

Arthouse Horror and the Manifestation of Fear Through Sound:

From *The Shining* to *Get Out*

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Introduction

Sound in a horror film is essential to evoking a deep sense of fright; in most cases, the scary element of a film does not register without sound. For instance, listening to the soundtrack of any *Insidious* franchise films (US, 2010–18) would be more effective in raising the hairs on your neck than watching the film with the sound off. Linda Williams coins the term “body genre”¹, which best identifies with the characteristics of horror, as it is essentially desiring to elicit a bodily reaction within its viewer. While visuals are important in creating a sense of fear, they cannot replicate the fear of the unknown because of their need for visibility. Sound in general is important to film for the same reasons, often to pull a laugh or tear from the audience through audio gags and sweeping soundtracks. Sound devices that seem to work for the horror film in specific tend to be sonic jump-scares, creaky floorboards, or soundtrack-like shrill themes, all of which seem to have become the groundwork for the typical Hollywood horror flick. Many aspects of sound, whether through the creation of a nondiegetic score, diegetic sound effects, or just complete silence and their symbolic relation to the character and mood are key to the effectiveness of the horror genre. More recent arthouse or art-horror films have proven that sound can be utilized in different ways, however, one of which adapts a pop song into a horror theme, such as when Jordan Peele transforms Luniz’s 1995 hit “I Got 5 On It” through a “tethered mix” into a chilling orchestral overlay for his 2019 film *Us*. Sound devices integral to how recent “art-horror films” take long-standing horror tropes (family trauma in *Hereditary* (Ari Aster, 2018), the monster/slasher in *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell, 2015), the bodysnatcher in *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017)) and update them to invite the complex modes of viewer engagement typically attributed to art cinema.

¹ Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2–13. Web

This essay will illuminate the aspects of sound that are used in the art-horror subgenre which aim to set apart, and also align, themselves with mainstream Hollywood cinema. One of the themes to be explored in this essay will involve the use of sound effects and their employment in the art-horror, a subgenre that critics argue reflects the blurred boundaries between popular genre films and auteur-driven art cinema in recent US filmmaking. In the interest of David Church's version of the art-horror subgenre, containing "both artistic innovation and cultural distinction"² the films *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), *Hereditary* (Ari Aster, 2018), *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell, 2015), and *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) will be explored for their divergence against average "monster" themes; slasher themes that much of art-horror tends to subvert, instead of using generic conventions to address topics of family trauma, race, and sexuality. While many film critics have written on these films, as well as analyzed sound in horror in general, there seems to be little to no conversation on how the sound in art-horror differs from the typical Hollywood horror. To develop an analysis, the voices of other critics that speak on topics surrounding this one must be compiled in one space. It would be relevant to dive into the history of general sound in horror cinema additionally, as to lay the groundwork for how the art-horror sub-genre adjusts the cinematic soundscape beyond what has been done.

The term art-horror, coined by Joan Hawkins in 2000, was defined as a collaboration made between conventional horror and the avant-garde.³ It is specifically a topic of interest for this area of study because of its continuous and often refined, use of sound as a story enhancer.

² David Church, *Post-Horror: Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Pg. 2

³ Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-horror and the Horrific Avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

Eddie Falvey discusses the genre of art-horror in a way that separates it from the central film industry, “cinema” apart from “movies”.⁴ The value of coining this subgenre, according to Falvey, is that it addresses how contemporary US horror increasingly “invites critical applause as well as box office profits, despite their seemingly difficult textual characteristics” and differing levels of independence from Hollywood modes of genre filmmaking.⁵ Falvey in his writing references Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* as an important precursor for the successes of contemporary art-horror films, as it bridged the worlds of mainstream cinema and art cinema. *The Shining* diverges from typical horror films with its slower pace and artful mise-en-scene, although it still can draw in the mainstream horror audiences for decades after its release in theaters. Though the director is known for his ambiguous art films such as *Lolita* (1962) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), Kubrick’s innovative use of sound in *The Shining* is crucial to how the film aims to elevate Hollywood horror conventions.

Falvey also describes the genre as a sort of subgenre of post-horror or “elevated horror”, having no clear defining aspect other than as “high” and “low” art in a hierarchical sense. David Church describes the art cinema scene as “more formally challenging than classical Hollywood cinema... frequently includ[ing] drifting, circular, and open-ended narratives.”⁶ Church also summarizes the genre in new wave cinema as a mixture of horror tropes and minimalist art films.⁷ The topic of art-horror and sound becomes complicated in many ways, as the debates about what constitutes art-horror are relatively new and ongoing. Some scholars and critics link

⁴ Eddie Falvey, “‘Art-Horror’ and ‘Hardcore Art-Horror’ at the Margins: Experimentation and Extremity in Contemporary Independent Horror,” *Horror Studies* 12, no. 1 (2021): 63-81.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶ Church. *Post-Horror*, 8.

⁷ Helena Heald, “What Is Post-Horror? A Q&A with David Church, Author of *Post-Horror: Art, Genre, and Cultural Elevation*,” *Edinburgh University Press Blog*, 27 Oct. 2021, <https://eupublishingblog.com/2021/10/29/what-is-post-horror-a-qa-with-david-church-author-of-post-horror-art-genre-and-cultural-elevation/>.

the subgenre's rise to the growth of independent production companies like A24, whose branding of new horror auteurs like Ari Aster has been integral to these films' critical and popular success.⁸ As a recently coined subgenre, debates around how to define the subgenre and its continued value for film scholarship and criticism have yet to consider the role of sound in how this non-slasher, non-Hollywood (big studio) have achieved such success. In other words, it would be easy to differentiate *The Shining* from a film such as *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) by a scholarly film critic's means. Not to say that *Scream* is not beloved by many, but it simply does not have the level of 'artistry' and 'taste' that the Kubrick film carries; extreme use of sound as a multi-sensory element. David Church elaborates that the perceived artistry of art-horror often is attributed to how filmmakers like Kubrick subvert common horror film tropes that display the monster as a separate entity, instead of conveying the monstrous as inextricably human. Art horror films, according to Church, refigure the conventions of monster and slasher horror films, touching on topics of the psychological and more bodily aspects of cinema.⁹ The bodily sensations appeal to the emotions of the viewer not through just visuals but also sound.

The primary intention of this essay is to analyze films that juxtapose topics of trauma and horror and how their engagement with sound amplifies, foreshadows, and adds depth under the title of "art-horror". In chapter one, a brief analysis of the history of horror cinema and sound will be laid out to understand their shaping of the genre as it is portrayed today. From live musical accompaniment in silent cinema to full-on soundtracks and sound effects, some "firsts" in the genre will be picked out for their development into common horror tropes in modern

⁸ A24 studios were founded in 2012 by Daniel Katz, David Fenkel and John Hodges. The studios produced a variety of films including popular titles of *The Florida Project* (Sean Baker, US, 2017), *Midsommar* (2019), and *Mid90s* (Jonah Hill, US, 2018).

⁹ Church, *Post-Horror*, 17.

cinema. The following chapters will be analyses of films that fall under the category of the art-horror subgenre. The first analysis is of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), a film that shaped horror beyond monsters and ghouls; uncovering the unspoken demons of isolation and family matters, while also enforcing sound as an active ingredient for evil under the surface. *The Shining* is said to have become an inspiration for several horror films following its release and has additionally produced many scholarly articles by film critics analyzing its cinematography and sonic elements. The use of silence in *The Shining* will be used to tie in the next chapter, which will again bring to the forefront the topic of family trauma through a look into Ari Aster's *Hereditary* (2018). The analysis of *Hereditary* will primarily focus on sound motifs, silence, and the woman's scream, while additionally discussing space and the ultimate entrapment of the family with the metaphor of a dollhouse; the inability to escape the matriarch. This spacial awareness will then tie in the next chapter, which centers on the 2015 film *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell), an all-around ambiguous horror that juxtaposes sexuality with fatality. The film is relevant for its synth-based soundtrack and stalking "monster" figure, which are both reflexive of the slasher horrors of the 1980s. While *It Follows* references this other subgenre of horror, it also makes a subtle commentary on the inescapability of death itself through its intertextuality. The last chapter will lean into *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) with the soundtrack as a primary foreshadowing of terror, and benevolent racism as the "monster". Finally, the conclusion will reiterate all of the previous points made in each chapter, including the identifying factors of art-horror itself, how sound in the subgenre is an update to overall horror sound, and the different ways in which this use of sound creates depth and purpose within the film.

A Brief History of Sound in Horror

The development of film sound has been essential for the evolution of horror; from the silent era to modern film, sound has evolved in many ways as the technology of film has advanced. Almost every stage of sound in the film remains relevant today like most aspects of the earlier silent (and sound) films are still used. For instance, live musical accompaniment that ruled the 'soundscape' in the silent era is prevalent now in the version of a soundtrack for setting the mood for modern horror, or any genre for that matter. Other developments in sound such as non-diegetic and diegetic sound enabled the horror to be seen from a different perspective, while sound effects like sound motifs signified the coming of a monster. Many sound effects in the more recent sub-genres of horror utilize different aspects of sound within them, in the way the monster in the monster horror speaks, the "monster" in the slasher horror does not. It seems that with every new sub-genre comes a new way to convey sound, therefore a new way to convey fear.

Before the talkies, there were many other ways in which silent films were made to imply sound, and the horror genre can be accredited for how this implied sound would evolve. Aspects of silent film such as intertitles, the title cards that worded what was going on during a scene and what the characters were saying, and live music allowed for the film to be a universally available and unique event. Music was how the emotions of the scene were played out and it seemed efficient for that certain period. As mentioned before, the soundtracks to the early horror films were the end all and be all to the entire soundscape, as there was no corresponding audio element to film previous to the innovation of recorded audio. After, it seemed that the use of soundtracks in horror was incorporated for the introduction of films and during transitions between scenes. In

modern times, soundtracks vary in their use as many filmmakers are continuously creating different ways to use this element of sound.

The German Expressionist movement is largely accredited as the source of the horror genre as the Hollywood scene at the time was more focused on romance and adventure films. The expressionist movement produced some of the most iconic films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1921), *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1929), and *The Golem* (Yoav Paz, Doron Paz, 1920), all of which would become a large influence on Hollywood cinema in the coming years. These German expressionist films created an uncanny environment, often consisting of a monster, and having developed fear through the concept of a physical body or a monstrous “other”. This monster horror genre was made effective during the silent era with visual aspects, dramatic dark makeup, and title cards with gothic fonts. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) directed by Robert Wiene, is a perfect example of this, having implicated sound through the dramatization of movements and the illustrative music accompaniment that went along with it. The uncanny atmosphere through mise-en-scene and psychological aspects of the film push the cinematic boundaries of silent cinema, creating one of the loudest (for silent cinema) and most frightening films of its time. As Marc Silberman argues, “viewers developed historically conditioned habits of lending the screen figures their imaginary voices . . . the absence of audible sound constituted its specific communicative condition, the condition of the viewer’s imaginary activity in watching the film” in ways that enhanced the feelings of surprise and fear that the film signaled visually.¹⁰ The Expressionists’ development of horror sparked interest in the genre universally, indelibly shaping Hollywood’s release of horror

¹⁰ Marc Silberman, “Soundless Speech, Wordless Writing: Language and German Silent Cinema,” *Imaginations* 1, no. 1 (2010):

several years later. With the popularity of monster horror and the innovation of sound in film during the 1930s came endless possibilities for what sound would be in the coming future.

Hollywood's horror films were exemplary of the influence German expressionism had on America, as they began to produce their versions of monster horror not long after, the most notable films being *Dracula* (Tod Browning, Karl Freund, 1931), a version of *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1931) to name a few. All films were exemplary of how the advancement of sound production would contribute to horror, as the element of the voice became increasingly relevant to the soundscape of cinema.¹¹ In contrast, Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) is significant in the realm of sound for elevating non-vocal sound effects for horror. *M* adjusts sound in a universal sense by carrying its most frightening moments through non-vocal auditory elements, one being that of whistling. It can be noted that the film has no soundtrack, a bold artistic choice, and a huge divergence from silent films a few years prior which were ultimately carried by soundtracks. Despite this, the tune of "In the Hall of Mountain King" is whistled by Hans Beckert, the murderer played by Peter Lorre, as he prepares to take his next adolescent victim; this aspect replaces any soundtrack that would have been in the film and is used only when Beckert is around. Lang's use of whistling throughout *M* opened a world of possibilities for the horror genre, as it transformed the mundane into a theme for the killer. Modern horror films have adapted to the same sound elements, with some examples being Jason from *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980), *Jeepers Creepers* (Victor Salva, 2001), and even *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), using a theme or sound effect to signify the coming of a killer.

¹¹ Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2007).

The use of silence in cinema has become increasingly popular in recent horror films for the sake of jump scares, one of the first few instances being in the 1942 film *Cat People* during the stalking scene. As the character Alice Moore (played by Jane Randolph) walks home, she develops the creeping feeling that she is being followed by someone. The scene is silent except for the footsteps of Alice and another woman, a cat person, and the setting is a barely lit walkway. As Alice looks around frantically for her stalker, a bus suddenly enters the frame, and the sound of the engine along with a cymbal hit simultaneously plays. The jump scare is made by the breaking of silence and a disruption of the soundscape, which again was once silent but for Alice's footsteps. Though the jump scare is nothing new in modern cinema, it has become one of the most used aspects of sound in horror; it typically follows the same pattern as well, having gone from silence or low volume soundscape to an interruption of loud music and or sound effects. Like *Cat People*, jump scares can become false to trick the viewer or pull through with their fear factor, the monster or other.

Non-diegetic sound or sound that is heard off-screen, within the soundscape may be one of the more significant aspects of audio in horror cinema, as it can be used in many different ways. In the horror films of the later twentieth century, it was used to frame the storyline of the monster through its terrifying nature, some iconic films and their memorable soundtracks include *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), and *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978). Often non-diegetic sound is also used to allude to an approaching monster, as seen in the aforementioned *Jaws* and *The Shining* (1980). The infamous theme in *Jaws* could frighten movie-goers with two simple notes, and can even be recalled by those who have never seen the film decades later.

Kubrick's *The Shining* as the Blueprint for Arthouse Sound

The Shining is considered one of the most influential precursors to contemporary art-horror because of its strategic silence, unique soundtrack, and its aesthetic formalism, and elaborate mise-en-scene that links the film to art cinema conventions. Since horror films during the late 1970s to early 1980s were primarily that of the slasher, monster, or supernatural genre, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* stood out for its steady pace and ability to manifest fear without the visual of a gory monster that lurks in the darkness, instead of with the incorporation of a "monster" as an immediate family member.

Adapted from the 1977 book by Stephen King, the 1980 film changed the way horror was approached by future filmmakers. *The Shining* is a psychological family drama that reveals the most sinister emotions of an unraveling father, who is previously mentioned to have abused his son years prior. The subject matter of the film, and the book, engages the unspoken thoughts of the deepest and darkest moments in parenthood and brings them to life. *The Shining* employs both non-diegetic and diegetic sound to escalate the sense of isolation that the Torrence family feels. The wintery environment in which the Overlook Hotel is placed allows for a plethora of eerie sound effects, sonic aspects such as the sound of wind blowing, footsteps in an empty hallway, and the characters' voices echoing in large empty rooms exemplify the spacious environment in which the film is set. Sound aspects such as the use of silence, nondiegetic and diegetic sound, and the use of pre-existing and originally composed music within the soundtrack develop the soundscape of *The Shining* in all of its terror.

Non-diegetic sound through the use of soundtrack is utilized to cue the most significant and frightening scenes in *The Shining*, one of which is when Danny (Danny Lloyd) encounters

the Grady twins (Lisa and Louise Burns) in the hallway. As the young boy innocently rolls through the empty hallways of the Overlook, non-diegetic music builds in anticipation of something sinister ahead. As Danny rounds the corner, he finds himself face to face with the twins. At this moment, the music changes, and a gong pangs; the twins begin to chant their infamous lines, “come play with us” and “forever and ever” all while a visual of their dead bodies flashes before Danny’s eyes. The music builds again with a shrill violin, and cymbal crashing theme as Danny covers his eyes with his hands in an attempt to rid himself of the nightmare before him. The music subsides the moment he, and the camera from his perspective, look back at the now-empty hallway. Several elements of this scene are effective in conveying a sense of horror—first, the non-diegetic sound, as previously mentioned to build the anticipation of something ahead. Secondly, the big reveal or change in the timbre of the score as Danny is faced with the Grady twins creates a cause for concern for the young boy. Although he had previously encountered them, the event is especially frightening since the hotel was now empty for the winter, and that these were potentially the ghosts of the prior innkeeper’s murdered daughters.

Caitríona Walsh in the article “Obscene Sounds: Sex, Death and the Body On-Screen” expresses sound within the film as a necessary aspect for the full-body experience in film viewing. The corporeality of the “bodily experience” is referenced several times as the result of an efficient atoning to the senses during production. The section “Embodied Cinema in Action: Horror Innovation and the Tell-Tale Heartbeat” nods to Stanley Kubrick as a significant innovator for horror sound in the film with his use of “aesthetic originality” concerning the soundtrack. It is written that the orchestral elements of the film juxtaposed with visuals of body and gore, the Room 237 scene, and the blood elevator, escalate this corporeal effect that Walsh

notes as particularly innovative.¹² However not mentioned in the article is Kubrick's use of the 1934 pop, jazz hit "Midnight, the Stars and You," which signifies the end of the film and the reveal of Jack Nicholson's character (also named Jack) as a previous overseer of the overlook hotel. The theme whenever heard by horror fans without a doubt brings images of a crazed man slashing an ax through a door and yelling "Here's Johnny!" as Shelley Duvall, who plays Wendy Torrence, screams in fear. In other words, the song becomes a symbol of the film, making it its horror piece amongst other pop hits. Walsh describes the importance of bodily sounds as well, delving into the topic of sonic heartbeats and compositional heartbeats. In a way, both elements point to, or become self-reflexive of, the film's ability to connect with filmgoers through "multi-sensory viewership."

Diegetic sound in *The Shining* is just as effective as the film's non-diegetic elements, one of which would be the sound of the wheels on Danny's tricycle rumbling across the hotel's floors. Kubrick places scenes of Danny rolling through the hallways a few times throughout the film, using tracking shots to place the viewer in a childlike perspective while simultaneously conveying the sense of vulnerability of being alone in the hotel. Often there is nothing heard but the sound of the child's wheels on the hard floor, making for a repetitive low humming sound as he moves. There is one scene in which Danny rolls through his father's workroom and Kubrick solely focuses the soundscape on his wheels transitioning from the hardwood to several soft carpets around the room. At one point this sound becomes reminiscent of a heartbeat thumping slowly.

¹² Caitriona Walsh, "Obscene Sounds: Sex, Death, and the Body On-Screen," *Music and the Moving Image* 10, no. 3 (2017): 36-54.

The diegetic elements within *The Shining* would not be as successful without the use of silence, as it became one of the most important effects Kubrick uses to exude a sense of fear. The quiet atmosphere of the empty hotel makes for the most frightening of settings, as it quite literally drives Jack to insanity. It is also because of this silence that the moments accompanied by the loud orchestral soundtrack are ever so terrifying in their contrasting nature. Both silence and the soundtrack are purposeful, but one can persuade the viewer into their entanglement with the anticipation of a monstrous “other.” Kubrick’s silence in *The Shining* is anxiety-inducing and ultimately permits the buildup to the main event towards the end of the film, in which Jack lets loose entirely.

Kubrick’s approach to *The Shining*’s sound and soundtrack further allowed for the film to stand out amongst other films of the genre. The director worked with sound designer Krzysztof Penderecki, who also composed the eerie soundtrack of William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist* (1973), to execute the soundscape of the hotel and match the music to the movements of Jack on-screen. Additionally, Kubrick makes use of the Gregorian chant, “Dies Irae” in the Main theme that opens the film, composed by Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind. This thirteenth-century Latin theme is repeatedly used or “sampled” to signify the coming of death and the “Day of Wrath” (the literal translation of “Dies Irae” in Latin).¹³ Kubrick also uses sound to contradict the relationship between Jack and Wendy, with the incorporation of “Midnight, the Stars and You” during the ballroom scene; Duvall’s acting points to an imbalance within the marriage and inflections of domestic violence at the hands of her husband. Jack visits the ballroom, directly after being accused of abusing Danny, as to relive his memories as a previous overtaker of the hotel, a time when he did not carry the “burden” of having a family.

¹³ “Giuseppe Verdi - Dies Irae Lyrics + English Translation.” *Giuseppe Verdi - Dies Irae Lyrics + English Translation*, <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/dies-irae-day-wrath.html-0>.

All of these elements used within the soundscape, silence, non-diegetic sound as a signifier for an ‘other’, diegetic sound (the heartbeat, the tricycle wheels), and soundtrack developed *The Shining* as a turning point for sound in cinema. The film’s visuals are also significant for their aesthetic mise-en-scene and cinematography. Stanley Kubrick masterfully executes horror as an art form, forever changing how the horror genre is approached, and therefore developing a new sub-genre, the art-horror. The subject matter of the film defies the then-current tropes, embodying topics of child abuse and domestic abuse, and representing a “monster” as an immediate family member. *The Shining* ultimately works as a blueprint for current and coming art-horror films for its innovative use of sound: employing silence to elevate a sense of isolation, foreshadowing despair through its use of the Gregorian chant in the opening theme¹⁴, and nondiegetic corporeal sounds (aka the “tell-tale heart” effect cited by Walsh).¹⁵

¹⁴ Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind’s “The Shining – (Dies Irae) Main Title ”

¹⁵ Walsh, “Obscene Sounds,” 41.

Hereditary: The Sound of Family Trauma

Ari Aster's 2018 film *Hereditary* uses sound to reflect on traumatic events and loss. Considered to be one of the scariest modern horror films, the 2018 family drama utilizes frightening twists, corporeal experiences, and a symbolic miniature scale model of the family's home to simulate a claustrophobic family space. Aster, who is also known for the just as popular horror film *Midsommar* (2019), focuses on family drama and trauma, which is also exemplified in his earlier short films *The Strange Thing About the Johnsons* (2011) and *Munchausen* (2013). *Hereditary* is a very real depiction of a family in the midst of what seems like a series of unfortunate events, haunted by past and present familial conflicts. Similar to *The Shining*, the setting in *Hereditary* is that of an isolated home in the woods, which also ultimately forces the growing tensions of the family to escalate even further. Additionally, the concept of a parental figure developing resentful feelings towards their child is a shared theme between the two.

Aster creates an unforgettable and traumatic experience visually and aurally during Charlie's (Milly Shapiro) death scene, the main turning point of the film. The use of sound throughout this scene is effective in escalating the panic Peter (Alex Wolff) feels, through nondiegetic music and diegetic sound. Aster overlays the scene with a rhythmic, racing heartbeat-like nondiegetic theme¹⁶ in addition to the sound of Charlie's gasping as she struggles to breathe. Visually, the camera switches between shots of the road, which is strictly lit by the car's headlights, Charlie's legs thrashing in the backseat, and the speedometer, an indication that Peter is speeding up in an attempt to save his sister's life. In a twist of fate Charlie opens her window and sticks her head out, just before Peter swerves to avoid a deer on the road, and it is at that moment that the non-diegetic music builds to a blaring horn sound.

¹⁶ Colin Stetson's "Party, Crash"

The sound of Charlie's death is that of a loud cracking juxtaposed with the sound of the car's wheels screeching against the pavement. At this point, a wide shot of the car on the road displays the desolate road and no life in sight. In the soundscape, there is nothing but silence as Peter sits in shock. After several moments, wary of the sight behind him, he carefully takes his foot off of the brake and drives home in silence. At home, Peter lays in bed till morning, and a static close-up shot of his face is displayed as Annie (Toni Collette) off-screen can be heard discovering her daughter's remains. Annie's screaming is devastating and loud, continuing as a shot of Charlie's ant-infested decapitated head parallels the shot of Peter. The music¹⁷ rises in the background similar to that of a blaring car horn, reminiscent of Charlie's accident. Annie's wailing continues for the next couple of shots, amplifying her devastation for the loss of her daughter and the betrayal felt by her son. In one shot, Annie grovels on the floor in despair as her husband, Steve, comforts her, and the camera pans to the hallway where Peter stands listening.

In this scene, the iconic use of the "woman's scream" to sonically create a sense of horror is retooled to reflect Peter's state of shock and to link his fate with that of the women in his family. Michel Chion has famously analyzed the relevance of the scream, specifically the woman's scream, in film. Described as a "rip in the fabric of time," Chion contends that the woman's scream crucially breaks into the soundscape via shrill and loud disruption of audio, unlike the shout of a man. Traditionally in horror scenarios like those in *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, US, 1933), the woman's scream is elicited by an outside danger—either man or monster—yet on its own it can achieve a "screaming point" that Chion describes as "a point of the unthinkable inside the thought, of the indeterminate inside the

¹⁷ Colin Stetson's "Mourning"

spoken, of unrepresentability inside representation.”¹⁸ Annie’s scream similarly poses a “rip” in the narrative progress of the film to foreground the nonlinear logic of maternal trauma.

Furthermore, as the film itself is fundamentally concerned with the unruly dimensions of communication that this family becomes a victim of (as indicated in the seance scenes), the indeterminacy of spoken communication that Chion observes in the woman’s scream takes on further significance in Annie’s breakdown.

The emotions Peter feels in the moments after his sister’s death; the inability to look into the backseat to see what horrors lie there; the silent drive home elevates this scene to be one of the most shocking throughout the entire film. The scene would not be as effective without the sudden transition between sound and silence, as the escalation of noise into sudden silence is a profound indication of an ending. The nondiegetic sound of the horn-esque blaring is another significant sound motif that can be heard post-Charlie’s death. This sound motif is heard (apart from her death scene itself) after Annie discovers what is presumed to be Ellen’s body in the attic and a symbol on the ceiling, Peter is seen at the same time in class hearing his sister’s klokking sound. Reminiscent of her death scene, the horn theme wavers, and Charlie’s diegetic klokking becomes amplified. While Charlie’s character signifier is diegetic, it is made known that Peter is the only character in the scene that could hear it, haunted by his sister’s death as mentioned prior.

The film relies on the conflict that Ellen and her daughter Annie shared concerning her children as well as Annie’s demons after the birth of her son, Peter. Though the interactions between mother and daughter were never shown, Annie tells of their unaligned philosophies in her own words throughout the film, whether it be in her art through her miniature recreations or

¹⁸ Michel Chion, “The Screaming Point,” in *The Voice in Cinema*, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 75–79 .

spoken in conversation with her husband or support group. It is revealed early in the film that the conflict between Annie and her mother is deeper than any average mother-daughter relationship, as seen in one of Annie's miniature creations. This particular model depicts Annie breastfeeding a baby, presumed to be her now 13-year-old daughter Charlie, and her mother bare-breasted attempting to take the child. Other moments in the film, such as Annie visualizing her mother in the corner of her art room, are telling of her inability to let go of her mother's overbearing presence, and she essentially continues to haunt her even in death. Annie also uses the miniature scale models to cope with her trauma, often recreating the most significant moments of her life in the form of dollhouse-sized settings (The funeral, and Charlie's death). The use of the dollhouse is symbolic throughout *Hereditary*, as it points to the family's orchestrated lives as a result of Ellen. Aster shows that the Graham home is a dollhouse in the opening scene, as the camera pans towards the miniature model in Annie's workroom and parallels it with a shot of Peter's room. The final scene solidifies this point even more, as a life-size doll bearing Charlie's decapitated head makes an appearance.

Sonic elements of the film are the main indicators of the evil that lies under the surface in *Hereditary*. The clicking of Charlie's tongue, or 'klokk'¹⁹, is pushed to be a character signifier and ultimately a sign of her post-mortem presence. While the 'klokk' is unsettling for the duration of the film that Charlie is alive, calling into question her stability and her reasons for doing so, it becomes increasingly frightening after her death scene. She can be heard making this sound as a shadowy figure in Peter's room in the second act of the film and finally as Peter after the transition to Paimon in the final scene. It could be argued, as scholar Beth Kattelman notes,

¹⁹ Beth Kattelman. "The Sound of Evil: How the Sound Design of *Hereditary* Manifests the Unseen and Triggers Fear," *Horror Studies* 13, no.1 (2022): pg. 133–148.

that the sound of Charlie's clicking was always a signifier that the Paimon was within herself.²⁰

Silence as sound is another sonic element Aster takes advantage of, often for the sake of isolating characters in the most sinister of spaces (Peter alone in the car directly after Charlie's decapitation; Peter waking up "alone" in the house after breaking his nose at school).

²⁰ Ibid.

Reflexive Sound and Ambiguity in *It Follows*

While the use of the soundtrack of *Hereditary* is minimally implemented, other art-horror films such as the 2014 thriller *It Follows* rely on the score immensely to signify a coming “monster” while simultaneously bringing a sensation of nostalgia. Reminiscent of the 1980s slasher genre, *It Follows* is an adolescent (or teen horror) that in some ways bears resemblance to Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) for its un-supervised nature, thrusting highschoolers into adult situations. While the director David Robert Mitchell admits the 1984 slasher is one of his inspirations for the film, among many others including *The Shining*, *It Follows* is a slower-paced horror commenting on the things that follow in the aftermath of a single sexual encounter. The film additionally changes the concept of a monster as commonly known in slasher films; adjusting who can see them, similar to Danny’s ability to see otherworldly figures in *The Shining*, and what form they take, in reference to *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982). *It Follows* would best be categorized as an art-horror film because of its complex nature surrounding the “monster” and the time; the soundtrack leans into this ambiguity to further this perspective.

Mitchell calls back to this era of films through his development of the “monster” or “it” as well as in his collaboration with video game composer Disasterpeace, employing a strictly synth-based soundtrack reminiscent of John Carpenter’s work. The soundtrack is allusive to the eighties cinematically, and in some ways is theorized to be reflective of the HIV/AIDS epidemic for its subject matter of fatal sexually transmitted diseases. Other theories argue that *It Follows* is a commentary on the transition from adolescence to adulthood²¹ because of its literary elements,

²¹ Henri De Corinth. “On Mitchell's *It Follows*: Literary Allusions.” *Henri De Corinth*, 20 July 2015

while some dispute the film is about the horrors of sexual violence and assault. Comparative to the slasher films that *It Follows* models itself after, the use of sound within the film, diegetic, non-diegetic, and the soundtrack, are used to point to a deeper meaning. Aspects of literature and featured media are significant to the plot, relating to the state of mind of the characters, as well as remaining relative to the tone of the scenes.

After high schooler Jay (Maika Monroe) sleeps with her new beau, Hugh (Jake Weary), for the first time, she quickly learns that she has been cursed with a fatal sexually transmitted haunting. Jay is told that she has to pass the curse on to avoid death, however, is always next in line if that person is killed. Hugh, who received the curse prior, informs Jay of his knowledge of the curse: that “it” will appear in the form of a friend or a stranger, “it” cannot run, and only the cursed can see “it” approaching. In realizing the very real danger that she is in, Jay tells her friends and younger sister about the curse, and the group attempt to elude and ultimately fight the seemingly invisible horror that follows the teen around. Knowing that death is imminent, Jay must decide whether she wants to pass the curse on or continue to run for the rest of her life.

Storyline elements within *It Follows*, such as the monster figure and unsupervised adventure, are reflective of common slasher horror tropes. The aforementioned development of the monster disguising itself as a familiar is reflective of *The Thing* (1982), while other specific characteristics, such as the slow approach of the monster, are comparative to figures such as Jason Voorhees, *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980). Mitchell’s rendition of the monster in *It Follows* carries a more paranormal nature about it, as it can also only be seen by those who have the curse. These films also share an explicit look into the topic of teenage sex, reeling young characters into the most vulnerable positions in the moments before they are brutally murdered, often in front of their lovers. The approach in *It Follows* is slightly different,

displaying sex as an intimate action riddled with deception and betrayal, her receipt of the curse. In contrast, the characters are pushed to spread the curse by having sex with others, essentially sharing the quite literal fatal baggage that it carries. In some ways “it” garners its powers through the ability to be spread to others, thriving off of one of the most intimate acts a human can perform. While monsters in *The Thing* and *Friday the 13th* kill mercilessly or for revenge, the monster in *It Follows* kills those you presumably love. This aspect garners one of the greatest fears of the human psyche, the fear of being alone, as it creates this inability to become intimate in fear of losing the one you love most.

As the storyline of *It Follows* is seemingly a call to the slasher horror films of the 1980s, the soundtrack is relatively a call to the same era as well. Mitchell enlisted the help of Disasterpeace after being inspired by his work on the original game soundtrack, FEZ (2012).²² In an interview with Vice, the American composer reveals Mitchell’s temp score for the film involved pieces from Carpenter and Penderecki, amongst others. Work by Penderecki, who is known for working with Kubrick on the score for *The Shining* (“Polymorphia” and “Utrenja”) seems to be reflective of Disasterpeace’s track “Company,” while his extensive use of the synth is reflective of Carpenter’s work. The soundtrack indicates the film takes place somewhere during the 1980s, however other props during the film allow for a more ambiguous period. Several times throughout the film Yara (Olivia Luccardi) can be seen reading from what looks like a makeup compact turned e-reader; on other occasions, both older and modern car models are seen being used by characters and in the background of scenes. The use of the ambiguous period allows for the film to exist within a realm that is other than the real world, a sort of dream-like state.

²² FEZ is an indie-puzzle game developed by Polytron Corporation and made for game consoles such as the Xbox 360, Nintendo Switch, and PlayStation 4.

Diegetic sound is another relevant sonic element that Mitchell uses in *It Follows*.

Throughout the film, there are several instances in which background noise is representative of the inner turmoil Jay feels, whether it be audio from the television or through an excerpt being read aloud in her class. During the classroom scene as her professor reads aloud an excerpt from T.S. Elliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), Jay encounters "it" for the first time in the form of a hospital patient. The poem is said to be a declaration of Prufrock, the poem's speaker, to a lover about his struggle to act on his desire as a result of his anxieties and mortality. As Jay realizes that Hugh's warning was a reality (with the approach of "it" in the form of a hospital patient, an elderly woman), the soundtrack indicates her growing consciousness through the off-screen reading of the poem that the curse poses a threat to her life, and love life, from then on. Other instances of this are vocalized by the television, one of which occurs as the teens are watching *Killers from Space* (W. Lee Wilder, 1954) the line, "You are an unwilling subject, Dr. Martin" is heard offscreen. It is significant later, as it is understood that Jay herself becomes an unwilling subject to the curse, becoming the next victim in the lineup as a result of Hugh.

During the scene in which Jay has her second and third independent encounter with "it", Mitchell uses several sound elements to amplify the soundscape, creating possibly the scariest scene in the entire film. He also utilizes perspective shots several times throughout to amplify the scene as if from Jay's perspective (subjective angles). While Jay and her childhood friend, Paul (Keir Gilchrist), reminisce in her living room, they are interrupted by a shattering sound coming from the next room. In the soundscape, the intro to the aforementioned "Company" begins to play, indicative of an anticipated monster coming. Paul goes to the kitchen, the source of the sound, and discovers that a window is shattered but no one is there; he goes upstairs to wake up Jay's sister, Kelly. Diegetic music from the television (playing a scene from *The Giant Claw*

(Fred F. Sears, 1957) can be heard in the soundscape employing a ‘suspenseful theme’ as Jay gets up to investigate the kitchen herself. As she approaches, the theme builds beyond the diegetic film and into the soundtrack’s “Company” piece again, which is at this point a slow thumping percussion with a wavering shrill. A moment of silence takes place as Jay, in slow motion, turns to look at the sight before her and into the camera lens. A shot then appears of a subjective angle of “it”, a half-naked woman approaching the camera (in real-time) and urinating.²³ The interaction is a continuous cycle of parallel shots with Jay looking into the camera at “it” and “it” approaching; in the soundscape the track phases between high and low notes with every separate shot. Jay screams at the monster’s appearance before knocking into a table and running upstairs (in slow motion still, until the point that she reaches her room). She locks the door and sits against the wall on the floor, another subjective angle shows her caution towards her surroundings. Greg and Kelly calmly ask to come in, reassuring her as the music in the soundscape de-escalates. After letting them in, Jay paces the room before returning to her spot on the wall when a knock is heard at the door. The non-diegetic theme builds again as Yara calmly asks to come in, presumptive of the monster approaching again. As the door opens she can be seen standing alone in the dim hallway, when “it” appears in the form of a tall man with darkened eyes moving hurriedly into the room with her. Jay screams again, running out towards her balcony and climbing down to her driveway.

²³ The Gore Connoisseurs blog has an article on “The Significance of The Entity’s 10 Different Forms in It Follows.” This specific monster is said to be a reflection of Jay’s traumatic experience after her sexual encounter with Hugh, being dropped off at her house half-naked and in the middle of the road. The urinating is speculated to be the monster ‘claiming its territory’ in Jay’s space. “The Significance of The Entity’s 10 Different Forms in It Follows,” Gore Connoisseurs, 19 July 2020, <https://thegoreconnoisseurs.blogspot.com/2020/07/it-follows-the-entity-forms-significance.html>

The diegetic sound of *The Giant Claw* on the television in this scene exemplifies the character's fear of the unknown, while also contributing a deeper meaning to the plot of *It Follows* entirely. *The Giant Claw* takes place in the North Pole, where engineer Mitch MacAfee (Jeff Morrow) discovers what he thinks is a UFO on his radar, subsequently when the Air Force arrives, they come up with nothing. The presumed oversight by MacAfee ultimately takes a toll on his reputation, despite the very real other-worldly threat at hand. The terror that Jay feels since only she can see the monster is escalated by her friends' nonchalant demeanor. First Paul discovers nothing in the kitchen, leaving Jay to discover "it" entirely on her own, and then later when the tall man appears in the hallway and the friends unknowingly let "it" in. At one point in this scene, Jay asks if there is something wrong with her indicating her sense of paranoia due to the events that have occurred (as well as their inability to see "it"). The concept of being the only one at crosshairs with this elusive monster allows for increased isolation between the character and her peers. The highly subjective experience of fear in *It Follows* means that audiences must rely on sound cues, rather than character reactions, to anticipate who "it" will appear as next.

Another sonic element in the scene is the soundtrack, which is used to anticipate the coming of the monster. During both instances in which Jay encounters "it": the soundscape is silent in the moments before she sees them; once they are revealed, the soundscape is flooded with the non-diegetic noise of the soundtrack. Often the art-horror subgenre does not play into common horror film tropes that display the monster as a separate entity, instead of conveying a more dedramatized and "human" appearance, which seems to be more effective for realistic, fright purposes.

The "monster" in *It Follows* is arguably a physical manifestation of Jay's worst fears. When "it" first appears to Jay independently during her class, it takes on the form of an old

woman, this clues into Jay's fear of growing older and her already fleeting innocence as she careens towards the end of her teenage years. Later, "it" appears as a girl with darkened eyes, who is half-naked and urinating on the floor. This version of the monster is indicative of Jay's betrayal after her sexual encounter with Hugh, as she was dropped off in the middle of the street half-naked and disheveled, similarly to the monster in this scene. As the film goes on the monster becomes more personal to Jay, materializing as Yara, one of the peeping boys in the first scene, and then ultimately as her father in the pool scene. As one of the themes of *It Follows* is the topic of sexual violence, it could be theorized that the appearance of her father, in the end, is the most triggering for Jay because she is a victim of sexual assault at his hand.²⁴

It Follows takes inspiration from the slasher and monster subgenres and adds complexity to them by utilizing intertextuality (through the use of media and literature) and sonic components to point to the 1980s. The significance of the film's monster is relative to that of the fear of growing older, sexual violence, and past family trauma. The true meaning of "it" is ultimately rendered ambiguous through the layering of perspectival and nondiegetic sound, forcing the viewer to engage with a more "claustrophobic sense of dread" that is impossible projected onto a single fear-inducing slasher figure.²⁵

²⁴Joseph Barbera, "The Id Follows: *It Follows* (2014) and the Existential Crisis of Adolescent Sexuality," *International journal of psychoanalysis* 100, no. 2 (2019): pg. 393–404. Web.

²⁵ Church, *Post-Horror*, 30.

Foreshadowing Soundtracks in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) generates a brand new meaning for horror for its development of racism as the "monster", additionally relating to *It Follows* for the assumption of that "monster" as a familiar. *Get Out* assumes "body snatcher" genre elements while additionally commenting on topics of race, reflecting Church's observation that "art-horror" is a mixture of art cinema and common horror tropes.

Peele significantly employs soundtrack elements to set the tone for *Get Out*, collaborating with composer Michael Abels and artist Childish Gambino for the film's main themes. The song by Michael Abels, "Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga" was used to frame the film, playing at both the beginning and end to emphasize its message. In an interview with *GQ*, Peele articulates his main goal for the song to relate to Black culture, incorporating a "bluesy" theme in addition to lyrical significance. The song chants, "Brother, Brother," a term used within the Black community to refer to non-relatives as a term of endearment. Contrastingly, those of the Black Diaspora often have an understanding that they may be related to each other because of their "forcible displacement" during the TransAtlantic Slave Trade, essentially as an effect of colonialism.²⁶ "Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga," a Swahili phrase that roughly translates to "listen to (your) ancestors," was purposeful in creating an "absence of hope" while also cautioning an approaching threat. The inclusion of Childish Gambino's "Redbone" is of importance for differing reasons, telling the story of broken trust within an intimate relationship. Other sonic aspects within the Black

²⁶ Rebecca A. Stevens, "Why Do Black People Always Call Each Other 'Brother' or 'Sister'?", ILLUMINATION-Curated, 31 Jan. 2022, <https://medium.com/illumination-curated/why-do-black-people-always-call-each-other-brother-or-sister-33b0bfc7626a>.

horror²⁷ such as effects, nondiegetic and diegetic sound are used as storytelling components additionally.

Get Out is a rendition of Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) with a modern, horror twist. Similar to the 20th-century film, *Get Out* begins with an interracial couple stepping into the next stage of their relationship—meeting the parents. After dating for five months, Rose Armitage (Allison Williams), a white woman, invites her African-American boyfriend, Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya), to meet her parents during a weekend visit to upstate New York. While anxiety is high for the unsuspecting boyfriend, he is welcomed with the guise of open arms when arriving at the Armitage's home. It is only when Chris encounters the family's African-American servants that the alarm bells begin to go off, in addition to their strange demeanor in general. It is not until Chris becomes unwillingly hypnotized by Rose's mother, Missy (Catherine Keener), that he begins to fall (both literally and figuratively) into a racially-motivated kidnapping.

Director Jordan Peele remains significant for his development of the soundtrack as a sound effect itself with the use of "Redbone," Gambino's song, although released a year before *Get Out* garnered more attention for its significance to the film's subject matter as well as familiar tune (the song samples Bootsy Collin's "I'd Rather Be With You" from 1996). The

²⁷ A term to identify horror films starring Black people, created by and for Black people. Earliest example of a Black horror film was *Son of Ingagi* (1940), though key precursors are analyzed in Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011). "The Evolution of Black Horror" by Margarita Madu at *CHALK* magazine argues *Get Out* (2017) is the first to explicitly define Black horror, for its ability to touch on the deepest, darkest fears of Black people. Margarita Madu, "The Evolution of Black Horror," *CHALK* 15 October 2020, https://www.kansan.com/chalkmagazine/the-evolution-of-black-horror/article_3581a636-0ef8-11eb-a587-1f0171965f25.html. See also Nicholas Whittaker, "Towards a Definition of Black Cinematic Horror," *Film and Philosophy* no. 26 (2022): 23-40.

importance of the feature lies within the lyrics, as Donald Glover repeats the lyrics “stay woke” (another way of saying “stay awake”) in a true political fashion, and easily resonates Peele’s theme within the film. The song developed a new meaning as well as a permanent tether to the 2017 thriller.

In true auteur fashion, Peele also incorporates and transforms Luniz’s 1995 hit, “I Got 5 On It”, to elevate the theme of his 2019 film, *Us*. As an advancement from *Get Out*, Luniz’s tune is slowed down for a ‘tethered’ version, creating nostalgia for viewers who had heard the song before the film’s release. The use of pop or popular music in horror is nothing new, as it can be seen in films such as *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978) and *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000), however the ways in which the songs are used can be said to differentiate their level of artistry. Peele’s employment of “Redbone”²⁸ is relevant for its foreshadowing effect, overlaying the song with the introduction of the film’s interracial couple; as much as it is unsuspecting for its tune, it is essentially warning Chris of Rose’s imminent betrayal. The funk-pop hit reflects mid-20th century Black culture, as the birth of funk (influenced by jazz, R&B, and soul genres) is accredited to “Funk Godfather”, James Brown. It also has its ties to the Civil Rights Movement, containing songs about Black pride and “unapologetic Blackness”.²⁹

The underground “kidnapping” of Black bodies relates to the United States’ underlying race issues, despite the country’s progressive facade (similarly to the Armitage’s attempt to make Chris feel at ease with comments such as, “I would have voted for Obama for a third term if I could.”). *Get Out* also takes common tropes from “body snatching” subgenre, a hybrid of satire

²⁸ “Redbone” as a title itself refers to the slang term for light-skinned African-Americans and/or mixed race African-Americans. See Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

²⁹ “Foundations of Funk: The Birth of a Genre: Features.” *MN2S*, 19 Nov. 2018, <https://mn2s.com/news/features/funk-foundations/>.

and body horror³⁰, as the characters within this version of suburbia auction off Black bodies and assume their physicality through the exchanging of brain matter. The psyche of the original host (the Black person) becomes “dormant” in the Sunken Place, an avant-garde void, while the crippled and aged³¹ white person takes over. This aspect points to the subduing of Black people in society and the unheard voices of those enduring distress because of the previous systems set in place in the United States.

Get Out juxtaposes satire, with the incorporation of Chris’ friend, Rod Williams (Lil Rel Howery), to break tensions within the film, while concurrently making a commentary on the ever-present realities of Black America. Rod, a TSA agent, works as an outside perspective throughout the film, warning Chris about the dangers of dating white women; while his paranoia is comical, he ultimately saves Chris’ life in the end. While Rod’s portion of the film is set apart from Chris’, he attempts to get help from outside sources in order to save his friend, the characters finally meet up in a twist ending. Jordan Peele’s mixture of horror and satire brings to life the very real issues that people of color often endure; concepts of racism as the “monster” bring up complex modes of film that have otherwise been dismissed in the past. Peele’s use of sound in *Get Out*, specifically with the use of Gambino’s “Redbone”, bridges fictional and social reality, relating Chris’ experience to the still-existing horrors of racism that plague Black Americans today.

³⁰ Vann R. Newkirk II, “*Us* and Jordan Peele’s New Horror,” *Atlantic*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/03/us-and-jordan-peeles-reinvention-of-horror/585532/>

³¹ The man in *Get Out* that attempts to take over Chris’ body is blind; a previous exchange occurs between Andre, the Black man who is kidnapped in the first scene, and a man named Logan King, a presumed elderly man off-screen.

Conclusion

The art-horror genre can be contextualized as an approach to horror genre conventions with an emphasis on symbolism and “narrative ambiguity.”³² It maintains the shock and fright factors while simultaneously conveying artful mise-en-scene, soundscape, and real-life topics. Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980) stands as an inspiration for modern art-horror films for its slower paced, nuanced nature; Jack Nicholson’s character of the same name stands in as the “monster” in contrast to horror films seen during the time, which were often serial killers, ghosts, etc. The topic of family trauma as the horror differs greatly and contextualizes the actual horrors in life, the literal unraveling of the patriarch with his family in an isolated hotel. Kubrick used sound elements such as silence (reflexive of the isolation during the wintery months at the hotel), the soundtrack (foreshadowing with the incorporation of Dies Irae and the Penderecki pieces), and non-diegetic heartbeats elevate the soundscape symbolically as well. The concept of a family member embodying the evil can be reflected again in Ari Aster’s *Hereditary* (2018) within Ellen and Annie. Contrastingly in this film, the matriarch (Ellen) knowingly places her family in the hands of a cult, and Annie relives the trauma through a recreation of events in her miniatures/dollhouse models. Aster also collaborates with silence (key in the moments after Charlie’s death) and the woman’s scream (Annie’s devastation over the loss of her child), relevant to Michel Chion’s concept of a tear in the fabric of space and time.

Hereditary plays into the existence of real-life “monsters” as people, which bridges the connection to David Robert Mitchell’s *It Follows* (2015). The “monster” of *It Follows* while ambiguous and unbeknownst to those outside of the curse; stalks its victims in an attempt to kill similarly to the “monsters” of the slasher era (*Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Friday the 13th*

³² Heald, “What Is Post-Horror?”

(Sean S. Cunningham, 1980)) while also appearing as a familiar face to elicit fear (*The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982)). The soundtrack of *It Follows* directly calls to the 1980s era of horror cinema, relying on a strictly synth-based aesthetic, which additionally plays into the ambiguity of the film. Finally, the concept of a disguised monster relates to the familiarity of evil within Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), as he frames the reality of racism as the "monster." The kidnapping of Black bodies at the hands of Rose and her family relates to the undertones of betrayal within the film's first sonic themes, "Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga" and Childish Gambino's "Redbone".

The topics described in these films relate to personal trauma as horror, contextualizing intimate relationships as the true source of fear. While *The Shining* touches on the common horror trope with its incorporation of ghosts (Delbert Grady and the Grady twins), it additionally unveils the true monster as a parent's resentment towards their child, bringing into context the reality of troubled parenthood and feelings of isolation often felt without the help of the community. *Hereditary* is just the same, harping on topics of parenthood and the power-dynamic between a mother and daughter and mother and son. Ari Aster employs sound elements such as the woman's scream and sound motifs to reiterate the echoing trauma the family feels and the reality of the unspeakable, the premature loss of a child. The occurrence results in the "suicide" of Annie, reflecting on a parents' emptiness and feelings of void. *It Follows* carries similar connotations in the reverse, beginning years after the death of a parent and the ending of youth through sexual awakening. Mitchell draws together sound elements of nostalgia through the use of the synth; reflecting on 1980s teen slashers and the ambiguity of time, the unfamiliar grounds that are adulthood and reality. Finally, Jordan Peele's utilization of pop music within *Get Out* reflects the real world in a fictional horror, commenting on society's nonchalant nature towards

topics of racism and bringing to the forefront the Black experience in America. *Get Out's* Sunken Place also reflects the stagnancy of Black bodies in America, materializing the inability to move and speak out as a result of their continuous suppression.

David Church's version of the art-horror works as an identifier for these films as their employment of complex subjects of reality and art cinema defy common Hollywood cinema. These films work to update common horror tropes while relating to the real world, elevating their sense of horror beyond the screen. These juxtapositions of sound and art horror open the door to alternative understandings of the kinds of multisensory viewing practices that horror engages.

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