Opposing the Monstrous: Analysing Political Bodies in Contemporary Horror

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Introduction

Have you ever walked home alone at night, that niggling feeling in the back of your mind warning you of danger as you walk through utter darkness – suddenly all too aware of your own vulnerability? It is likely you have – fear is one of our more basic instincts, meant to keep us safe and alive, yet sometimes paralysing (Grèzes, Pichon & de Gelder 959). Our minds and bodies are designed to react in moments of danger, to protect yourself, and it is at moments of fear that you become the most aware of your body: blood racing, pulse thumping, sweat dripping – physical and mental responses to fear that humanity is all-too familiar with.

Within the genre of horror, the physical body has always been at the centre of its story (Siddique 1). Several names are used to address these, such as bodies of horror, grotesque bodies, bodies of excess, and the horrific body. What is essential in considering the use of these bodies is not only how they are positioned within the movie, but also how these bodies reflect our cultural ideas of what constitutes as horrific, grotesque, or excessive. Siddique refers to these bodies as a place where we see the horrific and the horrified intersect. These cultural projections onto a body are ultimately political, both in their creation and consequence; as argued by Bordo, the body is a political site and subject (18). She points out that there is no such thing as a 'natural' body anymore, as every body is "historically and politically inscribed and shaped" (288). *How* these bodies are marked is what decides the way society views and treats the person, and it is through contemporary media that we can analyse these views. Horror, in its essential role of inspiring fear in its viewers, is a good way to analyse what bodies we consider 'safe', and which we have decided to be dangerous – an idea stemming from cultural and political views we hold. These views not only inform our own views, but

also shape the identities of the people we categorize as dangerous. While a body is always political, be they viewed safe or unsafe, the view we hold is not always informed by the political affiliations that influence our culture. Because of this, I will be using the term "political bodies" to refer to bodies whose experience, identity, and treatment in society is directly informed by the (biased) political and cultural views we hold as a whole. Understanding horror as the genre that reflects current fears and anxieties, what can we learn about our contemporary cultural views of these political bodies? This essay looks at the role of the political body, specifically the racial and female body, in contemporary horror. Uniquely, these movies have turned the role of the monster around on its audience, and the political bodies usually used as monster have now become protagonists. In this deviation of the horror tradition, what can we learn about contemporary cultural anxieties and understandings of the monster? How can we interpret contemporary horror's relationship to social and cultural norms? Put succinctly; what can we learn about our society through the analysis of these movies, when using the perspective of the political or non-normative body?

The genre horror was chosen because it reflects what makes people scared and uncomfortable, and in order to ensure my analysis will be focused on current social affairs, I will be looking at horror movies from within the last five years. I will use two movies as case studies: *Get Out* and *Midsommar*. These movies were chosen due to their social relevance, contemporary nature, and the overwhelmingly positive reception from the public (Ramos, Donaldson). Due to limitations of time, I will be looking specifically at the racialized and gendered body, though they are by far not the only political body relevant to the horror genre. For this research I will be looking at the theory of abjection, negrophilia, and the monstrous-feminine. The theory of abjection is one that focuses on the experience of dread and horror when cultural boundaries between the self and the Other are crossed, and though originating in feminist studies it is now widely applicable to racial theory as well (Simensen 15). This theory is of interest in this research because it not only seeks out the cultural demarcations of the self/Other, but specifically describes a practice where one can experience social rejection due to their identity being inherently dangerous to the established boundaries, thus

threatening the social safety of the individuals who belong to the category self (Phillips 19). Kristeva compares this sense of horror to those an individual can experience when encountering bodily fluids, taboo subjects, or transgressive acts (3, 6, 17). This theory will be used for both movies. The concept of negrophilia, however, focuses on the fetishization of the black body/culture, which explores a form of acception rather than rejection, which will be relevant specifically for *Get Out* (Archer-Straw 31). For *Midsommar*, on the other hand, the theory of the monstrous-feminine will be applied to further our understanding of the feminine body/subject as horrific: this theory looks at how typically feminine roles/traits are exaggerated to the point of monstrosity or grotesqueness (Creed 1). In the application of this, the monstrous-feminine disrupts the normative and patriarchal hierarchies, which is part of the analysis that will be relevant in this research of the gendered political body. Here, too, I shall look at both rejection and acceptance, and will pay special interest to how these themes are used to either demonize or glorify the feminine body. For this analysis and the application of these theories, I will be analysing specific scenes in minute detail so as to focus not only on the foregrounded and subtextual themes present, but also on the use of lighting and camerawork and its implications in the presentation of these political bodies. The application/analysis of the academic theories will be to build an understanding and interpretation of the films; the visual techniques applied will be analysed to see how they support, further, or perhaps even refute these ideas.

While in this essay the focus is on social criticism in horror, it would be a mistake to understand the genre as a whole as inherently socially critical. The films I am looking at are part of a subset in the genre named “the social thriller”, which are movies whose plot (and subsequent anxieties/fears inspired by it) are focused on social and societal problems. Though movies from the late 1900s such as *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Shining* are nowadays also counted as part of this genre, this term became only popularized after the movie *Get Out* was released to the public. Despite this term being fairly recent, the use of horror to critique and reflect on perceived social issues is not. However, this does not mean movies outside of the social thriller subgenre cannot be of use in analysing its

zeitgeist; as mentioned earlier, the anxieties and fears used by these movies are informed by our own cultural and political preconceptions (Prince 118). I argue, then, that the most important difference to note is that of intention: social thrillers *intend* to critique certain cultural norms, codes, or systematic injustices, whereas other horror movies simply betray their contemporary anxieties through their use of monsters and anxieties.

In horror, ways of portraying grotesque and horrific things have always included seeking out the uncomfortable, or the non-normative. Bakhtin refers to the way non-normative bodies and subjects are used in horror as grotesque bodies (Siddique 3). Crucially, however, Bakhtin identifies these bodies as a challenge to power rather than simply culturally Othered and rejected subjects: in both literature and visual media, these bodies invite audiences to question their own cultural assumptions and scripts (4). It is important, however, to understand the distinction here between bodies used in horror and body horror: while the former is used in this essay to look at the embodiment of racial and gendered coding, the latter is a term used in horror to refer to ways in which bodies have been graphically altered to induce the idea of destruction or degeneration of the human body, and in doing so elicits fear from the viewer (Reyes 52). This distinction is important as these are two different areas in horror that, while it may overlap at times, are not indistinguishable: in the analysis of this essay, the focus is solely on the culturally Other body and how fear is (or is not) elicited through the social scripts attached to these bodies; *not* how these bodies elicit fear through their unnatural depiction.

Film as a long history of representing social ideas through imagery; be that symbolically, or through lighting, or framework. Lighting especially holds a major role in this. Richard Dyer explores this relationship at length in his research, most notably in his book *White* (2017, reissue). Dyer's research focuses specifically on representation in film, giving him an oeuvre of racial studies to gender studies to queer studies. To start with racial imagery in cinema: he points out that early film developed lighting focused on white stars; lighting in which black skin would fall away into the dark

background. He also points out the theme of black and white as colours associated with moral implications; white as safe, pure, ordered, logical; black as dangerous, disorderly, irrational. What is essential to Dyer's theories is understanding that film, the cinema, is not simply entertainment; it is a place where our perception of reality is reflected and confirmed (Cervulle xvii). A lot of Dyer's work involves categorizing "white" as a race, rather than raceless or normative, emphasizing not only the role of white culture in their own normalization and presentation as "just people" but also the harmfulness this idea has perpetrated in our thinking about race (Dyer 2). In film, this has resulted in an aesthetic technology that favours white people, and through this favouring we see a correlation with aesthetically pleasing pictures and morally correct ideals. Technology is always both technical and social, as the technicalities are always informed by the social ideals of the people creating it: Dyer refers to this as a racial character of technologies (83). Movie lighting is the biggest perpetrator of this aesthetic/racial technology, making it essential when analysing the racial body and its social implications. Though movie lighting has several components that make up the final impression, most important for this research will be the use of lighting upon the subject, what colour light is used, and how the subject reflects and absorbs light in the movie. Since the protagonist of one of the movies is a black man, the use of these components will tell us much about the social inference we are meant to make, as well as the aesthetic techniques used in this movie; do we see the standard, white-favouring light or something different? What connections can we make between the distinctions made for light and darkness, black and white? Applying these questions and theories to *Midsommar* is equally interesting: the use of lighting when considering matters of gender is no less important, though there might be different contexts. In the lighting of the (female) subject, we must consider again what we can infer about the subjects based on the use of light. Is the light used to further horrify her person, or soften it? How is she presented to us, physically and mentally? Colour theory is also relevant: what subtext do we understand from the movie's use of colour, lightness, and darkness? Equally, how is her whiteness used on camera to infer social cues?

I have mentioned earlier some limitations that must be addressed before I move on to my analysis. The political bodies I described cannot be reduced to only the racial and the gendered, especially not in horror; in fact, even within these two categories, there is much more depth and complexities I will not be able to touch upon. For the racial body I am currently limited to analysing only the black political body, while there are many bodies of colour that are equally ostracized, shunned, or socially made grotesque. I will also take this time to look at the white body, which is equally racialized but not made horrific the way people of colour often are. Whiteness is a cultural category equal to any other race, despite its own normative narrative, and will be treated as such in this essay. I encounter a similar limitation with gender: while my focus here must remain on the feminine/cis female body, there is a slew of literature and research to be done on the topic of genderqueer or transgender bodies in horror and their representations/non-normative nature. Outside of these categories, there is also the disabled body that is all too popular within horror to be made horrific and monstrous – all bodies representing positions within society where one is with less, or none, power. These social positions are often betrayed by the very body one inhabits, as their embodiment can signal a cultural/social category: gender, race, or physical disability.

Chapter 1: *Get Out* the Pitchforks: Reversing White Tropes and Expectations

What's the difference between an outlaw and an in-law? *An outlaw leaves after ruining your life!* Jokes about the in-laws have long been popular and, granted, there are some real horror stories out there. None, perhaps, quite so debilitating however as the story we see in *Get Out* which, though fictional, has resonated with audiences in unexpected ways.

Get Out follows the story of Chris Washington, a young black man who is going to meet his white girlfriend's, Rose, family, despite the protests and warnings of his best friend Rodney. Though seemingly welcoming, the Armitage family is a little off, both in their interactions with Chris and around him. The family's two servants, also black, also behave strangely, making Chris feel uneasy. Missy Armitage, the mother, hypnotizes him one night without consent, to cure him of his smoking addiction, and he falls into a subconscious domain called the 'sunken place'. Later, friends and family of the Armitages get together for a party, and Chris has to withstand a slew of microaggressions as every member of the party express admiration and envy for black culture and black celebrities. Chris also meets blind art dealer Jim Hudson, who expresses an interest in Chris' photography skills. Strangely, Chris meets another black man who calls himself Logan King, but looks like an acquaintance of Chris: when Chris tries to take a photo, the flash causes Logan to become hysterical, and he screams "get out" at Chris over and over until he is subdued. Missy calms him down in private and Dean, the father, claims he had a seizure; however, the picture is successfully identified by Rodney as Andre Hayworth, a missing man. Chris convinces Rose they should leave while they are on a walk, but during this conversation the camera shifts to a view of Dean Armitage holding a silent auction for Chris with all the members of the party, the winning bid going to the art dealer. Chris packs to leave but finds photos of Rose's previous boyfriends, all black men, despite her claims he was her first black boyfriend. As he tries to leave, Rose and her family restrain him, and Missy uses a trigger implanted during the earlier hypnosis to render him unconscious. Chris awakens later in the basement, where a video of Rose's grandfather, Roman, explains they have discovered a procedure

allowing people to transplant brains into other people's bodies, Chris' body being the latest one. Hudson, the bid winner, tells Chris he will not completely disappear, but he will forever be in the sunken place while Hudson will control his body and live as him. Chris manages to plug his ears with cotton stuffed in the chair, effectively blocking out the hypnotizing sounds and allowing him to escape when Jeremy, Rose's brother, comes to fetch him for the procedure. He attacks Jeremy and escapes, impaling Dean with the antlers of a deer mount and setting the house on fire while Hudson is still inside. While making his escape in the car he hits the black servant Georgina and he brings her with him, unable to leave her behind when that is how his mother died: Georgina is however inhabited by the Armitage grandmother and attacks him, crashing the car and killing her. Rose and Walter/Roman, the other black servant/Rose's grandfather, catch up with Chris and attack. Chris uses the flash on his phone to "awake" Walter, who shoots Rose and then himself. Chris begins to strangle Rose, but he cannot kill her. A police car then shows up, which turns out to be driven by Rodney who came to save him. They drive away and leave Rose to die, alone and surrounded by the corpses of her family.

Themes and Implications

I will start the analysis of this movie by looking at the presence of negrophilia and abjection. The concept of abjection, or of being abject, in this essay is used to identify the social status a subject is given by those around him. Important to this theory is the idea of the boundaries existing to separate the insiders (or the normative) from the outsiders (the non-normative). Focusing on abjection as a boundary that must be kept, the abject in this case is how Chris is refused entry into the 'inner circle' that is inhabited by the white people he is surrounded with. This abjection also plays on a systemic level, as we see during Chris' interaction with a police officer when on their way to the Armitage house. Abjection is highlighted in this movie in how Chris is rejected and Othered by the white people around him, but in the negrophilic acts and views of the guests we see Chris'

complete cultural isolation as an abject. To explore this, I will look at the scenes that show the duration of the family's get-together. While we have not yet arrived at the part of the movie where audiences learn of the nefarious intentions of the Armitages, we have seen enough to understand the fragile and uncomfortable racial interactions existent between white people and a black person, and also how these relations are maintained and emphasized by the white person's inability to relate to a black person. This party is the climax point of microaggressions for Chris; though we have seen his interactions with police and the Armitages (save Rose) ripe with inappropriate and racially coloured statements, the epitome of white people tripping over their own feet to show their affinity with and acceptance of 'black culture', this party moves away from the previous "well-meaning but culturally unaware" tone of the conversations into completely inappropriate. Every white stranger he meets seems unable to discuss anything unrelated to his blackness; he is diminished from a complex person to simply 'the black man', and sometimes even just 'black'. The first conversation starts innocuous, an old man explaining his golfing career, but Chris' interest is quickly dampened as Tiger Woods is brought up. The scene transitions into a different conversation, one crossing the boundaries of socially appropriate or polite conversation even further. Below a transcript.

Rose: This is Nelson and Lisa

Chris: Hey, how you doing?

Lisa: So, how handsome is he?

Rose: I don't know, are you handsome?

[Chris and Rose chuckle. Lisa steps forward to grab his arm and scrutinize it, feeling her way up and down.]

Chris: [uncomfortable] Okay.

Rose: Oh!

Lisa: Not bad. Eh, Nelson?

[Nelson nods]

Lisa: So, is it true? [she looks Chris up and down] Is it better?

Chris: Oh, wow.

Rose: Wow.

This conversation is put in a different light when later it is revealed the guests are there to bid on Chris, making this interaction more like an inspection than a simple conversation. However, for both Chris and the viewers this is unknown at this point in the movie, and we simply observe an instance of both abjection and negrophilia at once: because of Chris' black skin and identity, he is clearly made into an outsider; not only by Lisa, but by the other party guests as well. We see this in the continuous remarks about black culture in the conversations he has with guests, and their inability to divorce his blackness from his person. This is where the concept of negrophilia becomes important to the analysis: negrophilia refers to the idolization or fetishization of black culture or people, where it is uplifted to a social ideal that still excludes the very people whose culture is being appropriated and used as a model. In the movie, the negrophilia is presented in the way each party guest seems to be unable to discuss blackness or black culture without heralding their personal ties/positive opinion on it; the topics of discussions are all about how black is somehow, while not superior, preferred nowadays; going so far as having one guest ask him in the middle of a group whether Chris thinks it is an advantage or disadvantage to be black in America, signalling the disconnect of these people with the social reality of American racial politics. Returning to Lisa, there are a couple of points of interest regarding her objectification of Chris; starting when Lisa starts to touch Chris. Her initial reaction being to invade his personal space, something sacred to Americans,

and her clearly unwanted touching shows us not only a complete lack of social boundaries, but also her lack of regard to him as an individual (Sorowska et al. 579).

(*Get Out,* 43:24)

The way she judges his physicality is similar to that of how one would judge a show pony, checking his strength and appearance without considering his person. She also addresses Nelson rather than Chris when making her judgment ("Not bad. Eh, Nelson?"). Visually, we see Chris tense up the moment Lisa steps into his space, though there is also an air of surrender in his face: the decision to undergo the humiliation rather than make a scene has been made, by both him and Rose, who simply looks on in feigned shock. Also interesting is the way this scene is framed: a black man boxed in by two white women, physically holding onto him. It seems a symbolic translation of Chris' position during the party, but also of his stay at the Armitage house so far: trapped between the white people who do not seem to notice the social liberties they are taking, and the space he has to give up due to his blackness.

To return to the topic of negrophilia in this scene, Lisa's objectification of Chris' body is rooted in a larger cultural fetishization of black culture, and specifically of the black male body.

There are stereotypes abound following the idea of the so-called “black male alpha” which we see return throughout the movie, such as the brother’s monologue during dinner where he declares if Chris wanted to, he would be “a fucking beast”. There has been a long history of white people animalizing black men, in a both violent and sexual way (Tucker 112). Lisa’s sexualization of Chris follows this thinking, as she ignores his personhood for her own interests and presuppositions. Crucial in this scene is that not once does Lisa talk to Chris directly; even the opening comment, ‘how handsome is he’, is made to Rose, as well as the closing remark. In the auction on Chris, it is essential these people dissociate him with being an individual, instead examining him like an animal or object, discussing his physical appearances and abilities without involving him in the subject. Kevin Lawrence Jr. argues the movie portrays how the so-called post-slavery boundary was never truly crossed; through the abduction, selling, utilization, objectifying, and stereotyping of the black body we see behaviour reminiscent of slavery times (334). Peele has made several statements attesting to his intentions in this reference, stating how he wanted his movie to disprove the illusion of America living in a post-racial time (Keegan Vanity Fair).

It is the third conversation that betrays the motivations and views of the people at the party; “black is in fashion”, an unnamed man proclaims, to which we see Rose’s blank stare and Chris’ dubious expression, caught between insulted and amazed. There are many moments in the movie we can point to in order to attempt to understand the motivation behind the actions of the Armitage family and friends, but ultimately most crucial to Chris is this statement. These people are not just desperate to live forever; they wish to live with the privileges they currently enjoy as well as those they do not yet possess. For them, blackness contains privilege, so they will take a black person’s body to get it. Popular culture has been focusing more and more on black culture and appropriating many of its expressions and traditions. The impression that “black is in fashion” might come from the glorification and colonization of black culture, language, aesthetics, and more by white society. Pop culture and white celebrities have started claiming and using blackness as a tool to improve social status, but without considering the consequences or lives of the black people from whom it is stolen

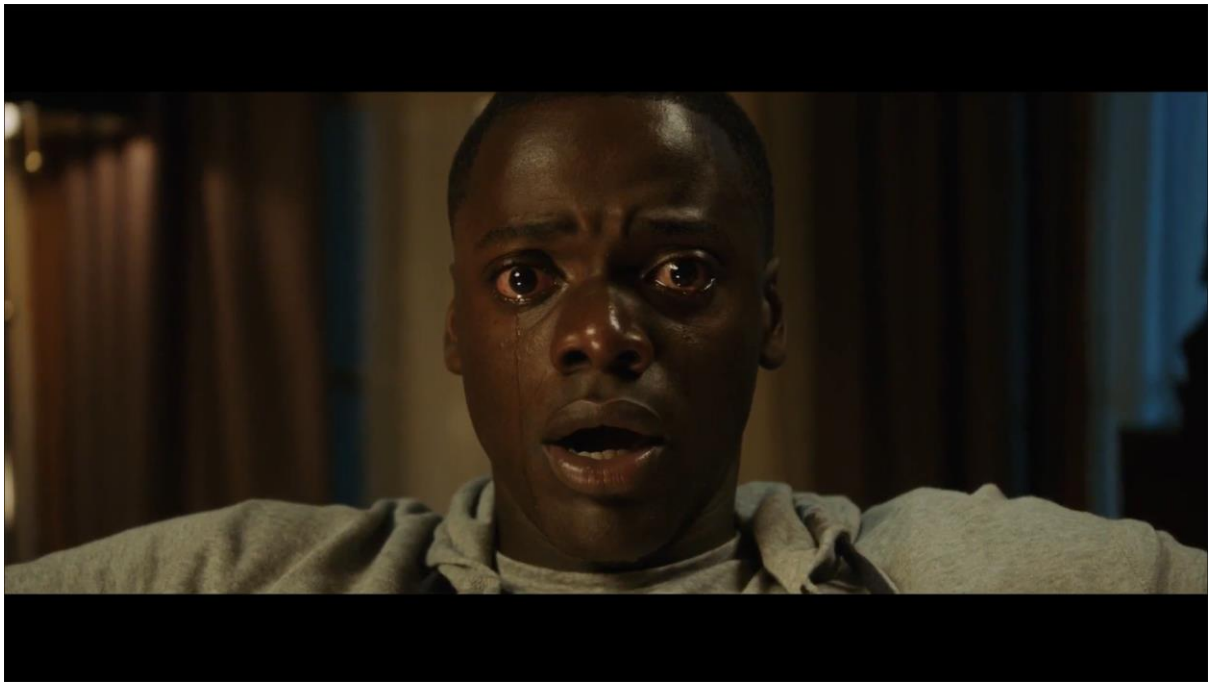
(Parisi 127). For the people at the party, this mostly means their view of society is skewed. They have no real understanding of what it means to be black in America. The idea that it would be preferable, advantageous even, is ludicrous to anyone who can comprehend Western social politics and hierarchy. Their desire for keeping power and privilege clashes with the view they have of society; they do not realize the loss of power and agency that can come with living in a black body, nor do they seem to realize their own role in the process of disempowering black people. Another angle here is the aforementioned possession or colonizing of black bodies as being something they assume they have a right to. Though I have been mentioning both black culture and bodies as part of what these white people seem to desire, I must retract some of that statement; while they seem to glorify the black body and enjoy using black culture to show their own social awareness, or "hip-ness", it is crucial to their transformation that it is the *white* mind transported into a black body. While the black body may be of superior power and/or functionality, it is emphasized that only the white mind can take full advantage of this (Boger 157). The ultimate human, they seem to think, is one with a white mind and a black body. Returning to the idea of rejection and acception, abjection and negrophilia, we see the black subject becomes divided by the whites around them. When in white society, they do not exist as a whole, complex person, but rather as parts that can be used in whatever way makes the lives of white people better. Henry Jr. points out that white terror and dominance has turned black bodies in something material, something to be owned or possibly seen as property (334). He creates a direct link between white supremacy and anti-blackness, arguing that as long as the dominant power of the normative white person is kept in place, the only way for black people to live is in a state of survival. This, again, is made literal in this movie.

Aesthetic Technology: Interpreting the Morality of Brightness

Moving on to Peele's use of aesthetic technology, I will focus on the scene where Chris is first being forced into the sunken place; Missy's hypnosis. There are two interesting elements to this scene: firstly, the imagery of the sunken place, and the symbolic meanings we can deduct from it, and secondly the use of colour and light in this scene. Starting with imagery, Peele's own explanation is crucial to understanding the role and meaning of the sunken place: "The sunken place is the system that silences the voice of women, minorities, and of other people", he tweeted. While in the movie it is a literal state of unconsciousness and paralysis Missy's victims are forced into, symbolically it is the silencing of marginalized voices by white people in power; Chris is shown to try to speak, try to move back up into his body, but this is impossible for him.

(36:42)

All he can do is sit paralyzed in the chair as tears escape his eyes and watch Missy from afar as though watching a tv screen.



(36:22)

The choice of using a tv screen as his view into the world when he loses control of his own body is certainly no less significant: there is the direct relation between TV and the trauma of Chris' mother's death, but one could try to push the meaning of a tv screen even further. The direct representation of Chris' trauma becoming his only view into the outside world also emphasizes Missy's abuse of power. She, a white woman who works as a psychiatrist, uses Chris' trauma to push him into a position of even less power and take away his agency and autonomy. Missy being a white woman is no less relevant to this scenario, as white women have a long history of racism, specifically through the victim role assumed by and projected upon white women. Acts of racial violence and degradation have been committed and justified in the name of protection, as a white woman's accusation used to be enough to not just silence but destroy a black person (Snyder-Yuly 861). In addition to this, she holds a position related to privacy and safety, being a psychiatrist, and the blatant abuse of the skills, authority, and trust that her position affords her further shows the willingness to make use of every advantage, privilege, and skill available to white people to uphold

their position as well as take possession of black bodies – including using a black person's trauma against them.

When pushing the meaning of the tv screen view Chris has of the outside world while in the sunken place, one could consider the role of tv as further distancing measure for black people. It is through TV and representation that people become normalized, accustomed, to people they might consider non-normative or an outsider. It is the act of representation in media or popular culture that can change our cultural notions of abject statuses; however, representation done wrong can also result in further abjection of the subject, as we have seen happen with black culture: negrophilia, idolization, maybe improves the social view from a white individual's perspective, but in actuality it continues to separate the racial Other from the racial self. TV has a huge influence on how cultural norms are formed and maintained (Chou 58). While TV in itself holds no moral component, the people who create shows do, and the influence and effect it has on children's behaviour and development is undeniable (Eastman). However, much like horror, TV just reflects existing cultural norms – though often with a less critical view. It is the white, straight, normative family/protagonists we see take up space on screen, and rarely is a character of colour important without their skin colour being the focus of their story. We see the way whiteness is set as the normative, the uncategorized, whereas every marginalized community becomes a sub-person of their own marginal identity; black people being black before being people, gay people being gay before people, etc. It is only the white person that does not need the precursor of white to be understood; the white person simply is: they are the norm (Dyer 127). In this way, TV perpetrates the continuous ideas of black people as Other, as outsiders to the white boundaries and system, and it is in this TV Chris finds himself prisoner as Missy strips him of his bodily autonomy. The TV then represents not only the silencing of marginalized voices, but specifically points out the role of television in the maintenance of this white status quo.

The second point of interest in this scene is the use of colour and light. We start the scene with Chris on his way back upstairs, unsettled due to a strange interaction with the groundskeeper, but his return is interrupted by Missy who turns on a light in the room where she seems to have been waiting for him. The excuse given for her use of hypnosis on Chris was that she meant to cure him of his smoking addiction, proclaiming her concern for her daughter's health as well as his own. Chris moves through the darkness when the light suddenly turns on; the sources of light are all behind Missy but not focused on her. When she turns on the light, it is the room that becomes well-lit and clear, and she is surrounded by the light, a clear view of her for audiences.

(31:04)

Chris, however, is still in the dark hallway, startled at her sudden appearance and confrontation about his smoking habits despite the seemingly unarming smile she gives him. It is Missy who subsequently invites him into the room, into the light, and we can see the hesitation in Chris as he walks into well-lit room.

(31:12)

Dyer argues the correlation between white and light, black and darkness, as well its moral values, but Peele seems to turn this idea on its head in this scene; it is in the darkness, unseen, that Chris is safe (Dyer 127). Stepping into the bright room denies him shelter and refuge from the Armitage family: not only their strange, racially inappropriate behaviour, but also from their usurpation of his personal and cultural space. While the two face each other, they both have sources of lights behind them, emphasizing their central positions in this room and moment; however, it is only Missy who is at ease in her chair. Chris is clearly uncomfortable, the chair a tad too big and low for his stature, his legs bouncing and eyes roaming the room.

(31:59)

As Missy starts the hypnosis process, the camera focuses and zooms in on her face, occasionally interrupting with images of her stirring her tea, a reminder of the focal point being used to hypnotize Chris. Chris remains in frame the way beforehand, possibly signalling that while the situation has changed for Missy, Chris is not yet aware of this.

(32:09)

(34:53)

Audience members, being aware of the genre they are watching, will recognize this as a sign for Missy's nefarious intentions, but the lack of change in camerawork for Chris' perspective signals his cluelessness. Or, perhaps more kindly said, his desire to have a good relationship with Rose's parents and consequent choice to ignore the inappropriate interactions he has with her parents. His choice to endure rather than criticize is shown time and time again when he steps into a well-lit space, allowing the people around him who are at ease in the light to impose and observe.

It is when Missy instructs him to "find the rain", that we are shown a flashback to Chris' youth, the focus point of his trauma; him sitting alone in a room as a child, watching TV and waiting for his mother – knowing she should have been home already.

(33:31)

The flashback is filtered in a blue light, and we see this continued when a few moments later he enters the sunken place again – a blue filter and overall darkness that starkly contrasts the brightness of the room he was in before. Although it must be understood that colour theory in film is widely regarded as a subjective field, prone to cultural connotations and personal impressions, Peele's choice of blue is by no means accidental. I will explore two aspects that create meaning through this colour: the psychological implications of the colour blue, and the contextual implications. In other words: finding meaning through an academic understanding of how humans react to blue, as well as how Peele intended to use blue. Psychologically, blue is considered a 'cool' colour, which is usually related to rest or ease. As a cool colour it also indicates a lack of warmth, which is furthered by the dark environment this blue filters over. The calmness of this blue combined with the idea of coldness gives the audience an impression of disconnectedness and loneliness. We are watching moments of trauma; firstly, Chris' personal trauma, and then a representation of transgenerational trauma symbolized through the sunken place. Trauma theory often returns to the idea of trauma being an untouchable and unspeakable moment in your life

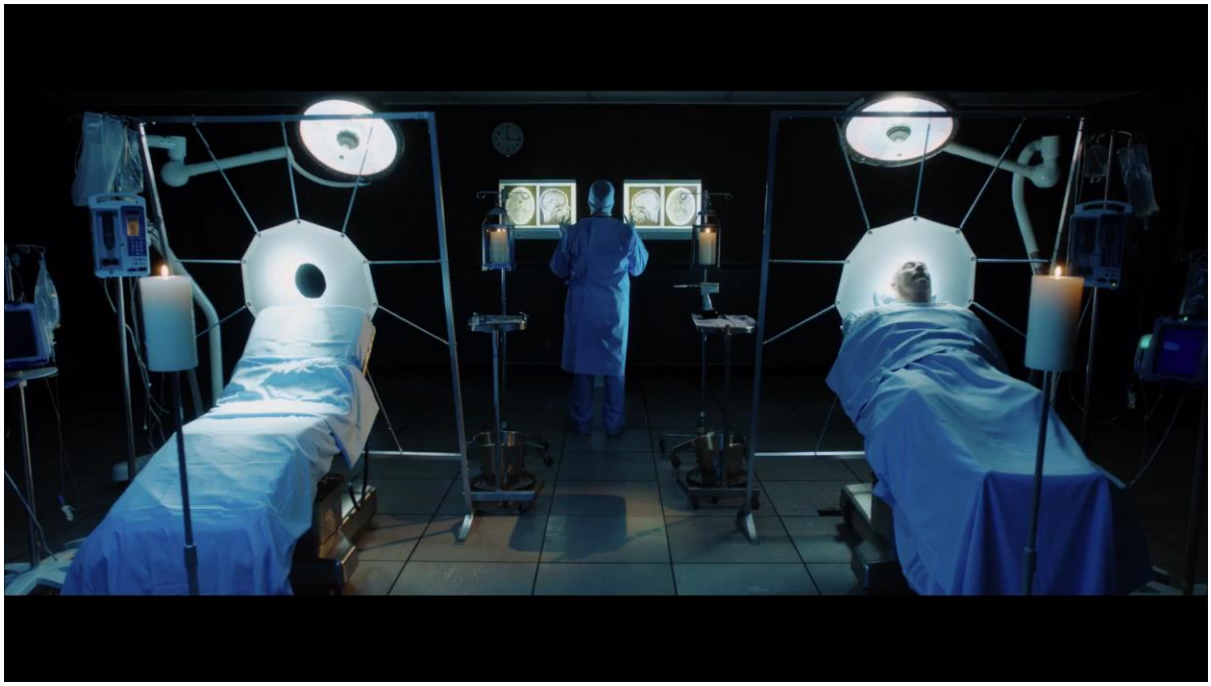
(Visser 274). There is no smooth transition shown between Chris' present moment and his traumatic memory; though the light and colour show us the switch being made, Chris simply moves in and out of that memory, making the same movements he made as a child in the memory. It seems that the traumatic memory and the sunken place having the same darkness and blue filter is a sign for the audience that these two are connected; whether it is a continuation of his earlier trauma or meant as a general signifier for trauma in the movie, is up for debate or personal interpretation. I would argue both; as the focalizer, we experience this movie through Chris, meaning that every moment of trauma has to be understood through him. Using light and colour to signify moments of trauma to an audience stimulates the bond between audiences and focalizers. More than that, this signifies to an audience trauma is always linked; there is no separating Chris' childhood trauma from the transgenerational trauma of being silenced and having your autonomy taken. When Chris wakes up after hypnosis, he is still bathed in this blue, despite not being in the moment of trauma anymore.

(36:51)

He wakes up shocked, though, hyperventilating and scared, and it is clear that although he is not currently in a traumatic situation, he is feeling the effects of having gone through one: hence the

continuation of blue. In this interpretation, it seems blue does not only signal trauma, but feelings of unsafety or panic, and possibly even a warning.

Reading the use of blue as a warning for audiences, as a sign of trauma or perhaps danger, is reinforced later in the movie. When Dean prepares for the surgery, the room is flooded in blue, and the colour returns in the cloth and clothes. This blue is however much more sterile, accentuated with stark white lights and white medical equipment.



(1:26:18)

The previous blue, in comparison, seems soft and perhaps even sympathetic. The use of white here is not a coincidence, considering the light/white dark/black connotations that return in film. This is a strong example of Peele's inversion of white film tropes: he continues to make use of these correlations, not denying the idea of dark being connected to black or light connected to white, but instead turns the implications of this around: rather than darkness being synonymous with danger, it is lightness here that raises the audience's feelings of anxiety. A lot of pivotal moments including the Armitages in this movie happen in the light – in well-lit rooms – yet this light does not signify safety, goodness, or purity in the way it has in the past. Rather it are moments of danger for Chris, where he

is forced to be observable and utilized by the white people around him and unable to hide. We see the light in the room where Chris is held near the end is the same bright and clear light present during his hypnosis; yet these are moments of horrific experiences that victimize and diminish Chris' autonomy and sense of self. It is in the dark we see moments of safety, haven; when Chris finally escapes, it is in the middle of the night where he can disappear. When he needs a moment to himself, he goes out at night to smoke, and when he first wants to leave it is during the night after the party. The danger happens within the house, while the lights are on; it is in the darkness that Chris is promised safety and refuge.

Taking these different findings, what interpretation can be found of Peele's use of aesthetic and thematics? The most important for finding meaning in Peele's work has to be his use of horror tropes: or, more precisely, his refusal to follow the standard tropes horror has been developed on. The way he uses these tropes to surprise audiences by reversing their meaning and execution into something that criticizes the people in power and uplifts the marginalized protagonist creates an effect that refocuses his target group from the normative audience (white, Western) to the marginalized people who suffer at the hands of said tropes – as well as the people, system, and norms that helped develop these tropes. Making darkness a place of safety, associating cold colours with feelings of intense trauma, and most of all; creating villains that reflect the normative idea of the average American – all of these elements point to Peele's refusal to cater to any cultural or normative ideas of protagonists, victimhood, or heroes: he writes for those who have been judged and diminished due to their political bodies; whose racialized existence has forced them into positions of trauma and helplessness, but who can take these traits and situations and use them against the oppressive system.

Chapter 2: *Midsommar* Daydream; Monsters Hiding in Plain Light

How far have you gone to end your relationship? Probably not as far as Dani, a young woman who travels to Sweden with her partner and his friends, which results in the end of her relationship – and the end of much more.

Midsommar follows the story of Dani Ardor, a psychology student whose mentally ill sister kills both herself and their parents at the start of the movie. The traumatic event further strains the relationship she has with the boyfriend, Christian, who has plans to break up with her and leave for a midsummer celebration at the hometown of one of his friends, Pelle. When Dani finds out, Christian invites her to join, expecting her to decline. When they arrive at a field close to the commune of the Harga, they meet two other guests, invited by Pelle's communal brother Ingemar, and the group does psychedelic mushrooms together outside. During this, Dani leaves due to her distress and hallucinations of her dead sister. After arriving at the commune, Pelle gives Dani a drawing for her birthday, something Christian had forgotten about. Later, two of the commune elders commit suicide according to an old tradition, ättestupa, something explained to be normal for people of the commune to do once they reach 72. One of the elders survives, and the commune is shown to mimic his pain by screaming along with him until his head is crushed with a mallet. While the visitors are disturbed, they decide to stay so Josh can finish the thesis he is writing on this community. Christian, however, decides to mimic this for his own thesis, and the two have a falling out. Dani means to leave but is convinced to stay by Pelle. The two other visitors do decide to leave, but they are separated by the commune and seemingly leave independently, though later we learn they were killed. Mark, another friend of Christian, unwittingly urinates against a sacred tree and ridicules the townspeople; he disappears also after being lured away by a commune woman. Josh, driven by anger over Christian's decision, sneaks into the Harga temple to photograph their sacred book, something he had been forbidden from doing, and is caught and hit over the head. The next day, Dani is coerced into taking more drugs and accidentally wins a maypole competition, leaving her

crowned as the May Queen. During this competition, Christian is drugged and engages in a fertility ritual meant to impregnate a girl from the commune, Maja. A group of older naked women surround the two and mimic the sounds Maja makes. Dani, however, sees this ritual and has a panic attack, during which the young women of the commune surround her and, again, mimic her pain and grief through wailing and crying with Dani. Christian attempts to run away after recovering, only to discover his friends' body parts, after which he is paralyzed by an elder. It is then that a leader of the commune explains to Dani this midsummer celebration is to purge evil out of the commune, and nine human sacrifices are needed for it: four outsiders, brought in by commune members, and four members of the commune. The final victim is a choice between Christian and a commune member – a choice that is to be made by the May Queen. She chooses Christian, who is consequently put into the carcass of a brown bear and left in the temple with the other sacrifices. They light the temple on fire, and the community wails along with the screams of pain and agony coming from inside the temple. Dani cries along, at first, but slowly begins to smile until the screen goes black.

Light in *Midsommar*: The Horrors of the Swedish Summer

I will start with an analysis of light/darkness and use of colour before moving on to the thematic subtext and the film's use of abjection and the monstrous-feminine. The movie starts in darkness, with shots of houses covered in show and with lit-up windows, and the ringing of a phone that turns into a voicemail of Dani, worried about her parents whom we see lay lifeless in bed.

(Midsommar, 02:35)

The dark tone remains throughout the beginning of the movie, while Dani's unstable relationship with Christian is made clear to audiences and we see her sister's murder-suicide. The dark lighting is likely not only to signal the night-time, but also signify the dark times Dani finds herself in at that very moment; with her relationship, family, and self-worth, as we learn during her phone call with a friend. This idea is further emphasized when the first scene with natural light starts, and the camera pans over from an outside view of Dani's window back into her dark bedroom, where she lays on the bed with her back to the window.

(13:05)

Dani's existence in darkness, and her literal choice to turn her back on the light, shows us her state of mind. We saw her take pills earlier; presumably those are related to her anxiety and/or depression. Throughout all the scenes in America, this use of dark/light contrast where Dani seems to favour the darkness continues; she is almost always in the shadows or out at night, further emphasizing the darkness she lives in while still at home and with Christian. The first time Dani is in a setting where natural light falls on her is when meeting Pelle, and their conversation about their trip to his commune, possibly hinting at how Dani will find resolution there. As the scene transitions into their flight to Sweden and arrival there, the use of light increases; more and more sources of light and general use of light is found in frame, though Dani is still often right outside of or only partly within its reach. It is during the arrive at the commune darkness seems to have disappeared: a blue sky and light green grass, as well as people clothed in white, welcomes us as an idyllic view of the Swedish countryside.

(26:20)

As Pelle introduces the group to his friends, everyone is bathed in light. This lightness continues throughout most of the movie, their stay in the commune of the Harga being brightly lit and unobstructed by darkness – save some exceptions. An example of this is during Dani's drug trip, when she starts having a panic attack and isolates herself in a small shed.

(32:14)

This is something we see reoccur with Dani throughout the movie, her self-isolation during times of distress, but here she is bathed in total darkness with only a mirror and the hallucination of her sister behind her as she strikes a match, further distressing her and causing her to run back outside; where she does not remain in the light but continues running into the shadowy forest, arguable telling audiences she is not yet ready to face lightness in her life, or finds safety in darkness. There is a short moment where the lack of darkness is addressed, when Dani wakes up after her trip and asks how long she had been asleep.

Dani: Did it get dark at all?

Christian: For a couple of hours, not completely.

As audiences, we are now aware of what to expect and, indirectly, to pay attention during scenes of darkness: the 'normal' in this Swedish commune is light, summer, brightness; therefore, it is during

times of darkness the abnormal or 'secret' will take place. Through this, the film takes a more traditional point of identifying darkness as a time of secrecy and danger, whereas lightness seems to signify purity, community, or safety – a signal that later becomes corrupted. This subtextual indications of the meanings of brightness and darkness, Aster's use of traditional visual cues while slowly corrupting them throughout the movie, speaks to the horror film's strength in using stylistic devices whose meanings are dependent on the film they are in: even when using the traditional colour and light cues, audiences are made to feel unsettled and anxious, aware they will be betrayed by their idea of conventional horror tropes (Tarvainen, Westman, & Oittinen 1).

The track to the commune shows us a bird eye view of a sandy path in the middle of thick woods, until the group takes a left into the woods, literally going "off the beaten track", telling us about the secrecy and isolation of this community (Reese 20).

(33:53)

If the importance of light had not been clear before, it is so when the group enters the commune: the gate into the village is a huge wooden sun, where upon entering you are surrounded by its beams.

(39:34)

This lightness is further emphasized by the white clothing worn by its members, the huge open valley they live in where the trees are too far from their houses to cast any shadows, and their keeping of animals who are also white/light-coloured. The angelic flute music creates an almost magical scene, which turns comical when we see the villagers playing the flutes, thus creating their own magicked atmosphere. As they are in the field, surrounded by the Harga, the lightness is almost obnoxious; as opposed to usual horror movies, where it is hard to see because of the darkness, here the colours are paled due to the brightness. This extreme use of white/light continues throughout the movie, exposing the most horrifying images right next to the idyllic views, further horrifying and intriguing audiences (Belling 311). In this way, Aster uses the brightness also to further horrify the audiences through confronting them with the brutal images and undeniable violence of these rituals: there is no darkness to hide parts of this violence in.

A scene where this is especially interesting is during the ättestupa, the ritual where two elders commit suicide. The rock from which they jump, the background present in these scenes – even the rock on which the woman falls – are all white and lit up. What makes this scene interesting

is it is the first time we see the horrific nature of the Harga rituals; the other end of their community ideals on family, connectedness, nature. As the camera focuses on Dani the background blurs, showing her in the middle of the frame focused but muted, she herself almost becoming one with the blurry light surroundings. It is then the other two visitors, a black couple from England, start a commotion and disrupt the peaceful and quiet of the ceremony. This, I argue, is no coincidence either; having two black outsiders surrounded by white landscape and people, everything around them is completely still as they move around and yell.

(1:02:25)

This is our first introduction to the normal of the Harga vs that of the visitors, who represent our own society. Dani's group is distressed but standing to the side, silenced and paralyzed by shock, but the other two visitors are in the middle of the Harga trying to stop the ritual. This disruptive behaviour, doubly stamped as outsider through their skin tone, is undoubtedly the reason they were chosen as the first sacrifices; it is when they try to leave after this scene the village separates and kills them. They, together with Josh, are the only characters of colour present in this movie, and it is by no means insignificant that they were the first ones killed. Both visually, physically, and actively

they disrupt the community's aesthetic and rituals, marking them definitively as not only an outsider to the commune but also a threat.

This scene is not only mentally challenging, but visually also brutal to witness, as the camera shows clearly not only the falls of the two elders but also their bloody corpses. Especially with the whiteness surrounding them, the blood becomes a stark reminder of the brutality of these acts and the violence behind them (Schultz 37). Again, we see a more traditional use of colour theory here, with white seeming to stand for the community's self-perceived purity and one-ness, and the red of the blood signifying violence, passion, and heart; the choice to jump is directly related to the community's ideals, and the willingness of the participants shows their belief and heart for the community and its beliefs. It is absolutely relevant to note the Harga's relationship to nature: it is noted in the movie that the Harga consider life to be a debt to nature, one that has to be repaid at the end of it. They see humanity and nature as one and the same, and death as less an ending but rather a return to their own roots. It is this reasoning that I argue the use of red to be contextually used as passion or love, despite the violent nature of the acts committed; despite the brutality, these acts first and foremost serve to fulfil community ideals and their own genuine belief in the natural cycle they are part of.

(1:02:20)

Something interesting to note in this scene is the fact that for both elders, it is their face that becomes disfigured and seems to be the cause of death: the woman through her fall onto the rocks, where she falls on her face, and the man due to the mallet used to end his suffering, which literally breaks his skull apart. The use of the mallet is where it is signalled to us this is as much an act of mercy as it is symbolic: the man is hit three times, despite being dead after the first, seemingly to completely obliterate his head. This literal loss of face, though usually related to embarrassment or loss of reputation, here seems to be more directed at the individual's loss of identity. This works on two levels; firstly, the loss of identity through their return into nature, but secondly this person becomes absorbed back into the commune. We see the commune grief and wail along with the man as he is dying, and through using the mallet to ensure not only his death but to destroy what could have identified him, it seems the commune sees him as redistributed into the oneness of the commune and nature altogether.

Monsters and Transgressions; Subtextual Warnings of Unity

This next part of the analysis is focused on the monstrous-feminine presence in Midsommar and the underlying meaning and thematics we can subtract through that. The theory of the monstrous-feminine focuses on feminine-coded monsters, and the specific coding that is used to exaggerate or highlight their monstrousness. Creed (1) argues this coding is dependent and informed by their gender/assumed gender roles, and often exaggerated to an extend that the female body it is meant to impersonate is made grotesque[1]. There are three aspects used to identify and analyse the monstrous-feminine in art: bodily wastes, boundary transgressions, and the maternal (Creed 10). The point of these three categories is to introduce feelings of repulsion and rejection in audiences by linking them to a feminine figure, the abstract and grotesque form they come in turning the experience/subject monstrous. What we see with the Harga is a female-focused society, meaning they seem to take opposition in what the patriarchal society includes in its matrix. When considering this in relation with the abject, we see that where the patriarchal society emphasizes cultural associations, the Harga revere the natural: the Harga, unlike our culture, embrace the bodily waste we have deemed so taboo. Of special interest to this category is the imagery of a corpse; the ultimate transgression of boundaries between the living and dead, as it straddles the demarcation between the two through its having-been-aliveness. The Harga, however, embrace the corpses and find meaning and solace in it. A piece of dialogue from after the ättestupa, when the two English visitors start walking away while cursing the Harga, explains this from the point of view of one of their community leaders:

Siv: Please! What you just saw is a long, long, long observed custom.

[1] In this essay I will use the term "the female body" to refer to the cis female body. This in no way is meant to invalidate other female bodies that might lack the components of a cis female body, but the term will be used this way to remain on topic and direct, as when discussing the cisgender/transgender body there is a different (though equally important) discussion to be had about their role in horror films.

Simon: “Custom!” It’s fucked!

Siv: Those two who jumped have just reached the end of their Harga life cycle. And you need to understand it as a great joy for them.

Connie: “Joy?”

Siv: Yes, and when it is my turn, it will be a great joy for me.

Simon: Fuck.

Siv: We view life as a circle, a recycle. The lady who jumped, her name was Ylva, yes? And that baby over there who is not yet born will inherit that name. Instead of getting old and dying in pain and fear and shame, we give our life. As a gesture. Before it can spoil. It does no good dying, lashing back at the inevitable. It corrupts the spirit.

The Harga idea of oneness with each other and nature is once again emphasized, the earlier mention of an absorption into the group typified by their custom of naming the next born after the recently deceased. Corpses in our culture are seen as taboo not only because of its rotting state, but also because it symbolizes the person you have loved; for the Harga, they do not lose anyone, therefore feel no disgust. In addition, through their connection with nature, they do not see something dead or rotting as repulsive because it is simply part of their idea of life cycles: it is a new stage of it, not a permanent ending. This is however not the only moment of bodily waste that typifies the Harga’s comfortableness with it or their cultural norms around it. Another example of the Harga’s embrace of bodily waste is in their fertility ritual, which is a sacred and important part of their commune and celebration.

(45:48)

In this ritual, the Harga use both pubic hair and menstrual blood (possibly the most taboo of the female body) to complete it. The unity they feel with nature, and the reverence they show for everything that is included in that unity, makes these bodily wastes a sacred part of life rather than taboo.

The transgression of boundaries is also present in the Harga's culture, where we see it not only with the above-mentioned transgression of life and death so strictly observed in our culture, but also in the transgression of how we use gender norms: the norms we consider feminine/female are much more dominant in the Harga culture, thus transgressing cultural boundaries the audience are familiar with. The Harga's ideas of unity with nature is an example of this, but it can also be found in their aesthetic choices: the white clothing that everyone wears is often considered virginal, pure, ideas we relate to the feminine (Hunt 332). The decorations on their clothing and in their buildings are flowers and rounded figures in soft pastel colours, and the Harga wear robes or pants seemingly indiscriminately. This is at the start of our introduction to the Harga community

immediately made clear to audiences, as a man in robes welcomes them and despite a joke about looking girly, is shown to be completely at ease and without embarrassment in it.

(37:23)

When discussing his clothing, the man says:

Father Odd: My frock? Yeah, quite girly, no? We do these as a tribute in respect of Ymir and because of the nature's hermaphrodite, I think, qualities. Yeah.

The use of the word hermaphrodite by father Odd here is interesting too because this, as well, is something considered to be taboo within our own culture, but the Harga again treat it opposite; as something to be respected, revered, and celebrated. There is a continuous theme in the Harga culture where the infusion of femininity increases the object or subject's cultural status. I call this an *infusion* of femininity due to the feminine presence in Harga culture not being dominant the way masculinity is in Western culture, but rather they emphasize the unity of both masculinity and

femininity. The hermaphrodite is what the Harga wish to celebrate, as it seems to them unity of everything, oneness of nature, is superior – which means they celebrate not just that what transgresses the (Western) boundary, but the space in between the boundaries itself. Abjection theory looks not only at cultural insiders/outsiders, but also specifically at how the borders between these two ideals is created (Tyler 3). The border established in Western culture between genders emphasizes the idea of the binarity of genders: male vs female, masculine vs feminine. This border, however, is the place where the Harga have established their own idea of subject; our abject, our boundary, is made subject or ideal in their culture. Their culture is built on our ideas of abjection: their norm is our transgression (Belling 305). This specific use of transgression boundary is however not done to raise anxiety or repulsion in audiences, unlike the bodily waste theme: rather I would argue it is meant to reflect back the ridiculousness of society focus on the gender binaries. This is not to say Aster means to emphasize the superiority of Harga culture, as the film demonstrates pretty strongly how horrifying their ideals turn, but in the commune's reversal of Western ideals and norms there is a criticism both levelled at the Harga and the audience watching it: pushing your ideals and norms to the extreme can only result in bloodshed, slaughter, and death.

The final category of the maternal is perhaps mostly used as an extension of the already discussed feminine/nature focus in the community. The best way to understand the role of the maternal in this film is by taking a step back from scene analysis and looking at the whole of the movie instead: Dani's extremely vulnerable character and delicate emotional state leaves her susceptible to emotional intervention and in need of support that the Harga as a whole can give her. The entire community, in this sense, represents the maternal and assumes a mother-child relationship with Dani. This is further emphasized by the community's intense conformist nature, as with a mother-child relationship there is often no individuality for the child yet; they are dependent on the mother not only for survival, but for their sense of identity, much like the way the Harga dictate the identities of their own (Sastra 55). This also pushes the idea of specifically the maternal as a monstrous aspect: the forced conformity and dependence pushed upon its own members

ensures the erasure of any member's individuality and sense of self, as we see not only in how the children are brought up following and believing the community's ideals and traditions without question (see Pelle and Ingemar's lack of hesitation in bringing home their friends as sacrifices), but also in Dani's absorption into the community through her own acceptance of the culture's sacrifices by playing an active role in the sacrifice Christian. The final scene, where we see her begin to smile as the temple burns down around the remaining sacrifices, signals the completion of her assimilation into the Harga. Through her active role in Christian's murder, Dani *herself* completes her transition into the community. An example of a moment where we see Dani's transition in progress is when Dani has a panic attack after seeing Christian have sex with another girl during the fertility ritual (Huber). As she has done throughout the movie, she isolates herself to grieve and cry, but for the first time this isolation is interrupted by several members of the commune who seek her out in her times of distress and rather than calm her down, they cry and wail along with her, allowing Dani a moment of catharsis as she is finally able to let out her emotions around others and have those emotions returned to her.

(2:05:46)

The second is more a symbolic moment, when Christian is burning and the community is crying for the members in the temple: Dani, as the May Queen, is covered completely in flowers by the community and almost unable to move. She is literally engulfed by the community's traditions and ideals, and in this image lies the message of Dani's absorption and acceptance of her new home (Spadoni 717).

(2:21:00)

Using these examples of the monstrous-feminine and transgressive nature of the Harga, Aster creates a society that is built upon Western ideas of the abject; where our insiders become their outsiders, our borders become their safe zones. In doing so, Aster seems to question our cultural ideas of abjection as he explores a society that defies our norms. It is then important to the horrific nature of the film that this commune starts out looking idyllic before turning metaphorically darker. However, it is also a warning of extremist nature and the danger of cults: this complete isolation of society and the lack of outside influences or criticism have allowed the Harga community to justify these actions as sacred, necessary, and normal. The community they have created hinges on their isolation, and the following dedication they can demand from their own people. One can

question; if they find life cycles so important, what would be their excuse for interrupting that of others? Or, perhaps more crucially: what came first? The belief that death is part of a cycle and therefore nothing to be afraid of, or the need for ritualized murder with the excuse of a debt to nature being paid? How was the abject decided in Harga culture – and how was it decided in our own? Essential to answer this is not only our understanding of the Harga culture but also the inspiration Aster used to create this society; folklore horror. While there are many elements we see return that are typical for the folklore horror movie, two of them are essential in its creation: landscape and isolation (Keetley 267). These two are shown to be equally essential to the creation and maintenance of the Harga commune. Landscape is important not only aesthetically, but also because the common threat of the environment creates a shared feeling of trust among the people who have to battle it, and though we do not see any particular dangers from the forest to the Harga, we do note the lack of modern equipment – arguably, having to 'conquer' or survive in such isolated circumstances (not to mention the extreme weather) would likely create an equally strong bond among the community. Isolation, then, finishes the task landscape starts: what better way to develop a community who will commit violent acts than to make sure there are no outside influences making the members question these traditions?

The focus of this chapter is not only on the social criticism we might recognize, but specifically how Aster portrays monstrosity and induces feelings of horror in his audience, creating a narrative around Dani and the role her body plays in this story. There are several elements to identify this: the use of colour and light seems used to emphasize two parts of the story; firstly, Dani's emotional state, who goes from living in darkness to living in the light, typifying her journey into the commune as well as her emotional journey; and secondly the differentiation and feminine nature of the Harga when laid parallel to our own cultural norms (Goldman 23). By emphasizing not only the personal journey but also the societal differences, the movie provides insight into our own cultural ideas and what we have culturally rejected, as well as possibly ridicule these ideas. For example, the scene where they meet father Odd, who is completely at ease in his frock and praises

the hermaphroditic composition of nature, while there is a teasing in his voice about looking girly this is clearly aimed at the cultural notions and surprise of the visitors, not his own ensemble. Aster's use of light/lightness in the movie also serves to further the more horrific nature, as he reverses the horror standard of darkness into lightness as a sign of the monstrous. This combined with the themes of the monstrous-feminine that are found throughout the movie, signal a horror based in the reversal of our cultural ideals and norms pushed to an extreme. By making our abject the Harga's subject, our taboo their revered, our abnormal their normal, he issues criticism towards our own unquestioned norms while also serving us the horror one finds in extremism and conformism.

Chapter 3: How To Catch Flies: Understanding Social Hierarchies and the Intertextual Web of Privilege and Marginalization

This last chapter is to discuss the findings of both movies and how they relate to each other. For this, I want to return to the research question I stated at the introduction: what can we learn about our society through the analysis of these movies, when using the perspective of the political or non-normative body? Due to the focus point being the political body, the theories I have applied to them are focused specifically on the embodiment of the cultural category deeming them political: negrophilia for a racial perspective, and monstrous-feminine for a gendered perspective. I want to stress here again that I am only analysing two small sections of the whole of racial and gendered embodiment. The protagonists are black and female, which are prevalent political bodies in horror, but by far not the only ones; not even in the category political body, racial theory, or gender theory. However, this does not mean there is no value to be found in the analysis of these political bodies. The aim of this final chapter is to answer the research question by looking at different conclusions from previous chapters and seeing how they overlap/differentiate, as well as spend time relating these findings to our own contemporary society: what criticisms and reflections can we find in the movies that are told from a political or marginalized perspective?

To start, let me summarize what seems the most interesting of the findings so far, starting with *Get Out*. While the political body of interest is a black body, Peele actively circumvents white tropes that equalize blackness with monstrous and instead turns this monstrous view on the white people of the movie. There is not one white person in the movie who is innocent; at best, they only participate and maintain the system that marginalizes Chris as black man; at worst, they actively try to cut out his brain to replace it with that of a wealthy white friend. This is done through the inversion of abjection theory, establishing Chris' outsider status within the environment he is in while simultaneously creating a relationship with audiences that situates Chris as an insider to them, which in turn creates distance between the Armitages and the audience. Everything the Armitages

do is meant to accentuate not only their monstrousness, but also how this monstrousness has been created and perpetuated by the dominant role and power held by white people. Neither large nor small offenses are forgiven or overlooked; every act of racism, discrimination, belittlement, or ignorance is laid out in the film and made clear for audiences to disapprove of. Of course, the most important part of the movie is when the switch is made from audiences' disapproval of the Armitage's ignorance to straight-up horror at their actions and beliefs. Peele uses different angles to highlight the racism present in white culture; both abjection theory and negrophilia can be used to identify different ways in which white people have Othered black people, and how they themselves see this Othering. What I mean by this is that, especially when it comes to the practice of negrophilia, the movie shows that white people see this kind of Othering as complimentary to black people. They discuss the superiority of black bodies, or the exemplary black celebrities, and distinguish between themselves (the norm) and them (black) without realizing it is this distinguishment that further isolates black people from being seen as normative. Conversely, it might be possible this distinguishment is on purpose, as it is clear in the movie they do not see the black person as their equal despite their desire for the black body. Either way, there is a complete lack of regard for the consequences of their actions, especially how those impact the black people they interact with. The white culture presented here is not only racist; it is a racism born from self-obsession, self-apotheosis, and greed. What makes these people such compelling villains, however, is the recognizability of their beliefs and actions. Transplanting brains for immortality is perhaps a tad further than most people would (be able to) go, but their greedy and selfish nature and the casual racism they display is not. They are monsters due to their actions; but these actions, crucially, are based in beliefs that are prevalent throughout white culture.

For *Midsommar*, the main focus was on the gendered monstrosity, but the theme of whiteness was essential to the creation of the movie's monsters. I hesitate to use the word villains to describe the Harga, due to the movie's lack of direct condemnation or triumph over them, as well as the lack of a typical hero: however, they are undeniably monstrous in their actions and beliefs. We see a

similar use of light in *Midsommar* compared to *Get Out*: Aster as well chooses to reverse the usual idea that light equals safety, instead bathing the movie in brightness and light/white colours. It being summer in Sweden, it does not really get dark in the movie, and there are only few moments where we see characters in the dark: most acts are done out in the open, even with the camera sometimes zooming in on the more brutal aspects of said acts, confronting the audience with an unfiltered and unavoidable view of the Harga's monstrosity. This use of whiteness/lightness is pervasive in the movie visually, but it is also relevant to understanding the Harga's values and view of self. The use of white, often meant to emulate purity, innocence, rightness, here is corrupted into a view of self-righteousness. They excuse their own violence by emphasizing these beliefs, using the colours to reflect on this mindset. Their cult-like community adds to these beliefs, as the complete isolation of the villagers and lack of privacy or personal development denies any member of the community to reflect and relativize their culture and/or traditions. In this culture, Aster also makes use of the monstrous-feminine to further emphasize their role as monsters; themes of bodily waste, boundary transgression, and the maternal are at the core of Harga culture. As Dani is slowly integrated into the community, we see these transferred onto her until she situates herself in the community not only as May Queen, but through her own choice and approval of the final sacrifice, thus taking on the Harga monstrosity. What makes this use of the monstrous-feminine so interesting, however, is not how it is used to victimize or villainize femininity or female identity. It is not the feminine that is identified as the root of the Harga's monstrosity, but simply a part of their culture that is entangled with their cultural development, possibly indicating that masculinity and femininity and hermaphroditism is all equally susceptible to corruption and brutality: the monstrous is not inherently gendered, but something all humans are susceptible to and capable of.

When comparing the movies, it seems the theme of brightness and whiteness is one especially important and recurring. This has both a visual and a social aspect. Both movies defy the typical movie trope of darkness and brightness having moral value, instead even using those assumptions to create more anxiety and confusion in its audience. This refusal of giving into white-based tropes

signals the films' awareness not only of its own social pitfalls but also the creator's intentions in their making of the movie. Creating a visual link between whiteness and the monsters of each movie signals to audiences to not only alter their cultural framework and assumptions going into this movie, but also emphasizes the role of whiteness as a race in the perpetuation of the(ir) current power system and monstrous nature. The role of race in *Midsommar* might be less on the nose, but it is by no means irrelevant nor absent. Aster's use of the runes, for example, are one of many hints at the white supremacist view underlying the Harga culture: these runes are identified by Ingemar as the elder iteration of the Uthark language, which we can link back to a book seen at the beginning of the movie in the boys' apartment; *The Secret Nazi Language of the Uthark*. Aster discusses in interviews his intention to reflect the rise of nationalism in Sweden specifically, meaning the reading of racial tones and white visualization is not accidental. Both Aster and Peele seem to understand the role of whiteness in creating something monstrous; something relating to dominance and power, that strips away humanity of the Other and allows the "self" to feel justified in projecting their view onto the world and enacting their ideals at the cost of others.

There are a couple of similarities in the movies regarding how to interpret its monsters. One of these seems a warning against extreme ideologies; both the Harga and the Armitages act in monstrous ways due to their unwavering belief in their own tradition/right. As mentioned earlier, these ideals are rooted in the society we currently live in, especially for the Armitage family; what makes their actions so monstrous is how these beliefs have been pushed to such an extreme, and considered to be such a truth of life, that they lose touch with reality around them. Their humanism disappears. The warning that comes with this, of course, is that this is something that can happen to anyone under the right (or wrong) circumstances: we are all brought up with the same racist and white-dominant system that created the Armitages, or we have the same historical background as the Harga; so how is the everyday civilian different? Especially white audiences are given food for thought, as they are given a taste of who they could have become had they been born somewhere else or pushed into a different ideology. And this is not just a warning for conservative, racist, or

right-wing white people; the Harga culture, as well as the Armitage family, are meant to critique by left-wing, liberal, or socialist white people as well, detailing their equal chance of falling for the dangers of extremism.

The villains being white people – not just using the white/light colour schemes and lighting, but specifically white people – driven by traditional ideas is also no coincidence. This presents differently per movie; where the Armitages find superiority in their own kind (wealthy affluent white people) and thus think they have the right to possess black people, which is rooted in colonial thinking and directly related to views from times of slavery, the Harga justify their rituals and practices as being old and revered traditions rooted in nature religions and Viking culture, as exemplified by the use of runes, illustrations, and the passing comments on their ancestral lines stemming from Vikings. Both of these time periods or cultures have been and are used by white supremacists to 'prove' their superiority over other races (Kieser 15). The glorification of the past and perpetuation of past values to uphold an idea of superiority that was not necessarily relevant nor truthful *in* said old times is something that seems to be on the rise in today's society too. The movies quite possibly intended to take parts of neo-Nazi culture and how it is sustained nowadays and use those elements to create an image of what these ideas can do to a person's psyche – and more so, what it can do to the marginalized people around them.

If we look at these movies from the perspective of the protagonists, we get very different experiences. Returning to the earlier comments about rejection and acception, it is exactly these two terms that describe their endings: Chris' rejection and Dani's acception. These two go both ways for both protagonists: Chris is rejected, but also rejects the Armitages, whereas Dani is accepted into the commune while also accepting her new role/place there. What does this mean for the protagonists? For Chris, the rejection *from* the Armitages and, adjunct to that, from white society victimizes and endangers him. He is subjected to objectification, depersonalization, and fetishization that strip him from his personhood and personal autonomy. The aim is, quite literally as well as

metaphorically, to take away his agency; but it is in *his* rejection of this that he saves himself. I would argue that the rejection from societal conventions and embrace of not only himself, but his personal and cultural history, is what gives him the upper hand. These victories are symbolized by two things: the cotton he uses to stuff his ears, and the deer he stabs Dean with. Cotton has become symbolic of the black person's enslavement and forced labour, inherently linking it to white violence, oppression, and death.

(*Get Out,* 1:25:50)

The picking of cotton has connotations understood due to its colonial past: the forced labour and enslavement of black people is directly tied to the plantation on which they had to work; picking cotton. When Chris uses the cotton to stuff his ears, he is saved through this piece of cultural history that used to symbolize his own oppression; he finds freedom, he frees himself, through something symbolizing past systematic abuse (Dianne-Mae Hughes 25). Again, we see Peele reverse the meaning of something we have pre-existing cultural notions of, signalling to an audience that their preconceived values and meaning are based not on facts, but on a history told by white oppressors. The deer antlers used to kill Dean with, however, is linked to Chris' personal trauma; as we see him

watch a deer they hit die in the beginning of the movie, we learn of Chris' inability to let someone die alone due to his mother's traumatic death. The deer head hung over him as he was paralyzed in the basement, signifying not only his trauma but also how his good faith had betrayed him; then, when he is able to escape, he turns this mockery around on the Armitages and uses the head – and in doing so, his own trauma – to fight for his freedom and safety. Black people cannot exist outside of their own trauma, which is both historical and personal. The system within which they live does not allow a black person to live untouched by the social rules or standards demeaning them, which is what makes this such a powerful scene. I hesitate to use words like 'overcome' or 'because of' when discussing trauma, as I do not wish to portray it as a jumping-off point for people to improve from: trauma is something that impacts your person and life, often forever, and you learn ways to live with it, not because of it (McTighe 176). However, Chris' ability to circumvent the paralysing existence of trauma and even find ways to weaponize it against his oppressors is powerful and telling for audiences who relate to his experiences.

Dani, on the other hand, goes through a journey of acceptance; the Harga embrace her, celebrate her, and show her love and care she is not receiving in any other aspect of her life. She, in return, accepts and embraces them: this can be understood through her final act in the movie being one that condones violence despite her earlier rejection of their violent rituals, as is clear during the scene of the ättestupa. This acceptance comes with a cost: she must sacrifice her individuality and personal morals to become one of the group. There is a reason Dani was the perfect victim for the Harga: not only was she completely alone in the world, having no family left and being emotionally reliant upon a partner who did not treat her well, she was mentally fraught and emotionally unstable, something Pelle was able to witness before their departure as she could not handle even the mention of her parents. Interestingly, in the Harga's embrace we see a similar thing happen to Dani that happened to Chris: their intention was to take away her agency and have her become a member of an extremely conformist group. The Harga chose a different route than the Armitages, validating Dani and making her feel at home; while they do not compromise on their own cultural

boundaries, they make sure Dani is not treated as an outsider, but rather turn her into one of them. This works not only because of Dani's need for emotional validation and a stable environment, but also because of the history of rejection she has already faced; someone less used to disappointment or being an outsider might not be so easily manipulated into giving up their personal values for a sense of community. I have mentioned in the last chapter how the movie shows us the absorption of Dani into the community through the members' refusal to let her isolate as well as their decoration of her as the May Queen by engulfing her in flowers. To elaborate further on the last moment, the symbolism at play here has both an aesthetic and physical quality: the flowers are decorative, pretty; they parallel the decorative embroideries on the clothing of the Harga, and while normally dressed in white, put Dani at the centre of attention by being a sea of colours.

(*Midsommar,* 2:20:30)

Aesthetically, these flowers represent Dani's sense of importance to the community, the beauty that the Harga present and idolize while committing acts of brutality. Physically, these flowers weigh her down, trap her with the community and make her unable to walk away even if she tried. The dual nature of this is intentional: Dani fell for the pretty ideas and values of the Harga, and in their

decoration/treatment of her was unable to realize how they were taking away her ability to move on her own, symbolically taking away her agency. The Harga's succeeding where the Armitages failed through acceptance rather than rejection can be interpreted on a larger social scale. The saying 'you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar' comes to mind: social acceptance, or the impression thereof, creates more opportunities for the people in power to take advantage of you. An example of this would be corporations using the month of June to preach for Queer rights and sell their merchandise, parading around their acceptance as a marketing tool, while supporting anti-LGBTI+ groups throughout the year and refusing to make a structural difference within their own company or outside of it. The Armitages may attempt to seem accepting, but their greed and views betray them; the Harga's acceptance and uniformity present an idyllic view that hides a violent nature.

As mentioned, Dani being chosen to be absorbed into the community was likely no coincidence; she was mentally distressed, emotionally fragile, and completely alone in the world. She was also, not coincidentally, white. Her whiteness is significant for several reasons: firstly, the Harga's white-focussed and nationalist views highlight whiteness as an ideal, and we see Aster make use of traditional white/light colour schemes to emphasize the Harga's own interpretation of whiteness as pure, innocent, and natural. Her being a woman is likely also a contributor, for several reasons: firstly, the Harga culture is one that has much more strong feminine tones than Western society, and we see women take the lead not only symbolically or spiritually but also in their actions and decisions. The way their culture is portrayed is, while perhaps not matriarchal, definitely female-focused, meaning a cis woman like Dani is likely to be integrated into their community. Secondly, there is the simple reality that women are socialized to be more flexible and adaptive to their environments, whereas men are taught to stand their ground (Leaper & Friedman 575). This flexibility is crucial to integrating someone who comes from a culture with very different moral values, as without it there would be less chance of her acceptance of *them*. However, Dani being a white woman, there is also the element of victimhood mentioned in chapter one: white women have a history of emulating victimhood to gain authority as well as authorize acts of (often racial)

violence. Dani was not the only woman who came to visit; like Dani, the other woman (Connie) visited with her partner and seemed susceptible to the things the elders said to her. There were only two crucial differences: Connie's partner was much more focused on her well-being, and much more outspoken against the Harga traditions, pushing them to leave immediately after the ättestupa – which ultimately led to them being the first two sacrifices. The second difference is that Connie is a brown woman, thus likely lacking the aesthetic values and morality the Harga project upon whiteness. The fact that Dani was accepted into a white supremacist cult, whereas Chris was rejected, is absolutely related to both their gender and race. The stereotypes and views on black men by white society are considerable and extremely harmful, creating an image of violent and animalistic men that, while not accurate to reality, does impact the experience and personhood of the men growing up being viewed as such (Rogers & Way 264). The societal rejection black men experience due to this cultural stereotype is part of the systemic racism they endure every day. In *Get Out* these notions are repeated by people such as the cop but also Rose's brother, when telling Chris he could be a beast if he really put his mind to it. This minimizes Chris to his body and its cultural associations only, despite the fact that audiences have seen him so far as a gentle, kind man. Chris' reduction to only his body is of course done by every white person in that party, and it is essential in this reading to note that while Chris experiences rejection, it is specifically his personhood and autonomy that is rejected; his body is desired and utilized by the Armitages. To call this acceptance would be insulting at best, as their glorification of the black male body in no way reflects social acceptance and equality, but it does further emphasize their inability to see Chris as a person beyond his body and their own cultural associations of it, thus resulting in the rejection of him as a person.

In looking at the roles of these two bodies in the films as well as their social standing, there is a question looming under the surface: is there hierarchy among the marginalized? While one might argue that there is, the question is extremely complex and does not have an easy answer. The fact is that every social class or cultural category comes with its privileges, and you cannot deny those in

the face of any marginalization you experience. Dani, as a traumatized woman, holds a marginalized place in society; yet as being a white person, she has privileges Chris never will. Likewise, Chris as a man has certain privileges Dani does not, yet as a black person is still put at a social disadvantage. In addition, being a black man or white woman also comes with its own specific stereotypes and biases. It is true the system is built in a way that certain identities are hit harder than others, even among the different marginalized groups, but the interconnectedness of privilege and status, agency and hierarchy, immunity and imprisonment make it impossible to draw easy conclusions (Dhamoon 231). Not that that is something we should look for: easy conclusions, or taking the easy path, is how people tend to wind up in marginalized positions. Being able to recognize the complexity of the human existence, of its individuals as well as its systems, is what gives us the opportunity to grow and learn and find understanding in one another. In this analysis, it is impossible to separate the different social classes and cultural categories our protagonists belong to from their experiences and identities; it is crucial in our understandings and interpretations of these films we acknowledge and analyse the intricacy of social identity as a whole. Trying to conclude who deserves it less, or rather, who is the bigger victim, distracts from the point of these movies: recognizing and analysing the social and systemic injustices done to its participants. The trauma these two protagonists experience is not unrelated to their social identities or their political bodies, and cannot be understood as a separate event, but must be acknowledged as trauma that is perpetrated and tolerated due to a society that has developed a social hierarchy which justifies violence and trauma done to those in lower social positions. Both these movies have many instances where we see the monstrous, the grotesque, or the evil laid out in front of us: the biggest similarity between the two is the fact this evil is rooted in the societal ideas and systems they – and we – have grown up in. As horror means to reflect cultural anxieties and fears, it seems these two creators have chosen to reflect the fears of the marginalized: to become a victim of those unable to criticize or question their own ideological assumptions or cultural values.

Conclusion

This research was focused on the discourse within horror surrounding social criticism and the political body, analysing two movies from the social thriller genre to consider not only the point of view these movies take, but also where the cultural anxiety they present is seated. I have done this through using several academic theories as well as a visual analysis of specific scenes in the movies where I paid attention to the use of light, camera framing, and colour. For the theories I paid attention to the role of abjection in both movies, the role of negrophilia in *Get Out* and the role of the monstrous-feminine in *Midsommar*. Thematically, it became clear both Aster and Peele seemed intent on reversing the standard and expected horror story by using its tropes and twisting them into something new to surprise audiences. Through this rewriting of tropes, both directors managed to criticize not only certain behaviours or individuals but address systemic flaws that directly contribute to the violence and oppression of marginalized communities and, thus, their political bodies. Both directors identify the threat of a white-based system and white dominance and criticize the white normativity that prevails in our conscious and subconscious cultural thinking. Aster uses this critique to also warn of the more nationalist dangers we see nowadays: the danger of conformity and extremism, where lack of individuality and personal critical thinking will lead to cultures that condone and enact violence upon its own members as well as innocent bystanders. These themes are further emphasized through the use of colour and light: Peele reverses the usual idea of darkness being dangerous, instead emphasizing how bright spaces are considered white spaces (of power), and also how being forced into these spaces as a marginalized, and specifically black, person means to endure becoming an object of white fascination: the black body is forced to become watchable and consumable for white people and pleasure. The darkness, instead, is a place of refuge and safety allowing its inhabitants to exist in peace and anonymity. Aster, likewise, uses light to further horrify audiences, though he focuses less on darkness being a comparatively safe space. The use of continuous light, as the setting is a Swedish summer, forces viewers to see the violence and horror in excruciating detail, making them unable to hide away from it. Aster's use of light and

darkness seems also to indicate the protagonist's emotional journey, as we see her grow from a dark, isolated, lonely mental place to a light, communal, familial home. For the Harga, lightness and pale/white colours clearly are meant to portray their own view of their community: a view of innocence, purity, and natural beings. This use of white surroundings, as well, furthers the brutality of the more violent scenes, as the white backgrounds leave nothing to the imaginations. The use of colour in *Get Out* is a little less culturally focused, instead seemingly creating an understanding for audiences to Chris' experiences in the movie. The colour blue, especially, returns often. Blue being a cold colour, it seems to point towards the isolating experience of Chris' visit, as well as it being used to signify trauma. While Chris' interactions with the colour blue are all bathed in darkness, the Armitages are only ever in blue environments that are bright, sterile; again we see the light as a space occupied by white people, but the sterile environments could also be linked again to Chris' trauma: whereas the darkness was a place where he experienced trauma by himself, it is the bright spaces where this trauma is done to him; the dark place inside is part of his traumatic experience, but the bright place outside is where white people force a traumatic experience upon him.

These findings show us a view of society that warns against the current system we live in. What does it mean for these political bodies to exist within these systems? There is a clear experience of marginalisation during the two protagonists' existence within the Western system, a marginalisation Dani escapes when she joins the Harga, though this is not shown to be a solution of any kind. Monstrousness is identified not only by the individuals perpetrating violent and horrific acts, but also as the system that maintains and perpetuates the cultural views that have created these people. Power and privilege are shown to be dangerous and corrupting; a history of this creates the idea of the existence of a sub-human species, or the marginalized groups. This levels a direct warning to audiences: no one is innocent in the systematic abuse of the marginalized; had you been born somewhere different, you might have become this monster too. There is a theme of rejection in Chris' story, but acceptance in Dani's: Chris can only overcome to violent rejection of the Armitages/society by rejecting them in return and using his own (transgenerational) trauma against

his oppressors. Dani becomes a victim of the Harga and is assimilated into the community, accepted by, and accepting of them in return, allowing them to take away her agency and individuality in the face of a family. Where Chris overcomes his trauma, Dani succumbs to hers. The fact that Chris, a black man, was rejected while Dani, a white woman, was accepted is by no means a coincidence either: their positions and politicized existences have made society around them view them as being desirable or refusable. This does not mean all of Chris is seen as undesirable, or all of Dani is accepted; Chris' black body is of interest, but his personal identity is rejected, showing a disinterest in the black people whose bodies and culture have become fetishized. Dani, likewise, has to give up part of her personhood in order to be accepted, namely her individuality; being of an incredibly fragile emotional state, this sacrifice seems easily made.

A final question that surfaces when comparing these movies, and especially Dani and Chris' personal journeys in it, is that of a hierarchy of victimhood: while both have a political body according to the definition set up in the introduction, one can question if their marginalized positions are unequal. In other words: is it harder to be black, or a woman? There is a complex web of intersectionality and privilege waiting to be untangled to answer this, and while it is a discussion important to have, I argue it is not one that should be addressed in this research: this essay means to look critically at society and systemic criticism revealed through the eyes of a marginalized body, not to pit these bodies against each other. The ultimate message of the movie, of Peele and Aster, seems to be about the monstrosity of the social injustices done and approved of by a white-dominant, patriarchal society. The root of evil lies not in its individuals, but in the social and cultural system itself, and the individuals who act *upon* this. Rather than consider the idea of a hierarchy among victims of this system, the census must remain on the flaws and inherent violence this system perpetrates. In future research, however, I hope someone tackles this question in a way that will do the complexity of the discussion justice.

For further research I also hope that people will fill in the gaps and limitations I have encountered during my own: the lack of variation among characters of colour or gender identities in their relation to the monstrous, other monstrous embodiments in horror such as the disabled body, as well as further investigate the social implications of having horror villains represented by the marginalized rather than the oppressors. Another social category ripe for research in this line is that of social class and the intersectional and intertextual relationship class has with other marginalized groups, as well as the villain status in horror. Finally, future research should include more diversity not only in its characters but in the origin of said horror movies, creating a more complex and international view of social horror. Examples that could be used for further research would be the movies *Hush* (2016), *Leatherface* (2017), *Tyrel* (2018), *Us* (2019), and *Parasite* (2019).

Filmography

Get Out. Dir. Jordan Peele. Perf. Daniel Kaluuya, Allison Williams, Lil Rel Howery, Bradley Whitford, Caleb Jones, Stephen Root, Lakeith Stanfield, & Catherine Keener. Universal Pictures, 2017. Film.

Midsommar. Dir. Ari Aster. Perf. Florence Pugh, Jack Reynor, William Jackson Harper, Vilhelm Blomgren, Ellora Torchia, Archie Madekwe, and Will Poulter. Nordisk Film, 2019. Film.

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