

CUNY School of Professional Studies
CM 316: Film History
Final Essay
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Hollywood in the Horror Era: The Female Gaze in Horror

Throughout film history, the horror genre has been almost defined by men with the introduction of cinematic pieces, such as Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho', and John Carpenter's 'Halloween' to the 1980s and 1990s slashers including Wes Craven's 'Nightmare on Elm Street', 'Scream' film franchise, Mary Lambert's 'Pet Sematary' (1989), Kasi Lemmons's 'The Silence of the Lambs' (1991), and 'Candyman' (1992). Women directors like Lambert and Lemmons broke ground through camera angles and framing. Investigating Hollywood in the Horror Era in an analysis of horror female directors, and the female gaze in horror.

Emily Moeck's 'The Blair Witch Project: Metatextual Layers of Subverting the Female Gaze', *Cinema Journal* (2023) writes the documentary *The Blair Witch Project* uses the gaze of a female filmmaker as a means to memorialize dominant horror film traditions and the potential ways whereas the film *BWP* is self-aware and subverts this exploitation in subtle but provoking ways. Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) essay, explains that [the] woman provokes—or rather than what she represents for the male hero. *The Take* video essay (2021) delves into film director Karyn Kusama's and screenwriter Diablo Cody's horror-comedy *Jennifer's Body* (2009) of how the film positions Megan Fox's character Jennifer in the swimming scene framing a close-up of her feet, her face, and not full bare naked body to Fox walking away full clothe.



Jennifer's Body (2009). YouTube.

The still shot of Fox's Jennifer exiting from swimming in the lake shows a force of agency with Jennifer in control and having the demand over her body with being objectified by the male gaze. In Coralie Fargeat's body horror, *The Substance* also places the framing of the film where Stacey Yvonne (*The Cherry Picks*, 2024) writes, "There's a distinct difference between when it's perpetrated from/for the male gaze and from/for the female gaze." Fargeat sets a still shot in '*The Substance*' where Demi Moore's character Elisabeth stares at her reflection in the mirror getting ready for a date and fixing her lipstick while beginning to doubt herself on how she looks.



Photo Credit: The Cut

Kusama's '*Jennifer's Body*' and Fargeat's '*The Substance*' is an explorations in use of camera positioning and provocative writing within the horror genre revealing a larger societal and cultural issue.

This essay presents a promising comparative framework and compelling choices of films to analyze. The argumentative structure was a bit unclear, though, and the analysis could have been more detailed. Choice of sources is good but also might have been engaged with more fully. Still, this is an interesting comparison with some insightful points!

Outline

- Written essay rather than a video essay investigating Hollywood in the Horror Era through analysis of horror female directors and the female gaze in the horror genre particularly past horror films such as the comedy horror Karyn Kusama's Jennifer's Body (2009) to Coralie Fargeat's 2024 The Substance is an example of the female gaze in horror.

Source

- Moeck, E. (2023). The Blair Witch Project: Metatextual Layers of Subverting the Female Gaze. CINEJ Cinema Journal, 11(1), 240–257. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2023.471>
- Mulvey Laura. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Essay. 1975. <https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1021/Laura%20Mulvey%20C%20Visual%20Pleasure.pdf>
- Jennifer's Body and the Horrific Female Gaze. 2021. The Take. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/X7Twg8rG2HI?si=jeJHNUdhDkvTRfAC>
- Yvonne Stacey. The Substance: Horror and The Female Gaze. The Cherry Picks. <https://www.thecherrypicks.com/stories/the-substance-horror-and-the-female-gaze/>
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- 30 Female Horror Directors. IMDb. <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls082744419/>
- Jennifer's Body. 2009. IMDb. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1131734/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_o_tt_7_nm_1_in_o_q_jennifer%27s

- The Substance. 2024 film. IMDb.
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt17526714/?ref=nm_sr_srg_1_tt_7_nm_o_in_o_q_the%2520sub