I DON'T KNOW WHO I AM IF I AM NOT BURNING: RACIALIZED TRAUMA AND AFFECT THEORY IN CONSTRUCTING AN ALTERNATIVE FINAL GIRL

by © Simi Khosa

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ABSTRACT

The slasher film has been entertaining (and scaring) audiences for decades. In a typical slasher film, a (usually) masked murderer stalks, torments, and murders young women over the course of a night. Only one survives the carnage - she is the "final girl." But who gets to be the final girl? What about her identity grants her the privilege of survival? In this project, I discuss and broaden the scope of the white, middle class, straight "final girl" trope in horror through an intersectional analysis directed by affect theory. I take the reader through the planning of my short film and discuss it in relation to the established library of slasher flicks. I will move the relevance of these films beyond gender to consider how race is fundamental to understanding how a "new final girl" represents the aftermath of trauma in contemporary Western subjects.

EPIGRAPH

"First, she cut her hair. That was one thing she didn't want to have to think about anymore. Then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her. When am I happy and when am I sad and what is the difference? What do I need to know to stay alive? What is true in the world?"
 - Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

"Survivors look back and see omens, messages they missed. They remember the tree that died, the gull that splattered onto the hood of the car. They live by symbols. They read meaning into the barrage of spam on the unused computer, the delete key that stops working, the imagined abandonment in the decision to replace it."
- Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

"I kept being alive when I should have been burning: I was Joan, I was Lazarus."
- Louise Glück, *Saint Joan*

DEDICATION

To Karan, Jeshan, and Karambir - may you never lose the terror that keeps you brave.

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I have been looking forward to writing my acknowledgements since I started writing this. Not only would it signify that this project was almost ripe enough to go out into the world, but most importantly, I would have the opportunity to show my gratitude for all who supported me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

SLIVER

BY SIMI KHOSA

EXT. HOUSE - EVENING

Early May - St. John's, Newfoundland.

On the front lawn outside of an unsuspecting house in the
suburbs - there is a large rose bush in front of the worn-out
beige residence with vinyl panels. Despite the nonexistent
spring, the roses are in bloom, surrounded by a layer of dirty
snow.

The door is open, and we MOVE towards it. We go through the
house. First up a small set of stairs.

While we tour, we hear TWO voices, they start off muffled and
get clearer as we go through the home.

                    PODCASTER 1 (V.O)
          Our story takes place in Trinity,
          Newfoundland. Newfoundland is a
          quaint and vast island province in
          Eastern Canada, eh. Trinity is
          located about three hours north of
          the province's capital, St. John's.
          Until three years ago, Trinity was
          known for its picturesque scenery,
          being the birthplace of Olympian
          runner Bob Fowler, and the setting
          for a 2001 film starring Kevin
          Spacey and Julianne Moore.

We go LEFT to a lived-in living room, around a small dining area
that leads into a messy kitchen, out of the kitchen through a
dark narrow hallway, finally, we reach a bedroom. In the middle
of the room is a large white tent.

                    PODCASTER 2 (V.O)
          Kevin Spacey...haven't heard that
          name in years. Too bad he got Me
          Too'd.

We inch closer to the tent as they continue talking. Inside the
tent is JERY (late 20s, woman of colour) laying down. She is
intense and concentrated, but far far away. Strewn around her
are dishes and blankets. The tent seems bigger on the inside. A
distortion of sorts.

                    PODCASTER 1 (V.O)
               Yeah, I kind of miss *House of Cards*.
               But now it's a town marred in
               tragedy and a hot spot for morbid
               tourism. Yup, today we are talking
               about "The Bonavista Bloodbath."
               Despite the name, the ACTUAL town of
               Bonavista is a 45-minute drive away.
               Anyways, I am Scott, and with me as
               always is Bryce, and you are
               listening to *Bodies Under the
               Stairs*, a true crime podcast with
               two loveable dirtbags.

It becomes apparent that the voices are coming from a speaker.
In-between a succession of quick shots around the room, it looks
as if a large silhouette of a person is in the room with her -
moving from place to place.

                    BRYCE (V.O)
               But would "Trinity Bloodbath" really
               be as catchy?

                    SCOTT (V.O)
               However, Trinity does fall under the
               Bonavista Peninsula, so it DOES make
               sense.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

We see Jery's friends. The last day.

                    BRYCE (V.O)
               Jay, Jery, and Sam were flying into
               the capital St. John's. Laurie and

                              3

Sydney lived there already, so it
                    made sense for them to meet there.
                    They stayed the night in the city.
                    Then in the early morning of May
                    20th, 2015 they crammed into an SUV
                    and went on their way to the small
                    town for their girls' trip. Once
                    they reached there at about 11 a.m.,
                    they spent the day hiking, eating,
                    taking pictures, and catching up.
                    Witnesses at the restaurant that saw
                    them earlier described them as
                    "having a lovely time." Around seven
                    p.m., they decided to start setting
                    up tents and ease into the night.
                    They chose this specific area to
                    camp for the creepy surroundings. We
                    will get more to that in a minute.

They WERE setting a campground. Building the tents. Heating the
food. Laughing. There were five of them together. They were
having fun. They are running and hiding.

Laughs slowly morph into screams.

We rapidly go back and forth between the white tent and the
black tent from the trip. On the side of the tent, there is a
creature whose head is poked into the fabric wall.

Jery's hand reaches for *IT*.

BACK TO: INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Podcast abruptly stops. The final girl jolts up to find MELANIE,
her sister, has paused the podcast from her phone.

MELANIE (early 20s, woman of colour) kind eyes and a worried
expression.

                         MELANIE
                You need to stop this. You know

                            4

this isn't good for you. You keep
                         torturing yourself.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The two women are silently eating dinner, Kraft Dinner with
wine. They are sitting on separate couches with their legs
crossed.

                         MELANIE
                This your fifth? Meeting right?

Jery nods.

                         MELANIE
                Cool...honestly Jer, I think it's a
                great step. Going out and bonding
                with people who have gone through
                the same stuff as you...I mean, not
                like trauma bonding. But you know,
                sharing and listening. It's good.

                         JERY
                I don't know...it can be
                overwhelming sometimes. They always
                plan meetings in public. And those
                other girls, they are nice, but I
                feel tired and heavy after.

                         MELANIE
                That is like exposure therapy.
                Really get you guys out there.
                Again, it's good, right? Helps
                stabilize and integrate you "into
                society" or whatever. It will help
                you feel safer, Jer.

                         JERY
                You are the only person I feel safe
                with at this point. Thank you for
                that.

                              5

Both women cautiously smile at each other.

                    MELANIE
          Of course, but I do miss going out
          together. You will get back to
          normal in no time.

Jery looks out the window. In the distance, there could be a
figure.

INT. FOYER - EVENING

Jery is listening to the podcast as she ties her shoes.

                    SCOTT (V.O)
          Jery said that by 12:30 a.m. the
          girls decided to head to bed because
          they were going to spend the next
          day exploring Bonavista for more
          nature hangouts. From this point on,
          we have taken the information from
          Jery's police report transcripts.
          She says that at 3 a.m., Jery, who
          was sharing a tent with Laurie and
          Jay, woke up to a noise and saw a
          silhouette of what they believed to
          be an animal on all fours right
          outside their tent.

Through the stainedglass window of the door, we see a figure.
The figure then moves right as Jery looks up.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREETS - SUNSET

Jery is walking down a semi-busy downtown street.

People are walking towards her. Their laughter seems directed at
her. Their silhouettes seem to morph into something tall and
blurred.

She clutches a pocket knife. As they pass her, they are back to
normal, however they shoot her a worrying look.

EXT. CAMPGROUNDS - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

We see the bad memories. The last moments of the friend's lives.

ABRUPT BACK TO: INT. BOWLING ALLEY CONCESSION - NIGHT

She suddenly finds herself facing a worker.

                    BOWLING ALLEY WORKER
              Ma'am, what size are your feet?

                         JERY
              oh, uh, 9... please.

They stare at each other just a beat too long (or is it in
Jery's head?) till the worker quickly turns away to get the
shoes.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY LANE - NIGHT

The sounds of the bowling alley come alive. The overpowering
music, shoes scuffling on the floor, pins being knocked, loud
talking that melds into one fuzzy sound.

There are six girls split into two teams of three. Their ages
vary from 17 to 36, apart from Jery, the women are all white.
Some are talking strategy; others are silently chewing their
nachos.

Jery grabs a ball from the rack and slowly walks up to the
platform.

                    BRYCE (V.O)
              Cranky and disillusioned with the
              area by this point, they decided on
              packing up and heading out to
              Bonavista. Sydney, who had just gone
              up by the mobile homes, 50 feet

                          7

behind the campsite to get pictures
                    of the sunrise, suddenly stumbled up
                    behind the group of girls, bloody
                    and stuttering, until she collapsed.
                    Within seconds, they heard a scream
                    coming from the same direction that
                    she had come from. It was the same
                    high pitched scream as earlier. Sam
                    attempted to call 911, but of
                    course, there was no cell reception.
                    The others were shaking Sydney,
                    begging her to get up. But before
                    they knew it, someone was running
                    full speed at them - a tall man
                    wearing a dirty mask with a long
                    weapon in his hand.

She extends her arm and throws the ball. It starts off promising
but quickly veers left into the gutter.

The facilitator MEGAN (50s, white) ushers to the group.

                         MEGAN
                    I am thinking it is a good time to
                    take a snack break and have a
                    discussion... If everyone wants
                    to…grab a seat.

Everyone awkwardly huddles together.

The facilitator MEGAN (50s, white) ushers to the group.

                         MEGAN
                    I am thinking it is a good time to
                    take a snack break and have a
                    discussion... If everyone wants
                    to... grab a seat. Everyone
                    awkwardly huddles together.

                         MEGAN

Before we begin today's discussion
let's do a quick round-robin.
Describe your week in one colour. My
week was...magenta. How about you,
Steph?

              STEPH
        uh-ah a dark red.
             THERESA
Mine was like the yellow on a
bumblebee.

           CANDIACE
  Earthy, rooted, safe (gestures)
          brown.

            ERIKA
           (nods)
         a violet.

            VICKI
         (rapidly)
Can I say Magenta as well? That is
what I see when I close my eyes.

CUT TO A QUICK SUCCESSION OF IMAGES: Closeup of a grey eye,
friends walking ahead clinking their water bottles together, the
glimmer of the sun off an otherwise rusted piece of metal on the
floor, blood pooling onto a gurney, the fork she was eating
dinner with.

             JERY
Metallic, grey or silver? Doesn't
matter if it's rusty or shiny.

           CANDIACE
That is probably more of a material
 or an object. Not really a colour.

             JERY
 (opens her mouth to say something)

ERIKA
          No, I think I get it. Metal can be
          reflective of everything - the whole
          spectrum can be seen through it.

                    MEGAN
                    (nods along)
          Alright, those are really
          introspective answers. Think further
          into how colour shapes your life and
          emotions this coming week… To carry
          on, I am thinking we talk about
          Audre Lorde's "questionnaire to
          oneself." Is anyone familiar with
          Audre Lorde?

Erika and Jery nod their heads.

                    ERIKA
          She was an activist and writer. I
          believe she described herself as a
          Black, lesbian, mother, poet,
          warrior?

                    MEGAN
          Right, so this questionnaire was
          adapted by a professor by the name
          of Divya Victor as an exercise for
          her university classes. The
          questions are influenced by Audre
          Lorde's essay on transforming
          silence into language and action.
          Here is the sheet...just pass it
          around...so there are four
          questions. They are as follows: The
          first question, what are the words
          you do not have yet? The second,
          what do you need to say? List as
          many things as necessary. Third
          question, what are the tyrannies you

swallow day by day and attempt to
make your own, until you will sicken
and die of them, still in silence?
List as many as necessary today.
Then write a new list tomorrow. And
the day after. And the final
question, If we have been socialized
to respect fear more than our own
needs for language and definition,
ask yourself: What's the worst that
could happen to me if I tell this
truth? Let's take a moment to think
or jot down.

Jery puts a headphone in her ear.

                    SCOTT (V.O)
          Anyways, before Jery knew it, the
          hook end was in Jay's head. While
          the killer struggled to get the
          blade back from its space in Jay's
          brain, Jery recovered from the shock
          and ran full force the opposite way,
          back to the campsite. As she ran,
          her shoes untied and she tripped;
          she quickly threw them off and
          continued on. She wasn't exactly
          sure of where she was going, but she
          knew she had to keep going. Once she
          got to the campsite, she saw
          Sydney's and Sam's bodies. Jery
          describes an unspeakable rage that
          came over her: grief, anger, and
          despair. She couldn't continue
          running and hiding. Jery then felt
          something poking into her skin and
          remembered that she had the nails.
          She then reached into Sydney's
          jacket and grabbed her pocket knife.
          She held each item in each hand,
          much like how most women stick their

keys in between their fingers when
they see you, Bryce.

                    BRYCE (V.O)
To clarify, this is before my charm
subdues them, you asshole.

                    SCOTT (V.O)
According to police reports, after
this, she sat herself by the fire
pit to wait. The sky, which up until
this point was sunny, turned dark
and cloudy. After a while, she heard
the footsteps behind her. The killer
grabbed her and brought her to his
eye line. In the struggle, she
managed to kick his weapon out of
his hands. While he squeezed her
neck, he reached out to get his
weapon, and just then, Jery took her
balled up hand and punched him in
the face. She had put the three
nails in between her fingers, the
pointed ends facing out. In her
other hand, she stabbed the pocket
knife into his shoulder. This
completely threw him off and he
tossed her onto the ground. Jery saw
that his weapon was still on the
ground while he was tending to his
face and shoulder. Jery crawled over
and managed to grab it. She then
plunged the full blade into his
body. He collapsed, breaking the
wooden part of his weapon, and
forcing the blade to go deeper into
his chest. With the pocket knife,
she superficially stabbed him until
she believed he was ...

                    MEGAN

(abruptly)
Candiace, you look like you already
have some ideas, would you like to
start?

                    CANDIACE
These are interesting questions; I
do have some ideas to start. So as
for the first question about the
words I do not have. I really think
I have all the words that I need to
express and live. There is nothing
that surprises me after what
happened. Nothing that needs naming.
As for the second, what do I need to
say? Well if you were to put that
man in front of me, I would tell him
fuck you, look at me. I am alive, I
have my life, I have everything.
What does he have? Solitary
confinement and the blood of two
people on his hands. A life behind
bars, he is pathetic.

                    MEGAN
It is good to find closure in these
hypothetical situations. Have you
thought of the next question around
what tyrannies you swallow, day by
day, or should we come back to you?

                    CANDIACE
I can continue. I don't have any
tyrannies. I am so blessed for my
family and friends that have helped
me through all of this. And for the
police and the legal systems that
saved me. For the healthcare workers
that put my life back on track. I
still have days where people walk up
to me on the street and commend me

for my strength. That helps me to
soldier on.

Erika and Jery exchange a look.

                    CANDIACE
                   (continued)
          I don't have to only live for
          myself, but for my two beloved
          friends that can no longer live for
          themselves. It is not helpful to
          focus on the tyrannies. Why would I
          do that? Why should any of us? I try
          not to think about what happened
          anymore, I have my life and I
          deserve to be happy, and I am happy.
          He can't take anything else from me.
          And for the fourth…

                    JERY
          This is such bullshit Candiace, and
          you know it. You are not okay and
          that is okay. But stop pretending
          with all this perfect survivor
          bullshit, it makes everyone else
          here feel like shit because we
          aren't as perfect or as okay as you,
          when you aren't even okay yourself.

                    CANDIACE
          Ok well actually…

                    JERY
          No no no. Listen, I agree with you
          though, I don't have the words
          either, but not because I think I
          have everything already, but because
          these feelings have no known
          definitions. They are just something
          I have and have had to deal with
          alone. I am glad you felt seen and

                    14

heard by those around you even getting yourself a talk show appearance. When I reached the town to get help, people just watched me...horrified, like I was the monster. Like I had disturbed their peace. Even after they had found the body of my friends' killer, I was locked in a room for two days answering questions. The only comfort I got was from the paramedic that stitched my wounds on the way to the station, not the hospital. Since then I have demanded not be known, I had to fight for my own anonymity in my story. Because I know what people's reactions would be to my presence. I have carried that my whole life, beyond what happened four years ago. I am not a perfect survivor; I don't know how to perform that. People use the word resilient all the time to describe us. But I am not, I am malleable, I am constantly molding myself to make others more comfortable while seeping further into my own discomfort. I know how to swallow myself whole for them and for myself? I just give in to my own paranoias. As a woman, especially of colour, I have always had to carry myself with a sense of hyper-vigilance. I have had to look around me, I am used to that. But now I am exhausted. The tyrannies I swallow are anger and guilt. I am here and I have to be here and I don't feel lucky for it. The fourth question, the worst thing that can happen, if I tell this truth? Nothing, the

worst thing has already happened and
now I have said something, even if
it is a quarter of what I feel. I
used language and I still feel like
shit.

She exasperatedly slumps. The others just stare at her either
awkwardly or blankly.

EXT. SUBURB STREETS - NIGHT

Jery is walking down a quiet suburban street.

                    BRYCE (V.O)
          Where is Jery today? No one knows,
          there is no public record of her
          anymore. No employer or friend can
          vouch for her. Similar to the killer
          that stalked and murdered her
          friends, she herself has become an
          enigma…

Following close behind her is the killer. They walk in sync.
They are forever tethered.

Fade out.

THE END

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

BRYCE: YELLOOOW back armchairs! It's ya boii Bryce!

SCOTT: And I'm Scott! Thanks for tuning into this week's Bodies Under the Stairs. A true crime podcast with two loveable dirtbags.

BRYCE: This week we have a very special case for y'all. A story that has become sort of my pet project.

SCOTT: It's really an obsession, Bryce.

BRYCE: I'm a SAVANT on the subject Scotty and I will not apologize.

SCOTT: We don't normally discuss crimes that have taken place so recently, but this one really fascinates us. It has all the classic markers of what makes a tragedy worthy of retelling: girls, a ghost town, and a guisarme? I don't know what that is but, let's dive right into whose Bodies are Under the Stairs this week...but first a few words from our sponsors.

BRYCE: Our story takes place in Trinity, Newfoundland. Newfoundland is a quaint and vast island province in Eastern Canada, eh. Trinity is located about three hours north of the province's capital, St. John's. Until three years ago, Trinity was known for its picturesque scenery, being the birthplace of Olympian runner Bob Fowler, and the setting for a 2001 film starring Kevin Spacey and Julianne Moore.

SCOTT: Kevin Spacey...haven't heard that name in years. Too bad he got Me Too'd

BRYCE: Yeah, I kind of miss *House of Cards*. But now it is a town marred in tragedy and a hot spot for morbid tourism. Yup, today we are talking about "The Bonavista Bloodbath". Despite the name, the ACTUAL town of Bonavista is 45 minutes away. Anyways, I am Scott, and with me as always is Bryce, and you are listening to *Bodies Under the Stairs*, a true crime podcast with two loveable dirtbags.

SCOTT: But would "Trinity Bloodbath" really be as catchy?

BRYCE: However, Trinity does fall under the Bonavista Peninsula, so it DOES make sense.

SCOTT: Let's move on to our main characters. This starts with Laurie - a recent graduate in Folklore who was working part time at the local museum. She loved the outdoors and nature. Laurie was the one who planned this post- exam, post work week camping trip with her four other friends as a way for them to reunite. Sydney - a PHD student in Classics. She was an older sister type, with a penchant for poetry. Sam Wan who was visiting her old friends for the week after landing a job in engineering in British Columbia. Sam loved her dogs and was an avid hiker. Jay and Jery came from Montreal for the gathering. Both were roommates who recently got jobs in their respective fields. Jay worked as a researcher for a project at McGill University. She was known to be opinionated and bold. She loved cooking and volunteered at the soup kitchen at a local shelter. Jery had an art history degree and was working as a junior curator at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. She was considered kind and quiet. All had become friends while at Newfoundland University for their various studies. At the time only Sydney and Laurie were residing in St. John's.

BRYCE: Jay, Jery, and Sam were flying into the capital St. John's. Laurie and Sydney lived there already, so it made sense for them to meet there. They stayed the night in the city. Then in the early morning of May 20th, 2015 they crammed into an SUV and went on their way to the small town for their girls' trip. Once they arrived there at about 11 a.m., they spent the day hiking, eating, taking pictures, and catching up. Witnesses at the restaurant that saw them earlier described them as "having a lovely time." Around seven p.m., they decided to start setting up tents and ease into the night. They chose this specific area to camp for the creepy surroundings. We will get more to that in a minute.

BRYCE: In subsequent police reports, Jery, the lone survivor of the bloodbath, told authorities that by 9 pm, they made a fire and were laughing, hugging, and swapping tales.Blissfully unaware that in a few hours the only tale from that night that would be told was of the tragedy that happened to them.

SCOTT: We are going to pause for a second here to give more history on the area. The loop itself has an interesting history. The loop was a part of the Newfoundland Railway which made daily trips every day for 70 plus years. Because of this, mobile homes were built for railway workers. Legend has it that when the Newfoundland Railway went under in

the late 80s, a worker who had nowhere to go. No family. No friends. Stayed back at the one place he had known. After a few years, the abandoned railway became an amusement park, equipped with a Ferris wheel and petting zoo. There was also an eating area and a diner, as well as a stage for children's performers and musicians. In 2004, the park and surrounding land was deserted once again. This time it was due to a natural disaster. The interesting thing regarding this is that there is a Reddit thread of people who were children in the late 1990s and early 2000s and visited the park, who talk about seeing a creepy man there who would just watch them and wave from outside the park gates. The kicker? When he would smile at them, the kids all remember him not having any teeth.

BRYCE: So, an abandoned railway becomes an abandoned amusement park which then becomes a murder scene? Yup, seems like the correct progression of events.

SCOTT: I have seen pictures and it is unnerving. It's literally like one day everyone just packed up and left. Broken glass, graffiti, a whole ass ferris wheel in the middle of the ground, and a huge mural of circus performers on the wall of the stage.

BRYCE: Jery said that by 12:30 a.m. the girls decided to head to bed because they were going to spend the next day exploring Bonavista for more nature hangouts. From this point on, we have taken the information from Jery's police report transcripts. She says that at 3 a.m., Jery, who was sharing a tent with Laurie and Jay, woke up to a noise and saw a silhouette of what they believed to be an animal on all fours right outside their tent.

SCOTT: Fuck that.

BRYCE: It was so close that the head was lightly pushed into the tent, breathing heavily. It was very dark so they couldn't make out the features. They sat still, believing it would go away on its own. After some time, Jay suspected it had to be their friends in the other tent, so she started to get agitated, and told them to cut it out. This did not work, so she shook the tent a bit, while telling them to go back to bed. The figure stayed put. She then pushed on the face that was leaning into the tent. When she did this, the figure screamed in a piercingly high voice and ran away. The girls in the other tent jumped out to check on them. After everyone calmed down, Jay and Sam decided to go for a quick walk around to see if they could see anything.

SCOTT: Have these kids ever watched a slasher or even Scooby-Doo? *Scream*, perhaps? Jamie Kennedy's character lays the laws down in a pretty straight forward way.

BRYCE: They came back after five minutes with no information, nor any clue as to what it could have been. The group then decided to squeeze into one tent for the remainder of the night. It was past 4:30 a.m. at this point and sunrise was due in the next hour or so. The idea of sleeping was near impossible at this point. Around 5, the group started getting up. They huddled around the fire for breakfast and warmth after this sleepless mishap.

SCOTT: This is the part where MY tent would have been packed and ready to get the fuck out.

BRYCE: Cranky and disillusioned with the area by this point, they decided on packing up and heading out to Bonavista. Sydney, who had just gone up by the mobile homes, 50 feet behind the campsite to get pictures of the sunrise, suddenly stumbled up behind the group of girls, bloody and stuttering, until she collapsed. Within seconds, they heard a scream coming from the same direction that she had come from. It was the same high-pitched scream as earlier. Sam attempted to call 911, but of course, there was no cell reception. The others were shaking Sydney, begging her to get up. But before they knew it, someone was running full speed at them - a tall man wearing a dirty mask with a long weapon in his hand.

SCOTT: What is it with killers and long weapons? What is the symbolism? HMMM.

BRYCE: The girls started running. But Sam was too slow and was yanked backwards by her hair. With one swift movement, her neck snapped, and her body was thrown to the side. The remaining girls began running for their lives, past the pond and towards the other end of what was the amusement park. This area had what was left behind of the stage, as well as a few obviously abandoned restaurants. Jery and Jay jumped into an old chest freezer, but unfortunately, there was no space for Laurie. As the thumping of the killer's steps came closer, she quickly dove into a cupboard beside the stove. As the killer wandered, Jery remembers hearing the footsteps get closer and then fade away, while holding her breath. Suddenly, the sound of a struggle is close. Jery gathers up all of her courage to poke her head out of the freezer to see Laurie had been pulled out of the cupboard about three feet away from them. The killer's back was to Jery, so she and Laurie made eye contact as Laurie screamed for help. Jery quickly ducked her head back into the freezer, a regret she probably still lives with, all the way up until today. Laurie's scream faded away, and it sounded as if the killer was taking her back to the vast outdoors. Jery and Jay sat in silence for a few moments until Jay suggested that they must go and find Laurie, or at the very least get some help. Once they got outside they saw Laurie's body hanging on the stage. It looked as though it had been purposefully displayed - arms out like a crucifixion. Blood all over. Instinctually Jery ran to Laurie's body and started hugging her and pulling her down. After getting Laurie down she put the nails that were holding her up into her pocket. She noticed that Laurie was still gasping for air. Jay began pleading with Jery that they should move and hide, as they are useless and vulnerable out in the open. They must go and get help. Jay began to walk away, urging Jery to join her. Eventually, Jery accepted Laurie's situation, telling her to hold on, and that they will be back with help. Jay was already by the edge of the forest motioning for Jery to follow, before they dove into the vastness of the trees. From behind a tree, the killer appeared with his weapon in hand. Jery stopped dead in her tracks, suddenly unable to speak, and desperately shook her head at Jay. For the first time, Jery really noticed the strange weapon. It was a long wooden pole with a blade

that split into two parts; one side was a thin straight blade, while the other was a thick curve, kind of like a hook. This very closely resembles a "guisarme."

BRYCE: The question on everyone's mind, Scott, is what the actual fuck is a "guisarme"?

SCOTT: Well Bryce, it is basically an extinct weapon that was used in Europe until the 1400s. We only know what it looks like due to descriptions from primary sources in that time period.

BRYCE: The second most anticipated question: how the fuck did he get one?

SCOTT: We will speculate on that a bit later. We gotta go back to the gore, man. Anyways, before Jery knew it, the hook end was in Jay's head. While the killer struggled to get the blade back from its space in Jay's brain, Jery recovered from the shock and ran full force the opposite way, back to the campsite. As she ran, her shoes untied and she tripped; she quickly threw them off and continued on. She wasn't exactly sure of where she was going, but she knew she had to keep going. Once she got to the campsite, she saw Sydney's and Sam's bodies. Jery describes an unspeakable rage that came over her: grief, anger, and despair. She couldn't continue running and hiding. Jery then felt something poking into her skin and remembered that she had the nails. She then reached into Sydney's jacket and grabbed her pocket knife. She held each item in each hand, much like how most women stick their keys in between their fingers when they see you, Bryce.

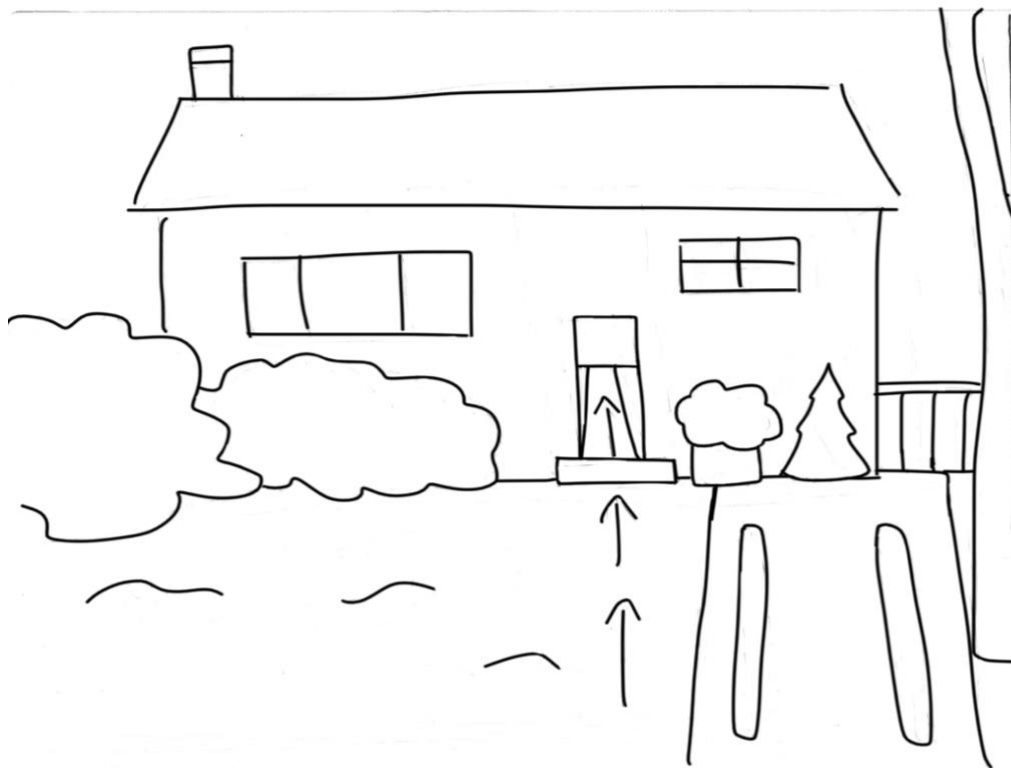BRYCE: To clarify, this is before my charm subdues them, you asshole.

SCOTT: According to police reports, after this, she sat herself by the fire pit to wait. The sky, which up until this point was sunny, turned dark and cloudy. After a while, she heard the footsteps behind her. The killer grabbed her and brought her to his eye line. In the struggle, she managed to kick his weapon out of his hands. While he squeezed her neck, he reached out to get his weapon, and just then, Jery took her balled up hand and punched him in the face. She had put the three nails in between her fingers, the pointed ends facing out. In her other hand, she stabbed the pocket knife into his shoulder. This completely threw him off and he tossed her onto the ground. Jery saw that his weapon was still on the ground while he was tending to his face and shoulder. Jery crawled over and managed to grab it. She then plunged the full blade into his body. He collapsed, breaking the wooden part of his weapon, and forcing the blade to go deeper into his chest. With the pocket knife, she superficially stabbed him until she believed he was dead.

BRYCE: Filled with anxiety and adrenaline, Jery made her way into town. The same witness who had seen the group the previous day when they were enjoying themselves, now had a very different story. She described how Jery was bloody, screaming, and laughing. She was Banging on doors. Wailing for help. Eventually, as people from the town surrounded

her, she collapsed outside of the church, paralyzed, other than the occasional gulp of air, until the authorities came to take her away. To this day, there isn't much known about the killer, no name or record of birth, just a 6'5 body in an unmarked grave. Apparently, they couldn't even match dental records because...he had no teeth underneath his mask. When the authorities investigated the area, they found that one of the mobile homes was being lived in. Despite there being glass shards all over the floor, there was a dirty mattress, food scraps, excrement, and piles of old books from the early Middle Ages and the Medieval times - which explains the Guisarme.

SCOTT: Where is Jery today? No one knows; there is no public record of her anymore. No employer or friend can vouch for her. Similar to the killer that stalked and murdered her friends, she herself has become an enigma…

STORYBOARD

Scene 1 sho
(wide shot)
- Hold 10
  secono
- Zoom into
  open door
- This will b
  a 'oner'
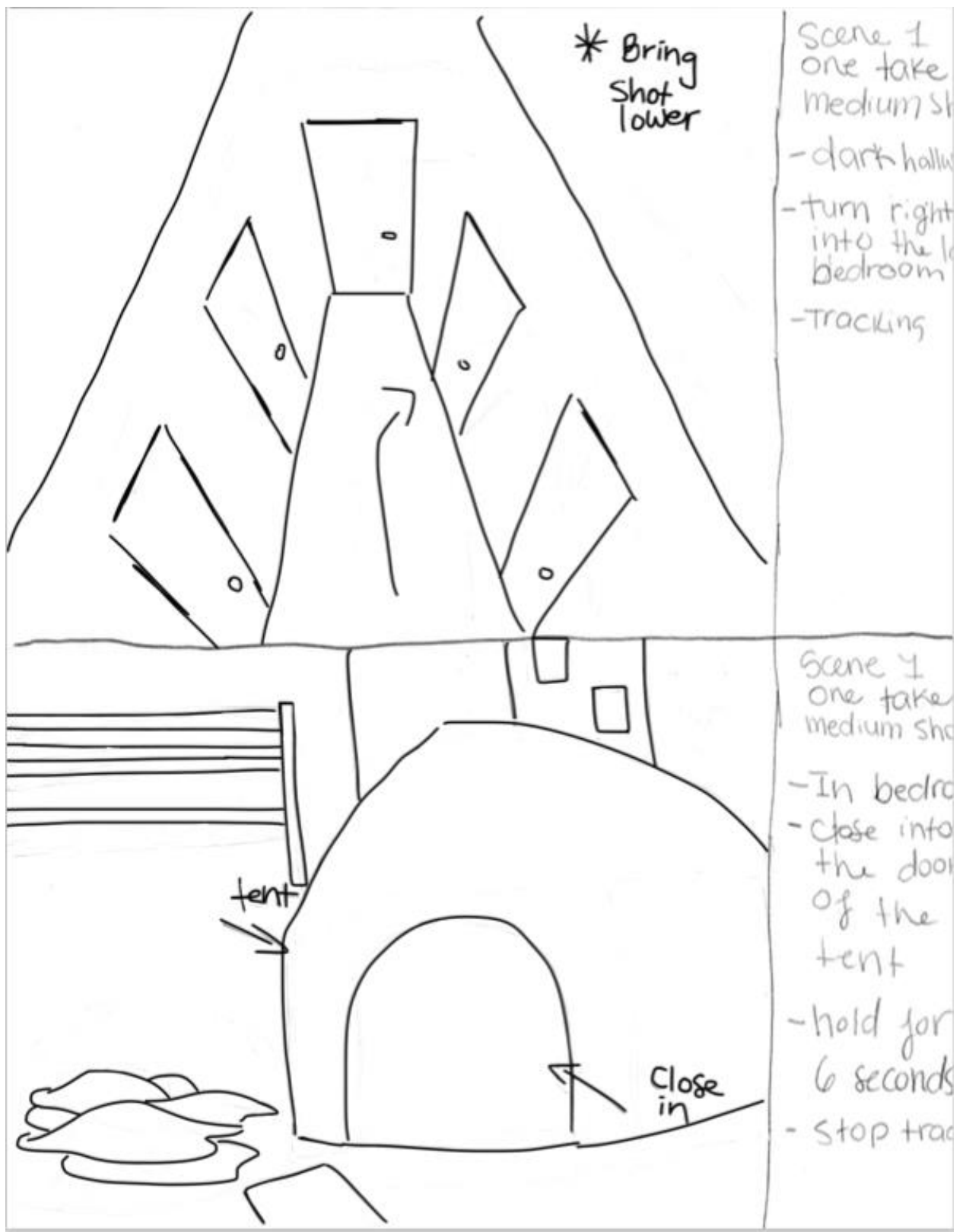- Tracking
  shot

railing
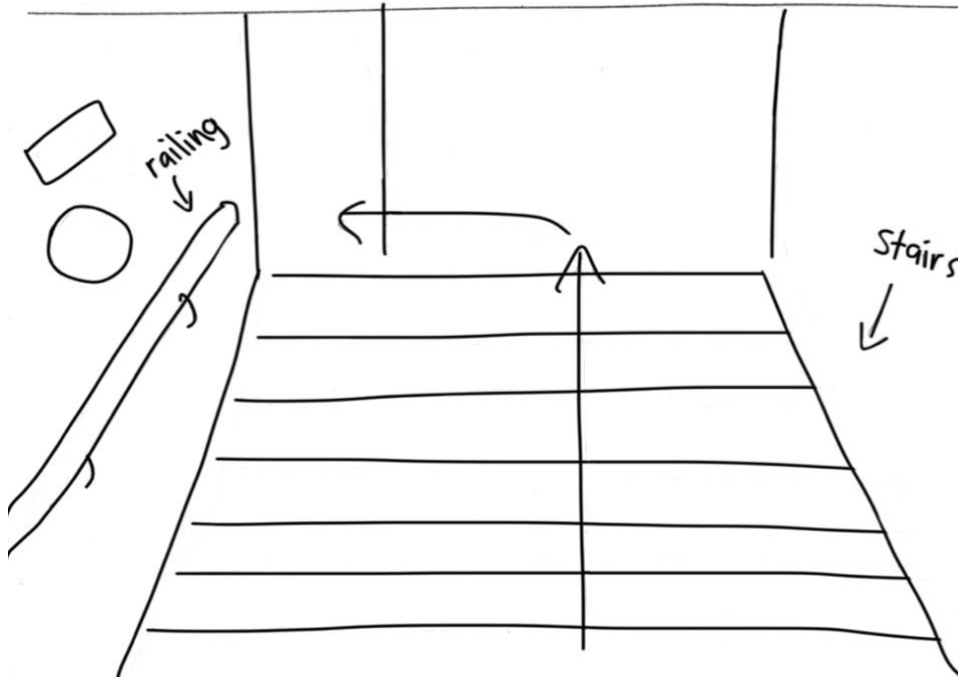
Stairs

Scene 1 (ope
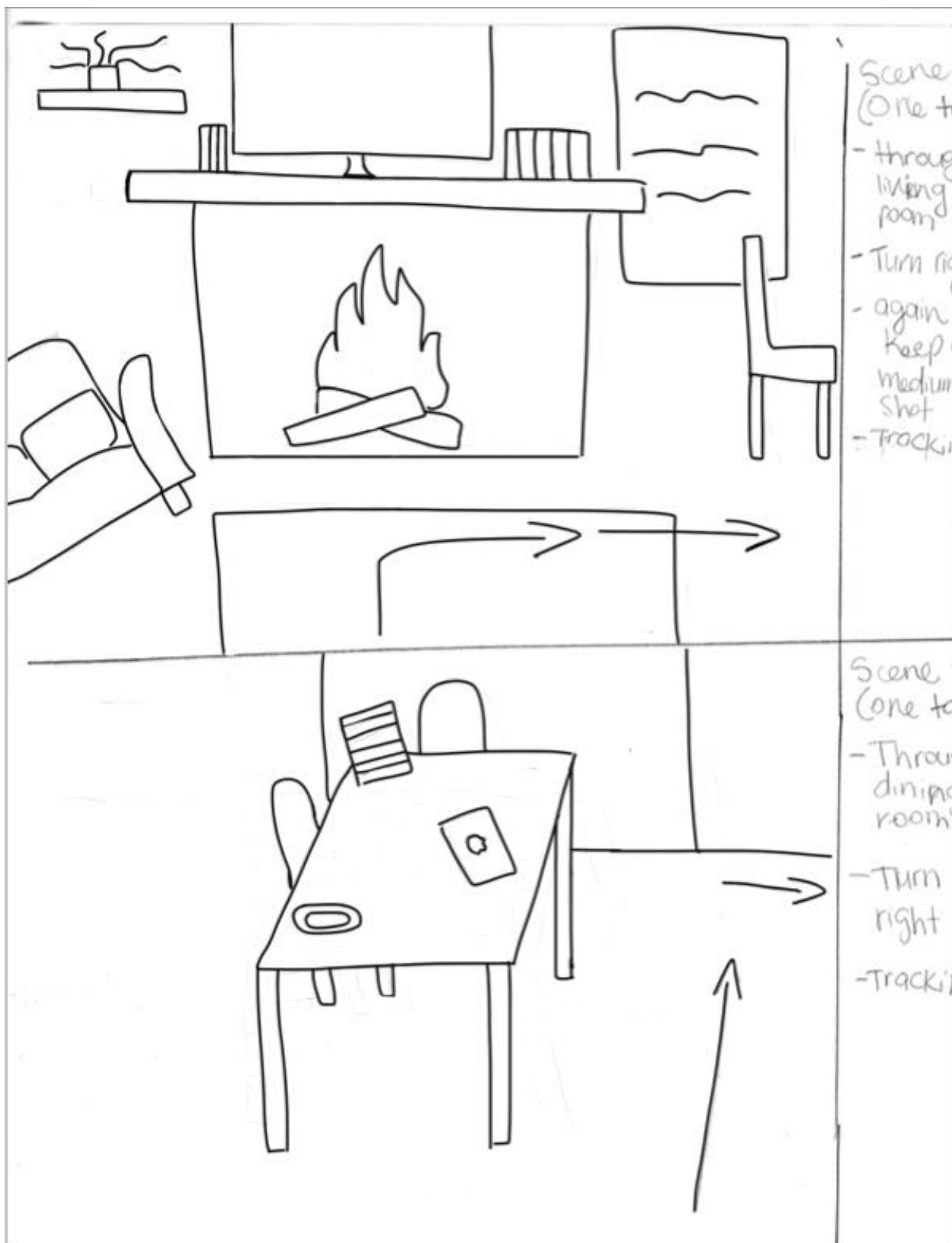(Medium sh
- move
  thougha
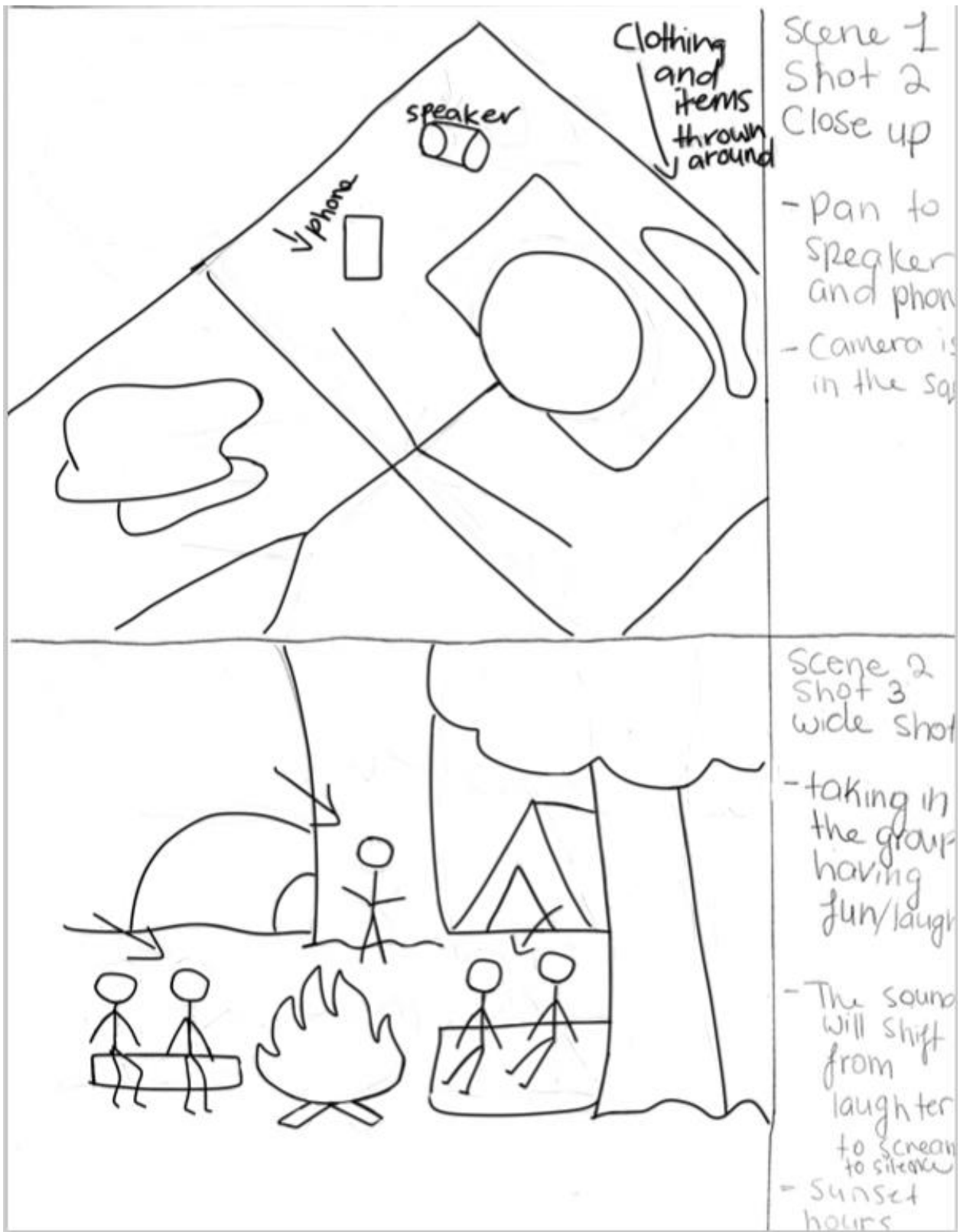 house,
  beginnig
  in doorw
- go up
 the stairs
- Turn left
- Voiceover
  begins
- tracking

*Bring
Shot
lower

Scene 1
one take
medium Sh

- dark hallw
- turn right
  into the l
  bedroom
- Tracking

Scene 1
one take
medium sho

- In bedro
- Close into
  the door
  of the
  tent
- hold for
  6 seconds
- Stop trac

tent

Close
in

Scene 1
Shot 2
Close up

- Pan to
  speaker
  and phon[e]
- Camera i[s]
  in the so[...]

Clothing
and
items
thrown
around

speaker

phone

Scene 2
Shot 3
wide shot

- taking in
  the grou[p]
  having
  fun/laug[h]

- The soun[d]
  will shift
  from
  laughter
  to screa[m]
  to silence
- Sunset
  hours

Scene 4
Shot 5
medium full shot
- eating dinner
- An awkward conversation
- Jery looks out and sees the figure at the end
- Static
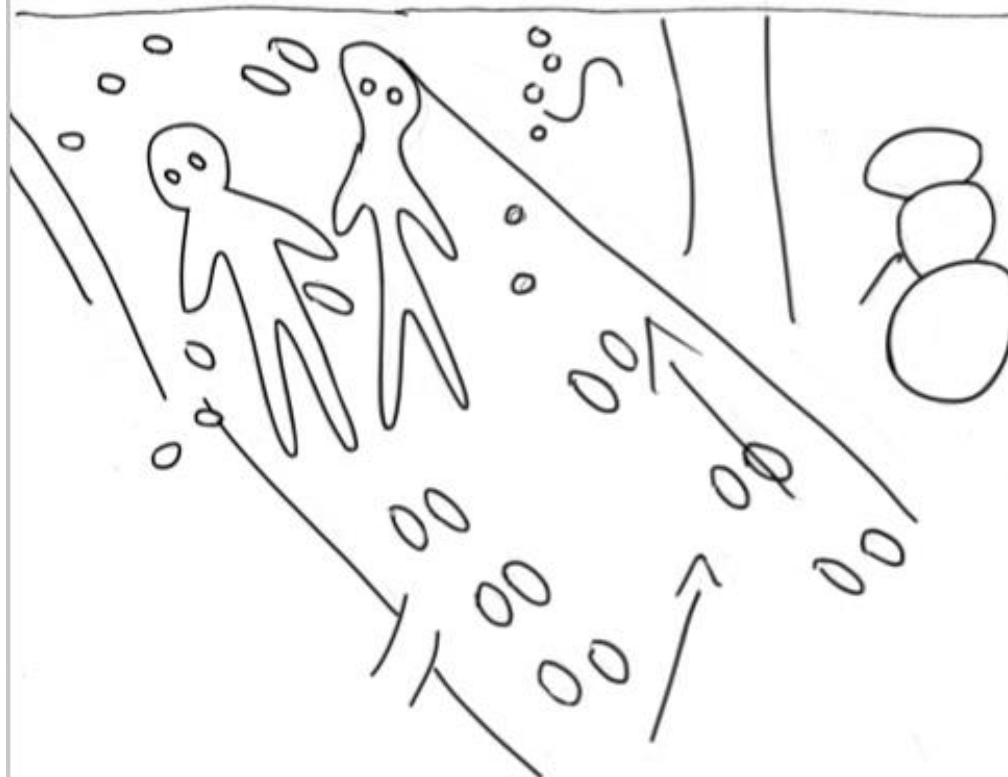
Scene 6
Shot 3
Handheld POV shot
- The people walking towards Jery become elongated unclear spectors
- She moves to avoid them, that is when she sees them normally again
- lighting is warm

Scene 9
Shot 4
Wide Sho

- Camera
pans fro
right to
left as
Jery
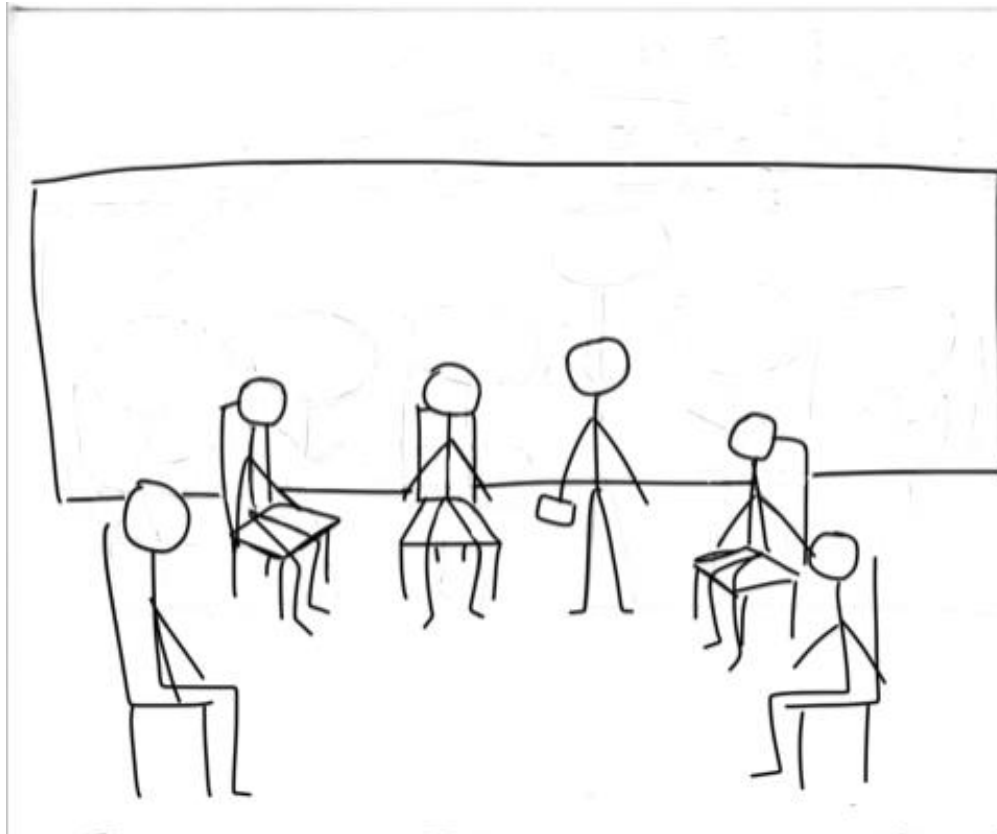Prepare:
to throw

- worm
neon
colours
- Tracking
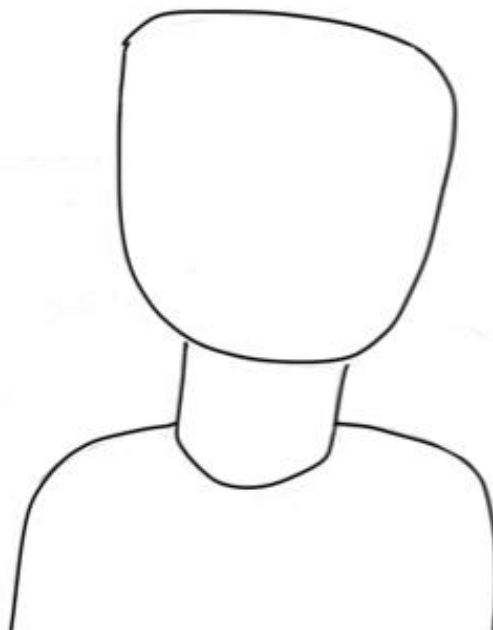
Scene 9
Shot 4O
medium
close up

- lighting
· (neon)
is coo) i
tone na

- Jery
shift
her
eyer in
search
validati
eventuall
looking au

- Handhel

slumps her
shoulders

Scene 9
Shot 41
medium sh[ot]

- They retur[n]
the look
split betwe[en]
awkward st[are]
and blank
stares

- The rectan[gle]
signifies what
I would like
the shot, bu[t]
(condensed)

- lighting wi[ll]
be much
dimmer in
contrast
- Static
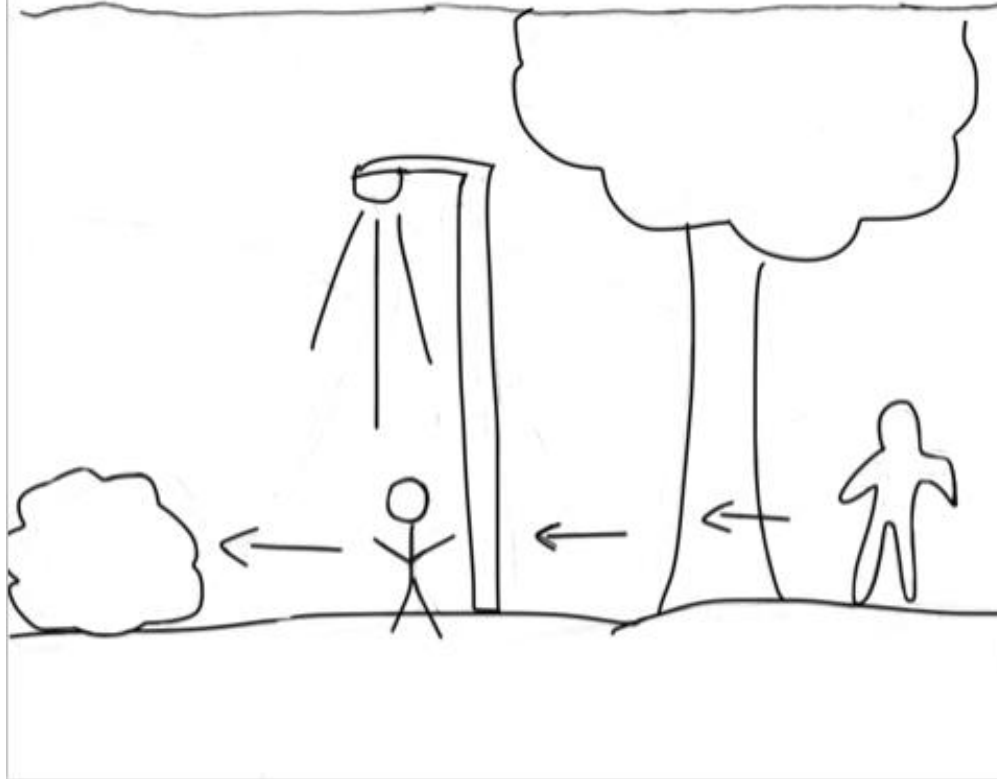
Scene 10
Shot 2
Wide shot

- Jery at[tacks]
the apparit[ion]
of the kill[er]
walk slow[ly]
in tanden

- 30 second
Static hol[d]
as actors w[alk]
- The end

VIDEO ESSAY LINK

Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3NNMxlbdps

Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5mnBV3eejs

"Everyone Gets Horribly Killed Except the Blonde Girl in the Nightie Who Finally Kills the Monster with a Machete, but It's Not Really Dead"
– Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1992)

Part One: Project Introduction

<u>The Alternative Final Girl</u>

In 1978, Laurie Strode (played by Jamie Lee Curtis) ran in a panic around her suburban neighbourhood in Haddonfield, Illinois. Earlier that day, she was just a quiet and bookish teenage babysitter. Now, we see her as she zigzags between houses, at first hiding from the silent masked murderer, Michael Myers, who has killed her friends, but eventually fighting back for her survival. As the film *Halloween* (1978) nears its end, Laurie is saved by Myers' psychiatrist and Myers himself is presumed dead. Forty years later, in *Halloween* (2018), Laurie is back. She is an alcoholic and suffers from PTSD. The relationship between herself, her daughter, and her granddaughter is fraught; the lineage of intergenerational trauma is clear. Laurie's relationship with others is nonexistent. She looks over her shoulder at every turn, and her paranoia is ever present to the point that her house is laden with traps, just in case Michael Myers ever returns. This is a horror film, so he of course returns. This rendition of *Halloween* shows us how the most iconic final girl has become a final *woman*.

Carol Clover first coined the trope of the "final girl" in her 1987 essay titled "Her Body Himself," which later became a chapter in her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992). This character is most often seen in slasher films, though in recent years, she has become transferable to other subgenres such as science fiction, horror comedies, and apocalyptic films. Like Laurie Strode, the final girl is most often a hegemonic character: she is white, virginal, middle class, straight, and straight-laced. She does not partake in the sexual

activities and recreational drugs alongside her peers (Clover, 1992). Clover analyzes that the

final girl encourages male audiences to identify with the protagonist by way of a white,

tomboyish girl who, by the end, survives the violent man who has killed all her friends, often

through the use of a phallic symbol in retaliation (e.g. a chainsaw, sword, or knife) (Clover,

1992). At first glance, the trope of the final girl may seem like a feminist victor (something

Clover disagrees with); however, if you dig slightly below this imagery, most final girls still

represent the dominant identities of white, cis-gendered, middle-class, straight society that

have always been overly-represented in media, and in horror films by the characters Sidney

Prescott (*Scream*, 1996), Nancy Thompson (*Nightmare on Elm Street*, 1984), Ellen Ripley (*Alien*,

1979). These final girls obliquely represent white masculinity and they obscure the survival of

other subjectivities in order to maintain one narrative of survival in the cultural

imaginary. What happens to those who are not often represented under the final girl moniker –

those who are racialized, queer, disabled, or poor? I argue that there is an overlooked form of

cultural resistance underrepresented in both film and the particular resistance represented by

final girls: I call this overlooked form the "alternative final girl".

I argue that the alternative final girl personifies a form of resistance to larger

oppressions such as violence, capitalism, and the heteropatriarchy, all of which are represented

by the killer and those who minimize their experiences. I seek to understand the relationship

between race and trauma through affect theory in the slasher film, both of which are at the

heart of these larger oppressive systems (Hardy, 2013; Lorde, 2013). I am interested in how the

final girl could endure or represent counter hegemonic culture and the forms of oppression and

trauma. My initial project involved creating a short film about, first, how a final girl of colour

may deal with her trauma, and, second, how affect informs trauma within the horror genre. It is not a heroic climb or triumphant return; I unpack the social realities of the aftermath: how the locals treat her, her presence in the environment, the lack of supports around her. I was interested in this subject for numerous reasons. As an avid horror viewer, the final girl always fascinated me. There was something about the lone survivor that appealed to the bravest part of myself. I speculate that this was because the final girl gave women the opportunity to fight back. The final girls were seen to be resourceful and capable in ensuring their own survival. Another aspect that inspired me is that horror is filled with socio-cultural metaphors and analysis that allows us to make connections to and sense of much of our world (Winter, 2014). Horror does this by using fear and anxiety as an unsettling mechanism, often to provide political and social commentary that reveals what we, as creators or audiences, find frightening. I specifically wanted to examine race, because racial representations are fundamental to understanding how a "new final girl" represents something other than a white feminist dream (who is represented) or a hegemonic masculinist one (what is represented).

The male gaze refers to how women are depicted or viewed by the hegemonic gaze. In film theory, if the camera is the stand in for the (normalizing) gaze, then what we see through the camera is a direct mirror of normative reality. Not only is the male gaze binary-driven and heteronormative, much of it is white-focused. According to Laura Mulvey, this not only alienates other points of view, but also hyper-focuses or objectifies the (white) women's bodies through editing and cinematography (Mulvey, 1975). This masculinist gaze is a pattern that goes back to classic Hollywood, where male viewers are the representative audience who wanted to see themselves on screen, so women were commonly archetyped as fatales and

damsels, and the men were thus able to be their heroes (Mulvey, 1975). The features which

make the 'final girl' as powerful as she is, for all the reasons I outlined earlier, are features

which can also leverage hegemonic narratives about power and privilege presented in horror

films. I contend that the alternative final girl is important as she can represent a new type of

narrative that queers racialized women in an affective way and provides a model or an inspiring

representation of the ways contemporary women in the West can overcome racialized trauma.

In analyzing this potential for representational power in the alternative final girl, I argue that

her affective embodiment can be used to empower the emotions and experiences of the final

girl's traumatic change. The film that I would have created would follow the protagonist, or

final girl, throughout the anniversary of the massacre that killed her friends.

Sliver: An Alternative Girl Short Film

The synopsis of my short film is as follows. The film starts with the protagonist, Jery, in

her own room surrounded by objects that remind her of the traumatic and violent day, while

she is listening to a true crime podcast about the event. Not only does the podcast give us

exposition, but it also adds a metatextual layer to the ways true crime and violence (especially

against women) is normalized in our society's popular culture. The podcast will be used as a

voiceover at different junctions of the film, providing commentary and contextualization of the

action. Memories of the event will also be presented through a series of flashbacks in order to

establish a timeline of affect and impact. Throughout the evening we follow our protagonist as

she has dinner, interacts with her sister, and leaves to go outside – all while she is symbolically

being followed by the shadowy figure of the deceased killer. We then follow her on the way to

a Final Girl Support Group meeting. She is the lone woman of colour in this group, so the

audience is impacted by the juxtaposition between the white women's experiences and her own. During this cathartic meeting, she honestly shares what we see has been bubbling up inside her throughout the day. In the last shot of the film, the final girl walks home while the killer, tethered symbolically to her, follows close behind.

The main themes I wanted to engage with in the film are race and gender because they are foundational to the genre, but unanalyzed as such. In the era of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, we must confront and come to terms with social and political power dynamics, the inequitable effects of capitalism, and the extreme violence prevalent in our societies, especially against women and Black women. For horror and its various subgenres such as slashers, haunted house, and possession, there is always terror and trauma, because there is always someone who wields power who then places others in positions of strife that often have cultural, racial, or gendered implications (Ahmed, 2004: 10).

Trauma is centralized in horror because of the expulsion of catharsis that contradicts the façade of maintaining hegemonic social norms. Characters in horror films spend the first part of the runtime attempting to uphold their normality before eventually realizing that they must face their traumas. Those around horror's final girl become wary of her resulting trauma, and, if done well, the viewer leaves the experience in some way attached to the final girl's trauma because we experienced that catharsis with, and through, her, feeling her otherness from those around her. However, I contend that trauma brings about social change, as there is no way to return to the previous neutral state of being; catharsis does not bring about a return to stasis but takes one to a new level of being (Herman 1992; Caruth, 1995). The audience feels a sense of responsibility in their attachment to the final girl. This sense of attachment is created

through the affect of film, a distribution of meaningful forces experienced and realized through the senses, something which comes together through aspects such as the lighting, *mise en scene*, shot types, and acting. This affective distribution of forces then leads our audience towards social change.

In regards to the physicality of affect theory, Silvan Tomkins' experience as a playwright called the ideas of body and positioning into focus. In his theory, he stated that for stage actors, conveying nonverbal communication and mannerisms was key to bringing the character alive (Tomkins, 1962). Although timing and on-screen positioning, rather than on-stage positioning may be different, the idea of the body as a vessel to convey emotional and mental embodiment of affect(s) transcends these two methods of physical performance. In film, as intended for my own, this involved a lot of time in emotionally charged scenes with the main character, demonstrating her body when still and in contemplation, as well as when engaged in physical distress, both when running away from, and fighting with, the killer. Ideally, audiences come away with new knowledge and a new sense of empathy for the pain and lived experiences of others that they then carry with them in their day to day lives. The eventual defeat of the antagonist is what creates catharsis for both the final girl (both alternative and dominant), the audience who is attached to her, and the society that normalizes violence. Simultaneously, this traditional series of events then opens up for discussion how this catharsis is affected by the introduction of racialized and gendered bodies.

In the midst of pre-production, a pandemic began in early 2020 caused by Covid-19; due to this, I was forced to take a different route with my project. I do not consider this new route to be a dead end or a detour, but rather a pitstop on my journey towards filming this short.

From my initial proposal, the aspects that have changed are that I was no longer able to film my

project; instead, I have now opted to submit my pre-production materials, which include the

script, the podcast transcript, the storyboard, and a video essay along with this report

analysis. The storyboard covers the filming plan for key scenes and the video essay is filled with

archive images and a voice over.

"Black and White and Cheaply Put Together like a Slasher Film"
– Motion City Soundtrack

Part Two: Subgenre and Trope History from 1960s to Present

Before film, characteristics of the slasher genre could be seen in other mediums such as literature and theatre. Examples of this are the Grand Guignol theatre in Paris and, in English, the novels of Edgar Allan Poe and Agatha Christie, as well as publications such as penny dreadfuls. Penny dreadfuls were cheap mass-produced literature about the macabre that were popular in the 19th century and were considered lowbrow; this is similar to how slashers were perceived over a hundred years later. The Grand Guignol used grotesque practical effects, such as blood and early prosthetics, to mimic real life violence and to heighten the effect of the theatrical productions, whereas the novels of Poe and Christie include disturbing themes around murder and mystery. Poe and Christie use violent description to underscore the importance of plot build-up and psychological terror for maximum terror effect.

I define a "slasher" movie as a film in which a killer (human or otherwise) stalks and kills a large group of people in a specific concentrated area (what Clover calls the "terrible place"). This "place" can range from a campground, to a suburban street, to a sorority house, and these locations are usually unoccupied (either permanently or temporarily) (Clover, 1992; Nowell, 2010). This makes for a contained location in which the action can be freely and unpredictably enacted. Slashers are metaphors for the death of childhood because they involve youth attempting to enjoy the last bits of their youth that result in their deaths, but these metaphors are couched in narratives of mystery and horror (Short, 2007). It is in the context of these slasher narratives that the final girl first comes alive. Before this, women were rarely given even

symbolically heroic roles in film (Hutchings, 2008), except to represent the abject, monstrous, or liminal identity positions within a system that prioritizes cisgendered heteronormative masculinity (Oswald, 2013). Considering that the final girl is symbolic of the male gaze, and of what the male audience members would do in her circumstances, it is important to remember her "tomboyishness" is a key identifier (Clover, 1992).

In this section I will give a brief history of the final girl trope and slasher subgenre through the decades beginning with the 1960s. This understanding of the genre will illustrate the temporal timeline in which the final girl has transformed throughout the decades and why. It also informs the reader of the historical aspects I chose to draw from as well as the ways that I chose to deviate from. Early in film history, the Hays Code, created in the 1930s, was a film censorship guideline to which film studios in the United States were forced to adhere. These guidelines limited what horror films could include visually and in regards to the violent aspects of plot until the mid 1960s. Though there are filmic influences and prototypes that predate the 1960s, I start by considering films from the 1960s, as this is when the slasher really begins to take shape as a genre and becomes more recognizable, eventually developing into what it became in the mid 1970s and beyond (Clover, 1992; Hutchings, 2008; Nowell, 2010). At this point slasher films were low budget and grotesque; they were quick to create and even quicker to replicate throughout different films with similar plots and sequels. Some earlier prototype films before the 1960s include *The Lodger* (1927), *Thirteen Women* (1932), and *House of Wax* (1953).

Throughout history, the slasher film has been heavily marketed towards the teen demographic which explains both the age range of the characters and their activities; due to

social compliance, they are stereotypical symbols of "teenhood": attractive people, sex, adventure gone wrong, and revenge (Nowell, 2010). However, in recent years there has been a pull towards nostalgia and meta-humour to attract those who were in their youth during the initial boom of the slasher film cycle of the 1980s. Meta-humour operates on the insider knowledge of a particular subject, for example, *Scream* (1996) and *The Final Girls* (2015). As such, being aware of these tropes and conventions brings about feelings of nostalgia. In relation to the audience, slasher films utilize an "attack - react" formula, where the killer attacks their victim and the audience in turn reacts to this (Nowell, 2010; Clover, 1992; Short, 2005; Connelly, 2007). There are two types of possible reactions: audiences are either disturbed or are cheering the killer; the reaction is not fixed and changes from person to person. These films have become so formulaic that producers eventually put their money into reboots and sequels as opposed to fresh ideas. Take for example the numerous *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween, and Nightmare on Elm Street* iterations that exist, all of which are now in double digits.

Figure 1: Still from Peeping Tom (1960) dir. Michael Powell

1960 saw the release of two key films that marked the coming of modern horror, a genre that leads into slasher: Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960). As a film released by a major American studio, *Psycho* was expected to abide by the Hays Code, but instead Hitchcock defied the guidelines and released it without approval (Billheimer, 2019). Both of these films are considered "influential serial killer dramas" (Hutchings, 2008: xix). The killers, Norman Bates of *Psycho* and Mark Lewis of *Peeping Tom*, represent the now famous type of killer who continues a cycle of victimization. Bates and Lewis are both abused by their parents as children. We see this pattern of abuse as a primary cause reappear with Jason Voorhees (*Friday the 13th*, 1980) and Billy Loomis (*Scream, 1996*). This creates a narrative orientated towards masculine subjectivities – whether that be the killer or the final girl. Killers attempt to gain power in killing the less developed characters, while the audience also grows to identify with the power in the survival of the final girl.

Both films use the first-person point of view or what Clover calls the "I-camera," which would later be used during the first slasher film cycle. This gaze, which is an extension of the male gaze, is voyeuristic in nature and drenched in power compared to who it is watching – often women in private moments (ex. in bathrooms and empty film sets) (Mulvey, 2001). Using the camera as a weapon, Lewis in *Peeping Tom* is quite literally the holder of the gaze. The camera or the gaze allows Lewis to reclaim his masculinity and power that was taken from him in his childhood. Part of reclaiming his power comes from "peeping" on and then killing women whom he notes to show fear in their eyes. Fear is what compels a need to control in Lewis, and what spurs him on to act out violently. This voyeuristic male gaze is problematic because it institutes such violence within these films. Both films play on the notion that men are the spectator and women are the spectacle, and in this way, slasher films consciously reinforce the concept of spectatorship of violence in the male gaze. Edgar Allan Poe writes in *The Philosophy of Composition*, "the death... of a beautiful woman" is "unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe, 1846: 165). This speaks volumes to a societal obsession with "female victimhood" and peering upon the "fetishized image" of the female body (Romanska, 2005: 37).

Another aspect of *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* that later becomes fine-tuned in 1980s is the implication of extreme violence against women that becomes increasingly explicit as the years go on. Both films were the first to step over conservative control in film, which means they defied the guidelines and depicted scenes that were deemed sensitive for viewers. In *Psycho*, both leads (sisters Marion and Lila) are active characters, who have agency and are investigative, which differs from other films of the era such as *Peeping Tom*, which is more

traditional in its women characters. These two films focus heavily on the killers, rather than the victims, as the films themselves are character studies into a killer's psyche. *Psycho* baits the audience and then switches the protagonist halfway through the film to a character we only know by name before that, in order to make the audience experience a sense of unease and danger.

When discussing visual aspects to horror films, "splatter" is a film genre that is defined by an excessive use of blood and violence and is a predecessor to the torture porn subgenre popular in the early 2000s. The Italian *Giallo* films -- films that are murder mysteries -- are also focused on violence, but are highly stylized in their colour palette and music; both are the direct antecedents to the slasher film, rising in popularity during the latter part of the 1960s. Splatter films, like the ones directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis, used the audience's now cultivated interest in gore and mutilation, while *Giallo* directors like Dario Argento preferred "whodunit" mysteries, but the films were still littered with the dead bodies of beautiful women (Power, 2001). These films are not feminist. The women in splatter and *Giallo* are starkly dichotomized as either hypersexual or virginal and penalized as such. More to my point, however, they almost never feature racialized characters or actors. Further, any type of queerness in the films of this era was coded and implicit, such as Norman Bates in *Psycho*, but was never raised to the foreground.

1970s

Before 1974, Wes Craven's graphic exploitation *Last House on the Left* (1972) and Brian De Palma's psychological thriller *Sisters* (1972) carry the gritty DNA of the slasher. But it is in this period that we meet the two first original slashers, as we know them today. The two films

were released on the same day, October 11th, 1974: *Black Christmas* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (although technically the latter premiered in Austin, Texas on October 1st). These films presented to us early iterations of the final girl, Jess Bradford and Sally Hardesty, respectively, who are comparatively more progressive than later incarnations such as Laurie Strode and the final girls who appeared after her, when the slasher genre was at its peak. Jess spends much of *Black Christmas* contemplating an abortion, while Sally is feminized and sexualized; in later films, this type of character would be among those killed, but here, Sally is the final girl. Laurie Strode and John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) in the later part of this decade usher in the golden era of the slasher. During the in-between era of 1974 and 1978, *Alice Sweet Alice* (1976) and *Schizo* (1976) were released, films that reinforce hyperviolence. *Halloween* changed the landscape by perfecting the formula from these previous films. This formula includes a group of teenagers being killed by an often-times masked killer. The requisite hypersexual female friend and the jock, and then various others, get picked off one by one until only the final girl remains. The narrative of slasher films became more cohesive at this time by developing the narration and characterization from the previous films in such a way that *Halloween* polished the killer's backstory and the act of the killings as it pertains to the plot's significance. Michael Myers is a psychopathic killer who murders due to the neglect he faced as a child and sexual envy. In these films, the final girl had a fixed personality: she was bookish, observant, clearly a virgin, most likely had a gender-neutral name, and did not partake in the same teenage debauchery as her friends who were all murdered. She represents a strength that this archetype can possess, namely refusal to participate in "immoral" activities despite the desire to do so, in order to studiously strive to "be better" than her peers. The

difference between the final girl and other girls in the film is that she is anticipating the attack; the girls who are "not ready for the attack" die (Williams, 1991: 11). Male audiences see themselves in Laurie Strode as someone who is proactive and prepared; preparedness and survival are presented as masculine qualities. The other women are not open to audience identification; they are hyper-feminized and, as too feminine, are blamed for their deaths. The dismissal and invalidation of typical womanly attributes is a way to justify their deaths, but the addition of "masculine" traits to justify the final girl's survival and the audiences encouragement contrasts the two positions women can take on: easy, unimportant, attractive victims, or the woman who has to denounce these traditionally female attributes in order to be considered valuable and worth saving. In *Halloween*, Carpenter uses the closed circuit of isolated suburban streets, the i-camera, promiscuous victims, and a memorable killer -- all the details jump started in the first slasher film cycle. In 1979, the final girl trope transferred to science fiction horror in the film *Alien* (1979) with action hero, Ellen Ripley, proving her universality as an archetypal figure with whom male audiences identify and female audiences celebrate. It shows the final girl narrative works in a space setting and with a non-human villain, but the trope remains semiotically the same.

1980s

The slasher's popularity can be owed to two factors: first, the VHS market which began in the 1980s, allowed 'underground' films to be circulated amongst audiences and second, since these films had a low budget, it made them quick to create (and re-create). However, the newly popular slashers were not without their detractors. Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert publicly criticized *Friday the 13th (1980)* and other slasher films of the time as undoing progress done by

second-wave feminists (Nowell, 2010) because their narratives and cinematography victimized women and exploited women's bodies. Although the 1970s are thought to be a horror "renaissance" where radical films "challenged societal norms and traditional depictions of female subjectivity," the 1980s returned to a more sexualized and hegemonic idea of women as sexual objects (Trencansky, 2001: 64). The slasher films of this era are simple, the films are misogynistic towards cisgender women, but also transphobic towards other individuals, such as in the way 1983's *Sleepaway Camp* was transphobic in its portrayal of the killer and heroine Angela, whose catalyst was that they were assigned male at birth, but were forcibly raised as a girl and this repression led to their murder spree. When analyzing the presence of marginalized characters in slasher films, in addition to misogynistic attitudes in these films, there are also racist aspects when people of colour are present. Racialized characters, especially Black characters, are present but undeveloped and play no importance in the narrative of the films, such as in *Friday the 13th: A New Beginning* (1985) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (1987).

Despite the fact that they more strongly represent hegemonic hyper-feminine and sexualized norms of women, the 1980s final girls are nevertheless much more active in their own rescue; what they lack in gender variation, they make up for with agency. Apart from *Friday the 13th*, the first half of the 1980s saw the release of films like *The Burning* (1981), *Prom Night* (1980), *The House on Sorority Row* (1982), and *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) among hundreds of others that sought the success given to *Halloween* (1978). By 1984, this formula of a group of young, attractive teens getting slaughtered one by one in an isolated location by a repressed killer soon became redundant and lost its novelty.

The final girls of this time also share much of the same traits as Jamie Lee Curtis' Laurie

Strode: they are bookish, shy, and level-headed compared to her peers. Wes Craven's film *A*

Nightmare on Elm Street (1984) rejuvenated the genre by adding supernatural elements and an

active, planning final girl – Nancy Thompson. Nancy actively seeks out Freddy Krueger in order

to defeat him. There were four more sequels that followed in the next six years. After *A*

Nightmare on Elm Street, producers poured their time into sequels as opposed to funding

original material. This could be due to the push in marketing successful franchises that helmed

the killers at the forefront, killers such as Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees, Michael Myers,

Leatherface, and Chucky. The victims and the final girl were disposable, but the killers were

here to make profit. Marketers and producers seemed to realize that there was something

relatable within these killers for audiences, especially men. This audience is given dual

identification between the killer and the final girl. This could be seen as backlash against second

wave feminism.

1990s

Alexandra West wrote the spiritual sequel to Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* with

her own work, *The 1990s Teen Horror Cycle: Final Girls and a New Hollywood Formula* (2018).

While Clover looks at the slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s, West concentrates her work in

the 1990s. The politics of the post-Reagan era resulted in "looser" values; teens were not

punished for enjoying the same "immoral" activities in film as they were in the 1980s. There

was more emphasis on marketing girl power and third-wave feminist grassroots movements,

such as Riot Grrrl (Bae, 2011). Third-wave feminism was decidedly much more sex positive than

the previous decade in that this feminism focused on agency and personal choice in women's

sexual health and decision making; the Slut March is an instance of this. This newfound agency

changed the rules. In the 1980s, the threat came from being outdoors and away from the

home, but in the 1990s the threat began to come from within the home, as well as the

neighbourhood and the town. The upshot is the 90's killers came from their victims' insular

worlds (West, 2019). In mirroring real world violence against women, the killer is known to the

victims and the final girls; for example, the killer in *Scream* is revealed to be the final girl Sidney

Prescott's boyfriend. Third-Wave feminism "increased the conversation around sexual assault

and violence against women" (West, 2019: 15). One of the leading events that marked the

beginning of the third wave was Anita Hill's senate testimony against her ex-employer Clarence

Thomas for sexual assault, who at that time was a Supreme Court nominee. Anita Hill's case is

echoed in the recent (2018) Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against another Supreme

Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh. Sidney Prescott in *Scream* has sex with her boyfriend, which

in the 1980s would have been unfathomable for a final girl, and yet she still manages to

confront the killer and stay alive.

The 1990s also witnessed a flip into postmodernity, which in this case means the film

had subverted conventional tropes, featured allusions to other films, while it also attempted to

be scary in its own right. *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994) is the first "meta" or postmodern

take on the slasher (Trencansky, 2001). The film features Heather Langenkamp who played the

character Nancy Thompson in the original and *Dream Warrior,* acting as herself. The

intertextual reference asking to be recognized is the original *Nightmare on Elm Street* as an

already established film, as well as Freddy Kreuger coming to the "real" world to exact revenge

on the crew of the original film *Nightmare on Elm Street* during the current film, *New*

Nightmare. This repetition of Heather Langenkamp as the main actress throughout multiple films in the same series allows a shifting from the final girl to a final woman, with subsequent change in what she portrays. In the 1970s, final girls were progressive characters, but were passive in their survival in that they had to be saved by men. In the 1980s, final girls were more hegemonic in their normative feminine identities, but were active in their survival, often saving themselves alone. This comes to a head in the 1990s and beyond, where we see a more active defense and sense of preparedness. For example, consider the difference between Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1978) to *Halloween: H20* (1998) to the newly rebooted *Halloween* (2018). In the original, she is ultimately saved by a man, while in the latter two she is a much more active participant in her survival. In addition, *Scream (1996)* ushered in a new era which focused on the final girl herself, rather than on the hyperviolence. This can especially be seen in subsequent sequels where the focus remains on the final girl's interactions and identity. These films were more character driven and sought to give agency to their final girls. Sequels of the 1970s and 1980s focused the killer as the only returning character, unless you were bringing the main character back to be killed within the first ten minutes of the sequel (*Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*, 1988) whereas in the 1990s, the films focused more intently on the plot, setting, and characterizations of the final girl(s).

Figure 2: Still from *Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight* (1995) dir. Ernest Dickerson

Scream introduced the idea of a character-driven narrative, as opposed to a kill-driven

narrative which zeroed in on the survivors. Sequels were originally meant to be a vehicle for the

killer to continue his "slashing." Keeping the same villain allows for the story to continue, while

keeping the formula and keeping the audience tantalized by the violence. *Scream*'s

intertextuality was also inventive in the way that it satirized while genuinely being scary. The

Scream and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* sequels (both written by Kevin Williamson) dealt

with the trauma of the final girls respectively. It is important to note that while trauma should

be a feature of these narratives, it is not, and instead, trauma is a generally overlooked feature,

due to the gendered and sexualized nature of the films. The narratives in both films force the

characters to explore the traumas that have been so overlooked in the genre.

The 90s is also when we see the tokenism of the supportive Black friend emerge. Ashlee

Blackwell wrote about the token character as a "pod person," the idea that "Black characters

seem to exist completely isolated from their own communities in service of a white character as

a friend or saviour" (West, 2019, 153). *Candyman* (1992) is a well-meaning attempt at portraying anti-Black racism and the American history of enslaved peoples, but ultimately falters due to its white gaze and white final girl. *Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight* (1995) is not particularly remembered as a cornerstone of the genre, but instead for the first final girl of colour: Jeryline. Her character is not only Black but has a sense of agency, which we see in her successful battle with the antagonist. In the documentary *Horror Noire* (2019), the director of the film, Earnest Dickerson, points out that Jeryline subverted expectations of Black characters at the time; his casting of a Black actress meant that audience would believe she was going to perish, rather than save the world (Neal-Burgin, 2019: 103:30). In the same documentary, Ashlee Blackwell states that Jeryline's fearless nature and ultimate survival made way for contemporary Black women leads, such as, Kira in *The Invitation* (2015) and Melanie in *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2016) (Neal Burgin, 2019, 104:20).

2000s

Slashers of the late 1990s and 2000s were either censored due to respect for the trauma of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre or dealt with the aftermath of it, as they were marketed towards teenagers (West, 2019: 141). The decline of the slasher film after the 1990s renaissance meant that final girls were free to move beyond their home genre of slashers into other genres and other representational possibilities. Now, they are found across horror sub-genres such as apocalyptic, supernatural, and science fiction films. After Jeryline, Selena from the post-apocalyptic film *28 Days Later* (2003) is the next iteration of a final girl of colour. Selena's shrewd preparedness can be seen as a way for Black people to "resist, rupture, and disrupt…aesthetically and materially" the representational possibilities of Black womanhood

51

(Sharpe, 2016: 13). The cultural background of this comes from the assumption that Black

women existed in subordinate or unsettling roles in society (Hill Collins, 1990). Selena is easily

the most competent of her team and is the direct reason most survive at the end, due to her

quick thinking and resourceful nature which are key features that keep her and the other lead,

Jim, alive against the military. Selena is not likable and vulnerable in a way that is hegemonically

expected of her femininity - survival is her first priority. Women, especially racialized women,

are expected to be likable so that they are not deemed as threats or as displacing the peace.

Through Selena's apocalyptic narrative we can see how affect provides links between

"gendered, sexualised, racialized, and classed relations of power" within the final girl, especially

in comparison to other characters in the film who maintain or do not challenge those power

relations (Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012: 116). Affect is used to explain how a specific

phenomenon of expressing emotions through the body, in ways that can cause a person to feel

and emote meaningfully, "which can easily be linked to emotions and mental processes"

(Scholefield, 2014: 45).

Figure 3: Still from *Halloween 2* (2009) dir. Rob Zombie

Instead of sequels, the 2000s preferred outright reboots of successful and sometimes less than memorable franchises. Some of the original films of the decade were *Wolf Creek* (2005), *Wrong Turn* (2003), and *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane* (2006). During this time period, slashers also morph into their successor: the torture porn. Films like *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005) were much more interested in body count than character journey. Films of this era are grittier than the few decades before. This can be affect-inspired in terms of directly engaging with the audience's visceral reaction, as Ahmed says, "emotion is the feeling of bodily change" (Ahmed, 2004: 5). The *Halloween* (2007) reboot directed by Rob Zombie and its sequel *Halloween II* (2009) continued the 1990s sequel cycle that dealt with trauma. In her essay about the remakes, Willow Maclay quips that the question Zombie attempts to answer and succeeds in is "what does it feel to be Laurie Strode?" (Maclay, 2016). Maclay remarks how trauma is both affective and fragmented, which can be "brought to life at any given moment by an image or a sensation" (Maclay, 2016). There is a lack of emotion and a coldness to these films, they elicit disjointed memories brought together by reminders of trauma. *Halloween II* ultimately deals with the PTSD that a survivor of violence and attempted murder may go through. The way Laurie attempts to heal but is unable to because of her fears surrounding Myers' return displays how victims "are torn between the urge to talk and a powerful sense of speechlessness" (Schönfelder, 2013: 84). When a character on screen experiences physical pain, it is common for the audience to grimace and feel the injury themselves. This can be extended to emotional pain. The mental and bodily reactions are equally important with affect. We are positioned in the slasher film's attempt to centralize affect on the audience, trauma as an affective element of the film itself. Michael Myers and Laurie Strode are reminders of how the killer and the final

girl are symbiotic, two- sides of the same coin. A gender confusion around their roles is present: the killer – a man who is feminine and repressed and the final girl – a woman who is masculine and unhinged (Williams, 1991: 3). The final girl must become her monster in order to survive.

<u>2010s</u>

One of the fascinating examples of this novel iteration of past tropes in a new context is Chris Washington in Jordan Peele's debut *Get Out* (2017). Chris carries a similar character arc as Carol Clover's white final girl; in fact, he is an inversion of this trope. The final girl always pulls sympathy and a sense of hope from the audience, and eventually succeeds against her oppressor; *Get Out* similarly forces non-Black spectators to identify with a Black protagonist (Clover, 1992). Though *Get Out* is not strictly a slasher, the film binds several genres and subgenres together, but the horror formula that Clover proposes is still present in the seeking out and mystery that forms the film's plot. Trauma fiction, like slasher horror films and television, may be affective to the audience because they are imagined and fictitious (Schönfelder, 2013). In general, trauma fictions create a barrier between what is on screen and what is present in the world, while encouraging empathy between the main character and the audience. Horror films, no matter how improbable, draw meaning and influence from the real world. At the end of *Get Out*, Chris sees a police vehicle coming towards him, and when the audience sees this it conjures images of police brutality and fear for Chris's safety.

In this decade, horror returns to a similar innovation of the 1970s. Original and elevated forms of horror continue to define the decade though periodic remakes. The films released in this decade are generally intertextual such as *You're Next* (2011), *Terrifier* (2016), and *Happy Death Day* (2017). Pinedo reflects on the horror film cycles and that a new "transgressive

incarnation of the genre" molds from the old (Pinedo, 1997: 109). The 2010s sought to return to the 1990s with postmodernity and meta humour mixed in, which means that the film gives self-reflexive nods to itself. Because the 2000s echoed the 1980's return to brutal physical violence and gratuitous sex, this may explain why we see these trends being reused and coming back into fashion after decades, like meta humour, nostalgia, gore, and re-use of old technologies (found footage or video tapes). Owing to the fact that there is so much social memory around the trope and subgenre, slashers and the trope of the final girl are now satirized similarly on television through anthologies the likes of *Scream Queens* (2015), *Slasher* (2016), and the recent season of *American Horror Story: 1984* (2019). By the end of the slasher film, the final girl is a survivor and a victim. Even after the credits roll, we are left knowing the final girl is not free from her killer.

2020s

The new decade has just begun, and we are already anticipating the new slasher and the new Final Girl. Due to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic two of the most awaited slasher sequels, *Halloween Kills* (2021) and *Candyman* (TBD) are now postponed indefinitely. We will now have to wait and see how the final girl changes in these next years. Throughout the last 60 years, slashers have been able to showcase "female and youth agency" in a way the "rest of mainstream cinema" requires further consideration and must catch up on (Trancansky, 2001: 64).

Summary

By laying out the character trope of the "final girl," over the past half century or so, we are able to understand that her representation is affected by both social and political

expectations and values relating to teenagers represented in a parallel way in reality. Over these sixty years, the "final girl" has moved from a side character, to the audience's surrogate, to an established hero in her own right. During this time, her decision-making abilities, her personality (ranging from helpless to full autonomy), and her physical representation(s) have changed, continually opening up more possibilities for *who* can be a "final girl." Moving forward, I believe *who* can be a "final girl," is full of endless possibilities. For my project, *Sliver*, I intend to demonstrate how a racialized woman can affect the audience's understanding of a final girl, and how it affects their relationship to her character, as well as how they address and hope for her survival and success.

"I Will Feast on Your Soul"
- Evil Dead (2013)

Part Three: Initial Project Summary

Julie Dash, whose *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) was the first film directed by a Black woman to receive a theatrical release, asserted that she would re-watch mainstream movies "for the pleasure of deconstructing them" (hooks, 1992: 195). By this, she means she takes pleasure as a Black female filmmaker who had to develop her oppositional gaze. My mentality with this project was that I must first deconstruct, in order to reconstruct, the trope of the final girl. Deconstructing as a filmmaker is a practice which involves paying attention to and breaking down every aspect of the final girl's characterization in order to form my own take on it, a reconstruction of the final girl that considers the racialized trauma of women and thereby creates an opposition to the white, masculinist hegemonic gaze.

My project's initial plan was to film an eight to ten-minute short film that follows the protagonist (the final girl) throughout the anniversary of the violent murder of her friends. This is an exploration of racialized trauma that is left out of the genre, and is hopefully interesting for all audiences, but especially for racialized ones. The short was to be filmed in Newfoundland, where I was living at the time. The flashback scenes served to depict the group's initial trip when they were attacked; the massacre was to be shot in Trinity and Trinity Loop. In comparison, present-day scenes were planned to be shot in St. John's – the suburban and downtown areas, where the final girl lives. Apart from Trinity Loop, the locations were chosen because they were close, convenient and representative environments of the everyday life in which my final girl would live. In terms of plot and character, the final girl scenario deals

with the anti-BIPOC racism prevalent in North America. Although Canada theoretically prides itself on being a "mosaic" of cultures and races, Canadian citizens, in particular white citizens and established institutions, continually throw a blanket over, for a lack of a better term, structural and institutional racism and try to hide and diminish it. This apparent act of "colourblindness" is often exacerbated in areas where the population is predominantly white, and people of colour are few and far between. Trinity, Newfoundland was chosen as the setting to support the plot and character because the isolated landscape and often overcast and gloomy weather, as well as the primarily white population, made the location perfect for the horror aesthetic: secluded and vulnerable. As I learned more about Trinity's history as a stop on the Newfoundland Railway, as well as that it was later the location of a now-abandoned amusement park, I began incorporating pieces of the Trinity Loop, a historical part of Newfoundland that includes both of these historic, yet deserted, sites, into my background or "flashback" story. I had been in contact with the Newfoundland Independent Filmmaking Cooperation (NIFCO) and Nickel Independent Film Festival for technical assistance and possible funding from the latter. I had cast most of the roles other than the lead, and was in the midst of finalizing the crew. The casting was done by word of mouth and posting to a Facebook message board. For the crew, I looked mostly to my friends and asked Jamie Skidmore, the coordinator of the Stage and Screen Technique program at Memorial University, to send out an email to alumni interested in assisting.

My previous experience has mostly involved writing scripts for myself, which made this project a learning curve for me in terms of developing the confidence to share my work and to rewrite accordingly, and repeatedly. From its initial conception, the plot of my film changed

quite a bit. The last scene, which involves the final girl walking at night, followed by the apparition of the killer a steady pace behind, was the first image that popped into my head, and I built the script around that. While writing the script, the first part remained much the same as it is presently. I made some minor changes to dialogue and the flow of the script as the rewrites went on, and the third act led to the final shot; this is the one that evolved the most because this was the final girl's cathartic moment. During my first draft, I wrote the climax to take place at a concert because the aural and visual environment would richly contribute to the generation of affect and emotion. The diegetic music and situation would have put the character and audience in the same mind frame. Due to the technical difficulty of filming a concert with a tight timeframe, little experience, and little funding, I thought about placing this act in a house party instead; this would be a similar atmosphere to a concert because it allowed for music and communication to occur. It was not until a few rewrites of the script in which items would not gel together, that I knew it was the house party that had to change. It was not serving the type of release for the protagonist that I needed, one which would allow for the characters around her to better understand her pain. I believed that I could go more in-depth with it, really drawing comparisons between the distinct treatments of white women and racialized women, how trauma resides within survivors, and how to portray that to an audience. From there, I thought more about support groups for survivors, the implication of shared experiences, and forging a community from them. Finally, the idea of a support group, specifically for final girls, was born. Slightly skewering the very grounded concept of a support group to fit my story's need was a good opportunity for the protagonist to verbally communicate what has been bubbling up within her for the last few years and throughout the

film's duration. Usually, we expect to see a room with sterile lighting and foldable chairs in a large circle. Instead, I wanted a setting that was somewhat kitschy, and yet with a small-town vibe, that offset the meeting's seriousness, with a quality of ridiculousness to it. A bowling alley meeting seems very much like a place that a well-meaning facilitator with a limited budget could plan for a support group, thinking it would help them connect.

I knew it was imperative to include interactions with others. Sara Ahmed theorizes that our affects are not ours to bear privately, but rather, they "mediate the relationship between the individual and collective" (Ahmed, 2004: 119). The final girl's relationships with her dead friends, her sister, and those women at the support group are integral to her positionality in society as a woman of colour who has undergone trauma. How is she seen as a victim, a survivor, or a woman of colour? Despite not going through the same experience, her roommate wishes there was a way to "feel the pain" for her so that the final girl does not have to bear it alone – an act of love (Ahmed, 2004: 30). This is her friend experiencing her own emotions towards the final girl's affects. What does it mean to survive and is survival itself revolutionary? What is one forced to carry after their survival – emotionally, mentally, and physically? How does this change in relation to the person's experience? With the dead friends, there is the guilt of being the one to survive and replaying that repeatedly for different scenarios (Herman, 1998). Because this was not being filmed due to COVID-19, I felt as if I had more opportunity to extend the support group scenes. The script pages went from indicating a 7-minute short film to a 15 minute one. The conversation that takes place at the meeting is based on *The Audre Lorde Questionnaire to Oneself* that Dr. Divya Victor adapted from Lorde's essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action:"

1. What are the words you do not have yet? (*Or,* "for what do you not have words, yet?")

2. What do you need to say? (List as many things as necessary)

3. "What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?" (List as many as necessary today. Then write a new list tomorrow. And the day after.)

4. If we have been "socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition", ask yourself: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?"

   * (So, answer this today. And every day.) (Victor)

In this essay, Lorde states that one's "silence will not protect" them; one must actively use language and action to mobilize change (Lorde, 80). This is the activity that the group pulls through; it allows viewers to compare experiences and it allows the final girl to verbalize her trauma to a group that may understand her experience in one way (being a survivor of violence), but not others (being a racialized woman and the challenges that come with it).

The protagonist as a woman of colour was the primary motivation because her character could show how – in comparison to white people and specifically to women – that the safety and health of women of colour are not priorities. In comparison, women of colour are displayed as dangerous, sexualized, or somehow more resilient through physicality (Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1992; Lorde, 1984). The movement between signs such as mannerisms or identifiers allows Othered or marginalized people to be understood in terms of emotional value. In bell hooks' essay "Oppositional Gaze," she writes about how the only people who seek to protect and care for Black girls and women are other Black women (hooks, 1992: 74). For Black women, gazing onto a fictional film as a spectator is difficult because of the mistreatment

of those in power of the gaze, which does not even view them at all. The subject position of Black women as viewers is nonexistent, and their positions as objects of viewing are non-existent, resulting in their total lack of dedicated space to play a role in filmic culture whatsoever (hooks, 1992: 194). My final girl exists as a spectator to those around her, instead of the spectacle of racialized being that she was forced to be. Lorde reiterates that women of colour, like Lorde herself, speak up about their experiences, which is often seen as destruction or disturbing someone else's peace instead of what it is: survival (Lorde, 1984: 243). This is seen to be destructive to anyone outside the demographic, specifically those in dominant positions of power. When it comes to the history of North American film and television, minorities are often overwhelmingly aware of the ways in which mass media upholds white supremacy by enforcing the stereotypes and roles that racialized people occupy, in addition to also prioritizing white perspectives (hooks ,1992; Ngai, 2005; Shohat & Stam, 1994). Patricia Hill Collins has written about how Black women are continually portrayed as "stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas" as a way to keep them subjugated (Hill Collins, 2000). Although the task of subverting these stereotypes should not be solely on the shoulders of people of colour, specifically women, it often ends up being the case.

I wanted my film to be an homage and critical love letter to the trope of the final girl. I recognize that final girls are no longer played 'straight' for scares and kills. They are mostly meta-textual in nature now, probably due to the over-saturation of the genre during its first ten years of popularity (Wee, 2005) The name of our final girl is Jery; this is a reference and homage to Jeryline from *Tales of the Crypt: Demon Knight* (1995) – the most famous example of a racialized final girl. It also maintains the tradition of naming final girls with gender neutral

names. Her friends, who we only see in flashback, are also named after iconic final girls,

something that underscores the iconicity of Jery's background meaning. Slasher films deal with

the death of childhood quite literally - what usually begins as a youthful event ends with

skewered bodies, and all that reminds one of childhood (friends, experiences, a sense of

contentment in the world, expectations) is dead, leaving the protagonists of these films aged

and changed, traumatically (Short, 2007). In slasher sequels, mental illness and trauma are

discussed in uncomplicated terms, as merely a way to continue inflicting the horror on the final

girl (Short, 2007: 67). The trauma is taken lightly and quickly forgotten; it is normalized. There is

a sense of "active empowerment" in saving oneself, which becomes difficult to sustain after

dealing with trauma - what was initially a survival method has since become constant paranoia

and fear (Connelly, 2007: 14).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent lockdowns, and safety requirements in

acquiring the props and equipment, casting, rehearsing, and filming, this project became

impossible, especially within the timeline of my degree. I then spent a few days thinking over

other options, including making this project into a traditional thesis. However, I decided that

since I came into this program with a filmic project in mind, and since I had spent the better

part of a year planning this, I could use my pre-production materials – script and storyboard –

and add a video essay to explain my influences. These influential films are: *The*

Innocents (1961), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Black Christmas* (1974), *Carrie (1976, Suspiria*

(1977), Halloween (1978), The Evil Dead (1981), *Tales of the Crypt: Demon Knight* (1995), *I Still*

Know What You Did Last Summer (1998), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *The Strangers* (2008), The

Babadook (2014), *It Follows* (2014), *The Final Girls* (2015), and *Halloween* (2018). These

implicitly animate my script and storyboard with their influence. Some share a similar cadence in their lead character, while for others it was the aesthetics that drew me to them, while for others it was the storyline. I will delve further into this in the next chapter: reflections and analysis, and in my accompanying video essay.

Mulvey famously distinguishes "the eye" as "cinema's privileged organ" meaning that filmmakers primarily use visuals to tell, and sell, the narrative (Mulvey, 2001: 5). In this way, motifs, *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, and colours, otherwise known as the aesthetics, are essential in telling a story. Visuality sets up the viewer as an ocular link to the viewed, even a centre of viewing that organizes the picture plane. The camera becomes the eye (Mulvey, 2001). However, the film is beyond seeing in order to make a visceral experience. Mulvey informs how "cinema offers several possible pleasures," though she mostly means it in a psychoanalytic context wherein white women are seen as objects; this statement can be extended to offer catharsis and the pleasure of being seen (Mulvey, 2001: 59). This is because while representation can be basic to telling a nuanced story, it is also a way to open up other perspectives and create social change. Returning to Julie Dash's film, *Daughters of the Dust,* there are references to it in Beyoncé's 2016 visual album *Lemonade,* which makes even more explicit the themes of Black feminism and empowerment. The stylistic choices taken by the directors have the potential to affect the audience and resonate with emotional notes depending on the desired effect. This includes setting ("All Night" has specific references to *Daughters of the Dust*); costumes (drawing on Beyoncé's southern roots); finally, *Lemonade* takes the viewer and listener on an emotional trajectory, beginning with anger at her husband's infidelity and ending with empowerment for Black women everywhere.

The opening scene of my film would have used a smooth camera tracking to introduce the setting and lifestyle all in one shot. In the film, the perspective is integral to generate and maintain the audience's empathy and involvement. The only moment the main character is not in the frame is this opening scene, which leads to her introduction. I would have utilized extreme closeups, which open up moments of intimacy between character and viewer. As killers are most often men, the idea of the male gaze becomes personified. However, an idea that Mulvey fails to consider with her work around the male gaze is how "the final girl might be viewed by female audiences" who don't identify with her (Short, 2007: 48). In the preface to her 2005 reprint of *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Clover highlights how the final girl has become wildly different than what she was initially intended to be. This diversion from her initial writings is part of the final girl's legacy, which arises from how the audiences perceive and construct her bravery and tactfulness in the face of peril, denoting her as a feminist hero by critics and audiences (Clover, 2005). This has shifted a lot from the inception of the trope, as audiences identified more and more with her, and now in recent years, since directors began doing more with the final girl. She is also considered smarter than her peers, regardless of their gender, whose personal irresponsibility is causally correlated with their promiscuity in comparison to the final girl. Because of these characteristics, no matter how shallow the representation of the final girl, female audiences view the final girl as a positive trope who is highly regarded by hegemonic society. Through her ordeal and subsequent trauma, the final girl is ultimately reprimanded and punished for her "desire and curiosity" for the rest of her life (Williams, 2015: 62). She disrupts the expectations of death and must pay for it through her

trauma, even though she survived because she was the feminine ideal of responsibility and virginal strength.

We, as the audience, are meant to relate to the final girl and her plight (Clover, 1992). How affect is communicated, and how the audience conceives the affect, is essential to the enjoyment or rating. The relating on its own is how we produce, transmit, or view affect. Image and affect, or film and audience, there is a duality that is produced by different mediums. In horror especially, an element of a monstrous affect is present due to something like body horror or the more general anxiety-inducing nature of the genre. For much of the history of film, the trauma of women characters was perceived as less than that of their masculine counterparts, whose traumas and pain were seen as authentic. Women's pain was thus considered "less profound" – forcing their affects to be mostly related to the more gendered "envy" (Ngai, 2005: 213). The liminal boundary, whether visceral, affectual or gendered, is always crossed and blurred in horror narratives. There is a reminder of the power that the killer holds over the final girl. The final girl must become her monster in order to survive. As an audience, we view the impact of trauma, the unnerving effects of it, and are then forced to "rethink our notions of experience and communication" (Caruth, 1995: 4). Caruth furthers her argument by stating that fictional representations of trauma speak to our relation to historical events and happenings (Caruth, 1995: 16). They become the primary way to "live" through them and understand them. Trauma then becomes a 'repeating' of the event," and an act the audience witnesses (Caruth, 1995: 10). Similarly, West muses "the women who lead these films are often in one way or another the site of their own horror" (West, 2018: 8). A continual cycle of trauma in relation to location. Those who have faced trauma can be transported to the

location of their trauma through memory. While my final girl, Jery, is never in the physical vicinity of the killing within my script, her mind is never far, or free, from it.

By presenting a final girl that subverts the typical expectations and image of who and what a final girl is, and then inflicting the same trauma upon her that is inflicted upon a character that doesn't have the added difficulties of being a woman of colour, we are asking the audience to examine how those complications affect the trauma, and in most cases, amplify that trauma in complicated and ongoing ways. In terms of the already established canon of film, a racialized final girl, and the complications of her trauma because of those marginalizations, is often overlooked and largely ignored, despite being a critical, dangerous, and often deadly combination in real world situations. In fact, a woman of colour enduring extreme trauma that has unlimited, lasting effects is, although rare in film, not so ironically, found everywhere in our current world. By presenting this depiction in film to mirror the real-world trauma(s) of racialized women, I hope to speak to the audience's understanding of the reality of the effects on real women of colour who experience similar and worse traumas on a daily basis. By presenting a pop culture representation of these effects, through an "enjoyable" and thrilling movie, to introduce that understanding indirectly to an audience that may/is have biases against the subject(s) and an unwillingness to truly understand or try to understand that trauma in reality.

"Where do They Keep the Chainsaws Here?"
– The Final Girls (2015)

Part Four: Theory and Methodology

<u>Affect Theory</u>

Affect's etymological root comes from the Latin word "affectus," which according to the Etymology Dictionary, can be translated to "emotion," "disposition," and "state of mind" (Online Etymology Dictionary). In the middle ages, affect meant "state of mind," clear in its early uses (Online Etymology Dictionary). More recently, in the 20th century, affect as a theory would gain attention from the works of Silvan Tomkins and Giles Deleuze, whose work in turn influenced a generation of affect theorists: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Brian Massumi, and Steven Shaviro, among others. Affect has since evolved into an everyday reference, meaning "to have an effect on something" or to be "emotionally changed by something" (Oxford Dictionary). In this everyday language, affect and effect are closely related, effect meaning a resultant consequence caused by a subject or object, while affect involves an ongoing or dialogic interaction between two things that changes them both. The most concise definition as it pertains to my project is found in Melissa Gregg's and Gregory Siegsworth's, "Introduction" to their *The Affect Theory Reader*, where they describe "affect" as a "force or forces of encounter" (Gregg and Siegsworth, 2010: 2). Horror is an emotionally driven genre that forces viewers to confront uncomfortable emotions, thus affect theory can help us come to terms with these emotions and how we sit with them. Horror appeals to affect and therefore, appeals to feminist and anti-racist analysis. I discuss who defines and benefits from affect further in this chapter.

In specific relation to feminist scholarship, feminist theorists who use affect theory include Lauren Berlant, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, and Sara Ahmed. In their essay entitled "Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory," Carolyn Pedwell and Ann Whitehead delve into the feminist engagement with affect. They explain that there is a critical link between "affect and gendered, sexualized, racialized, and classed relations of power" (Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012: 116). In Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed famously equates affect with being "sticky" and this stickiness of affect has a habit of sticking to some people and their identities more than others (Ahmed, 2004: 29). Ahmed expresses that power relations are "intractable and enduring, even in the face of collective forms of resistance" (Ahmed, 2004: 12). She explains that racialized and other marginalized bodies are more affected by their emotions and experience in comparison with the hegemonic white body (Ahmed, 2004). Affect is both about hegemonic power control and being overlooked. For this reason, filmmakers, whose work I was influenced by in this project, use artistic direction in order to create affect and empathy. In my film, the main characters' emotions are politicized because she is a racialized final girl, and therefore, affect has a different meaning to her than the traditional embodiment of the final girl.

Ahmed's concern with the politics of emotion is its connection to power. Ahmed places this stickiness onto marginalized groups of people, like racialized people, queer people, and migrants, because unruly perceptions tend to "stick" to them more. These "unruly perceptions," or often negative stereotypes or assumptions, tend to "stick" to these marginalized people because there is already a biased viewpoint from the dominant culture that seeks out ways in which to "other," and these perceptions or assumptions then support

and/or justify that othering. In her essay "*Happy Objects,*" Ahmed states that happiness or

other affects can be generated through proximity, and that sometimes in the midst of our own

emotions we can spread to another, for example, even a smile to a stranger on the street may

bring a sense of happiness (Ahmed, 2010: 33). Affect, therefore, tends to require community. It

is neither individualistic nor, perhaps, neoliberal but instead communal, intersubjective, and

participatory. Here, to be is to be affected; to be affected means to receive the affect of

another.

      This affective politicization reminds me of Sianne Ngai's notion of *Ugly Feelings*, where

she analyzes negative emotions or "ugly feelings," such as, anxiety, envy, and paranoia. Ngai

believes that these "ugly" feelings are also responses to "projected events" that have the ability

to be contagious and spread (Ngai, 2005: 210). Ngai explains that our attachments to emotions

are reflections of what we see in the media or in those around us. There are, for example,

specific techniques to elicit the emotions that filmmakers are hoping to generate in the

audience, specifically certain meanings or ideas about their viewing experience and beyond. For

example, in horror films, music cues are used in order to elicit a response of fear from the

audience or, in other words, to gather an affective response in response to the visual scene. I

am most interested in Ngai's work on racialized affect, which she calls "animatedness,"

specifically, the idea that racialized bodies and their emotions in the media historically cater to

white subjects for the sake of their comfort. Ethnic characters or those who embody "the

Other" in Western film and television productions are given stereotypes such as the "silent

inexpressive Asian" or the "hot tempered Greek" (Ngai, 2005: 93). This sort of stereotyping or

"animatedness'' is "politically charged" affect characterized by "too much affect, and too little

agency" (McGee, 2006). They are marked by the excessiveness of their racialization as a point of entertainment. Ngai's notion of "animated" racialized affect opens onto considering our relations to others or to community, and a different way of being in the world for marginalized folks.

Affect is a bold way of breaking down the distinction between public and private. While suffering from pain "may be (a) solitary" experience, it is not however, a "private" affair (Ahmed, 2004: 29). Affect theorists look at "the way feeling is negotiated in the public sphere and experienced through the body" (Gorton, 2007: 334). Emotions, pain, and trauma – experiences which are packaged as independent experiences – are ultimately tangled with one's association to other people and the world at large. Peta Tait makes an interesting point that emotions "can be deliberately written or displayed by a performer, but emotional feeling arises through the responses of the reader or audience" (Tait, 2016: 2). Affect not only is communal, but it shows the communal nature of trauma and, ultimately, of identity. Since I came into this project attempting to make a film, I ask myself what would elicit an affect/reaction from my own viewership, and then consider if that is a piece of art that others would be able to share in emotionally not only look at the form of emotion, but what relations are generated between the emotion as well. Affect in media is most often characterized as the way one transmits affect to the viewer or spectator through the various mediums. The final girl is a figure or trope that is drenched in affect; we as the audience are meant to identify with her and her perils, such that she is a vehicle for conjuring emotion into existence.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory first gained prominence in the 1980s in legal theory (Martinez, 2014). One key idea that came out of this era is Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of "intersectionality," which has since become of a foundational feminist idea. Intersectionality is the framework that a person's multiple identities combine together to create specific modes of oppression or of privilege. For example, the experience of a cisgender white woman is very different than that of a cisgender Black woman. For Crenshaw, being Black and a woman in the legal system were aspects of experience that could not be separated, but which were constantly distinguished as either race or gender, never both. This has become transferrable outside of the legal system to other aspects of life and to include other identities such as sexual orientation, class, and body type that may come together to compound treatment by others.

Critical Race Theory is also an important tool in unpacking modes of representation in media studies. For example, bell hooks considers an often critically underrepresented group, Black women, as media spectators. bell hooks reacted to and rejected the universalization of the theory of the male gaze in this piece. She notes how Black women are placed on the outskirts of this male gaze, as they are not the intended objects, nor do they identify with the desires of the subject of the male viewer's gaze of the said gaze. Further, because white women are the intended object, Black women are thus oppositional in how they are situated, such that they are allowed to observe the gaze, while neither being objectified, nor considered subjects. As the intended viewers, they are not considered filmically at all (hooks, 1992). Along with the under-representation of Black women in media, they are also never the intended audience. Thus, those who acquired the oppositional gaze are Black women "whose identities were constructed in resistance, by practices that oppose the dominant order" (hooks, 1992: 197).

The oppositional gaze is a means for black women to be spectators of film without identifying with the male gaze or white femininity (hooks, 1992: 198). It becomes a way to re-examine the images on screen through Black women's experience with power relations.

Similarly, Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* contextualizes the emotions and experiences of racialized peoples and/or racialized women in relation to dominant audiences who tend to over-represent or over-determine their marginalized counterparts throughout the years. Lorde differentiates what women of colour go through in life in comparison to white women citing their "built-in privilege of whiteness" as the default of womanhood and femininity, while women of colour become the outsiders to the dominant white society (Lorde, 1984: 216). Lorde also expressed the importance of rage in racialized women as a strength. Subverting the notion that anger is "useless and disruptive;" but instead, is a powerful and useful tool for survival and change (Lorde, 1984: 234). Lorde points out that life is inherently violent for Black women in day-to-day locations and situations – "in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the clinic and the schoolyard, from the plumber, the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us" (Lorde, 1984: 220). In her book, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe discusses how Black people deal with the "unfolding aftermaths" of trauma caused by slavery and other forms of structural racism that are tied to anti-Blackness and death (Sharpe, 2016: 2). She relates racialization, specifically that of Blackness, as an "ongoing and irresolvable abjection" (Sharpe 2016: 14). Abjection is Julia Kristeva's term that I will get into further in the next section, but here, what Sharpe means is that intergenerational and current societal trauma is continuous. Black and other racialized

people mobilize through ritualized emotions such as "grief, celebration, memory and those among the living" (Sharpe, 2016: 11).

Critical Race joins film theory in *Unthinking Eurocentrism,* where Ella Shohat and Robert Stam decentralize whiteness in society and throughout history by focusing on its delivery and social reproduction in film (1994). The book examines how racialized stereotypes are formed in world-wide media. An example of this is how the authors trace the inception of the "middle eastern terrorist" stereotype and trope in the media. Shohat and Stam propose ways in which we can decolonize global cultures and destabilize both whiteness and narratives that the West puts forward about racialized peoples. Fictions in film play a part in how assumptions and stereotypes are formed, both in the sense of "space and time," as well as "social and cultural relationships" (Shohat & Stam, 2014: 179). This means that stereotypes can shift depending on geographic location or time period. Shohat and Stam state how the "burden of representation" falls upon the marginalized (Shohat & Stam, 2014: 182). It is the onus of the marginalized groups to change their stereotypes or create positive representations for themselves. Those in power of production "project colonized people as 'all the same' any negative behaviour by any member of the oppressed community is instantly generalized as 'typical'" (Shohat & Stam, 2014: 183). In dominant culture's films, lead characters who are racialized are rarely depicted in stories not centered around race, for example, *Towelhead* (2007), *Green Book* (2018), and *The Help* (2011). An aspect of practicality I thought about extensively was how to cinematically light darker skin. It has been well documented that "film technology favours lighter skin tones," meaning if two people with different skin tones are in the same frame, the lighting and the crew see the lighter skinned actor as the neutral to pay attention to (Shohat & Stam, 2014:

186). James Laxton, the director of photography of the 2016 Barry Jenkins' film *Moonlight,*

stated the importance of choosing a camera that focused on Black embodiment and tone as

opposed to the "harsh" lighting and look darker skin usually endures (2016). This is an

important shift in recognizing the different levels of care in ensuring that Black people are

effectively seen and portrayed, both in their characterization and the visual aspect of film.

(Feminist) Horror Film Studies

Horror film studies, feminist or otherwise, began to gain traction in the 1970s. Cynthia

Freeland examines a feminist terrain for academics interested in analyzing horror films in

Feminist Frameworks in Horror Film, a genre which she points out is often faulted for sexism

(Freeland, 1996). In the first part, she critiques the psychoanalytic foundation of feminist horror

film theory. She states that the works of Laura Mulvey, Linda Williams, and Barbara Creed are

constricted by this Freudian or Lacanian analysis, where women are seen representing male

castration anxieties, while themselves having envy for their lack of male genitalia. She argues

that psychoanalysis is too regressive and only takes into account sexuality and other base

subjects, rather than looking further into other layers of meaning and intertextuality. Freeland

furthers this by saying that psychoanalysis is much too broad, centres the subjectivity on men,

and academics should be more mindful of how it applies to the specific film they are analyzing.

They use this type of analysis believing that it is a much more accepted and universal theory

than it is. Freeland then proposes using cultural representations, an approach that looks at plot

elements, as well as the societal context in which the films were created. A particularly

ubiquitous concept within feminist film theory relies on the notion of the "male gaze" as put

forward by academic Laura Mulvey in her 1975 pivotal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative

Cinema." Mulvey defines the male gaze as the way that narrative films utilize the camera to allow for masculine identification, which strives to afford pleasure to the male viewer, particularly when "viewing" the female and her body (Mulvey, 1975: 58). In Mulvey's theory, women are inherently objects and cannot be the bearer of the gaze; the male gaze is active, and the woman is passive (Mulvey, 1975: 60). In the 1990s, Carol Clover brought her own reflections of the 1970s and 1980s to her examination of slashers and the final girl. Throughout the book, Clover looks at how male audiences are forced to identify with the final girl – the last character standing among the group. The final girl begins the film already slightly more paranoid than her friends, continually suspicious of her environment until eventually confronted by the killer. In the end, she defeats her killer by using a phallic symbol (Clover, 1992). In this way, she mirrors the masculine viewer's idealized and biased approach to the world.

The roots of horror studies can be found in the uncanny – a horror concept authored by Sigmund Freud. Essentially, something that was once familiar, has since become repressed, and this repression can be haunting (Freud, 1916: 16). The uncanny is a close relative to Julia Kristeva's notions of the abject. Kristeva associates the abject with immorality and the outcast. The abject is vague, yet horrifying. Both the uncanny and the abject are not easily definable; rather, there is a visceral affect to these concepts. They are both rooted in a feeling. In this way, the abject is intrinsically linked to affect. In her first chapter, Clover explains that sexual repression is the connector between the final girl and the killer; I am much more interested in social repression being the link instead. Both the killer and the final girl are outsiders and considered the "Other," or outcast in some way, whether that be racially or socially. Clover goes

on to explain that the "final girl is abject terror personified" (Clover, 1992: 35). Abject terror is prolonged and gruesome, forcing the viewer to really see and experience a distilled version of society's cruelty through violence. The habitat in which the killer lives is filthy and lacks any type of cleanliness (Clover, 1992: 42). The environment itself is one way that the final girl becomes abject. The killer's presence is another. Julia Kristeva defines the abject as the innate human reaction to horror or situations that induce fear in our lives, a concept that begins to haunt our lives from the moment we are expelled from the womb (Kristeva, 1980). As Kristeva points out, the abject is how we understand the dichotomy between the self and the other, as one can be both drawn in, and repelled by, the abject simultaneously. It then becomes pivotal to understand what distinctions bring about this unease in horror narratives and how these spaces of meaning can differ while the narratives stay completely primal at the core. She discusses the abject as something which is intrinsically human in nature, such as a bodily fluid that causes a divide between the self and the object (Kristeva, 1980). Ultimately, in order to survive in a world that is both compelling and fearful for women of colour, one must become what they fear: the abject creature – she becomes monstrous, similar to my protagonist.

Trauma Theory

Ideas around trauma were first found in psychiatry, and since that beginning, trauma has always been linked to gendered bodies, especially through discourses around hysteria. The frequently prescribed cure for hysteria was a hysterectomy, assuming the body was the cause of psychological distress. It was not until neurologist Jean Martin Charcot realized that perhaps the causes of what was then called hysteria were psychological instead of physiological (Brandell & Ringel, 2011: 1). Through further research into his patient's lives, Charcot began

noticing most had been victims of violence in the past. From this, theorists and psychologists

started studying how these past instances of violence and stress had changed the patients'

demeanors and had an effect on their personalities (Brandell & Ringel, 2011: 3). After the first

and second World Wars and the Vietnam War, veterans and holocaust survivors were also

researched under the rubric of trauma due to their experiences. From there, researchers have

since broadened their work to include social events and mass catastrophes.

Cathy Caruth has looked at trauma through comparative literature in her books,

Unclaimed Experience and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Using literature, theory, and other

forms of art as her conduit to look at trauma, Caruth determines that there is a level of

repetition present in trauma and memory (Caruth, 1995). In my film, I showcase this by having

my main character live her experiences, and then continually relive her memories. Caruth also

looks at how the traumatic experience can shape language and narrative (Caruth, 1995), such

as in the French language horror *Raw* (2016) where the lead becomes tempted to consume

human flesh after a traumatic hazing ritual that impacted her vegetarianism. Another

interesting aspect to Caruth theory is how singular trauma can help us relate to the traumas of

each other. For my project, Caruth's musings on the repetitive nature of trauma has helped me

in understanding the main character and her struggles with traumatic memories. Caruth,

according to Christa Schönfelder, believes trauma fiction has the ability to warp one's sense of

violence and trauma in real life (Schönfelder, 2013). However, I believe that abstract violence

that is fictional has the ability to tell a narrative that is appealing and rooted in the real,

especially for the feminist reason that stories of marginalized peoples tend to not be told, so

there remains a void in public knowledge about this trauma, especially when it is violent. In her

essay titled *Wounds and Words*, Schönfelder posits the question that I also ask: "what can literary and cultural discourses reveal about trauma?" (Schönfelder, 2013: 36). I believe that these fiction-based discourses elicit an affective response, one that is traumatic or cathartic, depending on the viewer, but which ultimately reveals significant, yet often overlooked features of the world. To embed it is to process, internalize, and understand a lasting impact on the thoughts and actions of the viewers.

Through a real-life lens Susan Sontag begs the question of viewing in her famous essay *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Sontag ponders how photographic coverage of war and other violence can form our perceptions of events (Sontag, 2003). At its baseline, photographs allow us to view the experiences of others; we gain a moment stuck in time. One experiences the event firsthand, and the other watches. Again, we have a spectacle and spectator dichotomy. Similar to Caruth, Sontag believes that media, specifically photographs, do not have the power to represent the real-life atrocities and pain taking place. In fact, it can actually lessen the power and meaning of those events because photographs do not give a full story or generate an ability to completely empathize with its subjects. Further, because of our mass consumption of violent images and video, we are often desensitized to the pain of others. Film then attempts to re-sensitize as an empathy-building machine. These images, fictional or not, serve as reminders of our privilege, and our ability to turn pages and channels back to our real life. This then brings us back to affect and how "they remain affects until they are evaluated as being pleasant or unpleasant and become emotions" (Schubart, 2008: 64). Sontag also contends that presenting trauma has a potential to further points of healing and understanding in comparison to "contemporary psychiatric discourses" (Schönfelder, 2013, 81). Similar to Ahmed,

Schönfelder believes in the communal magnitudes of trauma – due to the social and political nature of trauma, it is impossible for it to be individual or personal (Schönfelder, 2013, 39). Because of this public nature of trauma, film becomes a method of interrogation putting viewers in conversation with one another.

These four theories (affect, trauma, critical race, and horror film) are all used to study and critique cultural artifacts and media content. In doing this analysis, we are able to make connections between films, specifically horror in this case, and reality. Both affect theory and trauma theory specifically deal with the complexity of emotions and emotional experiences, and feelings like anxiety, fear, and panic. In a similar way, critical race theory analyzes those same emotions, but particularly explores how those emotions are felt, and projected onto, racialized bodies. Finally, film theory, specifically regarding the horror genre, analyzes how the use of these emotions, predominantly fear, take created emotions in the actors, and instill those same emotions in the audience. When we encourage an audience to combine all these theories of analysis in order to truly understand a film they are presented with, we are asking them to understand not only the trauma in front of them, but to understand how that trauma is manifested in different bodies, how that trauma becomes complicated in the changing of different bodies, and finally, how viewing and synthesizing that trauma from their viewing experience changes and instills itself within themselves. By altering who the trauma can and does affect within a horror film, and how that trauma is complicated by aspects such as race, it complicates an audience's understanding of trauma in film, in others, and in themselves, allowing for more opportunities to understand trauma and its effects in real world situations as well.

"Kill the Commentary"
– I Still Know What You Did Last Summer (1998)

Part Five: Project Analysis and Reflection

When I initially began the process of my project, I started by actively seeking

inspiration. Beyond film, I was influenced by visual art, especially paintings, and by literature to

help me visualize or evoke referential meaning in my work. For example, "The Wounded Deer"

by Frida Kahlo (1946), pictures of American artist Keith Haring's apartment, and poetry by

Warsan Shire and Lydia Havens, all inspired me in different ways. The Kahlo painting (along with

other works by her) and the poetry by Shire and Havens deal heavily with grief, trauma, and

loneliness, both of the artists' own, and that of others around them. Shire's poetry deals

extensively with marginalized people, especially women of colour. She uses her poetry to heal

from gendered violence and traumatic memories, much in a way that Jery attempts to mend

and stitch her life together piece by piece. The wooded setting and the vulnerable position of

Kahlo's pierced body in the "The Wounded Deer" evokes Jery's direct experience. Frida Kahlo

artistically represents a lifetime of trauma through her works, both physically from a bus

accident and emotionally throughout her life, even stemming to the effects of Spanish

colonialization in Mexico. Trauma's repetitive themes, especially around chronic pain can be

linked to Jery's own physical vulnerability and survivor/victim dichotomy. Keith Haring's

apartment décor, much like his art, involved coming to terms with the losses in the queer

community from AIDS in the 1980s, filled with his signature graffiti of cluttered bodies

throughout. Haring's work compared to Kahlo's is less microscopic on the self, and more a

gesture of public mourning masked as a celebration of resilience in pop art. In pictures of Keith

Haring's apartment, we see a tent in a room. The tent's placement in the indoors evokes a sense of childhood and safety; being protected and insulated from the outside. Jery attempts to rebuild this protection and whimsy with the tent in her bedroom, but the illusion is dispelled when the killer presses his face into the fabric. This is a revisitation and repetition of a traumatic incident. These themes of grief, trauma, loneliness, loss, and isolation and the ways they are expressed by these figures are integral to my film. The grief that these artists discuss balances on the line of individual pain as well as collective grief and trauma. When one's mother passes, one will obviously grieve, but with societal ills such as AIDS, or the life experiences of Black or queer women there is a sense of collective pain one goes through that is both individual, collective, and all in between. The canon of art has been white men for most of history, but these artists have challenged that norm in their portrayals of grief that seeks to highlight their otherwise underrepresented point of view.

Figure 4: The Wounded Deer (1946) by Frida Kahlo

After this, I began composing a story by looking at what existing aspects of the slasher I wanted to draw from, as well as facets that are not often explored, such as a concentration on post-violence. Following this beginning, I sketched a general idea of story, characters, and setting. Afterwards, I wrote the first draft of the script. I put aside the script for a while to complete my theoretical readings, including works on affect theory, critical race theory, horror film theory, and trauma theory. Subsequently, due to the pandemic, I began to replan my project to make it feasible under these new circumstances; this meant completely axing my film and figuring out what I could submit in its place. One positive outcome was that I was able to make the script longer in the course of editing, since I was no longer held back by filming and production restraints. After this, I drew my storyboards, concentrating on the scenes that I believed were the most technical and important to pull off. The final step was to create the video essay.

This project's initial medium of a short length film shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic to a project consisting in pre-production materials, an analysis, and a video essay. Because of this, my project does feel unfinished, however, it is comforting to have a bulk of the pre-production material completed. I have separated this analysis of my project into four sections: script(s), storyboard, video essay, and finally, a brief analysis of the complete project.
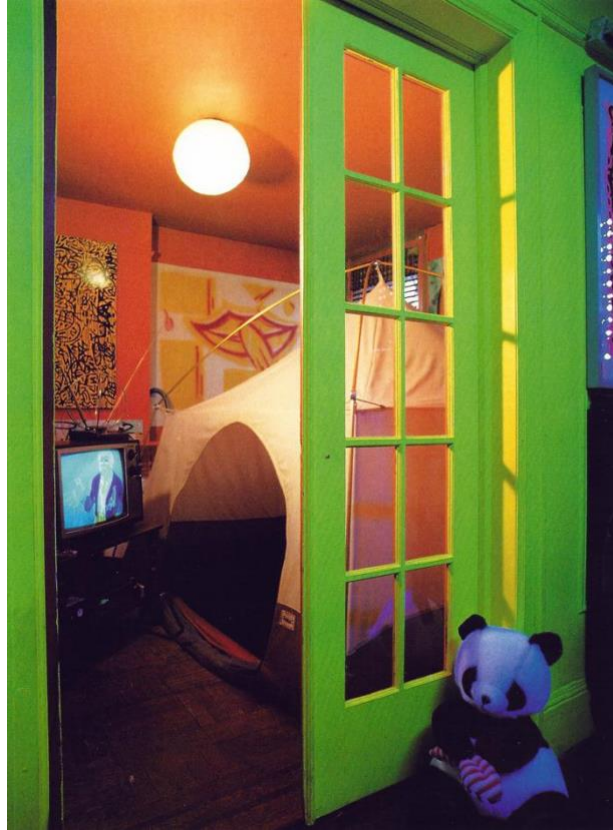
Figure 5: Keith Haring's apartment (circa 1980s)

Script

I include two scripts in my project. One is of the actual short film narrative, the other is

of the full podcast transcript that plays in interludes throughout. I found that I would play with

the dialogue for hours, reading it in numerous ways, and realizing each way created a different

meaning. Pronunciation, rhythm, and cadence came together to tell its own story. A script or

screenplay's job is to detail on paper what must later be translated on screen; this includes

dialogue, action, setting, sounds, colours, transitory scenes, and background information. The

script itself is a part of the elaborate procedure of cinema, due to the specific format it abides

by, one that ends with the final product (Turner, 1988: 31). This format includes scene heading,

action, character name, dialogue, and any parenthetical description. The film grows from the

script and it is not rigid, aspects are constantly shifting, sometimes because of practicality,

budget or a change in vision. In the same way, my film changed from its initial conception based on changes and developments in my script.

The scene that I find most representative of the ideas and events that my film is about, as it pertains to the script, is the support group meeting, which is also the climax. This is the longest scene in the script, which also allows Jery to finally speak and inform the others of what has been bubbling up below the surface. Megan, the facilitator, along with Erika, Steph, Candiace, Theresa, Vicki, and Jery, go around sharing the abstract concept of colours signifying their week, and through this we get a glimpse of their own mental states. After this, they are asked to think about Divya Victor's "Questionnaire to Oneself," inspired by Audre Lorde's work. Similar to Laurie Strode or Sidney Prescott, in *Sliver*, Candiace represents the neoliberal white final girl we have come to associate with the genre. This type of final girl, whether Candiace or Laurie Strode, Connelly points out, had to learn how to "penetrate, to gaze, and to enjoy violence" in order to defeat the killer, which she sees as the rejection of the feminine and acceptance of the masculine (Connelly, 2007: 19). She later appears largely unfazed about her trauma and experience (or at least attempts to make it seem this way) and has a large support system that explains her unphased demeanor. It is through hearing Candiace share her perspective that Jery becomes upset enough to speak out about what she perceives as Candiace's flippancy towards an experience that is not universal, but that this character assumes is universal because of her lack of understanding of intersectionality. Audre Lorde herself points out that what must be expressed and "shared" comes at the possible expense of being "misunderstood" (Lorde, 1984: 89). This is ultimately what happens, as Jery is no longer understood after the fact, but she feels a sense of release, or catharsis. Part of Jery's

85

monologue echoes the anger that women of colour feel when they are made to face the experience of constantly "being silenced" and "being unchosen;" an experience that forces self-sufficiency and survival (Lorde, 1984: 226). This contrast between experience(s) and the realities of both victims highlights her unsympathetic understanding of pain for the racialized final girl, while in turn highlighting the overwhelming comfort and closure for the other.

Podcast Transcript

My other script is essentially a true crime podcast transcript that covers the deaths of Jery's friends. True crime in the form of a podcast has become a phenomenon in the last decade or so (Sherrill, 2019). I wanted to satirize the ways in which podcasters and listeners undermine victims' lives for the sake of entertainment, and the casual way in which traumatic events are discussed, and even joked about. In my film, we see Jery listening to a podcast that uses humour to dissect the trauma and violence that she endured, and even make light of the events of her friends' murder. The hosts represent a type of podcast host who uses inappropriate humour while discussing lost lives and the trauma of others, as seen here with their jokes around rape culture. Not only does this create experiential distance between horror and everyday life, but it is a sexist and colour-blind distancing from a powerful subject. In the podcast transcript, we hear from a witness. The witness in the script remarks on their discomfort in seeing this group. Again, at the end, the same witness implies through language that the townspeople fear this screaming woman and comment on the final girl's grotesque and bloody appearance damaging the beautiful greenery. The townspeople are also slow to assist her, some of them even locking their doors before calling the police. Others gather around in a group to watch her as Jery begs for help until she collapses. This shows how the final girl has

become monstrous in physically mirroring the killer – bloody and screaming. It also points to

the witness's suspicion of her, and the fact that the witness cannot help but see the final girl as

ruining the town's peace. Instead of victim or survivor, Jery is viewed as a spectacle who ruined

their peace. When you juxtapose her experience with those of the other support group

members, namely Candiace, who describes being comforted physically by others almost

immediately when she was found, you see the real difference in how a woman of colour, even

one in distress, is treated in contrast to a white woman in the same position.

Storyboard

The storyboard is a still life image, a screenshot of a moment in film. Alfred Hitchcock,

who was known for his meticulous storyboarding, could produce an effective moment of

suspense through the process by mapping out pivotal scenes beforehand to prepare for the

logistics of filming and expectation. Storyboards can be seen as stand ins for the stillness in life;

they are simultaneously filled *with* action and a respite *from* action (Stewart, 2007: 19), which

means they serve as visual references that navigate the flow from one scene to another. There

is a sense of the ordinary or a "suspension of narrative," and a thought or feeling can be born

from this (Stewart, 2007: 20). Kathleen Stewart describes ordinary affect as a "public feeling,"

that are also "intimate lives are made of" (Stewart, 2007: 2). Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki

is known for holding scenes a touch too long, where characters will "sit for a moment" or "look

at a stream," which simply give a "sense of time and place and who they are" (Ebert, 2002).

Another example is Belgian director Chantal Akerman whose film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du*

Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975), a 3-and-a-half-hour feminist mediation set to a domestic

routine, utilizes the similar technique of letting a scene play out longer than we are taught to be

appropriate. I believe that these are the moments that allow us to truly understand our characters, and these nonverbal moments can tell as much of a narrative as dialogue and action. I tried to use this technique, which Miyazaki calls "ma" into my script, and what would have been my film, however with a short film with a run time of 10-12 minutes, this does prove difficult.

Going through the storyboard, I found myself able to fully realize the project and specific intricacies. The production design of the house is to be slightly messy, representing an absent mindedness, but also of someone haphazardly attempting to clean up after themselves. The end of winter or beginning of spring can represent new beginnings and rebirth. The tent is a way to personify her grief that she holds on to. I wanted the flashback scene, where we see the group on their last day by the campfire, and the reaction shot after Jery's monologue to echo each other in blocking and staging. When Jery and Melanie are eating their dinner, they are on the same couch but on complete opposite ends of it, as if they are backing away from each other. This symbolizes their inability to understand each other despite attempts to do so, especially on Melanie's part. In the scene where the protagonist is walking outside and encounters the couple, they appear to her as elongated and hazy, and part of her fear arises from the fact that she cannot discern and identify the threat. Having apparitions of the killer periodically appear shows how his presence and the trauma he caused permeates the story and Jery's everyday life. At the end, the audience comes to terms with what Jery already has – that they are bound together, but she is always ahead. I consider it a hopeful ending.

Video Essay

The films I included as influences on my short film are: *Carrie* (1976), *The Final Girls* (2015), *Evil Dead* (1981), *Black Christmas* (1974), *Halloween* (1978), *It follows* (2014), *Suspiria* (1977), *Tales of the Crypt Presents: Demon Knight* (1995), *Halloween* (2018), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *The Babadook* (2014), *The Innocents* (1961), *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* (1998), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and *Sharp Objects* (2018). Some of the films I am influenced by were from outside of the slasher subgenre, but still horror films.

In the script and storyboard, the first scene is a one take point of view shot. This means there are no cuts and takes; rather, it is one complete shot. I decided on this as an homage to old school and low budget horror films, such as, *Black Christmas* (1974) *Halloween* (1978), and *Evil Dead* (1981) that used this technique to put viewers in the gaze of the killer or demon. I subvert this, as the point of view is not of anyone in particular, primarily because the killer in my script is dead; rather, the viewpoint is an illusion of looking through a character's eyes, it is as if the audience themselves is watching in first person. The final shot was largely influenced by this shot in *It Follows* (2015), where it is left open ended whether the figure at the back is the shapeshifting demon or just an actual person on their stroll. My ending is much more finite - we know the killer's fate, and that this is simply a manifestation of Jery's trauma. Similarly, Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961) uses editing techniques and scene staging that creates the dread of *someone* possibly watching the character. As visualized in the scene, I included in the video essay the still of Flora and Miss Giddens by the lake. The HBO miniseries *Sharp Objects* (2018), based on the book by Gillian Flynn, is also a more modern feat in editing – the flashbacks, which are all memories, keep the viewer rooted in the present by using sound design. This means that while visually viewers are in the main character's head watching a

memory play out, the scene still retains the background sounds of where the character physically is while remembering.

Figure 6: Still from *The Innocents* (1961) dir. Jack Clayton

The lighting can signify the visual mood and create a sense of meaning for the audience to latch on to or decipher from. As shown in the video essay, the blues and reds in *Carrie (1974), Black Christmas (1974),* and *Suspiria (1977)* were the colour palette I wanted to have. For myself, the red represented desire and anger, while the blue symbolized feelings of melancholy and isolation (Bellantoni, 2005). The lighting in Jery's house is warmer, with more of a golden hue to represent a false sense of safety, while outdoors the lighting is dimmer and cooler. In the bowling alley, I wanted to use neon lighting that saturated and drenched everything that was in the scene. Neon lighting represents a loneliness in public spaces, like the bowling alley. The neon technology also evokes a sense of mid-century dreams of urbanity, modernity, or progress.

Because of the subject matter, I often felt like I was layering bits of characters and scenarios on top of each other to create my own. Jeryline from *Demon Knight* (1995) and Ben from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) were the rare Black protagonists in horror films, but more

than that, they were capable characters and held their own against zombie hoards and a demon. Whereas in a film such as *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer (1998)* (or, really, any 1990s slasher for that matter)*,* I am more interested in what would happen if the spotlight was given to the final girl's best friend (in this case Brandy's character Karla), a character who is most often the sole Black character of the film. What does that open us up to considering about what the alternative final girl can symbolize based on her life experiences? While *The Final Girls* (2015) is a comedic take which satirizes the final girl and the 1980s slasher, it still poses points on specific 1980s archetypes and how the final girl story can be modernized as a vehicle of coming to terms with grief. Here, the characters of this film get sucked into the cult classic slasher film in which the main character's deceased mother, a former horror movie actress, is herself the main character. As the daughter is sucked into the film, she experiences the same terror as her mother did as a character, and through facing the same killer, is able to process her grief. On a more supernatural front, Cole from *The Sixth Sense* (1999) and Amelia of *The Babadook* (2014) both share a sense of constant grief within themselves. By the time we have met them, they have undergone their traumatic events. Amelia is a widowed single mother with a deep depression and Cole is considered troubled because he can see the dead. This quiet type of being and carrying of pain is what my main character was influenced by. *Halloween* (2018) focuses on the character and her personal agency in the period that *follows* the traumatic event, with Strode herself nearly 40 years older. *Halloween*'s new emphasis on the character of the final girl and the negotiation of trauma in a post-trauma period – rather than the viewers' and the final girl's immediate experience of trauma – warrants a reconsideration of the final girl.

Perhaps the biggest shortcoming of my project came with the broadness with which I discuss race; like all other aspects of identity, there is no monolithic experience of race. My experience and positionality as a cisgendered Brown woman are very different from those of a Black woman or an East Asian woman. Though differentiating between white women's experiences and that of Black, Indigenous, women of colour is valid, it is too broad. It is worth mentioning that the bulk of my work has been informed by Black feminist thought as I discuss in parts three, four, and five (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Hill Collins, 1990).

"She Winds up Being the Sister Who Saves the World"
– Horror Noire (2019)

Part Six: Project Relevance

According to Sam Zimmerman, the curator on the horror streaming site *Shudder*, there are

two main horror booms in film history: the Universal monsters in the 1930s, such as

Frankenstein and Dracula, and the slashers of the 1970s and 1980s that are the subject of this

thesis (Zimmerman, 2019). The significance in popular culture of slashers in film history is the

reason that the final girl and other slasher tropes remain relevant to analyze. As I point out

earlier, Slashers are patriarchal, but these same Slasher films tend to represent inherent fears

of the hegemonic culture in which they are embedded, such as the emergence and rise of anti-

racism, queer celebration, feminism, and gender diversity, where the monstrous villain

represents white cisgender, heteronormative identities gone awry, and those victims acting

most deviant get killed first (Benshoff 1997, Grant 1996). As stated in the previous chapter, the

final girl is most closely associated with the slasher sub-genre. This was especially true in the

golden era during the 1970s to the mid-1980s. The closest sub-genre to the slasher is the rape-

revenge and exploitation films which frequently used a final girl-like character. The most

striking examples of the final girl are the ones who do not follow the morally hegemonic

bookish and abstinent aforementioned characteristics. Jess Bradford in *Black Christmas* (1974)

plans on getting an abortion, while Tre Glebman in *Happy Death Day* (2017) is a rambunctious

sorority sister. Especially in recent years, this has changed quite a bit. Final girls are now queer

(*What Keeps You Alive, 2018*), they are sexually active (*It Follows, 2014*), and sometimes they

are not even girls (*Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, 1985 and *Get Out*, 2017). As

the final girl remains a timeless horror staple, a cultural chameleon continually changing herself in response to her environment, she rarely has been a woman of colour. This may be because whiteness is deemed so universal that even a racialized male character is deemed easier to relate to than racialized women (Willis, 1997). Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women are not "perceived as vulnerable (people) whom an audience could identify with as victims of violence because we were barely seen as people at all, much less valuable ones" (Gooden, 2020).

Rationale

I initially chose to explore my thesis through film for two reasons. Firstly, film is a visually accessible and communally affective way to exchange knowledge and emotion. In different ways than a traditional academic paper, a film opens up interpretations by using the senses and the viewers' perceptions in an evocatively close manner: films have a great capacity to immerse the audience in the presentation of ideas. Film has medium specificities, such as the ways time and movement are exploited in their audio-visual narrative fields. Mediums such as "film, memoir narrative, literature, and art take up these traumas'' (Sharpe, 2006:11). Film differs from other mediums in its temporal structure -- film is based in time and movement -- and it has become its own way of producing and sharing knowledge. Film critic Serge Denay once stated that, "cinema isn't a technique of displaying images, it's an art of showing, and showing is a gesture, a gesture that demands looking and watching" (Denay, 2007: 64). As de Lucas and Sourdis write, it is the "irregular movement of thought, creation, composition, and the sparking of contact between images and ideas… a way of working with cinema is discovered and expressed through cinema's own means, often implying an appropriation of technical tools and

a reformulation of production standards, as well as a personal conception of cinema as a way of thought and emotion" (de Lucas & Souldis, 2019:81). By relying on otherwise impossible imagery, other than of course reality, film as a medium is able to convey a message unlike any other forms of media, by combining visual and audio techniques including sound mixing, lighting, music, and set production.

Slashers are often deemed to be one-dimensional, or cheap horror, but they carry a level of "cultural complexity" (Trencansky, 2001: 64). This cultural complexity is affected over the decades by the definition and changes to the final girl character, including her moral values and personality (weak and studious vs. strongly masculine and prepared), as well as the representation and motives of the killer. This complexity includes changing attitudes around women and race in film, changing North American values regarding racism and violence against both BIPOC and/or women, over time, and the ways that trauma and violence can affect one. Secondly, when dealing with film as the medium of analysis, I believe creating a product in the same medium assists with consistency because I am able to draw parallels between the subgenre and my film in a way that adequately shows the difference because the features and techniques align with other films to create an impact. My concern with the final girl, a film-specific trope, is that her affect is best instantiated onscreen and not exclusively in a written format because film sets up the viewer to empathize with the characters by placing them in proximity to their lives and minds by taking them through the traumatic events of their narrative(s) in great visual detail. As a visual medium, film is mainly living someone else's life for its duration, whether it be similar or different from one's own experiences. Gonzalo de Lucas and Carolina Souldis support this with stating "images are able to change when they have the

potential to activate a cinematic thinking, multiply their possibilities of association,

constellation and shaping of other images, even internal and metaphoric" (de Lucas & Souldis,

2019:90). Moving forward with the idea of the new possibilities of association created by

comparing an individual film, here "slasher" as a sub-genre of film, to another film for analysis,

as the intention for my short film. I propose that presenting an alternative "final girl" in my own

film, contrasted with the typical representation of such a character in typical slasher films,

allows the effect of such an alternative, racialized body to properly call into focus the historical

exclusion of racialized women's lived experiences in the worlds represented in horror. If,

instead of a film, I had used exclusively written materials to perform this analysis, the matter of

her skin tone would not have been revealed unless explicitly written. In contrast, if the film had

come to fruition, from the first frame, the viewer would be able to gather that my final girl

deviates from the traditional image of the final girl (a white, usually blonde, girl in her late teens

or early twenties). However, because I only have written production materials like the script, it

opens up new possibilities of association, since the race of the actor would have been fleshed

out further after casting, although she would have always remained a woman of colour. The

possibilities for association are then further opened up because this one representation can

then open up the audience's imagination and understanding of who and what a "final girl" can

be. On the basis of the above notion of visuality and on the idea of empathetic affect, this

project's relevance lies in three realms: (1) representation and depictions of women of colour in

film; (2) the trauma women of colour endure; and (3) how filmic affect can bridge the

relationship between character and viewer.

History of Racialized Women in Film

In Western film history, early actresses of colour like Hattie McDaniel and Anna May Wong, who were active in the 1920s to 1940s, were relegated to racially stereotypical roles. McDaniel and other Black actresses often played "the help," while Wong's most famous roles had her playing the stereotype of the "dragon lady," a domineering and manipulative woman of East Asian background. Behind the camera, representation fared worse for women of colour. Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* became the first film directed by a Black woman to play in US theatres as late as 1991, and films theatrically released by Black women in Anglo-American countries now are still rare. When it comes to horror, these changes are more recent. The first horror film to be directed by a woman of colour is Kasi Lemmons' *Eve's Bayou* (1997). Since then, there are a handful of names, such as Karyn Kusama, Ana Lily Amirpour, Haifaa Al-Mansour, Deborah Chow, Anna Biller, and Nia DaCosta, all of whom have directed horror films in the last decade. In 2014, "minority directors of all racial groups constitute less than 3 percent of the membership of the almost 4,000 member Directors Guild of America" (Shohat & Stam, 2014: 184). This small statistic drops significantly when one considers racialized women. Representation, however, is not enough. There is still a culture within the industry that keeps marginalized voices in filmmaking oppressed and this needs to change. This culture benefits the hegemonic decision makers who are often white and wealthy; entertainment remains a capitalist profit-motivated industry, after all, that deems racialized individuals as high risk because those in power constantly strive to establish representation and meaning that fits their agenda, namely the reproduction of hegemonic power (Hall, 1997). In this sense, representation is performative, a way to virtue signal for the elite who produce these films. However, when you are not represented as part of a larger culture, it becomes difficult to

consider your identity a meaningful part of a culture and to convince others that your

experiences are real and are a meaningful part of that culture. Art created by racialized peoples

gives "voice to the impact of larger social and political conditions on personal and communal

experience," it speaks to our presence, reminding the world we exist as creators and allowing

us to further explore our positionality (Machida, 2008: 3).

Figure 7: Still from *Eve's Bayou* (1996) dir. Kasi Lemmons

Race and Violence

A belief shared by race scholars from Angela Davis (1981) to Sara Ahmed (2004) is that

racialized peoples expect a lifelong practice of being "positioned" by the dominant white

culture accordingly, all while attempting to "position" oneself on their own terms (Machida,

2008: 6). This culture places these racialized peoples in a position of subordination to the

already "established" white social structure and people that do not allow for either equal rights

of racialized peoples or their upward mobilization, despite their desires and attempts to do so.

This then forces racialized individuals to create and carve out spaces for themselves. We see

this outside of the media in the healthcare system, poverty, high levels of incarceration - these

are all systems that benefit white people by both disregarding and harming people of colour

(Hill Collins, 1990; Davis, 2003). There is a sense of anxiety that arises from living under and

being in contact with hegemonic or authoritative forces for those who are racialized (Davis,

1981; Lorde, 1984). Ahmed also states that certain bodies "engender more anxiety" than

others, so their positioning in society becomes that of a threat (Ahmed, 2004: 79). Therefore,

their trauma, even that of meaningfully situating one's value and place as a racialized person

within a racist society, is not taken into account by a hegemonic misogynist, white culture.

Regarding women of colour who have undergone the trauma of violence, we must account for

the fact that there are less supports available (Cox, 2015). Tarana Burke, who created the Me

Too movement, states that the original mission of Me Too was to support Black women and

girls from low-income communities (metoomvmt.org, n.d.). Me Too has since evolved to

become famously associated with high profile white celebrity women, such as Rose McGowan

and Alyssa Milano, as well as many others (Griffin, 2019; Phipps, 2019). In a separate interview,

Burke recognizes this, stating that "women of colour, trans women, queer people—our stories

get pushed aside, and our pain is never prioritized" (Burke, 2019). The notion of universal

experience when it is applied to the media is often a synonym for the white experience.

Eurocentric whiteness is assumed to be the default due to centuries of European colonialism

that established itself as dominant (Shohat & Stam, 2014: 9). Film almost always has privileged

and prioritized white and Eurocentric experiences over racialized ones. I wanted to subvert the

white, Eurocentric gaze as much as the male gaze in order to focus alternatively on the

experiences of women of colour, along with resisting the hegemonic gaze and instead

constructing one of agency and safety for racialized women. Having a racialized gaze for this script was just as important as a female one. Unlike Carol Clover, Alexandra West acknowledges the limited view of gender that the final girl is built on, one that is: "white, slim, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied" (West, 2018: 7). My goal with this project is to give the long-forgotten or glossed over consideration to the trauma that women of colour face through fictional narratives.

Trauma

There is a system of responses that the body goes through after a traumatic event. Sara Ahmed draws upon two key emotions when a person feels a threat: fear, where the object is "identifiable," while anxiety is "vague" but insurmountable (Ahmed, 2004: 65). Memory and trauma go hand in hand with one another, as trauma can weave itself into memory; flashbacks and dissociation take us out of the present and leaves one perpetually in the past and dreading the future. Trauma works to "verbalize the unspeakable," similar to how film uses nonverbal symbols to tell a narrative without spoon-feeding it to the audience (Schönfelder, 2013: 35). They seek to destabilize the protagonist and the viewer by visualizing trauma and unpacking their experiences as either voyeuristic or cathartic, performative or immersive. Clinical psychologists that deal with trauma, such as Bessel Van der Kolk, discuss how on top of affecting our emotional capabilities, trauma can also rewire our DNA and our brains (Van der Kolk, 2014). We can see this through Indigenous intergenerational trauma caused by colonial tools, such as residential schools (Menzies, 2010; Anisman, Bombay & Matheson 2013). Although children after 1990 never experienced physically being in a residential school, the last effects of trauma on their parents have rippled down to the experiences of their children,

creating a new, yet related, type of trauma that has the ability to last for further generations. We are aware that healing is not a linear process; in most cases, there is not even an end to the process (Caruth, 1995; Herman, 1992). Trauma itself takes much power and vulnerability to deal with, due to the physiological and cognitive changes that come with it. Trauma fiction narratives then open up the concepts of pain and healing to deal with themes of "the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (Whitehead, 2004: 82). When it comes to horror and their sequels, the "repressed traumatic material returns in monstrous forms" (Powell, 2005: 40). This idea goes back to Freud's uncanny, where what was once repressed or forgotten must eventually return. In relation, in my script, the killer's apparition follows my protagonist as a way of personifying this repression and struggle to heal, my own representation of Freud's theory.

On the surface, affect and emotion seem to be about a response to an event or interaction that is felt in and throughout the body. Beneath this, we understand that emotions are much more intricate and culturally constructed (Ahmed & Schmitz, 2014: 97). Ahmed posits that emotions change depending on the body of the person -- both the viewer and the object – and that this can differ in terms of race, sexuality or queerness, gender, nationality, or body type (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed understands that emotions are as public as they are private; they inhabit the "surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2004: 117). This public notion of affect can seep into film. When viewing fictional trauma narratives, we immersively or evocatively experience real emotion, whether it be anxiety that the killer will pop up or fear for the safety of the characters, and therefore we share their "emotions, feel their pain, and experience their death" (Schubart, 2008: 135). Film scholar Linda Williams, who writes about

the three "body genres" being melodrama, pornography, and horror, claims that film here has the "power to excite" (Williams, 1991: 3). Violence and emotion are two of the three sensations Williams associates with genre excess. In these genres, women tend to be the bearers of "pleasure, fear, and pain," due to their presentation or performance as the primary victims in horror (Williams, 1991: 4). Her victimhood and loneliness mark the final girl, despite the fact that she is the lone survivor. Due to the viewers association of experience through her body, it is her pain and emotion we feel the most. It is through facial and body expressions along with cinematic choices such as colour and lighting that lead viewers into the cinematic space and perspectival depths of the visual field that we see affect play out.

In film, the final girl's survival, as West puts it, comes at the "cost of mental health and selfhood" (West, 2018: 5). For example, in the *Scream* sequels, within the first few minutes, the audience is reminded how Sidney Prescott has been struggling to move on since the previous film in her educational, personal, or professional life. This consideration ends there, as the trauma becomes a vehicle in which Sidney becomes genre savvy (for example, assuming the killer is alive and shooting them twice for good measure). As we view them over an experience of time, films are not "static structures," that exist in a vacuum without context; instead, they are real-life events and perspectives inform the film's inspiration and trajectory.

"I Wanna be in the Sequel"
- Scream (1996)

Part Seven: Conclusion and Going Forward

Hopefully in the near future I will be able to produce my short film. Nonetheless, this project allowed me to create something from scratch. Every aspect of it informed the next, which finally all came together to tell a story. Once I am able to shoot my short film, for the sake of accessibility, I would upload it to a mass media website such as Youtube or Vimeo. If possible, I would also submit the film for exposure to independent and local film festivals with a feminist slant, such as the St. John's International Women's Film Festival, Final Girls Berlin Festival, and Women in Horror Film Festival.

My project sought to understand the relationship between racialized trauma through affect theory in the slasher film. Upon further inspection of my work, I was surprised to see how embedded the theory was in all aspects of the film project. I wondered whether this is unconscious, due to the fact that cultural theory can be found in most facets of life, or the fact that most facets of life can be viewed and analyzed in and through a theory-based lens; it strikes me now that this is precisely the role of theory, to help explain the world. Upon constructing the project, I produced it with half an eye on my primary theoretical concerns and now that I am actively looking at theory, I am realizing that I have already put more in there than I initially recognized. For example, there are layers within the short film which mirror the stages that trauma narratives endure such as, dealing with grief, incessant feelings of danger, constant unease, and emptiness.

To emerge outside of the Eurocentric mindset, we must see ourselves embedded, and create alternatives. Horror has long been a safe outlet for audiences to release our fears. In the future, I would like for my short film to allow racialized women a sense of catharsis, a space to purge their fears about the world around them. When it comes to questioning power, race, and culture, affective embodiment can be used to interrogate the emotions and experiences of the final girl's traumatic change in transforming popular culture. We see this reflecting the violence that Black, Indigenous, and other women of colour face every day in real, or reel, life which continues to destabilize our societies. Racialized women are at the forefront of conducting change within their communities as we have seen with activism throughout decades. A better understanding of our emotions, reactions, and empathy for one another allows for a deeper consideration of the self in relation to the world around us. As Audre Lorde so eloquently put it: "to my sisters of Color who like me still tremble their rage under harness…I want to speak about anger, my anger, and what I have learned from my travels through its dominions" (Lorde, 1984: 234).

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