night, and the long shots and false scares up to this point has left the viewer with a sense of dread.

## **Ex 2: Lucid Dreaming – 48:08 – 49:42**

Japanese culture places high esteem on the spiritual world and does not necessarily see it as a bad omen, which this scene is an example of. We see a slanted full shot of Reiko sleeping from above, the room underexposed and tinted blue which we have seen is a

common convention of Japanese horror cinema, connoting isolation, loneliness, as well as suggesting the presence of the supernatural” (Balmain, p. 174). The composition is strange, showing Reiko from torso to head in the bottom right corner and sliding doors in the opposite one. This is an example of a unique angle, similar to the Dutch tilt, which can “create an unsettling feeling within the viewer” by throwing the image off balance, resulting in a somatic response creating dread (Kroll). The camera lingers on her as we hear child laughter off-screen. The effect is dependent on the context; children laughing at a birthday party is appropriate, children laughing in the dead of night is unexpected, which makes it creepy. It both reminds us of their innocence, as well as alert us that they are not alone (Hideous). The laughter continues as Reiko starts to stir, and the camera cuts to a medium shot from a side view angle, while she sleeps again. Again, the camera lingers on her sleeping form and suddenly Tomoko’s voice softly says “auntie”, causing Reiko to look in the direction of the camera. This is interesting because the side angle shot did not clarify that it was a POV shot, but hearing Tomoko’s voice, makes the viewer realise they are in her place, changing the context of the scene.

Next we see the room from behind Reiko, enabling us to also look in the direction of the voice. Reiko slowly rises up on her elbows and the camera cuts back to her face, which is underexposed to the point where it is almost erased, as she calls for Yoichi. The camera lingers on Yoichi’s bed and initiated by a quick sound, piercing the silence, the shot is overlaid with a semi-transparent figure dressed in black, their face obscured by a white towel and their arm pointing to the left of the screen. Behind them is a grey fog, making the contrast of the black clothes and white towel stand out. The image fades and a few seconds later reappear at full opacity with both the shot and the sound extended. For a while these two hallucinations are the only sound, which make us pay attention and heightens the anticipation of what is to happen. Furthermore, we read people through their expressions, which helps us determine their intentions, so obscuring or erasing the face is disturbing, as we don’t know what to expect, which puts us on edge (Jarrett).

We see Reiko’s face staring intently in the direction of the phantom, then a slanted above shot of the two beds. We see a medium shot of Reiko, a puzzled expression on her face as she sits up in bed, seemingly contemplating what she saw, as a rusty grinding sound cuts through the silence, the familiar sound from the cursed tape, which elicits a somatic response in the viewer due to the already established, sinister context. On the second grind, Reiko

stares towards the foot of her bed, rips open the sliding door there, and sees Yoichi in front of the TV as a cacophony of sounds assault our senses. While “images are central in horror films (...) sound is just as important, whether it’s dead silence punctuated by something eerie or a constantly ascending cacophony” (VanDerWerff), and when the unearthly sounds intrude on reality as the character gets closer to the source can help us get into the character’s headspace and potentially achieve somatic empathy, feeling their distress in our own bodies. The camera cuts to a close-up of him staring at the TV, which is again the only light source in an otherwise dark room, alluding to media anxiety, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, this sudden introduction of sound in the otherwise silent universe elicits a somatic response in the viewer, but not quite a jump scare as the sound continues instead of being a jolt. However, it is the kinds of sounds that make the hairs at the back of your neck stand up.

Reiko’s terrified expression fills the screen before a close-up of the well takes its place, lingering for a few seconds as Sadako’s arms come onto the edge and the screen turns to white noise. This is suspense building because the sudden jolt of sound causes adrenaline to rise in the viewer, and the moment extra on the video, showing Sadako’s arms is a promise that she is coming closer. The cacophony stops and gives way for Reiko guttural scream. The camera moves with her as she throws her hands over Yoichi’s eyes, screaming “No!”, before she crawls over to the TV, pulls out the tape and throws it in frustration. She shakes him by the shoulders, yelling why he watched the tape and eventually he says “Tomoko”, as the camera cuts to an over the shoulder close-up of Reiko’s face as her blood runs cold and a high pitched sound builds in the background, putting the viewer on the edge of their seat. We see Yoichi as if we are standing over Reiko’s shoulder as he tells her that Tomoko told him to watch the tape. Next we see Reiko’s face, from over Yoichi’s shoulder, her mouth agape, shoulders slumped as the pitch is doubled and slumps and let the shadows swallow her up. This shot is interesting because the darkness symbolises her hopelessness, which elicits a cognitive emotional response, as we can understand the reason for her despair.

### **Ex 3: A Mother’s Love – 1:18:39 – 1:21:57**

Ryuji crawls up from the well while Reiko is passed out on the ground. Viewed from above, we see a full shot of Reiko falling backwards as she faints. The whole frame is black apart from Reiko’s face and pastel yellow blouse, a visual representation of how small and

isolated she metaphorically is in the face of Sadako. She wears yellow throughout the film, a colour that is normally associated with the sun, happiness and relaxation (Baker), which contrasts the literal and emotional darkness she finds herself in, again, making us feel for her predicament. All we hear is the diegetic sound of her body meeting the ground, which is interesting because this is usually a place where an American film would make her fall in slow-motion to increase the dramatic effect. Japanese horror has a tendency to use suggestion and silence to create an overwhelming sense of dread, which is less prevalent in the Western world which likes to use effects and show everything for clarity (Malloy). Paradoxically, the diegetic sound and long shot makes it seem more realistic and relatable, as if it could be happening anywhere to anyone, which makes the viewer feel unsafe like the characters onscreen. Next we see a worm view medium close-up of Ryuji coming out of the well, making him seem threatening, which is unsettling, since we know he is supposed to be a good character. He calls Reiko's name and she rises to her elbows, her expression confused as she looks at Ryuji. We see him crawl all the way out of the well, looking displeased as Reiko comes to.

Next we see a full shot of them both by the well, Reiko on the ground and Ryuji stepping over the edge, only lit by a single small light above the well. Ryuji says they have to switch places as Reiko is not strong enough to lift anymore buckets of water. Reiko becomes hysterical, still sitting on the ground while Ryuji towers over her. She looks up at him and he slaps her and grabs her neck, shaking her while growling "what about Yoichi?". The camera starts circling in on the pair, as Ryuji is still holding Reiko in place, her face slightly illuminated, her eyes trained on him. He removes his hand and the camera cuts to a close-up from Ryuji's POV as he is holding the rope and Reiko is sliding down into the darkness of the well. This elicits a cognitive emotional response, and it is an interesting shot, seeing as Ryuji, the male character who is supposed to protect Reiko, looms over her while she sits submissively on the ground in front of him, which draws attention to the "conventions of Japanese horror, with its message of female oppression and violent men, articulated through reference to the archetype to the wronged woman that has dominated Japanese horror from its earliest days" (Balmain, p. 190), essentially drawing parallels between Reiko and, Shizuki Sadako and the circle (ring) of oppression.

Next we see an underexposed close-up of her hanging onto the rope, a worried expression on her face as she looks down. Ryuji shouts "Don't look down!" making her turn

her gaze towards him. Looking up, we see Ryuji standing over the well, a sudden sound replaces him with a black and white shot of a man looking down into the well, implying that Sadako's presence in the well is showing Reiko her last vision before she died. Reiko's eyes fly open, her mouth agape as she takes in the phantom, which tends to make the viewer do the same. Next we see the waterline of the well, the camera lingering on the bucket as we hear the splashes of Reiko getting into the water, the camera pans up to meet her. She is looking around like a mouse that has been cornered, clearly uncomfortable with the situation. The flashlight is subtly swinging, casting light around randomly, and building suspense of what is hiding in the water. Reiko reaches into the water, calling out for Sadako. We see Reiko from above as she unties herself from the rope, the flashlight hanging over her, illuminating her back. Removing the rope, she is essentially cutting her lifeline, in danger of being dragged into the deep without any chance of getting saved, reinforcing the uncertainty and dread in the viewer. Furthermore, this emphasises the maternal aspect, that she is willing to sacrifice herself for her son, as well as penalise Sadako's father for taking her life. However, she is portrayed as a neglectful mother in other ways, parentalising Yoichi to the point where he takes care of her, instead of the other way around, as well as leaving the tape out for him to find. There is some ambiguity about motherhood.

Reiko fills the bucket and Ryuji start hoisting it up. She keeps searching in the water, the camera slowly following her around. The way the flashlight is swinging, randomly casting light and shadows build anticipation as this is an obvious setup for a jump scare. The diegetic sound of the water moving and the complete darkness that surrounds Reiko leaves a lot of room for some unknown terror sneaking up on her, not to mention the claustrophobic space of the wet underground well.

Eventually, Reiko pulls her hands out of the water and they are covered in long, black hair. Reiko's face is out of focus as she looks closer at the hair, and we see over her shoulder from above. Reiko is holding and regarding her hands as if she is holding something precious. A hand shoots up from the water grabbing onto her wrist, and we see a close-up of her face, her expression relaxed and unfazed, which in itself is unsettling considering the situation that a corpse just grabbed her. This would be an obvious place for a jump scare, making the water splash loudly with a sudden noise, and the decision to keep it subtle and slow, gives the impression that Sadako and Reiko are symbiotic.

Black fills the screen while eerie music is building in the background. Sadako slowly rises from the water, her hair catching the shine from the light as the only indicator of something moving in the black mass. The background music shifts to a melancholic melody. We see a close-up of Reiko's face, her expression that of a loving mother as she strokes Sadako's hair. The camera shifts to a close-up of Sadako, Reiko's hands making it peel off the scalp with wet gushy sounds, revealing a slimy skull in an extreme close-up as the well-water pours out of the eye sockets. The juxtaposition between the abject corpse and the caring gesture is quite disturbing accompanied by the dramatic melody, eliciting a response of somatic empathy. The mise-en-scene creates a context which makes it seem like Sadako's skull is crying, and the music pull on our heart strings, making us sympathise with Sadako as a girl that was wronged. In a medium shot, we see Reiko look at the corpse, with an expression of wonder, and she hugs it carefully, resting her head against the skull, letting the camera linger for a few seconds, before cutting to a full shot from Reiko's POV of Ryuji looking down, excitedly announcing the deadline has passed, indicating their attempt to free Sadako's soul was a success. Reiko is bathed in warm yellow colours, a beacon of light in the darkness, as she is embracing Sadako's corpse like a mother hugs her child, a serene smile on her face. She emits calmness in a bizarre situation, putting the viewer at ease.

#### **Ex 4: Breaching the Barrier – 1:25:37 – 1:28:14**

Ryuji is writing notes on a note pad and we watch over his shoulder in a close-up, as the familiar rusty grinding sound breaks the silence. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Ryuji sitting at his desk, getting visibly tense, while listening for the sound. A medium shot of Ryuji at his desk fills the screen, but we are viewing from behind bars, and on the third grind, Ryuji turns around to face the TV. Shooting through bars is a technique used to create “a voyeuristic and unsettling feeling” (Kroll), giving us the impression that someone is watching. He gets up from his chair and the camera follows him towards the TV, as he crouches next to a screen door and watches the deserted forest scene on the TV. We see a medium close-up of the TV, then one of Ryuji as the grinding sound intensifies, creating a connection between the two. The forest scene takes up the whole screen and we see Sadako ascend, creating the impression that we are in her universe. Ryuji stares intently as Sadako climbing over the edge of the well, glitching intermittently, which reminds us that she is in fact inside the TV. As Sadako is walking towards the screen, the camera cross cuts between

her and Ryuji, until we see a medium shot of him as he is looking at the screen in disbelief. His expression is perceived as being more intense due to the urgency of the situation, as discussed earlier.

The phone starts ringing, and we see Ryuji from the opposite side, the TV in the background, showing how Sadako is slowly getting closer to the screen. The camera follows Ryuji as he throws himself toward the desk reaching for the phone, claiming “Now I got it!”, before we see a medium shot of the TV and Sadako moving with unnatural, jerky movements, seemingly right in front of the screen. We know she is just inside the screen, that we are safe on our side, but it is still unnerving watching her determination. “There’s something particularly unnerving about an entity that moves jerkily in a way that’s nearly human, but not quite” (Jarrett). Furthermore, Sadako manages to move like we expect a zombie would, violating our expectations of a ghost and stepping into the uncanny, which unsettles the viewer and the zombie connotation draws parallels to the fear of contagions (Jarrett).

We see an underexposed close-up of Ryuji’s shocked expression, he remains in warm earthy tones, everything from his clothes to his furniture is different shades of brown, which are typically associated with calmness, however “monochrome and/or sepia tone mixed with hot or cold shades of red and blue can create dark and eerie settings resonant of death” (Sampson). As with Reiko, this colour scheme is creating both visual and emotional contrast. Next we see a low angle medium shot of the TV from Ryuji’s POV and Sadako is up against the glass, taking up the entire screen. A loud cacophony starts as she sticks her head through the frame of the TV and crawls into the living room. We see Ryuji yelp and recoil, the camera taking on his urgency, making the viewer recoil with him.

The sounds continue over a medium shot of Sadako clawing at the floor toward Ryuji, her long black hair splayed out over her arms and the floor, her head bent. A close-up of her fingers reveal all her nails are missing, only soft red flesh remains where they were supposed to be. This shot tells us of her pain, indicating that she fought hard to escape the well before her death, creating an interesting mix of somatic and emotional response. The camera lingers on her fingers, showing how they bent in a way that makes them look like spiders, as she slowly slithers further, carefully showing her fingertips bending under the pressure, emphasising the lack of nails, which creates a somatic response of disgust in the viewer due to the an instinctual relation to mutilation of the body.

Ryuji is pressed against the window, his expression terrified, and the camera switches to his POV revealing all of Sadako on the floor in front of the TV, her well black and white on the TV in the background. The camera lingers as she slowly starts to rise with jerky movements, her hair still completely covering her face. This is a technique that creates terror, because we cannot be sure which potentially horrible sight is hiding behind her hair. At the same time we cannot read her, which makes her more terrifying. Nothing is as terrifying as our own imagination, and because we usually “[imagine] the worst, we now fear the worst” (Sipos, p. 82). Ryuji gasps, his expression wide-eyed and disbelieving as he pushes against the window, putting the viewer at the edge of their seat. He backs away, almost getting caught in the curtains, before a medium shot of Sadako in a profile view standing in full colour with her head bent. The music is building in volume and pitch, making us feel the somatic response of the urgency and panic Ryuji feels as he turns to run but instead falls, Sadako now facing toward him. A close-up of her hair makes it feel like she is watching even though her face is completely obscured.

From Sadako’s POV, we see a full shot of Ryuji fumbling to get away. Next an objective shot of Sadako walking past us and out of the frame, as if we are watching as passive observers. The camera circles chaotically to Ryuji on the floor from Sadako’s POV, imitating his state of mind. We see a close-up of him struggling to elbow away from the ghost, how he falls and it cuts to a medium shot of him from Sadako’s POV, terror on his face. He is turned almost upside down, and we see a full shot of Sadako standing in the middle of his living room in all her glory, but not from Ryuji’s POV. Since we know Ryuji is turned upside down and Sadako is not seen from worm view, it is clear that this shot is supposed to be from an objective POV, which lets the viewer watch helplessly. The cacophony is still unsettling our senses as the camera zooms on Sadako’s hair, a high-pitched screech as it cuts to an extreme close-up of an engorged eye peeking out of the dark curtain. The eye looks unnatural, without any eye lashes and too big for the face, which makes it creepier. Next, we see Ryuji screaming and thrashing as he sees the eye, his face upside down. The camera lingers for a few seconds before the shot turns negative, as opposed to Tomoko’s death which was instantaneous. This shift to negative is similar to the flash of a camera, and when Ryuji is shown thrashing and screaming for a period of time before the flash, it is a metaphorical representation of the inevitability of death.

## The Ring

### Ex 1: Vicious waters – 3:47 – 7:32

Water is a powerful source of dread and holds significance in terms of affect for its historical symbolism, as we will see in this example. In the opening scene Katie pranked her friend, Becca after telling her that she had watched an urban legend cursed tape a week prior. Becca is calming down after the scare, and the girls banter, but then the phone rings, startling the characters.

The camera holds still on the steps while Katie and Becca descend, showing us their body from feet to head as if we are peeking through a window, before cutting to a full shot with Katie in the middle of the frame, reluctantly approaching the phone. This over the shoulder shot creates distance and opposition between Katie and the phone, she is facing off against it, heightening the tension. The view makes it feel like the viewer is standing next to the phone, a passive observer awaiting something sinister. This framing puts the viewer in an ambivalent position of either observer or antagonist, which is unsettling for the audience, and helps build tension (Sipos, p. 83).

The eerie rumbling keeps building while the ring of the phone penetrates the silence. Once the girls are a few steps away, they stop and stare at it intently. The loud ring is assaulting our senses, making us alert. As Becca is seen from a profile view, the receiver to her ear, Katie is staring at her, facing the viewer. Everything is quiet and Becca's smile fades as she turns to slowly hand the receiver to Katie. Shortly after Katie says "Hello?", her body language changes, the tension leaves her shoulders and it is revealed that it is merely Katie's mother calling to check up on her. Katie snarls at Becca, who chuckles as Katie makes her way past her toward the fridge in a dolly shot following Katie's trajectory.

Katie looks at Becca as she lazily states "My mom says hi, she's glad you're here", to which Becca whispers "Ask her where she keeps her Vicodin", snickers, and turns around to head upstairs. Katie's side of the conversation implies that her mother is saying things like "Remember to lock the door and don't stay up too late", and Katie eventually ends the conversation, as she is pouring a glass of lemonade, with an exasperated "Bye, mom!"

We see a medium wide shot of the Katie in a profile view standing at the kitchen island with her lemonade as if we are watching her from the hallway. The kitchen counter behind her is neat and clean with a few appliances strewn across the surface. There is a bowl

of fruit in the middle of the kitchen island - in other words, it is what we expect of a suburban home, which consequently feels like this could be any home, which makes it easy to identify with Katie and the situation, creating an influx of negative emotions in the viewer. Above the counter are matted glass folding-panels, creating a barrier between the living room and the kitchen. Katie puts down the receiver and as she is about to walk out of the frame while taking a sip of her glass, the TV turns on and creates a blue shine through the matted glass behind her. Katie freezes in her steps, and the camera cuts to a close-up of her face as she slowly turns to look towards the glass.

The camera is from Katie's point of view as she is peeking around the corner into the living room, only to see the living room empty and white noise on the screen, which is the only sound in the house except for Katie's breathing and the rain pouring outside. Katie calls out "Becca, quit being a bitch, where is the remote-" only to notice it on the sofa in front of her. She turns off the TV and throws the remote on the sofa while looking disdainfully towards the TV, as if she is still expecting it to be a prank. As Katie is going back to the kitchen, the white noise turns back on behind her, and, clearly getting more nervous, she yells "Becca, quit it!". The next shot is a close up of Katie's face an inch away from the TV. She pulls the plug and the TV shuts off. As Katie watches the reflection in the screen, she sees a shadow pass through the kitchen behind her, but when she turns around, no one is there. She approaches the kitchen and sees the door to the fridge is open as if someone was just in there. Katie hurries to shut the door, panting when she does. A close up of Katie standing in profile view with the fridge door obscuring everything behind her puts her in a tight frame and creates an expectation that when she closes the door something will be standing behind it, as we see so often in horror films. The tight frame is often used to inspire anxiety, as it hinders us in seeing what is around the subject, which "unknown threats lurk off-screen, waiting to pounce upon the characters" (Sipos, p. 84), and "it could be nothing, it could be a hockey-mask clad psychopath with a machete" (Shelton). We cannot know, which creates a tense atmosphere. However, in this case there is nothing, which is an example of subversion; "when a film begins a small narrative arc and refuses to complete it, the audience is left hanging, which makes them uncomfortable [as they] know something is coming, but now [they] don't know when to expect it" (Shelton). We see a full shot of the staircase and empty hallway, seen from a high angle putting the viewer at the top of the stairs and consequently making Katie seem small and vulnerable. Katie, a bundle of nerves by now, carefully approaches the stairs. She is nervously fiddling with her hands as she calls out to Becca

upstairs, getting no response. All we hear is silence. This is unexpected, because Western cinema likes to “insert a stinger chord or a sudden blast of noise”, where Japanese [cinema] instead employs “the total suspension of sound”, as we saw several examples of earlier, which can even make people believe something is wrong with the film (Brown, p. 63).

Katie skittles up the steps and the camera cuts to a low view of the hallway, as if the camera has been sat down on the floor with a view towards the stairs, which can induce anxiety since it is an unusual angle to film from. We see Katie slow her pace at the top of the stairs as she notices the water seeping out from her room. She slowly comes closer and we only see her feet as she is closing in on the water, displaced forest noises are playing faintly. Her face is tense, but the context is making us perceive her as scared, as her hand reaches for the handle that is also dripping water. Switching between her face and the door build urgency as well as create an expectation that she will face an unknown terror. Watching from inside her empty room, waiting for her to enter, creates anticipation and tension. While we cannot be sure if we are seeing the antagonist’s POV, the cross cutting indicates that we are, and this POV can “elicit different emotions from different viewers” and could create the sensation “of being inside an onrushing train and unable to stop it. We see the victim lying ahead on the tracks, we want desperately to yell a warning or to stop the train, but we are helpless and forced to experience the train tearing over the screaming victim” (Sipos, P. 83).

Katie throws open the door, and we see a close-up of her TV displaying a wide shot of a well in the middle of a deserted, barren forest, accompanied by a high pitched screech, as the frame quickly and jaggedly zooms out and cuts back to Katie, where it zooms in on her face as she opens her mouth in a scream and her skin turns a sickly grey, her face morphing into something horrific. The camera zooming in this disturbing manner gives us the impression of the world closing in on our character as well as transfers her disoriented mental state to the viewer.

Katie’s face is quickly replaced by rapid cross cutting between intangible black and white images of a house, a woman, a ladder, and an eye, ending with white noise filling the frame. The reason the somatic response works here is because we were subconsciously primed since the phone rang, increasing the intensity of our somatic response. Christian Grillon, a psycho-physiologist who studies fear and anxiety, says that when you’re watching a horror film, you are already hyper-vigilant, thus more susceptible to a jump scare. Grillon states “If a startle-eliciting stimulus comes, then the startle will be much larger than in a non-

anxious state. In my lab, when I make subjects anxious and then startle them, the startle reflex can be increased by 100 to 300 percent” (Guarino), meaning that the false scares and the dread building up help make us susceptible to a more intense jump scare.

From Katie entering her room, everything happens so rapidly that we are barely sure about what we saw, which serves as a form of gas-lighting and make us feel uneasy. The water symbolism is a characteristic element throughout the film. Water has many different connotations historically, both in relation to rebirth and cleansing, but also as “an elemental conductor in connecting the portal between the living and the dead” (LaRue). Furthermore, water is viewed as something transformative in film, as “the soft and liquid transition from one place to another, from one time to another, from one state to another”, as well as “a plane of separation and connection between different but not incompatible worlds” (D’Aloia, p. 99). In Japanese folklore, water represents a doorway to the dead, a portal “through which souls could travel to [the underworld]” (Collin). We quickly learn to equate Samara with water, through Katie’s death scene, and because the film appears to be drenched in everything from wells to the sea to the heavy rain, it is implicitly warning us that Samara is everywhere, which results in somatic empathy, as “watching characters attempt to escape an unstoppable force can create a sense of dread” (VanDerWerff).

## **Ex 2: Lucid Nightmare – 47:27 – 50:50**

Cinematography plays an important part in terms of portraying a character’s state of mind, making it easier to identify with them and this affect the viewer. Rachel just closed Aidan’s door, leaving his room in complete darkness and the black screen cuts to Rachel closing the fridge door in the kitchen while she is on the phone with her sister, asking her to take Aidan for a few days. We see a full shot from a low angle cutting her off at the waist, as she pours herself a glass of water. The camera zooms in on the water and lingers on the pitcher after she picks up the glass, which tells the viewer that the water will be significant.

Rachel takes a sip, but she barely gets a taste before she starts coughing, cut to a close-up of the glass as she sets it down and back to her coughing. This creates an association between the water and Rachel’s ailment, and indirectly, since we are aware of Samara’s affinity for water, an association between her and Rachel’s incident. She puts the phone down

and we hear her sister say "Rachel.. is this about Katie?", while Rachel falls to her knees, violently coughing in a worm view, medium shot of her face. She coughs and notices something in her mouth, she grabs it and starts pulling on what looks like a string coming from her throat. She keeps pulling hard on the string, gagging and coughing. There is a cut to her POV close-up of her hands pulling, putting the viewer in her place, causing somatic empathy and fearful disgust in the viewer. While it is not as abject or visceral as a bleeding body, not being able to breathe is relatable through our ability to project sensations of pain and corporeal distress.

The string snakes into a spiral on the floor, and back to Rachel's face as she finally gets it all out. With a disgusted expression, she realises that it is an electrode, and there is a cut to a close-up of the pile on the floor. Cut to a medium shot of her hand grabbing the phone from the counter and a full shot of her standing up speaking into the phone. The sister is gone, cut to a super close-up of the head of the phone, as water leaking out of the speaker.

Rachel looks toward the camera, into the underexposed full shot of the hallway, the rain pouring down outside, Samara implicitly looming. Rachel steps into the frame, giving a similar feel as we saw with Katie carefully approaching the phone earlier, which elicits cognitive emotion drawing a parallel between Katie's fate and Rachel's. In the same manner Rachel walks towards us and as she moves closer, the camera dollies toward her, making the distance between her and the viewer smaller. She pauses at Aidan's door and calls his name, the camera lingering on her as she hesitates to open the door, and the gentle background hum increases building anticipation.

We see a close-up of her face from inside the door - again, similar to Katie in the beginning - cut back to Rachel's POV, a wide shot of the room almost completely soaked in darkness, the door covering the right side of the image in pure black, and gradually revealing more of the left, showing us Samara sitting on a chair with her back to us. As Rachel moves closer, so do we, still from her eyes, and as the door opens fully, we notice a giant puddle of water circling Samara, implying again that she can be where ever there is water.

We see Samara from inside the room, her face completely obscured by her long obsidian hair. She takes up the right side of the screen in clear focus, while we see Rachel's blurry midsection on the left as she approaches. She reaches her arm forward and Samara grabs it hard with her green, wrinkly, wet, decomposed-looking arm, accompanied by a ghostly scream and a gasp from Rachel, as it cuts to an overexposed shot of her, then a circle

shot taking us from Rachel to a tiled wall to a chair in a sterile room, then crosscutting to a close-up of electrodes, to a camera that is zoomed in on, to a rapid zoom in on Rachel's face as she is sitting on the chair in the sterile room, her head hanging to the right, to Rachel sitting up in bed with a gasp. The rapid cross cutting and circling is giving an impression of insanity, which implies that we might not be able to trust Rachel's perception. Sounds can be emphasised by the frame, for instance using a moving frame to quickly zoom in and out as someone is trying to break down a door our character is behind, will help the audience feel the "shudder" of fear the character feels, by making the frame "shudder" (Sipos, p. 90), similar to how the camerawork here indicates Rachel's descent into madness. The camera zooms out from the front, and Rachel looks at her arm, pulls up the sleeve, and reveals a burn in the shape of a hand on her arm and back to a close-up of her face, panting in disbelief. This gas-lighting is eliciting somatic empathy with Rachel, as we feel her confusion and rising dread.

The camera zooms out as Rachel hears the diegetic sound of the whirring from the tape. Rachel scrambles out of bed and the camera cuts to a POV from Aidan's room, so we see as she approaches from the hallway. Rachel realises Aidan's bed is empty and an eerie melody plays in the background, as the camera dollies with Rachel's movements as she walks towards us down the hall. We watch from Rachel's POV as she moves down the underexposed hallway, a deep rumbling building in the background, making it seem like the hallway is closing in on her even though she is getting closer to the end, a reflection of her mental state. Rain is pouring outside the window, which is the only sound apart from Rachel's breathing. Next, we watch from the living room as Rachel emerges from the hallway, pauses a second while the camera cuts to her POV as she scans the room and notices a flicker under the sliding door. She gasps and storms towards it, ripping it open and we see Aidan with his back to us, watching the well on the TV. The well fills the screen, a hand reaching the edge, before cutting to white noise signalling the video is over. This is quite similar to the scene in *Ringu* where Reiko finds Yoichi in front of the TV,

Rachel is frozen in place as the severity of the situation dawns on her, before she screeches "No!", and we see Aidan's dazed, wide-eyed expression and Rachel storming towards him from behind, throwing her hand over his eyes and clinging the other arm around his waist in a tight, desperate embrace. Rachel rips the tape out of the VCR and throws it across the room and we see a close-up of the tape landing under the cabinet, which indicates it will be significant to the story. Rachel grabs Aidan and shakes him, chanting, "why baby,

why? WHY?" to which Aidan responds, "I couldn't sleep" and Rachel pulls him into another hard embrace, looks at him and he says "where is she, Rachel?". This exchange is chilling in more than one way. The implication that Aidan has talked to Samara is unsettling, but the other side of it is the interpersonal relationship between the two as parent and child. Aidan addresses his mother by her first name, which is a sign of emotional distance and indicates that he has an avoidant/dismissive attachment style, meaning that Rachel met his basic needs as a teenaged mother, but did not care for him emotionally, causing him to shut down - children who are not getting their needs met learn to cope by pretending they have no needs (Firestone). Aidan is independent and takes care of Rachel and her needs, an example is when she is running late on the day of Katie's funeral and Aidan, all dressed up, calmly informs Rachel that her clothes is ready on the couch. Rachel's attachment style is anxious/preoccupied, meaning she relies on Aidan to take care of her emotions, while she is only there for him inconsistently. She does not have a natural maternal instinct before this moment where she realises that Aidan is cursed unless she solves the puzzle. The distance between Aidan and Rachel elicits somatic empathy as well as cognitive emotion in the viewer, as it is not uncommon that unprepared teenagers in Western culture.

The phone rings and we see Rachel's fearful expression, seemingly expecting it to be Samara's warning call. She runs to the phone, picks it up and hangs up. It calls again and she screams "Leave him alone" into the receiver, but it turns out it is Noah saying "Rachel, I need to talk to you, okay.. I .. I believe you" as the camera cuts to him sitting in his car in the rain, zooming on a pile of polaroids of his face blurred in disturbing ways in the back seat. The obscuring of the face is another reference to the uncanny, just as Sadako's unnatural movements, as it reminds us of the familiar, but not quite, because what is a person without a face? Often monsters in horror movies have masks or deformities distorting their face, which, as mentioned earlier, make them hard to read and therefore it unsettles us. Noah's blurred selfies represents an eradication of the self (Enns, p. 41). Our face is literally the first impression other people get from us, and without our face and ability to make expressions, there is no identity and nothing for people to assess. Furthermore, the blurred out faces on the polaroids are similar to the horrifically distorted death face we see on Katie and Noah, both of which are presented as a jump scare. The death face is one of abjection and fearful disgust, eliciting a somatic response in the viewer.

**Ex 3: Neat Narrative – 1:20:12 – 1:23:45**

Cognitive emotion is at play when Samara's story unravels. We see an underexposed close-up of Rachel's face, her eyes looking down, her brows furrowed, indicating she is concerned. A tragic melodic score runs in the background along with the sound of the pouring rain outside. There is a voice over of Aidan saying "She doesn't like the barn." We see Aidan folding up his drawing as Rachel unfolds it in her hands. There is stick figure dad who is holding a mom's hand and she is holding the hand of a little girl with her face crossed out, clearly portraying the Morgans and Samara. They stand in front of a house and the camera pans to the left to reveal a barn, which is one of the only things that is coloured on the drawing, Aidan narrating, "The horses keep her up at night". Rachel is holding the drawing, in profile view staring into space, her jaw dropped, she turns toward the camera, which dollies away from her as she walks toward us. Noah is blurred in the background as he follows her and the focus is on Rachel as she repeats Aidan's words while opening the curtain to show Noah where they need to be searching. We see a full shot of the barn, fully lit and seen through the window from Rachel's POV making it appear as if it is behind bars. As Rachel finishes the sentence, it fades into darkness. Highlighting the barn as she talks about it is a visual cue often used in American cinema, where there is a preference for a logical progression in the narrative, here a minimal use of colour can call attention to something specific in a scene, namely the barn (Sampson). The score switches to a more upbeat tone, creating inspiring hope in the viewer.

The score ends suddenly as we see a close-up of Noah's hands smashing the lock on what we assume is the barn. All sound is diegetic, the crickets, the loud smack as the lock breaks, Rachel and Noah's breathing. We see only their silhouettes as Noah rips the chain off the door and throws down the shovel. Cut to a very underexposed shot from a high angle inside the barn as the doors open. It is almost completely black. The flood light comes back around and lights our characters from the back as they enter the barn. This excessive underexposure is used to create a "mysterious feeling, accentuating shadows" (Shelton). We see Noah touching a switch, and the shot is almost perfectly split in a dark and a slightly light side, only interrupted by Noah's dark silhouette over the light one. Everything to the left of the switch is left in complete darkness, making us wonder what dangers hide there, which causes suspense. As Noah switches on the light, a sad melodic score starts to play in the background, similar to a lullaby as we see a close-up of Rachel's face as she looks at something we cannot see. We are instinctively drawn to faces in film for a few reasons,

namely because a close-up can personalise the drama, and make it easier for us to relate and empathise, and because shots like this one tends to create an illusion that we can read the character's mind (Tan).

We borrow Rachel's POV as she enters the barn. Noah is standing on the right a few steps ahead, looking towards Rachel. Everything is underexposed, except the ladder ahead of them, which is lit up, but otherwise shrouded in darkness. As we move forward we see more of the ladder but not where it leads, and then a shot of Rachel walking into the light. This framing and editing signals that Rachel is metaphorically seeing the light; solving the mystery. Everything around her is black, and the camera lingers on her face, her expression is one of empathy. This is interesting because it causes a transfer of emotional contagion, letting the viewer be impacted with somatic empathy, although there is a discrepancy between taking on Rachel's experience and projecting your own subjective experience onto Rachel's character, whether fear, doubt, worry, or something else (Tan). We see a worm-view full shot of a small room far above them in the midst of darkness, appearing to float rootlessly, only accessible from the ladder, which is an unsettling metaphor of Samara's life and death. This angle makes us feel small. Next, we see a close-up of Rachel's face looking up in awe on the far right, and Noah blurred and dark in the background on the left. Her eyes are glossy and she whispers "Samara", making Noah's blurry figure look in her direction.

Rachel's maternal instinct lets her feel sorry for Samara on the account that, being a parent herself, she realises that children are born innocent, and only corrupted by their surroundings. Children need love and guidance from their caregivers in order to achieve a secure attachment, which relies on feeling safe, soothed, seen and secure by having their needs met and not having to manage their parents' emotions (Firestone). Samara suffered severe neglect and emotional abuse, causing her to have a disorganised attachment, meaning her caregivers were unpredictable and she could never anticipate how they would act, putting her in a constant state of terror and anxiety (Firestone). This may have been a reason for her lashing out, and it is interesting to consider what would have happened if Samara had not been isolated and resented, but instead loved and guided, eventually learning to control her psychic powers. Paradoxically, Rachel has done her part of neglect to her own child, a milder kind that is not outright abuse, which may be easier to overlook. Rachel mentions later that "She wanted that child more than anything in the world. How could she have done that? She just wanted to be heard. Sometimes children yell or cry or draw pictures", realising Aidan's cry for attention is drawing pictures.

We see a close-up of the ladder, as if we sit behind it and watch as Rachel determinedly climbs up. A full shot of the ladder from a profile view, shows us the two climbing up, bathed in a warm light, in contrast to the very dark scene. A close-up of Noah as he looks up while climbing, the camera following his moves, then a quick cut to Rachel in the same pose as we follow her moves. The camera pans vertically up the ladder, finally revealing to us, the room above. It is clearly a nursery, there is a single little chair in profile view positioned in front of a TV. Behind it we see a rocking horse on the right and a bed on the left in the far corner. Next to the bed is a small nightstand with a music box and on the floor two balls. Everything is has vintage pastel colours and is bathed in an eerie warmish green light. We learn earlier that it has been 30 years since Samara was killed, so this is fitting.

This whole scene stands in stark contrast to the rest of the film, which tends to have a blue tint. In fact, the desaturated, murky blue tint creates "a gloomy atmosphere; a feeling that the story is caught in a depressing downpour, even when it's not raining" (Sipos, p. 103) and the aqua palette helps reinforce the theme of water, which is prevalent through the film; the rain, the ferry, the ocean as Anna lets it swallow her, the well in which Samara drowns, her body dripping as it emerges from the screen. Furthermore, this blue tone makes the "visual contrast and its emotional impact" much greater when we see "radiant flashbacks" of Samara's past as she grabs Rachel's arm (Sipos, 103). Aesthetically, the desaturated aqua colour that tints the entire film help us determine time and place, which becomes very clear when we see flashbacks that are either highly saturated or black and white - both very different from the water world we mainly see. Furthermore, film maker Lewis Bond explains that colours can portray a character's inner workings with tints (Chriswell), which is interesting in relation to Rachel. Blue can mean calmness, loyalty and wonder, or it can be isolation and hopelessness (Baker). This blue has a bit of desaturated green in it, which often make for a lifeless impression (Chriswell). Rachel is rarely seen displaying any positive emotions, she seems cold and distant, which this palette helps us experience. The vivid flashbacks are interesting as they not only step out of conventions of horror movie palettes by increasing the vibrancy of certain colours, which can "create a less predictable and more psychological thrill" (Sampson), but also stand in much harder contrast to the murkiness of the real world.

The warm tone of this scene creates a sense of sympathy with her tragic story, supported by the faded pinks and yellows, which traditionally have "a calming effect and can

provide a light-hearted, feel-good aura” (Sampson), although this aura gets lost in the tragic story that is Samara and in contrast to the harsh darkness and cold blue tint. The pastel colours in her room remind us that she was once innocent as any other child, which is difficult to reconcile with the relentless source of evil she is portrayed as. The warm light also creates associations to heaven, as does the long ladder, which is a juxtaposition with what we know about Samara. However, it indicates that she was corrupted, which is in line with the Kaidan tradition. Colours affect us psychologically, but we do not necessarily know why - that is how we know “which lightsabre is good and evil” (Chriswell). The design of the colours is an important choice, hue, saturation and value matter, as changing either one will change the whole impact of a scene. It is no coincidence that complementary colours such as blue and red are preferable in horror films, since “this combination emits contrasting emotions and feelings; ice cold/red hot and calmness/danger” and “the juxtaposition of semiotics demonstrated through this hybridity of colour and lighting truly messes with the mind” (Sampson). Contrast is important to create interest, but balance is pleasing and calming to look at, whilst discordance unsettles, and “the audience will notice that which does not fit in” (Chriswell).

Rachel peeks her head up, taking in the scenery before climbing up. We see Rachel in between the TV in the left and the chair on the right, creating a pleasing symmetry. Noah climbs up behind her. A camera pans horizontally over the room, revealing the stacks of dolls and figurines and boxes behind the TV. The music box is playing a solemn melody on its own as Rachel says “He kept her here.” Rachel walks into the frame, continuing, “her mother was going crazy,” and we see a close-up of Noah looking at the TV with antennas, “Morgan blamed the child,” close-up of Rachel seen through the bars of the horse carousel music box - “So he kept her here” - as Rachel touches a horse and stops it and the melody promptly - “Alone.” The sudden silence is used to illustrate the isolation Samara endured. The camera lingers for a few seconds. Noah checks the TV for dust, his eyes firmly fixed on the TV as he responds, “not alone” and looks at Rachel, locking eyes with her. We see from a POV behind the music box, the focus on Noah in the background, leaving Rachel and the music box blurry in the foreground as they both rise and Rachel walks towards Noah. The melancholic melody plays in the background. Rachel speaks softly when she narrates Samara’s short life, her voice occasionally close to breaking, which makes it seem like her heart, as a mother, is breaking for Samara, regardless of her mayhem - supported by a sad lullaby and a lifeless world, Rachel empathises with her, and we empathise with Rachel.

We see a low angle medium close-up of the chair from the video, as if seen from a child's perspective. Rachel walks over and touches it, turns her head toward the TV, before we see an angled close-up of the shiny glass screen of the TV showing Rachel the reflection of her and the chair in reference to her earlier nightmare. The camera zooms out to an extreme long shot, showing us Rachel and Noah rummaging around the tiny room from across the barn, making it appear like a tiny island in a sea of darkness, only one lifeline (the ladder) and not enough time. This is a reference to the severe isolation Samara suffered at the hands of her father. The camera lingers for several seconds giving us time to take in the desolation of Samara, before a medium shot of the two, Rachel's gaze pointing into the darkness, Noah's toward us. He utters her name and she turns, showing us a close-up of a rift in the yellow wallpaper with a horsehead pattern. Anna being a horse rider, it appears she chose this wallpaper especially for her dream to become a mother, but instead it ends up symbolising the failure of her endeavour, carrying heavy emotional weight. The gash makes it appear like the wallpaper - the horses, Anna, Samara - is bleeding, again reminding us of the bloody sea from the tape. Noah states "there's something on here" as the camera follows his hand reaching out to touch the gash, we see a medium close-up of Noah in profile view, starting to tear off the wallpaper.

We see a close-up of the wood under the wallpaper, revealing a pattern underneath. Noah says "it looks like it's etched into the wood". We see Rachel looking down, tightly framed. She pulls up her sleeve revealing the handprint from her nightmare and the camera glides from her arm up to the wood, creating an association between the two, as Rachel corrects Noah: "Or burned". They shoot each other a look and return to ripping the wall paper. The screen is black and as they tear off wallpaper, their faces appear, making it seem like we are inside the wall waiting to be freed - like Samara. This is an interesting decision, because it seems the director constantly wants us to feel ambivalent about Samara's role - is she nothing but pure evil or is she wronged? Showing us the signs that she was at some point in time wanted is contesting what we have seen so far, that she relentlessly kills. Furthermore, it the confusion is grounds for anxiety, making us doubt whether the point is to vanquish Samara or save her.

We see piles of wallpaper falling at their feet, crosscutting between different angles of their ripping job, until finally the motive is revealed. Both are seen from the side looking upwards in awe, as they realise what is burned on the wall. The piles are a visualisation of all the pieces of the story that they have to find in order to solve the mystery. We see their faces

up close as they back away in awe. Rachel says "I've seen this tree before", to which Noah responds "yeah, it was on the tape". The camera zooms in on Rachel's face as she shakes her head "no. I've been there", she says in an over the shoulder view, zooming in on the tree - "Shelter Mountain". The framing of the tree in the centre of the wall in the tiny room, makes it look threatening, towering over them.

#### **EX 4: Glitch in Reality – 1:39:38 – 1:44:12**

Long shots and CGI helps the audience feel Noah's terror in the face of his demise. Long shot of Noah in his studio as he picks up his cup of coffee, that has left wet ring left on the newspaper. The room is big and stacked with TVs looming over him, seemingly watching him. This amount of catalysts for Samara along with the long lingering shot of nothing really happening creates suspense. As Noah takes a sip of his coffee, one of the many TVs behind him turns on. As we know by now, the ring is a reference to the tape and the water is a warning of Samara's coming, an assumption that is immediately confirmed by the familiar white noise. Noah slowly turns his head toward the white noise. He rolls to the side on his desk chair and the camera shifts to his POV as it pans over the shelves obscuring his view of the TV until it is in the clear. Noah casually strolls toward the TV, cut to a shot showing us Noah, putting us in a position of voyeur, cut to a full shot of him standing a few feet from the TV, him in the right side of the screen, the TV on the left in a profile view. It takes a few seconds before he breaks "eye-contact" and grabs the remote, turns the TV off and throws it back on the coffee table. Silence. This is an almost exact replication of what Katie did in the beginning, making the audience recall her demise and associate it with Noah's impending, which gives us a sense of dread.

As Noah is walking away, he shakes his head, and the TV turns on again behind him, making him pause. As he turns around, the focus shifts from him to the TV, now displaying the well on the screen and the haunting bird chirps from the tape. Next, we see a close-up of the screen glitching on the image of the well in the barren forest. We see Noah's reaction, his eyes wide and his mouth ajar, as the phone starts ringing. Suspenseful tones play in the background as the camera zooms rapidly on the phone and the loud ring cuts through the silence. We see a close-up of Rachel with the receiver to her ear as she urges him to pick up, while she tries to stop Aidan's nose bleed. There is a pile of bloody tissues on the table already. The red blood demands our attention as the only red in the otherwise blue tinted

scene. Red causes us to react instinctively, often used to convey “aggression, violence, and anger”, but depending on the use it can also “invoke feelings of love and passion” (Baker). In the context of Noah’s impending demise and Rachel’s attempt to reach him, the connotations are more akin to a warning. Cutting between Rachel and Noah, knowing that Samara works fast and that Rachel is helpless, creates a sense of urgency, which feeds the dread.

Back in Noah’s living room, we see a close-up of the well on the TV, the camera zooming out revealing more of the background, reminding us that the TV is not our reality. Noah walks into the shot, crouches down and we see a close-up of his face, his eyes fixed on the screen. The phone continues to ring in the background, reminding us of Rachel.

Cut to a close-up of the well, the camera lingers for several seconds before Samara crawls up and a high pitch noise accompanies her, Noah’s wide-eyed expression still fixed on the screen. Cut back to Samara, the image glitching as she moves jaggedly towards the screen, again reminding us that she is not in our reality, creating a false sense of security. Samara is dressed in a white dress, dirty and wet from the well, and her long black hair obscures her face. Noah looks slightly more disturbed - or is it merely our perception that he looks more distressed, because we know Samara is coming? An over the shoulder shot as we watch the screen with Noah, taking on his increasing uneasiness. As Samara comes closer, we see Rachel’s POV as she races through traffic, yelling into the phone and barely escaping a collision with a truck, which creates a somatic response in the viewer as adrenaline starts to course through our body.

Back to Noah’s studio, the camera slowly moving out from behind the TV, letting us observe Noah as he is starting to pull backwards away from the TV. Samara is very close to the screen and actually penetrates the digital barrier and with it, our sense of safety. She reaches her hand out and starts crawling through the screen, dripping water everywhere. Noah tries to get up, slips and falls, and scrambles backwards, eventually getting to his feet. We see a close-up of Samara’s wrinkly, wet, zombie-skinned hands, crawling on the floor, leaving a trail of water. Next we are behind Noah peeking out from the shelves as Samara starts to rise. Putting us as a silent observer, makes us empathise with Noah and feel his panic in our own body. Using a jump cut editing technique, Samara glitches and reappears right in front of Noah, startling him and causing him to fall backwards into the shelf, knocking it over, glass shattering over the floor. A jump cut creates “a sense of anxiety and dislocation”, which is the opposite of continuity editing, where the point is to make everything look

seamless (Duckworth). The shot where he falls is filmed in slight slow-motion for emphasis. We see Noah rolling off the shelf, the wind knocked out of him, trying to crawl away. Next, we see a medium shot of Samara, appearing very large in relation to the background, which is a visual representation of the threat she poses on Noah - and on humanity. She looks like a black and white movie still, emphasising how she is intruding on our reality. This intrusion relates to media anxiety, which is a major theme in the film. She looks out of place because she is - she is a digital image, able to wreak havoc on our world through a device most people own and keep in their homes. Samara is computer generated, which emphasises the dissonance between her and us. The implication is that we are never safe and technology is its own entity rather than merely tools for us, raising the question, are we controlling technology or is technology manipulating us?

We see a close-up of Noah's terrified expression as he crawls through the shattered glass, slipping and sliding, leaving a trail of blood. Next, we see a medium close-up of his escape, letting us see Samara hovering over him in the background. Samara's wet, wrinkly feet stalk after him slowly. The camera tracks her movement and reveals Noah in the background, as he turns around to look at her, her hair revealing an angry zombie-looking face, the camera zooms on her eye, then turns to zoom on Noah as he screams. Images from the video in rapid succession and finally white noise, lets us know that Samara's revenge is carried out. This is an intense scene, causing somatic empathy in the viewer. The pace is sped up and the many close-ups of Noah's face lets the audience experience his anxiety, panic, and terror. As mentioned earlier, a person's facial expression is how we read people, and when we see intense expressions, we experience emotional contagion, which is "the tendency for humans to absorb and reflect the intense emotions of those around them" (Tan (2013)). This mirroring of other people's emotions is a way to show empathy, which is an essential social skill.

We see a car speeding towards the camera from a low angle, which makes it imposing. Rachel exits the vehicle and sprints out of the frame and into Noah's building in the next shot. The lift is too slow, so she runs up the stair, intermittently showing us spiralling shots of the infinite stairs seen from below, making Rachel's quest seem pointless, as well as symbolising her mental state, spiralling in a panic. Despite our knowledge of Noah's demise, the score keeps building suspense, and we are forced to watch and experience Rachel's fear like we did Noah's.

We watch from the inside as Rachel rips the door open, and the camera pans over the destruction of the studio from Rachel's POV. Noah appears to be sitting in a chair in front of the TV displaying white noise. Rachel hesitates and looks at the phone in her hand, slowly flips it shut and stops the ringing. She takes a deep breath, indicating that she knows what awaits her, and starts walking slowly towards Noah, her face stern and scared. She notices the huge puddle around Noah's chair. We see a close-up of the smeared blood on the concrete floor, tracking it to a pile of glass shards. Again, this is the only red in the otherwise bleak scene. She continues to walk toward Noah and we see her Rachel bracing herself for the worst before switching to her POV as she slowly reaches for the back of the chair and swivels it toward her, making us identify with her, which helps manipulate us into fear. We watch her from an over the shoulder shot from Noah's perspective as she looks at him and lets out a blood-curdling scream. This is an interesting scene, because the editing makes us believe that we see what she sees; Noah's face distorted in a death scream, his skin a sickly grey and his mouth open too wide to be humanly possible. In fact, we do not see anything at this time, but because we saw Katie's in the beginning, and especially because Noah's actions were the same as Katie's, we draw the parallel and imagine we see Noah's. This form of editing is often used in horror movies (Shelton).

Rachel descending the stairs in a dazed state, her scream echoing in the hall. As she reaches the last platform, she hears the familiar whirr of the lift, and sees Noah's girlfriend about to get on. She hides in a doorway out of sight as she watches the girlfriend step into the lift. Tears are running down her face and she stares at the bloody tissue in her hand, clenching her hand so hard it is shaking. This scene is interesting because Rachel chooses to let the girlfriend experience the same horrific sight she just witnessed, putting her in an unsympathetic position. She is already spreading Samara's curse.

Rachel is a distant and cold character for most of the film, only showing compassion for Samara and Aidan. The dysfunctional mother challenges classic representations of motherhood as "she is either unable to protect the child's safety or on the verge of destroying what she has brought to life. She switches from a life-giving to a death-giving entity, and becomes 'other', monstrous and 'dysfunctional'" (Bitoun). Society puts a lot of pressure on mothers, constantly judging their choices. Rachel is a single mother and was perhaps even a teenage mother, which causes even more scrutiny. The implication is that anything goes in the name of motherhood, which feeds into the idea of the dysfunctional mother in horror

films, and the association between the tape and reproduction draws a parallel between motherhood and technophobia.

### **Media Anxiety**

Anxiety about technology is a prevalent theme in both *Ringu* and *The Ring*, an expression of the anxiety about the unknown. Kristen Lacefield's anthology *The Scary Screen: Media Anxiety in The Ring* explores some different aspects of this anxiety,. Lacefield argues *The Ring* indicates that "breeding horses (...) is less disruptive than breeding humans, though the two may have some vague technological connection here: Samara replaces herself with a videotape, horses are replaced with cars" (Lacefield, p. 9), drawing a parallel between reproduction and machines. This argument focuses more on the biological reproduction, whereas another element of the story is reproduction in relation to photography. Sadako/Samara haunt their victims for seven days after viewing the tape, and then, "kill them by immobilizing and capturing their souls through the "camera" of their eye. This "camera action" accounts for the fact that the kill scenes in both *Ring* films prominently involve a close-up of Sadako/Samara's eyes, an image that closely resembles the appearance of the ring depicted in the haunted videotape" (ibid, p. 9). The ring is a reference to both the shape Samara sees from the well, the ring of the telephone that warns of the victim's impending death, the shape of Samara's eye, and the shape of a camera lens, which translates "the intensive fear of rings that structure these films [into] larger fears about the loss of subjectivity to the camera and the extinction of 'self' that occurs when an image is stolen from the temporality of its existence, captured, then re-projected via the lens of the camera or the projector" (Lacefield, p. 9). The connection between photography and death is not a new one. As Lizzie Shanks argues, there has been a longstanding discourse on this subject through history. Several cultures believe the "soul is made up of light" and the word, photography, means "drawing of light", essentially capturing the light we emit at a given time (Shanks, n.p.). Furthermore, fear of photography and fear of mirrors seem to go hand in hand, which can be "traced back to Mayan culture, where mirrors (...) were considered to be portals to the other world" and photographs were "considered mirrors with a memory", some cameras even using mirrors as part of the mechanism to this day (Shanks, n.p.). Similarly, Lacefield points out that every time the tape claims another victim, their face is "instantly astonished (in the etymological sense of the word) and remained fixed in a violently grotesque expression" (Lacefield, p. 10). This connection to photography is further emphasised in the Japanese

version where the victim's death is signified by changing the print to negative as a representation of the opposition between life and death.

The media anxiety in *The Ring* is quickly made explicit in one of the first scenes of the film, through a seemingly casual exchange between Katie and Becca. The girls are trying to find something to watch and Katie says she hates TV and explains how magnetic air waves from electronics are damaging our brains. Visually, the film suggests that the television is the main source of evil, as "Sadako/Samara may be able to deploy their respective revenge narratives by imprinting their murderous thoughts on film, but the deployment of those narratives is utterly dependent on our technological capacity to view films in the "safety" and privacy of our own homes" and there is a large black television in almost every major scene "glowering at the characters and sometimes, it seems, even at the [audience]" (Lacefield, p. 10). The barrier between the digital and the material world, the possible and impossible, is important as that is what keeps the viewer safe from what they see on the screen. Breaking this barrier invades our safety and introduces fear and anxiety. This idea is represented in a later scene when Rachel is looking out from the balcony of her high-rise city apartment when she notices a television in every room in the building across from her, seemingly contemplating, "what it means to have televisions extending their unseen tendrils of presence and influence into what should be our most private of sanctums" (Lacefield, p. 11).

Only two fathers are represented in the film, Noah and Mr. Morgan, both of whom are surrounded by televisions at one point. Noah is a technology expert whose apartment is filled with video cameras and televisions; Samara's adoptive father commits suicide by electrocuting himself in the bathtub with a pile of televisions. These instances draw a parallel between technology and paternity. Moreover, as Rachel discovers Noah dead, he is seated in front of the television in a puddle of water, which "inadvertently suggests a powerful connection between Aidan's father and Samara's, both of whom seem less than enthusiastic about their respective acts of fatherhood" (Lacefield, p. 20). The film creates a meta-reality in which the viewer is possibly in danger of the technological evil as well, one of the ways in which they are confronted is the end of the film where the screen turns to white noise, similar to the end of the cursed tape. However, as much as they are in danger themselves, they are also forced to be complicit in spreading the curse, which raises questions of ethics. According to Lacefield, "Nakata's *Ring* articulates an important truth about the movies: all films are in essence snuff films, and all who view them have blood on their hands" (Lacefield, p. 10), which is an interesting framing of the human survival instinct.

Lacefield explores the reproductive aspect of the curse whereas Anthony Enns presents another perspective, namely the connection between technology and spirituality, specifically the occult. Plenty of horror films explore this and at this point it is more of a horror trope that inexplicable behaviour in electronics and electricity is indicative of a ghost or entity, such as in the series of *Insidious* (2010) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and multiple others. Enns points out that “instead of presenting modern versions of traditional ghost stories, in other words, [these Ring films] effectively replace older notions of the spirit realm with the new realm of electric communication” (Enns, p. 30). Furthermore, he claims that “Ringu thus illustrates not only the parallels between the occult and technological media, as spectral images and voices repeatedly manifest themselves through media technologies, but also the threat that these technologies pose to the integrity and autonomy of the subject” (ibid, p. 31). This is an interesting point as there are numerous cases of possession of different kinds - more subtly in the Ring films, but more pronounced in *The Ring 2* when Samara’s spirit possesses Aidan’s body and leeches on his soul.

Enns also draws a parallel between the body and identity. In the Ring films the victims of the curse will have their face blurred out once they try to take their own picture. This act of blurring the faces emphasises “the destabilisation of identity and the gradual transformation of the subject into spectral image. Once invaded by the media virus, in other words, the subject is no longer self-identical to itself” (Enns, p. 41), essentially indicating how the individual is being erased from existence.

Greg Wright expands on the idea of the curse as a virus and connects it to consumerism. Wright refers to the novel more than the films, but the argument is relevant. He points out that, “Although the villain behind this viral video is not a corporate nemesis or media conglomerate, the novel’s characters suggest that this horror is simply a magnification of the media’s sinister usurpation of human experience, with which consumers around the globe are already complicit from their couches” (Wright, p. 46). The virus is similar to HIV, “altering hosts’ genetic code to program them for death”, and the only possible salvation is to pass it along to someone else, spreading the infection, “thus helping the viral video reproduce, a feat that the video, as ‘organism,’ is not capable of doing without its host’s help” (ibid, p. 47). Similar to Lacefield’s point about reproduction, Wright states that the act of copying the video “means a non-organic kind of sex, wherein video reproduction stands in for sexual reproduction” and for the watchers, the options “boil down to fuck or be fucked” (Lacefield, p. 48)—and by extension kill or be killed, appealing to basic survival instincts.

However, the twist with the Ring is that, “distributing the viral video’s disease is always voluntary”, which is usually not the case with viruses, as “the behaviors that spread viruses may appear involuntary or benign, there is conceivably some mechanism of desire, however sub-cellular, that wants to spread the infection outward” (p. 50). While these theorists have different perspectives, there seem to be a tendency to regard technology with a certain reluctance and anxiety, as well as a determination to connect it with organic processes which are also under scrutiny in the field of studies of horror, namely reproduction and sexuality.

The Ring came out at a time where the DVD was in the process of replacing the tape, not to say the cassette was already verging on being obsolete. Another year or so would make a haunted videotape highly improbable, to say the least, making viewers question who even has a VHS machine in this day and age and why the video is not distributed online. However, according to Michael Fisch, this is how the films can “provide a unique opportunity to look as the shift from cultural modes of representation dominated by analogue storage media to those informed by digital media” (Fisch, n.p). He points out that, “with the clock ticking, the quest to determine who made the video and where it came from propels the film towards the first conclusion via a repertoire of motifs drawing on the relation between analogue recording media, the body, the unconscious, and time” (Fisch, n.p). This obsession with time is an inherent human quality as we never know when we will die or how, but still try to predict it and prevent it. The idea of extinction is terrifying.

The films are preoccupied with the subject of time, not only in racing against the clock, but through several shots focused on numbers. Numbers are also used as a means to unsettle the viewer as well as indicate whether what we see is real. According to Fisch, “The implication is that the image on the tape is not simulacra but the real - not a recording of reality but a reality itself” (Fisch, n.p) further implied by the scene in which Rachel notices that the numbers on the recording are jumbled as she copies the tape and Noah then explains to her that “when you record a tape, the make-up of the tracks is like a signature for whatever did the recording like camcorder, VCR, whatever, so the control track could tell us where it came from. But to not have one, that’s like being born without fingerprints” (Fisch).

As technology continues to evolve, horror films are exploring new ways of weaponising electronics playing on our fear of the unknown. Everything will eventually be replaced, just as the cassette tape giving way to DVD, although the VCR has been a valuable invention as the leading digital recording device as it could “store digital code, as well as

audio and light waves” and is “only now losing ground to the built in hard-drive and flash-drive” (Fisch, n.p). In *The Ring* the tv is the source of evil and Samara herself is equated with technology, which is made clear when we see the footage of her in the psychiatric facility. She is seen sitting alone in the middle of a sterile, white, empty room and a cord is snaking over the floor to her feet, making it appear as if she is plugged into a socket. In contemporary times, there is an indication of this same fear that we cannot disconnect from electronics. In fact, now that cell phones are so common that they are essentially an extension of your arm, horror films have had to find new ways to isolate the victims for slaughter. In “Classics like 1960’s *Psycho*, 1974’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, or 1980’s *The Shining* dropped the protagonists at remote houses. With no access to landlines, the characters in those movies were so removed from help or contact with the outside world, they might as well have been stranded on the moon” (Castro, n.p), but since that is no longer the case, the formula had to evolve. Another way of isolating the victims is having them strand in a dead zone without cell service, and most recently, have the battery run out; these scenarios have become so common that they are crossing into horror-trope territory (ibid).

This phone obsession of the twentieth century is still a source of terror. Today, most people are permanently connected to the internet via their smart phones, or at least cell phones, which contain everything from their bank details, pictures and private messages to their social media, where they can present and reinvent themselves as desired. This opportunity for reinvention can be tied to the idea that cameras steal the soul. When your picture is taken in the digital age, it can potentially be accessed by anyone and, “how that image is used, altered and re-purposed, is largely out of our control”, indicating that a piece is lost every time a picture is posted online, and thus “the less control [we have] of our identity” (Yamamoto, n.p). This is interesting because it draws a parallel between the number of pictures we take and our online personas, as well as the importance of how other people perceive us. According to this idea, other people’s understanding of who we are play a part in shaping our identity. However,

We film ourselves and film others and we watch these images for clues as to who we really are and where we really fit, and appear to come up short for answers each time, judging from the staggering number of people suffering from depression and anxiety”, which indicates an attempt to modify ourselves to a perceived societal standard, essentially removing ourselves further from our true self. (Shanks, n.p)

## Videogames

### **Alien: Isolation**

*Alien: Isolation* is a first-person survival horror game released in 2014 by Creative Assembly. The game follows Amanda Ripley, as she travels to Sevastopol, a remote space station in search of the flight recorder from the *Nostromo*, the ship aboard which her mother found herself facing off against the nefarious Xenomorph alien 15 years prior, in Ridley Scott's *Alien*. Her journey is one not unlike her mother's, with several twists and turns along the way, aided in part by her very own specimen of the Xenomorphs. The game has won several awards, including awards for Best Audio at the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Game Developers Choice Awards (GDCA), and the Audio Achievement award at the 11<sup>th</sup> British Academy Games Awards (BAFTA).

*Alien: Isolation* is a game that tries to immerse the player into the body of Amanda Ripley. The majority of the game is seen through her eyes, meaning that we as the audience are meant to play the game as if we found ourselves in the game's world. Another element of this game, which tries to enforce this notion, is the distinct lack of what is called a Heads-up Display, or HUD. A HUD is a tool many games use to impart information to the player about their avatar's status, such as the condition of their health, amount of remaining ammunition, current objectives, and so on. *Alien: Isolation* does away with the HUD almost completely, only reserving a small area in the lower left corner for this information. Many of the functions that a HUD often serve are implemented diegetically into the game instead, as such, there is no map on the screen, there are no markers or compass to direct you, almost nothing obstructing the player's view into the world of the game. Amanda carries a few tools with her that gives the player this information, and most important of those are the motion tracker. This tool not only tracks the movements of anything in the player's vicinity, it also serves as a wayfinding tool, showing the player where to go, in case they get lost.

Crick argues that the design and presence of an avatar is important dynamic in the player's experience (p.264). *Alien: Isolation* does not offer a visible avatar for the majority of the game, since we only see Amanda's full character model when we are not in control of the game. However, since the game takes place in an already established fictional universe, and the avatar we inhabit in the game the daughter of Ellen Ripley, who a very prominent and distinguished character in popular culture, most players will go into the experience with some

expectations already in mind. Amanda does resemble her mother in many ways, both in terms of personality and physical attributes and skills. “Like her mother, Amanda is a technical expert with no illusions about the nature of the megacorporations that rule life in the 22nd century. She's smart, she's resourceful, and she's a survivor. In cutscenes, we see a no-nonsense woman” (Riendeau). With this image already established, the player should find it fairly easy to identify with her. Playing from the first-person perspective removes the border that might otherwise exist between player and avatar, since there is no visual obstruction on the screen to dispel the illusion of the game.

“When I ‘enter’ the virtual world of a FPS such as Call of Duty 4, my experience is not one of disembodied perception nor can my body be reducible to a mere set of eyeballs. For example, sometimes my heartbeat races or my body feels rushes of excitement and jolts during moments of intense combat with NPCs. Furthermore, during some gaming moments, I will be aware that my body intuitively leans toward the direction to which I require my avatar to run” (Crick, p. 266).

What Crick tries to convey in the quote above is that the player and avatar are to some degree one and the same. As long as the player stays immersed, their reaction to anything that might happen to or around the avatar affects the player on some level as well. Even though no physical harm can come to the player, it does not mean that their immersion in the world of the game they are playing cannot excite them, scare them, or enjoy them to a degree that it almost feels as if it actually was real.

Creative writer Alistair Hope points out in an interview that the game focuses on the survival aspect, instead of the killing aspect, and that it is important to him that each action the player has to make is associated with a risk, constantly encouraging them to contemplate their resources and options and whether the timing is right for action. A player reports having been paralysed with fear, incessantly watching the tracker that alerts her to the Xenomorph approaching, but Hope reveals that the tracker is purposely beeping, as it “is constantly sensing the alien’s presence, because it is constantly there. But that is not to say that it’s noticed you yet” (Amini). The game puts you in a constant state of peril, with scarce few moments of respite. The Xenomorph, deranged survivors, or androids are all working against the player’s further advancement. These notions are present in the gameplay, as well as the visual and auditory storytelling of the game. Sevastopol station never feels welcoming, and the many nooks and crannies are ripe with the possibilities of assault from whatever hostile entity might set upon you. The station creaks and groans as it has fallen into disrepair,

androids converse with you in droning voices slighted with vague threats, the Xenomorph screeches and growls, and stomps around heavily as it searches for your hiding place. The experience of *Alien: Isolation* is a complete and desperately frightening one, which manages to envelop its audience in a rich tapestry of noise and lights designed to get under your skin and make your heart race.

The concept of ‘mental modelling’ in game design refers to the difference between horror wrapping and horror simulation. Wrapping is when a horror theme is thrown over a game, that could just as easily have been an action game, usually based on numbers such as “what kind of opponent you are facing, what weapons you have, the current ammo supply, health levels” and the like. The focus is not on the monster’s appearance, but on the statistics. Simulation requires a degree of replication of the feeling of being in a given environment, about what you cannot see, and how you can intuitively affect the narrative based on your in-game decisions, which, combined with “a map that forces you to think yourself as part of the environment, and monsters that you mostly keep track of by inferring their position” make for a much scarier, potentially immersive mental model that truly inspires terror (Grip).

### **Ex 1: The Xenomorph Appears – 25:36 – 26:41**

Amanda is trying to disengage the security lockdown, which is the reason the alarms have been blaring loudly for a while. When she reaches the terminal and the Xenomorph slithers out of the vent in the ceiling, almost all of the diegetic sounds, such as alarms, disappear. Only those of Amanda and the Xenomorph are heard. The player gets the feeling that Amanda’s fear is being portrayed through the game’s audio as her focus shifts completely to the threat that has just. There are several warning-lights in the room, all of which are continuously blinking and rotating, adding to the confusing atmosphere. The sounds of the scene play an integral part in making it so terrifying and effective. The alarms are extremely loud, and while they do not cause the player any actual harm, their constant blaring are an incredible nuisance. Not only this, their continued sounds make it extremely difficult for Amanda to listen for any potential enemies, which could be approaching. The unwelcoming, and dangerous environment, from the audio to the visuals, imparts cognitive emotions on the player, as the distractions of the alarms and their lights are unmistakable. Further, the presence of the Xenomorph and its imposing nature only compounds the

cognitive emotion experienced, as the player empathises and imagines themselves in Amanda's place.

As the Xenomorph appears, Amanda's full attention is taken up by the creature, hence why the blaring of the alarms disappear. The diegetic sounds of the alien creature dropping to the floor tells us of its physical weight, tells us that it is in every way Amanda's physical superior. Then, as the Xenomorph rises to its full height, the score swells and fades away eerily. The rattling of the Xenomorph's tail as it drags across the floor as it starts to leave the room makes it clear that it is something innately not human. The presentation of the Xenomorph here is mainly why it, affectively, is so scary. The player feels, much like Amanda, helpless to do anything about the monstrosity that towers before her. Being in so close proximity to the Xenomorph during gameplay would almost certainly end in a negative manner, so the exhilaration and fear that the scene inspires is palpable.

As Amanda hides behind the desk, the Xenomorph is seen from a low angle. The creature is naturally much taller than Amanda, but this low angle only intensifies the visual stature of it, making it seem even more monstrous.

## **Ex 2: System Glitch? – 27:35 – 28:21**

The scene in this scene android is several times stronger than any human is, and thus is a formidable foe. Moreover, its cold and artificial exterior conveys no emotion, much like its vocalisations, which are by nature robotic. At a glance, it might look human, but upon closer inspection, its rubbery, static face reveals its true nature. Amanda is watching, crouched, from inside a vent, thus creating an image of the Android as being larger than it really is, but the raw physical power it commands means it is not to be trifled with, even if it is the roughly the same size as Amanda.

The score is quite dramatic during this sequence of events, underlining the action well, as it swells just before the hostile intentions of the android becomes clear, and again when the Working Joe begins bashing the man's head against the wall. Moreover, the voice of the androids is a chilling tool that signals the mechanical and methodical nature of these robotic antagonists. Coupled with their utterances, which often are in total incongruence with their actions or intentions make them an eerie presence throughout Sevastopol station.

With Amanda watching from the relative safety of the vent, this is how the player is made aware of the danger in a controlled way, so they can process it and prepare themselves for the inevitable encounter with it later in the game. This is cognitive affect, since it requires reflection on the part of the player to be utilised later in the game.

Furthermore, the android we see in this scene is directly disobeying the orders given to it. Since these androids are found everywhere across the station, the notion of them going rogue is highly disconcerting. The performances in this scene, accompanied by the visuals and particularly the audio, help to reinforce the effectiveness of this scene. Affectively, many elements are in play. While Amanda is not in any immediate danger, she is witnessing the incredible potential for danger that the androids represent. Chances are that she will come across these androids many times, as she works her way through Sevastopol station. Dealing with them is, from a gameplay perspective, cumbersome. We can surmise that since Amanda is a tough person, and the fact that she is prepared to fight them, that she does not meet the same fate as the man we see perish in this scene when coming across these androids. Furthermore, there is the visuals of the androids to consider. Their lifeless exteriors mirror their cold-hearted actions, which only increases the fear they inspire. There is an element of somatic emotion at play, when we see the man suddenly getting overpowered by the android, as well as cognitive emotion that lingers with us as we know we can easily find ourselves in combat with these androids.

### **Ex 3: Core meltdown – 1:16:03 – 1:16:42**

After having been deep inside Sevastopol's reactor, which is where the Xenomorphs have their nest, Amanda is getting ready to overload the core, hoping to finally rid the station of the hostile creatures. As the reactor starts pulsing with electricity, several Xenomorphs are seen escaping their nest, meaning that the danger is still present, and perhaps more dangerous than ever.

The reveal of the Xenomorphs having multiplied severely complicates matters for Amanda. Her hope is of course that all her work was finally done, and that the creatures would finally have been eliminated. The game, once again, drives home the point that these creatures are practically indestructible. Not only that, but what was supposed to kill the Xenomorphs has inadvertently released more of them into the bowels of the station. Similarly, dealing with just one Xenomorph at the beginning of the game, the knowledge that

there are now several of the creatures loose on the station reinforces the feeling of helplessness in the player. Now, there are multiple enemies to contend with. Again, the game presents the danger to Amanda at a distance, so the player has a chance to reflect on it. This tactic heightens the anticipation of potentially having to face off against not just one Xenomorph, but potentially two or more, making the fear much more accentuated.

There is little score to be heard, only a short jolt of an orchestral stab as a Xenomorph appears on screen, using a jump scare to startle the player. Diegetically, the awe-inspiring noises of the reactor as it charges up for the purge is truly a tool which imparts somatic emotions on the player, as well as cognitive emotions. Both because there is an immediate reaction to the pure volume and scope of the noise, and what that entails in the game's world, but also because that power failed to kill several Xenomorphs, signalling that these creatures are truly indestructible.

#### **Ex 4: Playing with Fire – 1:35:17 – 1:36:07**

This scene shows us a glimpse into the Xenomorphs behaviour in actual gameplay, where most of the interaction with the creature happens. Normally, the Xenomorph is afraid of fire and would run away if blasted with the flamethrower, but here we see that the player has to shoot several bursts with the flamethrower before the creature scampers off. This is part of the AI of the Xenomorph, which will adapt to the player's actions and choices. As such, the creature learns to withstand the fire to some degree, sometimes even charging through it to knock down the player before hiding. This trait of learning also carries on to other aspects of the game, and is designed to keep the player from relying on a single tactic to avoid or fend off the Xenomorph. This creates an image of an enemy, which is highly intelligent, fearsome, and constantly adapting to its environment and the things within it.

The overall effect of this behaviour is that the player is kept on their toes in terms of how they play the game. If you frequently hide in lockers, for example, the Xenomorph will slowly become more likely to check in and around lockers in any given area. Similarly, if the player uses a noisemaker, which is one of many disposable devices that can be crafted in the game, to lure away their enemy, it will gradually become less and less effective the more it is used, since the Xenomorph will learn to ignore those types of distractions. This is cognitive affect, since it is a learned behaviour by the antagonist, which the player must keep track of

themselves, lest they suffer the consequences of relying too heavily on one type of hiding place or distraction.

The AI in the game is separated into two parts, with one part of it always knowing where the player is, often called the Director, and one that controls the Xenomorph itself. The Director's job is to regularly give the Xenomorph AI hints as to where the player is, so that it is always in the vicinity of the player. The Xenomorph AI also reacts to player actions, such as making noises, or triggering certain events in the game (AI and Games, 2016).

The sounds aspect of this scene, while rather minimalistic, is still quite telling of the game soundscape. We hear the Xenomorph stomping around, with its heavy step that are quite characteristic for this game. We hear a few of its other noises too, such as its hiss, and a screech as its hit with the fire. These noises, perhaps apart from the walking sounds, are part of the greater, established lore of the *Alien* universe, and therefore, they bring with them potential a myriad of connotations and experiences, as it comes down to the players previous experiences whether or not this sound is simply terrifying, or also carries some nostalgia. If nothing else, the somatic response to these very established sounds tell us of a creature which is extremely large, animalistic, and threatening.

### **Ex 5: Abducted - 1:41:01 – 1:42:15**

Amanda is about to climb into a spacesuit, the cutscene begins and as Amanda holds the helmet in her hands, a few strands of slimy drool drips onto the visor of the helmet. She looks up and sees the Xenomorph in a vent directly above her. It hisses and screeches as it grabs Amanda, and seconds later she is being violently dragged through the intricate system of vents. With a disembodied scream, the screen turns black. The first time playing through this game, this could be understood as a death-scenario. The Xenomorph can lurk in the vents above and snatch the player quickly. However, as we see, this is not the end of the game.

In the darkness, muffled sounds are heard, perhaps indicating Amanda's attempts at escape. As we see a few second later, she has been cocooned into the walls of what we must presume to be either the remains of the Xenomorphs' previous hive, or a new hive. There are eggs everywhere around her, some still unopened. These eggs contain smaller creatures, called Facehuggers. They are usually laid by a queen variant of the Xenomorph, although we never see one in the game. The Facehugger lives up to its name, in that it positions itself on

top of the victim's face, and inserts an ovipositor into the oesophagus of the host, whereupon the Xenomorph embryo is implanted. After this process is complete, the Facehugger dies and often falls off the victim-turned-hosts face.

This is the first time in the narrative where Amanda is overpowered by the Xenomorph, perhaps her desperation and the general chaos of what is happening to the station has distracted her enough that she lets her guard down enough to not notice the presence of the Xenomorph above. Regardless, she is powerless to resist the physical prowess of the creature and it steals her away with ease. Not only is this scene scary in itself, but we also get a glimpse into the fate of the many people who has died in order for so many Xenomorphs to be on Sevastopol, and while we never see anyone die from birthing the alien creature, it is a horrible thing to behold. Witnessed in all the films of the franchise, the Xenomorph gestates inside the host, until it reaches the sufficient level of maturity and size. It then proceeds to violently burst through the chest cavity of the victim, who are often cocooned onto a wall as Amanda is. Since there is no dead Facehugger near her, it would be safe to assume that she has been implanted with a Xenomorph embryo.

This is the most vulnerable Amanda has been throughout the game, and the player empathises greatly with her, as the confusion so to where she is as she wakes up is immense. Not only that, but one of the game's biggest jump-scares is the moment where the Xenomorph is spotted just above you. Both cognitive and somatic emotions are portrayed as we feel the lingering shock and terror at being caught, as well as knowing that we have to now find our way back, only this time the station seems far worse off, with fire, chaos and destruction everywhere.

### **Ex 6: Final Sacrifice – 1:48:32 – 1:52:02**

We hear clanging and explosions, as Sevastopol is being dragged into the nearby planet's atmosphere. Amanda is breathing heavily. She has to release the Torrens from the station manually, which means going outside onto the surface of the station. As she finishes arming the last release bolt, the station has become increasingly unstable, and she latches herself onto a nearby railing. As she turns around to engage the release, four Xenomorphs appear from all sides. Amanda barely manages to hit the button before it is too late. She is hurled off the platform, spinning wildly, and is seen hitting the side of some structure. The screen then switches to a wide view of Sevastopol station, now being fully disintegrated by

its descent into the planet's atmosphere. A hard cut to Amanda, who has made it inside the Torrens. She calls for Verlaine, with no answer returning. As she opens one of the doors, a final Xenomorph emerges from behind it. Amanda slowly backs up, the stalking creature mere feet in front of her. Making her way into an airlock, she lures the Xeno inside as well, realising that her only option is to flush both of them into the vacuum of space.

A final cut to Amanda, floating in space. As the camera zooms in on her face, we see from small movements in her face that she is still alive, albeit seemingly unconscious. Just before the credits start rolling, we see a light passing over her visor and face, suggesting that there is someone nearby searching for her or just survivors in general.

Amanda's ultimate sacrifice is symptomatic of one of the narrative's main points, which is that the Xenomorph cannot be killed. As we see when Amanda is arming the manual release, the Xenomorphs have no trouble being in the vacuum of space unaided, which means that what Amanda does is not killing the creature, but merely minimising the chances that this extremely volatile organism makes it back with the ship to civilisation, since the implications of that would be catastrophic. We witness first-hand what kind of devastation these creatures can wreak upon a relatively small grouping of people. When Amanda arrives at Sevastopol, everything has already gone completely wrong. People are looting and killing others, fending only for themselves. If a Xenomorph were to make it to a larger civilisation, the result would most likely be completely cataclysmic. This final scene really drives the point home. There is no contending with the Xenomorphs. These creatures are so proficient at what they do, that the only chance Amanda has is to somehow escape them, not kill them.

The sound design of this final scene is one of the main proponents of the claustrophobic and terrified sensation that is felt. As Amanda is inside a space suit, and outside in open space, very little sound can reach her. In fact, it is only because her feet are planted on the station itself that any sound reaches her at all. What we hear most clearly is Amanda's heavy breathing, as she has been through the mill three times over, and must be physically, as well as mentally, exhausted by this point. While this game is a sci-fi horror game, the sound design is really designed with such care that it all seems reasonable and true. This reality of the world is ultimately what grounds the entire experience, and makes it so effective.

*Alien: Isolation* is undoubtedly a horror simulation. The game was built to simulate surviving in these incredibly tense and horrific situations, rather than as a mindless shooter

with horror-elements forced into its narrative. *Isolation* is built around the Xenomorph and its horrifying abilities to stalk its prey, and quickly strike without much chance of the victim averting it. You cannot kill it, only scare it off for a few seconds while you run away and try to find a place to hide. One need only play a few minutes into the game to understand the level of dedication and care that was put into creating this game. The game does not play out in a completely linear fashion, meaning that Amanda's survival is contingent on the player's abilities to utilise the few tools at their disposal in order to outsmart the Xenomorph. Creative thinking and an understanding of the way the creature works becomes paramount and this requires the players to invest themselves into the game at a higher level than a game where your only objective is to kill as many opponents as possible. This immersion also comes with the "price" of feeling a deeper connection to the narrative and the characters within it, meaning that the player is likely to feel more scared, overjoyed, or puzzled whenever something happens in the game. It is no surprise that reviewer David Houghton describes the game with high praise:

"Movement is measured in inches and feet rather than metres, and simply remaining alive becomes more exhilarating than any objective achieved. Every new hiding place reached becomes a glorious win. Every room crossed becomes more satisfying than any boss fight. It's as thrilling as it is terrifying, and that's to say, immensely. But over time, your relationship with the Alien will change, just as it changes the dynamics of the world around you. Despite its horrific, primal nature, you'll steadily form a closeness to it. A strange, terrified, adversarial intimacy as you unconsciously study it and learn. Its sheer array of behaviours, reactions and abilities, while always monstrously imposing, will start to inform your own. The sound of its footsteps when out of sight, the cacophony of its breathing and screams, and the metallic thunder of its traversal through vents, gradually become a language, and your deadly, cat-and-mouse interplay a conversation" (Houghton).

This is exactly the type of interaction the game tries to promote. The player spends so many hours in the company of the Xenomorph that they slowly learn to interpret its mannerisms, sounds and habits. The experience may become slightly less hectic as the player progresses through the game, but in no way does this mean that it becomes easier to avoid the Xenomorph.

## Until Dawn

*Until Dawn* is a horror adventure videogame, which was released in 2015. The narrative is the main driving force in the game and to a great degree the main selling point of the game as well. In the game, you control several different characters, all of which are located in and around the same lodge, located on a mountain in Western Canada. Firstly, the narrative suggests that a rogue psychopathic killer is on the loose, which is not untrue. Later other, more mystical elements are introduced into the narrative. The narrative is somewhat loosely structured and shifting in that certain actions made by the player can change how parts of the narrative unfolds. The narrative framework is still quite fixed, in that the player does not have total freedom to shape their own story, but all characters can end up dead through bad or sluggish decision-making on the player's part.

Immersion is particularly important in games for them to cause real affect to the player. Immersion refers to a 'spatial presence' which lets the player believe they are physically in the game world. While playing the game, the player forms a conceptual idea in their mind of what the layout of the game might be, based on visual, haptic, or auditory feedback, after which the player must decide whether this representation is believable – however, this is not necessarily a conscious decision, nor is it a constant. Two elements must be present in order to achieve immersion, namely a "rich mental model of the game environment and (...) consistency between the things in that environment". Richness refers to "multiple channels of information", which means assaulting more than one sense at any time, for instance, having the player both see and hear an object; "completeness of sensory information", meaning that the game world makes sense on its own sphere, through familiarity; "cognitively demanding environments", in which players have to pay attention and concentrate in order to progress in the game; "a strong and interesting narrative, plot or story", which interests and engages the player (Madigan). The immersion is lost once the game world does not make sense, for instance, if something reminds the player that what they are seeing is artificial, and they are not actually in the game world, which is often connected to menus, tutorial messages, and notifications, unexpected behaviour from the in-game characters, and the inability to interact with an object (Madigan). Furthermore, the player is relatively complicit in the level of immersion they can achieve, as some people choose to believe the illusion, and want to role-play their part, while others are more critical of the game world and need to be convinced by the game (Madigan).

*Until Dawn* places the player in an important position, as they alone have the power to shape the fate of the characters. Through careful examination of the fine details and deduction of certain clues, the player can potentially save all of the kids on the mountain. If the player neglects to envelop themselves in the narrative, if they do not search for clues, read journal entries and such, the chance of one or more characters dying rises. This means that not only must the player immerse themselves in the game – the game has to make itself inviting in a way that calls for this kind of immersion. Generally, the game is quite accessible, the story is easy to understand and get into, and the gameplay has nothing exorbitantly difficult to it. The introductory part of the game presents all the characters in an easily digestible manner, and sets up a dramatic conclusion that will, leave the players curious as to what happens further. Technically, the game has no interrupting elements, there is no intrusive HUD that points the player in a certain direction, there is no need for a map, or ammunition/health information, since these factors never come into play. Where *Alien: Isolation* was heavily focused on the player's own ability to creatively elude a hostile Xenomorph foe across a giant map, *Until Dawn* places the player into a more rigid gameplay structure. For the most part, there is only one path to go, although some scenarios will have diverging paths. However, these paths are just two ways of reaching the same place eventually, with the choice often being between left or right, or sometimes going on a faster, more risky path versus a slower, but safer path. Both will lead the player to the same location, but one will perhaps change the outcome of later events, since it is a faster route. Including the player in the process of shaping the narrative helps to immerse the player even more in the experience. As Kostas & Karpouzis performed a study where different scenarios were presented to the testers. One of these involved the testers playing two kinds of games, one where the story was extremely superficial, while the other was more intricate. Their findings proved that “Playing the game with the elaborate story led to significantly greater interest in and focus on the story compared to playing the game with the minimal story” (p. 48). Greater interest and focus also lead to more care being given to the narrative, which in turn means that the player's emotions are affected more by the game.

### **Ex 1: A Gruesome Trap – 2:27:30 – 2:32:55**

Chris is searching for Ashley. As he enters an old, dilapidated cabin, he finds Ashley and Josh tied to a wall. In front of the two is a short railway, which splits in two and leads to each of the two victims. At the other end of the tracks stands a small cart with a sawblade

mounted on top. This trap is designed so that Chris has to decide which of the two victims gets to live. The cart moves slowly down the tracks as Chris tries to make up his mind about who to save. The decision is tough, because he has to choose between his best friend and a potential love interest. Regardless of this, the game is designed in such a way that Josh will always die in this trap. Unbeknownst to the player the first time playing through the game, they might think that the Psycho is being disingenuous about what the choice meant, or perhaps that the trap was faulty in some way. The real reason for Josh's supposed death is of course that it gives him free reign to terrorise the others freely as the Psycho.

Nonetheless, this scene shows us the manipulative and menacing methods used by the Psycho, which are not unlike something we might see in the *Saw* franchise. The special effects used by Josh to stage his own death are highly effective, as neither Chris nor Ashley are able to see through the deception. There is plenty of gore and viscera to horrify the player, and Josh's performance is convincing enough that even the player would not suspect anything. The fact that the Psycho seemingly does not abide by his own rules also brings about an air of uncertainty and unease. The player is left without any usable knowledge on how to approach these traps, since the result seemingly is not affected by your choice.

The visuals, while not photorealistic, are realistic enough that the experience does not remove the player from the immersion of the game, and thereby destroying the tension and fear of the game.

There is no score in this scene, which only accentuates the mechanical whirring of the terrible mechanism which is responsible for Josh's presumed death. Coupling this with the very convincing performance from Josh, and Ashley and Chris's completely genuine horror at what has happened, and the scene is very effective in not only terrifying the player, but also disgusting them with the visceral imagery. The modified voice of the Psycho is also play a part in creating a somatic response, since it clearly sounds unnatural and strangely calm. All these elements play on both shock value, as we see the now grotesque imagery of Josh's body, as well as the cognitive dissonance in the way the Psycho seemingly does not adhere to his own rules. This scene is also clearly planned with intent, meaning this is not the work of a random psychopath.

**Ex 2: Caught Again – 4:02:15 – 4:05:46**

In this scene, we are following Chris and Ashley once again. This time they are both free, but not before long, as we see the Psycho sneaking up behind Chris, silently. He gasses Chris to incapacitate him, and then he faces Ashley who tries to fight back, but receives a brutal punch to the head. When they both wake, they are each strapped to a chair across from each other at a table. Chris has one hand free, and the reason for this is soon revealed. Being faced with their probable death, they finally decide to confront their feelings toward each other. Suddenly two sawblades turn on above them, slowly descending.

Again, the choice falls to Chris, who must choose to shoot either himself or Ashley with the provided pistol. The choice, again, has no direct effect on the characters, as the weapon is loaded with blanks, and thus can do no real harm. The interesting thing about this choice is that if the player decided to shoot the gun at Ashley, her mental state will deteriorate severely, causing her to be more likely to die later in the game. Chronologically, just shortly after this scene, Josh reveals himself to be the Psycho, which turns the story on its head going forward. This scene is, much like the previous one, designed to give the player agency in the narrative. While it initially seems inconsequential, it later turns out to be part of what either saves or kills Ashley, provided she does not die before that.

There are a few visual aspects of this scene which makes it particularly interesting. As becomes clear once Ashley and Josh have been strapped into their chairs, this is also, clearly, an orchestrated scene, this time there is even a video-camera standing close by to film the action. There is even a light shining down on them in the otherwise darkened rooms, framing them perfectly. The cognitive emotions come into play especially here, as the player will understand that this is part of a larger whole. Coincidentally, this plan is revealed only moments after Chris had made his choice in the trap. On the first time playing through the game, there is a good chance that the player has not deduced that Josh is the Psycho, at which point the reveal of his identity would come as a massive shock, especially given his supposed death earlier in the game.

**Ex 3: The Wendigo Attacks – 5:04:44 – 5:06:36**

Chris and the Stranger are walking to the shack where Josh had earlier been tied up. After finding him missing, the two proceed, and as they leave the shack, the Stranger warns Chris not to move, since a Wendigo is nearby. The Stranger then tells Chris to run as the Wendigo is closing in on them, and they are in a compromised situation. This leads to the Stranger's death, as the Wendigo swoops by at an immense speed and decapitates him in a flash. Chris then alternately runs and shoots his way back towards the cabin where he finally makes it inside, with the Wendigo close at his heels.

What this scene sets up, primarily, is the ferocity and raw animalistic power of the Wendigos. The Stranger, who has been living on the mountain for many years, and keeping a close eye on the Wendigos. He has a vast knowledge of their abilities, and yet dies within minutes of coming into contact with one in this scene. Clearly, the kids have very little chance of escaping the mountain alive, if a man whose life seemingly has revolved around keeping these creatures in check can die so quickly at their hands. The fear comes from the speed and strength this lanky and sinewy creature can muster. The scene also shows us a great example of the jeopardy that hangs over the player through the entirety of the game's duration; that the death of a character can occur as a result of even a moment's hesitation. While the Stranger is not an important character to us, his death is not without meaning, as explained above. This sets the stage for all the following encounters with the Wendigos, since we now know their fearsome capabilities intimately.

We hear the howling of the wind, and distantly the screeching of a Wendigo. The game then prompts the player to not move, a feature used a few times throughout the game, which actually requires the player to physically not move the game-controller. During this, almost all sounds fade away and a heartbeat is heard, which heightens the tension. This passes after a few seconds, but we soon cut to the view of the Wendigo, not far behind them. Their vision is mostly red, and any movement is highlighted in a light-blue colour, although this is not shown here. The significance of this vision is two-fold. First, it paints a picture of the Wendigos as something far removed from humans, whomever they may have been before their transformation, their predatory vision alone tells us that a fundamental change has taken place, secondly, the colours is a visual tool that tell us something about the Wendigos and how they function. That their vision is based on movement is information that could come in handy further down the line.

**Ex 4: Derangement – 5:55:27 – 5:58:23**

Josh finds himself deep in the mines of the mountain. His psychosis now taking over completely, he starts to hallucinate and envisions several disturbing sounds and images based on his guilt and fears. First, he sees the decomposed corpses of his sisters, Hannah and Beth, reanimated and speaking to him. Then, a giant, pulsating wall of flesh appears in front of him, it splits and out comes a giant, severed, pig's head, which promptly falls to the floor, still moving. His sisters appear out of a pile of entrails, now all bloody. One of the two peels their entire face off and they both start talking to him once again. Lastly, the giant head of a Wendigo appears from the ceiling of the cave, roaring and screeching at Josh.

Josh, having been met with the disapproval of his friends for his crazed antics as the Psycho, and losing touch with reality because of his psychosis, finally snaps completely when he finds himself in the lair of his former sister, Hannah, now in the form of a Wendigo. In his internal “dialogues” with his mental image of his psychiatrist, Dr. Hill, we are shown that he feels immense guilt over not being there when his sisters lost their lives, as he was passed out drunk. His manifestations of his sisters, blaming him and telling him that he is all alone, are representations of his guilt.

First we see Josh from high above, lying on the floor. This angle makes him look small and insignificant, whereas before he was a threat to everyone. As the disembodied and demonic voices of his dead sisters sing “Frère Jaques” to him, the camera slowly descends upon him. Josh moves around in the cave as the camera pans around him quickly, then quickly cuts to a different angle. Josh rambles to himself during all this, a multitude of voices now talking to him out of the darkness. More quick cuts, before the player is given control of Josh and the camera returns a different, wide angle of him. The player only walks a few steps before the angle switches once more, this time to a close-up of Beth's rotting corpse talking to him. The player is then permitted a few more steps, until the same cut, except now both Hannah and Beth are in frame. Once more the scene changes and we see the giant wall of flesh spawn the giant pig's head. It falls to the floor and we get a worm's eye view of his two sisters menacingly saying “Josh”. Cut to a close-up of Hannah's face that zooms in very close as she peels off her facial skin. More quick cuts and disorienting angles, before we see the giant Wendigo head appear.

This whole sequence is, extremely disorienting, with its many strange and quick cuts, and the use of multiple strange angles. Coupled with the narrative elements of the scene, this all makes for an emphatic display of Josh's broken mind. Whereas before, he seemed crazed, but perhaps more mischievous, we now see the full extent of his psychosis, and our empathy is with him. It is clear that, while Josh might have been in control of the 'tests' he laid out, his mental state was far worse than they led on. This, retrospectively changes our outlook on Josh and his actions throughout the game through the use of cognitive affect. The cuts, angles and scene in itself makes heavy use of somatic elements, almost bordering on jump-scares.

### **Ex 5: Final Battle – 6:20:57 – 6:26:17**

In this final scene, we see the stand-off between the survivors, however many are left, and the Wendigos. We get our best look at the creatures, as they invade the cabin in search of the survivors. Their erratic movements remind us more of an insect or a spider than anything like a human. Hannah fight with and kills one of the other Wendigos, and in the struggle a gas pipe is knocked loose, creating a unique opportunity for the survivors to fight the Wendigos. Mike sees this opportunity and slowly walks toward a lightbulb which he plans to break and in turn ignite the gas with the light-switch. The two remaining Wendigos continue their clash and Hannah swiftly deals with the other one, leaving her to focus on the survivors now. Based on the player's choices, the remaining survivors slowly start filtering out of the cabin, leaving Sam and Mike to execute the plan. This sequence contains multiple very close encounters with the Wendigo that was once Hannah, and requires the player to hold the controller extremely still several times, all while the monstrous creature is staring both the player and the characters straight in their faces, screaming and howling. Another Wendigo enters the cabin, which changes Hannah's focus, allowing the survivors to breathe for a second, and continue their plan of escape. Sam is the last person out of the cabin, and as she makes a run for it, the two remaining Wendigos scuffle, making it possible for Sam to reach the exit and turn on the electricity, which ignites the gas and explodes the two Wendigos inside the cabin.

This final confrontation is the pinnacle of the story, and several characters can die in a heartbeat here, raising the stakes considerably. The setting is dark and dreary, as it has been throughout the game and the pale Wendigos, while harder to spot in the wilderness, stand out by a mile. We really get to see their strangely stretched bodies and deformed features, not to

mention their erratic mannerisms, which underlines the fact that they are no longer human in any way perfectly. Their inhuman nature is also shown in the Wendigos fighting with each other, as opposed to working cooperatively to kill the survivors.

We get to see the full extent of the visual and auditory aspects of the Wendigos here, their screams almost seem to function like a form of echolocation; as we can see they deploy these shrill screeches to essentially scare their prey into moving, at which point they can see it. The sheer number of close encounters with the Wendigos during this final scene is extremely stressful, especially as they stand only a few centimetres from you in some cases, loudly screaming directly into your face. There are several point in this scene where they player could have made a fatal choice, resulting in characters' deaths. Clearly, saving everyone is the most difficult path of all, and this scene showcases that perfectly.

## Conclusion

By using affect theory to examine various products of horror, we have tried to refrain from walking down the same path as many have done before – that of interlinking gender and horror. Instead, by using affect, we have tried to look at horror in a more objective manner, taking into account ourselves being part of the analysis. That being said, affect theory can be put to good use when looking at cultural products from a different time – such as *The Thing from Another World*. Looking at every bit of horror as having some connection to gender is to restrain yourself from seeing other, perhaps even more profound connections between horror media and culture that would otherwise have been left by the wayside. It is true that horror often incorporates elements of gender, but our claim is that several valuable points can be made without defaulting to gender when analysing horror.

Our first point of analysis looked at what differences there was not only in the narrative, but also in the filmmaking of three films, which all share the same basic concept. *The Thing from Another World*, which deals with a budding alien invasion story, where a group of American researchers and air-force crew discover a crashed alien spacecraft. The craft is inadvertently destroyed, but the pilot is still intact. The Thing soon springs from its icy prison and starts to cause chaos and mayhem for everyone on the base. Alongside this narrative, there is an internal struggle between the air-force crew and the scientists. By the end, the non-professionals have, through ingenuity managed to come up with a plan to

destroy the Thing, which is successful. The alien invasion narrative and the cold, logical thinking of the scientist can be linked with the looming threat of communism arising from the Soviet Union. Hint of the threat of invasion and nuclear war are also to be found within the narrative. This film, while not particularly frightening now, plays on a lot of fears that were prominent in the 1950s society. The reasoning for why this film is less effective in a modern setting is in no small part due to the look of the film. The monster is far removed from what audiences are used to seeing today, and the monochromatic look of the film is hard to ignore. While the film clearly relies more on suspense, the few action-scenes we get are also not up to modern standards.

The next adaptation comes in the form of *The Thing*, from 1982. Here, the threat of the alien creature is much more sinister; it has the ability to absorb and replicate organic matter. Once this is found out, the panic begins to spread as everyone on the base begins to suspect everyone else of being a Thing. Ultimately, most of the crew pay the ultimate price in an attempt to stop the Thing, and the end is left unclear as to which, if any of the two remaining humans have been infected. This film was released into a culture, which it did not fit. It resonated better with the cultural atmosphere that was present in the 1970s where conspiracies and distrust of the government was commonplace due to the Watergate scandal and the controversies connected with the Vietnam War. This film creates a deeply unsettling and suspenseful narrative, with effects that still are effective today. The sound-design for both the score and the creature completes the effective package that is the 1982 *Thing*.

The third and final adaptation takes place in the same universe as the 1982 film. It was released in 2011 and is called *The Thing* as well. In this film, we get to see the events that transpired only days before the previous film, all of which are quite alike. This film tries to mirror the narrative of the previous film for the most part. However, the film's production was not allowed to run the intended course, as the studio and test-audiences called for more action. While this does not say anything specifically political about the culture that fostered the film, it does say something about the impatience of audiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This film tries to polish up the previous film, but fails to deliver on several important points, not least of which is the Thing itself, which was made using CGI. The film is an overall lesser film than its predecessor, and caters more to modern audiences than to fans of the original. This film relies more on traditional horror tropes, and discards much of what many feels are the what made Carpenter's 1982 *Thing* so great.

The evolution of these three films shows us not only the technological evolution of the Hollywood film, but each also reflects some part of the time in which they were conceived. Often, the film reflects a cultural attitude, whether in relation to global conflict, national identity, or something as simple as the general attitude towards horror films. None of the *Thing* films are explicitly concerned with gender in the first place, but excluding it entirely gives us a chance to view the films on their own merits, and examine what makes them frightening based on other factors, which vary greatly based on historical context.

The two *Ring* films examined were not separated by any significant amount of time, instead they stem from different cultures, one originated in Japan, the other in America. Both films, again, share the same general background. The story revolves around a young girl being drowned in a well, after which she comes back as a spirit, haunting the world by way of a cursed video tape. Sadako in the Japanese version is somewhat justified, once we consider the cultural implications of her being betrayed by the patriarchy that was supposed to protect her. Japan is keen on folklore and myths, as well as a general ambiguity and balancing forces.

However, America is a bit more cynical when it comes to paranormal activity; it is not something that is taken very seriously. When it is, it is inherently evil, which Samara is a perfect example of. She haunts relentlessly, thirsts for blood and preys on small children. Sadako is given the benefit of a doubt, as she seems to have a reason to want revenge. That is not to say that Samara does not have an excuse, she was murdered by the people who were supposed to protect her, but the difference is, even when she was alive, she had sadistic tendencies. The American *Ring* causes affect mainly through the use of disturbing visuals, and unsettling musical scores, in contrast to *Ringu*, which creeps up on the viewer, and requires a bit more context. American audiences prefer when the narrative ties up nicely, whereas the Japanese audience is content with being left with more questions than answers.

Videogames are an interesting medium with which to portray narratives. Audience participation and attention is guaranteed, since the game will not play of its own accord, which also means that the player becomes more immersed within the game's narrative automatically. It is not all games that cater to a gripping narrative, however, yet those which do are often extremely effective.

*Alien: Isolation* follows Amanda Ripley, daughter of renowned horror-queen Ellen Ripley. Amanda is searching for clues of her mother, and her search brings her to Sevastopol

Station, a huge construct to which, she learns, a flight recorder with a message from her mother has been brought. Once upon the station, it soon becomes clear that something is awry, and as you traverse throughout the massive space station, you are stalked by the unstoppable Xenomorph. It is a creature, which is always lurking nearby, and to which there is no recourse; you can only temporarily stop it, giving you a vital few seconds to find some place to hide. The Xenomorph is an iconic film monster – and in this game, we get to experience the terror of it first-hand. The game's sounds, visuals and mechanics all cater to the frightening experience, and all three types of affect are in use as the player tries to avoid being horrendously murdered by the stalking creature. Whether it is the expectation of the Xenomorph rounding the corner or jump out of a vent above, getting terrified by its charge towards you or jumping in your seat as it pulls you out from under the desk suddenly, this videogame provides everything in terms of creating a thoroughly frightening experience.

*Until Dawn* is, from a gameplay perspective, a quite simple endeavour. Much less involved than *Alien: Isolation*, the gameplay consists mostly of walking your character around and pressing some buttons every now and then. The narrative however contains a lot more interesting elements. A mentally deranged killer, later revealed to be one of their friends, is on the prowl. As the teens flee in every direction and are scattered, we follow along with everyone in small episodic parts. The most compelling narrative tool the game employs is that one wrong move can permanently change the outcome of any situation. Any of the controllable characters can die at the slip of a finger or a moment's hesitation. This in turn affects the outcome of the remaining characters' story. *Until Dawn* is highly affective both emotionally, cognitively and somatically, the atmosphere and setting of the game makes for a very compelling narrative, and the increased agency that is given to the player makes it all the more captivating.

Affect is used in many different ways, depending on which medium is in play. Some types of affect can stand the test of time and be relevant many years later. Others fluctuate with political or cultural changes in society, and can come and go into style. Horror often makes use of affective elements in its narratives to heighten the experience of the film, game, or book. Similarly, some kinds of affect are simply inaccessible to certain cultures – as *The Ring* and *Ringu* has shown, Japanese horror is not necessarily the same as American horror. Our look at the *Thing* films has, amongst other things, shown that a 35-year-old horror film can still be extremely effective, if only everything in it has been done with great care and

precision. Videogames can also employ affect quite successfully, and because of the interactive nature of videogames, the horror often seems even more effective to the player.

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