



**Cardiff University**  
**School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies**

**Exploring Abjection in Twenty-first Century ‘Quality’ TV Horror and the Abject  
Spectrums of its Online Fan Audiences**

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the rise in graphic TV horror in the twenty-first century. Locating it within wider cultural contexts, shifting TV industries and digital technologies, and online transcultural audiences, I analyse this mode of genre television hitherto unseen on this domestic media platform. The thesis draws upon and revises Julia Kristeva's abjection theory (1982) as a means of constructing an analytical framework that allows me to explore the cultural and subtextual meaning of TV horror, evidencing how graphic horror is implemented as a discursive marker of quality TV aesthetics within specific production and (trans)national contexts. These are British public service television, US basic cable, and US/Japanese premium cable co-productions, providing both domestic and transcultural foci. I also explore how the formatting and media ecologies of TV horror can shape meaning (Lobato and Thomas 2015), and how screen abjection is affectively engaged with in an on-going and gradational manner via what I am conceptualising as 'abject spectrums'. This involves considering how the phenomenological, psychological, and cultural components of abjection can intersect, serving to better account for audience-horror text relationships at pre-textual, paratextual and extra-textual levels, as well as in relation to diegetic, transmedial, and post-object audience readings. In order to do this, I employ textual analysis and netnography to provide in-depth examination of my case studies: BBC3's youth TV horror *In the Flesh*, AMC's basic cable transmedia franchise *The Walking Dead*, and Showtime's premium cable *Masters Of Horror*, specifically its American/Japanese co-produced episodes 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise', analysing the online fans and anti-fans who responded to these texts. In my effort to offer much needed attention to this form of television, I build on the work of Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott (2013) and offer two interlinking sections that critically unpack graphic twenty-first century TV horror. Beginning from a textualist point of view in Part I, each Chapter analyses a specific case study's abject attributes as diegetic horror, and considers how abjection is used within bids for an elevated cultural status in TV industry contexts. In Part II, all three case studies are analysed together, with each Chapter structured thematically to develop my abject spectrum model – a gradational conceptualisation that situates abjection between aesthetic, affective, and/or ideological reactions/readings. This begins by considering how Web 2.0 has shaped the formatting, circulation, and consumption of twenty-first century TV horror, particularly on an international scale. I therefore offer 'Only-Click TV' (see also Gillan 2011) as a model that addresses the situation when textual content is solely available online for certain audiences,

and how this can shape meaning and value for these viewers. I then turn to how audiences' responded to the on-screen abjection of the case studies. Using my abject spectrum model I account for polysemic readings, how self-identity can anchor readings, and how the cultural construction of abjection is negotiated via 'third space' transcultural translations (Bhabha 1994). Finally, building on the traditional analysis of audiences' written *logos* (Postill 2010:648, Gillan 2016:21), I extend my analysis to online image culture as a salient user practice and a valuable data type in evidencing abject spectrums. Such work complements the mixed method approaches of TV Studies (Geraghty and Lusted 1998, Geraghty 2003, Creeber 2006a, Casey et al 2008) better serves the understanding of audiences in Horror Studies (Cheery 20020, Hills 2005a, 2014a, Hanich 2010, Barker et al 2016) and triangulates these approaches with the focus on active participation that has been characteristic of Fan Studies (Hills 2002a, Jenkins 2010a, Booth 2015b, Gillan 2016). The thesis concludes by highlighting how graphic and 'cinematic' TV horror has become far more common. Thus, the Conclusion discusses potential future research into other forms of TV horror present in the twenty-first century that experiment with more 'ordinary' forms of television, such as reality TV, and how 'post-TV' that disrupts TV's ontology also opens up new areas of research in terms of content and audience engagement. Furthermore, in noting the limitations of netnography to develop and demonstrate abject spectrums, I suggest interviewing as a research method that could better serve the phenomenological aspects of the model involving individuals' histories and experiences of texts. Resultantly, the thesis' main original contribution is the abject spectrum; this is an on-going and gradational concept that can account for the range of ways audiences encounter a text; the myriad readings and responses to TV horror texts that involve a much more expansive affective field than simply being scared; and the longitudinal perspective where new experiences and repeat consumption can shift and change audience-text relationships.

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## Introduction

### 1. The Horror, the Horror! A New Graphic Mode of Horror Television in the Twenty-First Century

‘[T]he changing landscape of television has brought the [horror] genre to new prominence’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:xiii), where it is ‘able to pronounce itself as horror through the more graphic and nihilistic conventions of the genre’ (Abbott 2016a:97). But despite this prominence, twenty-first century TV horror has received little research, especially in comparison to film (e.g. Humphries 2002, Prince (ed). 2004a, Hutchings 2004, Schneider (ed) 2004, Lowenstein 2005, Magistrale 2005, Derry 2009, Hanich 2010, Hantke (ed) 2010, Briefel and Miller (eds). 2011a, Wetmore 2012, Benschhoff (ed) 2014, Tompkins 2014, Reyes 2016, Keeseey 2017).

Historically, TV horror was prominent throughout the twentieth century in both the UK and US but was often ‘disguised’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:2), being ‘generically nominated in ways that render[ed] horror relatively invisible’ (Hills 2005a:112). Conversely, for gothic horror television, producers were forced ‘to create *atmosphere*, to audio-visually evoke the supernatural in mode and feeling rather than clearly visualise the genre’s associated ghosts or monsters, and therefore... develop[ed] a restrained, suggestive aesthetic’ (Wheatley 2006:36). However, ‘[i]ncreasing advances in technology and effects and more focus on TV aesthetics... [have enhanced] TV horror as spectacle’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:13). Whereas gothic TV’s bids for quality status lie with its cultural heritage and literary lineage (Wheatley 2006:9), this new form of horror emphasises graphic visuality and filmic aesthetics, traditionally linked to premium cable channel HBO (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11). Consequently, my focus on twenty-first century TV horror explores ‘the destruction of the body in graphic detail’ (ibid:131-2), as a marker of quality TV. Furthermore, such body-centric visuality resonates with Julia Kristeva’s abject model (Arya 2016:106) which has been a salient concept in deconstructing horror’s monsters within wider cultural contexts (Austin 2012:100-1).

Yet abjection theory has found little application to television. Arya and Nicholas Chare’s edited collection *Abject Visions: Powers of Horror in Art and Visual Culture* (2016), and Arya’s

monograph *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (2014) include painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media, theatre, literature, film, news reporting, and video games, but TV fiction is strikingly absent. John Lechte argues that ‘cinema is a privileged form of art in its encounter with abjection... because films... are able to evoke the fact that the object is that which, for artistic thought, borders on what is most unrepresentable’ (2016:26). This resonates with arguments that

[w]here[as] horror film can supposedly assume a focused viewer, watching attentively and being caught up in a film’s structure as an “emotion machine” (Tan 1996), horror on TV appears to contrastively assume a distracted, disengaged viewer (Hills 2005a:113).

Consequently, ‘horror on TV appears to lose all affective/emotional intensity simply by virtue of being televised and received within the distracted, sociable domestic sphere’ (ibid). However, this thesis rejects such notions. Like film (Arya 2014:133), TV horror offers ‘multiple forms of social commentary’ (Abbott 2016a:109), consequently becoming ‘a way of mobilizing the power of abjection and of rethinking normative identities’ (Arya 2014:133). Abjection offers a productive model for analysing graphic TV horror’s monsters (Chapters 1-3) in the tradition of Horror Studies: deconstructing the genre’s ‘themes and underlying structures as well as its social function’ (Hutchings 2004:6).

Furthermore, locating my work within wider socio-technological contexts, this thesis addresses how TV horror is consumed, not only via formal broadcast channels that are bidding for quality in producing such content, but also within informal digital media ecologies (Lobato and Thomas 2015). The thesis explores examples of graphic TV horror when it is only available via digital, often illicit, means in what I term ‘Only-Click’ TV. This formatting allows audiences to circumvent formal gatekeepers within domestic spaces, but is particularly salient to transcultural audiences. Thus, I will analyse how formatting, distribution, and consumption are significant to the meaning-making around twenty-first TV horror (Chapter 4).

Concurrently, Stacey Abbott self-reflexively acknowledges that ‘no television show has brought forth as many tears from me as what must seem to be one of the least likely candidates, *The Walking Dead*’ (TWD) (2012a). Abbott is not alone. Both *Roamers and*

*Lurkers*<sup>1</sup> – an online *TWD* community – and a Subreddit thread<sup>2</sup> have asked members about which scenes/episodes of the series have made them cry. Yet for some, it is not grief and sadness that are dominant emotional responses. Rather, the excitement and thrill of *TWD*'s propensity for narrative twists and the killing-off of major characters predominate (Johnson 2013). For others, the gruesome killing (Lealand 2016) and/or problematic treatment of black males (Steiger 2011) (discussed in Chapters 5 and 6) proves too much, resulting in viewers quitting the show. Thus, while the analysis of graphic TV horror utilises abjection as a schema for textual analysis, it cannot avoid longstanding challenges to this method that critique its capacity to speak for a presupposed monolithic audience (Barker 2000:7, Hills 2006a:93). Rather, my thesis serves to not only illustrate how audiences form different affective responses to key textual points (Hills 2008:31), but also demonstrates wider discursive framings of the text-at-large (Hills 2015b:152-3).

In negotiating the abject qualities of texts against the myriad responses and abject effects in audiences' readings of said texts, I put forward the concept of *abject spectrums*. This model stresses different readings of horror that can consider the often neglected (Keltner 2011:20) phenomenological dynamics of abjection (Sobchack 2004), acknowledging individuals' in-process identities that are also situated in wider (sub)cultures. Thus, the model looks at the gradational responses that can occur between abjection as affective in producing emotional responses, as an ideological device that wider social commentaries/subtexts can be read through, and as an aesthetic impact read from (fictional) imagery. These specific components can be active in particular instances for distinct audiences, but they can also overlap as well. Furthermore, in recognising how both an individual's identity and the culture they reside in are on-going, I factor in how abject spectrums can shift and change over time, informed by both new experiences and repeat viewing (see Fig.1.).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.roamersandlurkers.com/topic/1532-which-episode-has-made-you-cry-the-most/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/thewalkingdead/comments/2nmfj6/what\\_scenes\\_have\\_made\\_you\\_cry\\_on\\_twd/](https://www.reddit.com/r/thewalkingdead/comments/2nmfj6/what_scenes_have_made_you_cry_on_twd/)

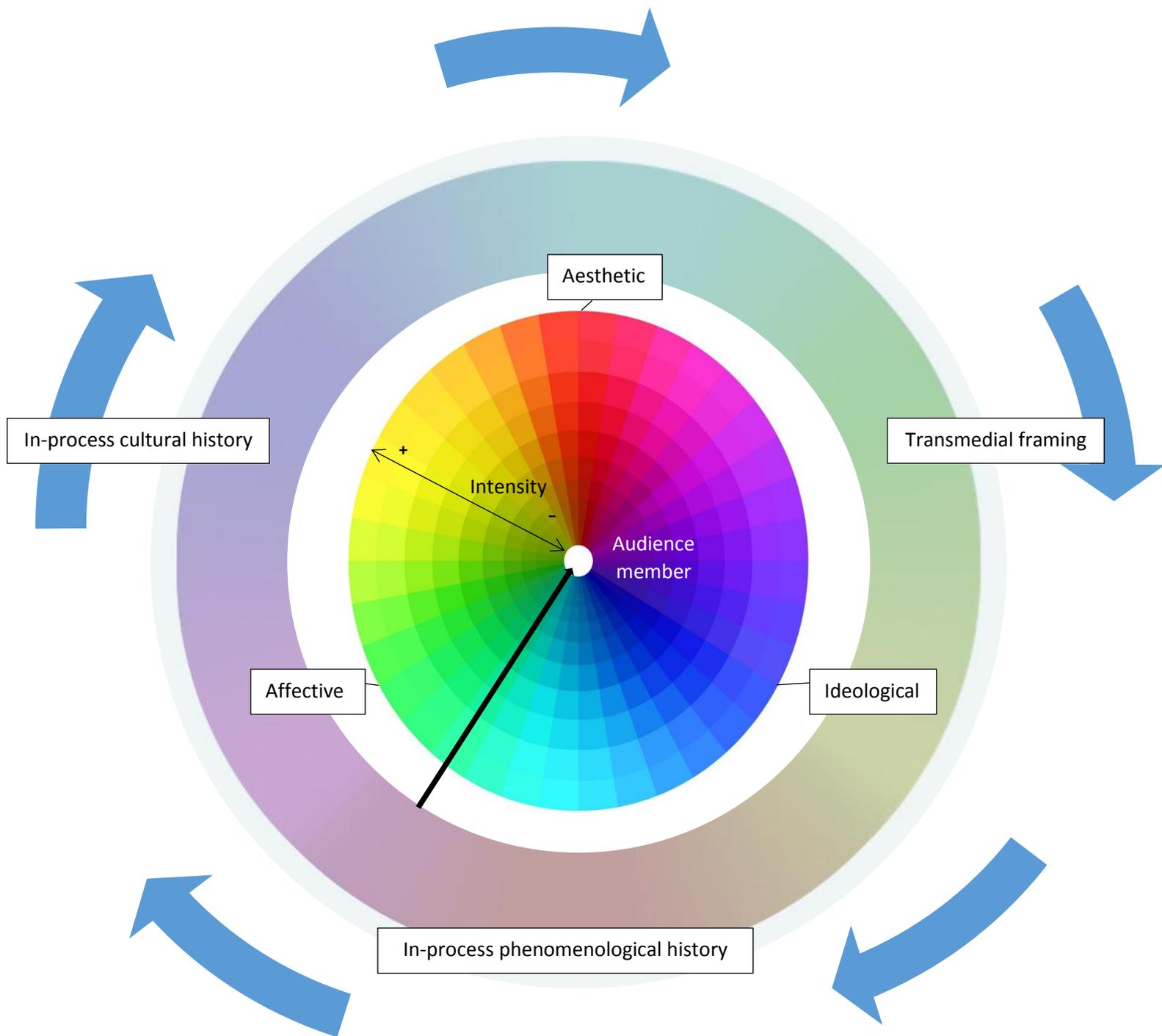


Fig.1. Diagram of an object spectrum. The central zone indicates types of responses and the intensity at which they are felt. It also allows for the blending of responses. The outside area highlights how individuals' in-process lived experience, cultural history, and the development of narratives through transmedia can all contextualise an individual's object spectrum.

Abject spectrums thus take seriously what is at stake for audiences who view abject twenty-first century TV horror (Chapters 4-6), audiences that are frequently neglected in Horror Studies (Hills 2014a:90, Barker et al 2016:66-7). Such audiences also evidence the prominence of online platforms, not only for circulating TV horror but also for discussing it. My research analyses how the textuality of online sites intersects with the performance of audiences' abject spectrums, stressing how visual cultures of TV horror fandom *use* the graphic abject imagery of TV horror as part of their meaning-making rhetoric. Thus, my work gives much-needed attention to audience-created visual texts (GIFs and memes) prominent on social media sites such as Tumblr. I will now present a summary of the thesis to highlight how my work utilises and revises key conceptual frameworks, introducing my case studies and the reasons for excluding/omitting other media content, and the methods used.

The Literature Review takes Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982) as the ur-text of abjection theory (Wark 2016:31), critiquing its core components. It begins by considering how abjection maps onto the horror genre via visibility and affect (Creed 1993a). I then discuss how Kristeva's phenomenological subject-in-process negotiates the model's psychoanalytic underpinnings, thereby accounting for the subjectivity of responses grounded in socio-historical contexts. In doing so, I bring to the fore two of Kristeva's key influences: Mary Douglas (1966) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1984). Both focus on the body and its ability to disrupt cultural order, again remaining pertinent for reading graphic TV horror against and within its wider cultural contexts. Lastly, I focus on the thresholds of abject experiences and how they differ for different audiences. This also means considering the *re-experiencing* of abjection and how this (re)shapes audience (and especially fan) responses. As such, I offer a revisionist account of Kristeva that addresses the liminality of textual experience(s) informed by individual and cultural contexts and leading to abject spectrums of horror TV consumption.

My Literature Review then locates graphic TV horror within the TVIII paradigm with 'its move towards multi-platform forms of distribution and storytelling, but... always [keeping]... some... link with the technology, branding and programming strategies, and social

connotations television traditionally carries' (Jenner 2016:259). Using Jason Mittell's 'textual clustering' (2004), the genre is considered from a socio-historical and discursive standpoint, comparing it to pre-twenty-first century TV horror. This is not to present a juncture or disruption precisely at the beginning of 2000. Rather, noting examples from the early-to-mid noughties, when texts such as *Carnivále* (2003), *Masters of Horror* (2005), and *Dexter* (2006) were created via the artistic freedom of premium cable production contexts (Jowett and Abbott 2013:10-1), graphic TV horror then becomes more common towards the end of the decade. Likewise, during this period more traditional styles of TV horror that utilise restraint and suggestion are still present on TV networks, adhering to twentieth century modes of gothic TV (Wheatley 2006). Therefore I explore how other developments in television such as digital convergence and transmedia, TVIII, streamability, tentpole TV, aesthetics of multiplicity, and monumental series have impacted on the increased embedding of graphic horror within the televisual landscape. Furthermore, my research adds to the body of work exploring TV's construction and dissemination at the turn of the millennium (e.g. Jenkins 2006a, Lotz 2007a, Ross 2008, Shimpach 2010, Evans 2011, Gillan 2011, Clarke 2013, Jenner 2016), specifically looking at how some forms of television become solely available informally via 'Only-Click TV'.

Having reflected on the screen abjection of horror TV and myriad potential audience responses, the Literature Review then synthesises Homi Bhabha's postcolonial third space with Fan Studies; the third space is an 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha 1994:4). Doing so allows for more detailed considerations of transcultural relationships between texts and audiences (Chapters 3, 5, and 6). In my revisionist reading of Bhabha I locate this third space within digital spatiality, thus focusing on online third space (Booth 2010b:129) via audiences' readings/postings.

In arguing that, within this twenty-first century TV context, graphic horror offers a reconsidering of the genre's role on television – a site previously considered unsuitable for such content – the thesis restricts itself to certain content informing specific case studies (see the Methodology). Firstly, whilst horror generally has become more popular on television, in focusing on *graphic* TV horror as a marker of quality TV I omit examples that still adhere to twentieth century aesthetic restraint and suggestion (Hills and Williams 2005:207), structured

by political economies that serve general audience demographics<sup>3</sup> (Tunstall 2015:112). Secondly, whilst this new form of TV horror strongly engages with cinematic language, it still utilises television's media specificity. As such, I omit 'post-TV' horror since it disrupts TV's ontology (Proctor 2013b): this expansive paradigm is not readily identified as television, e.g. web series. Furthermore, post-TV that centres on online portals over TV channels, such as Netflix and YouTube (Lotz 2017:26-7), can present myriad disparate textual qualities specific to these respective sites and portals<sup>4</sup> (Lindsey 2016:176-7). Thus, 'post-TV horror' is too broad to specifically analyse in detail in this research, and falls outside my scope, however, I do come back to consider this media platform, its content, and its audiences in the Conclusion. Lastly, despite the popularity of horror blending into other genres (Jowett and Abbott 2013:xiii), my focus on graphic TV horror sees not only cinematic visuality being used as an aesthetic framework but also the genre's propensity for abject monsters acting as a key trope of the genre cycle (Bordwell and Thompson 1996:58), one previously unafforded to TV horror. Thus I omit TV science fiction and (tele)fantasy (Johnson 2005:95-101) due to their longstanding legacy on television<sup>5</sup>. In doing so, the thesis highlights a distinct form of twenty-first century abject television hitherto under-theorised. I will now discuss the thesis' case studies.

## **2. Introducing Part I – Analysing Abject Artefacts: Case Studies in British, US and Transcultural Twenty-First Century TV Horror**

Part I utilises textual analysis to explore various facets of abjection whilst also evidencing how different industry players – public service broadcasting (PSB), basic cable, premium cable subscription – use graphic TV horror. Chapter 1 begins by analysing the BBC3 TV horror drama *In the Flesh* (2013-2014) (*ITF*). The political economy of *ITF* is one that must negotiate traditional BBC PSB discourse: informing, educating, and entertaining (Crisell 2006:19) whilst also competing with an increasing diversification of choice offered by commercial satellite/cable TV (Bignell 2013:70-1, Ouellette 2002:54-6). This has seen the introduction of more target-audience-based channels by the BBC (Nelson 2007b:13, Bignell 2013:44), namely BBC3 aimed at youth demographics (Crisell 2002:265). Such negotiations between a BBC

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<sup>3</sup> For example *Supernatural*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *Grimm*.

<sup>4</sup> For example *Hemlock Grove* and *Stranger Things* on Netflix as OTT post-TV horror (Lotz 2014b:74, Bisen 2016:133) compared to *Fight of the Living Dead* on YouTube as a web series that utilises aesthetic tropes of this digital post-TV (Stein 2015:161, Strangelove 2015:152).

<sup>5</sup> For example, *Doctor Who* (Hills 2010d:116-140).

ethos that promotes PSB ideologies and its bid to attract niche audiences manifest themselves in the text's aesthetics: the hybridisation of horror and British social realist iconographies (Woods 2015:234) nuances *ITF*'s images of zombiedom.

In *ITF* zombies have undergone psychosomatic restoration and are subsequently reintroduced back into human society, causing political division and aggressive xenophobic outbursts by humans, thus questioning who exactly the 'Other' is. Furthermore, the central sentient undead protagonist Kieran (Luke Newberry) is gay. Queer horror and queer readings of horror offer significant debate on the Othering of bodies (Sutton 2014:75, Benshoff 1997, Halberstam 1995, Elliott-Smith 2014a, 2016). *ITF* uses the zombie body to directly address homophobia, questioning cultural constructions of Otherness (Magistrale 2005:4) and the subjective perspective of being coded *as* abject (Moylan 2017:278). Utilising Stacey Abbott's I-zombie perspective where 'the zombie is not only sympathetic but is also the narrator or focalising perspective of the text' (2016a:163), I apply I-abject subjectivity as a narrative strategy that seeks to align audiences with the abject subject, rather than in opposition to it. This device is significant since it can play a key role in positioning abject spectrums, by which audiences situate themselves towards that which is abject. For instance, Chapter 5 shows how *ITF* fans align themselves with the undead over the show's human characters.

Moving from British PSB TV to US basic cable, Chapter 2 focuses on AMC's *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*) (2010-). While a form of basic cable television that seeks both niche and mainstream audiences, the text's graphic abjection serves to elevate the series and the channel from its traditionally held position and into alignment with higher prestige forms of TV, namely premium cable (see Spangler 2017). Furthermore, utilising the transmedia-rich remit of 'quality' US franchise/tentpole TV whereby quality is ascribed due to *TWD* texts constantly being in circulation<sup>6</sup> (Gillan 2011:4, Hassler-Forest 2016:161-2), the series fosters extensive character development and complex narrative threads (Teurlings 2017:6). *TWD* is set in a post-apocalyptic world where the fall of patriarchy results in, or is the cause of, a zombie outbreak (Mutean 2011:81). The zombie body fits within a long lineage of mediated/cinematic bodies,

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<sup>6</sup> Originally a comic book series (2003-), the television incarnation of *TWD* is currently on its seventh series. The franchise also includes two video games, webisodes, and seven novels (Kirkman and Bonansinga 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, Bonansinga and Kirkman 2014, 2016a, 2016b), alongside a slew of merchandise.

monstrous or otherwise<sup>7</sup>, that can be read as allegorical/symbolic (Hutchings 2004:37, Gelder 1994, Miller 2011:221, Sconce 2014:99) along with the spaces of horror they dwell in (e.g., Hills 2005a:15, Blake 2008:128-130, Gelder 2000c:225-7). Developing abjection as a reading model, dystopian space becomes an abject landscape as patriarchal institutions fail to stop the zombie uprising. Consequently, '[d]eath becomes a continuing state of being' (Christ 2011a:79).

Situated in the Southern states of the US, the fall of civilisation sees a return to the rural for *TWD*'s hero Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) (Hartigan Jr 2005:140), who looks to salvage forms of patriarchy, often coming into conflict with others seeking to do the same (Christie 2011b:64-5, Telotte 2014:70). A prominent theme of post-9/11 horror (see Wetmore 2012:159-64, Blake 2012), I analyse *TWD* through Amanda Lotz's conceptualisation of North American male-centered TV seriality's 'masculinity-in-crisis' (2014:5, see also Bennett 2015). Lotz argues that '[t]hese series depict male characters' feelings and relationships in stories that probe the trials and complexities of contemporary manhood in a manner previously uncommon... for this storytelling medium' (ibid). *TWD*, through an abject dystopian space creating/housing the zombie and human Other, centres on heteronormative white masculinity's attempts to survive in this geography.

Yet, when *TWD* is analysed as a transmedia franchise then Lotz's model is complicated since transmedia versions of *TWD* do not have Grimes as their central protagonist. Analysing season one of *Fear the Walking Dead (FTWD)* and the Telltale video game *The Walking Dead (TTTWD)*, these certainly adhere to Lotz's 'masculinity-in-crisis'. However, the former goes beyond post-9/11 rhetoric, encompassing real-world protest against the mistreatment of black citizens by US police forces, while the latter subverts the white-centricity of the TV series by having a black male lead. I will consider the ludic qualities of the video game medium in relation to abjection theory, exploring *TWD*'s tentpole/transmedia narratives of abjection as thematically overarching (reiterating masculinity-in-crisis) but also as disaggregated (via the issue of race relations). Abjection's post-structuralist framework can account for ideological

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Cohan (1997), Grant (1998:288-290), Watson (2002:15), Davies and Wells (2002:3), Radner (1998:249), Lehman and Hunt (1999).

migration and diversification across texts. Furthermore, in considering the franchise as intratextual, Chapter 2 addresses how audiences' ergodic pathways and semiotic sequencing can shape abject spectrums via the texts they consume, and in what order (Aarseth 1997:1-3, Bennett and Woollacott 1987:234).

Chapter 3 continues my focus on US TV horror by examining premium cable subscription, a type most aligned with cinematic horror (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11). But where Chapter 2 centred on basic cable/transmedia, my third Chapter develops an example of *transnational* horror television. Showtime's *Masters of Horror (MOH)* episodes 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' (directed by Miike Takashi and Norio Tsuruta respectively) highlight transcultural dynamics at textual, industrial, and audience levels. From a political-economic standpoint, all three of my British/US/transcultural case studies can be seen as seeking to attract pre-existing horror fans as well as quality TV audiences (Johnson 2012:29, Wells-Lassagne 2017:23), hence operating as forms of neo-cult television (Hills 2013e). Yet Chapter 3 presents abjection that is intertextually specific within a subgeneric cluster of horror TV and cinema: both texts are framed within pre-existing Western industry rhetorics and paratextual shadowings of J-horror and 'Asia Extreme' cinema<sup>8</sup> (Dew 2007:53-4), constructing pre-textual 'brand-specific abjection' (Hills 2010d:123). Consequently, the 'extreme' rhetoric of this generic banner (e.g. Hunt 2005:7) presents these *MOH* episodes as TV that purports to be 'not-TV' thanks to its associations with non-American cinema. This is reinforced by the transnational branding of the directors used by Showtime (Lee 2008:204-5). Framed as horror auteurs who are also markedly Japanese, this national identity resonates as a marker of authenticity (Miller 2013:20-22).

At first, the episodes reproduce Western framings of abjection, adhering to an Orientalist aesthetic (Needham 2006:9, Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009:6, Shin 2009:86-7, Cagle 2009:124-5), and exoticising the Eastern Other as hyper-sexual and hyper-violent (Rendell 2016). Both texts utilise *kaidan* ghost stories presenting the female body as grotesque, abject, Other, and Japanese (McRoy 2005b:3-4, 2014:415), juxtaposed to White American male characters. These lead characters stress transcultural relationships between self and Other, conflating/intersecting gender with nationality. However, both texts are Japanese-American co-productions between Showtime and Kadokawa (known for its connection to J-horror film;

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<sup>8</sup> J-horror is a sub-genre/cycle of Japanese horror, whilst Asia Extreme horror is a wider cycle of cinema that incorporates films from largely South East Asia. Both came to prominence at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gaining cult reputations in the West (Mathijs and Sexton 2011:122).

Davis and Yeh 2008:65). Additionally, ‘Imprint’ was originally a novella written by the Japanese feminist author Shimako Iwai, whilst ‘Dream Cruise’ uses Japanese-drama (J-dorama) genre tropes, a female-centric genre (Han 2008:27-8). I thus argue that these contextual markers shift how the discourse surrounding abjection is coded, offering a feminist reading of the episodes, utilising the post-structuralist approach of Kristeva and textual analysis (Creeber 2006a:6,2006ab:28). Yet more is at stake: unlike the previous two Chapters, abjection can also operate as a transcultural reading schema. In this instance, the Chapter combines abject geography along with shifting points of subjectivity. We can either read the female figures as wholly Other – pure abject monsters – or we can take up an I-abject position that reads these women as victims of patriarchy and abject products of wider systems, depending on the (trans)cultural contexts we use to inform our analysis.

Having utilised textual analysis to illustrate various facets of abjection and locate my case studies in wider cultural – British, North American, Japanese – and industrial contexts (PSB, basic cable/transmedia, premium cable/transnational co-production), Part II then uses netnography to analyse audiences’ online responses to on-screen abjection and develop my abject spectrum model. Here, I move to a thematic structuring which considers all three case studies together and comparatively within Chapters 4-6.

### **3. Introducing Part II - In Digital Space, Everyone Can Hear You Scream: Online Circulations, Audience Responses, and Abject Spectrums**

Chapter 4 begins by going beyond audiences’ diegetic readings (e.g. Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1999)), to analyse how the formatting, distribution, and consumption of my case studies as broadcast media, DVD/Blu-ray, streamed content, and digital files (Lobato and Thomas 2015:5-6), can shape abject spectrums. Furthermore, I consider how each study relates to ‘Only-Click’ media, and how respective audiences’ engage with, negotiate, and/or reject this practice. Firstly, in 2016 BBC3 became online-only (Plunkett 2014, Dowell 2015a). Consequently, *ITF* became a formal instance of Only-Click TV. Moreover, the text was not renewed for a third series (Brew 2015, Jeffery 2015), causing anxiety and anger amongst fans. Moving beyond abjection as a reading schema for TV horror, this provoked ontological insecurity among *ITF* fans who became abject themselves as the series entered a ‘post-object’ phase (Williams 2011b). The Chapter addresses fans’ extended activism, over a range of online

platforms and networks (Pink et al 2016:105), in attempting to get the series brought back and so de-abjectify the community, rejecting the BBC's industrial formalising of Only-Click TV. Thus, we can see how abject spectrums can operate for some individuals relationally to the industrial state of the text, as well as through its diegesis.

Considering how both domestic and transcultural fans want to consume TV content as it is released, yet those who are overseas may not have access to it via traditional broadcast means, audiences can turn to Only-Click downloading in order to partake in 'just-in-time' fan practices (Hills 2002a:178). Transcultural fans of *TWD* have used Only-Click practices to view it concurrently with US audiences, temporally informing their meaning-making around the series. Yet Only-Click TV suffers from a lack of extra-textuality, unlike DVD. Moreover, whilst television is available via Only-Click means, other *TWD* texts on other media platforms are not. This aids in increasing the circulation potential to the widest audience possible, reducing the financial risk of producing this type of TV horror, but also creates more exclusive DVD/Blu-ray content that serves fans' collecting sensibilities yielding subcultural capital. Thus, Chapter 4 compares formal/industrial DVD formatting to informal Only-Click piracy whilst also analysing how Only-Click affects the semiotic sequencing of consumption patterns discussed in Chapter 2 (i.e. involving transmedia) at a transnational level.

However, some audiences are wary of Only-Click dissemination. Due to its graphic content and sensitive subject material, Showtime refused to broadcast Miike's 'Imprint' in North America (Hendershot 2011:150). Consequently, while graphic TV horror can be used to add value to a channel, it may also run the risk of being a detriment to this brand image. Furthermore, whilst some fans used Only-Click methods in accordance with just-in-time discourse, others were sceptical of Showtime's self-censoring, viewing it as an attempt to create hype around the episode by building on Miike's transcultural notoriety (Rawle 2014:226, Ruh 2008:145, Hyland 2009:205, Hantke 2005:55). As a result, some fans were hesitant to engage with the episode in its Only-Click form, reading this as another facet of Showtime's neo-cult construction of the text, as discussed in Chapter 3, and evidencing how audiences can sometimes be sceptical of brand-specific abjection. Resultantly, Chapter 4 illustrates how abject spectrums present both ongoing affective engagement with my case studies, but also how these spectrums are present in audience-text relationships at a pre-textual, transmedia, extra-textual and post-object level.

Chapter 5 moves away from this to examine audiences' readings of texts' abject content, in the process engaging with the quality discourses that my case studies commonly explore. In turn, audiences' online writing evidences instances of abject spectrums as they discuss affective engagement with graphic twenty-first century TV horror. For instance, fans on *ITF* Facebook groups align themselves with the Other, sympathetic to the I-zombie narrativisation discussed in Chapter 1. Yet, mapped onto such subjectivity, fans' abject spectrums still provide various readings of the polysemic undead body. Therefore, despite a consensus surrounding its 'quality' status, *ITF*'s abject Others' symbolic heterogeneity demonstrates the plural nature of fans' abject spectrums.

Building on online writing as a form of identity performance, the Chapter explores instances of hybrid identity performance. Contestation on racially-aware fan websites such as *Nerds of Color* over the prevailing whiteness of the TV incarnation of *TWD* evidences an engagement with wider political/civic unrest surrounding the mistreatment of ethnic minorities by US police forces. Anti-fan objections to *FTWD* centre on the black Other, yet *TTTWD* is discursively engaged with through the racial dynamics of the text's lead, Lee, on the Telltale forum. Chapter 5 therefore considers how the socio-political impact of *TWD* as a form of tentpole television sometimes works *against* the phenomenological cultural experiences of specific ethnic audiences. It also evidences how abject spectrums can be informed by ergodic semiotic selection within a transmedial/intratextual nexus, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Significantly, fans are active and critical<sup>9</sup> (e.g. Lewis 2006:305, Hargreaves and Thomas 2002:103, Garner et al 2010:xviii, Burr 2005:376, Hills 2010f:211), and fan knowledge can *inform* anti-fan readings (Claessens and Van den Bulck 2014:63, Alters 2007:344). This is the case for *MOH*'s 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise'. While the episodes are paratextually framed by pre-existing Asia Extreme/J-horror branding that seeks to attract established transcultural fans, on the fan-run Asia Extreme forum *Snowblood Apple*, posters deploy their *film* fan identity. Therefore, this part of the Chapter addresses how abject spectrums can function at an intertextual level.

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. instant 'citizen journalism' that can contribute, and respond to, the news and political agendas (Sandvoss 2013:253, Bruns and Highfield 2012:15-7, Figueiras 2013:228, Harrington et al 2013:407, Mauro 2011, Hjorth and Kim 2011:188, Shaw et al 2013:23-5, Deuze 2003), and traditional media adopting this within frameworks of media constriction/dissemination (e.g. Bennett 2013:2-3).

Furthermore, in ‘reading-for-cultural-difference’ (Hills 2005b:168), these transcultural fans construct discourses of Japan(ese horror) (Athique 2016:6). Nuancing Bhabha’s third space theory to consider transcultural fandoms, this section explores how, informed by pre-existing fan identity and a corpus of ‘authentic’ Japanese texts, these episodes are marked as inauthentic co-productions. Furthermore, anti-fan rhetoric towards the texts and Showtime’s paratextual/branding strategies undermines the transnational auteur status ascribed to both directors (Stubbs 1999). Consequently, despite rupturing film/TV distinctions via the use of genre and abject aesthetics, this fan audience symbolically re-installs a media-based dichotomy, legitimising the former whilst delegitimising the latter. Thus, abject spectrums can operate transculturally and intermedially to produce unexpected textual evaluations (Athique 2016:33-5,151).

Whilst the previous two Chapters consider the written form/*logos* of audience responses, my final Chapter extends beyond this, considering the image cultures popular on Web 2.0 sites (Kozinets 2015:5,229, Pink et al 2016:64-5) that can ‘break down... hierarchies by exhibiting engagement with multiple sources and providing coherent meaning for other viewers’<sup>10</sup> (Thomas 2013). As such, the Chapter illustrates how various user-generated images engage with my case studies’ on-screen abjection but also serve to illustrate visually abject spectrums. For *ITF* fans, image posts correspond to the relative ontological security of the series and the fans themselves (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). During active broadcast, fan visuals centre on relationships between characters (Booth 2013). However, when the series is between seasons, fans turn to pre-textual poaching to restore affective order (Hills 2010d) posting images of the cast as friends as affective markers/verifiers of characters’ diegetic relationships. However, when the show was cancelled and fans had turned to activist practices (discussed in Chapter 4), imagery focused instead on the undead characters, mirroring the state of *ITF*. Tracking the use of abject imagery in posts shows how ongoing fan-text relationships and abject spectrums are informed by temporal qualities, reinforcing the subject-in-process of Kristeva’s model (Oliver 1993:13).

Developing the *logos* of *TWD* anti-fans in Chapter 5, the black male body becomes a visual marker in meme posts that superimpose images textually poached from *TWD* with captions that subvert preferred textual meaning whilst bringing in wider debates about the mistreatment

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<sup>10</sup> Even if ‘those viewers might not immediately understand the intertextual nature of the posts’ (Thomas 2013).

of poor black men in the US (Harman and Jones 2013:954-5). Semantically distilling official images that are undercut by superimposed text (Shifman 2013), users highlight the structured absence and relative ineffectiveness of black males in *TWD* using textual content as a means of verifying readings. As such, the section explores how these posts perform an ideological subversion that both highlights individual-culture-text relationships and intratextual frameworks present within this transmedia franchise.

Whereas *ITF* image posts correspond to the state of text itself and are used to support fans' shifting engagement – from affirmational fandom (Baym 2011) to activism – and *TWD* memes are used to support/heighten the counter-ideological discourse present in anti-fan writing, *MOH* image posts demonstrate different affective readings compared to written posts on *Snowblood Apple* (Bennett 2012:752-6). Some Tumblr posts stress the horrifying elements in 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' that reinforce abjection as a key genre marker of graphic TV horror, highlighting the affective-aesthetic qualities of the texts as markers of quality via textural poaching (Gillan 2016). Additionally, others use images and GIFs on Tumblr to subvert *MOH*'s abjection by reframing these texts as comedic. Performing these shifting 'semantic reproduction[s] of textual elements' subverts the horror, and thus ideology, of the episodes by coding the images, and the posts, as humorous (Staiger 2000:2). Consequently, Chapter 6 analyses the various ways comedy is used in fans' visual posts as an affective and performative engagement with horror TV.

To summarise, the thesis focuses on the under-explored area of twenty-first century TV horror, triangulating Horror, TV, and Fan Studies. My research discusses graphic horror in various political-economic contexts – British PSB, cable/transmedia, premium cable/transcultural – arguing that this creates various forms of quality TV horror. It also argues that abjection is a crucial concept for understanding twenty-first century graphic TV horror via the I-object, object landscapes, and multiple codings of abjection. I locate graphic TV horror in different locations – UK, US, Japan – to facilitate national and transnational discussions. All these facets are developed in Part I of the thesis.

The research also highlights the salience of formatting, distribution flow, and consumption patterns to shaping meaning-making at pre-textual, textual, post-object and social levels. Moreover, Only-Click TV highlights the importance of informal media ecologies, and how they affect transcultural flows of TV horror. In arguing for the complexity of audiences'

affective readings of on-screen abjection, the thesis sets out abject spectrums as an original model that can account for individual, (sub)cultural, and transnational contextualisation, as well as patterns of consumption that inform intertextual semiotic meaning-making, and repeat viewing. The work also introduces Bhabha's 'third space', as an act of cultural translation, into Fan Studies to better understand how transcultural audiences deconstruct texts and construct discourse around the cultures from which they hail. Finally, whilst analysing online audience posts, I offer an innovative conceptualisation of image posts as significant to audience engagement with graphic TV horror. These facets are developed in Part II of the thesis.

I now turn to the Literature Review to locate my research, to critique existing arguments that horror is incompatible with the televisual medium, and to challenge theories of horror that neglect audiences' repeat viewing and phenomenological histories. Intercultural dynamics have also been underexplored in work on horror TV, providing a gap in the literature where I shall develop concepts of the abject spectrum, Only-Click TV, and third space fan readings. Resultantly, the Literature Review establishes the original conceptual frameworks through which I undertake my research.

## Literature Review

### 1. Intro

The aims of the Literature Review are to rethink Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection (1982) not only as a pertinent model for the textual analysis of graphic twenty-first century TV horror but also as a gradational concept that explores individual and cultural factors that influence audience affect. Moreover, within Fan Studies I consider audiences' consumption of twenty-first century TV horror *and* how they play a salient role in circulating it via informal means. Consequently, my research benefits from going beyond Western/Anglophonic examples to also address transcultural media and audiences. Consequently, I introduce Homi Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' (1994) to Fan Studies to explore the construction and translation of culture through media texts and community discourse that accounts for the complexities of postcolonial formations of place within the fissures of twenty-first century globalisation.

While abjection is perceived as symbiotic with the horror genre, and used by many analysing the genre (e.g. Davis 2000, Mendik 1998, Chanter 2008:180-215), Kristeva's seminal *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) goes far beyond this, as is evident in the plethora of work applying the theory in a diverse range of academic fields (Tyler 2009:78, Arya 2014:11-2). Concurrently, that which horrifies is not created in a vacuum: it is continuously reshaped, pressured, and influenced by a diverse range of cultural factors, conversely shaping culture itself (Connolly 2003:424). Furthermore, such imagery, themes, and narratives are responded to by audiences through affective/immersive engagement, yet always located in cultural contexts.

Examining how Kristeva's use of psychoanalysis is negotiated with phenomenological experiences, the Literature Review begins by exploring how abjection operates at the micro-perspective of the psychosomatic individual, highlighting subjective differences and thus avoiding grand sweeping reductions of, and speculations over, viewer responses. Locating affective reactions to horror means considering how subjective responses are not simply corporeal reactions; rather, they are environmentally contextualised and thus semiotically-loaded.

Considering two of Kristeva's main influences, Mary Douglas's work on dirt, pollutants, and (dis)order (1966) and Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque bodies and the carnival (1982), embodied/bodily abjection is culturally ascribed – often by those in power – and responded to through rituals that seek to restore patriarchal order. Addressing the symbolic order and agency bestowed to certain cultural institutions, the liminal qualities of abjection offer ways of deconstructing the abject Other, which in the case of the horror genre, largely centres on monstrous antagonists.

After establishing the never-static subjective body and the ever-shifting context of culture, I will consider how repetitive affective contact with that which is abject fosters more nuanced and complex responses than simply 'being horrified'. Tying together the phenomenological and the culturally ritualistic dynamics of Kristeva's work acknowledges the potentially diverse reactions to graphic TV horror's polysemic texts from a range of audiences, from fear to joy, from horror to laughter, and from immersion to avoidance. Consequently, abjection theory is revised here to not only look at how horror utilises abject visuals, sounds, and stories contextualised within wider culture, but also how diegetic horror relates to what I term audiences' 'abject spectrums'. This model allows for more fluid and malleable forms of engagement with texts, considering the complexities of individuals and (sub)cultures, and accounts for gradational responses to abjection as corporeally affective, as culturally/ideologically expressive, and/or as aesthetically constituted (see Figure 1 on page 13). Moreover, by considering self-formation pertaining to abjection's on-going phenomenological underpinning, the model covers responses that can shift with the in-process qualities of new (genre/textual) experiences gained and new reading contexts that an individual finds themselves in. As such, the abject spectrum helps to theorise initial and subsequent interactions with screen abjection at textual, intratextual, and intertextual levels.

Moving on from abjection, section 3 locates twenty-first century TV horror within its wider socio-industrial, technological, and cultural contexts (Sontag 2009:18). The twenty-first century has seen much debate around television's ontology and cultural standing. Many argue the digital era has brought about the death of TV (Simon and Rose 2010:52, Lotz 2007a:1, Gray and Lotz 2012:1, Hart 2010:9, Tay and Turner 2010:33). Others contend that the new

millennium has seen a rebirth/revolutionising of television<sup>11</sup> (Caldwell 2005:91, Poniewozik 2006, Axelrod 2010, Epstein 2010, Lavery 2011). However, what becomes apparent in this debate's fault lines is that television is heterogeneous and must be studied as such (Newman and Levine 2012:100-1).

Part of the polysemic nature of television is represented in changes in TV production, distribution, and consumption, and the types of texts emerging during this period. This provides the catalyst for analysing what has been a marked shift in twenty-first century TV horror. Therefore, the third section locates horror's tentative relationship with television (Jowett and Abbott 2013:xiii), arguing that horror's rhetorics have been read as incompatible with television's cultural ordinariness and domesticity (Branston and Stafford 2003:87), resulting in older TV horror prioritising restraint and suggestion over graphic visuality (as discussed in the Introduction). This section then explores post-millennial shifts in aesthetics and narrative devices as discursive strategies (Gray and Lotz 2012:54) utilising established markers of quality and, consequently, argues that discourses surrounding the horror genre have been renegotiated in relation to twenty-first century TV. This does not entirely supplant previous themes and approaches to horror TV, rather it recontextualises them within a changing milieu (Natoli and Hutcheon 1993:viii).

Significantly, part of rereading horror TV within a twenty-first century paradigm involves the digitality of media. At the same time, analysing transmedia as both an industry-wide strategy and a form of audience engagement is central to understanding the complexities of the current media landscape. Looking at how digital/online media has shaped content that sees televisual (hyper)diegetic worlds spilling out over other media platforms/paratexts (Genette 1997, Gray 2010), dislocating TV-as-central-medium in the process, this section addresses how narrative complexities encourage repeat viewing. Analysing the highly diverse transmedia nexus of twenty-first century television, it is apparent that digital media not only shapes content and audience engagement, but also the range of television available to transcultural audiences, opening up transnational gateways for acquiring horror texts from other countries that previous experiences and theories of TV could not countenance.

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<sup>11</sup> The former claim is premised on a technological discourse and its attached symbolism, fragmented and decentralised from its analogue position. The latter is premised within the televisual text's narrative and diegesis, raising an aesthetical discourse often linked with markers of quality (Gray and Lotz 2012:53, see also Cubitt 2009:28).

As such, I move beyond popular Anglophonic television to explore how transnational circuits of flow also impact on my research. Positioned within a body of work (e.g., Ang 1998, Liebes and Katz 1993, Gripsrud 1995) that challenges the ‘McDonaldization’ of culture (see Ritzer 2000, Kellner 2004), and ‘media imperialism’ (Sinclair et al 1996:6), section 3 looks at how (trans)cultural value is ascribed to transnational TV, how TV horror functions within such rhetorics, and how fans play a key role in disseminating twenty-first century TV horror, often by illegal means.

While previous literature has tended to focus on official routes of transnational flow/formation, such as DVD and commercially-successful texts, this only provides a partial picture. Consequently, I conceptualise television that is only consumed by non-traditional/informal means, or what I term ‘Only-Click’ TV. Showing how this fosters transcultural fan engagement, Only-Click has become a popular mode of textual acquisition, particularly for drama and horror. Thus, I explore the value in this mode of television and how it challenges ephemerality.

Fan Studies is salient for highlighting the diversity of individual and communal activities within horror fan cultures. Intimate relationships materialise through repeated contact with cultural object(s) (Sandvoss 2005:57-8, Duffett 2013a:26), forming subcultural capital that fans use to distinguish themselves not only from those outside the fandom (Hills 2002a:40, 2005c:163), but also from those within (Hills 2002a:46, Johnson 2007:286). Consequently, I consider how fandoms and anti-fandoms foster rituals, rules, and knowledge that not only frame texts but also audiences’ identities. Furthermore, liminality can subvert and/or champion other forms of cultural identity such as race, gender, and/or sexuality. Moreover, fandom is an important, and neglected, field of study in addressing postcolonial relationships (and vice-versa), especially when transcultural fandom concerns the investment that fans have in objects originating in foreign locales. Relatedly, Bertha Chin and Lori Hitchcock-Morimoto are hesitant to use the term ‘transnational’ fandom due to ‘its implicit privileging of a national orientation that supersedes other... subject positions’ (2013:93, see also Hjort 2010:12). However, I do not completely negate ‘national’ discourse (During 1990:138). Rather, it can be a rhetoric utilised from positions of marginality (Said 2000:xxv, Huddart 2006:101-2), as a means of (re)constructing space. Since horror provides heavily-coded Otherness manifested in the monster and emblematic of wider cultural anxieties/commentaries (Hutchings 2004:37,

Levina and Bui 2013:4), the ‘third space’ concept considers how culturally-coded Otherness embodied in the abject monster is translated when transcultural audiences consume horror media. Furthermore because third space considers cultural identity *beyond* the national, it also accounts for other identity markers such as race, age, class, gender, and/or sexuality (Chan 2004:10) that form part of a translation framework.

Postcolonial Studies addresses colonial discourse and power inequalities (e.g., Desai and Nair 2005:1, Césaire 2005:62), colonised emancipation strategies (e.g., Young 2003:2, Spivak 2006 [1998]:270-2), and/or disruptions of ‘traditional’ Western structures of knowledge and power (Mongia 1997:2), but has tended to inadvertently produce ‘monolithic characterizations of the [Western] colonial [self]’ (Boehmer 1998:20). Consequently, the Literature Review not only addresses heterogeneous Others to the hegemonic Western self, but also evidences diversity *within* Western/Anglophonic culture (Del Campo 2008:247). Consequently, Bhabha’s “third space” provides a useful model for negotiating identities as hybrid forms, given that transcultural fandoms are constituted when material from one culture is used by fans of another culture in identity formation (Hallward 2001:xi, Huddart 2006:1).

Additionally, in questioning/building upon pre-existing postcolonial theory, the Literature Review addresses key areas of my thesis: (A) it considers how intercultural relationships shape models of horror. This is something not greatly explored in Horror Studies. Yet socio-cultural translation takes place in consuming transcultural horror. (B) Despite ample research on transcultural anime and manga fandom (e.g. Eng 2012, Condry 2013, Ruh, 2010, Napier 2000, Siuyi Wong 2006), the thesis moves beyond the tendency to explore Anglophonic fandoms of Anglophonic horror media, exploring new areas of fandom (see also Chin 2007:211, Gray et al 2007:9-10, McLelland 2009), and addressing forms of television previously neglected in Fan Studies, namely Japanese-horror television in relation to J-horror fandom.

While Bhabha’s work has had little-to-no critical attention in Fan Studies, it is my argument that he can play an instrumental role in analysing fandoms. David Huddart writes that Bhabha’s work differs from other postcolonial academics by focusing on, and distinguishing between, non-militant forms of resistance and cultural relations (2006:2-3, see also Bhabha 1992a:240-1), not limiting himself to colonialism (ibid:8). Furthermore, Bhabha’s work covers a wide breadth of discourse (Byrne 2009:xi), suitable for the heterogeneity of fan activities. Lastly, while Bhabha is traditionally recognised as a literary theorist, his work covers a range of media

in the construction of cultural identities (1988:6) including cinema (1983, 2001, 2002), TV advertisements (2000:300), museums, and art galleries (1992a, 1995a), that all ‘reveal vital links between human affect – the emotional and inter-subjective realm of suffering and survival’ (2003a:162). Consequently, I revise Bhabha’s third space to address the spatiality of communities as shaping knowledge and identity (Soja 1996), specifically the prevalence of online space for (transcultural) fan practices (Booth 2010b), subsequently developed in the Methodology. But to return to horror, I begin by critically reading Kristeva’s abjection model.

### **2.1. The Subjectivity of Abjection: Negotiating Psychoanalytic and Phenomenological Approaches to Horror**

For Kristeva, ‘[t]he abject has only the quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*’ (1982:1). It threatens identity, structure, and position, whether it be a ‘fall’ from a social, psychological or biological standing (ibid:3), creating anxiety towards abject object(s), people, and situation(s) (Lechte 2003:10). Kristeva highlights the monstrous within abjection, writing that,

a conjunction of waste and object of desire, or corpse and life, fecality and pleasure, murderous aggressivity and the most neutralizing power... [the monster] becomes the feminine exalted to the point of mastery, impaired master, the ambivalent... [*a*]bjection *itself*. (1982:185)

Fear is induced by that which we perceive indicates the fragility of our identity, hence we reject it. Yet since it indicates the self, it is paradoxically part of *I*. Markers such as refuse, blood, sweat, and vomit indicate that which ‘I permanently thrust aside in order to live’ (ibid:3), with the ultimate in abjection being ‘[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science’ (ibid:4). This aesthetic corpus is highly analogous to the generic elements popular in the lexicon of horror. Yet what is at stake here is more than a genre checklist. Such bodily aesthetics are culturally contextualised. As Kristeva notes, ‘[i]t is not a lack of cleanliness or health that cause abjection but what disturbs identity, system, and order’ (ibid). Cultural symbolism frames identity (Nead 2010:519). However, for symbolism to be enabled, discourse must be taught/learned. Kristeva’s psychoanalytic stance argues that this stems from the ‘deep well of memory’ residing in a pre-cultural/pre-linguistic domain of the ‘unconscious’ (1982:7); an area

cognitive approaches to horror cannot explain (e.g. Carroll 2004:265, Hill 1997:60). *I*/self is opposed to that which is not self, i.e. Other. Kristeva offers a fundamental example of this:

[f]ood loathing is perhaps one of the most elementary and archaic form[s] of objection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk... I experience a gagging sensation and still further down, spasms in the stomach, the belly, and all the organs shrivel up in the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight, clouding dizziness, *nausea* make me balk and that milk cream, separates me *from the mother and father who proffer it*<sup>12</sup>. (ibid:3-4)

This passage is often-quoted but rarely explored. Firstly, the response is corporeal. Reaction is felt in different parts of the body in varying ways (Sobchack 2004:80), framed by borders. In this case, the eyes or lips of the recipient experiencing the milk, and the surface of the milk itself. When borders are disrupted/transgressed, abjection occurs. Attention to bodily reaction highlights the phenomenological experience of abjection, reified by the author's first-person perspective, with bodily/sensory responses differing between Kristeva and her parents. This aspect is often ignored, creating one-dimensional generalised affects and/or idealised audiences of abjection (Keltner 2011:20). Finally, and most neglected, is the temporality of responses. The demarcation of a child/parent binary highlights the liminality of abject effects. The child will grow into an adult and what was once such vehement abjection *may* transmogrify and create different responses – even pleasure. Self-identity is not static, thus that which is in opposition to *I* is susceptible to transformation. As Oliver notes, 'Kristeva looks to the orders of subjectivity in order to demonstrate that we are all subjects-in-process' (1993:13). McCabe and Holmes concur, noting that '[s]ubjectivity, as described by Kristeva, is what is contained within an imaginary border drawn around the body: a border that is continuously constructed and reconstructed throughout life' (2011:78). Indeed, the subject-in-process is paramount to this thesis.

Beyond this exemplar, Kristeva looks at another universal process: birth/childhood. Utilising a post-Freudian/-Lacanian approach, Kristeva argues initial abjection occurs prior to the Oedipal Complex/Mirror stage.<sup>13</sup> Abjection takes place before the construction of the ego via the

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<sup>12</sup> My emphasis

<sup>13</sup> The Mirror stage/phase occurs 'between the sixth and eighteenth month of life.' (Roudinesco 2003:30).

paternal role, control of the Phallus, and instigation of language<sup>14</sup> (Dor 2000:93-5, Kennett 2005:49). Before this, the child is in the state of *chora*, locked within the narcissistic gaze identifying with the mother's body (Kristeva 1984:27, McAfee 2004:23). Self-identity can only be constituted by separating from the maternal body – she must be repelled/rejected (Kristeva 1982:13), and made abject (Oliver 1993:56).

The mother is abject, and abjection is the 'primer to my culture' (Kristeva 1982:2). Thus, abjection is feminised. The child will only dispel the state of *chora* when they traverse the mirror stage, via the designation of self and Other through language instigated through the paternal body. Hence, '[a]t this point the mother is not-yet-object and the child is not-yet-subject' (Oliver 1993:56). Consequently, abjection is not only that which is Other to me but *is* part of me, hence abjection ruptures the self via a 'narcissistic crisis'<sup>15</sup> (Kristeva 1982:14).

This construction of the abject mother has been important in Horror Studies. For Barbara Creed, horror films offer a ritualistic return of the threatening abject mother, arguing that

[t]he horror film would appear to be, in at least three ways, an illustration of the work of abjection. First, the horror film abounds in images of abjection<sup>16</sup>... Second, the concept of the border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the "border" is abject... The third way in which the horror film illustrates the work of abjection is in the construction of the maternal figure as abject. (1993a:10-11)

Abjection does not demarcate the horror genre exclusively. It also manifests in other genres, such as medical and police dramas, as well as thrillers (see Taubin 2002:29, Jacobs 2003:69-70, Billson 2011, Jowett and Abbott 2013:19-21, West 2012, Pierson 2010). However, Kristeva, commenting on the author Céline, writes that

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<sup>14</sup> Lacan differs from Freud in arguing that the Phallus does not mean the penis, but symbolises gratification (Luepnitz 2003:226).

<sup>15</sup> While the difference in temporality and gender domain for identity construction moves away from the male-centricity of the paternal function of psychoanalysis, Kristeva's failure to address how a child's process may differ depending on their sex resonates with a male-centred approach, as during initial abjection we assume Kristeva is talking about a male child (1982:8).

<sup>16</sup> She includes at the fore 'the corpse... followed by an array of bodily waste such as blood, vomit, saliva, sweat... and putrefying flesh' (1993a:10).

Céline's narrative is a narrative of suffering and horror, not only because the "themes" are there, as such, but because his whole narrative stance seems controlled by the necessity of going through abjection, whose intimate side is suffering and horror its public feature. (1982:140)

Thus, horror offers a *particular* vehicle for abjection different from other genres vis-à-vis a thematic framework of suffering. For Kristeva this is done via the body. Consequently, 'she brings the speaking body back into signification by maintaining that bodily drives make their way into language... [and also] reinscribe[s] language within the body' (Oliver 1993:3). Unlike Anna Powell's Deleuzian 'body without organs' which removes symbolic order from 'organs such as [the] penis, phallus, vagina, [and] even mouth' (Driscoll 2000:71), favouring 'form, style and content [as] ... predominant diagrammatic components' (2005:2), in a bid to eliminate 'traditional associations' of the female body (ibid:72), abjection reads the body as symbolically-loaded. Despite suggesting some theoretical similarity to Kristeva's subject-in-process in terms of affective responses 'becoming' (see Grosz 1994), Powell's essentialising of the viewer fails to see how the allegorical body resonates with wider culture (e.g. Maddrey 2004:51, Zinoman 2008:156-7, Blake 2002:151, Becker 2006:43-5). Such body-centricity provides the focus of my textual analysis in Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Kristeva intertwines subjective thought and social symbolism<sup>17</sup>, highlighting one of abjection's most pertinent strengths. By analysing the psyche of the subject via psychoanalysis *and* the society in which that subject performs via an anthropological/ethnographical approach, Kristeva addresses aspects that her two theoretical influences fail to explain: wider cultural context(s) for psychoanalysis, and the subconscious/pre-cultural for anthropology/Cultural Studies (Keltner 2011:2). By focusing on subjective responses, the Literature Review stresses the pertinence in phenomenology of Kristeva's abjection model and how this engages with and negotiates psychoanalytic approaches to horror.

Kristeva's psychoanalytic stance resonates with Freud's theory of the uncanny (2003:123); another theory popular in horror analysis because of its 'aesthetic and cultural dimension[s]' (Hutchings 2004:69), commonly recognised as the 'source of horror' in the Gothic (Miles

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<sup>17</sup> What she calls in her earlier work 'semanalysis.' Although she rarely uses the term in her later work, she nevertheless still used the method.

2001:49), and a prevalent discourse when historicising/contextualising the genre (Carroll 1990:4, Hunt 2000:330). While there are significant parallels between the two theories (Hills 2005a:57), important distinctions are worth noting. Freud argues the uncanny<sup>18</sup> is ‘the entrance to man’s old “home”, the place where everyone once lived’ (2003:151), representing the mother’s/female genitalia or womb. Additionally, ‘the fear of going blind is quite often a substitute for fear of castration<sup>19</sup>’ (Miles 2003:139); a taboo of screen horror imagery (Williams 2002:13). Therefore, in some instances, the uncanny too offers a feminine threat. Like abjection, the ‘acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts’ (Freud 2003:148). The cadaver as an indicator of horror and anxiety in both paradigms indicates similar aesthetic markers (Wilton 1998:179). However, there are differences between the two concepts (Maylan 2017:278). Kristeva notes that, ‘[e]ssentially different from “uncanniness,” more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin: nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of the memory’ (1982:5).

Like abjection, uncanniness is structured around subjectivity, with ‘people differ[ing] greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling’ (Freud 2003:124). The uncanny emerges from ‘intellectual uncertainty’ (ibid:125). This is a striking parallel to Kristeva, who argues that ‘abjection is above all ambiguous’ (1982:9). For both, that which defies classification, disrupts borders, and refracts certainty, creates fear and anxiety, highlighting the fragility of self-identity. However, the uncanny has a moral dynamic: ‘[w]e can call a living person uncanny... when we credit him with evil intent’ (Freud 2003:149). Yet, evil being culturally-constructed does not exist in-and-of-itself. Kristeva recognises this, arguing that ‘[h]e who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts the law’ (1982:4). Thus, like immorality/evilness, the disruption of law and order is symbolic too (ibid). Whilst in certain contexts immorality is read as abject (Kristeva 1988:135), the paradigm is not premised on it.

The uncanny is not without its issues. Freud fails to address female responses, highlighting the male-centricity of psychoanalysis, and ‘relies on naturalized or essentialist categories as the basis for an explanation of the [uncanny]’ (Wilton 1998:177), failing to take socio-subjective forces into account (Hutchings 2004:76, Grant 2004:182, Powell 2005:16). Furthermore, Freud

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<sup>18</sup> The uncanny also being known as the *unheimlich* or ‘unhomely.’

<sup>19</sup> For Freud, unlike Lacan, castration is firmly linked to the phallus and thus fails to address the symbolism of violence towards females’ eyes and subsequent anxiety created.

only deconstructs the body within fixed, rigid contexts/instances (Dolar 1991:6), offering little room for some sort of open or contingent 'process' to take place; this has been a criticism of psychoanalysis in general (Connolly 2003:409, Carroll 2004:259). Psychoanalytic approaches to horror cinema that stress fixed gendered hierarchical responses run into similar issues (see Mulvey 1975, Williams 1992, 2004, Harré 1998:13-5). Abjection, however, transcends the symbolic to include the semiotic (Kristeva 1982:12). While Kristeva also falls foul of essentialising bodily structures during the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal/mirror stage in the characterisation of abjection (Kristeva 1982:32-3, Wilton 1998:179), her theory allows for wider psycho-social relationships that transcend Freud's fixed contexts of morality and fear, and considers wider cultural factors and other identity markers (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Lastly, to reconcile the uncanny with abjection, their respective weaknesses must be addressed. If the transmogrified familiar is uncanny and the absence of familiarity is abject then what are we to make of repeat viewing/experiences? This complicates not only the boundary structure between the uncanny and abjection, but discourses of abjection in general. Myriad interactions with horror in both aesthetic/narrative form and individual responses mean considering phenomenological dynamics. Whilst often neglected by others adopting Kristeva's work and her psychoanalytic underpinning (Keltner 2011:20), abjection also utilises phenomenology. Initially, this appears problematic, as psychoanalysis and phenomenology present two distinct, '[competing,] antagonistic disciplines' (Jiménez 2004:66, see also Shaviro 1993:138). Yet, whilst separately they 'fail to account... [for] the signifying process as a whole' (Keltner 2011:23), both reflect intersubjectivity and structures of meaning (Monti 2005:1028).

Moreover, whilst traditional psychoanalysis seems incompatible with phenomenology, 'new interpretative styles' (ibid:1017), such as Kristeva's, use of psychoanalysis as the starting point of subject formation, then develop identity in a constant 'being-in-the-world', informing subsequent experiences (ibid:1013, Jiménez 2004:75). For both approaches, that which evokes a response is meaningful. Yet, 'meaning and the subject are dependent on their socio-historical contexts, including even the discourses by which we understand them' (Keltner 2011:37). As Vivian Sobchack notes, 'the phenomena of our experience cannot be reduced to fixed essences; rather, in existence they have provisional forms and structures and themes and thus are always open to new and other possibilities for both being and meaning' (2004:2).

Julian Hanich (2010), whilst not explicitly referencing Kristeva, uses phenomenology to theorise audience responses to cinematic horror and thrillers. Arguing that audiences ‘are drawn to violence and the monster because we can see and hear things usually unseen and unheard’ (ibid:87), Hanich writes that the ‘ontological distance’ between diegetic and audiences’ worlds creates a safe audience passivity that fosters narrative immersion (ibid:87-9,94-5). Unlike medical/biological/neuroscientific approaches into audiences’ responses to horror (e.g. Prince 2004b:249, Powell 2005:22), Hanich ‘provide[s] a description’ of viewer experience (2010:46), taking a first-person perspective, arguing that film has pathic qualities that create affective responses (ibid:90-1). Consequently, immersion reduces, or vanishes, our ‘phenomenological distance’ to the text: ‘[t]he viewer experiences the phenomenological distance to the film as *vacillating* on a continuum from *growing* to *decreasing*, depending on the relative position beforehand’ (ibid:94), therefore eliciting emotive responses. Moreover, individuals can extend their phenomenological distance physically: looking away, covering our eyes or ears etc., (ibid:95), and/or by bringing to the fore other aesthetic qualities of the text such as form, materiality, or fictionality, thus looking *through*, rather than *into*, the film (ibid:96) in an attempt to reduce, or even extinguish, affect.

Additionally, extra/non-diegetic aspects also shape screen texts’ horror through their emotive/immersive and/or shocking qualities (ibid:170). Kristeva notes that, ‘[b]eyond the narrative, dizziness finds its language: music... not only as metaphor of an imaginary rival where the voice of the mother and of death are hiding’ (1982:146). Thus beyond the scopic remit of horror (see Saxton 2007), sound/music also causes abjection (Thrower 2011, Hutchings 2004:128-9,141, Lerner 2010:viii, Doane 2004:380-1) and is useful in reading the opening credits of TV horror (Abbott 2015), as I do in Chapter 3 (see page 168-69).

Saliently, ‘viewers have very different thresholds in terms of what they consider scary’ (Hanich 2010:32), reiterating abjection’s subjectivity. But while Hanich correctly identifies that horror ‘not only fulfil[s] various functions but also generate[s] diverse pleasures’ (ibid:6), often playing with audiences’ knowledge/expectations (ibid:161), he ultimately reduces these functions and pleasures into a meta-/grand-theory universally felt in a conscious manner. Therefore, he does not fully address the potential for differing responses to the *same* on-screen abjection. Furthermore, Hanich romanticises the multiplex theatre as the *only* genuine space for affective responses (ibid:54), failing to see how other media platforms and their texts shape phenomenological distance, such as binge-viewing a TV series (Mittell 2015b:39, Klein 2010,

Sconce 2004:98, Nelson 1997:34, Gomery 1983, Gillan 2011:95-6, Turner 2008:8), or the ludic qualities of video games (Perron 2009:8-9, Jansz and Martens 2005:337); these are discussed in Chapters 2 and 5. Furthermore, whilst Hanich acknowledges how paratexts shape responses, meaning ‘we never approach a film completely uninformed but always with a certain horizon of expectations’ (2010:162), his limiting of film-viewing as a sealed-off experience cannot account for transmedia and its phenomenological impact on audiences. Likewise, it fails to consider responses to the text *prior* to the screening, in say the marketing of a horror vehicle, for instance, or feelings felt *after* viewing, for instance when discussing the text with others. In effect, we need to account for the pre- and post-textual effects of abjection (discussed in Chapter 4). Lastly, while concurring with his argument that ‘[e]ach viewer has a personal tipping point beyond which he or she feels unable to bear the fearful experience’ (ibid:197), Hanich fails to consider (sub)cultural dynamics as experiential variables and/or collective identity politics intersecting with affective responses (evidenced in Chapters 5 and 6). Nor does he consider how audiences might read the abject imagery through an ideological or political prism. Therefore, beyond individual relationships with texts, attempts to locate responses within wider cultural contexts can also be made.

## **2.2. (Sub)Cultural Abjection: Kristeva, Douglas and Bakhtin’s Wider Contextualisation of Horrifying Bodies**

Having established the abject source and subsequent merging with symbolism, Kristeva explores abjection within wider culture. Embedded in language, prohibition of taboos are recognised as sin, again mapped onto the body (1982:14). Sin, like evil, is not intrinsic. Kristeva argues that ‘sin is [culturally-]subjectified abjection’ (ibid:128), citing Mary Douglas’s research on cultural rituals, order, and bodies. Douglas argues that ‘[t]here is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder’ (1966:2).

Just like ‘filth is not a quality of itself’ (Kristeva 1982:69), with abjection a mode of disorder (ibid:4) ‘persist[ing] as a rite of defilement and pollution’ (ibid:17), dirt-as-pollution symbolically destabilises order (Douglas 1966:4) relative to specific cultural contexts (ibid:44, 150). For Douglas, horror/anxiety is created by those in-between frames of identity, often marginalised, embodying disorder (ibid:118). Those outside of cultural and/or classificatory

borders are deemed threatening. Yet, Douglas offers departures from Kristeva's abject model. The latter explains that,

[w]hile they always related to corporeal orifices as to so many landmarks... constituting the body's territory, polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value. (1982:71)

However, Kristeva's corporeal description of abjection here is contentious. While excrement and menstrual blood are coded as pollutants, the latter waste fixes abjection onto the female body (ibid). While both sexes excrete 'and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpses etc.)' (ibid), the prioritisation of female abject waste over male ejaculation (see Rosengarten 2000:92) is contradicted by Douglas, who argues 'there are beliefs that each sex is a danger to the other through contact with sexual fluids' (1966:4).

Sperm and semen may be highly polluting/abject in the context of sexuality, arbitrarily attached to other discourses, e.g. class, race, age, etc., in the context of rape and/or other sexually transgressive acts (Clover 1992:82), and diseases (Elliott-Smith 2016:64-5). Contra Kristeva, the 'masculine abject body' paradoxically symbolises giving life through sexual fluids, whilst also eradicating life/identity via sexual acts (see Chapters 1 and 3).

If pollution is disorder, then ritualistic acts (re)frame and (re)establish a status quo of the body and society (Turner 1991:5). Douglas writes that '[f]raming and boxing limit experience, shut in desired themes or shut out intruding ones' (1966:78). Ritual, shaped by meaning to be read/experienced in certain ways, standardises 'values of a community, [and] mediates the experience of individuals' (ibid:48). However, like Kristeva, Douglas scrutinises morality in relation to pollution and culture: whilst '[a] polluting person is always in the wrong' (ibid:140), she writes, '[p]ollution rules, by contrast with moral rules, are unequivocal. They do not depend on intention or a nice balancing of rights and duties' (ibid:162).

However, instances of ritualistic cultural disorder also need to be addressed. Mikhail Bakhtin, a key influence on Kristeva (1982:138), argues that the grotesque body<sup>20</sup>, one of ‘gross exaggeration and hyperbole’ (1984:301), forms when the binary of the upper stratum of the body bestowing the heart, brain, and soul is subverted by the lower bodily stratum, the site of ‘defecation and copulation’ (ibid:317), linked to ‘the underworld’ (ibid:311). Representative of society’s topological structures, horror ensues through the grotesque as ‘the confines between the body and the world [collapse]’ (ibid:315-17). Yet, Bakhtin argues there are times when disruption to such order is discursively allowed/welcome within societies: the carnival (ibid:5-6).

The carnival-as-ritual creates a positive and/or socially-contained, temporary dis-order whereby ‘life is subject only to its law, that is, the laws of freedom’ (ibid:7). Empowerment is afforded to those relegated to the lowest hierarchical status, the Other(s), as the constraints of symbolic order are relinquished, offering ‘radicalism’ and ‘freedom’ (ibid), and providing ‘countercultural space[s]’ (Gelder 2003:82). However, ritualistic disorder may actually reaffirm social inequalities due to its *temporariness*. After the ritual is over, societal order/parameters are re-instigated. This is not to say everyone will return to order. Furthermore, some rituals are more exclusive than others, e.g. subcultural rituals (e.g. Sweetman 1999:165-7). Thus, when exploring abjection’s socio-political potential, consideration of cultural temporalities framing coding and meaning, and the limits of affect, must be made. Bakhtin aids my approach in addressing spaces for abject empowerment through the subversion of patriarchal law and hierarchy. This is most stark in Chapter 5’s analysis of ‘Imprint’ that sees female agency against the oppression of males occur in their monstrous form. Such abject empowerment, in turn, fosters a feminist reading of the text.

If the body remains ambivalent, polluted/polluting, grotesque, and/or abject, ‘powers are exerted on behalf of the social structure [to control and suppress the Other]’ (Douglas 1966:123). Positions of authority have traditionally been held by religious bodies (ibid:77, Kristeva 1982:17), but in more secular cultures/periods authority has been bequeathed to science, medicine, law, and political elites (see Chapters 1 and 2). Kristeva argues ‘[a]bjection

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<sup>20</sup> Although, counter-discourses of urine as an alternative medical/religious treatment (Lupton 2000:52-3, see also Mills 1991, Alter 2004), and/or artistic inversions of the body (and its waste) can re-code/destabilise the rigid stratification of the bodily binary (see Betterton 2006:87). While in certain contexts human urine has had a healing/positive discourse attached to it, I have been unable to find previous literature saying the same for human faeces.

– dietary, sanguine and moral – is pushed back with the chosen people, not because they are worse than others, but because in the light of the contract they alone have entered into, abjection appears as such’ (1982:107).

The existence and degree of abjection are thus predicated on the logic of separation/contact. This also works at smaller scales such as subcultures, for example, taste cultures and bodily excess (see Bourdieu 2010, Williams 2004:727, Hills 2005a:92). Debates on screening/framing the body in ‘excessive’ genres, such as pornography (Longhurst 2006:221), exploitation/paracinema (Sconce 1995:373-4, Jancovich 2008:154-55), and horror (Wood 1986:87-8), raise arguments over how the body is coded in relation to artistic beauty or somatic exploitation (Frey 2016). Kristeva also notes that religious rituals separate the ‘defiling element from society’ (1982:65). Considering fandom, the quasi-religious sacred objects that define communities may be abject to hegemonic society (e.g. video nasties and/or paracinema) but sacrosanct for fans. This fan-cultural coding of objects significantly complicates abjection, raising the consideration of how abjection can be aestheticized textually (Arya 2014), and how audiences may respond to said aestheticism.

Furthermore, abjection as embodied by certain identities threatening the hegemonic patriarchal self (Wood 1986:74-5, Dolar 1991:19) provokes debate about how some bodies are Other and the possibility of culturally elevating and ‘de-abjectifying’ them. This has been carried out in various cultural contexts in relation to gender (Neal 2010), race (Hook 2006), sexuality (Johnston 2002), illness (Wilton 1998), disability (McCabe and Holmes 2011) and deviations from socio-familial roles (Tyler 2009, Betterton 2006, and Longhurst 2006). However, fundamental misreadings of Kristeva are evident, reducing her approach to permanent, universal, monolithic, rigid binaries of that which is abject and subsequent responses to it (Tudor 1997:444), hence failing to take subjectivity and shifting contexts into account (Kristeva 1982:119). Focusing on the subject as the affective locus is vital, but addressing how those perceived as impure feel about being abject remains greatly neglected (Kristeva 1982:8, Linstead 1997:1122, Grant 2004:184). There is liminal subjectivity *in* abjection (Maylan 2017:278-9). This is explored textually in Chapter 1 and extrapolated to consider abject audiences in Chapters 4 and 6. Kristeva explains that,

[i]n consequence of this placement of subjective space, *judgment* henceforth prevails over the preestablished dichotomy between pure and impure... The culmination of that

interiorization doubtless lies in the proposition that impurity is a matter for the subject himself to decide. (1982:119)

This raises two points: firstly, the socio-subjective stance of the individual is an anchoring point by which personal identity politics frame and intersect responses to narratives/storyworlds. Identity markers such as class, sexuality, gender, and race can shape affective engagement with texts (hooks 1996:3). Moreover, such identity politics are inherently hybridised (Lury 2011:108, Lara 2012:347), e.g. black, female, and straight, and/or white, male and homosexual. Raising this point stresses the complexities of self, and thus the relationship it has to the Other. This leads to the second point: the self of the audience member forms fundamental, albeit shifting, relationships with what can be read as self and/or Other on-screen. The Other-*as*-abjection is pivotal as the diegetic threat and locus for affective responses from the audience, but is also a culturally-loaded vessel (Hutchings 2004:37-8, Levina and Bui 2013:1-11, Gelder 2000a:81-2, Guerrero 1993:56-7). This has led to ample work analysing horror fiction in relation to identity politics such as gender (e.g. Creed 1993a, 1993b, Greven 2011, Clover 1992, Blake 2012), class (e.g. Hartigan Jr 2005, Grant 1998, Walker 2012, Lönroth 2014), sexuality (e.g. Elliott-Smith 2014a, Lara 2012, Benshoff 1997), disability (e.g. Smith 2010), nationality (e.g. Blake 2008, Lowenstein 2005, Wetmore 2012), and/or race (e.g. Coleman 2011, Nama 2008, Gelder 2000b, Rony 2000, Kee 2015).

Whilst representations may reaffirm the existing order, this is not to say that being Other is inherently negative. As Kristeva notes, abjection's ambiguous state is not morally predetermined (1982:9). Being Other can be politically subversive against oppressive forces (ibid:4). Some may seek to identify with such positions/monsters (Haraway 1991:293). This is pertinent to horror that questions the conservative status quo (e.g. Wood 1986:84,121, Ryan and Kellner 1990a:179-82, Humphries 2002:113-8, Jancovich 1996:26). Concurrently, transmedia TV drama offers strong points of characterisation as 'characters, their image, and their inscribed mental lives serve as the constant throughout a series' endless differences and derivations' (Clarke 2013:48-9; Pearson 2009, O'Meara 2015, Wilcox. 2010:36). However, just as audience members' formulation of self is relational to the on-screen Other, so too is it relational to other diegetic characters (Thompson 2003:22), which can be accepted and/or negotiated (e.g. Acedo 2013), consequently effecting immersion and readings. As Booth remarks,

[n]ew types of criticism based on social networks... reveal a greater connection between characters and audiences. Instead of seeing characters as mere components of narrative, the social network mode reveals them as links in a network of multiple identifying “selves,” of which the viewers can also be a part. (2012a:310)

Character representations relative to audiences’ self-identity are further framed by heteronormativity, by which ‘discursive power [is] granted to the compulsory heterosexual matrix of western society’ (Dhaenens 2012:443). This ‘relies upon fixed notions of gender, sexuality and identity’ (ibid), and the structured absence – literal and/or symbolic – of certain bodies/identities (Nama 2008:10) results in audience demographics accepting or rejecting texts (Conlan 2016). For instance, there has been strong criticism towards the heteronormative human protagonists in *TWD* concurrent with marginalising black, particularly male, characters (Steiger 2011, Johnson 2015) (discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, I consider the representation of on-screen characters within the abject paradigm, negotiated via audiences’ abject spectrums. Furthermore, fan identity is linked to wider identity-formation, and when performed in certain fan spaces it may bring to the fore, negotiate, and/or disavow other forms of identity politics that frame and cut through affective relationships with fan object(s).

Moreover, the subject-in-process and shifting/multiple gazes mean that abjection must be polysemic. Even if collective performances evidence evaluative consensus, this cannot be empirically verified without audience studies because the sense of abjection ultimately resides in the subject (as chapters 4, 5, and 6 argue). I will offer an exaggerated example using the aesthetics of the abject body within shifting contexts of horror. Can one convincingly argue that the level of abjection/disgust/impurity of ‘nail, [and] hair clippings’ (Douglas 1966:150) is the *same* as ‘a wound with blood and pus’ (Kristeva 1982:3)? Yet because subjective/cultural filters are in-process, never finalised nor complete, macro-reductions of abjection fail to address this complex topic adequately. Likewise, because there is such variation within one discourse of embodied Otherness, so too the reaction from subjects can vary, shift, and change, and despite the potential longevity of responses, it is never certain they will be permanent.

We may *expect* to find blood and pus more abject than hair. Yet in some contexts or because of individual differences, this may not be so. For example, if someone had Chaetophobia – a phobic fear of hair – combined with the way the monstrous entities in many J-horror texts have used the aesthetics of hair as a marker of horror (Hand 2005:26, McRoy 2008:6, Balmain

2008:32-3) (see Chapter 3), this could lead to reading against the hegemonic grain, coding hair as just as, if not more, abject compared to blood or pus. Likewise, differing aesthetics of blood in varying contexts of horror (Kristeva 1982:90) can affect audience responses. For instance, where imagery is restrained, talked about, and/or suggested compared to being graphically visualised (Hills and Williams 2005:207), this can differentially frame images of abjection. Whilst TV horror has predominantly adhered to the former mode, the latter has now become far more common (discussed in section 3). Furthermore, whilst this section triangulates between horror texts, subjective responses, and the socio-cultural/political body within the abject paradigm, such arguments focus on single/initial experiential moments, neglecting multiple/reoccurring points of contact. This final point brings to the fore processes of repetition, the litany of abjection, and how this can foster shifting affective responses. Even where research has analysed ‘portfolios of interpretation [of violent films]’ (Hill 1997:4-5), these fail to consider changing reactions to abjection. Rather, gradations of response that account for the complexity of text, viewer, and cultural contexts are required that factor in self-identity, polysemic readings, shifting affects, subsequent experiences and repeat viewings. The next section therefore develops abject spectrums as an audience-based model that can incorporate individuals’ readings and reactions to on-screen abjection.

### **2.3. Abject Spectrums: The Affective Potential of Repetition and Ritualistic Contact with Horror Media**

Because previous literature uses prototypical bodies/responses, repeated contact with the mediated abject is not sufficiently addressed. Kristeva notes herself, ‘[t]he abject, mimed through sound and meaning, is *repeated*. Getting rid of it is out of the question... one does not get rid of the impure; one can however, bring it into being a second time [or more] and differently from the original impurity’ (1982:28). The consequences of this have been under-theorised in Fan, TV, and Horror Studies alike. They can be explored in several ways.

Firstly, the phenomenology of abject spectrums means that by using this model we can negotiate ‘[textual] properties in the light of how they make themselves known’ (Mathijs and Sexton 2011:16). Furthermore, it ‘offers the opportunity to balance traditional points of

attention in a reception study (such as box office [and viewing figure] performance, critical reception, marketing, and so on) with a focus on elements such as emotive overtones, degrees of investment, or formation of attachment. It also offers a possibility to investigate terms such as loyalty, time-wasting, excessive idolatry, or enthrallment in... reception' (ibid:17-8). As a spectrum, the model is concerned with the range of responses, and the degree and frequency to which they are present.

Secondly, repetition acknowledges the phenomenological affect of (previous) bodily experiences/responses, and thus shapes abjection. As Hanich notes, 'it is easily conceivable that a single viewer experiences the exact same scene very differently depending on the circumstances' (2010:23). I borrow the infamous example of

Hitchcock's unprecedented "special policy" of allowing no one into the theatre once the film [*Psycho* (1960)] had begun... [ensuring] that audiences would fully appreciate the shock of having the rug pulled out from under them so thoroughly in the surprise murder of the main character in the shower [and subsequent twist in revealing who the monster was]. (Williams 2002:73)

Hitchcock attempts to guide contact and response with abjection by only allowing audiences to see the film from the beginning. However, this experience can only function for the audience/viewer initially seeing the text. Consequently, whilst permission to enter the theatre was disallowed to latecomers, there was no sanction prohibiting viewers from seeing the text subsequent, multiple times. And knowing the horrific twist, the film is no longer new. We are aware of previous contact with the abject Other (Dick 2002:78). Thus, repeat viewing affects our relationship with the abjection of the text, reiterating the subject-in-process, and relating heavily to fandom (Duffett 2013a:26, Mathijs and Sexton 2011:3). We are not the same subject viewing the text the second time (or more) as we were on an initial viewing. Consequently, *how* we come into contact with that which is abject must be taken into account. Moreover, there is a tendency to assume audiences' responses to *Psycho* (Altman 1999:157, Hutchings 2004:88) without fully considering the range of responses and the degree to which they are engaged. The aim of the abject spectrum model is to better account for this.

True, we can consider the degree of affective corporeal responses as discussed by Hanich (2010), but audiences may also look at the thematic or wider subtextual readings of *Psycho*'s

screen abjection and Bates's monstrosity (Greven 2011:70, Wood 1986:77, Twitchell 1985:257,290, Fuery 2004:123-4, Staiher 2000:128). Alternatively, they may focus more on *Psycho*'s abject aesthetics and how these evoke quality status and/or reinforce Hitchcock's auteur status (Skal 1993:130-1, Hutchings 2004:146, Fenimore 2010, Belz 1972:145-8, Twitchell 1987:203, Verevis 2006:59). Furthermore, whilst these can be seen as compartmentalised readings/responses, by operating within the abject spectrum they can overlap and inform one another to varying degrees (see Barker et al 2016:23-4). We must, therefore, ask how it is that audiences are framing and shaping textual material (Hills 2015b:153).

Sticking with this example, we also need to consider the viewing experiences and contexts of *Psycho* beyond the movie theatre of 1960. The film is still recognised as an important piece of cinema (Skal 1993:323). Heterogeneous entry points into fandom have been acknowledged in Fan Studies (Hills 2013a:5-6, Jenkins 2006b:163): e.g. being a fan as long as one can remember (Booth 2013a:11); love-at-first-sight (e.g. my relationship with *Battle Royale*); initial dislike for the now championed text (e.g. Brooker 2002:xi), or delayed entry temporally misaligned with the majority of fans (Hills 2011:16-7). These phenomenological contexts can inform individuals' relationships with a text. Likewise, so can its reformatting into multiple DVD/Blu-ray editions with their potential for extra-textual features and paratextual packaging (Nakahara 2010:140), alongside the development of home viewing technology (Klinger 2006) to contextualise the film and shape viewing experiences.

We must also factor in that whilst *Psycho* is a landmark film it is not a lone text. Instead, it is part of wider inter- and intratextual nexus. It is based on Robert Bloch's 1959 novel of the same name (Carroll 1990:15, Verevis 2006:61), which took the real-life serial killer Ed Gein as its source material (Hutchings 2004:50, Nakahar 2010:141). Likewise, the film spawned three sequels during the 1980s that develop the narrative and offer backstory (Verevis 2006:59), a 1998 remake much to the disdain of fans of the original (ibid:58, Lowestein 2005:9, Blake 2008:118) and in 2013 A&E created the TV horror series *Bates Motel* which explores the formative years of Bates as a teenager and his relationship with his mother (Wells-Lassagne 2017:133-5). Therefore, which *Psycho* texts are consumed and in what order provides further phenomenological formation to the inter- and intratextual structuring of fans' abject spectrums. This informs my analysis of *TWD* and audiences readings of it (see Chapters 2, 5, and 6).

We can also locate *Psycho* within wider intertextual genre grids that shape the horror genre's use of abjection (Kristeva 1982:140). Jason Mittell argues that '[g]enres emerge from intertextual relations between multiple texts' (2004:8). *Psycho* has been heralded, and contested (Carroll 1990:38-9, Russell 1998:238), as one of the first modern horror genre films (Lowenstein 2005:9, Greven 2011:12), creating a cycle of similar movies (Conrich 1997:229, Hutchings 2004:2,29). Thus, abject spectrums are also phenomenologically informed by intertextual relationships of screen abjection. For instance, some horror fans' pleasure comes not from being scared when watching the film but from intratextual knowledge that links *Psycho* to the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Staiger 2000:179, Hills 2005a:170-1, Mathijs and Sexton 2011:201-2). Therefore, conceptualising genre as both a top-down and bottom-up device (discussed in detail in section 3) focuses attention on how audiences' abject spectrums can involve generic pleasures (Lipsitz 1998:208), horror affects (Hanich 2010), wider socio-political meanings (Russell 1998:237-40), and/or aesthetic value (Leffler 2000:260) salient to the genre.

Beyond the textual, intratextual and intertextual qualities of the text, we can also address the ritualistic temporalities discussed by Kristeva, Douglas, and Bakhtin, and the cyclical nature of culture that means at certain periods in various cultures, the populace is closer to abjection. For instance, the Day of the Dead in Mexico, the Gothic of Christmas time in the UK, and Halloween as a popular Western season, all temporarily increase proximity to objects, subjects, themes, and represented bodies we often thrust aside in order to live. With the latter two examples, horror texts become prevalent within everyday media and society. Such recurrence and semiotic framing of abjection at a textual, audience, and cultural level allows for more heterogeneous and dynamic forms of affective engagement.

For instance, Bakhtin writes that carnival spaces foster 'ritualistic laughter' (1984:6). This in itself may be abject (Wood 1986:93), undermining law and order. Conversely, it may be a response to the abject/grotesque as a means of subverting its threat (Bakhtin 1984:91): 'laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection' (Kristeva 1982:8). It may also be nervous laughter indicating ambiguity – where audiences are unsure *how* to respond – or even hysterical laughter, should language break down under the milieu of the phobic (ibid:41,45). This illustrates how responses to horror are not always affective abject reactions reduced to a singular emotive/bodily response (Hutchings 2004:82, Hills 2005a:4-5). This can be even more true for genre hybrids/subgenres such as 'horror-comedies' (Carroll 1999a:145), 'gross-out

films (Paul 1994:419), ‘black comedy’, and other genre amalgamations (e.g. Picart 2004:337-38). I offer a detailed consideration of this in Chapter 6 when I analyse how audiences’ image posts of ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’ reframe the abject horror of texts as instances of gross comedy.

Bakhtin’s grotesque body and Douglas’ cultural pollutants combined with Kristeva’s abjection highlight how coding and re-coding reiterates the constant process of bodily construction and reading. We cannot assume universalistic semiotics of, or responses to, the abject. Some audiences will scream, others will laugh, and some will do neither, concurring with, or refracting, generic markers. For whatever reason a response is produced, it can also be read as performative, having collective performance qualities. Such considerations necessitate the need to explore more fully aspects of audiences’ phenomenological experience in relation to abjection.

This also indicates the need to situate abjection and its aesthetics along a spectrum that functions across real, imaginary, and symbolic discourses (Kristeva 1982:32-3), structured around the subject-in-process, and accounting for individual differences that are not fixed/finished, whilst recognising that cultural contexts too are on-going. Such an approach would allow for gradation relative to abject objects/Others. This avoids the idealised responses and monolithic projections of self and Other, considering how audience subjectivity is located. My research will develop this abject spectrum model, extrapolating Kristeva’s theory to analyse twenty-first century TV horror texts, the cultures they are produced in, and the audiences that oscillate around them, providing a concept of abject readings that better serves the variety and intensity of responses to media content.

Whilst this part of my Literature Review has focused on complex facets of screen abjection and corporeal abject effects, I now consider the specific TV textualities that are tackled across the thesis. As mentioned, Hanich, echoing the sentiments of many others before and after him, privileges horror cinema over horror television. Yet, this thesis not only contests such claims, it seeks to explore twenty-first century TV horror in its own right. The following segment focuses on television as a technological platform, content created for it, how value has been ascribed and/or negated around certain types of televisual content, the influence of transmedia, and how all of this aids in constructing horror television as something quite distinct at the turn of the millennium.

### 3.1. New Beasts: The ‘Discursive Clustering’ of Twenty-First Century Versus Twentieth Century TV Horror

Traditionally, horror TV has been read as lesser to film aesthetically (King 1981:253, Magistrale 2003:182-3, King 2005a:111), as incompatible with discourses surrounding the home (Branston and Stafford 2003:87, Gunter et al 2003:1-2, Wheatley 2006:14), and/or as causing anxiety towards technology in the domicile (Sconce 2000:2, Newman and Levine 2012:17). This has shaped televisual horror into something quite distinct (Hills and Williams 2005, Johnson 2005:104, Wheatley 2006:55), revealing a cultural economy around the genre (Ellis 2002:103), and resonating with wider television/cinema binaries of quality<sup>21</sup>. However, there has been a marked shift in aesthetics and style of televisual horror from restraint and suggestion (Wheatley 2006:36) to graphic visuality, linked to wider discourses of quality TV<sup>22</sup> (Abbott 2012:29, Jowett and Abbott 2013:10-3). TV aesthetics, while not a genre in their own right<sup>23</sup> (Hills 2005b:190, Bianculli 2007:35-37, Cardwell 2007:32), are used as a schema by both industry and audiences when distinguishing texts<sup>24</sup> that are often juxtaposed to ordinary television (Cardwell 2007:26, Pearson 2009a:1, Scolari 2009:598).

As noted, Mittell argues that ‘[g]enres emerge from intertextual relations between multiple texts’ (2004:8). Taking a bottom-up perspective, Mittell evidences ‘how genres actually form and change over time – out of specific cultural practices of industries and audiences, not out of macro-structures’ (ibid:14, see also Hills 2005a:112,114, Altman 1999:19-20, 2003:29).

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<sup>21</sup> Traditionally, television/televisual technology has often been read polemically in relation to the aesthetics, technology, and consumption of cinema (Seiter 1999:1, Barker et al 2001:178, Nelson 2001:8, Pearson and Messenger-Davies 2003:107, Caldwell 2005:93-4), a devalued medium because of its places within the semiotics of ‘the home’, the material it disseminates (Ellison 1978, Giles and Jackson-Beck 1985:191), and being low in cultural capital (Sconce 2004:93, Ross 2008:53).

<sup>22</sup> Reflective of wider culture (Thompson 1992:230, Jameson 1991:2, 64), discourses of highbrow qualities have been conflated with the mass consumer culture, opening up/re-evaluating texts at both production and reception level.

<sup>23</sup> Despite others claiming it is so (e.g., Thompson. 1997:16, 2007:xvii).

<sup>24</sup> Markers included: high production values akin to cinema (McMurria 2003:83, Abbott 2009:14), visual style (Feuer 1984b:32-3), acting/cast quality (Feuer 2007:150, Hand 2010:40, Hunt 2003b:21), narrative content/complexity (Shimpach 2010:36), character development (Feuer 1984b:36-7, Nelson 1997:31), verisimilitude/counter-verisimilitude (Neale 1983 36-40, Feuer 1984b:36, Hunt 2005:3, Johnson 2005:38, Ellis 2002:13), reinforced brand value (Feuer 2007:148, Gillan 2011:21, Brundson 1997:112-13, McMurria 2003:71) and transmedia potential,

Mittell argues that genre circulates as cultural practices via ‘*definition, interpretation, and evaluation*’ through the formation of ‘*discursive clusters*’ that, whilst coherent, transmute and shift (along with their ‘meaning and value’) across spatio-temporal contexts (2004:16-17, and see Todorov 1975:6-7, Neale 1980:19, Altman 2003:34). By using discursive clusters<sup>25</sup> as textual strategies, not only can I analyse genre more holistically, addressing construction, value, use, and ideology embedded within wider culture(s), I can also trace genealogical ‘generic dominance’, recognising ‘previous incarnations’ (Mittell 2004:36). This highlights how genre texts can be reframed from low cultural status to greater prestige (or vice versa) over time and space (Nelson 1997:68, e.g. Chris 2007:137, Masters 2012, Newman and Levine 2012:59), allowing us to explore twenty-first century TV horror in relation to previous (and residual) incarnations of TV horror and against other horror media. Moreover, whilst highlighting the generic nature of television (Fiske 1987:109), this also indicates televisual hybridity (Feuer 1992:158, Spiegel 2004:4, Ellis 2002:102 Turner 2001:6, Collins 1992:331). Hybridising genres actually reinforces their respective attributes due to foreknowledge of these genres (Tudor 2003:8, Buscombe 2003:24). Thus, Mittell’s discursive clusters can be used to analyse texts that hybridise horror with other genres (see Chapters 1 and 3).

Part of examining differences in TV horror involves exploring what catalysts have provided opportunities for experimentation/departures, consequently buttressing further changes (e.g., Graves 2010:38-9). Firstly, certain cultural periods allow for opportunistic dissemination of genre texts. Mittell notes that genre, as cultural practices, extends beyond the experience of textual-receptive contact (2004:99-100). With horror, Halloween and Christmas are periods where the genre holds wider prominence in the media (Mathijs 2009, 2010, Ellis 2002:44, Gillespie 1995:20-1, Cooke 2015:136, Johnston 2015:149). Producers may be more likely to broadcast horror texts during this period to gain higher ratings<sup>26</sup>. This is a time for Halloween/Christmas ‘specials’ when audiences may be more inclined to watch horror. Likewise, these periods provide instances of event TV whereby particular texts take on heightened significance (Evans 2011:163), elevating them above the flow of television. For instance, season one of *The Walking Dead (TWD)* premiered over the Halloween period in 2010 in the US and UK (Surette 2010, O’Brien 2010:47<sup>27</sup>, Gray 2010:12). Similarly, *Dead Set* aired

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<sup>25</sup> Which Mittell compares to genre cycles.

<sup>26</sup> These spikes which, while not a new trend (e.g., BFI 2012), echo North American TV practices such as the sweeps (see Caldwell 2004:60).

<sup>27</sup> O’Brien reports that ‘[w]hen the pilot was shown on American cable channel AMC, it received 5.2 million viewers, a record for the channel, with the finale clocking up 6 million’ (2010:47).

in the UK beginning on the 27th of October 2008 over a five-night period on E4<sup>28</sup>, subsequently being shown in its entirety on the 31st of October 2009, again on E4<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, twenty-first century television is often constructed through seriality rather than closed episodes (Dawson 2011:43). The growing success of overarching serial storylines such as in *The Sopranos*, *The O.C.*, *24*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Lost*, resulted in primetime schedules embracing hour-long serial dramas (ibid:44), paving the way for texts such as *TWD* and *American Horror Story*. However, previous narrative structures are not entirely supplanted, with TV horror such as *Masters of Horror*, *Fear Itself*, and *Black Mirror* utilising anthology structures akin to those of *The Twilight Zone* and *Hammer House of Horror* (see Newman and Levine 2012:20-1,81, Tulloch 1990:90, Creeber 2001a:9-11, Feuer 2007:146). The digitality of new media and experimentation with televisual seriality, concurrent with the prevalence of ‘the intricacy of... multithread narratives and the space of... sweeping season[s] – and... story arcs [in serial dramas]’ (Dawson 2011:38-9), has resulted in what Max Dawson terms ‘monumental serials’. Dawson explains that,

Monumental serials earned television, its storytellers, and their network and studio patrons unprecedented levels of prestige, and in some instances significant profits as well. But on account of the unconventional storytelling techniques many of them employed, these programmes also exposed various sectors within the industry to heightened economic risks. Television networks have in many instances sought to manage these risks *textually*, employing a variety of supplemental texts to protect their growing economic and ideological investments in monumental seriality. (ibid:39)

This ‘monumentality’ shapes an aesthetic that revises TV horror, moving away from previous restraints to use ‘quality’ narrative structures and visceral spectacle. Seriality also resonates

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<sup>28</sup> Jon Rogers writes that, the original airing of the first episode gave E4 ‘its best performance... since June 2002... Gaining a multichannel audience of 1.4 million viewers/8.5%... [it] was the fourth most popular channel outperforming both Five and its terrestrial older sibling Channel 4’ (2008:4). That includes the ‘220,000 viewers who watched the’ program on at the later time of 11pm on E4+1 (ibid). *Dead Set* was also nominated for a BAFTA and sold ‘to four international territories’ (Broadcast 2009:12).

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, despite the praise and popularity of *Dead Set* in the UK, it was not officially imported (by channel IFC) into the USA, until *TWD* was being premiered in 2010. Again, it was shown not only during the Halloween period, but used as direct competition with its North American counterpart (Lewis 2010), indicating a twofold opportunistic dynamic.

with a ‘more respectful medium – the novel’ (ibid:44). Newman and Levine note, ‘[o]ne of the central strategies employed in discourses of legitimation is [TV being] compared with already legitimated art forms, such as literature and cinema’ (2012:4). With horror having an extensive literary and cinematic history, monumental serials provide a suitable format for twenty-first century TV horror in bids for quality status, e.g., *Penny Dreadful* and *Sleepy Hollow*. However, the ‘literary associations’ of monumental serials can also be their downfall, due to the (un)sustainability of viewing figures over time (Dawson 2011:44, Simpson 2010:12, Rundle and Simpson 2010:30-3). Spectacle is costly, and producers may be unhappy if excessive spending is combined with declining ratings: e.g., *Carniv le* was cancelled after two seasons (Adalian 2005). This may also account for *TWD*’s premiere season only being six episodes (Seidman 2010, Grant 2010:12-3), with the second season expanding to have an additional seven episodes once initial viewing figures were positive.

Quality material is often aimed at niche demographics that have sufficient economic capital, which they can subsequently turn into (sub-)cultural capital (Jancovich and Hunt 2004:27-8, Abbott 2010a:91). The perceived demographic of this quality audience is often young, male, middle-class, white and affluent (Feuer, 1984:25, 2007:147, San Martin 2003:33, Hart 2004:214, Einav 2004:221); this can be linked back to the digital divide that operates at various global/local levels and which negates certain undesirable audience demographics in opposition to this target audience (Mayo 2009:122, Seiter 1999:120-1, Kompare 2010:81, Dawson 2010:96-8, Whittle 2004:180-81).<sup>30</sup> However, hermetic relationships between quality/cult TV and audience type are somewhat reductive (see also the Conclusion page 299). Therefore, whilst rich narratives combined with spectacle-driven imagery can encourage dedicated fan tele-participation, they also offer mainstream appeal by not alienating ‘other/normal’ viewers (Ross 2008:177, Abbott 2009:11-12, Ndalianis 2009:190).

Another way financial risk is addressed is by aiming content at pre-existing fandoms. Hills defines neo-cult television as self-conscious television attempting to ‘appeal to historical,

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<sup>30</sup> This problematises claims that new media is in some way liberating/revolutionary (See Caldwell 2005:91, Poniewozik 2006, Axelrod 2010, Epstein 2010, Lavery 2011, Creeber and Martin 2009:5, Lotz 2007a:54, Hilmes 2009:46, Waterman 2004:64), as it highlights how Bourdieuan structures of capital still operate, contra Jameson’s claim (1991:3), within this digital paradigm (2010, see Hills 2009a:116, 2009b:117-8, McPherson 2002:187, Barker 1997:9, Hilmes 2002:12, Banet-Weiser et al 2007:8, Creeber 2009:17, Doyle 2010:1). This demographic has also been linked with new media technology (Boddy 2002:247, Klinger 2006:13), cult fandom (Thornton, 1995:115, Hollows 2003:37), and horror (Clover 1992:6), despite being a somewhat outdated construction (e.g. Cherry 1999, Abbott 2010b:1-2).

established audiences... [and] various, “mainstream” audience[s]’ (2013e:291) as it attempts to ‘produce “event” TV (i.e. “quality,” “cinematic” television)’ (ibid:297). Neo-cult TV is novel to new viewers whilst seeking to entice established fandoms (evidenced in Chapters 3, 4, and 5). This may involve utilising both cult and mainstream intertextual connections within the same text (e.g. Cherry 2012), and/or combining niche and wide-reaching marketing (e.g. Abbott 2012:28). With horror fans, and fans more generally, not being limited to a single cultural object (Cherry 2010:71), the industry can use horror to attract vast and established market demographics (Cherry 2002:47-8, Egan 2007:107). Concurrently, neo-cult TV is emblematic of cult television’s shift into more mainstream territories (Abbott 2010b:1, Pearson 2010:9, Hills 2010a:71-2, Newman and Levine 2012:29). Some texts see canonical horror film directors move to the small screen such as *Masters of Horror*, *Fear Itself*, and *South of Hell*, offering legitimacy through their cinematic legacy. Some remediate popular horror cinema such as *Bates Motel*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, *From Dusk til Dawn*, and *Scream*. Others remediate horror from different platforms such as comics (*TWD*), and literature (*Dracula* and *Hannibal*) (Wells-Lassagne 2017:23). Some employ common horror tropes, themes, and visuals popular with fans whilst utilising quality TV’s seriality, such as *American Horror Story* and *The Returned*, and we have seen the rise of zombie horror television concurrent with the wider popularity of the monster (Shakir 2015:6, Moore 2016:299-300), such as *Dead Set*, *In the Flesh*, *Z Nation* and *iZombie*. Such examples not only attest to the growth of horror on television but also indicate the wide variety of horror vehicles that have been produced.

Finally, Dawson notes that ‘[t]elevision’s myriad paratexts open entryways into their parent programmes, fostering encounters between audience and texts’ (2011:44). Paratexts are not confined to TV; they exist over a range of media whilst harnessing the digital potential of online/internet services. Such television often utilises transmedia in its storytelling dynamics and/or audience engagement (Evans 2011). Consequently, transmediality is central to this thesis’ analysis of twenty-first century TV horror.

### 3.2. Of Industry Gods and Technological Monsters: Transmedia Impacts on Twenty-First Century TV Horror

Elizabeth Evans defines transmedia TV texts ‘by both the text and the technology on which it is accessed, with both helping to shape each other and the experience of the viewer’ (2011:173-4). Exploring the industry and audiences’ use of digital/transmedia in the production, dissemination, and consumption of television drama (ibid:40) several synonyms illuminate key aspects of this televisual paradigm, and can be used to discuss overarching themes of current TV horror. Principally, television, now located within a wider digital media milieu, converges with other media (Hills 2007:44, Bar and Taplin 2007:81, Gerbarg and Noam 2004:xxi), concurrent with web 2.0’s consolidation<sup>31</sup> (Creeber and Martin 2009:3-4, Costales 2011). Television began as a mass-appeal/least objectionable media platform (Reeves et al 1996:25, Ellis 2002:48), and moved to targeting fragmented quality/niche demographics through the introduction of cable television and Video Cassette Recording (Reeve et al 1996:29-30, Rogers et al 2002:44, Feuer 1984a:3, Friedberg 2002:31, Kompare 2005:206). The current third phase of TV – TVIII – evidences socio-historical shifts in technology and content (Richards 2010:179), leading to deeper control of consumption by audiences (Williams 1990:86-7, Barker 1997:55-6, Banet-Weiser et al 2007:4, Caldwell 2004:42, Johnson 2010:138), and creating what Faltesek refers to as ‘TV everywhere’ (2011:412, e.g., Frankel 2012). As such, Catherine Johnson characterises the TVIII epoch ‘as the escalation of media consolidation with the emergence of large media conglomerates; the shift towards first-order commodity relations (where viewers pay directly for subscription or pay-per-view services); and an increase in the number of sites through which television can be distributed’ (2007:6). This provides a valuable schema when combined with other discourses such as government legislation, celebrity studies, and/or Fan Studies (Starks 2007, Hart 2010, Hills 2010b, Ellcessor 2012, Hilmes 2002:11). This symbiotic relationship between online/digital media and television informs Sharon Marie Ross’s ‘aesthetics of multiplicity’ where ‘the TV series becomes inextricable from the text of the Internet site’ (2008:22).

Aesthetics of multiplicity can shape interactions with technology and texts (ibid:46). Fans engage in ‘tele-participation’ which oscillates around discourses of truth and knowledge from

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<sup>31</sup> Such television is seen as emerging between the early to mid-1990s (Reeves et al 2007:89)

multiple perspectives (ibid:24), with multiple media technologies being central to content and consumption (Stein 2011:130-2, Hills 2010c:105). Additionally, texts are created that ‘offer this experience of multiplicity through continuing serial structures and ever-expanding mythologies’ (Ross 2008:61). Building on a text’s ‘hyperdiegesis’; the ‘vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within a text’ (Hills 2002a:137) (see Chapter 2 and 5), transmedia storytelling ‘functions to a specific end with drama programming... [being used] to expand the fictional world of a series away from the television episodes’ (Evans 2011:10, see also Caldwell 2004:52, Jenkins 2006a:20-1, Sconce 2004:95).

M.J. Clarke argues that the ‘streamability’ of transmedia across a range of media platforms is used by producers of franchise/blockbuster television to create ‘tentpole TV’ (2013:4). Not only does this encourage audiences to consume texts across a plethora of media, but from an industry perspective, it is a strategy for reducing financial risk (ibid:4-5). Often aimed at fan cultures (ibid:8), the ‘visual and narrative sophistication of tentpole TV in all its manifestations begs... [for] more minute [textual] analysis [from its audience]’ (ibid:7). Yet, while each ancillary iteration adds to fans’ deep knowledge, such additions must not disrupt the TV text’s underlying themes and ideologies, or subvert primary characterisation. Thus, tentpole TV both expands and concentrates the storyworld, stressing the need to analyse parent and secondary texts (ibid:63) (see Chapter 2). Accounting for these textual aesthetics and rich narrative matrixes, I must consider how TV horror’s transmedia potential results in audiences engaging with textual extensions across other media, and how such engagement feeds back into meaning-making and affective responses to the TV text itself (Evans 2011:40) (see Chapters 2, 3, and 5).

Similarly, Jennifer Gillan refers to the relationship between television and new media using the twenty-first century industry model ‘Must-Click TV’; an emerging strategy for American networks to compete with ‘quality’ subscription channels<sup>32</sup> (2011:10, 80). Must-Click TV ‘utilizes standard notions of televisual flow between its broadcast network’s programs and across its scheduling grid and capitalizes on emergent modes of overflow [such as digital platforms]’ (ibid:1), keeping the text constantly in ‘circulation’, and reinforcing brand identity/image (ibid:4, see also Selznick 2009:181, Feuer 1995:111, Rogers et al 2002:43,

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<sup>32</sup> Others have recognised this discursive practice under the title ‘TV 360’ (Ross 2008:228, Grainge 2009:102, Doyle 2010:2-3).

Grainge 2008:5-6, 2009:97). Therefore, transmedia, as an industry strategy, is important across UK and US TV forms such as basic cable, subscription/premium cable, and public service broadcasting (Bignell and Lacey 2014:13-4).

Echoing this relationship between text, technology, and viewer, Henry Jenkins defines this period as the age of ‘convergence culture,’ seeing a collision between old and new media, macro- and micro-structures, and a readdressing of power<sup>33</sup> (2006a:2; de Sola Pool 1983:6-8, Caldwell 2004:47), as well as acknowledging active audience participation, or ‘viewsing’ (see Harries 2002:172, Gillan 2011:31, Vellar 2011:189, Lee 2009:1011-2). Audiences both watch and *use* texts within the digital media landscape, which may lead to subsequent fan-productions (discussed in Chapter 6). With convergence culture there is a surplus of content (aesthetics) and platforms (technology) available within the home that directly influences how television is made and consumed (Caldwell 2004:48-9, 2005:95, Shimpach 2010). Repurposing texts (both old and new) across a range of media (Richardson 2010:180, Klinger 2006:8, Carey 2004:188) fosters ‘narrative elaboration of the text... allowing the narrative arc of the show (and the narrative reception of the show) to “continue” outside of the show itself’ (Caldwell 2004:52). This culminates in ‘[t]ransmedia storytelling...[as] the art of world making’<sup>34</sup> (Jenkins 2006a:20-1, Sconce 2004:95). Collectively, these models use ‘forensic fandom’ as a discursive strategy to maximise viewing figures and retain loyal fans (Edwards 2012:2), finding ‘a natural home on online forums’ (Mittell 2009a:129-30, Ross 2008:176).

An exemplar of this that has acquired much academic attention is the American TV series *Lost* (Gray 2008:80). The text can be explored across multiple platforms and utilises digital media as a means of expanding hyperdiegetic space that appeals to the ‘technologically savvy’ cult fan (Pearson 2009:1). For *Lost* to sustain a heightened presence within the abundance of convergence culture, standing out from rival texts across myriad media technologies, branding is essential in attaching connotations to both text and industry/channel (Caldwell 2004:54, Selznick 2009:181, Feuer 1995:111), symptomatic of the era (see Jameson 1991:85, Grainge 2008:5-6). As such, branding tied to quality discourse is multifarious, evoked via innovative

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<sup>33</sup> However, Hills notes that transmedia convergence took place earlier during non/less digital epochs (2007:44, see also Bordwell 2009). Jenkins subsequently recognises this, arguing that, ‘the contemporary moment of transmedia has heightened our awareness of these earlier moments of authors unfolding stories across media’ (Jenkins 2009), clarifying the paradigm (see Jenkins 2007, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> World making as an extra/paratextual act having a pertinent link with wider discourses of cult media (see Eco 1998 and Jenkins 2007).

aesthetics and images, narrative content and trajectories, and engaging with various audience types. All of which work to similarly shape TV horror in the twenty-first century.

Commenting on this, Mittell argues such forms of complex TV have drastically changed storytelling practices (2015a:2), noting '[w]hat was once a risky innovative device, such as subjective narration or jumbled chronology, is now almost a cliché' (ibid, see also Campora 2014:1-2). While graphic TV horror may have begun as unusual/risky at the turn of the century in texts such as *Carnivále* (2003), *Kingdom Hospital* (2004), *Masters of Horror* (2005), and *Dexter* (2006), near the end of the noughties the genre gained more prominence with *Dead Set*, *Fear Itself*, *Being Human*, and *True Blood* all coming out in 2008. Subsequent popularity in the 2010s has encouraged the corpus of texts to grow rapidly, pushing aesthetics and narratives in attempts to remain innovative especially with the mainstream global popularity of *TWD* (Smith 2017a:7). This is not to state that visual and narrative innovation did not occur in TV horror prior to this (see Jowett and Abbott 2013:xi-xiii, Abbott 2013:vii). However, whereas horror was previously downplayed as a genre marker, hybridised with more acceptable TV genres (Hills 2005a:112), '[m]ore recent television shows are specifically categorized and marketed as TV horror' (Calvert 2014:186), attracting both pre-sold/niche fans and wider quality audiences (Spigel 2004:4, Wells-Lassagne 2017:23) that stress the abject visuality of TV horror (Jowett and Abbott 2013:10-1).

Furthermore, complex TV is 'less of a linear storytelling object than a sprawling library of narrative content' (Mittell 2015a:7) over a transmedia web. The 'committed viewing patterns encouraged by a complex narrative and visual style encourage transmedia engagement' (Evans 2011:13), used as a marker of quality (ibid:106). This form of television in both its narrative intricacies and digital formatting stresses the practice of repeat viewing – itself pivotal to abject spectrums, as I have previously argued. Barbara Klinger suggests that the fact that 'a film cannot be adequately consumed on the first viewing is the bedrock proposition of aesthetic motivations for re-viewing' (Klinger 2006:157, 2010:11). This is more so for some television due to texts' length, narrative breadth/depth, and character development (Gray 2009:235, Gillan 2011:83). Initial viewing only provides a partial picture of affective interaction<sup>35</sup>, whilst

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, Helen Wood (2007a, see also 2005, 2007b) looks to combine text-reader and product-user models addressing transmedia usage/reception in the home. Exploring the 'text-in-action', Wood looks at the phenomenological experience of digital television in 'real time' (2007a:493). While the approach has the

repeat viewing aids in the process of acquiring evaluative knowledge used as (sub-)cultural capital (Klinger 2010:11, 2011:198, Uricchio 2011:29-30, Hills 2007:48). However, this is not always why we may repeat-view. We may re-watch championed texts to enjoy other qualities. For example, watching an old favourite because you are tired, it is easy to view, or you do not have to deal with the unknown. This is vital when questioning the hypothesis that watching horror creates negative emotions (Hills 2014a), reiterating the emotive elasticity in repeat viewing. Repeat viewing galvanises ‘quasi-familial status’ between viewer and text (Klinger 2010:139), providing ‘a foreknowledge of the narrative that is a source of a series of pleasures... [This enables] both comfort and mastery. Foreknowledge of the story alters the narrative experience’ (ibid:152-54).

Furthermore, if traditional dynamics of television looked at the temporal ‘shelf-life’ of texts via syndication potential (Caldwell 2004:48), transmediality considers texts’ ‘after-life’ through ‘the continued circulation... and repurposing of programming beyond... initial iteration’ (Shimpach 2010:4, see also Ellis 2002:163). The majority of television DVDs/Blu-rays sold have already been seen, indicating both economic and cultural investments in repeat viewing (Caldwell 2008:167, Dawson 2010:96). Moreover, online streaming sites such as Netflix and Amazon Prime (Jenner 2016) provide ‘a culture of replay’ through the ability to allow audiences to pause and repeat television as they so wish (Klinger 2010:4). Additionally, DVDs allow the storing and dissemination of extra-textual material which can be converted into (sub-)cultural capital (Klinger 2006:73). As such, ‘the DVD “intratext” – “extras,” such as “making-of documentaries and “audio-commentaries” are now equally defining characteristics of the format. This crucially impacts how one conceives the textuality of film and television texts on DVD and the particular textuality of DVD itself’ (Bennett and Brown 2008:6) (discussed in Chapter 4).

However, whilst transmedia television has become the hegemon in textual production, dissemination, and consumption, it is not universal (Gillan 2011:101,220, Doyle 2010:18). Some TV horror pertains to older forms of television (Hills 2010c:24, Boddy 2002:244-46). For example, the BBC’s *In the Flesh* (analysed in Chapter 1) is a two-series British horror drama that was contained to the televisual medium. Moreover, certain transmedial content such

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ecological validity of examining users within their home and moves away from industry statistics, the study ignores any contact before or after these moments of experience, thus only giving snippets of interaction.

as *TWD* webisodes, tie-in novels, and/or video games are limited to particular regions/countries (Catania 2015:205-6, Scott 2013:326) (discussed in Chapter 2 and 5). Similarly, the source text for adaptations may be available to some audiences but not others. For instance, the Japanese/American co-production of *Masters of Horror* episode ‘Imprint’ (analysed in Chapter 3), directed by Miike Takashi, is based on the Japanese novella *Bokke Kyoutei* by author Shimako Iwai. However, the latter has yet to be translated into English, meaning ‘Imprint’ is a multi-formatted text in Japan (book and TV), but not elsewhere (TV only). Likewise, cultural contexts frame the transmedia potential of texts but also shift meaning around these texts for different audiences, evidencing how ‘audience responses to emerging transmedia texts are not uniform’ (Evans 2011:16). Some audiences even reject the transmediation of texts and platform relocation (ibid:66). Thus, considering the limits of transmedia remains vital when analysing my case study texts (see Methodology and Chapter 4). This also brings to the fore the necessity to both move away from US TV horror, but also to consider how the international flow of TV horror – both formal and informal – functions via transcultural fandoms.

### **3.3. Not Just American Horror Stories: Transcultural Circuits of Non-Anglophonic TV Horror and its Transnational Value**

Texts do not operate the same way across cultures (Barker 1997:7, Dahlgren 2000:7, Tudor 2003:7). This has often been ignored when overstating globalisation (Doyle 2010:41, Selznick 2008:1, Wai-ming Ng 2008:143). Furthermore, it ignores how other cultures influence the West/Western audiences (Sinclair et al 1996:28, Phu 2010:45, Conrich 2010:1). Imported television can carry (sub)cultural cachet reflected in bidding wars between channels (Grainge 2009:98-99), and subsequent dissemination as quality imports that activate ‘new meanings’ (Gillan 2011:171; Johnson and Turnock 2005:198, Cooke 2005:145-6, Hills 2002a:36).

Denise Bielby and C.L. Harrington examine ‘products that are especially successful globally [and the reasons for this]’ (2008:19). Focusing on ‘traditional television screens’ (ibid:xii, see also Sconce 2004:95, Lotz 2010:188-9, Dawson 2010:96), they analyse structures of transnational TV’s recordings within new locales from both macro-/top-down and micro-

/bottom-up perspectives. They note that particular generic elements/emotional themes<sup>36</sup> travel well when articulated through action (2008:50-1), such as via soap opera. Thus, genre is an important industrial device at local/national *and* transnational levels (2008:73, 77-8, Selznick 2008:11).

Linking melodrama with action resonates with Williams' (2004) theorising of genre, excess and the body, indicating a possible reason why horror, as action on/via the body, travels well globally. Likewise, Shawn Shimpach argues 'spectacular special-effects, visceral actions, and fascinating visuals... [are popular] across national, cultural, and linguistic barriers' (2010:26; Pearson and Messenger-Davies 2003:106, McMurria 2003:77). Spectacle-heavy graphic TV horror emerging at the turn of the millennium may not only bid for cinematic quality, but also global appeal, further stressing political economies of television production. Yet we must also consider textual alterations when TV travels.

Dubbing and subtitles have their own discourses, acting as tools by/for audiences in understanding what is being said by characters (Koolstra et al 2002:327, Knee 2008:132, Diffrient 2008:165, Gray 2009:225). Furthermore, a fundamental consideration for both TV market buyers and sellers are the literacy rates of purchasing countries. Specifically, literacy is a precondition for subtitling, but not dubbing (Bielby and Harrington 2008:152). Often dubbing may be read as camp and/or funny (Sontag 2009:275-290). Conversely, subtitling can be a marker of quality (e.g., *The Killing* and *Spiral* aired on BBC4 linked to the channels' cultural cachet; see McCabe 2011a, 2011b, Hills 2012). It may also be used in indigenous texts as a marker of non-mainstream quality<sup>37</sup> (e.g. Shimpach 2010:187, Xu 2008:194). While translation creates meaning (Dwyer 1999:176), *where* translated material is disseminated also frames the text. Moreover, online media expands the 'international visibility' of television (Newbury 2009:207, Wada-Marciano 2009:31), questioning Noam's prediction that '[i]nternet TV will be strongly American' (2004:242).

Furthermore, (re)formatting transnational television is also salient. Parts of imported texts can be edited or censored because of cultural concerns (Bielby and Harrington 2008:135-6, Jowett

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<sup>36</sup> They argue soap opera has been successful internationally because content relating to 'family, romantic relationships, emotions, and conflicts seems to hold universal appeal. Through the reliance on melodrama as a stylistic form, action located in the real world is pushed toward the symbolic activity of metaphor.' (2008:50-1)

<sup>37</sup> Both *Lost* and *Heroes* use subtitling for characters speaking in a non-English language

and Abbott 2013:9, Burr 2003, Hill and Calcutt 2007:63-4).<sup>38</sup> Additionally, texts may be censored in domestic markets but not globally e.g., the *Masters of Horror* episode ‘Imprint’ was not aired in the U.S., but was shown in the UK (Hendershot 2011:150) (discussed in Chapters 3-5). Likewise, the global market and necessity to appeal to myriad audiences shapes narrative format – e.g. texts can be structured around a certain number of episodes to avoid financial risk and/or fit the dominant American television market’s structure (Shimpach 2010:178). Transnational preferences also shape indigenous texts. This is complicated/reiterated by transcultural funding where certain stipulations are required from non-native bodies (McMurria 2003:78, Shimpach 2010:25-6). Thus TV texts can function, at some level, transnationally before they have even been exported/imported.

However, whilst Bielby and Harrington identify that ‘distribution helps connect production and consumption to one another and *transform* TV texts and their meaning in the process’ (2008:147), as well as how middle-range factors such as scheduling shape transnational meaning (ibid:97; Sinclair et al 1996:15, Tulloch 1990:49, Barker 1997:154), they neglect to consider the reformatting of TV. Focusing on globally-popular television fails to understand how niche television can travel around the world via other formats (Hilmes 2009:53). This skews discourses of quality/popularity, and for whom they can operate. Hills notes that ‘ordinary’ television is less likely to be reformatted into a ‘bounded and discrete’ text (2007:46-7). Some genres<sup>39</sup>, Hills argues, ‘do not transfer well to DVD’ (ibid:50), being linked to femininised cultural discourses (Kelly 2011:125; Brunson 1997:111, Austin 2002:132-3 Newman and Levine 2012:10), and thus culturally devalued (Bonner 2008:175-6, Feuer 1984b:56, McCabe and Akass 2007:73). Masculinised quality/cult television, on the other hand, is canonically positioned as a ‘proper’ artefact (Hills 2010a:68), culturally elevated via its (re)formatting (Bennett and Brown 2008:3, Klinger 2008:21,2010:10-11, Bertellini and Reich 2010:103-4). This is both useful and problematic. While DVD allows for extra-textual material and close readings (Hills 2007:53-4, Newman and Levine 2012:40), it also allows for the acquisition of imports never aired/broadcast, complicating ‘traditional’ rituals of viewing (e.g., Brooker 2009:60, Gillan 2011:87, Barker 1997:13, Ellis 2002:43, Nelson 1997:175, Hills

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<sup>38</sup> For example, Catherine Johnson notes both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off series *Angel* were cut/edited when imported from the US to the UK because certain aspects of content were deemed unsuitable for British media (and its viewers) by industrial powers (2005:125-60), as was *Millennium* by ITV for similar reasons (Rixon 2003:56).

<sup>39</sup> Hills list such ordinary genres (see Bonner 2008) as ‘TV quiz and game shows, daytime chat shows; light entertainment series; a range of sitcoms; [and] even many soaps [that are linked to the ‘dailiness’ of television].’ (2007:50)

2002a:178). Texts can be bought by consumers from both general and specialist companies/online retailers, and because media technology can read DVDs from multiple regions, texts can be consumed transnationally, yet via a different process than that described by Bielby and Harrington. New media technology and grassroots dissemination/acquisition (Shimpach 2010 51-2, Hills 2007:50, Robson 2010:219, Lobato and Thomas. 2015:7) facilitate what Ramon Lobato refers to as 'shadow economies'. These are non-official channels of acquiring texts that take on new value/meaning for both the consumption of media and the texts themselves (2012:11, 18, see also Hills 2002a:35), and that occur 'within capitalist economies but outside the purview of the state' (ibid:39-40). Lobato adds that 'many informal circuits have temporal qualities which differ from those of conventional distribution structures' (ibid:43). This is exemplified in East Asian piracy and the rise of VCD technology (Moran 2004:7, Hu 2004:209, Davis and Yeh 2004:227). Iwabuchi writes that, '[t]hrough the illegitimate East Asian trade in VCDs, Japanese TV dramas have gained new transnational cultural meanings and connections outside of Japan.' (2004a:8). Hu explains that 'VCDs have been widely marketed in most Asian countries, excluding Japan' (2004:205)<sup>40</sup>. In order to appeal to transcultural audiences, pirated material uses high production values and aesthetics in its packaging in a bid to construct quality/'official' discourse<sup>41</sup> (Lukács 2010:182). This reformatting of the ephemeral J-dorama, Davis and Yeh argue, renders them 'born-again in time and place... This happen[s] in spite of Japanese producers and networks' (2004:229). The time-lag of reformatted texts as they move from Japanese ephemerality to East Asian artefacts affects their relationship to Western fandom; the spatio-temporality of transnational texts' flows can be multi-routed. Thus, for Hu, 'the aura of self-contained Japanese locality is disrupted when... [texts] are embellished with Chinese subtitles and re-packaged' (2004:222). Downloading can allow 'ordinary' texts to be reformatted in their entirety. Such nuances are explored in Chapter 4 via 'Only-Click TV'.

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<sup>40</sup> Hu suggests that a possible motive for lack of Japanese VCDs is their preference to remain gatekeeper of indigenous material, which they format and region-lock on such media technology as DVD/Blu-Ray, and are the leaders in this respective market (ibid:206, Iwabuchi 2002:24)

<sup>41</sup> This has created ambiguity around the legal stature of these texts (Davis and Yeh 2004:229, Lukács 2010:182), causing e-stores such as *HKflix.com* to be closed down for selling of this material (Bernstein 2011).

### 3.4. Accessing Twenty-First Century TV Horror: Only-Click TV

Evans notes that '[u]nofficial distribution networks have become the most prominent example of digital transmediality's impact on the reception of televisual material' (2011:44), creating Only-Click TV. Whereas Must-Click TV 'utilizes standard notions of televisual flow between its broadcast network's programs and across its scheduling grid and [online platforms]' (Gillan 2011:1), Only-Click TV has at one point or another been aired via traditional broadcasting, but through spatial and temporal shifting vis-à-vis the internet/digital media it becomes available to the viewer purely via digital, non-broadcast means. A given text will not be Only-Click TV to all viewers, stressing the fragmentation of texts in time and space (Lobato and Thomas 2015:18). Transnational television offers a perfect example of this, as domestic content broadcast traditionally may only be available in another country as Only-Click TV (Lobato 2012:82, Evans 2011:164).

Key to this is the procurement of texts. Acquiring Only-Click artefacts may be no easy feat, thus the practice itself can yield (sub)cultural value (Lobato 2012:6, 15), and galvanise fan responses (Benjamin 1992:61, Bjarkman 2004). Moreover, production, reproduction and consumption have become blurred via digital media (Harries 2002:172, Gillan 2011:31, Vellar 2011:189, Lee 2009:1011-2, Richardson 2010:180, Klinger 2006:8, Carey 2004:188). Making a text available to others via uploading/fan-subbing/distributing<sup>42</sup> that would otherwise *not* be accessible can be read as a mode of creative production (e.g., Denison 2011:456, Costales 2011, Lee 2010:238). Thus, gatekeepers/quasi-producers can activate subcultural capital through controlling paths of acquisition as well as acquiring texts themselves (Jääskeläinen et al 2011:144, Denison 2011:450-1, Lobato 2012:16, Hills 2002a:40). These rituals disrupt traditional hegemonic hierarchies of TV distribution (Vellar 2011:187, Denison 2011:462-3, De Sa 2011:4), complicating discourses of globalisation (Lee 2011:1132).

Building on such qualities, '[d]ownloading... allows viewers to transcend their local broadcasters' delivery schedules' (Gray 2008:90). Fans of current active texts may illegally

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<sup>42</sup> Fansubbing is when active audience members create subtitles to international texts, often because 'official' subtitles are not available, the material takes too long to be imported into the country, or the subtitles available (officially/unofficial) are not to a high enough standard/quality.

download because they simply cannot wait for dissemination by *slower* traditional means, or because a text is unavailable in their territories (Lukács 2010:183-7). As such, Only-Click practices have proven popular with TV dramas from North America, the UK, and Europe (Marshall 2009:41, Bury and Li 2013:16, Evans 2011:147), with TV horror *TWD* evidencing extremely high levels of downloading during times of traditional broadcast (Wallenstein 2015, Spangler 2015, Sweney 2014, 2015).

Downloadable distribution also creates ‘secondary audience[s]... The distinctive quality of this secondary audience is the level of commitment of its members, which has driven them to download and watch programmes in a more user- and time-intensive way’ (Marshall 2009:41-2). The level of commitment linked to acquiring texts through Only-Click means such practices have subcultural capital attached to the liminality of textual acquisition, fostering engagement with ‘just-in-time fandom’ (Hills 2002a:178) (explored in Chapter 4). Matt Hills explains

that practices of fandom have become increasingly enmeshed within the rhythms and temporalities of broadcasting so that fans now go online to discuss new episodes immediately after the episode’s transmission time... in order to demonstrate the “timeliness” and responsiveness of their devotion. (ibid)

Just-in-time fandom is a ‘*community of imagination*’ (ibid:180) that ‘constitutes itself precisely through a common affective engagement, and thereby through a common respect for a specific potential space’ (ibid). Hills evidences value in the liminality of fan engagement because ‘rather than using... the web merely to confirm academic hypotheses (of audience “activity”, of subcultural “identity” etc.), it may be more significant to address *online spatiotemporal transformations in what it means to be part of a “cult” audience as a commodity-based community*’ (ibid:179-80). Thus, Only-Click, over delayed traditional broadcast, creates affective intensity for fans, also fostering transcultural online fan engagement as audiences from around the world discuss, deconstruct, theorise and hypothesise TV they have just viewed (Evans 2011:162). Moreover, Only-Click affords transcultural fans material *never* broadcast in their indigenous homes (Schneider 2003a:11, Einhorn 2004:171, Evans 2011:164). Likewise, audiences who live abroad may seek ‘home’ material unavailable via traditional broadcast in the place where they currently reside (ibid:169-70, Jenkins 2006b:162, Appadurai 2003:257). As such, Only-Click can raise the symbolic value of a text, subverting mainstream media, and creating exclusivity for those who obtain it (Fiske 1992:45, Lee 2011:1138).

Therefore, it is rarely as simple as Jenkins states: ‘once you distribute via the web, television instantly becomes global’ (2006a:254; Van Tassel 2001:27, Pepper 2004:110). Despite digital media being a space of abundance (Uricchio 2011:24), this does not create a free, open field of consumption (Dovey 2011:139-141). Collecting is a heterogeneous act, highlighting the meaning-making, use-value, and performance-based functions that these practices are bestowed with (Hills 2002a:xiii, (Benjamin 1992a:63, Arendt 1992:46-7, Gourgouris 2006:220). Moreover, the same individual, at different moments, may utilise different modes of acquisition, illustrating the complexities of collecting, and how digital media extends this diverse practice, providing various routes for gaining (sub)cultural capital. This remediation allows for a revaluation of aesthetics of multiplicity and questions the traditional cultural values assigned to areas such as TV horror (Hastie 2007a:171). Only-Click practices also move away from cherry-picking commercially-popular television not necessarily representative of the plethora of material within the digital television terrain (Hills 2010c:103).

Allen and van der Berg write that, ‘DVD box sets of TV serials and illegal, digital versions available for download [mean that] serialization has a complex set of transmedia implications that affect, and emerge from, specific modes of serial production’ (2014:3). Only-Click acquisition, like DVD box-sets, ‘drastically changes the serial experience, as screen time becomes far more controllable and variable for viewers’ (Mittell 2015b:35), facilitating binge viewing ‘which fosters a more immersive and attentive viewing experience’ (ibid:39; Uricchio 2011:132, Newman and Levine 2012:4), as well as encouraging repeat viewing (Kompere 2010:80-3, Carter 2004:144, Thomas 2002:82-84). Thus, in considering Hanich’s textual immersion model (2010), the serial horror narrative, when conflated into a short period, could reduce phenomenological distance as audiences can continually work through the story without distraction, and without the temporal gaps instigated by industrial structuring of the text. Therefore, ‘[c]ompiling a serial allows viewers to see a series differently’ (Mittell 2015b:39), and (re)shape viewers’ abject spectrums.

But while the transmediality of Only-Click TV subverts the ‘ephemerality or impermanence’ (Grainge 2011:3) central to television’s previous conceptualisations (Evans 2011:148), I also consider relative weaknesses of the model (addressed in Chapter 4). Whilst Only-Click methods might put the text in the hands of audiences with a much-decreased time-lag, it comes to them without extra-textual features, and not necessarily as the final version. The extra-

textuality of DVDs (Bennett and Brown 2008:6, Brown 2008:83, Caldwell 2008:157,160,165-6), moreover, can also be used as a strategy to combat piracy by offering paratexts less readily available, or not at all, digitally (Kompore 2006:352-3), stressing the ‘thrill of acquisition’ linked to an official release (Bennett and Brown 2008:7). DVDs can provide extra scenes, thus additional information central to subcultural capital and fans’ affective engagement, further illustrating the complexities of the transmedia paradigm that I locate twenty-first century TV horror within. Thus, while Only-Click offers certain advantages to fans in terms of textual acquisition and reduced time-lag, its disadvantage lies in its lack of additional material present in official formats.

Beyond digital media aiding in the dissemination and consumption of twenty-first century TV horror, the final sections of the Literature Review explore how audiences, both indigenous and transcultural, operate in online spaces, and how this shapes, and is shaped by, the liminality of identity; something that is also fundamental in structuring abject spectrums. Moreover, by utilising and nuancing Homi Bhabha’s ‘third space’ I consider how cultural abjection is translated when it travels to other audiences and communities around the globe. As such, I now turn my attention specifically to transcultural fandom.

#### **4.1. Bhabha’s ‘Third Space’: Introducing ‘Contact Zones’ and ‘Cultural Translation’ to Abjection**

As discussed earlier on, abjection is culturally coded (Kristeva 1982:128). Applying this to the horror genre and its themes of suffering (ibid:140), monstrous Others have been read to embody cultural abjection (Hutchings 2004:37, Levina and Bui 2013:4). However, this relationship between horror and culture becomes complicated when texts travel internationally and/or are transnationally co-produced. Kristeva does not account for how abjection operates *transculturally*. Moreover, transcultural fandoms form when audiences from other parts of world champion media and the indigenous culture that produces it. Henry Jenkins argues that transcultural fandom has created a pop-cosmopolitanism whose ‘embrace of global popular media represents an escape route out of the parochialism of [their] local community’ (2006b:152). This ‘refer[s] to the ways that the transcultural flow of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness’ (ibid:156; Smith 2017b:21). Cosmopolitanism involves

‘orientation to the stranger, a welcoming of difference’ (Corpus Ong 2009:450; Hannerz 1990:239-40, Teo 2002:183-4). But whilst cosmopolitanism has been read as ‘antinationalist’ and offering ‘no new sense of solidarity’ (Calhoun 2003:535), ‘[pop-]cosmopolitans use networked communications to scan the planet in search for diversity and communicate with others of their kind around the world’ (Jenkins 2006b:162). Postmodern cosmopolitanism thus fosters selectiveness in cultural hybridity where “‘Western connoisseurship” locates cultures “in a kind of... [imaginary museum],” in a grid of its own choosing’ (Soja 1996:140). Consequently, forms of nationality are constructed and deconstructed through transcultural fan rhetoric (see Chin and Hitchcock-Morimoto 2013, Hjort 2010, Billig 1995, Hills 2002b), as fans’ postmodern position establishes a plurality of meanings, agendas, and knowledges (Hutcheon 1988:200). Applying this specifically to my thesis, I look at transcultural fans of Asia Extreme and J-horror cinema and how they engage with the American/Japanese co-produced *MOH* episodes ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise.’ Traditionally, Asia Extreme/J-horror fans have been framed within Orientalist frameworks where ‘[w]ithout knowledge of the domestic context of these films, international audiences are apt to draw conclusions and make generalisations based on what they see... [Resultantly,] these films are... misunderstood by ignorant viewers and celebrated only for their difference’ (Martin 2015:8). This Orientalist argument (Said 2003:3) is premised on Western audiences claiming cultural differences and distinctions that code the ‘Eastern’ as abject, informed by sensationalist marketing strategies (see Chapter 3). However, I concur with Emma Pett who writes that this argument

overlooks the complexities of post-colonial orientalist scholarship, reducing it to a singular discourse characterised by a reductive power binary; it adopts a ‘media effects’ approach to the analysis of promotional paratexts, implying they are consumed within a social and cultural vacuum; and it elides reading strategies that are particular to film genre users (Altman 1999), specifically cultists. (2017:37)

Therefore, in arguing that abject spectrums consider the differing gradational responses between ideological, aesthetic, and corporeal affects that are phenomenologically informed, I turn to Homi Bhabha’s ‘third space’ (1994) as a concept that can account for transcultural contextualisations of screen abjection as an act of ‘cultural translation’.

Significantly, Bhabha's work elicits strong connections with Kristeva's semanalysis, combining psychoanalysis<sup>43</sup> with cultural studies, and considering the disruptive potential of language (e.g. Bhabha 1985, 1992b, 1998b, Kristeva 1984). For both, borders (physical and cultural) form order/hierarchy, whilst ambiguity/subversion forms at the edges (Bhabha 1998:126-8, 1984:126, Kristeva 1982:9). Both are informed by Foucault and Bakhtin (Clark and Holquist 1984:64-5), perceiving self and culture as in-process, with the Other forming part of the self. Bhabha even uses Kristeva's work, writing that '[t]he borders of the nation, Kristeva claims, are constantly faced with a double temporality: the process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative)' (1994:153).

Bhabha argues that colonial authority's discriminatory discourse functions through the "'part" (which must be the colonialist foreign body)... representative of the "whole" (conquered country)' (1985:153), producing hybridity where the Other-as-part is ambivalently split and repeated in its image (1986:vii-viii). Colonial texts create sites of '*différance*', doubly-inscribed as the master of histories and the source of fantasy, whereby 'colonial authority depends less on universal symbol and English identity than on its productivity as a sign of difference' (Bhabha 1985:150). The authority of discursive transparency creates a 'reality effect' akin to Foucault's power/knowledge relationship (Foucault 1980:204)<sup>44</sup>. It is from the master/coloniser position that narratives are formed, claiming 'direct forms of representation' (Huddart 2006:39), in what Bhabha coins 'DissemiNation': 'a narrative strategy... [used as] an apparatus of power' (1990b:292). Thus far, this resonates with Orientalist arguments as previously stated.

However, Bhabha argues '[c]ultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self and Other' (1994:31), 'never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional' (1985:152). This hybrid 'third space' stresses liminality in cultural interactions<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> However, Kristeva also considers the preverbal stage of identity-formation in children as pre-Oedipal and pre-mirror stage (1982:7). On the other hand, Bhabha, heavily informed by Lacan and Fanon (Papoulias 2004:24, Huddart 2006:42-3), looks at the splitting of subject from the paternal function and mirror-stage (Bhabha 1988:16, 1994:42-5,52). This may be one reason Bhabha has been accused of giving a masculine gendering to his writing (Rose 1995:372, Mahtani 2004:233).

<sup>44</sup> For Bhabha, Foucault has had a 'profound influence' on Postcolonial Studies (2004a:x).

<sup>45</sup> Bhabha provides an allegorical example to illustrate this concept: 'The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal

(Mongia 1997:1), where ‘cultural differences, if not contradictions, are not homogenized but create frictions and need to be “negotiated”’ (Rosback 2015:77). Bhabha argues that, ‘[t]he third space is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and in the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts’ (2009:xii). For Bhabha, ‘cultures are the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities’ (Huddart 2006:6, 2009:ix). Third space, thus, ‘opens up and broadens horizons for translating and communicating the multiple elements of self and other that are simultaneously present and thought to interact in a contact zone’ (Ikas 2009:130).

Bhabha explains that because cultural boundaries are Janus-faced, this generates ‘other sites of meaning’ (1990a:4). These other sites form ‘forcefully, within cultural discourse’ (ibid), through hybridity itself (Bhabha 1985:158). Hybridity creates agency for the colonised Other’s ‘reality effects’, where their enunciation creates the ‘*authority to differentiate*’ (ibid). Importantly, the Other ‘change[s] their condition of recognition while maintaining their visibility’ creating a doubling effect (ibid:160-1) since third space is an *in media res* ‘interruption and then reinscription... [with] something new produced in-between’ (Bhabha and Burgin 1992:71:76). The psychoanalytic underpinning of memory provides experiential frameworks between past and present, shaping one another in a ‘past-present’ or ‘projective-past’ (Bhabha 1994:7, 1995b:6). Bhabha uses ‘contiguity’ as ‘a critical measure... evaluat[ing] the movement that exists between the borderline[s]’ (2003b:32, see also Kuhn 2013a:15-7), which ‘explores lived temporal experiences of space and time’ (ibid). Articulation, thus, become ‘translational’. Ambiguity, Bhabha concludes, is not an issue of either identity or difference, but ‘alterity’ (2010:2, Bhabha 1992c:47, 1999:39, 2004b:347).

Consequently, the ambivalence of language is both a constructive and deconstructive process of enunciation and interpellation (Bhabha 1990c:209-10). Translation is a form of ‘contamination’ acting as a ‘connective tissue and boundary between [cultures]’ (Bhabha 1996a:54). Contamination acknowledges ‘the historical connectedness between the subject and object of critique so that there can be no simplistic, essentialist opposition between ideological miscognition and revolutionary truth’ (Bhabha 1994:26, see also Young 2003:139-42, Huddart

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movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’ (1994:4).

2006:4). Third space ambivalence induces a time-lag<sup>46</sup> allowing for temporal shifts to occur at the borderlines, demanding ‘an encounter with “newness” that is not part of the continuum of past and present... [I]t renews the past, refiguring it as contingent “in-between” space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present’ (1994:7). Cultural difference as a disruptive postcolonial force means that ‘the same representational time frame is never adequate’ (Bhabha 1992c:46). The double-reflexivity of partiality, established by colonialism but utilised by the subaltern, creates a ‘belated moment of proximity... [allowing for] differential temporalities... [to] constitutes the “same” historical event’ (1998a:129-30).

Rosbach explains that the salience of cultural translation that take places in third space is that it evidences how ‘cultural contact zones are never static but are instead defined by the historical, political, economic, and social contexts in which they emerge’ (2015:87). Consequently, ‘negotiations of cultural difference within these “third spaces” need to be in constant flux, adapting to the circumstances that feed these negotiations’ (ibid). Thus, whilst the Literature Review has indicated that abjection is culturally-loaded and serves to evidence systems of cultural order, third space discourse allows us to look at *how* transcultural audiences translate, make sense of, and value abjection from other cultures.

Furthermore, focusing on who is translating the textual abjection, ‘the central actor in this cultural negotiation... decides which translation strategy wins over other possible solutions’ (Rosbach 2015:77). Moreover, the ‘effects of cultural negotiation in translation not only offers new perspectives on the texts under study but also provides insight into the cultures [and subcultures,] and cultural practices involved’ (ibid:78). As Bhabha notes, third space ‘provide[s] the terrain for... sites of collaboration and contestation’ (1994:1-2). Therefore, we can ask how transcultural fans engage with third space rhetoric as players in the translation of media and culture.

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<sup>46</sup> Time-lag, according to Bhabha, problematises Foucault’s account of colonial enunciation in *The Order of Things* (2005), as it ‘intervenes in... the “slenderness of the narrative” of nineteenth-century historicism’ (1992b:63-4). The liminality of the postcolonial subject provides the very agency by which temporality becomes negotiated, rather than binary-forming (Bhabha 1998a:125).

## 4.2. Tourists Not Migrants: Transcultural pop-cosmopolitanism's Hybridity and its Reframing of Bhabha's 'Third Space'

Importantly, Bhabha's focus on the struggle of migrants/migration cannot fully account for transcultural fandom (Wagne 2009:169). Migration suggests unsettledness (Bhabha 1996a:54); an uncanny distressing potential (Said 2000:xi-xii). Bhabha argues that the migrant in 'his myth being... has become the "borderline" figure of massive historical displacement... that is not only a "transitional" reality, but also a "translational" phenomenon' (2000:300). These kinds of experience, he adds, have 'no resolution... because the conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the "survival" of migrant "nativist", even nationalist, atavism and a postcolonial metropolitan *assimilation*'<sup>47</sup> (ibid:301). Thus, the third space describes 'displaced populations who negotiate often irreconcilable fragments of different traditions'<sup>48</sup> (Papoulias 2004:55, see also Ikas and Wagner 2009:2, Kalscheuer 2009:38, Gillespie 1995:18-9). Whilst third space has been criticised for not giving the migrant any real power (Parry 1994:16, Lavie 1992:92-3), hybridisation also becomes a catalyst for transcultural fan agency and the identity-formation that's central to Bhabha. Yet, the extent of postcolonial emancipation taking place in transcultural fandom can be questioned (Jenkins 2006b:169-70), with such fandom sometimes performed by those in privileged positions, potentially romanticising the marginal as 'emblematic of traditional [culture]' (Rawle 2014:213); a criticism Bhabha makes of Kristeva<sup>49</sup> (1990b:292; Chow 2010f:95-7), but which has also been directed at him (Mongia 1997:7, Huddart 2006:7). This is not to say that migration cannot create new homes and a sense of belonging. Rather, third space needs to be 'pluralised' (Schulz-Engler 2009:155). Fittingly, the fragmentary subject has also been considered within postmodern cosmopolitanism and, in the case of this research, how consuming horror from other parts of the world shapes national discourse and transcultural fan identity (Ashcroft 2009:114).

As noted, transcultural fans 'embrace' media from other parts of the world (Jenkins 2006b:152). But as active audiences, fans may also seek out wider extra-/paratextual

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<sup>47</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>48</sup> For Bhabha, this is exemplified in the writing of Salman Rushdie<sup>48</sup>, and his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1989), which explores British Muslim identities, marking the shift in cultural boundaries (1990b:315).

<sup>49</sup> Although, Bhabha has also been accused of 'privileging... the migrant [condition]' (Schulz-Engler 2009:149).

information about championed texts and the cultures they come from, which yields subcultural capital. Consequently, pop-cosmopolitanism generates its ‘own intelligentsia, its own critics, historians, translators, and educators’ (Jenkins 2006b:170; Booth 2010b:12, Pullen 2004:80, Jenkins et al 2013:4-6, Kaplan 2006:137), speaking out against institutional powers/control (Jenkins and Shresthova 2012, Leavitt and Horbinski 2012), and challenging monolithic constructions of the ‘East’ and ‘West’ (Beck 2009:15, Hannerz 1990:239). Indigenous content is central to such fan practices.

If ‘transparency of reference’ creates an English presence in the colonial text even when translated into other languages (Bhabha 1985:150), indigenous texts offer an alternative visibility/knowledge, providing intercultural proximity (Bhabha 1996a:132). Visibility is instrumental in transparency (ibid:152), and by considering audio-visual texts as well as literary examples, the visibility of foreign cultures can frame the fan gaze. Visibility is a means of ‘travel’ linked to ‘symbolic pilgrimages’ fans undertake based around cult geographies. Hills writes, “‘cult geographies’ begin not only with a “tourist gaze” coloured by mediated preconceptions but also with a “tourist gaze” which is thoroughly determined by media products’ (2002:145; Brooker 2007:150,154). Taken from Urry and Larsen (2011, see also Urry 1990, 2002), ‘[t]he concept of the gaze highlights that looking is a learned ability... Gazing refers to the “discursive determinations”, of socially constructed seeing or “scopic regimes”’ (2011:1-2). They stress that ‘[j]ust like language, one’s eyes are socio-culturally framed and there are various “ways of seeing”’ (ibid:2). Symbolic pilgrimages (Aden 1999, Sandvoss 2005:139), potentially supported by literal travel to set locations (e.g. Hills 2002a:147, Couldry 2007), media-induced tourism (Beeton 2005:9, Lukács 2010:56), and supportive paratexts (e.g. MaGee 2011), allow fans to gain closer symbolic proximity to their championed foreign cultures/texts. Furthermore, new media plays a palpable role in symbolically increasing proximity between cultures (Bhabha 1998a:34), increasing transcultural contact (Kalscheuer 2009:26, Gillespie 2007:156, Mitra 2000:77-8<sup>50</sup>), and disrupting traditional borders and representations of imagined national communities (Anderson 1990a). The time-lag of enunciation and travel of transcultural fandom can be reconciled by online just-in-time fan practices such as Only-Click consumption (discussed in Chapter 4), providing transcultural temporality ‘precisely through a common affective engagement, and

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<sup>50</sup> See also Sandvoss 2011:61, Feenberg and Bakardjieva 2004:37-8, Miller and Slater 2000:6, Hillis 1996:88-9, Stratton 2000:729, Funk 2013, Gruzd et al 2011:1297-9, Bailey 1996:37-40, Foster 1997:25)

thereby though a common respect for a specific potential space' (Hills 2002a:180). Such considerations stress not only the salience of space in transcultural audience-texts relationships, but also temporally-framed liminality in how fans use transcultural texts and the culture they are produced in, in order to formulate grids of knowledge.

For instance, using academic discourse<sup>51</sup> (Hills 2002a:17-9), online J-horror fans discursively 'read-for-cultural-difference' in *Ringu* against its Hollywood remake<sup>52</sup> (Hills 2005c:161, Davis and Yeh 2008:113), with their quest for 'native knowledge'<sup>53</sup> (Bhabha 1985:157, Chow 2010c:22, 2012:171) demarcating them *against* the latter's mainstream output/audience<sup>54</sup> (Hills 2005c:166). Stressing the difficulty of reading J-horror, informed interpretations are converted into subcultural capital, with those speaking/understanding the Japanese language wielding the highest status (ibid:168-9).

Likewise, despite technophobia being prominent in Western horror vehicles<sup>55</sup> (Hills 2005c:167, Gurney:2013:172), this J-horror theme is often read as resolutely Japanese<sup>56</sup> (Phu 2010:44,50, Wai-ming Ng 2008:146-7, Jones 2010:188, Conrich 2010:1-2, Shin 2009:111, Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009:4). This stems from Japan being positioned in wider global culture as techno-centric<sup>57</sup> (Gauntlett 2003:xii), both as a pioneer and victim (Iwabuchi 2002:24-5, Chow 2010e:3-4). Conversely, ghosts have a global remit but are present in Japanese tradition as *yūrei* (vengeful ghosts, often female) (Balmain 2008:47, Rawle 2014:224), and/or *yōkai* (mythical creatures) (Foster 2009:3-5). Yet the growth in popularity of J-horror in the West has been

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<sup>51</sup> Hills notes the imagined subjectivity of fans and fan-scholars often constructs the self in opposition to the academic institution which is seen as 'long-winded' or over-rational (2002a:17-9, e.g. Leary 2008:61).

<sup>52</sup> Transcultural fans on *Ringworld* discuss the use of "*nensha*" (literally, the "thought-writing" displayed by Sadoko [in *Ringu*]), and focus on differences between western "rationalism"... [and] the supernatural in Japanese culture' (Hills 2005c:168), in their textual deconstruction.

<sup>53</sup> If one is to challenge stereotypes they must first have an awareness of them (Chow 2010d:51-2). The stereotype still exists, but how they are interpreted and used can shift (Dyer 1993:12), reiterating third space discourse.

<sup>54</sup> The global success of J-horror cinema prompted 'horror film cycles in other Asian countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand,' (Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009:1, Black 2003:202), which also lead to a number of Hollywood remakes (Richards 2010:9, Xu 2008:191).

<sup>55</sup> The 'technological uncanny' (Kinoshita 2009:108), and/or technophobic horror (Sconce 2000:133,165, Dinello 2005:5, Badley 2010:58 Botting 1999:140, Aden 1999:29), in the West has often been linked to science-fiction as a vehicle for ideological criticism (Kuhn 1990:54), promoting 'fears of machines or of technology usually negatively affirm[ing] social values such as freedom; individualism, and the family' (Ryan and Kellner 1990b:58, see also Kozlovic 2003:344, Clapp 2003:3-4, King and Krzywinska 2000:15-17).

<sup>56</sup> Ching argues 'technoculture is always already potentially transnational' (1996:191).

<sup>57</sup> Western technophobia has also often focused on the techno-centricity of Japan and East Asia (Morley and Robins 1995:169). However, Hills explains that, as with Said's 'original' orientalism, this is concerned with Western representations of the East as Other.

considered within the more global horror cycle of a ‘ghost story with a twist’ (Branston and Stafford 2003:94-6).

Reading-for-cultural-difference hermeneutically seals off Japan, along with fans’ ‘insider’ status, omitting other flows of knowledge that disturb their self-constructions. This is prominent in heritage discourse. Kevin Robins uses Bhabha to look at the ‘responsibility of cultural translation’ whereby narcissistic barriers are created through ‘tradition’ (1991:43; Yoshimoto 2002:64). ‘Truth’ becomes history-as-ritual through omission and inclusion (Bhabha 1998a:123-5, Derrida 1996:2). Tradition in transcultural fandom arises *through* translation (Gillespie 1995:18-9), whereby retrospective frames ‘bound up with the notion of “culture”’, are used by fans when objects of their fandom become contaminated (Hebdige 1979:39). For example, whilst researching the Asia Extreme and J-horror fan forum *Snowblood Apple* during the height of Hollywood remakes of championed East Asian horror, fans on the site would frequently discuss rare indigenous content that the mainstream West would not have heard of, nor would be tarnishing via remediation. Robins notes that ‘purified identities are constructed through the purification of space, through the maintenance of territorial boundaries and frontiers... purification aims to secure both protection from, and positional superiority over, the external other’ (1991:43). But since complete purification cannot be achieved, ambiguity/anxiety are still manifest. Furthermore, heritage traditions interplay with the mundane and/or exotic (Whittier Treat 1996:1, Skow 1996:147). For instance, ‘knowledge’ that Japan has long appropriated Western culture (Richie 2005:11, Aden 1999:151, Tamotsu 1996:274), evident in J-horror<sup>58</sup> (McRoy 2005:176-7, Balmain 2008:115), is not prevalent in fan discourse.

Moreover, transnational co-productions as hybrid texts also engage with third space rhetoric. Marks argues that ‘[i]ntercultural cinema... operates at the intersections of two or more cultural

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<sup>58</sup> There have also been other arguments as to why the cycle of J-horror came out of Japan and its subsequent popularity in the West. David and Yeh ask us to consider the ‘real-life horrors [that] flourished in Japan [during the 1990s]’ (2008:120). They argue that J-horror epitomised this ‘social darkening’ (ibid:122). Wetmore (2012:157) argues that the effect of the 9/11 terrorist attack left on the West, particularly the U.S., was an affective empathy with J-horror generics. However, this tenuous link is sweeping in its conclusion and is not empirically verified (see Briefel and Miller 2011b). Stafford takes an industrial approach and argues horror is a cheap genre that can garner mainstream attention and devoted fandom (2007:12). As such, J-horror became a suitable cycle for Hollywood to invest in because of the financial return until the point of tautological saturation and audience-volume declined/moved on (ibid:14). The remit of my thesis does not permit me to explore each avenue in-depth, rather, I wish to make the point that no single factor can account for the rise of a genre cycle and its reception. One must consider a range of cultural factors that considers both macro- and micro-accounts.

regimes of knowledge' (2000:24), adding that 'where meaningful knowledge is located... is between cultures and so can never be fully verified in the terms of one regime or the other' (ibid). For instance, *Masters of Horror* not only uses horror film directors in bids for quality auteur status (Miller 2013:20-22, Totaro 2010), but its two U.S./Japanese episodes 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' are enveloped in hybridity. They are industry co-productions between Showtime and Kadokawa, disseminated in both the West and Japan. Both feature American male protagonists in abject Japanese locales alongside Japanese actors, but use J-horror and (*kaidan*) ghost story genre conventions. As such, they operate transculturally at industry and textual levels (see Chapter 3). However, the former is directed by Miike Takashi and the latter by Norio Tsuruta, doubly-coding the episodes as cult-quality: they are discursively clustered with graphic horror cinema at large, but also with J-horror and Asia Extreme film, and the filmmakers' oeuvres. Thus, they are markedly framed as Japanese as they narrate the nation, with the episodes aimed at an established transcultural fandom (Pett 2013).

Significantly, Bhabha argues that the 'narration' of nations can be exemplified by public figures that reflect or refract national identity (1997:14, Huddart 2006:102). As such, we can see how figures within third space discourse are used as vehicles of cultural construction. This is evident in Chapter 5 where transcultural Asia Extreme/J-horror fans discuss their favourite filmmakers as representative of the cultural cluster of texts championed within the community. Resultantly, the Chapter considers how this audience's third space translation/construction of Japan encounters the paratextual framing of Japan by Showtime and *MOH* (Annett 2014:197).

But third space also goes beyond 'Western connoisseurship', considering other transcultural fandoms (e.g. Ching 1996:187, Syder and Tierney 2005:39). J-horror's technophobia is not prominent in other fan discourse. For example, Siriyuvasak (2004) argues that Thai fandom surrounding the TV series *Ringu* does not focus on ghost story (*kaidan*) genre codes or technophobia (Tateishi 2003:298-9). Rather, the text is clustered with other TV dramas such as *doramas*, a hugely popular TV genre in Japan (Clements and Tamamuro 2003:xxv) which emphasises 'the female lead as a "young girl" – in the modern, "trendy" environment within which these dramas are set<sup>59</sup> (Siriyuvasak 2004:190, see also Lukács 2010:195, Kuo and Keshishoglou 2004:102). Unlike the Western popularity of J-horror, Lukács notes, 'the appeal of J-dorama, which has not become a mass commodity outside Asia, is their close connection

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<sup>59</sup> Societal roles in a politically-changing Japan are also evident in J-horror films (McRoy 2008:75-6,85).

to Japan' (2010:195), adding that 'the rootedness of trendy dramas in a particular locality and temporality becomes an important factor in overseas viewers' enjoyment of these shows' (ibid:196). Thai youths use Japanese alongside American culture to 'articulate their deep-seated frustrations against their repressive and patronizing society' (ibid:178). Thus, transcultural fandom operates through fans' indigenous experiential history alongside media 'poaching' (de Certeau 1984:xiii-xiv, Sandvoss 2011:59-60), informing textual translation (Kalscheuer 2009:27, Āurovičá 2010:xiii, Andrew 2010:59-60, Lim 2009:40-1) and shaping the very borders that fans disrupt.

Resultantly, Bhabha's third space exceeds orientalism (Yoshimoto 2000), and therefore self-orientalism (Currid 1996:80, Needham 2006:8 Chan 2004:3-4, Iwabuchi 2008:547, Yan and Santos 2009:297-8); 'a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and... "the Occident"' (Said 2003:2), because '[t]he "locality" of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as "other" in relation to what is outside or beyond it' (Bhabha 1990a:4; Young 2004:170)<sup>60</sup>. Third space, unlike orientalism, also considers transcultural interactions hybridised with other cultural/epistemological frameworks, e.g. feminism (Chan 2004:10). As Schneider and Williams argue (2005:5), a 'dialogue' opens up between local and transnational cultures at various junctures: this can occur at textual (e.g. Boss 2006:105-7, Diestro-Dópidó 2013:27-9, Hutchings 2014:56), industry, market, and audience levels vis-à-vis reading strategies privileging the culturally-specific. Narrative translation creates 'grids of intelligibility' with multiple and/or overlapping 'discursive formation[s]' (Newman 2010:5-6).

As such, third space allows for a Janus-faced heterogeneity of what Japan 'means' (Jenkins 2006b:156-7). Fan gateways, plus repetitive points of contact (Spivak 1976:xi-xii), communal relations, and consumption of extra-/paratextual material illustrate the *ongoing* fluidity of third space. As Bhabha writes, '[i]n the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myth' (1994:8, see also de Certeau 1988:1, Derrida 1976:60). J-horror fans' pedagogical activities (Hills 2002a:2, Sandvoss 2005:147), compared to Thai fans' textual clustering (Mittell 2004:16-17), frame texts, knowledge, and fans themselves through writing. Writing is fundamental in third space resistance to colonial oppression. For Bhabha, 'the pedagogical is

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<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Said only constructs the East as suppressed Other, ignoring Eastern imperialism, by Japan for example, which shapes transnational relationships (Chow 2010e:3-4, Lee 2004:251).

caught up in the logic of the performative' (Huddart 2006:109), much in the same way as fans perform knowledge as a means of subcultural capital. Therefore, we can turn to fan spaces, and their textuality, as evidencing and revising Bhabha's third space meaning-making. As highlighted in the previous section, the transmediality dominant within this analysis of twenty-first century horror TV has not only been instrumental in influencing narratives' trajectory and complexity (Shimpach 2010:36, Stein 2011:130-2, Hills 2010c:105), and dissemination (both official and illicit) (Evans 2011:147, 164), but also fan engagement via online space.

### **4.3. Online (Third) Space: Revising Bhabha's Model Within Digital Textuality**

While Young notes that third space is 'the site of enunciation' (2009:81-2), he explains that the model is '[n]ot a space at all... if by space we mean architectural... or physical space' (ibid). Bhabha's predominantly literary position neglects how wider (sub)cultural spatiality interacts with the symbolic (Lossau 2009:63, Ika 2009:130). Thus, I turn to online space, textualities, and practices as a revisionist form of third space modality. Paul Booth writes that online activity<sup>61</sup> is central to fan meaning-making (2010b:2), considering web third space to be a 'mash-up of... virtual and physical identity' (ibid:129). Informed by Foucault's heterotopias and the role of virtual and imagined spaces, online fan communities can be seen as a salient 'third' spatiality for identity construction and resistant practices (Pieterse 2003:272). The textuality of online media allows users to communicate and perform, shaping both the individual's self and the meaning of the texts they are consuming.

While language/writing has been implemented as part of controlling the Other in colonial discourse (de Certeau 1988:3-5, Said 2003:20-1, Hall 1992:299-302, Ashcroft 2009:109), it has also been fundamental for postcolonial subversion and empowerment (Ashcroft et al 1989, Bhabha 1992b, Byrne 2009:53), reappropriated within third space whereby cultural translation resinscribes the postcolonial body (Bhabha 1998c:108) via the ambivalence of language (Ashcroft et al 1989:9-11). It is this ambivalence of language tied to (re)inscribing signs and symbols that intersects between text and fan language (Mowitt 2005:28). Cultural translation, which this thesis argues transcultural fans undertake, provides a meaning-making framework.

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<sup>61</sup> Booth allegorises digital fandom as Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) (2010b:1).

This can be found in the textuality of such fans' writing. In what Foucault terms 'self-writing', whereby an addressee is 'to "show oneself"... [providing] both a gaze... and a way of offering oneself to [be gazed at]' (2000:216), identity is maintained through the projection of writing: 'By externalizing thoughts into writing, blog post authors can literally write themselves into existence' (Booth 2010b:44; Foucault 1984:102-3). 'In this process the binary opposition of "original" and "translation" is dissolved, bringing forth an artefact of its own. The new text is not simply the same text in a different language but a contact zone of cultures and languages [located in third space]' (Rosbach 2015:77). But the same content also presents third space constructions of the cultures in question which others can read and use to inform their own frameworks of translation. This is central to Chapter 5 as I address how transcultural fans of Asia Extreme/J-horror on the *Snowblood Apple* forum read *MOH*'s American/Japanese episodes in relation to the intertextual canon of work that their fandom oscillates around, and against their construction of a wider 'Japanese' culture. Furthermore, fans are not limited to literary textuality but frequently utilise visuals in the forms of pictures, GIFs, and/or memes that rewrite textual representations (Miller and Sinanan 2017, Hills 2013d), producing other sites of meaning, thus reiterating third space rhetoric (as illustrated in Chapter 6).

While third space is instrumental in postcolonial empowerment that goes beyond any simple inversion of dualities, Bhabha only explores its potential for the colonial Other. But Bhabha's postcolonial/postmodern model can be applied to both domestic and transcultural fan writing which critiques 'gender, sexuality and race in mainstream media texts' (Kohnen 2014:76). For instance, transcultural fans of the original *Ghost in the Shell* Japanese franchise took to meme imagery and text to criticise Dreamworks' whitewashing of the hero, played by Scarlett Johansson (Yuen 2017:28), which was read by these fans as part of Hollywood's wider cultural imperialism (Rendell 2017). I therefore extend Hills' 'reading-for-cultural-difference' as a discursive fan practice (2005c:168; Tierney 2014:131) to consider fans' writing-for-cultural-difference within a third space rhetoric as it provides 'space[s] of... reorientation and multiplicity' (Young 2009:92).

Such multiplicity resonates with Abigail Derecho's work, which argues that fan writing remains 'forever open to new entries' (2006:64; Stasi 2006:119). These texts do not have definitive borders, allowing for multiple writers to build on a collective knowledge that stems from an 'original' version/point of focus located within the fan world (Derecho 2006:66). Furthermore, fan postcolonial writing has been used 'to critique patriarchy, xenophobia, and racism'

(Derecho 2006:67) (see Chapter 5). This is not to say (neo)orientalism/colonialism no longer exists (Bhabha 1994:6). However, it questions reductive arguments that the digital terrain is simply another colonial frontier<sup>62</sup> (Bell 2000:690). Nor does it argue that new media fan communities have revitalised a public sphere rendered devoid of ‘social and economic power’ (Larsen 2010:163-4). Rather, it illustrates the heterogeneous West and the complexity of transcultural relations, where structures/systems of power are present at transnational, transcultural, and subcultural levels.

But while transcultural fans through their consumption of content, consumption of paratexts, and discussions with other fans aid in the collaboration of third space construction (Annett 2014:205-6), there are complications. Aden’s use of Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’, whereby ‘rules... construct – in a cultural sense – the space in which we live’ (1999:3, Brooker 2007:160, Sandvoss 2005:34), ‘limit[s] what is acceptable, defining what is proper and reasonable’ (ibid:65). Performed fan knowledge is read/used by other fans (Booth 2010b:37); knowledge-as-subcultural-capital operates within the economy of fandom both in relation to fan performance and textual relationships (Booth 2010b:132, Shefrin 2007). Paul Booth terms this the *Digi-Gratis economy*, ‘an economic structure where money is not exchanged but which retains elements of a market structure’ (2010b:24) within a gift economy (Mauss 1990:3). Sharing fan knowledge strengthens social cohesion, motivating subsequent communal sharing and collaboration (Benkler 2012:19-21; Hyde et al 2012:53-4, Larsen 2010:161). Whilst the exclusivity of owning material other fans do not can be a marker of status (e.g. Tsutsui 2004:150), withholding knowledge does not fit within the *Digi-Gratis economy*. Instead, information must be made visible (Booth 2010b:133). Therefore, fans’ objects are mediated not only by the individual self, but by the collective who impart rules and rubrics that shape individuals’ affective relationships with said objects, stilling the liminal flux of responses through fans sharing/performing knowledge (Hills 2015a). Resultantly, abject spectrums may be pressurised by subcultural/social norms, values, and rituals. For instance, despite the strong affective resonance of screen abjection as a marker of quality for horror audiences (Barker et al 2016:88), some online horror fandoms tend to privilege ‘knowledge over affect’ (Hills 2005a:75) as ‘correct’ habitual responses, used to demarcate/authenticate *against* ‘wrong’

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<sup>62</sup> Whether this sees cyberspace as having an American colonial history (Barwell and Bowles 2000:704), colonial/orientalist performance and fantasies (Nakamura 2000:712-3), capitalist deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (Stratton 2000:723-4), or that it is simply the reflection of Western postmodern civilisation as a whole (Sardar 2000:734-5, 1998:13).

audience responses from non-fans (ibid:203) whereby the affective/emotive nature of abjection is reduced in favour of its aesthetic and subtextual qualities within fandom.

Resultantly, fans can be marginalised via a pathologising of their perceived emotional investments by wider cultural rhetoric (e.g. Ito 2012:xi-xii, Jones 2014a, Hills 2013b:82), or Othered because of pejorative positions *within* fandoms (Jones 2013). Moreover, other socio-subjective identity politics/markers can strengthen and/or reduce individuals' relationships within fan groups. For example, fandoms have not been particularly strong in stressing the importance of racial diversity, in comparison to gender and sexuality (Jenkins 2016:54, Kligler-Vilenchik 2016:143, Daniels 2012:700) (this is addressed in Chapter 5). Personal politics negotiate textual meaning (Scodari 1998:183, van Zoonen 2005:6, Brown 2001:201), but communal fan spaces can suppress (e.g. Johnson 2015, Young 2014), negotiate (e.g. Scodari 1998), or stress/heighten (e.g. Dhaenens 2012) certain identity markers as (non)conducive to fan knowledge within communities. Revising third space within Fan Studies shows how cultural translation is informed by indigenous texts and paratextual material, but also by normative fan-communal discourse and practices. As such, both texts and communities may be considered as contact zones. Moreover, this allows my research to look at how and why transcultural fans unpack texts, the meaning and value that comes from this, and how co-produced TV texts are positioned within a constructed notion of Japan.

## **5. Conclusion**

While horror endeavours to create affective responses in its audiences, these texts are constructed within wider cultural contexts, allowing us to semiotically unpack horror texts, locating meaning through Kristeva's abjection supported by Douglas's pollutants and Bakhtin's grotesque figure. My thesis will analyse the diegetic Other and how their embodied disorder and excessiveness functions as a mode of horror through the theme of suffering that is central to the genre (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3). Moreover, Kristeva's model can be linked to cinematic/generic devices, as noted by Hanich. Thus, it is not only how the Other is abject but the aesthetic framing of the Other, and how that plays with audiences' phenomenological distance, that creates abject affects.

But while themes and tropes of horror are situated within wider culture, and aesthetic and dramatic devices used by producers seek to elicit affective responses from audiences, this relationship is far more complicated than has previously been considered. Subjective histories, experiences, and stances all shape individuals' responses to abjection, as prior instances of consumption. Likewise, external (sub)cultural forces shape how we consume and respond to screen abjection. Since both the subject and culture are in-process, the *abject spectrum model* has been formulated here so as to incorporate such dynamics, not only between different individuals but also involving how responses can change *within* an individual over time and across space.

Amanda Lotz postulates that television 'functions both as a technology and a tool for cultural storytelling', and it is through this duality of the medium that we must explore 'new rituals of use' (2007:2-3). Therefore, I have located the growth in graphic twenty-first century TV horror within wider industrial contexts – digital convergence and transmedia, TVIII, streamability, tentpole TV, aesthetics of multiplicity, monumental series – allowing for a discursive clustering of genre texts that evidence a marked shift in graphic imagery, controversial themes, and complex narrative strategies, whilst also being popular over a range of TV forms such as PSB, basic cable, and premium cable. This mode and medium of horror should be analysed in its own right (Kaminsky and Mahan 1985:25, Brunson 1998:96, Cornea 2010:7). Furthermore, highlighting how the relationship between technology, text, and audience creates/negotiates meaning and value, this section has explored how wider shifts across digital media foster new rituals of textual dissemination and consumption. Engaging with quality TV discourses in narrative, content, aesthetics, and transmedial hyperdiegesis evidences how the genre itself has become a pertinent source for TV producers tapping into existing and established fan bases, whilst also trying to lure in new, unseasoned, and/or curious audiences. Likewise, graphic TV horror's focus on the spectacle resonates with the global popularity of other television genres, stressing the need to analyse non-Anglophonic TV horror texts and transcultural audiences.

Highlighting the centrality of digital media in framing twenty-first century TV horror also requires us to turn our attention to the audience. Transmedia facilitates greater control in what, and how, media is consumed (Bignell and Lacey 2014:1-2, Lobato and Thomas 2015:29). Digital media has opened up alternative transnational flows of television. This owes a great deal to DVD and, increasingly, online streaming platforms. Furthermore, audiences themselves have played a central role in sharing this content with others. Consequently, Only-Click TV,

a practice as varied as it is popular, will be explored in relation to the thesis' case studies (see Chapter 4). Allowing transcultural audiences to acquire TV unavailable in their home-nations via traditional means, Only-Click is pertinent to just-in-time fan rhetoric dominant within transcultural TV fan practices. This is not to say this practice provides the viewer with everything they want: official DVD, through its extra-textual qualities, remains an important object for fans. Nevertheless, online media is key to audiences discussing TV horror and communicating with others in fan communities.

Building on the complexities of horror affect manifest in abject spectrums, the Literature Review has also illustrated the intrinsic hybridity of fans' self-identity and how this can inform readings of the textual Other/monster as well as other characters. Moreover, just because a character presents matching identity markers with certain audience members does not simply mean that these individuals will automatically align themselves with said characters. Readings and responses are far more complex in terms of textual characterisation and the individual perception of social markers (Brown 2001).

Furthermore, whilst these media texts create affective relationships and aid in self-formation in the process, a wider community can shape fan identity via shared knowledge, norms, and values. Fan positions are inherently hybridised with other identity politics such as gender (e.g. Baym 2000, Scodari 2005, 2007, Gregson 2005, Bury 2005), sexuality (e.g. Dhaenens. 2012, Li 2012, Kreisinger 2012), age (e.g. Harrington and Bielby 2010, 2013, Van den Bulck and Van Gorp 2011), and race (e.g. Gatson and Reid 2011, Rowland and Barton 2011, Brown 2001). Likewise, fan identities are inherently hybrid as individuals are often fans of multiple objects, and part of multiple fandoms (Cherry 2010:71). Yet the distilling of knowledge and, thus, identity, alongside the omission of what perturbs it, means that in some instances other facets of an individual's hybrid self can be muted in favour of their fan identity (Young 2014:745). This is demonstrated when I look at how players of colour negotiate their race against their affective pleasures and fan positions of the TellTale *The Walking Dead* video game in the Telltale community forum in Chapter 5.

The Literature Review has extrapolated from Bhabha's model to consider online fan activity as a third space between the physical and virtual, providing a significant domain for identity politics to be played out. This manifests itself in the tangibility and viscosity of fan writing. Furthermore, not only has online media allowed for the transnational circulation of media, it

also allows fans to transculturally engage with said media and each other. The breaking down of national borders combined with transcultural fans' third space strategies of reinstalling cultural parameters stresses how meaning-making and the liminality of knowledge are contextually specific and evidenced in fans' writing. This will be demonstrated in Chapter 5 and 6 where transcultural fans of Asia Extreme/J-horror film read *MOH*'s 'Imprint' and 'Dream' as Asia Extreme and J-horror texts, respectively, that engage with the wider intertextual corpus that these fans champion as a marker of cultural difference. Online spaces as semiotically-charged sites of meaning-making around TV horror texts, as well as sites of self-Other identity performance/negotiation, and fan community, become pertinent areas for analysis.

The following Methodology will now consider how abjection can be analysed within horror television via textual analysis combined with online netnographic audience studies, with both acting as a means of developing and analysing abject spectrums. It will address the complexities of my chosen methods and their respective strengths and weaknesses; the justification of my case study selections; the omission of other types of TV horror and the reasoning for not choosing other potentially suitable examples; and lastly, ethical considerations and how they can be used to offer a robust exploration of TV horror in the twenty-first century.

## Methodology

### 1. Intro

Having discussed and developed abjection as the theoretical model utilised in this research, considered the socio-historical/industrial locating of graphic twenty-first TV horror as markedly different from previous iterations, and introduced third space formations by transcultural audiences in the Literature Review, this Chapter develops the thesis' focus on graphic twenty-first century TV horror by outlining my methodological approaches, negotiating their respective limitations, setting the research parameters, and considering ethical implications. I begin by outlining textual analysis as a method that allows for the reading of my case studies, located in their wider semiotic environments (Hartley 1998:42): cultural/representational, generic, industrial, and socio-historical (Brunsdon 1998:106, Mumford 1998:117, Nelson 2006:74-5). I posit that Kristeva's post-structuralist abjection model and its application to horror film (Schneider 2001) is advantageous to the analysis of my case studies as both horror and *TV* texts, aligning with post-structuralist approaches in *TV Studies* (Creeber 2006a:28-9). Subsequently, I establish the case studies of this research which serve to show how abject *TV* horror functions in shifting *TV* contexts – UK PSB, US basic/premium cable, and (trans)cultural contexts. Concurrently, I discuss the omission of other *TV* horror that falls outside the remit of my research. Whilst I consider weaknesses of textual analysis, I do so to highlight further strengths of abjection theory, namely that it serves as a useful concept for audience-based research on what I am terming abject spectrums as a gradational, on-going model of audience responses to screen abjection oscillating between affect, ideology, and aesthetics.

Evidencing the importance of analysing audiences, the second section discusses netnography as an appropriate method for studying abject spectrums. As the Literature Review noted, online spaces have proven popular not only in accessing twenty-first century *TV* horror via 'Only-Click' methods but also for audiences to form fandoms around these texts (Burn and Parker 2003:79, Zwaan et al 2014:2). Whilst audience research has served *TV Studies* well (Boddy 2005:81), *Horror Studies* has suffered from a relative lack of audience study (Hills 2014a:91). My research serves to address this absence. Furthermore, the textuality of online media which netnography analyses can provide qualitative data for my application of Bhabha's third space

to Fan Studies through its performative qualities (Kozinets 2015:228). Consequently, netnography allows me to analyse identity formation, meaning-making, and performances via digital *logos*. However, as discussed in the previous Chapter, online visual and pictorial posts are now a common audience practice (Gillan 2016:13). Thus, I give detailed consideration to analysing such content whilst also acknowledging how different online sites foster different practices, textualities, and values that shape the audience content explored in Chapters 4-6. In discussing how netnography adds to my analysis of twenty-first century TV horror whilst acknowledging its weaknesses, I consider other audience-centric methods and the limitations of my own work.

Lastly, in utilising netnography as a form of audience research, I consider the ethical implications of my research. Online research complicates ethical considerations of traditional ethnographic and face-to-face research, and, as such, I address the implications of analysing multiple audience groups over a range of online sites over several years. By taking a mixed ethical stance, my research offers a nuanced conceptualisation of online ethics that recognises the myriad nature of digital cultures. But I will begin by outlining the research parameters of my case studies and the reasoning behind their selection.

## **2.1. On-Screen Abjection: Approaching Textual Analysis**

Christine Geraghty and David Lusted explain that ‘Television Studies has its roots in a mixture of disciplines’ (1998:3), encompassing ‘production and audience ethnography, policy advocacy, political economy, cultural history and textual analysis’ (Miller 2002:3, Mumford 1998:144). The latter, Casey et al argue, ‘has been at the core of television studies, particularly those of a semiological bent’ (2008:289). This semiological bent<sup>63</sup> provides the apparatus for analysing ‘actual television programmes, particularly focusing on issues of form, content and representation’ (Creeber 2006a:6), that informs my readings in Chapters 1-3.

Textual analysis has its roots in structuralism. Glen Creeber writes that ‘[s]tructuralism implicitly questioned overtly subjective analysis by setting out a more rigorous and “semi-

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<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Bignell explains that ‘[s]emiotics or semiology is a way of analysing meanings by looking at signs... which communicate meanings’ (2002:1). He adds that, ‘as language and sign systems [as culturally-constructed] shape our reality, they are also media in which to communicate about this reality’ (ibid:6).

scientific” approach to the text’ (2006b:27). He adds that, ‘structuralism argued all texts were composed of a complex system of “codes” and “conventions” that, if certain practices were followed closely, could be carefully “decoded”... by which the meaning of a text could be read as a complex systems of “signs”’ (ibid; Bordwell 1985:276).

However, Creeber explains that ‘structuralism itself came under increasing attack during the 1980s... [as] it tended to over-emphasise the conclusive nature of the readings that it offered... [that] were simply too rigid in their conclusion[s]’ (ibid:28). In comparison, ‘post-structuralism attempted to foreground the *plurality* of meaning found in a text, suggesting that a text was always ultimately a product of *interpretation*’ (ibid). Post-structuralist textual analysis<sup>64</sup> lends itself to Kristeva’s abjection model since her location of cultural abjection allows for a plurality of abject objects and bodies informed by socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, I use abjection as an interpretive schema that fosters particular, rather than definitive, readings.

‘Meanings... are socially constructed’ (Casey et al 2008:248) in TV horror, both via diegetic place; ‘the way in which objective, buildings, people and landscapes are related to one another in space and time’ (Lury 2005:148), and via the characters that occupy such places (Booth 2012a:310). Likewise, ‘qualities in non-representational signs - colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork’ (Dyer 2002:20) elicit meaning (Bignell 2002:191). Textual analysis ‘can illuminate the underlying subtextual meanings of... [a] series, to show how it might resonate with current concerns and problems which might be recognised by its audience’ (Bignell 2013:75). Through reading TV’s aesthetics, ‘conceptual[, political,] and philosophical questions can arise from attention to specific television texts’ (Cardwell 2006:72; Gray 2008:135, 141-6). Moreover, characters, objects, and spaces, not only foster semiotic meaning via their representations (Brunsdon 1998:108), but also create meaning *through* their relationships with one another (Creeber 2006c:44-6, Berger 2014:5).

Furthermore, since analysis unpacks ideological subtexts located within wider socio-historical contexts (Davis 2006:267, Nama 2008:139-40), textual analysis explores semiotic readings of twenty-first century TV horror’s engagement with ‘contemporary sources of fear, anxiety, and political strife’ (Frost 2011:16; Muntean 2011:82, Sconce 2014:99, Dyson 2014:145). Those studying horror ‘have often become preoccupied... with what might be termed horror’s inner workings, its themes and underlying structures as well as its social function... Here notions of

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<sup>64</sup> Textual analysis offers various foci such as semantic, semiotic, narrative, rhetorical, and discourse analysis (Ifversen 2003:61, Hartley 2002:32-3).

repression and the monstrous have become very important' (Hutchings 2004:6). Indeed, Part I's textual analysis works to deconstruct the case studies' monstrous Other(s) (Levina and Bui 2013:4). Yet, whilst Kristeva's model has been pertinent for textually analysing the abject Other in horror films (Creed 1986, Mendik 1998, Davis 2000, Trencansky 2001, Chanter 2008, Sibielski 2013, Kee 2015), viewing 'the monster as either a symptom of or a metaphor for something bigger and more significant than the ostensible reality of the monster itself' (Hutchings 2004:37), there is a tendency to neglect the cultural and symbolic construction of heroes and other characters threatened by abjection (Jowett 2017:9-11,37-9). Therefore, I also analyse other characters in my TV texts and how they engage with the abject monstrous (Bordwell 2007:90-1).

Creeber adds that '[t]extual analysis on its own is rarely enough but when it combines with the wider contextual or "extra-textual" nature of the subject, it can offer insight' (2006d:84). Aesthetic elements can be 'a way of entering into policy debates about why television matters in a culture' (Geraghty 2003:36), considering how quality is claimed, negotiated, and/or valued (Wheatley 2004:327, Farr 2016:154). The Literature Review has argued that the rise of twenty-first century graphic TV horror can be ascribed to wider discourses of 'quality' television. Concurrently, technological developments have diminished the visual hierarchy between film and television (Lotz 2014b:54,88, Biesen:2016:133, Newman 2014:73); a distinction that often linked the former to higher cultural value than the latter (Ellis 1992:127-8). Indeed, analysing TV from a Film Studies perspective has proven useful in textual deconstruction (Hills 2007b:44, Thompson 2003:28, McLoone 1996) whilst highlighting TV's own textuality (Jacobs and Peacock 2013:6-8, Davis 2006, Ellis 1996, Geraghty 2003:26, Cardwell 2006:76).

Furthermore, textual analysis is important when looking at a range of media texts and/or platforms, prevalent in convergence culture, considering how TV narratives and storyworlds display transmediality. This is salient to Chapter 2's analysis of abjection in *TWD*'s TV, comic, literary, and video game formats. While this is not to refute the importance of audiences' readings, textual analysis can offer analyses not yet evidenced by, or alternative to, viewers (McKee 2003:68-9; Kennedy 2002, Fürsich 2002, 2009). Likewise, with audiences becoming more elusive, fragmentary, and dispersed (Jermyn and Holmes 2006:50-1, Pink et al 2016:64-5), textual analysis can illustrate a *range* of potential readings<sup>65</sup> (e.g. Jenkins 2010a). For

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<sup>65</sup> Likewise since the TV auteur-/showrunner-/producer-as-author (McCabe 2013:189-90, Bignell et al 2000:35-6), is problematised by more collaborative television (Geraghty 2003:36, Tulloch 2000:175-7), the post-structuralist paradigm put

instance, Chapter 3's readings of 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' use abjection theory to deconstruct the Japanese female monster, interpreting her as empowered and as a socio-political conduit that offers feminist (re)readings of both episodes. However, (anti-)fans' readings in Chapters 4-6 focus largely on these episodes as vehicles authored by Japanese film directors, i.e. as genre texts that are discursively clustered and thus evaluated against existing Asia Extreme/J-horror films, given the transnational political economies at stake in these instances of US/Japanese TV horror (Hills 2005a:90).

Yet textual analysis has received a number of methodological criticisms, e.g. that it neglects 'who or what produced the text and in what social, historical and political circumstances' (Casey et al 2008:289). Moreover, if post-structuralism allows for multiple readings 'critics have... argued that textual analysis... offer[s] little more than wholly personalised and unfounded interpretations' (Creeber 2006b:33). The tendency of textual analysis to speak for audiences, create universal/monolithic readings, not account for multiple interpretations, and/or lack self-reflexivity (see Barker 2000:7, Creeber 2006d:82-3, Lewis and Jhally 1998:111, Hartley 2002:32, Philo 2007:185, Geraghty 2003:41) has led some academics 'to embrace audience analysis... and ethnographic research as a whole' (Creeber 2006b:34). Martin Barker, for instance, has rejected 'psychoanalytic accounts because their findings resolutely refuse any kind of empirical verification' (2000:13; Bignell 2002:4). Resultantly, audience studies and ethnographies have often been used in opposition to textual analysis (Geraghty 1998:141, Hills 2006a:93, Storey 2003:81) as bids to enrich 'our understanding of the role of ethnic, racial or national identities may play in audience response[s]' (Mumford 1998:124).

Similar arguments take aim at Horror Studies. Hills notes that 'horror audiences have been poorly served by theories of the genre aiming to resolve the "paradox" (why do people enjoy seeing images that they should find repulsive?)' (2014a:90). Consequently, audiences are spoken for through academic textual analysis. Importantly, 'audiences can... produce their own mediated framings of textual meaning, for example blogs and reviews' (ibid:91). Textual interpretation is used by audiences to test their 'own embrace of [the text]' (Jenkins 2010b). Thus, when reading texts' meanings, '[a]ny attempt to fit together textual and contextual themes needs to negotiate not just the semiotic multiplicity of textual codes, but also the

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forth by Barthes (1977:142) means not only 'the death of the author' but the death of *authors*, further subverting single meanings.

possible openness of contextual meanings’ (Hills 2011b:109, see also Hartley 1999:22, McKee 2003:19; Ford 2011b). Likewise, the reflexivity of scholarly readings is just one discursive way of ‘halting [the slipperiness] of semiotics’ (Hills 2011b:111). Thus, what is at stake is semiotics’ claim that ‘culture can be theorised in relation to signification and textuality’ (Pollock 2003:134) versus arguments that ‘[t]he very “lived” condition of culture, of different cultures and the differences within any given culture, a culture’s difference from itself... repeatedly becomes simplified in any academic transformation of culture into an area of study [such as textual analysis]’ (Wolfreys 2003:162).

My own stance on textual analysis aligns itself with Creeber’s argument that ‘contemporary textual analysis tends to explore the playfulness and open-ended textures of textual meaning’ (2006b:34). Despite being criticised (Barker and Brooks 1998:111-8), discourse analysis deters ‘single meaning of a text’ (Creeber 2006b:35). Discourse analysis ‘is interested in the various means by which different socio-cultural discourses (gendered, sexual, national, racial, artistic, institutional and so on) compete for meaning’ (ibid). Since cultural abjection is contextual, each case study examines different discourses through which abject monsters are coded: in Chapter 1, my analysis of *ITF* centres on sexual, class and regional discourses within the UK (Chambers and Elizabeth 2017:195-6); in Chapter 2, readings of *TWD* focus on discourses of white masculinity in post-9/11 North America (Bennett 2015); and Chapter 3’s focus on transnational co-production means that transcultural discourses intersect with discourses of national female monstrosity (Wee 2014:43-5). Such arguments are ‘supported and developed around... wider contextual or extratextual framework[s]’ (Creeber 2006b:35). Considering the limitations of textual analysis, I am aware I offer ‘only *one* interpretation of a text’ (ibid:36) informed by abjection. As such, my textual analysis of the case studies examines ‘the generation of meaning that occurs when the structures of the text meet with the socially located meaning systems or discourses of the reader’ (Fiske and O’Sullivan 1994:240). I employ abjection as the device ‘which “guide[s]” the reader as to... [the text’s] preferred reading and direction’ (Hartley 2011:23), utilising the post-structuralist qualities of abjection to present a threefold overall argument to my research: 1) abject imagery is used within different industry contexts as a marker of textual and brand quality in these TV horror texts; 2) abjection offers a framework that culturally contextualises the monstrous Others within these texts; 3) abjection therefore becomes a key reading strategy for these texts. However, I acknowledge that whilst ‘[t]he text can prefer one reading... the reader always has the resources of his or her meaning systems to produce his or her “own” reading’ (Fiske and O’Sullivan 1994:240). Thus, I avoid

making assertions on the part of the audience (Creeber 2006:37), positioning my research instead within the realm of Fan Studies' 'active audiences' (Hartley 2011:113), and developing my abject spectrum model and use of Bhabha's third space to underpin the audience research of this thesis in Chapters 4-6. I will now consider the case studies used in my thesis (Burn and Parker 2003:83).

## **2.2. Establishing Case Studies, Setting Parameters**

As argued in the Introduction and Literature Review, twenty-first century TV drama has seen a marked shift in the graphic imagery of certain forms of horror, moving away from traditional TV horror effects, visuals and aesthetics (Abbott 2013:vii-viii, Subramanian 2013:112-3). Consequently, by aiming not to legitimate certain types of television while neglecting others (Hills 2006b:19, Creeber 2006d:85, McCabe et al 2011:108, Cardwell 2006:75-6), I have chosen various case studies (Woods 2016:5, Abbott 2016b:155), analysing a number of aspects of TV. Firstly, I locate TV horror within different industry positions that bid for quality in varying ways, and I also account for differing political economies and their constraints. Chapter 1 operates between the PSB of the BBC, the niche status of the youth channel BBC3, and its marked opposition to US youth TV (Woods 2016:29). Chapter 2 explores how US franchise TV horror uses transmedia to engage with quality by providing an expansive hyperdiegesis that means the storyworld is perpetually open for audiences to consume narratively (Hills 2002a:137), fostering ongoing character development (Gray 2009:235). In effect, AMC use graphic horror to shift its basic cable position towards 'premium' quality whilst still targeting a mass audience remit (Jowett and Abbott 2013:12-3, Ambrosius and Valenzano III 2016:70). Lastly, Chapter 3's focus on premium subscription TV addresses the filmic visual and thematic freedom bestowed on such content as symbolically 'non-TV' (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11), but also non-Western in its construction of Japanese TV horror.

Secondly, the increased focus on the abject body in all three case studies means that I take Horror Studies' propensity for using Kristeva's work (Austin 2012:100-1) and apply it to the specifics of television. Each Chapter illustrates a different way of using abjection theory to understand the ideological embodiment of the monstrous within the respective text(s), locating the abject threat within wider cultural contexts. Chapter 1's examination of the English north

(Elliott-Smith 2016:175-6) in *ITF* considers both social realist aesthetics and a cultural climate that marginalise the abject Other. However, the series takes an unconventional position of presenting abject subjectivity through its I-zombie narrativisation (Abbott 2016a:163), reading the Other in a sympathetic manner. Chapter 2’s study of a US post-apocalyptic environment that features in extensive transmedia shows how *TWD* creates an abject landscape that perpetuates masculinity-in-crisis as a ‘tentpole’ TV theme (Clarke 2013:63). Yet, while gender scripts create existential turmoil for male leads across *TWD*’s franchise, their relation to wider cultural anxieties shifts from post-9/11 themes to fear of the State as we move from *TWD* to its spin-off TV series *Fear the Walking Dead*. Lastly, Chapter 3’s analysis of *MOH*’s Japanese female monsters locates abject threats in transcultural contexts. While Kristeva uses anthropology to culturally ground abjection she does not consider how *transcultural* relationships can affect such dynamics. However, using abjection’s ambiguity (Kristeva 1982:9) provides shifting readings of how abjection can be (re)coded: from the exotic Other to victims of patriarchy.

Whilst each case study serves to stress diversity in the aesthetic value of graphic TV horror, in cultural constructions of the monstrous, and in abjection as a robust reading model (Connelly 2003:10), the scope of the thesis restricts me from looking at all twenty-first century TV horror. Therefore, I deliberately make certain omissions either because my case studies address key arguments sufficiently or because other examples do not fall within twenty-first century TV horror as I have defined it. This includes my decision to deliberately exclude mainstream TV horror (e.g. BBC1 and US network television) that ‘openly mingles on our screens with the staple genres of television’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:17). This is not to claim that such TV horror is of any less quality, especially considering the loyal fans who enjoy such content. However, this form of TV horror adheres to the aesthetic restraint and suggestion dominant in twentieth century TV horror seeking mass audiences (Hills 2010b:24, 28, Tunstall 2015:112). Thus, it does not illustrate the marked shift in graphic horror visuals and TV abjection that I am specifically analysing. Similarly, I omit children’s/family TV horror for the same reason (Wheatley 2006:86-7, Jowett and Abbott 2013:26-30) (see Table 1):

Table 1 – Examples of mainstream and children’s TV horror	
Mainstream TV Horror	Children’s/Family TV Horror
<i>The Originals</i> (The CW)	<i>The Simpsons: Tree House of Horror</i> (Fox)
<i>Urban Gothic</i> (Channel 5)	<i>Primeval</i> (ITV)

<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> (The WB/ UPN)	<i>Goosebumps</i> (Fox)
<i>Angel</i> (The WB)	<i>Scooby-Doo</i> (Cartoon Network)
<i>The Vampire Diaries</i> (The CW)	<i>Mona the Vampire</i> (YTV)
<i>Supernatural</i> (The WB/The CW)	<i>The Haunted Hathaways</i> (Nickelodeon)
<i>The Secret Circle</i> (The CW)	<i>Casper's Scare School</i> (Cartoon Network)
<i>Bitten</i> (Space/Syfy)	<i>R.L. Stine's Haunting Hour</i> (Discovery)
<i>Sleepy Hollow</i> (Fox)	<i>Truth or Scare</i> (Discovery)
<i>Grimm</i> (NBC)	<i>Deadtime Stories</i> (Nickelodeon)
<i>Lucifer</i> (Fox)	
<i>Whistle and I'll Come to You</i> (BBC)	

I also omit contemporary post-TV horror (see Table 2). Post-TV drama subverts key aspects of TV's ontology since '[n]ew technological and industrial practices have introduced radical changes in technological aspects of television, its use, and its consequent cultural significance' (Lotz 2014b:35), encouraging the 'broader blurring of media formats' (Sim 2016:204) via internet portals rather than TV channels (Lotz 2017:8-9). This centres on subverting linear broadcast (Arnold 2016:50), shifts in consumption patterns/habits (McCormack 2016:101, Sim 2016:2110-1, Strangelove 2015:10-11), and changes in textual construction (Lotz 2014b:74, Bisen 2016:133). The serial nature of a TV series, disseminated with systematic breaks in the narrative (e.g. weekly broadcasts), is frequently altered by post-TV, meaning that audiences have access to the entire new series ready for consumption. However, whilst these developments may bid for 'quality' status by offering something that traditional TV previously has not, my approach to graphic twenty-first TV horror centres on how textual content employs televisual discourse alongside its abject imagery, and also how the serial nature of television shapes audiences' practices – e.g. informal downloading as part of 'just-in-time' fandom in Chapter 4 – and the affective meaning of texts, e.g. *ITF* fans' relationships with the text during broadcast, in-between series, and when it becomes a 'post-object' text. This is defined by Rebecca Williams as when 'original fan objects cease to offer any new instalments... [and the] fan moves into a period of post-object fandom' (2011b:269) – it is something that I discuss throughout Part II.

Furthermore, Post-TV includes both post-network television and original content on the web (Newman 2014:73-4, 86, Lotz 2014b:153, Nicholas 2006:158, Stein 2015:15). Likewise, while Netflix 'stands as the biggest success story in this transition away from traditional television

media’ (Lindsey 2016:173), TV streaming services are highly disparate (ibid:176-7, Smith-Rowsey 2016:69). Differences in visual style, aesthetics, and technological platforms (McDonald and Smith-Rowsey 2016:5) prove too vast, conceptually unstable, and are too insecurely articulated within discourses of ‘television’, for examination within the scope of this research.

Moreover, while I discuss streaming platforms in relation to informal Only-Click practices in Chapter 4, post-TV platforming also presents issues, e.g. some TV horror is both post-TV *and* traditional TV. For instance, *Scream* was broadcast on MTV in the US, but streamed on Netflix in all other regions. Conversely, while frequently offering series in their entirety there are still instances where streaming platforms disseminate episodes on a weekly basis, thus adhering to more traditional TV formatting, flow, and audience relationships (Steigler 2016:243). Furthermore, over-the-top TV services can also distribute network TV horror after its initial broadcast in a post-TV format. For instance, in the UK Amazon Prime offers entire earlier series of *TWD*, whilst Netflix offers *i-Zombie*, blurring the distinction between linear and non-linear TV horror. And Hulu’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* has been broadcast by Channel 4 in the UK as Hulu is not available in this region (Ward 2016:224). Lastly, post-TV is predominantly US-based and oriented (Stiegler 2016:243), thus running the risk of reinforcing quality TV discourse as inherently North American. Therefore, I omit post-TV horror as a case study, however, I do consider it as a possibility for future research in the Conclusion.

Table 2 – examples of post-TV horror

<p><i>Hemlock Grove</i> (Netflix)</p> <p><i>When Evil Calls</i> (mobile phone series)</p> <p><i>Fight of the Living Dead</i> (YouTube Original)</p> <p><i>Stranger Things</i> (Netflix)</p> <p><i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> (Hulu)</p> <p><i>Freakish</i> (Hulu)</p>
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Finally, in noting how the genre’s use of monsters (Bordwell and Thompson 1996:58) is central to the rise in graphic twenty-first century TV horror, my case studies break away from the cycle of gothic television and telefantasy that has been a dominant form in TV horror and, understandably, its academic study (Wheatley 2006, Johnson 2005, Kaminsky and Mahan 1985:115-33, Hills 2005a:113-4, 2010d:116-7, Hand 2010, Abbott 2010d). Gothic TV and

telefantasy have sometimes stood in for television horror *tout court* (Hills 2005a:112), and remain very popular today (Hassler-Forest 2016). Whilst no texts are genre-pure (Mittell 2004:156-7), I furthermore do not include related TV genres such as science fiction or fantasy (see Table 3).

Table 3 – examples of science fiction and fantasy TV
<i>Helix</i> (Syfy)
<i>Doctor Who</i> (BBC)
<i>Game of Thrones</i> (HBO)
<i>Masters of Science Fiction</i> (ABC)
<i>The Strain</i> (FX)
<i>The Leftovers</i> (HBO)
<i>Jekyll</i> (BBC)
<i>Frankenstein</i> (ITV)
<i>Torchwood</i> (BBC)
<i>The X-Files</i> (Fox)

Whilst the use of monsters and abjection theory remain relevant to these genres, their longevity in TV history, compared to my examples, means they have already received sustained analysis. However, this thesis explores more fledgling versions of graphic TV horror, previously read as incompatible with television, understood alongside Kristeva’s discussion of horror (1982:140). In choosing three case studies, I had the potential to pick from an ever-growing corpus of graphic twenty-first century TV horror that could have served to address certain textual, aesthetic, and abject aspects. For instance, other social (sur)realist TV horror includes *Misfits*, *The Fades*, or *Carnivále* (see Woods 2015, Jowett and Abbott 2013:172). The former two series would have also offered examples of PSB horror. However, *ITF* was chosen to elaborate on the I-object model, its sympathetic zombie, and its negotiation of sexuality as monstrous. Similarly, a text such as *Hannibal* with its artistic graphic style, transmedia remit, and cult fan following (Casey 2015, Napoli and Kosterich 2017:407) could also have served Chapter 2’s focus on commercial US transmedia/franchise TV that ‘exhibits many of the features commonly associated with “quality TV” programming’ (Brinker 2014:a). However, in already addressing sexuality I did not want to repeat aspects of Chapter 1. I also wanted to explore abjection as geographically-based. I could have used other apocalyptic zombie texts such as *Dead Set* or *Z-Nation*. However, I also wanted to consider how transmedia relates to abjection

theory. Thus, *TWD* was a suitable choice. Lastly, Chapter 3's highly cinematic TV horror could have analysed other *MOH* episodes, or other premium cable texts such *Bates Motel*, *True Blood*, *Penny Dreadful* or *Ash vs. Evil Dead*. Yet, picking another US-produced (rather than co-produced) text runs the risk of over-stressing graphic quality TV horror as solely American. Likewise, I have avoided vampire horror TV due to the expansive academic work already undertaken on it (e.g. Abbott (ed) 2005, 2007, 2010c, Jowett 2010b, Cherry 2012, Kaveney (ed) 2001, Molly 2003, Hammond 2004). Given these requirements, 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' made for significant examples which also allowed me to discuss transcultural fandom. However, the examples presented here further stress how graphic TV horror has become more common across different sections of the television industry.

But whilst abjection is used to read texts, I do not use abjection theory to project horror's affect onto ideal or imagined audiences (Hartley 1992:11,14). As Jenkins writes, 'you cannot write... about horror without a theory of fear and dread... [But] work which writes about someone else's feelings is apt to distort the nature of what it is describing in relation to popular culture, to be dismissive and simplistic' (2011c). Moreover, as a straight white British male aged 30, I would question whether I could adequately speak *for* female, gay, and/or audiences of colour, and their responses to screen imagery (Hartley 2002:32). Rather, I take an audience-based approach to analyse how individuals and communities read and responded to my case studies in developing my abject spectrum model.

Offline spaces and cultures hold a prominent position in forming fan knowledge (Lewis 2006:305, Hargreaves and Thomas 2002:103), practices (Booth and Kelly 2013:57, Lamerichs 2013:155, Hills 2010f, Bayout 2013), and interactions (Chin 2014, Jones 2014b, Kohnen 2014:75-6). However, due to the transmedial nature of these case studies' narrative content, as well as 'Only-Click' dissemination, and Web 2.0 fan discussion/image cultures, audience engagement largely involves online media platforms, and hence the thesis analyses audiences using netnography.

### **3.1. Utilising Netnography, Self-Reflecting on Scholar-Fandom, and Considering Written and Visual Digital Texts as Evidence of Abject Spectrums**

As discussed in the previous section, ethnography has been implemented to provide empirical evidence of audiences' responses to media. Ethnography derives largely 'from anthropology, where the researcher enters into a culture/particular group and provides an account of meanings and activities "from the inside"' (O'Sullivan et al 1994:109, see also Corner 1996:282, Deacon et al 2007:5-6, Marcus 2012:xiv). Since culture is semiotic, meanings made in cultures are open to interpretation (Geertz 2000:1), creating 'thick descriptions' highlighting complex meanings, symbols, nuances, and social interactions (ibid:6-7, Howard 2002:557, Holtz 2012:59, Boellstorff et al 2012:16).

Like ethnography, netnography 'studies complex cultural practices in action, drawing attention to a multitude of grounded and abstract ideas, meanings, social practices, relationships, languages, and symbol systems' (Kozinets 2010:25, Germonprez and Hovorka 2013:530, Kozinets 1998:366-7). But despite presenting similarities with ethnography (Sugiura 2014), netnography is distinct (Kozinets 2010:25, Sudweeks and Simaff 1999:30). Netnography diverges from ethnography, moving away from 'face-to-face entrée in terms of accessibility, approach, and span of potential inclusion' (Kozinets 2010:5), allowing the researcher 'to unobtrusively collect data and study processes and patterns of behavior' (Nelson and Otnes 2005:90, see also Kozinets 2002:62, van der Graaf 2014:40). Despite being unable to account for individuals that use forums but do not post, known as lurkers<sup>66</sup> (Hills 2002:173, Williams 2011a:274, Davies 2014, Sugiura 2014), online spaces provide rich sources of data (Murphy 2014, Brooker 2014, Sloan 2014).

Many studies of fandom have utilised netnography (Kozinets 2015:96). For example, Tom Phillips' research into Kevin Smith fandom implements a 'netnography... [as] an online ethnographic research... to present qualitative data within an autoethnographic context' (2011:481). Similarly, Lucy Bennett's netnography of online R.E.M. fandom illustrates the heterogeneous complexities of online fandom and consumption practices. This moves away from monolithic constructions of subcultural capital, evidencing that not all fans value the same

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<sup>66</sup> Kozinets argues that '[n]etnographers are professional "lurkers": The uniquely unobtrusive nature of the method is the source of much of its attractiveness and its contentiousness' (2002:65).

types of knowledge, temporalities, and/or experiences (2012:752-6, see also Gray and Mittell 2007).

Like the previous examples, my research situates me as both scholar and fan; an aca-/scholar-fan, i.e. academics who adhere to cultural and institutional practices in discussing (often their) fandoms (Hills 2002a:20), frequently via autoethnography (ibid:81, Howard 2002:555, Boellstorff 2012:44, Duffett 2013b:300). Whilst ‘much cultural studies work has constructed distinction for itself by implying that its scholars are exempt from the domains of fan culture and/or popular culture’ (Hills 2007b:33; Sandvoss 2007:19), scholar-/aca-fans study ‘fan cultures seriously as objects of scholarly analysis and carry out such study from a perspective both inside that world, as fan themselves, and outside it, as academics’ (Roach 2014:35). We might note academics, in some affective way, are ‘fans’ of what they study (ibid:36, Hills 2014a:90, Hellekson 2011 Coker and Benefiel 2010). Conversely, one may be a scholar-anti-fan of certain texts/approaches (Giuffre 2014:53, Hills 2007b:40-1, Gray 2011).

This discursive stance problematises core elements of traditional ethnography and netnography: namely, the monolithic construction/role of those conducting research, typically positioned as outsiders to the population under analysis (O’Sullivan et al 1994:109). Furthermore, issues of ‘going native’, where researchers become too involved with those they are studying, ‘losing their sense of cultural identity’ (Hansen et al 1998:40), are problematised when those undertaking the research are already ‘inside’ or ‘emic’/‘native’ (Lindlof and Shatzer 1998:177, Roach 2014:47, Boellstorff 2012:17, Bennett 2011,2013:129). Yet, native ethnographers still need to treat their culture as academically ‘strange’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:81, 90, Maxwell 2002:111). However, this simple acknowledgement of scholars-as-fans offers little insight in-and-of-itself (Hills 2011d).

While ‘Fan Studies have... [sought to erode] boundaries between audiences and scholars’ (Sandvoss 2007:20), tension still resides between academia and fandom (Phillips 2011:481, Bennett 2014a:11, Roach 2014:37). However, scholar-fans risk alienating themselves ‘from both groups’ (Phillips 2011:482): academia criticises a lack of critical distance (Hills 2007b:34, Hellekson 2011), whilst fans reject those in ‘ivory towers’ talking about or for them (Hills 2014a:101, Forman 2004:4, Ford 2011a), since both groups ‘act as differential interpretive communities with divergent norms and practices’ (Hills 2012b:16).

For Phillips, however, as a scholar-fan, ‘an “overly confessional” approach to... academic writing is integral to the fidelity of... [his] research’ (2010). This allowed him ‘to intervene

with a study of a hitherto unexplored close relationship between producer and fans within fan studies' (2011:480). Scholar-fandom can study new areas of culture, ask new questions, have a dialogue with new voices, and subvert traditional/conservative thinking<sup>67</sup> (Forman 2004:2-3). Additionally, it can be advantageous in gaining access to, and building rapport with, fans (e.g. Geary Pate 2014, Podoshen et al 2014:6, Garcia et al 2009:60), encouraging better dialogue between fans and scholars (Hills 2010f:211).

However, scholars' alignment 'with their "fan-consumer" identities may work to reproduce... specific tastes of audience demographics... which are over-represented in academia' (Hills 2005e:181), potentially romanticising fandoms (Dwyer 2010, Busse 2011). Certain texts are often neglected/dismissed in academia because of issues around their 'genre, [and lack of] "quality", and "buzz"' (Hills 2005e:182), creating a '*canon problem*... [where] a severely limited range of texts' (Hills 2007b:40, Perren 2011) and fan practices (Hills 2011c), are subject to rigorous study (Gray 2008:60, 2007:75-6, Tulloch 2007, Jenkins 2006c, Pearson 2011). As noted, TV horror has been neglected and/or devalued in comparison with its film and literature counterparts (Hills 2005a:111), something this thesis addresses.

Fan Studies has also been useful in considering the role of gender identities (Brown 2001:98-101, Janz and Martis 2007:142), but has suffered from naturalising whiteness in the process (Wanzo 2015). As such, Chapters 5 and 6 devote sections to audiences of colour and their engagements with *TWD* to highlight how lived self-identity can anchor abject spectrums. Similarly, transcultural fans of Asia Extreme and J-horror cinema have largely been represented in academia through industry rhetoric (e.g. Dew 2007, Shin 2009, Martin 2015), rather than analysing the audiences themselves (e.g. Pett 2017). Thus, third space is used to show how abject spectrums can engage with transcultural discourse. Consequently, Chapters 4-6 explore audiences' readings of 'Dream Cruise' and 'Imprint' that enrich transcultural Fan Studies (Lange 2007:367). Lastly, while fan practices are highly varied, fan image posts remain relatively underexplored. Thus, Chapter 6 focuses on audiences' Web 2.0 image culture and how this nuances the engagement with horror texts, offering user-generated and visual markers of abject spectrums.

Furthermore, aca-fans run the risk of essentialising both academic and fan (Campbell 2011b), creating a monolithic 'aca-/scholar-fan' ontology (Hills 2011c, 2012b:14, Schimmel et al

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<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, fans are leading discussions in certain areas (e.g. Therrien 2009:28, Smethurst and Craps 2015:286), where academics are learning from them (e.g. Potter 2010, Hills 2010f:213-4).

2007:588, Hills 2011c, Maxwell 2002:112). Yet, scholar-fandom fosters ‘multiple... bids for identity’ (Hills 2012b:17). For instance, Susan Napier notes that whilst being a scholar-fan of Japanese pop culture, she is not a ‘hardcore’ fan (2007:20), abstaining from, but recognising the importance of, certain fan practices.

Offering my own self-reflexive auto-ethnography, my love of horror media – particularly film and video games – stems from my early teenage years when such content was illicit, evading the control of my parents (Kermode 2001:126). Remaining a fan into early adulthood, a time when the rise of J-horror took the West by storm (Bingham 2015:63,66) and my interests in horror had become transcultural, I took my interests into the realm of academia, undertaking Media/Film Studies at A-level, Film and Cultural Studies as an Undergraduate degree, and then Cult Film and Television as a Master’s degree (Belsey 2003:28). Thus, my field of experience and intertextual corpus as a horror fan grew with my love of studying media, culture and audiences/fandoms (see Hills 2005f:160, Muggleton 2000:1-2). Resultantly, my stance is similar to Napier’s: my personal and scholarly fan interests can largely be described as traditionally affirmational rather than transformative (discussed in detail later), whilst still recognising the salience of the latter within fandom and academic study. As I now turn to twenty-first century TV horror as fan, scholar, and scholar-fan, I do so with a subculturally informed eye. Like Lorna Jowett, ‘I have tried to curb, if not entirely suspend my personal likes and dislikes, and to approach the material with appropriate critical distance’ (2017:4). Since my initial contact with *TWD* and *MOH* was as a fan – by contrast, my first experience of *ITF* was one of scholarly curiosity which subsequently turned into fandom – like Jowett (ibid:5), I am not defending either series’ problematic representations that other audiences take up and challenge (see Chapters 4 and 5). Studying these audience readings has, thus, informed my own abject spectrum around these texts.

Furthermore, scholar-fandom can open up new areas of academic exploration (Bradney 2006, Roach 2014:36), proving useful in interdisciplinary dialogue and broadening the perspectives of the respective fields<sup>68</sup> (Ford 2011a, Tchouaffe 2010). Indeed, Horror Studies can benefit from the self-reflexivity offered by scholar-fandom (Hills 2014a:90,2011:108). Aca-/scholar-fan stances also raise methodological questions. Stein asks

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<sup>68</sup> Booth also indicates that while fans might not necessarily self-proclaim a discursive fan-scholar and/or scholar-fan stance, they may still be academics in neighbouring, overlapping or distant fields (2013b:129).

how do I balance investment and critical analysis, how do we usefully acknowledge our particular positioning in relation to a given text or community, and what insights come from a given situated position (be it a casual observer, lurker, personal fan, fan-creator, community participant, antifan)? (2011b)

Consequently, we should interrogate scholar-fan stances; as I have stated in my brief auto-ethnography, and as I develop in later sections, my stance is affirmational but also seeks to negotiate my interest in textual analysis (screen abjection) and audiences' relationships (object spectrums) with my case studies. With aca-fandom, are we labelling 'a scholar's position relative to an object of study, a mode of engagement within particular methodologies and approaches; or [presenting] a label for a distinct kind of scholar or a sub-field of work under "fan studies"' (Ford 2011b)? Considering all three positions allows for a more advantageous conceptualisation of scholar-fans.

However, claims that ethnography can problematise naturalistic data because researchers disturb the site of study, whereas netnographers observe data silently and unobtrusively (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:15, Lindlof and Shatzer 1998:175, Eriksson and Salzmann-Erikson 2013:338), allowing data to remain naturalistic (Sharf 1999:249, Kozinets 2010:56, Holtz et al 2012:56, Beaulieu 2004:146), run into difficulties. Matt Hills argues that,

[t]he ethnographic process of "asking the audience"... constitutes a potentially reductive approach. It assumes the cultural activities can be adequately accounted for in terms of language and "discourse"... depicting the processes as fan "knowledgeability". (2002a:66)

This is not to say that 'fans *cannot* discuss feelings, passions and personal histories of fandom in a meaningful manner' (ibid). Rather, fandom is 'performative; [featuring]... identity which is (dis-)claimed, and which performs cultural work' (ibid:xi, see also Kahn-Harris. 2004:108, Hills 2006c:100). Rather than being naturalistic (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:10), audiences' performance of meaning-making 'whether explicit or implicit, is always a form of iterated "citationality"... depending on established cultural codes and ways of doing (or making do)' (Hills 2005a:xi, see also Woodward 2002:112). Applied to this thesis,

(dis)pleasures of horror ‘are performative by virtue of arguing for, and constructing, their bearers *as agents who display expertise and authority in relation to horror’s text*’ (ibid).

The same holds true for online audiences (Sussex Technology Group 2001:206), disrupting attempts to contrast (problematic) ethnography with (supposedly naturalistic) netnography. Online identity performance has often been theorized via work from Goffman (1959) and Butler (1993) (Lind 2012:7), whereby individuals communicate and present versions of themselves that are citational within the social context they are situated in (Foster 1997:27, Thiel-Stern. 2012:93, Papacharissi 2012:199). Furthermore, online usage allows for a more ‘strategic self-presentation than everyday interaction’ (Cheung 2004:56), taking ‘on “socially appropriate forms” and conventions [of digital participation]’ (Kidd 2009:173).

Furthermore, if performativity ‘allows us to consider horror’s pleasures [and displeasures] – as constructions and performances of meaning, rather than as reflections of brute, positivist reality’ (Hills 2005a:ix), this is not a detriment to my research. On the contrary, online posts not only illustrate audiences’ responses to TV horror within specific socio-cultural contexts, but also evidence self-writing whereby fans write and display their identity (Foucault 2000:216). Thus, the performativity of language provides evidence of hybrid identities presenting (anti-)fan positions *alongside* other identity markers. For example, Chapter 5’s anti-fans of *TWD* use their own ethnicity and experiences of racial marginalisation to write about, and reinscribe, marginal black male bodies in the series as a critique of the mistreatment of black males in the US.

Moreover, Hills notes ‘inter-fandom conflicts’ (2014a:98). Therefore, whilst social media can negotiate and/or stabilise identities (boyd 2008:120, Mineo et al 2009:184, Hendry 2014, Renninger 2014, Robards 2012:385-6), and perhaps promote socialisation and sociality in those who struggle with offline interactions (Mazurek 2013), online practices/sites are in fact far more complex and conflictual (Dery 1994:3-4, Branwyn 1994:226, Stivale 1996:133-5, Millard 1996:145-6, Baym 2007, Tatarchevskiy 2010, Annett 2011:174,181). Within an intertextual affective field, one may be a fan, but at times also be an anti-fan of certain texts or readings, consequently effecting meaning-making processes (Giufre 2014:53, Claessens and Van den Bulck 2014:63, Alters 2007:344), and abject spectrums.

But if responses are informed by context, netnographers should recognise their own epistemological position and interpretation of culture (Proctor 2013a:11,15-18) as a performance of scholarly identity (Hills 2005a:xiii). Reflexivity of researchers’ subjective

positions (Jones 1999:8) acknowledges ‘ways in which our culturally embedded rationalities influence what is eventually labelled “data”’ (Baym and Markham 2009:xviii). This has a significant impact on the thesis since Part II functions partly as a way of seeing audiences doing/performing theory (O’Brien 1999:78-9, Hills 2005f:3) (e.g. pages 191-8). Furthermore, all three of my case study texts, to varying degrees, have become transculturally popular (Hart 2014:335). This informs my conceptualisation of Only-Click TV in Chapter 4 as a predominantly audience-led activity. It also frames my audience analysis of third space transcultural fandom around Asia Extreme/J-horror audiences in Chapters 4-6.

Studying multiple audiences across various online spaces ‘can help us develop our understanding of [TV horror] fandom’ (Bore and Hickman 2013). Online communities/sites encourage social cohesion through the act of gossiping (Tufekci 2008:546), something that is essential to fan and anti-fan discourse (Claessens and Van der Bulck 2014:71), whether drawing on extra-/paratextual sources or intra-fandom discussion between members (Van den Bulck and Van Gorp 2011:213-4, Costello and Moore 2007:133, Biltreyst and Meers 2006:76-7, Shefrin 2004:261-2, McNamara 2011:516, Gray and Mittell 2007, Frost 2011:85-7, Hunt 2003:186, van der Graaf 2014:37). This undermines arguments that social networks represent little more than ‘phatic exchange’<sup>69</sup> (Miller 2008:393).

Audiences may traverse multiple sites in their fan practices (Ellcessor 2009). Jenkins describes these ‘affinity spaces’ as non-exclusive sites where ‘content might spread... from one site to another’ (2009c). Importantly, ‘[n]ot all “affinity spaces” operate according to the same social dynamics’ (ibid). Moreover, an individual might be a mixture of lurker, poster, and/or re-poster depending on topics and social media platform (Beninger 2014), highlighting an overarching issue with studying social media:

“social media” irons over the specificities of the media it collectivises, encouraging blindness to the underlying architectures, the distinct affordances and characteristics of each of the platforms and services that are lumped together... Superficially... sameness is privileged over... difference. (Docherty 2014)

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<sup>69</sup> A ‘communicative gesture that does not inform or exchange any meaningful information or facts about the world’ (Miller 2008:393).

By exploring the various networks fans operate within/across, this thesis considers how posters' interactions, at a social level, shape and form knowledge, how respective software facilitates, hinders, and shapes socialisation between members, and how individuals are not moored to one space, thus influencing 'the type of data that you get' (Canhoto 2014). Whilst online media fosters relationships between fans, media producers, and celebrities (Chin and Hills 2008, Bury et al 2013, Murray 2004, Ellcessor 2012, Marwick and boyd 2011), differing digital spaces offer different potential.

Facebook allows you to 'like'<sup>70</sup> texts', producers' and actors' pages, linked to like-minded users (Jenkins 2009c). Fans set up groups and spaces to discuss championed texts, extra/paratextual material, and share creative content such as art, videos, or photos<sup>71</sup> (Rendell forthcoming), akin to forums and blogs (Zhivov et al 2011). Knowledge is translated into subcultural capital (Arriagada and Cruz 2014:153), providing 'information in a *convenient* centralised manner as well as provid[ing] *information efficiently* to all its members' (Zhivov 2011:6). This is salient to *ITF* fandom as their Facebook groups not only have lengthy discussions about the text, its characters and storylines, and the symbolic qualities of the abject zombie (see Chapter 5), but also became centralised spaces for informing fans of activist strategies to save the show when it was cancelled by the BBC (see Chapter 4). The site evidences both polysemic and on-going affective abject spectrums (Click 2017:191).

Moving on from Facebook, Harman and Jones argue that 'the participatory nature of Twitter makes it an almost ideal platform for engaging in fandom' (2013:959). Yet, they note that limited character space<sup>72</sup> means 'Twitter makes it difficult for users to engage in lengthy criticism' (ibid). Twitter has been widely discussed as a means of audience engagement due to the immediacy with which audiences can discuss media (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2011, Harrington et al 2013, Highfield et al 2013, Deller 2011) via the hashtag(#) feature<sup>73</sup>. The second-screen qualities of Twitter interaction offer real-time affective engagement for TV audiences (Kozinets 2015:166). For instance, Chapter 5 discusses how audiences of colour criticise *TWD* via Twitter for killing a black character during Black History month. This creates

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<sup>70</sup> Previously a 'fan' of (see Helft 2010, Gelles 2010, boyd and Hargittai 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Contra arguments that the internet stifles creativity (e.g. Keen 2007:6,61-3, Lanier 2011:22-3, Hassan 2012:176), online media allows for new forms of intelligentsia to emerge, including media professionals (Figueiras 2013:227, Kellner 1998:182, Meyers 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Tweets can only consist of 280 characters. Previously this was 140 characters.

<sup>73</sup> Zubiaga et al write that hashtags are 'included in a tweet... group tweets in conversations or represent the main terms of the tweet, usually referred to topics or common interests of a community' (2014:2). They add that, [u]sers live-tweet... result[ing] in spiky activity associated with the occurrence in question, which produces what is known as a social trend' (ibid:1)

‘a collective entity of users as it displays the user’s visible and deliberate attempt to be part of the group’ (D’heer and Verdegem 2014:3). Yet, one must consider the various levels/modes of address, ranging from micro/user-to-user dialogue to macro/one-to-many communication, and the differing content of types of tweets<sup>74</sup> (Bruns and Moe 2013:20, Anstead and O’Loughlin 2011:455-7, van Dijck 2011:338-9, Marwick and boyd 2011:145, Balasubramanyan and Kolcz 2013). Searching hashtags can retroactively compile tweets using the internal archiving of Twitter, ‘captur[ing] and account[ing] for varied forms of time’ (Clemens 2014a).

But whilst highlighting the variety of communities, online spaces are prone to volatility, creating a major methodological challenge. For example, during my PhD the *Snowblood Apple* forum and an *ITF* Facebook fan group both went down (Whiteman and Metivier 2013). Fortunately, a strength of netnography involves obtaining, storing, and cataloguing data (Kozinets 2015:173). Online asynchronous communication means data is already textualised (Jacobson 1999:128, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:4, D’Orazio 2014, Boellstorff et al 2012:120, Williams 2009:4). Consequently, part of my data referred to is no longer available online; rather, it is stockpiled in personal files. These archives allow deep analysis of data by collating posts to explore points of interest (Kozinets 2015:165).

Furthermore, when forums, websites and groups are ‘dead’<sup>75</sup>, then other online spaces can be considered. Some argue that twenty-first century J-horror film has reached its apex of popularity and has been on the wane for some time (Rucka 2005). Yet fans still seek out, and engage with, this material. Indeed, nuanced/reviced audience practices become evident though the ‘proliferation and diversification [of online space]’ (Postill 2010:648). The ‘death’ of forums and the diversification of fans across online platforms may actually evidence shifts from older Web 1.0 platforms to Web 2.0 social networks (Kaplan and Haelein 2010:61, Zhivov et al 2011:3-4). Consequently, in Chapter 6 I consider the ever-growing trend of audiences’ use of image postings in their engagement with my case study texts (McWilliams

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<sup>74</sup> Zubiaga et al classify the typology of tweets/hashtags as topic triggers: ‘news’ whether it is a breaking story or a newsworthy trending topic ‘that major news outlets [are reporting]’ (2014:3, see also Lind 2012:9-10); ‘ongoing events’ whereby live-tweeting covers an unfolding event in real time (ibid); ‘memes’ are identified as ‘trending topics... triggered by viral ideas initiated by either an individual or by an organization, that were popular enough to spread widely’ (ibid). Memes as fan-texts can be a useful source of data in that they might be used to illustrate fans’ opinions/feelings towards cultural objects (e.g. Ellison 2013, Shifman 2012:200, Lothian 2012:11). Lastly, ‘commemorative’ tweets remember a ‘certain person or event’ (Zubiaga et al 2014:3). They note that there is overlap between these various typologies but that we can begin to identify different types of tweets via hashtags and how they are used differently within different contexts, by different users.

<sup>75</sup> *Asian Horror Movies*’s forum section and *Ringu/The Ring* forum *Ringworld* are also inoperative.

2013, Woodfield 2014, Bennett 2014a:8, Lupton 2014, French 2014, Gilliland 2016) as visual citations that evidence abject spectrums.

Jennifer Gillan explains that in the current epoch of online use, ‘web interfaces of Tumblr, Pinterest, and YouTube, among others, not only allow, but also encourage visual commentary’ (2016:13). Unlike the written or scriptural *logos* of TV horror (anti-)fandom (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5), fan images maintain the (tele)visuality of my case studies (Bore 2017:18), focusing on the bodies that are so often pivotal to abjection (Arya 2016:106) and graphic TV horror (Jowett and Abbott 2013:131-2). This raises wider methodological considerations to studying image cultures and audiences’ visual posts (Kozinets 2015:5,229, Pink et al 2016:64-5), central to my final Chapter.

Gillan writes that the ‘circulation of television character GIFs... broadens the scope of television studies during a period of expansion... [in] the number of platforms... which... re-circulate television content’ (2016:21, Jenkins et al 2013:28). Image posts can provide the ‘dominant discourses around the show that circulated within... particular fan culture[s]’ (Bore 2017:13), evidencing meaning-making and the ‘affective registers’ audiences have toward screen abjection (Hillman et al 2014:5, Bore and Hickman 2013, Bore 2017:14).

Noting differences between the conceptualisation of fan writing and visual posts, Gillan explains that ‘whereas textual poaching focuses more on appropriating elements of a story world or a characterization and utilizing them within original content’ (2016:12), comparatively, ‘[t]extural poaching pivots on the appropriation of the textural elements of the look and feel of a shot or sequence of shots’ (ibid). She adds that image posts such as GIFs ‘are detached from the original context from which they take their textual meaning’ (ibid:14, see also Thomas 2013). The graphic aesthetics and images of abject TV horror suit textural poaching using ‘the visual and tactile sense of how [they look and feel]’ (ibid:12). For instance, image posts of ‘Imprint’ eschew narrative in favour of focusing on the graphic visual content of the episode that displays its cinematic style (Bore 2017:14) (see Chapters 3 and 6).

Image posts can serve as a form of ‘reiteration discourse... repeatedly inscribing particular elements with value’ (Bore 2017:14). The ‘aesthetic customization’ of image posts (Renniger 2014:7) also opens up paths of communication between fans and media producers (Ballinger 2014, Bennett and Chin 2014, Hillman et al 2014:8). This is evident in *ITF* fan imagery on Facebook and Twitter: the majority of visuals centre on relationships between characters (see Booth 2013), highlighting ‘semantic reproduction of textual elements and syntactic

appropriation of ideological moments from the media text' (Booth 2015:26) but also serving as a visual marker of the ontological (in)security of fandom. Thus, Chapter 6 addresses how images can reinforce fans' engagement with texts/characters.

Such practices are not limited to fans but are also prominent in anti-fan posts that reinterpret texts via memes' use of 'macros': 'image[s] superimposed with a caption which subverts the meaning of the picture... [to] negotiate and at times subvert the meaning of a text by... providing a humorous commentary' (Harman and Jones 2013:954-5). Unlike, the *MOH* image posts on Tumblr which reiterate generic moments (Bore 2017:17), memes largely centre on textual themes. This is a dominant tactic for audiences engaging in racial discourse surrounding *TWD*, performing ideological subversion via the semantic distilling of images undercut by superimposed text (Shifman 2013). Unlike textural poaching's focus on textual aesthetics, *TWD* memes highlight the absence of black males in the text, and their relative ineffectiveness in the narrative. These posts provide a 'truth' about *TWD* shared by audiences utilising content from the series itself that (re)inscribes the black male body. Consequently, Chapter 6 evidences the diversity of online image practices and cultures that also serve to demonstrate abject spectrums visually. Having established the strengths and weaknesses of netnography – that it provides 'thick descriptions' that evidence complex meaning-makings of texts and also demonstrates social interactions between audiences online, however it cannot account for lurkers and the researcher's position in relation to culture under analysis needs to be reflected on/negotiated – I now consider other methodological approaches and the limitations of my research.

### **3.2. Closing Tombs: Contesting Other Approaches and Focusing on Research Limitations**

Whilst I implement netnography to develop and illustrate my abject spectrum model, other methods were considered for the analysis of audience responses. Content analysis observes sites without any social contact from the researcher (Kozinets 2010:96, Jensen Schau and Gilly 2003:389, Holt and Copes 2010:634, Hemetsberger and Reinhardt 2006:193) by 'breaking down the media's output into different components or categories, whose frequency can then be measured. Meaning is inferred from the number of times a particular feature occurs' (Rayner 2001:102, Jones 1999:32). While the extensive amount of data available online lends itself to

content analysis (Weir and Dunne 2014:81), I am not utilising the approach as the method's lack of contextual awareness fails to address subjective meaning-making central to my abject spectrum model, as well as failing to grasp the range of nuances present within one site and *between* sites (Postill and Pink 2012:126) which I cover in Chapters 4-6.

An 'analytical tool... [in] structural anthropology' (Tateo 2005), Social Network Analysis (SNA) 'focuses on the structures and patterns of relationship between and among social actors in a network' (Kozinets 2010:49, see also Garton et al 1999:76, Scott 2002:2-3, Ackland and Zhu 2015:222-3). Interaction becomes the central focus<sup>76</sup>, as '[l]ooking at what people do and talk about with others is an ideal unit for examining behaviors' (Haythornthwaite 2005:127), highlighting the in-process nature of online cultures (Wellman 1982:72, Frank 2005:52, Valente 2005:107).

This appears useful to Fan Studies due to the communal nature of fandom (Ridings and Gefen 2004, Herring 1996:82, Chan and Cheng 2014:316-7, Ackland and Zhu 2015:225), weak tie information flows (Haythornthwaite 2005:137-8, Granovetter 1982:119, D'Amato 2014:137, Pink et al 2016:105), and hierarchies that operate within fandoms/sites (Garton et al 1997:85, Jarrett 2008, Lin 1982:132). Additionally, it acknowledges fans operating over multiple fandoms/communities/sites (Hills 2014b:9, The Janissary Collective 2014:82, Harrington and Bielby 2013:98, Gray 2007:102, Baym 2007), and transnational or transcultural online networks (Pink et al 2016:105). However, whilst SNA considers structural features and the '*programmed sociality*' of sites (Bucher 2012:490-1), the focus of this research is on audiences' reading, meaning-making, and engagement with screen abjection (Hills 2005a:203, Benkler 2012:19-21, Pearson 2009). While communal aspects of online space are salient to this, the networks themselves are not my main concern. Moreover, SNA is 'too mechanistic' (Granovetter 1982:118), and 'formalistic... ignoring the substantive content of... subject matter' (Blau 1982:276; Scott 2000:ix, Freeman 2005, Huisman and van Duijn 2005), resulting in 'sterile descriptive' analyses (ibid:279, e.g. Kenny et al 2006). It says nothing of *what* is

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<sup>76</sup> Taking an egocentric approach means SNA 'focus[es] on the network as it appears from the standpoint of those situated at particular locations within it' (Wasserman et al 2005:3). Alternatively, a 'whole network approach... considers an entire social network based on some particular research definition of the boundaries of that network' (Kozinets 2015:63). This allows researchers to 'identify the relative positions that members occupy within a network as well as suggesting the very important partitioning of subgroups or "cliques" within the group.' (ibid).

being shared within the group. Consequently, ‘network studies is often problematic’ (Aldrich 1982:286).

Perhaps the most pronounced limitation to this research is my interrogation of audiences’ responses to screen abjection. Online surveys can be widely disseminated (Kozinets 2010:44, Lambert 2015:105), and are useful in gaining responses from lurkers (Kozinets 2015:58). Interviews can be used as an element of participation observation within netnography (Kozinets 2010:46). Both allow researchers to focus on specific points, elaborate on grey areas, and confirm subjective points of view (ibid:47; Holt and Copes 2010:630, Garcia et al 2009:66-7). Since abject spectrums have a phenomenological underpinning, these techniques could be very useful in revealing personal histories that shape individual responses to screen abjection. For instance, Barker et al’s (2016) survey of audiences’ watching *Alien* complicates existing textual analysis of the film/franchise, evidencing how memory plays a central role in ongoing affective engagement. Similarly, Rendell’s (forthcoming) interviews with transcultural Studio Ghibli fans shows how various cultural locations and personal histories demonstrate heterogeneous contact zones with the franchise, fostering polysemic affective meaning around the company.

However, while useful in analysing expansive sample-populations through set questions (e.g. Walther 1997:356, Gray and Mittell 2007, Nimrod 2013, Bennett 2014b), surveys are less advantageous when investigating new communities/topics or seeking complex understandings of rich data (Kozinets 2010:45, Holtz et al 2012:64), and can suffer from low response rates (Murphy 2015:86). Thus, surveys do not readily analyse in-depth audiences’ use of texts, and do not fit with my small-scale case studies (Kozinets 2015:59).

As for interviews, whilst they have been used ‘in order to produce data which otherwise would be lacking and from these interventions... [researchers] have elaborated their research “findings”’ (Savage 2015:303), the networks/communities explored here include three Facebook groups, Twitter, Tumblr, blogs, websites, forums, and online petition sites. All of these have generated a huge wealth of material, spanning several years. Thus, I already have a very large volume of data available for analysis without engaging in separate interviews. Moreover, interviewing a selection of members from one site could not account for this variety of data. Nor would any such interviews necessarily be representative of users on other sites (Hills 2006b:19). In addition, not all users/groups may consider themselves part of a community (Feenberg and Bakardjieva 2004:37, Jenkins 2013a:3, Fernback 1988:216). Thus, whilst I would have liked to have included more detailed audience responses providing deeper

contextual background to people's abject spectrums, the constraints of this research, particularly the wide range of different audiences analysed, meant that it simply was not achievable. Having said that, I discuss how such approaches could productively develop my abject spectrum model in the Conclusion. Having discussed netnography over the use of other methods, and the need to consider the specific affordances of different social media sites and the types of textualities they foster, I now consider ethical implications.

#### **4. Ethical Considerations**

For online research, ethics is a much-debated area (Floridi 2014:viii, Markham and Buchanan 2012:5, Hudson and Bruckman 2004:128, Bassett and O'Riordan 2002:233-4, Alun Jones 1994). Likewise, '[o]bservation of online fan activity remains a contentious issue in academic debates around the ethics of studying and citing online fan posts without asking permission' (Bore and Hickman 2013). Not only considering how converging technologies raise new considerations, such as consent and copyright (Ess 2014:12-3), I also acknowledge ethics at individual, local, subcultural, cultural, national, and transnational levels (Weber 2011, Brandes and Levin 2013). This, of course, is no easy feat. However, an awareness of context is essential (McGee 2008:118, Reilly 2014, Richardson 2014).

Online ethics relate to issues of consent, transparency, privacy, and anonymity (Ess and AoIR 2002:2, Reilly 2014, Salmons 2014). Likewise, just because something is technically 'ethical', does not necessarily equate it to good practice (Scheuermann and Taylor 1997:269, Williams and Copes 2005:73, Sharf 1999:244-5). Additionally, when taking a scholar-fan position it is important to endeavour to maintain good relationships with fans as research subjects (Booth 2013b:120-1, Hamelink 2000:5, Ess 2014:25-7). Failure to do so may result in audiences rejecting research that talks about them, becoming unwilling to participate in future studies (Hudson and Bruckman 2004:135, Boellstorff 2012:78, Jones 2014c).

Despite debates about online space being public *or* private (Markham and Buchanan 2012:6-7), digital networks more complicatedly collapse these together (Kozinets 2015:131-2). Firstly,

sites' Terms and Conditions<sup>77</sup> (Ess and AoIR 2002:5, Brown 2014) construct space and position users in different ways. Some sites are open: I can readily search and read postings with no commitment to signing up, e.g. blogs, YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr (Jones 2014c, Canhoto 2014). Other spaces are both open and private. For instance, Facebook groups can be open to all but an account is required and you must be added to the group, therefore some gatekeeping takes place. This was so for *ITF* fan communities. Some fan forums, or certain threads, are open to read but you must be a member to access all the network and/or post. This was the case with *Snowblood Apple*. Other spaces are closed, accessible only via password, membership and/or subscription (Phillips 2011:480, van der Graaf 2014:36) – these are not used in my research.

Furthermore, whereas ethnography requires consent and debriefing (Ess and AoIR 2002:2, Jacobson 1999:135-7, Haigh and Jones 2007:82), the lack of face-to-face interaction with online research complicates ethical considerations (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:84-5). Additionally, purely observational research provides no human interaction. Therefore, informed consent is not required (Walther 2002:207, Whiteman 2009:398-9). While this might be seen as deceptive, Sugiura argues

deception occurs when a researcher intentionally misinforms or fails to fully disclose relevant information to subjects in cases when informed consent is required. This would appear distinct from research where the researcher has just acted covertly, assuming the role of the lurker, usually because the community is in the public domain. (2014)

I also consider users' contextual perceptions (Ess and AoIR 2002:7). Some are aware they are on an open platform with their identities available to all (Shim and Noh 2012). Yet others' perception of sites means they would not readily want their identities disclosed (Workman 2015, Markham and Buchanan 2012:10, van der Graaf 2014:36, Sandvoss and Kearns 2014:96). Furthermore, since Only-Click TV often involves illicit acquisition (Lukács 2010:183-7, Iwabuchi 2004a:8), users are unlikely to want to be shown partaking in such activities (Futrell et al 2006:280, Haigh and Jones 2007:80-1, Busse and Hellekson 2012:38-

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<sup>77</sup> However Facebook intentionally manipulated emotional content of its users without their consent and any form of audience interaction, subsequently changing their Terms and Conditions (see Murthy 2014, Cook 2014, Clemens 2014b).

9). Presenting practices to a wider audience without consent could be read as an invasion of privacy and a form of data harvesting<sup>78</sup> (Sharf 1999:251). Therefore, consent to use material should be ascertained before quoting and/or naming users, and/or anonymity must be given to disguise users' identities (Kozinets 1997, Shim and Noh 2012:129, Currigan 2014, Reilly 2014).

Lastly, I consider the nature of users' content disseminated on various digital sites. Some fans post opinions or debate on more general forums and/or engage with wider topics (e.g. Williams 2011b, Weir and Dunne 2014:83). Yet for others, such as those penning fan fiction (Jones 2014c, Pink et al 2016:50-2), the personalised creation of writing is for closed groups, especially if content is sexual, e.g. slash (Busse and Hellekson 2012:38). Ethical considerations also relate to different scholar-fan stances focusing on transformative or affirmational fan practices, 'i.e. those fans who participate in communities and define themselves through participation, and those who act within a less fixed networks, or none at all' (Kustritz 2011). Consequently, research on transformative practices 'tend[s] to not cite and reference material without the permission of its fannish creators' (Busse 2011), whereas research on affirmational practices does not often require consent (Baym 2011, Harrington 2011, Hills 2012b:19). My own stance is of the latter kind, thus informing, in part, my textual/methodological and ethical considerations. Additionally, whilst my analysis of images, GIFS, and memes focuses on transformative fanworks, their remixing of textual content, over the creation of audience content that uses the text as source material (Shifman 2013:365-7), and high degree of spreadability (Jenkins et al 2013:28) means they are public texts. Thus, consent was not deemed necessary for discussing these data sets. This self-reflection goes some way to answering the question: 'what does the "fan" part [of aca-/scholar-fandom] actually refer to?' (Hills 2011d).

Significantly, whilst different research studies have chosen different ethical stances, justified by different contexts, I am dealing with mixed data sets from a range of media-technological platforms, users, and content (van der Graaf 2014). As such, where websites are considered open I have not acquired consent due to the public nature of the content and the pragmatic issues of gaining consent from every individual over such an extensive period of time (Bassett and O'Riordan 2002:236, 244, Anderson and Jirotko 2015:275). In the closed *ITF* Facebook groups, consent was granted from the users, with debriefing, the right to withdraw, and the

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<sup>78</sup> Sharf defines this as 'the collecting of the words of others... for purposes of making a profit and self-aggrandizement' (1999:251), and an invasion of privacy.

option to see the research (Chatman 2014, McGee 2008:118, Haigh and Jones 2007:82). Since *Snowblood Apple* is no longer active, consent from its users was impossible to gain. As I am analysing a mixture of potentially-sensitive and non-sensitive data, I have avoided creating a dualism of anonymising only some data (Bruckman 2002a:229, Workman 2015) *by anonymising all written and image posts* (Bruckman 2002b, Williams 2011:268, Haigh and Jones 2007:81), whilst quoting verbatim. Moreover, anonymity is ‘important for minimising... intrusion into the fan community’ (Bore and Hickman 2013). My research ‘could risk upsetting intra-community relationships by citing... responses that were critical of ... particular kinds of behaviour’ (ibid). Therefore, removing the identity of all posters is ethically sensible, ensuring that posters do not receive wider criticism from the online communities they are part of as a result of my research.

## **5. Conclusion**

Using Kristeva’s abjection theory (Nelson 2005:12), my textual and audience analysis looks at TV horror from various perspectives. This methodology highlights how horror has often been analysed as culturally allegorical/subtextual. The case studies, through their use and subversion of horror genre codes, visual representations, cinematic/technological devices, and characterisation, offer rich meaning. Moreover, the three different examples studied in Part I provide an array of twenty-first TV horror and bids for quality (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11-12), accounting for wider cultural contexts and political economies of twenty-first century television (Lewis and Jhally 1998:111-2, Akass and McCabe 2007:292). My analysis ranges from national to transnational, from content residing firmly within television to spilling out over a transmedia nexus, and from horror texts reaffirming hegemony through to subverting ideologies and identities. But meaning-making does not solely lie in these case study texts. On-screen abjection meets audiences’ abject spectrums whereby affective meaning is informed by viewing contexts, audience members’ personal histories, identity politics, lived experiences, initial and subsequent viewings, and consumption trajectories – all can play a role in guiding individuals’ responses. Furthermore, audiences are caught up in the habitual lexicon and engagements of online groups, with communal dynamics also shaping performed responses to these texts. Whilst Part I’s textual analysis presents preferred readings of my case studies that focus on the ‘internal structure of the text[s]’ (Fiske and O’Sullivan 1994:238), demonstrating

how abjection is used in aesthetic bids for quality, structures of narration, and culturally-coding Others, it cannot readily account for the variety of audiences' affective responses. Therefore, whilst Part I establishes core textual qualities in the case studies' on-screen abjections, Part II looks at how audiences' abject spectrums intersect with these texts.

Since online media is central to audiences' engagement with texts and one another, I use netnography to analyse audiences' abject spectrums of the case studies at pre-textual (Chapters 4 and 6), paratextual (Chapters 4-6), textual (Chapter 5 and 6), and post-object (Chapters 4 and 6) levels. Since Only-Click TV requires a digital platform to circulate, fans' online interactions offer a suitable source for examining it as a consumption practice, and the various meanings/contexts surrounding it (Chapter 4). Using textual and audience analysis means considering the cultural locations of both (Buckingham 2006:12), whilst also acknowledging that neither is more authentic than the other (Hills 2005a:90).

Netnography can also analyse the language of audiences in both written and visual form, whilst considering the possibilities and restraints of differing online sites in their engagement with Bhabha's third space model as audiences translate cultural abjection with *MOH*'s Japanese episodes. Such 'a "select and mix" approach through which' fans utilize both industry and fan-generated content (Sandvoss and Kearns 2014:103) is not only important in addressing convergence culture in-action, but also to exploring how different fans *use* and *position* varied texts in constructing self-identity and fandom (Sandvoss 2007:29-30).

This exploration of twenty-first century TV horror has also shaped my ethical considerations. Taking a self-reflexive scholar-fan stance has been fundamental not only in considering the analysis of the netnographic data, but has also been key to underpinning difficult ethical dynamics. Dealing with multiple audiences and discussing a range of topics over a range of sites has meant needing to be flexible enough to remain ethical in each context through rigorous examination of my practices, engagement with differing networks, the type of data ascertained, and how that materialises in my findings. Examining the specifics of each context has resulted in an ethical stance that is multifaceted.

I now begin my substantive and original analysis of my case studies and their audiences. Part I serves multiple purposes: it analyses TV horror located within different sectors of the television industry, and different types of television horror, as 'quality' TV discourses are constructed. Chapter 1 begins with British PSB/youth TV horror *In the Flesh*. The series has to negotiate a traditional public service broadcasting ethos against increased digital

commercialism in the UK (Bignell 2013:70-1). Concurrently, the ‘BBC... can rarely deliver the same level of [textual] expansions as their American or local commercial counterparts’ (Gray 2008:95). Consequently, this mode of TV horror is ‘overflow’/transmedia poor (ibid), relying on ‘quality’ British social (sur)realist aesthetics and themes embodied its innovative I-zombie narrativisation that humanises the abject undead Other (Abbott 2016a:163). Subsequently, Chapter 2 turns to US basic cable and *TWD* that, by contrast, is ‘overflow’/transmedia rich (Gray 2008:95), helping to keep the storyworld constantly in circulation (Gillan 2011:4). *TWD*’s narrative complexity, character development, and graphic content all seek to elevate the status of AMC in line with premium television, where abjection constructs the hyperdiegetic landscape. The final Chapter of Part I ends with what is often considered the benchmark for quality TV, premium cable and its artistic and thematic freedom linked to high production values (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11). But in choosing *MOH*’s two American/Japanese co-produced episodes I also provide a transnational focus to discussing graphic twenty-first century TV horror. This informs the contextualisation of abjection that uses its ambiguity to reframe how the texts’ female Japanese monsters are coded. Part I’s textual analysis establishes key components of abjection – themes of suffering, aesthetic qualities, cultural-coding of monstrous Others – taking a critical distance that positions said components in their industrial and cultural contexts. However, the thesis is also interested in how these components are affectively engaged with by audiences. That is to say, what are the components that audiences particularly bring to the fore in their discussions, how do they respond to these aspects, in what contexts are these aspects heightened and/or diminished, and how do these responses change over time? Therefore, in order to address the myriad potential for different readings and the in-process gradational affective field of aesthetic, ideological, and/or emotive responses to on-screen abjection, Part II presents abject spectrums as an audience-based model. This explores how audiences engage with the case studies within phenomenological contexts that are themselves materialised online. Consequently, Part II’s netnography develops the abject spectrum as an original concept through which we can better understand audiences’ readings of the screen abjection discussed in Part I.

## **1. Fleshing Out Abject Subjectivity: *In the Flesh*'s I-Zombie Narrativisation and the Sympathetic Other**

### **1.1. Intro**

This thesis has argued that a distinct shift in graphic horror television in the twenty-first century pertains to cultural, industrial, and technological developments. Part I will now consider these developments in relation to specific case studies from the UK, US, and US/Japan, using Kristeva's work along with other relevant theories discussed in the Literature Review as a means of analysing TV horror's on-screen abjection. This not only highlights how abjection can be located within socio-cultural and transcultural contexts, but also evidences the robustness of the abject model in analysing characters and storyworlds. It also considers the case studies from an industrial position, exploring the aesthetics of abjection used both textually and paratextually to attract audiences and lay claim to 'quality' TV status. Building from this, as stressed in the Methodology, Kristevan readings of my case study texts will then be triangulated against audiences' abject spectrums in Part II. While changes in horror TV have resulted in more graphic visuality (Abbott 2016b:155-7), and a wider transmedia remit (Evans 2011) – which Chapters 2 and 3 discuss – it is paramount to note that transmedia is not ubiquitous. Some TV horror still adheres to traditional models of textual structure, staying within the confines of television's "ontology" (Turner and Tay 2009:3, Miller 2009:75), and not spilling over into a transmedia matrix (Hills 2010b).

Whilst cross-media narratives and merchandising are popular within the TVIII corpus (see the Literature Review page 55) (Jowett and Abbott 2013:10), this remains an expensive and thus risky endeavour for industry players (Gray 2008:95), creating problematic logistical issues<sup>79</sup> (Viljoen 2002:24-5). Consequently, while ample commercial TV, supported by advertising revenue and business partnerships, is transmedia rich (Gray 2008:95)<sup>80</sup>, the BBC-as-PSB is

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<sup>79</sup> Moreover, 'it is hard to persuade manufacturers to enter into merchandising deals, until the programme has had some exposure... Therefore, for all but the most long-running and frequently repeated series, serious merchandising is unlikely to be achieved' (Viljoen 2002:24-5).

<sup>80</sup> Or in the case of anime be crucial to its very political economy (Kelts 2006:90-1, Steinberg 2012:190, Condry 2013:71-2).

more restrained in its transmedia remit (Gray 2008:95, Hammer and Gulyás 2013:viii). This is not to say the BBC does not utilise cross-media platforming/merchandising, e.g. *Doctor Who* (Hills 2010c:66-7), *Torchwood* (Hills 2012c:409-10, Williams 2015:194), *Sherlock* (Stein and Busse 2012:12-3), and children's programmes (Jackson 2013:25-6, Franco 2015:40-1) have all utilised transmedia storytelling. But texts that do not have such a legacy or pre-existing fan-base, unlike *Star Trek* (Geraghty 2010:131), *The Walking Dead* (Hassler-Forest 2014:94-5) or *Battlestar Galactica* (Johnson 2013:3), are far less likely to utilise transmedia strategies. This holds true for Chapter 1's case study, BBC3's teen horror drama *In the Flesh* (*ITF*). Given that this programme is framed within the UK's public service broadcasting remit, BBC3 'must juggle this with a channel brand and youth address that necessitates a presentation of itself as... risk-taking' (Woods 2016:46), whilst being confined to a limited budget (Cooke 2015:244). Even as it seeks to compete with US TV (Woods 2016:29), the series is confined solely to television-originated content.

Within the UK the BBC has been at the forefront of digital/online convergence not only in terms of content (Sutherland 2008:2, Gray 2008:81, Marshall 2009:44, Hendy 2013:110-2), but also through its role in policy making (Collins 2002, Klontzas 2013, Cunningham 2009:90-1). Launched on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2003 (Cooke 2015:213), BBC3 was created by its parent institution in relation to the BBC's move, via the digital switchover, to diversify its services 'with a narrower editorial focus' (Suter 2013:74). But whilst traditionally the BBC, through its financial structuring and ethos to inform, educate, and entertain (Buscombe 2000:12, Scannell 2000:47-8), could 'afford to be more daring and overtly innovative' (Gray 2008:39, Klontzas 2013:53), in the digital media market it is now having to compete within a more commercial paradigm both nationally and internationally (Bignell 2013:70-1, Crisell 2006:42-3, Turner 2009:54, Tinic 2009:66). Consequently, the rise of digital youth channels such as BBC3 and E4 seeking to create original content aimed at this target demographic<sup>81</sup> (Woods 2013:17-8, 2016:30, Cooke 2015:238) has been influenced by US imports, yet both evoke British identities (Woods 2015:233, 2016:71). TV horror, sci-fi and telefantasy have proven successful youth-oriented genres whilst also creating original, dynamic content that adheres to PSB ideologies (Johnson 2010:145, Cooke 2015:12). Lez Cooke argues that this is evident in innovative teen TV dramas such as *Misfits* and *The Fades* (2015:240), which combine social realism with fantasy and horror (ibid). While horror, in its grandiose grotesqueness, has been held in opposition to social realist aesthetics (e.g. Ryan and Kellner 1990a:9, Ryan 2009), TV drama

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<sup>81</sup> BBC3 is aimed at 16-34 year olds (Woods 2016:30).

set in supernatural realms can evidence ‘clear engagements with the social injustices [of the time]’ (Willis 2003:76), partly utilising social realist imagery and/or narratives (e.g. Schneider 2003c:186 Walker 2016:50).

Unlike horror texts positioned as rites of passage, shaped by an illicit discourse for younger audiences (Kermode 2001:126, Walker 2016:13,17-8), *ITF* presents social realist horror dealing with a number of ‘issue-based storylines’ (Cooke 2015:195), eschewing wholly realist narratives in favour of framing controversial subject matter such as teen suicide, sexual identity, radicalisation, and drug-taking within the realms of horror (Abbott 2010a:93). *ITF*, ‘[l]ike many dramas about outsiders... could be seen as a metaphor for the hatred and oppression of “the other”, whether blacks, Muslims, homosexuals, or teenagers rebelling against... conformity’ (Cooke 2015:241-2), positioning its ‘zombie Other as a victim of religious, sexual, and moral persecution’ (Elliott-Smith 2016:171). Whilst abjection is a bodily trait (Kristeva 1982:3-4), it is also a cultural process acting upon those deemed as Other (ibid:14, 128). *ITF* critically engages with both aspects dialogically, taking the perspective of the sympathetic monster (Jowett and Abbott 2013:206). Abjection theory can serve to not only highlight how the monstrous body is symbolically-loaded, but in conjunction with Douglas’s work (1966), the rules and rituals that seek to control abjection can also be read as reflective of wider cultural prejudice and oppressive schema. By taking an ‘I-zombie’ reading strategy, ‘in which the audience [are] implicated within the perspective of the undead’ (Abbott 2016a:144), the narrative device serves to humanise the Other. Such narrativisation is central to positioning audiences in relation to on-screen characters and is fundamental to the on-going formulation of abject spectrums, as whilst *ITF* offers a cultural-coding of abject and non-abject bodies, thus engaging with ideological, emotive and aesthetic qualities of abjection, it asks us not to fear the monsters but to be empathetic to their perspective. In becoming ‘I-abject’ audiences are asked to respond from an abject point of view, rather than seeing those deemed abject as wholly Other. And as we’ll see in Chapters 5 and 6, fans of the show responded to the trials and tribulations of the undead characters, viewing them as markers of textual quality.

## **1.2. Out of the Grave, Into The Kitchen: *ITF* as TV Horror, Subjective Abjection and British Social (Sur)Realism**

In the Literature Review, I asked what does it feel like to be, and/or to be treated as, abject (Kristeva 1982:8, Maylan 2017:278-9), and what are the systems that seek to control abject disorder (Douglas 1996:78,123, Kristeva 1982:107)? Applied specifically to horror, the monster provides a platform for considering these questions. Tenga and Zimmerman note that ‘while the sympathetic vampire incites desire... the zombie incites fear’ (2013:77). This has occurred largely via their respective conceptualisations. The latter is framed as wholly abject, both corporeally – ‘[t]hey rot; smell; body parts fall off; and they bear the scars of their death’ (Abbott 2016a:161; Creed 1993a:10) – and existentially, losing all conscious subjectivity (Lauro and Embry 2008:90). Therefore, zombies are ‘an object of horror because they lack individuality’ (Abbott 2016a:161). This lack of individuality means we cannot take their subjective position, and zombies are often massed as narrative threats. Consequently, ‘distance must be kept between the living and the dead by constructing physical and emotional barricades’ (Abbott 2016b:163). The vampire, on the other hand, more readily represents sympathetic monstrosity, luring ‘audiences with the pathos of their predicament and their painful awareness of their outsiderdom’ (Williamson 2005:29, Janicker 2014:53), as well as evidencing a reluctance and disdain for who they are (Abbott 2012:34). This shifts the abject body from horror to melodrama, intensifying subjective narration, and emphasising ‘emotion and personal crises’ (Wheatley 20006:152). These ‘reluctant TV heroes... [who just want] to be normal’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:176), provide a point of view that asks the audience to see what it is like to be Other (Abbott 2016a:142).

Boon (2011a:7-8, 2011b:57-60) separates zombiedom into nine forms. These consist of the traditional ‘zombi’ as a state of possession vis-à-vis voodoo/vodou, traditionally linked to Haiti and Africa (see Kee 2011:9, Degoul 2011:24, Sheller 2003:145, Dayan 1998:37-8, Coleman 2011:47-9), through to modern-day cannibal zombies as introduced in George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (Jancovich 1992:89, Pinedo 2004:99, Derry 2009:76-7, Dyson 2014:132). In all zombie forms we see abjection personified or, more appropriately, de-personified as boundaries such as subject/object, Self/Other, life/death are conflated within the zombie body (Lauro and Christie 2011:4, Christie 2011a:71), reiterating ‘the fall’ of abjection (Sconce 2014:99). Equally, in all forms of the zombie as post-human there can seemingly be no consideration of any human restoration.

However, concurrent with the rise of graphic TV horror in the twenty-first century has been a rise in the ‘post-zombie’ subgenre; texts that install a subjective viewpoint from the previously non-conscious zombie body (Hassler-Forest 2016:171). Making the zombie sentient provides

what Stacey Abbott terms ‘I-zombie’ subjectivity. Resultantly, ‘the I-zombie, in which the zombie is not only sympathetic but is also the narrator or focalising perspective of the text’ (2016a:163) fosters posthuman narratives that explore prejudicial reactions towards the abject Other (Cox and Levine 2016). *ITF* utilises this narrative device whereby ‘the personal framework of the I-zombie facilitates an exploration of sexual identity, a subject which bridges the personal and political in terms of identity politics’ (Abbott 2016a:172). Precisely because neither is morally prescriptive (Kristeva 1982:9, Douglas 1966:162), both abjection or dirt/disorder offer frameworks through which the Other can become politically subversive (Kristeva 1982:4), questioning acts of prejudice towards the sympathetic undead (Cox and Levine 2016:77, Woods 2016:98). This ‘I-abject’ position acts as a primer for abject spectrums, aiding in audience identification and interpretation (see Chapter 5). As noted, this presents a subjectivity to beings coded as Other, inflecting how audiences may (or should) feel about abjection, in marked contrast to situations where those depicted as abject are wholly Other and so must be thrust aside (Kristeva 1982:3), e.g. the zombies in *TWD* (see Chapter 2). My analysis is informed here by *ITF*’s hybridising of horror and social realism (Jowett and Abbott 2013:2013:92), which not only provides textual authenticity (Woods 2016:9) but also uses social realism’s sense of place and aesthetics to localise the culture in which the undead are treated as pollutants (Douglas 1966:2-4).

Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment explain that social realism ‘focuses on the lives of characters in a particular milieu or environment that is at some remove from the images and places that populate most commercial generic production’ (2000:190). This “‘slice of life” drama... is distinguished by the attention it pays to characters who usually figure as background presences in the generic mainstream, those marginalised by virtue of their social status and/or ethnic identity to perform in supporting, often servile roles’ (ibid). This focus on Othered identities often utilises ensemble casts and multi-stranded narratives to explore the hardships and alienation these characters endure (ibid; Lay 2007:236-7), and is frequently ‘motivated by political change and transformation’ (Creeber 2009b:428).

Similarly, within a British context ‘social realism has often been used in ways that are highly discomfoting, rather than complacent or consoling’ (Turner 2006:209). Consequently, social realism is frequently character-driven ‘as a means to explore the conditions of the working class’ (Cooke 2015:142). Moreover, melodrama is also linked to *ITF*’s characters, ‘inviting the viewer to identify with their personal narratives’ (ibid:181). As such, ‘British screen genres...

can be a response to social conflicts, with the potential to become the basis for the hegemonic re-imagining and reordering of society through negotiation' (Baker 2009:454).

Here signification is symbiotic with representations of space and place, exploring the geography that these marginalised characters reside in. The construction of place in British social realism mirrors and matches, and thus often engulfs, those 'living in the gaps left by successive waves of industrialisation and economic redevelopment' (Hallam and Marshment 2000:193). Stressing a gritty verisimilitude of the working class/underclass, realism linked to the alienated (Sexton 2014:35) provides a strong sense of regionalism (Lay 2007:235). As Millington notes, 'Northern realism fulfils a significant and socially progressive role in TV by providing a space for the exploration of working-class life' (1993:124). Consequently, post-industrial places provide social realist engagement in their construction of mise-en-scene, highlighting the impoverishment of characters (Baker 20009:455-6, Woods 2015:238-9, Lay 2007:239-40). As such, '[t]raditionally, social realism has been associated with a dour look, especially when the location has been factories and terraced houses of the industrial north, as if this iconography was synonymous with dark colours and an absence of vitality' (Cooke 2015:199-200). Such realism, stemming firstly from 'kitchen sink dramas' that aimed to speak to, and represent, the British working class (Cooke 2015:36-7), and secondly from a documentary heritage with its potential for 'serious' and 'progressive' depictions, highlights social issues concordant with the BBC's PSB ethos (Thornham and Purvis 2005:68-71, Caughie 2000:204, Creeber 2009b:426) and its production of quality TV drama (Millington 1993, Sexton 2014:31).

Significantly, 'British... youth drama... [also] has its roots in social realism' (Woods 2013:17), arguably positioning itself against versions of US teen television<sup>82</sup> by utilising 'cultural discourses of authenticity and "realness"' (ibid:18). Akin to social realism, British teen dramas have addressed issues such as drug use, queer identity and identities-in-crisis via eating disorders and mental health problems (Lay 2007:238), refusing 'to offer neat political or moral solutions' (Creeber 2009b:429). Furthermore, British teen drama tends to offer a self-reflexive stance, seeing its target demographic as media-literate and engaged with popular culture

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<sup>82</sup> However, it is important to note that US youth TV *has* combined fantasy with social realism (Jowett 2010a:108) in cases such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* where the protagonist Buffy must deal with the issues of being a teenager and the perils of saving the world (Early 2001:16), and its spin-off series *Angel* where 'vampires and demons can "stand in for social issues"' (Jowett 2010b:144). Rather, in British youth drama, social realism has a lineage in dealing with social issues *and* in representing a specific style of TV aesthetics.

(Woods 2013:22), but also sometimes struggling with liminal identities/positions (Woods 2015:230).

While it is often seen as a ‘distinctive feature of British film [and television] culture’ (Lay 2007:231), Samantha Lay argues that British social realism is about more than ‘presenting a “slice of life” in any uniform way’, with social realist style being ‘employed across a range of genres... for instance, comedy, horror and science fiction’ (2002:23), offering social commentary (ibid:77) and generic hybridity (Sexton 2014:34). Moreover, despite the grittiness of documentary providing a significant heritage (Sexton 2014), social realist texts may nonetheless strive for highly stylised aesthetics (Baker 2009:461, Glenn 2014:80, Cooke 2015:196-8). But whereas many twenty-first century British horror films ‘merge social realist and horror film iconography’ (Walker 2016:87), displaying a reactionary stance to the threat of underclass youth in what has been called ‘hoodie horror’ (Walker 2011:119-20, 2012:447, 2016:86), British youth drama adheres to what Creeber terms ‘social surrealism’ (2009b:429). Proving popular with E4, ITV2 and BBC3 (Johnson 2010:145, Brown 2010), this push towards ‘fantasy, stylisation, and anti-naturalist techniques... [fosters] a more implicitly subjective view of “the real”’ (Creeber 2009b:429), whereby ‘the[se] “kitchen sink” ...[texts] are less about the conditions of the working class and their collective class consciousness, than they are about the attempts of individuals to escape from those conditions and that consciousness’ (Higson 1996:146). Social surrealism formulates ‘interior subjectivities’ to engage with social realist themes/topics from *within* the geography, as opposed to deploying an outsiders’ voyeuristic gaze (Creeber 2009b:430).

This allows writers ‘to address serious and controversial issues in a way that might be difficult to discuss through more realist narratives or where the expectations of large mainstream audiences must be satisfied’ (Abbott 2010a:93). It allows writers, producers and other creatives ‘to say obliquely what they cannot say upfront’ (Angelini and Booy 2010:20), and in the process highlight how the heteronormative trinity of ‘whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality are no longer the invisible “norms” of society’ (Jowett 2010a:107), offering alternative representations that engage with identity issues (Jowett 2010b:114).

*ITF*’s social realist engagement focuses on queer liminal identities marginalised in traditional post-industrial northern locales. Moreover, the white working-class masculinity so often victimised in British social realism (Lay 2007:236, Glenn 2014:78, Creeber 2009b:428-9, Blandford 2007:25-6) becomes part of a heteronormative paradigm that marginalises and

threatens queerness within *ITF* (Jowett 2010a:107-8). Social surrealism then provides the I-zombie perspective by which versions of oppressed lived experience are mapped onto the undead body (Abbott 2016a:163). In series one this focuses on queer sexual Othering, whilst series two expands into queer political Othering.

### **1.3. Queer Fear: *ITF*'s Sexual (Body) Politics**

Traditionally, the returning abject body from the grave has been the narrative drive threatening the human race where the zombie-as-Other represents a final corporeality. However, *ITF* subverts the normativity of such generic structures through its questioning and conflation of undead and living bodies; it is 'told through the perspective of zombie Kieren Walker, who suffers from partially deceased syndrome (PDS)' (Pulliam 2014:143). A medical cure has been found offering the restoration of cognitive brain function, meaning PDS sufferers return from an undead form akin to modern zombiedom and re-occupy a human-like state. By taking the I-zombie perspective 'we follow Kieren as he attempts to come to terms with what he had to do to survive in his untreated state and grows to accept who he is, both in terms of his PDS and his sexuality' (Cox and Levine 2016:300), therefore resonating with Kristeva's subject-in-process (Oliver 1993:13).

Set in the fictional town of Roarton, its location in Lancashire holds pertinence. As noted, place in British social realism is a central component of the genre and British youth drama (Woods 2016:96). Place and space are equally important in horror in terms of monstrous settings. In its bid for heritage legitimacy and transnational appeal, British horror has largely located itself within the gothic setting of London (Hutchings 2009:190-2, Williams 2014:71, Allmer et al 2012, Walker 2016:17), or the rural wilderness (Williams 2011c, Cramer 2016, Walker 2016:100-2). Yet such a tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011) does not manifest in *ITF*. Through its use of working-class characters, post-industrialised northern landscapes, and bleak, sombre and washed-out hues (Johnson 2013), the series instead again engages with the 'kitchen sink' aesthetics of British social realism (Elliott-Smith 2016:175-6, Chambers and Elizabeth 2017:196-200).

Richards notes that '[w]ithin England and outside London, the county with the most sustained and influential cinematic image is Lancashire' (1997:252). Moreover, links to Britain's global

industrial presence mean that Lancashire is an industrial hub representative of Northern England (ibid). Through this working-class ethos and identity Richards argues that Lancashire proffers a strong sense of locality and community (ibid:253). The dissolution of industry in this region during the post-industrial epoch resulted in mass unemployment and impoverishment, and it is this socio-cultural context that frames the fictional Roarton. The geopolitical climate is juxtaposed to the government's (London-centric) decision to reintegrate PDS sufferers back into their homes. This North-South divide echoes British social realist dramas of the 1980s, commenting on the disenfranchised underclasses of the North effected by (neo-liberal) policies made in England's capital (Cooke 2015:148, Elliott-Smith 2016:176).

Met with xenophobia, prejudice and hate, the returning undead are perceived as 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966:44), marked as abject Others by Roarton's locals – most notably through old testament doctrines spouted by the local vicar, Bill Macy (Steve Evets), leader of the vigilante faction the Human Volunteer Force (HVF) which later becomes the Roarton Protection Service (RPS), as well as through the far-right manifesto of the local electorate. These hyper-masculine patriarchal figures/institutions within the small town act 'as a model of civic integrity... [due to] faith in the church and military [or militia] as the foundations of social order and security, [and] its insistence on the absolute otherness of the enemy' (Hantke 2011:172). However, we learn that right-wing conservative agendas existed pre-Uprising, aimed at marginalised human bodies/identities such as LGBT subjects. Thus, *ITF* uses regionality and the construction of local identity 'as a means to critique precisely the stereotypes from which it is constructed' (Morgan-Russell 2007:324), not only negotiating insider and outsider identities linked to place, but also showing how other identities such as sexuality and gender cut along this axis (Glenn 2014:75).

In stark socio-corporeal opposition to human fundamentalism, the Undead Liberation Army (ULA) led by the Undead Prophet, utilise their own bodies as biochemical weapons. Individuals ingest the drug 'Blue Oblivion', turning them rabid. They become fundamentally extreme both in political and bodily terms. The formation of the group, its doctrine and its actions, become points of debate within the text. Via the subjective focus of Kieren, situated in neither political camp, marginalisation becomes the gaze through which such politics are filtered (Creeber 2009b:433, Woods 2015:234, Hallam and Marshment 2000:194). Abjection disrupts patriarchal order (Wood 1986:74-5, Dolar 1991:19), but from a queer/I-zombie perspective it is not the undead who are amoral (Kristeva 1982:4). Rather, it is fundamentalist/hyper-masculine patriarchal institutions that are coded as such. These

depictions resonate with Douglas's argument that considers both masculine and feminine gendered threats in cultures (1966:4), as opposed to Kristeva's feminine-only abject model (1982:71) discussed in the Literature Review (page 39).

Thus, the liminal status of Kieren – corporeally, existentially, sexually, and socio-politically – provides scope for the negotiation of self and Other relating to wider cultural discourses. As a posthuman he becomes a vehicle for ideological change as he 'undermines our conceptions of "normality" and encourages audiences to embrace and celebrate hybridity and difference within a changed world' (Abbott 2016a:7). This is not to say *ITF* offers simple allegorical links between zombies and terrorism (e.g. Cocarla 2014:55), or Western Manichean reactions to terrorist acts (Wetmore 2012:151). Rather, through the liminal scope of various embodiments, a cultural climate is created (Frost 2011:16, Hills 2011b:107-8, Jones and McGlotten 2014:3), one that draws on a range of societal issues and discourses within both British and global contexts. Resultantly, Kieren is multiply queer.

Whilst other undead bodies such as mummies, vampires, and Frankenstein's monster are afforded sexual quests and lay 'claim to sexual identities' (Jones and McGlotten 2014:8, see also Elliott-Smith 2014a:148, Cocarla 2014:54), the zombie has been frequently desexualised, with academia often coding it in other ways (Jones and McGlotten 2014:9). For instance, in Harry M. Benshoff's socio-historical account of the shifting depictions of the monster (as queer in Hollywood and Western Media, the zombie is strikingly absent. Benshoff offers no consideration of modern zombiedom (post-Romero), despite noting the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s/70s (ibid:173, 182, 221). Likewise, in linking the AIDS crisis during the 1980s with the vampiric body (1997:2, 242-3; Skal 1993:344-351, Miller 2011:221), he neglects zombie-as-contagion representations of that epoch (Russell 2005:164), and in general<sup>83</sup> (Moore 2016:300, Bishop 2016:172, Pielak and Cohen 2017:2, Hattner 2017:374).

Yet, for Jones and McGlotten the zombie's necrosexuality is 'akin to human experience of sex because it is of the body' (2014:16-7)<sup>84</sup>. Moreover, zombies 'are... rooted in concepts of sociality – the relationship and forms of reproduction that organize associations between

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<sup>83</sup> Even when the zombie text is deconstructed in his case study of *White Zombie* (1932), the monstrous threat to the homosocial equilibrium of patriarchy resides solely within the (homo)sexual agency of the Caucasian human threats, Legendre and Beaumont (1997:66-8). This reading reduces the zombie body to an impotent bystander, also removing the racially charged sexual threat of the black body linked to imperial discourse of the time (Wood 1985:200-1, 209-10, Bishop 2008:150-1). Benshoff's writing out of the zombie in *White Zombie* reduces the wider cultural climate, distilling it solely onto queer rhetoric, thus neglecting the wider social chromatography.

<sup>84</sup> Although they note 'the zombie-body has a different set of capacities and limitations compared with human embodiment' (Jones and McGlotten 2014:16-7).

people, social systems, and non-human others' (ibid:4). Zombies as vessels for contagion are intrinsically reproductive, either via biting or through the paradoxical state of death and rebirth. Therefore, Benschhoff's construction of queer discourse *is* applicable to the zombie. He writes that '[s]ociologically, the term queer has been used to describe an "oxymoronic community of difference"... [of] any people not explicitly defining themselves in "traditional" heterosexual terms' (1997:5). He adds that '[q]ueer seeks to go beyond these and such categories based on the concepts of normative, heterosexuality and traditional gender roles to encompass a more inclusive, amorphous, and ambiguous contra-heterosexuality' (ibid). Similarly, the zombie collective is also an 'oxymoronic community of difference' bound by corporeal drives and morphological identity; anyone can become/join the horde. As Benschhoff notes, with humans becoming, or creating, monsters, '[t]he act of procreation, read as sex, thus makes this particular formula spectacularly queer' (ibid:49). Likewise, the act of 'cannibalism and oral sexuality', which Benschhoff only ascribes to the vampire, and which is seen as the 'most pervasive sexual perversion' (ibid:56), is fundamental to zombiedom. Assimilation into Otherness is the threat defined against the hegemonic state of humanity through such antagonistic perversions. Yet, like queer identity, the ambiguity and amorphousness of the zombie links the Other to the self, resonating with Kristeva's abjection model (1982:3). Benschhoff himself notes: 'the male homosexual or queer is monstrous precisely because he embodies characteristics of the feminine... Kristeva centrally locates the abject in patriarchal culture's fear of revulsion towards the specifically maternal body with its fluid boundary-crossing potential' (ibid:6). He adds that 'it destroys rigid territoriality and undermines binary oppositions, just as queer theory insists' (ibid).

Gelder notes that '[q]ueer theory's readings are always about sex relations. It teases out the proximity of one sexuality to another' (2000d:187). Yet, for Benschhoff,

[q]ueer theory seeks to re-examine and redefine the social constructions of gender and sexuality and race, to take the cultural understanding of those topics beyond strict binarisms of male and female, straight and gay, white and black, in order to deconstruct the implicit hierarchical valuations within those oppositions (1997:255).

While this runs the risk of supplanting other marginalised groups' counter-hegemonic voices, notably ethnicity (ibid:59, 205, 257; Jowett 2010a:110), within a universalising discourse that

foregrounds white homosexuality (Miller 2011:228, Elliott-Smith 2014a:152), Benschhoff's use of queer theory is salient to *ITF*.

Paramount in the series is the fact that, unlike traditional zombie films, zombiedom is not infectious. Whilst the act of cannibalism can be present in a zombie's drug-induced rabid state, individuals do not become undead by being bitten, consuming abject material, or dying post-Uprising. By removing this central generic component of zombie identity, *ITF* sidesteps previous discourse that has attached monstrous mimesis, via contamination/infection, to the real infections of HIV/AIDS and/or other sexually-transmitted diseases (Cocarla 2014:68. Elliott-Smith 2014a:153, 2014b:144). The undead can claim autonomous sexual freedom because they are not restricted by human fears 'regarding STIs, or the limitations of one's sexual identity' (Jones and McGlotten 2014:14-5), unlike the deadly carnality of the cannibalistic/contagious zombie. In this case, queer identity is not an abject threat as with traditional zombiedom, but is rather a subversive potential in the face of radical conservatism (Cox and Levine 2016:75) and a liminal state worked through existentially.

However, Kieren's queer identity is a source of conflict within Roarton.<sup>85</sup> Importantly, Kieren was treated as abject before the Uprising, moving the body from horror to melodrama in order to highlight 'the intensities and introspection of teenage experiences' (Woods 2016:88), and the subjective affect of being Othered. Kieren fits into the marginalised masculinity of kitchen sink dramas, where his scholarship, sensitivity, and social status have to be negotiated in relation to his working-class background (Cooke 2015:47, Elliott-Smith 2016:176). He informs Amy (Emily Bevan) (his 'best dead friend') that he was unwelcome in the local pub when human because he was 'different'. This is reiterated when he and Amy go there in their subsequent PDS state, and are mocked by HVF members for being feminine and weak, thus (always) remaining Other to hegemonic masculinity. Juxtaposed to the traditional masculinity of his best friend Rick (David Walmsley), Kieren is marginalised within the conservative community. Conversely, Rick, in joining the army, provides a militaristic discourse in which the exotic Other is fought by Western patriarchal armed forces, offering hyper-masculinity trained to maintain hegemonic order.

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<sup>85</sup> Like Cocarla, I am 'not conflating queerness with necrophilia or vice versa' (2014:63), but rather using queer discourse within the realm of monstrosity and wider cultural rhetoric.

This queerness of identity is exaggerated when Kieren returns in zombie form. Evidencing thematic tropes of British teen drama/social realism (Lay 2007:238), we learn that he committed suicide, unable to cope with the rejection of the community and Rick's departure to the armed forces (Abbott 2016a:172). But it is in both their returns to Roarton that identity can be renegotiated and wider perspectives challenged. Kieren's queer sexual-political agency threatens pre-existing prejudices held about him as a human, challenging conservative ideologies held by far-right religions and politics that regard him as undead and/or queer. The liminal and transitive body of Kieren represents the driving force for social cohesion previously un-afforded to the zombie body or his human state.

However, the queer potential ascribed to Rick in both his relationship with Kieren and his corporeal state does not result in a social shifting. Unlike Kieren, Rick's return (despite also being a PDS sufferer) does not equate him with traditional zombiedom or queerness. Rather, this change has fixed and 'zombified' his identity as a soldier, delineated by his military attire, and upheld by his father, Bill (Fhlainn 2011:140). He is forced by his father's ideologies to masquerade himself in line not only with his previous state as a soldier but also as human (Abbott 2016a:173), reiterated by phallic rituals performing his heteronormative masculinity (Cohan 1997:x, Butler 1990:173). The two are frequently seen shooting and partaking in homosocial relationships, linking Rick's army identity/masculinity to that of the militaristic HVF. Furthermore, this disavowal of undead identity also highlights the suggested sexual identity of Rick: that like Kieren, he is queer. When Rick rejects his militaristic position and paternal control, coming out to his father as proudly undead (Abbott 2016b:167), thus aligning himself with Kieren and the ideologies he symbolises, his father cannot reconcile this with his fundamentalist beliefs (which can be read as homophobic) (Woods 2016:99), and he murders Rick with a knife. This outcome evokes social realist tendencies that not only highlight inter-generational conflict between father and son (Hallam and Marshment 2000:194), but demonstrate how the oppressive constraints of place often lead to 'tragic consequences of containment and exclusion... erupt[ing] in violence and death' (ibid:194-5).

However, while this storyline engages with discourses of masculinity and sexuality, queer discourse is not limited to homosexual identity and relationships. Despite being heterosexual, Amy's overt sexuality can also be read as queer. Marks argues that because vampires are 'fully conscious... [they are] overtly gendered... [However, the] zombie is not subject enough to adequately *perform* gender' (2014:161). Yet, it is through the conscious undead state that Kieren, Amy, and the other PDS sufferers can *perform*, and thus overtly and discursively

challenge, norms of identity (Jones and McGlotten 2014:12). Therefore, Amy as a consciously heterosexual undead female remains positively queer(ed). Such queer socio-sexual discourse is displayed in several instances: firstly, Gary, one of the HVF members, asks what local school Amy went to. When she explains she attended the Girls' Grammar School, a space denied any male presence but also offering a male fantasy, Gary retorts that it must have been full of lesbians, then suggests Kieren should have gone there, further feminising/Othering him (Elliott-Smith 2016:3). Here, the female outsider, both spatially and corporeally, is demarcated as queer/Other. Secondly, Amy has a sexual encounter with Philip, a human and a local councillor for Roarton who often displays conservative cultural values in a bid to gain status within the community. Philip fantasises about Amy thereafter and also secretly attends an illegal undead brothel for humans to have sexual encounters with zombies, partaking in taboo acts in 'clandestine' and 'circumscribed' spaces (Foucault 1990:4). Amy's Otherness becomes a source of male sexual fantasy and abjection. As Jones and McGlotten comment, '[s]uch interchanges between sexual voyeurism and zombies throw doubt over the presumed lines between [the] "disgusting" and [the] "desirable"' (2014:11). This is reinforced by the subsequent attack by Gary on Amy (Moore 2016:305-6), which, in his phallic dominance of forcing her to wear lipstick, connotes rape (Elliott-Smith 2016:8) and further genders the human/undead binary as masculine/feminine (Douglas 1966:4). Thirdly, upon Amy's return to Roarton after her time spent at the Undead Prophet's commune – having left due to the aforementioned assault – she is betrothed to another undead member of the cult, Simon (Emmett Scanlan). The marginalised are to partake in hegemonic acts, potentially echoing gay marriages being recognised in the UK (Brown 2011, Kitzinger and Wilkinson 2004, Clarke and Finlay 2004). Whilst we later learn that Simon is gay himself, as he starts a romantic relationship with Kieren, Amy is given further sexual identity and agency through human/undead relationships: Philip argues with the human mob that there are no such things as pure bodies and that the good/evil binary mapped onto the human/undead distinction is ethically wrong. To speak of these relationships is a 'deliberate transgression...[that] upsets established law... [but also] anticipates... coming freedom' (Foucault 1990:6). Amy witnesses Philip's plea for social acceptance, and his subsequent chastising by his own kind. The two subsequently rekindle a sexually active and romantic relationship. Therefore, while prejudice manifests 'wherever posthumans form an identifiable group in conflict with humans' (Cox and Levine 2016:75), Amy's queer-straight liminality, similar to Kieren's, becomes a force for social change.

This Chapter has thus far argued that positionality can align audiences with those deemed abject and Other, stressing sympathy over dread towards the monster. In doing so, it raises questions about the culture that holds such prejudices (ibid:77). But since Kristeva inscribes ‘language within the body’ (Oliver 1993:3), the ambiguity of abjection affords multiple cultural identities and politics to be mapped onto the monster. Thus, Kieren et al not only queer sexual politics/prejudices but also wider ‘social and political concerns, particularly around terrorism, social intolerance, and the drive towards radicalism, themes that are highly prevalent in contemporary society’ (Abbott 2016a:112). However, whilst engaging with these pertinent issues of the day, the I-zombie perspective still firmly locates the personal affect of being treated as Other in relation to presiding political debates (van Zoonen 2005:6).

### **1.3. Queer Politik: *ITF* Beyond Sexual Politics**

Travis Sutton argues that just as ‘people do not question heterosexuality’ as an invisible cultural norm, so too has ‘able-bodiedness’ been the silent ‘category of ability’ (2014:75). Sutton links these normative identity categories, and thus their respective forms/processes of Othering – homosexuality and disability – by arguing that ‘[q]ueer theory aims to make visible such invisibilities by questioning both dominant and marginalized positions’ (ibid). Therefore, queer theory allows for the consideration of additional Othered identities in *ITF*, weaving ‘multiple forms of social commentary within the unfolding zombie storylines’ (Abbott 2016a:111).

For instance, while medical care offers Cartesian restoration for the undead, it is insufficient to suggest that *ITF* takes such a straightforward medico-political stance. Rather, the series inverts what Steve Jones terms a ‘transition narrative, in which protagonists gradually turn into zombies’ (2014:181). Much like Jones’ subgenre account, there is a ‘kinship between the living and undead’ (ibid:184), stressing sociality over legal-medical structures as constructing selfhood (ibid:191-2). But this does not come from the human subjects’ conscious state transitioning (‘zom-being’) into the carnal hedonism of the zombie, with zombiedom equating to loss (Boon 2011a:6-8). Instead, it is Kieren et al’s transition *back* into consciousness that reinstates ‘(a) phenomenological experience... [as] the foundation of selfhood, and (b) social bonds [as] provid[ing] an index for the formation of identity’ (Jones 2014:194); elements lost during the ‘transition into zom-being’ (ibid).

Kee notes of traditional Haitian/voodoo zombie narratives that ‘zombification... created a situation in which victims of a zombie master were feminized. Typically, under patriarchal systems, the female is under the power of the male’ (2011:16). Similarly, gendered systems of control centring on the queer(ed) undead body are present in *ITF* whereby myriad patriarchal institutions operate, often in tandem, to demonise, marginalise and feminise PDS sufferers (Moore 2016:304), therefore justifying exploitative actions on the zombie body that keep it suppressed (Hallam and Marshment 2000:194). The barbarity of medical institutions is prominent throughout *ITF* (Woods 2016:94). When rabid individuals are caught and brought to the local clinic, they are detained in a small cage and treated with no respect. Moreover, Simon remains a guinea pig for medical/scientific experimentation even after he requests this to end, further pushing him towards radical beliefs about humankind. The county of Norfolk becomes a site of medical research/practice, hosting a detention centre and a prison. Reiterating repressive powers of patriarchy that control, dominate, and disempower the undead, doctors work side-by-side with soldiers.

Institutional Othering also produces corporeal demarcation, perpetuating exploitation. The government implements a ‘volunteer’ scheme to be undertaken by all PDS sufferers. This initiative denies them access to travel, forcing Kieren to stay in Roarton and stopping his plans to head for the more liberal, cosmopolitan Paris (Elliott-Smith 2016:176), reiterating the oppressive landscape of British social realism (Woods 2015:241). The scheme also forces the undead to work as unpaid labour, requiring those already in paid work to stop, and instructs labourers to wear orange uniforms, suggestive of prisoners/detainees. If the pacifying of the zombie body through medical practices and reintegration through the human aesthetics of make-up both caused anxiety in the first series, then the overt labelling of the body as Other, and imposing disciplinary power on zombies’ bodies, further reiterates a Foucauldian model of knowledge and power in series two – one that is much more aligned to traditional discourses of visibility and embodiment. Cultural anxiety shifts from a failure to recognise the Other, to ‘seeing’ such a group, exploiting them, and fearing their resistance. Forcing individuals to wear flesh-coloured makeup reverses depictions of ‘zombie drag as a means of subcultural assimilation and... revisits the concept of “fitting in” and assimilating to a wider, normative society’ (Elliott-Smith 2016:173). The cultural climate standardises ‘values of community’, mediating ‘the experience of individuals’ (Douglas 1966:48).

However, the text adopts the perspective of individuals treated as Other, and how they conform to and/or reject such oppressive rituals (ibid:205). The visibility, or lack thereof, of the undead

is contested by the PDS sufferers regarding whether they should adhere to this stigmatisation. Negotiations between integration and marginalisation oscillate around queer-political discourses of assimilation/liberation (Moore 2016:300). The former is about acceptance, and becoming one with mainstream culture by ‘making difference invisible’ (Sullivan 2003:23), whilst in the latter case, ‘through the creation of alternative values, beliefs, lifestyles, institutions, communities... [claiming] one’s identity “needs no excuses”, ...it is something to celebrate’ (ibid:29-30). Roarton grows frightened when the undead challenge the oppression they receive, notably through the rejection of the make-up they are forced to wear by patriarchal powers. Proud queer bodies threaten the hegemony of the town, destabilising societal structures by engaging with issues of queer identity performance (Glenn 2014:75).

Furthermore, looking at how PDS sufferers are deemed Other within the diegesis we see how media representations play a central role in portraying them as villains rather than victims (Hartley 2011:180), presenting another institution that oppresses the undead. Taking the subjective position of undead characters who watch this content further reinforces their sympathetic framing. Diegetically, like other zombie texts<sup>86</sup>, the media hence plays a central role in the dissemination and consumption of ‘knowledge’ about the undead. At the beginning of the second series we see members of the ULA ingest Blue Oblivion, turning them rabid before attacking humans on a train. Not only resonating with global terrorism linked to post-9/11 attacks, this calculated violence, carried out in the name of fundamentalist dogma, is also specifically allegorical of the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005. However, unlike the mediated 9/11 event that was insistently re-shown (Frost 2011:14) and ‘quickly absorbed into the lexicon of horror and suspense’ (ibid:15-6), this ULA attack is not the main political focal point of *ITF*. The text does not rely on iconic imagery from the real 9/11 terrorist event (Wetmore 2012:26-7), rather, the diegetic terrorist attack becomes embedded within wider cultural politics of identity construction by various bodies of power. The event tied to the milieu of social realist commentary, whereby the mainstream media is frequently and diegetically utilised to construct/label the PDS body as Other (see Walker 2016:85-6). Journalistic reports inform the audience of clashes between humans and the ULA. This also becomes a vehicle for discussing the political fallout of these events in relation to governmental actions and responses. In *ITF*’s narrative, media debates frequently depict cultural tension surrounding the undead’s reintegration into society, positioning them as threatening to the human population. Likewise, state-issued ‘training’ DVDs are disseminated by the council to instruct PDS sufferers to make

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<sup>86</sup> Such as *28 Days Later* (2002) and Romero’s zombie films.

visible their condition, and thus their embodiment of Otherness, but also informing them to behave in a subordinate, submissive, and apologetic manner when coming into contact with humans, reiterating the oppressive, exploitative nature of patriarchy on marginalised bodies (Hallam and Marshment 2000:194).

Moreover, the use of online media to gain alternative knowledge and/or disseminate dogmatic ideologies also holds diegetic salience. Through online research, the media-literate Kieren finds footage of local politician Maxine Martin at a political rally decreeing the need for the removal/extermination of zombies. Yet *ITF* does not solely connote racial Othering and/or far-right political parties such as UKIP or the BNP (Woods 2016:98-9, Abbott 2016a:113). The head of the party, Maxine Martin, is both female and black, subverting any argument that this can represent neoconservative white supremacy; a discourse often discussed in relation to imperialism in early zombie films (Bishop 2008). Moreover, Martin's own political agenda is filtered through her familial ideologies: years before the uprising, Maxine's younger brother accidentally died in Roarton. It is her belief that by killing the first-risen and causing the Second Rising, her brother will return to the family, thus completing their familial unit. This offers moral ambiguity unlike the patriarchal fundamentalism of Bill, who destroys his family by murdering his son. Rather, Maxine endeavours to restore her family, much like the opportunity that is offered to Kieren and his household. Yet, like its religious counterparts, the extreme fundamentalism of the party's politics is a threat to Kieren.

Furthermore, Kieren learns of the Undead Prophet through the latter's online videos. The 'prophet', while delivering his digital sermon, hides his face with a skull mask. While allegorical of real-world videos uploaded by Islamist terrorist organisations, again to link the zombie to Middle Eastern discourse is too simplistic. Activist political groups such as Anonymous also mask their faces during protests and video recordings (Kaulingfreks and Kaulingfreks 2013, Jenkins 2011c). Thus, the socio-political ambiguity offered by the Prophet's videos adds further moral uncertainty to his message. It is a message that although calling for the extermination of Mankind, akin to traditional zombies' actions, also argues against cruelty towards the undead by humans.

Lastly, the Literature Review highlighted issues around distinguishing between the abject and the uncanny. Whilst presenting aesthetically similar topographies, Kristeva notes that '[e]ssentially different from "uncanniness," more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin: nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of the memory' (1982:5).

But since PDS sufferers ‘regain their memories and with them, their identity’ (Abbott 2016a:169), Kieren and his family must face his uncanny return as both a ‘familiar loved one... [and as] unfamiliar through death’ (ibid:161). As noted, Kieren took his own life and in his return he ‘still bears the scars from where he slit his wrists’ (Abbott 2016b:165), as do other undead individuals retaining corporeal markers of their deaths (Woods 2016:97). Kieren must deal with the guilt of what he has done in his zombie state but also face his own suicide, as must his family. Faye Woods argues that Kieren’s ‘battling with guilt and social prejudice builds a narrative that blends two of Linda Williams’ body genres (1991): the violent excess of horror and the emotional excess of melodrama’ (Woods 2016:95). However, whilst Kieren’s transitional state is read as dangerous within Roarton (Douglas 1966:118-9), his posthuman state ‘encourage[s] us to rethink how we understand life, intimacy, and interactions between the human and non-human’ (Grizzell 2014:124). Kieren, in religious overtones, describes his ‘resurrection’ as a blessing. In doing so, this has wider and socially positive ramifications: the community can grow to accept Kieren for who he is. His return from a ‘failure’ to cope with his own identity in a cultural climate equally as unforgiving ‘might be reimagined as an opening for critical intervention or even an intervention in and of [the] social order itself’ (ibid:124, see also Vodoun 2012:348, Thorton 2014:31, Benshoff 1997:231). Therefore, it is his uncanny existential crisis over his undead state, rather than being wholly abject, that intertwines melodrama with social realism (Woods 2016:94), formulating the subjective position of the I-zombie narrative (Abbott 2016a:196). This further makes him sympathetic and humanises his posthuman state (Jowett and Abbott 2013:2306).

## **1.5. Conclusion**

In looking at how *ITF* implements an I-zombie/I-abject narrative around the queer undead body, this Chapter has shown how discourses of abjection can serve to highlight cultural order and rituals that are oppressive, and it has diegetically explored affective responses to being treated as abject (Woods 2015:234). The undead body becomes a vessel for ‘contemporary British social realism [that] continues to provide critical accounts of important issues and themes circulating in British society and culture’ (Lay 2007:242, Grizzell 2014:127-8, Creeber 2009b:434). Thus, whilst in-transition identities provoke cultural disorder (Carroll 2008:4, Miller 2011:221, Elliott-Smith 2014a:155-6), posthumanism champions this liminality

(Humphrey 2014:39-41, Battis 2010:80-2, Halfyard 2010:121). Consequently, not only do *ITF* and BBC3 lay claim to ‘quality’ status by playing with zombie/horror tropes (Jowett and Abbott 2013:12, Woods 2016:71), but ‘the allegorical function of the zombie serves British youth drama’s public service-led engagement with [its] social concerns’ (Woods 2016:98). Furthermore, by presenting youth-as-Other (ibid:70), *ITF* speaks to BBC3’s target demographic. As such, mixed and myriad queer characters/identities allow ‘viewers a variety of political positions with which to identify’ (Henry 2008:66-7; Espenson 2010:49-50, Abbott 2010c:101). Part II develops this to explore not only how fans take up an I-zombie/I-abject stance, but also how this becomes the viewpoint from which they ideologically read the text as representative of wider British culture, as well as how they affectively respond to the character relationships and reflect on how it feels to be abject as part of the value they ascribe to the text (Johansson 2006:31, McCabe and Akass 2007:72, Williams 2013:91).

But if *ITF* reconciles self and Other via the PDS body, providing subjective but also socio-political queer positionality, in contrast, *TWD*’s zombies seem to remain wholly Other and ‘irrevocably separate’ (Lauro and Embry 2008:95). Chapter 2 moves on to read AMC’s *TWD*’s post-apocalyptic landscape as abject and feminine (Kristeva 1982:185), fostering a diegetic political landscape in which gender scripts are negotiated, and reading *TWD*’s basic cable US texts as a male-centred serial (Lotz 2014). Moving into a different national context, *TWD*’s basic cable industrial background has a much wider audience remit than BBC3. Moreover, as a niche section of the BBC’s PSB remit, BBC3’s per-hour budget is likely to be considerably smaller than AMC’s, operating by contrast in a basic cable production context. Whilst no definitive information could be found on the cost per-episode of *ITF*, BBC3’s budget in 2013/14 was £85 million (BBC 2014b). This was cut to around £30 million in 2015 with the channel becoming online-only and cancelling *ITF* in the process (Plunkett and Sweeny 2014) (for more on this see Chapter 4). This is compared to each episode of *TWD* reportedly costing on average, approximately \$3 million (Adejobi 2016, Surrey 2016, Gardiner 2016), with season 2 being thirteen episodes long, whilst seasons 3-7 all have 16 episodes. We might also note that in the fourth quarter of 2016 AMC reported net earnings of \$730 million (up from \$679 million in the previous year) (Byland 2017) thanks to ‘strong ad sales and licensing revenue from hit shows like *The Walking Dead*’ (ibid). Thus, whilst *ITF* was axed in-line with budget costs, *TWD* is seen as central to its parent company’s success. And whilst the former resides solely on television in just nine episodes, the latter utilises transmedia extensively to also extend stories and characters within its hyperdiegetic space, keeping *TWD* constantly in circulation

(Gillan 2011:4). Consequently, AMC's model not only competes with premium cable channels by offering a plethora of texts across a range of media that create complex narratives and character development (ibid:10), but also assimilates 'premium aesthetics' as part of its visual lexicon to elevate the status of the text and the company's brand image (Jowett and Abbott 2013:12). Building on this, whereas Chapter 1 offers I-bject narrative subjectivity that asks us to sympathise with those coded as Other, Chapter 2 considers how the abject environment maps onto the tentpole TV/transmedia remit of *TWD* as a franchise (Clarke 2010, 2013) that engages with, and undercuts, gender discourses located within a post-9/11 US context. Resultantly, abjection in the following Chapter is less concerned with representing abject subjectivity. Rather, abjection represents a constant diegetic threat to surviving humans, and one that traverses not just televisual formatting, but also comics, tie-in novels, and video games. Thus, in considering how abject spectrums are on-going and (re-)formed by new and repeat textual experiences, I will also explore how the expanded transmedial and intratextual world of *TWD* can be selected from, navigated, and/or omitted by audiences in ways that subsequently shape abject spectrums (discussed in Chapter 5).

## 2. Dead Men Walking: *The Walking Dead*'s Transmedia Abject Landscape and Masculinity-in-Crisis as a 'Tentpole' Theme

### 2.1. Intro

If Chapter 1 explored how *ITF*-as-PSB youth TV horror used the I-zombie/-abject narrative position of the sympathetic zombie to critique prejudiced acts of Othering through its social (sur)realist aesthetic, Chapter 2's analysis of *The Walking Dead* (*TWD*) sees the zombie offer no humanist perspective, nor civic posthuman potential. Rather, the monster remains an irredeemable Other. Moreover, unlike the reintegration of the undead to live alongside their human counterparts in *ITF*'s new cultural order, the post-apocalyptic world of *TWD* creates a landscape that displays perpetual disorder. Thus, this Chapter focuses on how both abject bodies and abject space are tackled by the human faction, led by Rick Grimes, and what it means to survive in such a land. As his surname connotes, Rick along with the other survivors will become stained and dirtied by the abject world around them (Canavan 2010:441, Maberry 2011:23, Liaguno 2011:140). Here zombies, known as 'walkers', are used to break down the humanistic aspects of the human group, forcing them into (morally) ambiguous positions.

Significantly, *TWD*'s depictions of gore and violence have been linked to discourses of quality TV (Jowett and Abbott 2013:12), revealing further the televisual and political economy around abjection. Although well suited to subscription-based HBO (ibid:10-1), the series was acquired by basic cable outlet AMC (Liaguno 2011:117,123). Resultantly, graphic TV horror offers an aesthetic affinity with more 'premium' forms of quality television in terms of visual experimentation (see Lotz 2007b:90-2). Seen also in AMC's *Preacher*, this strategy has been adopted by other basic cable companies such as FX's *American Horror Story* and *The Strain*, and Syfy's *Z Nation*, evidencing how graphic horror television is becoming more commonplace. Returning to *TWD*, Dan Hassler-Forest writes that, '[w]hile appealing to many [new] viewers on the basis of its Quality TV credentials, it has simultaneously mobilized fan communities who embraced its zombie-genre heritage' (2014:91, see also Jowett and Abbott 2013:31). Thus, going beyond a cult audience (Hills 2013e), the wide success of *TWD* has played a significant role in mainstreaming the zombie (Lansdale 2011:xi). But despite its

populist uptake and commercial success, this is not to concur with arguments that *TWD* offers little in the way of social commentary (e.g. Sharrett 2014:63-4). While ‘lesser-known fantastic storyworlds often have a far more obvious radical direction’ (Hassler-Forest 2016:18), such as *ITF*, Levin and Bui explain that the abject monster can still ‘represent and address anxieties of its time’ (2013:1).

Since the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001, North American horror vehicles have engaged with a political climate exploring ‘themes of paranoia, devastation, terrorism, survivalism... global politics and ideology’ (Ndalianis 2015:135-6). This has seen both the zombie and apocalyptic space become pertinent, prominent symbols within cultural allegories (Frost 2011:16, Wetmore 2012:159, Bishop 2015:17). As such, there is a growing body of work analysing *TWD* in multifarious ways, often locating the series within a post-9/11 paradigm of horror (Simpson 2014:28-9, Baker 2014). Post-9/11 horror rhetoric ‘examine[s] American anxieties in the wake of a “changed America”’ (Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo 2013:245). Anxieties of selfhood are embodied by *TWD*’s central protagonist Rick Grimes as he seeks to fulfil myriad masculine roles traversing and tackling abjection after the uprising. Locating such masculinity-in-crisis within what Amanda Lotz has termed the ‘male-centered serial’ (2014) – a recently recurring televisual construction of male protagonists who struggle to maintain/perform gender scripts in the ambiguous cultural paradigm of post-9/11 – Chapter 2 reads *TWD*’s ongoing seriality as a constant threat to the heteronormative, hegemonic white male within *abject post-apocalyptic space*.

Furthermore, and again unlike *ITF*, *TWD* is transmedia rich. M.J. Clarke explains that increased seriality and transmedial fragmentation of franchise television has resulted in ‘tentpole TV’ (2010:123) that is ‘densely serialized and intimately connected episode to episode and narratively connected to any number of off-broadcast iterations from online to traditional print and video games’ (ibid), utilising long-tail economics (2013:4). Consequently, whilst *TWD*’s storylines are altered as they are adapted from the original graphic novel sources (Jenkins 2013b:377, Booth 2014:24), ‘the vastness and complexity of tentpole TV have necessitated experimentation in the very techniques of storytelling, [and] the organizational systems used to hold all these narrative components’ (Clarke 2010:124) through ‘reoccurring strategies... [of] mastermind narration’ (ibid). This narration offers a guiding rhetoric of thematic consistency across the transmedia network. Such is the case for *TWD*, I argue, as it not only presents male-centred seriality in its TV incarnation, but presents masculinity-in-crisis as its over-arching *modus operandi*, thereby guiding seriality across its expansive hyperdiegesis.

This connection is evident in tie-in novels, video games, and the spin-off TV series *Fear The Walking Dead* (FTWD).

Moreover, *TWD*'s extensive serialised transmedia remit allows us to address different modulations of abjection. The textuality of abjection, while stressing themes of suffering (Kristeva 1982:140), means that different horror media can narrate and present abjection in medium-specific ways (Jowett and Abbott 2013:32). Thus, beyond television horror, I consider how popular fiction and video games construct and engage with abjection, in turn affecting audiences' abject spectrums. For the former, the literary qualities of textuality, for instance *TWD* tie-in novel *The Walking Dead: The Road to Woodbury*, allow for extensive exposition of the abject storyworld and what it feels like for the characters occupying it, encouraging audience immersion (Bonansinga 2011:61). For the latter, for instance *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct*, the audience-as-player is central to developing the narrative. Resultantly, abject horror's themes of suffering only develop via audiences' ludic input. Noting media specificity provides a more detailed consideration of audience-text relationships. However, *TWD* also offers 'a variety of ways to explore the remains of a world that has outlasted capitalism' (Hassler-Forest 2016:13). Different phenomenological paths, I argue, are fundamental to formulating abject spectrums that consider (trans)media consumption patterns as experiential and informative.

Consequently, 'if each [transmedia text] adds something unique then it should be given status as a primary text' (Calbreath-Frasieur 2015:225). I concur with Clarke that 'the visual and narrative sophistication of tentpole TV in all its manifestations begs... more minute [textual] analysis' (2013:17). Therefore, in not only looking at how transmedial practices give an insight into the (re)formation of abject spectrums, the Chapter ends by looking at how *FTWD* engages with masculine gender scripts that extend beyond post-9/11 discourse, instead resonating with wider cultural issues around the patriarchal dominance of the armed forces and police forces in North America. I also consider *TWD*'s video game (produced by Telltale, hereafter *TTWD*) and its engagement with previous arguments around racial scripts and embodiment in *TWD*, given that it allows gamers to play as a black male. Both tentpole TV and transmedia tie-ins adhere to *TWD*'s masculinity-in-crisis, whilst offering other multi-layered subtexts, and potentially making the 'consumer rethink the meaning of all other associated texts' (ibid:20). Consequently, Chapter 2 builds on Kristeva's work to explore the spatialisation of abjection and how this expands across *TWD*'s transmedia storyworld. Thus, I begin by seeing how such topography can be read using abjection.

## 2.2. Undead (and Male) Body Politics: *TWD* as post-9/11 Horror

The Literature Review explained how abjection is that which threatens societal order (Kristeva 1982:3-4). Spaces outside of, or challenging, cultural order are abject. Kristeva argues that through the theme of suffering, central to abjection in the horror genre (ibid:140), the apocalyptic realm manifests (ibid:138). As abjection is a mode of disorder (ibid:4) that ‘persists as a rite of defilement and pollution’ (ibid:17), monstrous spaces that embody this are frequently, and problematically, coded as feminine (Creed 1993a:10-11). Thus, abject space fits within TV horror landscapes. Abbott notes that ‘[t]he zombie apocalypse is not a sudden cataclysmic event but a gradually dispersing infection... making it ideal for seriality’ (2016a:106).

In *TWD*’s post-apocalyptic topography, the pollutant of death becomes the hegemon in both the zombie body and the entire geography it now roams. Keetley argues for the nihilistic stance of the text: since death is not the end (2014a:6) then no utopian space can be found in ‘a collapsed world seemingly beyond repair’ (Peaty 2014:186). She adds that because *TWD* ‘is an ongoing serial narrative, it is distinctive in its orientation to the *human survivors* and their struggle to re-constitute something that looks like a viable social order in the post-apocalyptic world’ (Keetley 2014a:6; Boehm 2014:126). Consequently, the landscape expresses ‘a general view of social [*dis*]order’ (Douglas 1966:4), whereby ‘matter out of place’ (ibid:41) supplants patriarchal control as the dominant cultural climate that human factions must traverse and combat in order to survive, resonating with post-9/11 horror themes.

Post-9/11 horror’s lack of traditional patriarchal figures able to protect citizens (Wetmore 2012:43,163, Muntean 2011:81), concurrent with an abject feminine post-apocalyptic space, creates an ambiguous site where multiple forms of masculinity are contested in *TWD*. Focusing on men’s attempts to restore order attests to the narrative drive of the series that explores the costs of surviving in this world (Jenkins 2013b:375, Farnell 2014:177, DuVoix 2012). These themes, consistent across the TV series and the transmedia franchise, are established in the pilot episode (Mittell 2015b:56), centring on central protagonist Rick Grimes who, as a father, police officer, and leader, attempts to fulfil patriarchal male roles as he negotiates the abject landscape. From the very beginning, when Grimes awakes in an abandoned hospital, he finds the locked-up undead trying to escape; multiple cadavers are strewn across the carpark in white

body-bags, and abandoned military vehicles and tents litter the vicinity. Both the medical and militaristic arms of patriarchy cannot aid Rick in this new world. Additionally, prior to this, the opening shots of the pilot episode show Grimes, in police uniform, stopping his police car to refuel at a petrol station. Abandoned and destroyed automobiles indicate this is now in the uprising era, while Grimes is informed by a makeshift sign that there is ‘NO GAS’, echoing global post-9/11 issues around oil acquisition and consumption (Feasey 2008:57, Long 2016:182-3). This scenario is reiterated when Grimes travels along an empty motorway on horseback adjacent to a clogged up sea of abandoned motor vehicles. When Grimes sees a child walking past, he stops her in a bid to offer help. She turns around revealing herself to be zombified, resulting in him shooting her in the head. He is both unable to protect the child, a common trope of the series (Bennett 2015:79-80), and fulfil his role as peacekeeper (Keetley 2014b:159), thus establishing his various roles as points of masculinity-in-crisis (Canavan 2010:444). This ‘mastermind narration’ codifies ‘shared tendencies’ (Clarke 2010:127), whereby the audience is frequently positioned with the masculine subjectivity of the protagonist facing abject threat(s) in *TWD*, yet are not afforded a ‘mastermind’ diegetic character who can fully master, contain and subvert such horror (ibid:130-1), thus perpetuating male characters’ crises of identity.

The crisis of white middle-class masculinity has become prominent in twenty-first century North American media, partly being linked to the tragic events of 9/11’s terrorist attacks (Baker 2015:1). Consequently, ‘[t]he nexus of increased attention to international policy in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent “Great Recession” shifted the US political focus’ (Lotz 2014:25), and saw cultural-political debates around marginalised groups such as women, LGBT groups, ethnic communities, and the poor ‘replaced by... political questions of “weapons of mass destruction,” “enemy combatants,” and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq’ (ibid). During this period, ‘stories told about men in a multiplicity of scripted series – nearly exclusively on cable – ... delved into the psyches and inner lives of their male characters’ (ibid:5), where ‘[t]hese series depict[ed] male characters’ feelings and relationships in stories that probe[d] the trials and complexities of contemporary manhood in a manner previously uncommon... for this storytelling medium’ (ibid). Noting the dearth of academic literature about ‘men on television’ (ibid:7, Feasey 2008:3), Lotz focuses predominantly on representations of straight white males who negate pre-existing gender scripts/roles in their struggles to understand how to be a “man” in what she terms the ‘male-centered serial’

(ibid:16). While the horror genre is surprisingly unaddressed by Lotz (Bennett 2015:33-4), it is in this ‘male-centered serial’ category that I locate *TWD*.

Grimes, as the locus for negotiating masculine identity, sees his sense of self constantly in a state of crisis via ongoing attempts to restore patriarchal order and fulfil heteronormative roles (Hassler-Forest 2016:165). Dhaenens defines heteronormativity as ‘the discursive power granted to the compulsory heterosexual matrix of western society’ (2012:443), adding that this ‘matrix relies upon fixed notions of gender, sexuality and identity and veils its constructedness and anomalies by feigning universality and rendering the heteronormative discourse hegemonic’ (ibid). Importantly, arguing that these series<sup>87</sup> incorporate second-wave feminist ideologies as the catalyst for men’s perplexed state about performing heteronormative masculinity (Clark 2014:445-6), Lotz notes that ‘they do not blame, contest, or indict the feminist endeavours that lead to their uncertainty’ (2014:20-1). Rather than chastising feminism as the cause of such struggles over identity, male characters commonly blame their fathers, those who embody traditional patriarchy, and/or themselves. Thus, while *TWD*’s apocalyptic geographies are abject and therefore feminine, females are not the cause of this (ibid:84). Rather, *TWD* opens up an ambiguous space for competing masculinities (ibid:41). Grimes does not seek to reinstate ‘women’s subordination’ (ibid:57), though women in the series still often display traditionally feminine roles (Bennett 2015:68, Simpson 2014:35-7), whilst other masculinised human factions who endeavour to oppress or threaten, such as Shane (Jon Bernthal), the Governor (David Morrissey), the biker gang, and Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), are seen as Other alongside the risk of zombiedom. ‘Such a framework for analysis,’ Lotz argues, allows for ‘a spectrum of reconstructed masculinities and varied possible combinations of patriarchal and feminist aspects’ (2014:36).

Lotz postulates that ‘[c]onsiderable character depth emerges as an attribute of any series of this era. Important back story about protagonists add[s] growing complexity to characters’ (ibid:53). Whilst the pilot of *TWD* starts *in situ* post-uprising, the episode includes pre-uprising back story (Clarke 2010:132), indicating the tentative relationship Grimes had with his wife Lori (Sarah Wayne Callies). Making ‘[t]he presence of an attention to domestic affairs... one of the primary distinctions of the male-centered serial’ (Lotz 2014:68), Rick discloses to Shane, his best friend and colleague, his marital problems. He explains there is a lack of communication between himself and Lori, and that he feels unable to express himself. This

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<sup>87</sup> Including *Breaking Bad*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *The Shield*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Dexter*, *Hung*, *The League*, *Scrubs*, *Boston Legal*, *Men of a Certain Age*, *Rescue Me*, and *Entourage*.

lack of ability to express oneself alludes to traditional forms of masculinity that suppress the vocalising of emotion. Familial issues continue during the uprising, where ‘marital bonds are... fragile’ (ibid:70-1). Upon Rick’s return, the nuclear family is restored yet his duty to save Morgan and his guilt at leaving Merle mean that he wants to return to the city. This is contested by Lori who wants him to remain with her and their son Carl (Chandler Riggs). Such points of contestation over his roles as peacekeeper, father, husband, and leader fragment Rick’s identity, leading to moments of existential crisis as he struggles to fulfil these hegemonic roles (Keetley 2014b:159).

Furthermore, ‘[p]arental, if not paternal, duties – particularly the notion of providing for one’s family – consistently emerge as the men’s primary motivator, one that they pursue by any means necessary, and [which] often lead to... illegal endeavours’ (Lotz 2014:58). In providing for and protecting his family, Rick often compromises his peacekeeper/lawman stance as he attempts to fulfil fatherly roles (ibid:69). This focus on men as fathers also affords character development to their children (ibid:69-70); in *TWD* this is evident in the passing on of phallic agency when Grimes teaches his son to shoot. We might note that ‘[w]hen Rick offers Carl a gun, he also gives him his hat. The gun and the hat are potent mythic symbols’ (Hopkins 2011:207). Therefore, through teaching Carl ‘to shoot a gun as soon as he can’ (Vizzini 2011:129) Grimes extends patriarchal order within the abject space, represented by the symbolic masculinity embedded within his sheriff hat. It is a hat that Carl continues to wear as he too seeks masculine autonomy and agency.

Brian Baker explains that, ‘[a]ccompanying the anxieties of loss are those to do with fatherhood and the role of the father’ (2015:2). Unlike the comic book series that sees Lori and their newly-born daughter Judith die<sup>88</sup>, in the TV iteration Lori dies in childbirth with Judith surviving. Thus, the anxiety of paternal failure remains in the show as an ongoing point of crisis rather than becoming a permanent part of Rick’s back-story and established identity. From this point on, Rick is a single father. Whereas before ‘[n]either husband nor wife appears able to make unilateral decisions for the family’ (Lotz 2014:73), Grimes must now deal with fatherhood in a family lacking any maternal figure (a dynamic not present in Lotz’s model). This again subverts Grimes’ identity as a heteronormative male figure, resulting in him functioning in a highly liminal state: in fact, Grimes has a psychotic break where hallucinations make him see Lori and allow him to talk to deceased members of the faction (Lauro 2011:232), aligning him

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<sup>88</sup> Both are shot by Lily during the Governor’s attack (Canavan 2010:444).

more with the dead than the living. It is at this point that we see him at his most aggressive: going into zombie-ridden parts of the prison slaying hordes, becoming covered in so many dismembered body parts, and so much blood and bile – all visual markers of abjection – that Glenn cannot tell if Grimes has become zombified. Moreover, at this moment Grimes rejects any outsiders seeking refuge within their group, subverting his role as a peacekeeper, and shifting his leadership stance to one of dictatorship (Abbott 2016a:115-6). Citing Freud, Kremel argues that whilst ‘mourning involves letting go and finding a replacement love object’ (2014:88), melancholia ‘is the inability to break that bond, thereby maintaining both the dead and the living in psychological stasis’ (ibid). This also manifests itself with Morgan unable to shoot his undead wife and the Governor keeping his undead daughter chained/locked up (Christie 2011a:77). It is only when Grimes moves into mourning that he can work through other aspects of masculinity, with further heteronormative functions being fulfilled/restored as a romantic relationship develops between himself and Michonne.

These texts explore ‘*men’s lives...* [in] both the[ir] personal and professional spheres’ (Lotz 2014:55). Whilst his previous occupation as a police officer becomes obsolete in the lawless culture he awakes to, the symbolic status and patriarchal values linked to the position are something Rick negotiates over *TWD*’s narrative arc (Nurse 2014:71, Feasey 2008:2-3). Thus, Grimes’ engagement in ‘work’ (Lotz 2014:65-6) is twofold: his pre-uprising position as a maintainer of patriarchal order bleeds into the post-apocalyptic world. It remains a core principle through which he tackles the threats of Others and landscape alike (Vizzini 2011:133-4, Nurse 2014:71). But as Grimes’ previous role becomes gradually subverted within the abject space so too does his own ‘professional’ identity. This role positions him as the faction’s leader (Boshears 2014:115). Yet in doing so, his identity – attached to leadership – is challenged by zombies, human (male) antagonists, and intra-faction feuding with other men (Vizzini 2011:135). Hassler-Forest argues *TWD* ‘creates a space in which the contradictions of... power are made visible, and the problematic ways in which the myth of the White [Male] Hero relates to issues such as race, social class and gender’ (2011:353; Young 2014:56-7).

Concurrently, post-9/11 culture has seen a marked rise in return-to-rural horror (Miller 2011:225, Blake 2011:187, Wetmore 2012:26). *TWD* partly adheres to this through the text’s ‘connection between the western and zombie genre’ (Hassler-Forest 2011:342). Contra Lotz’s male-centred series, which are mostly urban-centred (2014:78), ‘cities have become so dangerous that they must be avoided at all costs. The narrative... focuses instead on the countryside, where it follows the model of the archetypal American western’ (Hassler-Forest

2011:345); spaces where, traditionally, suburban middle class white men have been able to reinstall classic forms of masculinity<sup>89</sup> (Hartigan Jr 2005:140). Within *TWD*'s abject 'western' space, 'power is exercised through violence, with the male heroes' guns and horses presenting an obvious superfluity of phallic imagery' (Hassler-Forest 2011:345; Miller and van Riper 2013, Bennett 2015:22, Keetley 2014a:9-10). Furthermore, this landscape sees modern forms of masculine/patriarchal control disempowered, as science and 'information-based society' are eclipsed by 'practical survival skills' (Collins and Bond 2011:188). New technology, in this instance, carries 'a reference to something that no longer exists' (Ralph 2013), reinforcing the abject disorder that Grimes' faction finds themselves in.

For example, in season one Grimes and the group visit the Center for Disease Control which is solely ran by Edwin Jenner<sup>90</sup>. Like medical and militaristic discourse before it, scientific order presents another element of patriarchy that is unable to explain, control, or eradicate the abject threat of zombiedom (Abbott 2016a:126). Jenner destroys the CDC knowing he cannot stop zombiedom as it is an inherent aspect to all human life and not just the result of being bitten by a walker. Consequently, the zombie remains the archetypal abject object in the show (Bishop 2011:4, Vint 2013:134, Canavan 2010:441): something that must be thrust aside in order for humans to live (Kristeva 1982:3). Furthermore, such failed attempts at seeking refuge reiterate *TWD* as post-9/11 horror, evidencing preoccupations with safety and security. Grimes is frequently tasked with providing shelter/order for the group. This provides thematic shifts across the series (Nurse 2014:74-6, Abbott 2016a:113). As Pokornowski illustrates:

the shift from the farm to the prison represents a shift in the narrative's politics from a biopolitical attempt to secure life and maintain a certain way of life... to its dark reflection: a... destruction of life and political order in an always-already-failing attempt to save life through the slaughter of life (2014:48).

Yet, fatalistically this cannot work since the feminine abject space occupied by zombies continues to attack such sites, alongside other masculine figures vying for leadership. As Young comments, Herschel's 'idyllic farm, the American homestead that "resurrects an entire

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<sup>89</sup> Since the primitive Other also occupies such a space, one sees civilised Man having to adopt the tactics of the monster, thus potentially becoming monstrous himself (Hartigan Jr 2005:141).

<sup>90</sup> Having 'no direct counterpart in the comic book series' (Jenkins 2013b:380), such narrative trajectory reiterates the text as post-9/11 horror.

mythic apparatus of American genesis, character, and values,” cannot stand when illusions are void... and walkers descend upon the land *en masse*’ (2014:65). The constant need to remain mobile in order to survive nullifies stability offered by fortified homes, as ‘death literally comes to them if they stay in one place for too long’ (Heckman 2014:101).

Since this is a land with no order, characters’ moral compasses are called into question in order to survive. As Lotz remarks, ‘[t]o a significant extent, the[se] series raise questions about which immoral actions can be justified and under what conditions’ (2014:63). Similarly, ‘complex television’ – broadly synonymous with Quality TV rhetoric (Mittell 2015a:74-5) – offers morally ambiguous men in the form of anti-heroes. Morality becomes relative, ‘where an ethically questionable character is juxtaposed with more explicitly villainous and unsympathetic characters to highlight the anti-hero’s more redeeming qualities’ (ibid:75). To deal with such ambiguity ‘alignment and elaboration are key components of our allegiance to an anti-hero – the more we know about a character through revelations of backstory, relationships and interior thoughts, the more likely we will come to regard them as an ally in our journey through the storyworld’ (ibid:76, see also Clarke 2010:132).

Questions of morality in *TWD* are exaggerated by Grimes’ previous occupation as a peacekeeper alongside his familial role. At the same time, Daryl (Norman Reedus), arguably *TWD*’s other central white male protagonist, has an outlaw background (ibid:85). As an anti-hero, Daryl is first presented as morally ambiguous through his bond to his brother, Merle, with the latter’s Othello traits holding a strong influence over his younger sibling. Lotz notes that ‘[t]he outlaw stories explored subsequently tell more particular stories about younger men attempting to reconcile legacies left by deceased fathers with their own sense of how to be a man in contemporary society’ (2014:93). Daryl’s attempt at being a ‘good’ man and a positive character within the group has already failed when he tries to find the daughter of Carol (one of the other members of the human faction), Sophia; his own lack of familial bonds drives his attempts to save her (Bishop 2016:180-5).

Like Rick, Daryl is also skilled in riding horseback, reiterating the image of the western lone (anti-)hero discussed by Hassler-Forest (2011:345). However, on one occasion Daryl falls off his horse and down a rock-face, severely injuring himself as one of his arrows penetrates his body. In a state of semi-consciousness he begins to hallucinate, allowing *TWD* to present further back-story to his anti-heroic stance. Visions of his older brother talking to him allude

to harsh treatment from Merle but also seek to separate Daryl from the group. He awakes to see an attacking walker and continues to see Merle who taunts him in highly gendered terms:

**Merle:** You his bitch now?

**Daryl:** I ain't nobody's bitch.

**Merle:** You're a joke is what you are, playing errand boy to a bunch of pansy-asses, niggers and democrats... They ain't your kin, your blood. Hell, you had any damn nuts in that sack of yours, you'd go back there and shoot your pal Rick in the face for me.

In season three when Daryl leaves the faction to be with his brother, we learn of the harsh beatings given to them by their father, reiterating the problematic relationships these males have with traditional forms of masculinity (Bennett 2015:120).

Male-centred serial dynamics are reiterated in the spin-off video game *The Walking Dead: Survival Instincts* (2013) featuring the Dixon brothers. Playing as Daryl, the game reiterates the travelling aspect of the TV series (Heckman 2014:101), whilst offering visual fidelity to its televisual counterpart (Clarke 2013:108). Stopping at various points, you scavenge for supplies, and can save or leave other humans who aid you in such tasks. Significantly, you begin the game's tutorial as the Dixon brothers' father who is bitten when out hunting. Daryl, unable to shoot his dad, is forced to watch his uncle shoot him in the head. Upon rescuing Merle from the police station where he has been incarcerated, the brothers divulge further information about the relationship they had with their father, providing exposition/elaboration that reinforces anti-hero characterisation (Mittell 2015a:76, Clarke 2013:53-5).

Furthermore, whilst *TWD* constructs a 'western' space that frames Grimes as a cowboy hero, walkers fail 'to be the perfect villains. Instead, they... mirror... the western heroes (Rick Grimes and Shane Walsh) in the act of killing' (Keetley 2014a:19). Whereas in *ITF* the undead body highlights the 'proximity of monsters to humans' (Jowett and Abbott 2013:111) that questions Othering, *TWD*'s zombies remain ongoing posthuman antagonists (Cox and Levine 2016:76). Proximity in *TWD* means that zombies serve to project ambiguity onto the human faction who have to adapt to their new polluted environment, thereby becoming polluted themselves (Young 2014:56-7). Rather than humanise the zombie as *ITF* does, *TWD* depicts humans becoming more monstrous. Whilst in the comic book series, Grimes becomes

accustomed to barbarism more quickly (Bishop 2015:80-4), as a male-centred serial the TV adaption focuses on masculinity-in-crisis. This stems not only from Grimes' struggles and failures but also from opposing forms of masculinity. Whilst this process begins with Merle's attempt to take control of the party by force, continuing with Herschel's medical and religious perspective that views the undead as ill (Reyes 2014:148-9, Baker 2014, Vint 2013:140), the most overt example of this opposition emerges through Rick's relationship with Shane.

Whereas Lotz considers dyadic hetero intimacy between male friendships as largely conducive to negotiating anxieties surrounding masculinity and gender scripts (2014:146), this type of relationship becomes the very source of conflict between Rick and Shane. As best friends and colleagues, these hetero relationships are contested when Shane's use of violence is juxtaposed to Rick's desire for peaceful responses (Keetley 2014a:20, Simpson 2014:30-1, Young 2014:60). Concurrently, falsely telling Lori that Rick died in hospital, Shane begins sexual relations with her, assuming a quasi-paternal role to Carl. Upon Grimes' return Lori rejects Walsh, throwing his own masculine identity into turmoil. Disrupted by Shane's sexual relations with Lori alongside vying for faction leadership, the two males' closeness becomes the source of dyadic antagonism, yet obstructs any queer reading as intimacy does not bring them together (Lotz 2014:148). Rather, it is the tinderbox for hetero conflict. They become intermittent foes as their friendship unravels over the series. Significantly, 'Shane's survival represents a decisive shift from the original [comic]' (Jenkins 2013b:379; Booth 2014:24).

In the original comic Carl finds Shane aiming his gun at Rick whilst hunting for deer. However, in the TV series it is the oldest member of the human faction, Dale, who sees Shane take aim (Hassler-Forrest 2014:100). This change reinforces and exaggerates the male-centred serial dynamic of *TWD*. Firstly, this change reinforces Carl's position as a child, ignorant of human threats and allowing for paternal care from Rick. Secondly, it reinforces Dale's position as the older sage of the faction whose knowledge is extended through this witnessing of Shane's actions (Heckman 2014:101). Thirdly, the drawing out of Shane's death over a longer narrative arc builds up and strengthens dyadic, intimate hetero conflict. Character development pertaining to Rick and Shane's growing antagonism, premised on their contrasting masculinities, is elongated in the TV series. Grimes is ultimately forced to kill Walsh as the latter leads them out to a field and aims a gun at Rick (Bennett 2015:83-4). Ultimately, it is Carl who shoots Shane in the head when he returns in undead form, further solidifying the father-son dynamic of the TV series. Such changes, I argue, reinforce, heighten, and nuance Lotz's model of male dyadic relationships. Whilst such points of male contestation illustrate

intra-faction disputes, *TWD* also presents external male human threats to Grimes and the group (Collins and Bond 2011:202).

For instance, the Governor – a ruthless leader of another human group based in the fortified town Woodbury, and ‘for whom the ends justify the most brutal of means, particularly when it comes to his child’ (Lowder 2011:xv) – offers one of the most overt male threats to Grimes. In his state of melancholia, the Governor is unable to let go of the past both in his paternal role, as he keeps his undead daughter locked up (Bennett 2015:81), and also ideologically. Keetley explains that ‘[f]or the Governor... the human past is something to be desired, recapitulated... Re-creating the old civilization, the old South, inevitably involves re-creating violent, exclusionary social structures’ (2014a:12). In asserting his highly reactionary masculinity, he also differs from Rick: where the latter frames the group in a mode of self-defence, the former’s ‘approach in Woodbury is that of a paramilitary force’ (Nurse 2014:77). Yet, one might also consider the tie-in novels which give significant back-story to this character (Hassler-Forest 2014:100-1). Clarke notes that tie-in texts, such as novels, negotiate a precarious position that whilst extending the hyperdiegetic remit of tentpole television (2009:434) must simultaneously adhere to continuity and not undermine, subvert, problematise, or contradict storylines and characters from the parent TV series (as is often done in ‘fanfic and fan interpretation’; Hills 2012c:413). As such, official tie-in novels tend to build on ‘unexplored gems’ of the text’s storyworld, drawing on ‘elements implied in the on-air series, but not directly addressed’ (Clarke 2009:447), hence allowing for the exploration of existing characters (ibid:448) and/or the introduction of new ones (ibid:451).

Jay Bonansinga argues that *TWD* novels take ‘readers deeper into the narrative waters of all the rich tributaries branching out of the central story’ (2011:56),<sup>91</sup> whereby ‘the sensory details suggested in the panels of the comic are amplified, intensified, enriched [in the novels]’ (ibid:61). Similarly, Lotz notes of male-centred serials, that ‘[i]n some cases... interior monologues presented through voice-overs make the viewer privy to the character’s understanding and assessments of events, although audiences also see his fallibility and misperceptions’ (2014:55). In the novels, we learn that Philip Blake is the Governor. Trying to protect his daughter, younger brother, and two friends, his characterisation is in accordance with his TV and comic book depiction (Long 2016). Despite largely being presented as the

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<sup>91</sup> The first of these novels was commissioned ‘to coincide with the highly anticipated second season of the AMC series – premiering on Halloween 2011’ (Bonansinga 2011:56). Again, we can see how wider cultural rituals, such as Halloween, can presuppose the dissemination of texts, both central and/or paratextual.

protagonist in *Rise of the Governor* (Kirkman and Bonansinga 2011), Philip rapes a female survivor and one of the human faction who killed his daughter, Penny. Here back-story offers a strong sense of moral ambiguity. Informed by the comic and televisual incarnations, these intertextualities reinforce the Governor's Othered masculinity. Yet, this is also a father desperately trying to protect his daughter, thus stressing the key theme of paternal care in the male-centred serial and post-9/11 horror. However, Philip dies along with his daughter, whilst his brother Brian who has remained effeminate and unable to fulfil masculine duties throughout the narrative, takes his brother's name and title as the Governor upon arriving at Woodbury. This narrative twist offers complexity to the TV series' antagonist and his masculine identity. Brian/The Governor is a tie-in 'echo character' that, whilst distinct, serves 'to symbolize the measured, paradoxical connection [of the novel to the TV text]' (Clarke 2009:449), aiding in mastermind narration and 'maintain[ing] the status quo of the series' (ibid:450), i.e. masculinity-in-crisis. The novels use 'echo themes' to elaborate 'on a set of themes borrowed from the on-air series' (ibid:453, see also Hills 2012c:421-2, Holder 2010:191). However, one can only make such claims if the novels have been read and/or accepted by audiences. Therefore, the Governor's represented masculinity differs depending on which version of *TWD* is consumed, in what order, and whether the tie-in novels are acknowledged by audiences; he shifts from sexual abuser in the comics, to paternal parallel in the TV series, to impotent brother in the novels (Hassler-Forest 2014:101-3).

What becomes apparent from such continuations of abject space is that the choices made by Grimes are constantly challenged by Others (undead and living). The damaged man of the male-centred serial remains so in a world that does not allow for patriarchal order to be stabilised. But whilst 'specific characteristics of a fictional text can [reflect or] refract... dominant assumptions' (Pearson 2013:213), offering debates around discourses of white hetero masculinity, or what constitutes the Other (ibid:214, van Zoonen 2005:54, Williams 2015:90), alternative representations of race and sexuality are markedly absent.

Hassler-Forest explains that Rick-as-central-hero, combined with a lack of black male characters, becomes problematic in readings that privilege white, heterosexual, middle-class, patriarchal order (2011:348). Similarly, Keetley argues that Rick's banishing of 'all racial difference (shaping his post-apocalyptic world as "post-racial") allows it to creep back unrecognized, and killing the zombie can thus easily become... the "thinnest sublimation" of violence against the racialized colonial object' (2014a:9, see also Nyong'o 2012). In analysing

cross-racial interaction in *TWD*, Heckman postulates that “‘whiteness’ simultaneously contains and owns capital’ (2014:97, Feasey 2008:3).

Unlike other ethnic bodies (Brown 2001:53), whiteness is heteronormative and an ‘invisible norm’ (Newitz and Wray 1997:3, Dyer 1997:1, White 2013:217). Therefore, whilst Lotz’s male-centred serial serves as a useful tool for considering masculinity within a post-9/11 horror paradigm (Alsultang 2013:85, Scott 2013:322, Kompare 2015b:3) it can tend to neutralise other forms of socio-cultural embodiment such as race. This is not to say whiteness is entirely normative in *TWD*: ‘bad’ forms of whiteness, coded through white trash rhetoric (e.g. Merle, and cannibalistic human factions), litter *TWD*’s transmedia world. Such ‘white trash poetics’ (Hartigan Jr. 2005:136, Wray 2006, Harkins 2004) are juxtaposed to Grimes who is trying to lead and restore a seemingly post-racial order (Bennett 2015:75), echoing an ‘increasingly pervasive [real-world] “post-racial” politics that works to deny the ongoing and significant presence of racial hierarchy and oppression in U.S. national culture’ (Campbell 2013:101) – for more on this, see Chapters 5 and 6.

Building on Chapter 1’s focus on abject bodies, Chapter 2 has so far emphasised that space can also disrupt cultural order, most overtly in the post-apocalyptic landscapes of *TWD*. Furthermore, whilst Lotz’s male-centred serial presents heterogeneous, albeit heteronormative, masculinities trying to traverse and/or tame the chaos around them, her model solely addresses television. Yet *TWD* spans across a range of media. Such ‘transmedial storytelling’ extends the hyperdiegesis (Hills 2015b:151, Stein 2013:339), and thus the potential meaning-making of *TWD* as male-centered transmedia and tentpole television (Clarke 2013:53-5); this has already been evidenced in the Dixon brothers’ video game and the Governor novels. But whilst transmedia can utilise abject spatialisation to perform overarching masculinity-in-crisis and mastermind narration, this is not the *only* narrative discourse present in *TWD* as tentpole television (Hills 2012c:411). The Chapter will now focus on the spin-off TV series *FTWD* and the video game *TTTWD* to analyse other ‘trans-discourse[s]’ (ibid:414), which whilst maintaining ‘brand presence’ do not always sustain ‘core consistency’ (ibid:417). Moreover, addressing the transmedia matrix of TV horror has a profound impact on abject spectrums in two ways: firstly, character elaboration, theme consistency, and/or the introduction of new characters and stories can (re)shape how one reads and responds to on-screen TV horror abjection. Secondly, in noting the phenomenological aspects of experience, the route/order through which one consumes texts and paratexts can also shape an audience member’s abject spectrum. Thus, whilst I now turn to transmedia *TWD* texts, I consider how the individualized

and cultural chronology of this textual ordering can shape meaning-making in relation to twenty-first century TV horror.

### **2.3. And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead: *TWD*'s Converging Paths of Consumption**

Marie-Laure Ryan defines storyworlds as the static component preceding ‘a dynamic component that captures... unfolding events’ (2013:364; Booth 2014:24, Hills 2012c:410-1, Ecenbarger 2014:). Vivally, ‘[s]ome components are optional’ (ibid). *TWD* has a ‘one-world/many-texts’ ratio whereby transmedia ‘extends the scope of the original storyworld by adding more existents to it, by having secondary characters turn into heroes [or villains] of the story, and by prolonging the time covered by the original story through prequels and sequels’ (ibid:365-6). Significantly, though, *optional* transmedia narratives running parallel to and/or overlapping with the TV series offer new characters and develop established ones ‘without damaging the integrity of the [TV] show’ (ibid:379), or punishing audiences who do not partake in these avenues of storyworld expansion<sup>92</sup> (Ecenbarger 2014:2).

The Literature Review argued that in avoiding monolithic/idealised audiences, theories of abjection must consider the phenomenology of audience experiences (Keltner 2011:20) and how these inform subsequent responses (Monti 2005:1013, Sobchack 2004:2). Therefore, personal histories are fundamental to abject spectrums. Not only does this consider real world experiences but also histories of textual consumption. In a transmedia matrix, various patterns of consumption are available to the individual. Some fans may seek to expand the storyworld across media, or might only consume some media, or focus on a single media platform (Hills 2012c:412). But in so doing, consumption patterns shape abject spectrums and meaning – here around TV horror – through phenomenological processes of experience.

Therefore, ‘the meaning of... [*TWD*] is constantly being constructed... based on previous understanding of other texts’ (Ecenbarger 2014:3; Blake 2017:120). Moreover, ‘each incarnation can develop its own audience without having to rely on any previous familiarity

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<sup>92</sup> For instance, ‘the promotional webisodes for the second season feature the back-story of “Bicycle Girl”... from the first season’ (Beisecker 2014:210). Such a paratext offers a humanising of an iconic walker, further blurring the line between self and Other, but does not directly impinge on the central narrative of the TV series.

with other versions' (Hassler-Forest 2016:162). In considering how *paths of consumption shape abject spectrums*, I now turn to how texts within *TWD*'s transmedia storyworld reflect and complicate its masculinity-in-crisis mastermind narration.

*FTWD* offers a multicultural cast of characters, embedded within subtexts both in line with, and departing from, *TWD*'s post-9/11 male-centred serial rhetoric. In accordance with *TWD*, *FTWD* reinforces the paternal role of a male hero via Travis Manawa (Cliff Curtis), also reiterating the importance of family, the use of melodrama, and both zombie and human threats to the series' protagonists. *FTWD* supports *TWD*'s depictions of familial order that see a male at the head of the family unit. Travis acts as a patriarch to both his wife Madison's family and to his son Christopher and ex-wife Eliza. The melodrama of the series frequently circles around Travis negotiating this position as both families challenge his gender script; he is a failed father/husband and is seeking familial restoration.

The prequel constructs two socio-temporal axes. Firstly, diegetic ordering means that *FTWD* as a prequel does not begin *in situ* with the uprising. Thus, its main focus is instead on the fall of patriarchy from order to chaos. Technology fails and the city's lights go out, alongside common 9/11 imagery: 'planes crashing, crowds fleeing, buildings being destroyed, walls covered in photos and fliers of the missing and the dead, empty streets and falling bodies' (Wetmore 2012:26-7). As the State can no longer maintain order, it rolls out more extreme measures of force. The army invade domestic spaces, the sacred site of the family, and set up quarantined zoning in the suburb that Travis, Madison and her two children Alicia, and Nick live in. They patrol the area and create borders over which they can exercise power. This state of martial law is reinforced when Madison, upon secretly leaving the compound, finds that the army have been killing humans as well as zombies. As patriarchy falls, its institutions and their actions become highly questionable. Unlike Rick as a sheriff trying to maintain order within the dystopian wilderness, both the police and the army become equally abject, if not more so, than the undead themselves (Fhlainn 2011:139-40).

However, contra Rick's phallic agency enforced by badge, uniform, and gun, Travis opposes the use of firearms and forbids Christopher to learn how to shoot, quite unlike Rick's teaching of Carl. Such revising of masculinity does not entirely negate Travis' leadership. He is the most physically strong male, beating an army private to death with his fists after they shoot one of the members of the faction he is leading, Ophelia. Rather, his stance is juxtaposed to the hyper-masculine bodies of the army who have become Other in their mistreatment of human

survivors. The refusal of gun possession, as an ideology Travis has prior to the uprising, continues into the narrative's abject space and offers a subtext less in accordance with the self-protection of post-9/11 discourse and more in line with current cultural issues surrounding gun accessibility, youth, and crime in North America (Diamond 2015, Chalabi 2015, BBC 2016).

Subsequently, despite being diegetically prior to *TWD*, *FTWD* offers revised socio-political engagements with current issues in the US (Gray 2008:131-2). Unlike the failure or absence of technology central to *TWD*, digital media is prominent in *FTWD*. Leaked footage of a zombie returning to eat a paramedic and his subsequent shooting by police is used in news reports. Further leaked footage taken on mobile phones and showing the event in much more detail is watched and shared by students. Digital media is also used in documenting the oppression of civilians by the State. When an unarmed homeless man is shot by the police, Christopher films the event and the crowd's vehement reaction descending into a riot. Such citizen journalism and criticism of police brutality resonate with current real-world cultural issues about excessive police force, most notably towards black and ethnic minorities that are often documented on mobile phone technology (Swaine et al 2015, Lam 2016, Bayerl and Stoykov 2016:1006-7). Unlike post-9/11 horror's unknown external threat, symbolic of racial Others (Sharrett 2014:64, Bloodworth-Lugo and Lugo-lugo 2013:243-4), it is the violent police and army in riot gear shooting civilians who are the enemy here. The shift in cultural politics, whilst still stressing masculinity-in-crisis, sublimates the White male anxieties of post-9/11 horror into wider multicultural anxieties around State control and oppressive order. As riots emerge, the city falls into chaos. Central to *TWD*'s universe, societal institutions once used to control the abject body, such as hospitals, now become abject sites themselves that threaten the human body, whilst human Others, i.e. the military, that are coded as masculine directly threaten Travis' ability to fulfil his paternal roles. Yet it is hard to ascertain whether *FTWD* is a spin-off of *TWD*-as-tentpole-TV, or whether it should be read as an autonomous, albeit connected, TV text due to its thematic shifts. True, one sees masculinity-in-crisis across both shows, but *FTWD* also offers much more in its focus on the end of civilisation and the world *becoming* apocalyptic, as well as exploring the rise of State oppression and Othering of patriarchal institutions. What is evident is that such storylines can be separated and 'modular' (Clarke 2013:137-8).

The video game *TTWD* uses similar strategies by depicting

actions of a character-avatar entirely absent from the on-air series, or any other transmedia manifestation; [it] refuses to share information that would inflect back on the larger mythology of the series; and contains, by its conclusion, an ultimately ambiguous and confounding connection to the overall... narrative. (ibid:91)

This shapes transmedia textual abjection; abject spectrums are further effected by the added dimension of the video game's ludic agency and medium-specific modality, as the in-process relationship between audience member and text is formed by the player's agency in acting upon gameplay narrative. Charles Ecenbarger comments on *TTTWD* that 'those who have played [the] video game may not have read [the] comics, however, an audience... [is] reached by extending the story and creating a transmedia artefact (the video game)' (2014:3)<sup>93</sup>. While the game favours an aesthetic style linked to the comic rather than the TV series (Chambers and Skains 2015, Franco 2015:48), ideologically it provides theme consistency with both incarnations as it extends *TWD*'s hyperdiegesis (Clarke 2013:68-9). You 'control... Lee Everett, a thirtysomething former history professor' (Smethurst and Craps 2015:279) who is on his way to prison having been convicted of murdering his ex-wife and her partner. As the police car veers off the road, Lee manages to escape, only to be attacked by the undead. After randomly taking shelter in Clementine's house, Lee rescues this little girl who has lost her parents, 'becoming a father figure to her for the rest of the season' (ibid). Your aim is to protect Clementine whilst negotiating Lee's pre-uprising past. Evidently, 'Lee... and Clementine are strikingly reminiscent of Rick and Carl' (Ecenbarger 2014:3); events in the video game infer 'thematic parallelism' to the television series (Smith 2015:28).

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<sup>93</sup> Ecenbarger adds that, 'by setting the game in the universe of the comics rather than the television series, it is acting as an entry point for video game players who may not be familiar with the comics' (ibid). However, these claims can be partially contested. While visually the game is aligned with the comic (see also Booth 2014:20, Franco 2015:42), structurally the serialised episodic narrative, use of 'previously on', and preview cut scenes are far more televisual (Mittell 2015b:27, Smith 2015:22-3, Smethurst and Craps 2014:278-9, van den Berg 2014). Likewise, its 'emotional connection' ties it to *both* the comic and the TV series (Booth 2014:32) through recurring characters like Glenn and Hershel but also via key themes of the male-centred serial, such as paternal protection and morally ambiguous/difficult choices. However, one might consider how, as a TellTale vehicle, the game's mechanics, aesthetics, and style also adhere to the producer's brand identity (Dreskin 2016:127-9). Thus the game fosters transbranding potential (see Hills 2016).

*TTTWD* offers brand/franchise consistency (Hassler-Forest 2014:97) by evidencing aspects of the male-centred serial (Lotz 2014, Bennett 2015) and using ‘standard mechanisms of serialization, such as cliffhangers, multiple-episode narrative arcs, seasonal episodes and a large cast’ (Goggin 2014:86). It also displays on-brand moral ambiguity (Riley 2011:91), a diverse range of complex characters (Lansdale 2011:xi), and a strong remediation of *TWD*’s TV seriality by making each iteration of the game a ‘season’. Yet, by playing as a black male, one can reconsider and recast ‘post-racial’ criticisms of *TWD*’s ethnic marginalisation (Woods 2014, Galloway 2014), also playing as a type of lead character uncommon in video games (Brock 2011:2, Smethurst and Craps 2015:281, Rowland and Barton 2011, Jansz and Martis 2007). Players are given limited agency over Lee’s development, potentially negotiating gender and/or race scripts as ‘[y]our actions determine what kind of person Lee is, how he reacts to certain situations, and how the other characters see him’ (Froschauer 2014). In *TTTWD*, ‘a choice is technically a branch in the narrative – a path in a story. However, through the narrative, players are encouraged to care about characters and to choose their company more than optimal paths’ (Sicart 2013:27).

Much like the TV and comic series, *TTTWD* frequently perpetuates moral ambiguity in its protagonist’s actions, forcing players to make choices ‘within a very stringent time limit’ (Smethurst and Craps 2015:281; Taylor et al 2015). Forcing players into making tough moral decisions offers the affective potential for audiences to feel responsible for their outcomes (Veale 2015). In stressing the choices one must make, concordant with wider *TWD* themes (Keetley 2014:158), *TTTWD* presents a ‘multicursal narrative structure’<sup>94</sup>. Semiotic sequencing via ‘selective movement’ (Aarseth 1997:1) provides an ‘ergodic’ structuring with ‘each decision... mak[ing] some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed’ (ibid:3). Such ergodic dynamics, whilst fundamental to the medium-specificity of *TTTWD* (Franco 2015:47), can also be applied to the wider *TWD* transmedia matrix and abject spectrums (see Chapters 5 and 6). This is because ‘“the different ways in which the reader is invited to “complete” a text’ (Aarseth 1997:20) allow for multiple ‘plausible interpretation[s]’ (ibid:51). By consuming only the TV series we may read it as a post-9/11 horror representing national trauma. But if we consume other transmedia *TWD* texts this may strengthen the trans-discourse of masculinity-in-crisis, or it may lessen the tendency of readings to be male-centred, especially

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Cursality’ is defined as ‘the realisation... that there are multiple paths through the narrative in addition to the one [...players] are currently following’ (Goodbrey 2015:65).

if we have consumed tie-in texts with female leads such as Clementine, Michonne, and Lily (Abbott 2016a:116-7, Bishop 2016:173-9).

Moreover, in the Literature Review I noted that ‘narrative[s] of suffering and horror, [act as such] not only because the “themes” are there... but because... [the] whole narrative stance seems controlled by the necessity of going through abjection, whose intimate side is suffering and horror its public feature’ (Kristeva 1982:140). Applied to video games, one is forced to go through the abject suffering in the storyworld if one wants to progress. Consequently, immersion through ludic interaction arguably means that ‘fear becomes much more intense’ (Rouse III 2009:20; Perron 2009:8) through the reduction of phenomenological distance and shifting modes of horror (Hanich 2010:82-3, 128-9, 156).

Furthermore, immersion also stems from ‘seeing the consequences and rewards [or punishments] for decisions that provide... the core narrative experience, as much as the explicit narrative conveyed through cut-scenes and character dialogue’ (Brown 2014:163). Central to the line of argument put forward in this thesis, ‘[t]his phenomenological framework reminds us of the importance of thinking not only about the games or texts as objects, but also the effects that they have on their recipients’ (ibid.160).

Saliently, ‘characters’ actions and interactions are of immense importance in... narrative comprehension’ (Tseng 2013:587). The agency afforded to players in choosing Lee’s actions and consequential feedback from character interaction moulds meaning-making. Consistent with the wider *TWD* storyworld, threats not only come from zombies but also human Others who frequently endanger Lee and Clementine. Intra-faction conflict must be negotiated alongside the threat of an unknown male wishing to steal Clementine, marauding bandits, and a rural cannibalistic family devoid of a father (Ralph 2013).

Thus, crises of masculinity via the (in)ability to maintain order in *TWD* are given new ludic dynamics for *TTTWD* players as ‘the circumstances of *your* game playing, personality, mood, and time investment will influence how you feel about failure’ (Juul 2013:13). *TTTWD*’s ‘analytic complexity... allows a player several options but forces trade-offs’ (Costikyan 2013:90). As a result, the video game deals with multifarious forms of failure linked to abjection (Hills 2014a:104, Juul 2013:7):

The player, as Lee, makes choices that result in the deaths of others. Yet choices are forced upon you to progress though the narrative, allowing players to ‘experiment with failure’ (Juul 2013:30) and stressing a complicity between the player and Lee (ibid:112-3, Perron 2009:9,

Sicart 2013:22). Additionally, a significant departure from other *TWD* texts is the death of the central male protagonist. Unlike Rick Grimes and Travis Manawa, the corporeal blurring of self and Other is embodied by Lee as you play out his narrative, as he turns from human to abject zombie whilst still endeavouring to honour his parental duties. In order to complete the game, Lee must sacrifice himself in order to save Clementine (Juul 2013:27). Consequently, a paradox manifests whereby in order to advance through the narrative of suffering (Kristeva 1982:140), the player's avatar must fail biologically and parentally, leaving Clementine to fend for herself (Juul 2013:31,108). Playing via Lee's 'zom-being' (Jones 2014:181) provides the melancholic framing of the game's conclusion which negotiates between male crisis and I-zombie narrative (Abbott 2016a:160-1). Lee greatly fears what he is becoming, with both dynamics giving way to the pure Other (Lauro and Embry 2008:89).

Considering the repeatability bestowed to failure in video games, replaying the game allows for similar effects on players' abject spectrums as re-viewing the TV series, and/or re-reading the comics and novels. As discussed in the Literature Review, re-consuming a text fosters a 'quasi-familial status' with it (Klinger 2010:139). Experiential affective knowledge means that through failure we gain skills to overcome abjection in the game and continue through the narrative (Juul 2013:45). Similarly, online paratextual information provided by other players can equip individuals with knowledge to overcome abject obstacles (ibid:15, Costikyan 2013:24-5). The ambiguity of the unknown becomes known to us, combined with the skills/knowledge to traverse and combat this, transmogrifying affective relationships with the text through our ability to predict what will happen. The game itself may trade on such relationships by presenting different choices and trajectories through the narrative, as well as offering unlockable achievements for completing goals/stories that stimulate revised encounters with abjection (Juul 2013:86), encouraging yet further replaying (Taylor 2009:53-4). Thus, affect is founded on 'the dual domain of the semiotic and the procedural' (Sicart 2013:47). How the abject is coded *and* the process by which a narrative develops around abjection work together to provide the affective grid that readers will make meaning from. As narratives proceed, whether this is a single episode, level, chapter, or film – or a serialised (trans)media narrative – the procedural component feeds into semiotic frameworks of the text. In this Chapter, I've shown how the process can centre on male characters and the ongoing negotiation of gender scripts within abject diegetic space.

Moreover, the ongoing ergodic pathways selected and experienced will link to the audience member as a subject-in-process, where ongoing psychological and socio-cultural identity

formation (based around textual consumption and wider experiences) informs abject spectrums. That is to say, the phenomenological framework of abject spectrums means that the path that an individual takes to work through the semiotic and procedural grid of a text such as *TWD* is not entirely locked into a singular procedural-narrative trajectory. Rather, there is a twofold ergodic system in place: firstly, the texts I choose to consume, and in what order, will shape affective readings and relationships with the wider textual corpus. Sequentially, I may choose to watch *TWD*, then *FTWD*, perhaps reading novels in-between series, watching new webisodes, and playing the video games. However, I may choose to proceed through this transmedia corpus in a different sequence, devoting more time to certain components, and omitting others. This may even be forced upon me if transmedia texts on certain platforms are not available to me in my region (Scott 2013:326). Thus, abject spectrums are formed and coloured by initial experience (e.g. watching a TV pilot), by repeat experiences (rewatching season 3 and knowing that Lori will die, for example) and by newly interpolated transmedia experiences (perhaps reading about the Governor and how he ended up at Woodbury in the novels). And secondly, wider ongoing life experiences beyond textual consumption will also impact on the ergodic nature of abject spectrums. Given their necessarily hybrid identities, (anti-)fans will experience other events and phenomena that are not directly linked to a text (or their fandom) yet which can still shape affective responses. As Chapter 5 will go on to show, for example, US audiences of colour read the *TWD*, its abject landscape, and its characters against and through their own ongoing experiences as racial minorities in North America. Depending on which *TWD* texts are consumed – relating to the first ergodic pathway – online audiences read the franchise differently against their own phenomenological histories. Resultantly, *TWD* can be read as both racially problematic and as emblematic of wider social injustices perpetrated against black males by the State, or it can be read as racially progressive via its construction of a black male lead and the agency and character development afforded to him via the ludic qualities of the *TTTWD* video game.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This Chapter has explored how space can be an abject concept that subverts cultural order. The (post-)apocalyptic landscape provides an exemplar of this which is also well-suited to ongoing serial television (Jowett and Abbott 2013:31). But while such fantasy worlds break down

societies within their diegesis, their abject meaning remains informed by wider contemporary culture (Hassler-Forest 2016:8-9). Locating *TWD*'s twenty-first century TV horror within Lotz's male-centred seriality, I have argued that post-9/11 discourses of trauma inform its spaces, monsters, and the hegemonic patriarchal identity of lead characters trying to survive. However, 'any given storyworld's spatiotemporal organization is at least as crucial to understanding its political and ideological implications as the narratives that take place within it' (ibid:9). Therefore, building from the TV series' diegetic abject space, this Chapter also considered the transmedia spatialisation of the *TWD* franchise and how this has impacted on its masculinity-in-crisis mastermind narration.

Jason Ditter argues that '[c]onsidering time and space as multiplicities that take on meaning when they intersect in particular contexts is a key intellectual move because it holds open political potentiality' (2014:126). Such multiplicities, I argue, offer polysemic subtexts in *TWD*-as-transmedia and in the abjection it visualises. *FTWD*'s subtext around State force is culturally pertinent to wider issues in the US, reinforced by its multiracial cast. Similarly, *TTTWD*'s Lee offers a black male lead that engages with racial discourse within the post-apocalyptic landscape in a way that is markedly absent in its TV horror counterpart. Both *FTWD* and *TTTWD* engage with key mastermind narration, yet are not completely bound by it. Thus, *TWD* is afforded a semiotic slipperiness via its transmedia trajectories (Crawford and Rutter 2007:275).

Both *FTWD* and *TTTWD* use 'secondary characters... as the connective tissue in dense interpersonal networks, to assemble resolute characters into a compelling, novel plot' (Clarke 2013:60), fostering the continuity and thematic parallelism of masculinity-in-crisis that guides *TWD*'s tentpole seriality. Yet, both texts reflect Clarke's concern that 'continuity becomes more difficult to manage in serialized properties wherein each addition potentially contains elements that could alter the subsequent rules of the series' (ibid:70). This is not to say that they completely subvert *TWD* as both can still be 'hermetically sealed from the larger plot questions of the series' (ibid:83).

As fans of graphic horror TV consume modular storylines (ibid:137-8) then such bricolage can shape and colour the hyperdiegesis for them in various ways. While *In The Flesh* (Chapter 1) can be read as a radical form of twenty-first century TV horror, queering perspectives and identities via its use of the I-zombie narrative, this reading remains strongly preferred via it being a TV-only text. *TWD*, however, can be both racially reactionary and/or progressive

depending on which (transmedia) texts are consumed and in what order. It can be post-9/11 horror about white male anxiety chiming with other North American TV texts' representations of white, heteronormative masculinity as constructions of US 'quality' TV (Lotz 2014a) and/or something else: a political commentary on the oppressive nature of white patriarchal institutions, for instance. And transmedia texts reveal different modulations of abjection that can potentially undermine *TWD*'s 'tentpole TV' thematic consistency. However, the spatialisation of abjection represents a key consistency that allows for *TWD*'s overlapping and diverging themes, storylines, and discourses to take place within the same transmedia storyworld (Hassler-Forest 2016:162).

Furthermore, Ditter comments that 'meanings and affects are the result of an emergent *assemblage* of visual elements as well as environmental affects and embodied habits' (ibid:139) whereby old texts are reinterpreted in the light of new ones (2014:134). Thus, transmedia consumption is not only propulsive via new storylines, or lateral via the layering effect of repeated consumption of the same franchise, but it is also re-constitutive: any new text consumed (re)informs previous texts and understandings of the storyworld.

This does not mean valuing one medium over another, or treating one reading and/or set of subtexts as more authentic than others (Smith and Pearson 2015:15). Rather, this illustrates the complexities of serialisation that can have 'profound ideological and aesthetic consequences' (Allen and van der Berg 2014:3). I concur with Jonathan Gray who explains that '[d]espite synergy, expansion, and overflow, we are still relatively free to consume the version of the program that we want to consume' (2008:85); there is malleability in the abject spectrum as a model. It proffers a *transmedial scope* that can consider the franchise-level hyperdiegesis. At the same time, ergodic pathways intersect with audiences' wider cultural and experiential histories. This will be explored in more detail in Part II; Chapter 4 looks at how transnational audiences can partake in Only-Click TV acquisition in order to engage with *TWD* and its fandom. Comparatively, while *TWD*'s male-centred serial stresses a particular form of hero – white masculinity that is straight and paternal – one must acknowledge that 'masculinities are not reducible to one "self" or type' (Baker 2015:243). Chapters 5 and 6 evidence how different audience identities and racial politics, along with wider socio-cultural issues and discourses within the US, are read critically against the TV series, *FTWD*, and *TTTWD*. Considering all three texts reiterates the polysemic reading of the franchise whilst showing how self-identity, beyond fan identity, informs abject spectrums (Sicart 2013:14).

Whilst Chapter 1 considered the I-abject narrative positioning of sympathetic monsters, addressing a British PSB model that confined graphic horror to TV texts, Chapter 2 has focused instead on the monster as wholly Other and as representative of abject space that exploits basic cable TV's propensity for extended numbers of episodes per season. I have also moved away from analysing standalone TV texts inflected by public service values, showing how *TWD* commercially employs transmedia storytelling to provide 'experience[s] of multiplicity through continuing serial structures and ever-expanding mythologies' (Ross 2008:61). In Chapter 3's case studies, the *Masters Of Horror (MOH)* episodes 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise', I will explore how monstrous bodies may shift between sympathetic portrayals and Othering via the ambiguities of abjection. Considering the interrelation between bodies and space, the next Chapter supplements my transmedial analysis here by looking at both episodes as *transcultural TV horror* positioned between Japan and the US and shaping on-screen abjection at a textual, paratextual, cultural, and industrial level as neo-cult TV (Hills 2013e). Furthermore, Chapter 3 covers a third industrial type of twenty-first century graphic TV horror, building on my discussions of UK public service and US basic cable thus far by analysing Showtime's *MOH* as a premium cable text. Unlike AMC, but similar to BBC3, this targets a niche audience (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11): as a subscription pay-channel, Showtime frequently addresses a cult/quality viewership. Rather than adhering to a public service ethos or 'FCC regulations that affect other [US] channels' (ibid), Showtime as premium cable television is afforded the artistic license to create TV horror that culturally pushes at aesthetic and thematic limits (Brown 2010:158). Thus, as I will argue next, abjection serves as an integral part of its brand identity.

### 3. A Woman Scorned: *Masters of Horror*'s 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' as Premium Cable, Brand-Specific, and Transcultural Abjection

#### 3.1. Intro

Evidencing the breadth of screen abjection in twenty-first century TV horror, Showtime's *Masters of Horror* (*MOH*) is markedly different from the previous two examples in several ways. Whereas BBC3 had to negotiate its PSB ethos in relation to *ITF*, Showtime is not restricted by such regulations/political economy. Furthermore, unlike AMC who reduced the risk of creating *TWD* as a 'monumental series' by 'employing a variety of supplemental texts to protect their growing economic and ideological investments in monumental seriality' (Dawson 2011:39), making it transmedia rich (Gray 2008:95), Showtime's focus on graphic visuals signposts quality aimed at loyal and niche audiences that ties into its brand identity. Catherine Johnson explains that 'branding is particularly valuable within the first-order commodity relations that characterize subscription and pay-per-view series, where viewers pay directly for programmes that are not funded by the sale of airtime for advertising' (2012:28). Moreover, not being bound by restrictions over graphic imagery and subject matter, these channels have been able 'to develop more edgy and controversial content' (ibid:29), seeking to entice 'a demographic of affluent, educated 18-34-year-old males who the national networks struggle to attract' (ibid). Therefore, premium subscription TV can take greater risks in experimentation (Lotz 2007b:90-2) in terms of constructing the most graphic horror spectacle (Jowett and Abbott 2013:13). This is also evident in other Showtime texts such as *Penny Dreadful* and *Dexter*, and HBO's *Carnivále* and *True Blood*. Unsurprisingly, then, *MOH* brought 'some of the most outrageously intense, violent, sexual, controversial, and *political*, horror images to television screens' (Totaro 2010:87).

Additionally, unlike the 'fully-furnished' storyworlds of *ITF* and *TWD* (Angelini and Booy 2010:19-22, Wilcox 2010:32), and restricting its hyperdiegetic potential (Hills 2002a:137-8, Johnson 2005:2-3, Nelson 2012:26), *MOH*'s closed narrative anthologising adheres to more traditional formats of TV horror (Wheatley 2006:13,32, Jowett and Abbott 2013:40, Angelini and Booy 2010:20) that stress auteur-driven vehicles, seeking recognition as quality (TV)

horror. A key part of the focus of this Chapter, the series' two Japanese episodes, 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise', directed by Miike Takashi and Norio Tsuruta respectively, are framed by preexisting rhetoric from Western distributors such as Tartan's 'Asia Extreme' catalogue that 'attached [a] unifying label and an extremely strong brand identity to these films' (Martin 2015:1), marketed on 'stereotypical perceptions of the East' (ibid:4) familiar to transcultural fans (Hendershot 2011:145). This Chapter addresses the importance of such paratextual framing as it informs these TV J-horror episodes, studying the intertextual field in which they are contextualised (Gray 2015:230). I use Mittell's 'discursive clustering' model (2004) as a means of not only exploring genre construction, but also textual meaning/evaluation through such practices. Furthermore, building from Johnson's 'quality/cult' TV model (2005), the Chapter analyses *MOH* as a form of 'neo-cult' horror television aimed at pre-existing horror/cult fans as well as wider quality audiences (Hills 2013e:291), thus considering how brand-specific abjection (Hills 2010d:132) is instilled at a paratextual level (Menotti and Crisp 2015:5). For 'Imprint' this works around its Asia Extreme aesthetics, for 'Dream Cruise' its J-horror themes also feed into Showtime's brand image which is premised on cinematic qualities, offering non-TV (or 'more-than-TV') attributes in comparison to more traditional TV aesthetics (Schneider 2003d).

Whereas Chapter 1 located British Northern culture as part of the socio-spatial discourse framing abjection in *ITF*, and Chapter 2 read *TWD*'s apocalyptic geography through post-9/11 and cultural contexts in the US, both examples were rooted within one nationality. This Chapter provides a transcultural axis that constructs Japan as Other and abject to the Western, white, male self in both *MOH* episodes. Yet, whilst this abject relationship resonates with Orientalist discourse (Shin 2009:86-7), one must consider that both texts are transnational co-productions between Showtime and Kadokawa: other (trans)national aspects can (re)frame readings of them. For instance, both Japanese directors utilise non-native English language, cultural heritage, and globalised horror discourse. Furthermore, 'Imprint' is an adaption of Japanese feminist author Shimako Iwai's *Bokkee Kyoutee* (Lambert 2006, Kooyman 2010:216n10), whilst 'Dream Cruise' was penned by *Ringu* author Koji Suzuki. These considerations present a highly dynamic and hybrid space for analysing both texts (Rawle 2014:215), addressing the affective abject relationships *between* self and Other. Utilising a Bakhtinian reading of 'Imprint' reframes the grotesque female monster that constructs the abject space she resides in as carnivalesque. That is to say, a space that empowers those of low status and actively disrupts

culture order (Bakhtin 19847). Therefore, rather than only being part of a Japanese threat embodying geographically-located horror, she becomes the victim of an ageless and global patriarchy. And in ‘Dream Cruise’ the melodramatic themes salient to the episode’s gendering undermine the (masculine) horror of the text, offering progressive potential through J-dorama genre codes of female emancipation. Such shifts in how one can read abjection as an ambiguous state (Kristeva 1982:9), considering transcultural/transnational aspects, involve ‘a careful consideration of the larger sociopolitical and cultural contexts against which... texts are created’ (Wee 2014:9-10). Consequently, in Chapter 3 I will question the paratextual/intertextual shadow cast by Tartan as the dominant Western model for reading these types of horror, interrogating pre-existing criticisms of Orientalism (Shin 2009:86-7, Martin 2015:58). I begin by addressing the paratextual framing of the episodes which derived from Tartan and was adopted by Showtime to inform both their brand image and the text’s quality status.

### **3.2. Imprinting Paratextual Frameworks: ‘Asia Extreme’ as Brand-Specific Abjection**

The Literature Review highlighted how discursive textual clustering not only illustrates how ‘[g]enres emerge from intertextual relations between multiple texts’ (Mittell 2004:8), but frame meaning and value in texts (ibid:16-7). Pre-existing Western discourse around modern Japanese and Asian horror largely stems from the branding of Tartan Films’ ‘Asia Extreme’ banner, which clustered together specific East Asian cinema as daring, dangerous, and distinctly non-Western (Dew 2007:53-4), formulating brand-specific abjection (Hills 2010d:132) via an ‘empty’, or excessively generalized, pan-Asian aesthetic (Needham 2006:9, Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009:6). Consequently, Tartan created ‘a set of cultural assumptions and implications that guides – and sometimes misguides – the viewer in assessing the political and ideological significance of the films’ (Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009:6; Frey 2016:15). Texts were grouped in a way – as tautologically extreme, as horror, as Asian – that may not be the case in their indigenous countries (Wada-Marciano 2009:34, Kim 2005:106). Thus, it has been argued that *Western* preconceptions falsely assume that these texts somehow reflect an intrinsic

‘nature’ of the culture they are produced in (Cagle 2009:124-5), ‘operating within the discourse of Orientalism’ (Shin 2009:86-7).

Daniel Martin writes that since *Audition*<sup>95</sup> (1999), Western critics have focused on the extreme violence of Miike’s films (2015:42), aided by Tartan’s marketing (ibid:44-6, Dew 2007:53-4). Unlike aesthetically restrained J-horror (McRoy 2008:85, Martin 2009:36), the hype constructed around *Audition* and its director emphasised dangerous, shocking imagery that is contrasted with mainstream UK horror/cinema (Martin 2015:47), offering Orientalist understandings through its reductive, essentialised approach (ibid:58). Reviews often used the ‘term *auteur* in relation to Miike, promoting the authorial interpretation of the work, rather than a generic one’ (Rawle 2014:226; Turner 1993:36, Neupert 2006:47; Bondanella 2006:38).

Yet one must acknowledge the wider political economies of auteur branding. Timothy Corrigan considers ‘the commerce of the auteur’ (1998:41-2) and how this affords certain directors an economic value. Going beyond national boundaries, Nikki Lee argues that ‘*transnational commerce and practices of auteurism*’ are ‘embedded in the material conditions and commercial strategies of international institutions and networks of circulation’ (2008:204). Therefore, symbolic/cultural value ascribed to ““foreign”... directors is habitually reconstituted in transnational processes and thus contingent upon local configurations’ (ibid:205). Miike functions as the central figurehead of ‘Asia Extreme’ cinema, supported by Western hype and evidencing transnational commercial value as an auteur (Mes 2013:22). Thus, his reputation, identity and cultural value *precede* him in the contextualisation/reception of his subsequent output (Rawle 2014.226). Miike as auteur is both pre- and paratextual (Gray 2010:18,108) whereby his ‘auteurship’ positions him as a ‘signifier of cultural difference’ (Rawle 2014:213). Auteur accreditation frames the aesthetics of his abject imagery as having artistic status whilst hermeneutically sealing his work as ‘Japanese’ even if it is a co-production, such as ‘Imprint’. Western audiences are ‘primed for a Miike whose work... [is] shocking, disgusting, aggressive, agitational, and, above all, very violent, often with a sexual overtone’ (ibid:208), with these attributes being understood through authorial intent (ibid:226). Consequently, Miike’s hype aids in shaping the ‘genre, gender, theme, style and relevant intertexts [of ‘Imprint’]’ (Gray 2010:18).

But in Japan, Miike’s generic remit is far more elastic, creating texts spanning a wide range of genres, aesthetics, and themes. Moreover, auteur status is not necessarily attached to Miike in

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<sup>95</sup> Miike Takashi’s first film to gain British theatrical release in 2000.

this context. Rather, he is often framed as a director-for-hire (Mes 2003:10, Jowett and Abbott 2013:103), or as the creator of ‘schlock’ (Frey 2016:7). This is not to say one stance is of greater validity than the other – although the former bequeaths more prestige to Miike globally – rather, both constructions become salient when analysing ‘Imprint’ within transcultural contexts, acknowledging the discursive strategies that have been placed onto and around Miike.

In comparison to Miike’s oeuvre, Norio Tsuruta’s visibility is far less prominent in Tartan’s ‘Asia Extreme’ marketing strategies. Credited with popularising modern J-horror’s style and suspensefulness through the utilisation of V-cinema technology (McRoy 2008:8-9), his previous work includes J-horror films *Ringu* prequel *Ringu 0: Bâsudei* and *Premonition*<sup>96</sup>, and the straight-to-video horror anthology *Honto ni atta kowai hanashi* (*Scary True Stories*). The former two were distributed by Tartan under the ‘Asia Extreme’ banner. Despite garnering praise and respect for his distinctive restrained aesthetic, tied to the cultural-technological limitations of video-cinema (ibid:176), the lack of graphic imagery in Norio’s work does not chime with Tartan’s brand identity. Nevertheless, both DVD versions of *Premonition* have been discursively clustered with other canonical and financially-successful J-horror texts such as *The Ring* trilogy, *The Grudge*, and *Dark Water*, all of which became Hollywood remakes (Mittell 2004:36) (see Figs.1. and 2). However, with the exception of the third film in the *Ringu* series, Norio did not direct any of these features. Rather, the intertextual/creative link between these texts is Takashige Ichise, their producer. Moreover, Norio’s name does not feature anywhere on the DVD covers, reiterating his lack of wider status within this (sub)genre and his lower transnational commercial value as an auteur. In this instance, the J-horror (sub)genre ‘serves ...an important duty in the interpretive process’ (Gray 2010:35-6), acting over and above authorial/artistic cachet.

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<sup>96</sup> Subsequently given a Hollywood remake



Fig.1. and Fig.2. UK Tartan DVD covers of *Premonition*.

Such intertextual rhetoric, distinguishing these respective directors, manifests in the paratextual coding of *MOH*'s DVD covers and marketing – stressing the transnational commerce of Miike over Norio, whilst also evidencing the cult sensibilities of *MOH* as a horror anthology series in a bid to attract fan audiences.

Catherine Johnson notes that ‘in the early 1990s... [telefantasy] emerged as a dominant form of primetime series drama on the US networks’ (2005:95). Recognising increasing market fragmentation (ibid), producers created ‘quality/cult’ TV using quality TV rhetoric to appeal to quality audiences (ibid:97), whilst utilising telefantasy as the prevailing genre to appeal to science fiction and horror fans (ibid:101). However, as evidenced in my Literature Review and Methodology, whilst telefantasy was previously used to ‘generically nominate’ horror (Hills 2005a:112), revised tactics have been adopted in the booming growth of ‘quality/horror’ television in the twenty-first century, and such content is now commonly demarcated as overt horror (Calvert 2014:186, Wells-Lassagne 2017:23).

Both *ITF* and *TWD* evidence ‘quality TV’ status in their engagements with horror and zombie fandom, using a pop-cultural monster very much *en vogue* (Abbott 2016b:163-4) in interesting

and distinctive ways to attract wider viewership: the former through I-zombie subjectivity (Abbott 2016a:7), the latter through its expansive apocalyptic transmedia remit (Hassler-Forest 2016:161-2). Yet *MOH* strives for ‘quality’ status through different abject aesthetics. Whilst ‘quality/cult’ TV of the 1990s differentiated itself from ‘regular’ television (Johnson 2005:96), using ‘the horror genre’ to evoke ‘a rhetoric of distinctiveness’ (ibid:101), it did so ‘without “lots of blood”’ (ibid), nor was its visual style simply cinematic (ibid:106). By contrast, neo-cult TV of the twenty-first century self-consciously aims to ‘appeal to historical, established [fans and]... various, “mainstream” audience[s]’ (Hills 2013e:291), in an attempt to ‘produce “event” TV (i.e. “quality,” “cinematic” television)... [combined with] the effective targeting of cult fans’ (ibid:297). *MOH*’s bid for quality/horror status draws on this strategy whereby the ‘type of monster... being wholly proprietary to the brand’ (Hills 2010d:132) evidences strong brand-specific abjection. This is achieved via its premium cable position that ‘offer[s] writers and series creators a great deal of autonomy and creative control’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11), especially compared to the PSB ethos of restraint found in Chapter 1. Resultantly, Showtime is more freely able to engage ‘with horror [film] conventions, graphic cinema-style body horror, and unsettling ambiguity’ (ibid). Moreover, unlike Chapter 2’s study of basic cable, premium cable TV horror ‘does not need broad appeal but rather targets niche audiences’ (ibid) who pay premium prices to access content (Shimpach 2010:6). In this instance, bids to attract a quality/niche demographic seek to mobilise cult horror film audiences by having cult horror film directors produce its abject imagery (Mathijs and Sexton 2011:30). Cult cinema marketing, like premium cable, is less ‘geared towards a mass public that is not automatically associated with this kind of movie going and consumption’ (ibid). Again, this strategy is not readily implemented via the previous forms of TV horror seen in Chapters 1 and 2 that rely on alternative markers of quality.

Textually clustered within the horror genre, both *MOH* episodes are anchored by situating their directors alongside all the other horror filmmakers who have been appropriated as *Masters of Horror*, ‘uniting leading horror directors to create frightening and innovative programmes’ for the series (Jowett and Abbott 2013:82). Likewise, Stacey Abbott explains the importance of TV horror’s title sequences as they ‘evoke the narrative and thematic landscape of the series’ (2015:113). Whilst aiding in the creation of ‘brand identity’ (ibid:111), they also paratextually serve ‘to establish generic signifiers’ (ibid:118), guiding audiences to engage with the text in certain ways (ibid:125, Gray 2010:74-5, Halfyard 2010:126). *MOH*’s opening score (composed

by Edward Shemur) uses slow, haunting piano, overlaid with staccato guitars and droning industrial sounds to create a sense of dread and suspense, whilst the title's imagery – blood dripping onto a white sheet followed by a skull, a pentagon, an axe, blood-soaked clenched fists, a decomposing carcass, a slew of dolls' heads, and gothic architecture – 'establishes [the] stylistic and generic approach to the series as well as links to other examples of the genre' (Abbott 2015:118). The series uses the same title sequence throughout, reiterating the generic framing of its standalone episodes.

It is also important to note that Mick Garris, the producer of *MOH*, professed to having no creative input into the material of the series, being merely a conduit to bring horror directors together. Garris's emphasis on creative freedom reiterates the auteur status of the contributors (Jowett and Abbott 2013:82), offering the series' 'unique selling point' (ibid:100) in its attempt to target pre-existing niche horror fans. Yet this self-refuting of production power is open to scrutiny. Garris's choice of these two Japanese directors, and how they are discursively framed, remains significant. Addressing contemporary cult TV, Hills notes that a dialogue is formed whereby 'producers can use storytelling techniques and genres to target fans... [a]ppealing to built-in, loyal audiences' (2013e:290-1), and creating self-consciously cult television.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Martin argues that Tartan also sought to make its catalogue self-consciously cult, a label 'thrust upon [its films] as a result of carefully planned marketing campaigns and skillfully judged interactions between the distribution company... and the mainstream press' (2015:13).

While concordant with the neo-cult rhetoric of Showtime and *MOH*, the series also plays on, refines and exaggerates the dangerous, taboo connotations of Tartan’s ‘Asia Extreme’ branding when coding these two episodes, and the wider series, as niche, transgressive and anti-mainstream (Hills 2010f:67, Abbott 2010a:91, Battis 2010:78). For ‘Imprint’ in its American, European, and British DVD boxset marketing (e.g. the cover inlay), the episode is paratextually promoted solely through Miike’s name and his most transculturally authenticated and infamous works, *Audition* and *Ichi the Killer* (Jowett and Abbott 2013:103, Barker et al 2007:127, Martin 2015:63, Taylor-Jones 2013:200-1), with no mention that it is an adaptation of a novel (ibid:80) (see Figs.3-5).



Fig.3. US DVD cover denoting that the episode had been ‘banned from cable broadcast’. Fig.4. European DVD that notes Miike’s other films *Audition* and *Ichi the Killer*. Fig.5. The UK DVD boxset of *MOH*, series one, volume two, which stresses the master horror film auteurs brought together.

‘Dream Cruise’, however, carries multiple names on the US DVD cover (see figs.6 and 7.), such as Norio’s (alongside the previous films he has directed), the teleplay author Naoya Takaymama, the author of the short story the episode is based on, Koji Suzuki, and the actors who feature in the episode (Gray 2010:99). Thus, unlike ‘Imprint’, adaptation discourse is used whereby Koji’s reputation<sup>98</sup> is drawn on as a marker of literary and genre quality, seeking to

<sup>98</sup> Koji is the author of the canonical novel *Ringu* which the films were adapted from.

appeal to a pre-existing fan-base (Jowett and Abbott 2013:59). This is visually supported by the focus on black female hair, a common trope of J-horror (McRoy 2008:6) as well as being central to *Ringu*, and it is reiterated by critical praise quoted on the back of the DVD case:

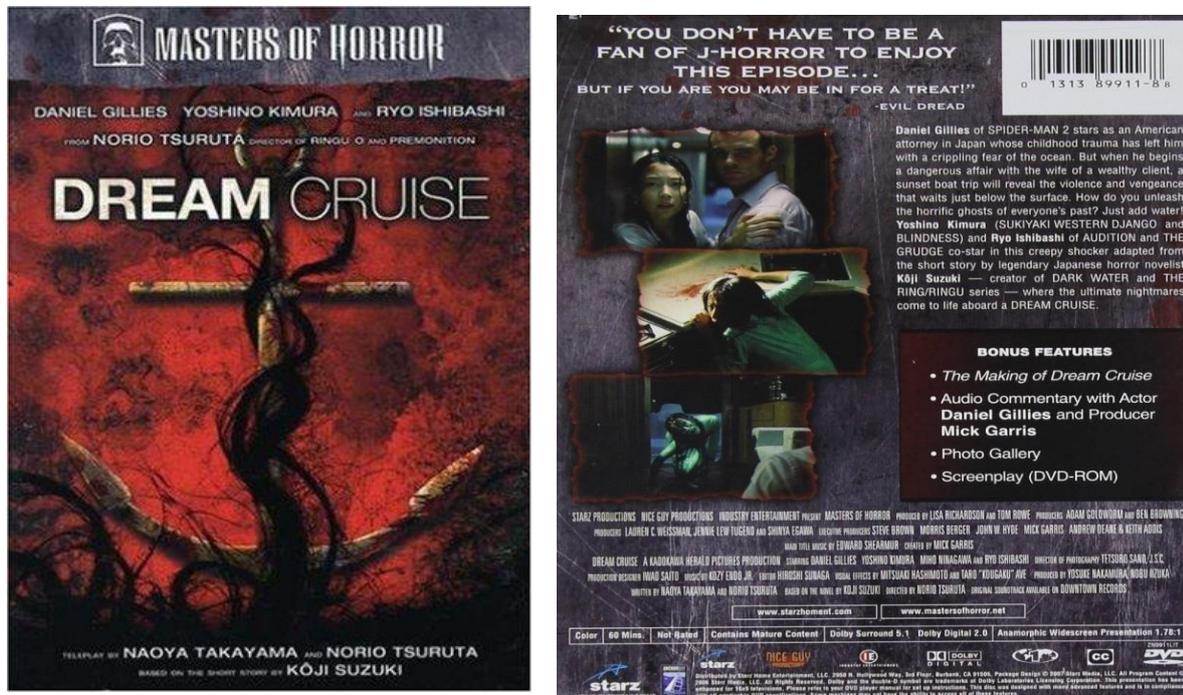


Fig.6. The US DVD cover of ‘Dream Cruise’ displays multiple names involved in the creation of the episode alongside their previous work. Fig.7. The back of the DVD cover notes that ‘you don’t have to be a fan of J-horror to enjoy this episode... but if you are you may be in for a treat!’

To conclude, this section offers a twofold argument: firstly, Western distributors have been instrumental in disseminating and framing both directors’ output in the UK and beyond. Tartan’s ‘Asia Extreme’ branding and textual clustering strategy has created an ‘authentic’ body of films that nevertheless represents Japan and East Asia, and specific auteur directors, in limited and limiting ways. Secondly, this discourse has subsequently been appropriated by Showtime. For Miike, this has occurred predominantly through his ‘figurehead’ status for ‘Asia Extreme’ (Rawle 2014:226). In Norio’s case, his work has been located, and thus synthesized, within a wider canonical corpus, including discourses of adaptation. Yet such framing, whilst paratextually manifesting genre codes ‘representative’ of the ‘Asia Extreme’ corpus, remains open to scrutiny, calling into question Western branding and reading strategies. Building on this, I will now address how, in both episodes, diegetic abjection formulates around the

Japanese female body in a Japanese space. Chapters 1 and 2 have analysed abject gendering and spatiality at national levels; this Chapter explores both aspects but through a transcultural prism that utilises the ambiguity of abjection (Kristeva 1982:9) to evidence multiple readings. This unfixes relationships of self and Other, and in the process, further conceptualises abjection as a tool to analyse the connections *between* East/West transcultural positions. For ‘Imprint’ this is done via a Bakhtinian framing of abjection which rather than repelling abjection as wholly Other, positions the grotesque female body as ‘linked to the underworld’ (Bakhtin 1984:311) within a carnivalesque space questioning patriarchal power structures.

### **3.3. ‘Imprint’: *Kaidan* TV Horror and the Restructuring of Abjection’s Self and Other**

Considering how Western public discourses of Miike can contextualise textual analysis (Staiger 2000:174), placing his work as excessive and violent, but also as aesthetically and thematically consistent within his own ‘authentic’ oeuvre, *MOH*’s transnational co-production context potentially raises criticisms of self-Orientalism whereby ‘Imprint’ is ‘*openly* overdetermined by the production of Japanese-ness through [the] Western Orientalist imagination’ (Currid 1996:80). That is, Miike propagates self-exoticised/Orientalist national representations (Martin 2015:61), exaggerating his ‘work’s own foreignness as a conscious strategy’<sup>99</sup> (Frey 2016:15), and deliberately creating content that was ‘right up to the limit of what American television would tolerate’ (Miike cited in Schilling 2006)<sup>100</sup>. Miike, who often subverts cultural tradition (Gerow 2009:24, Mes 2006:21, Fonfrède 2003:291), noted that ‘I thought a step back to old Japan would be fun and visually pleasing for American audiences’ (in England 2006:10), resulting in ‘Imprint’ being a resolutely Japanese Gothic horror text.

Moreover, the episode’s stark generic boundaries are supported by its *Kabuki/kaidan* aesthetics and themes ‘depict[ing] the incursion of supernatural forces into the realm of the ordinary,

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<sup>99</sup> Contra speculation by some who predicted a suppression of ‘authentic’ Miike in this transnational TV co-production (e.g. Daniel and Wood 2003:285,291).

<sup>100</sup> Garris himself acknowledges this as the main reason why he chose the director in the episode’s DVD extras (2006).

largely for the purposes of exacting revenge’ (McRoy 2006:219). These supernatural forces are *yūrei/onryō*; vengeful ghosts of women who have often been killed by men (Balmain 2008a:47). Aesthetically, *Kabuki* theatre ‘is characterized by a propensity for striking visuals and graphic effects and is marked by “*zankoku no bi* ([an] aesthetic of cruelty)”’ (Wee 2014:31) utilising ‘elaborate costumes, remarkable stage effects, virtuoso performers’ (Hand 2005:20-1). The episode’s frequent use of stark colours, bold silhouette forms and graphic visualisations of bodily violence all support such an aesthetic of cruelty. This is buttressed by the text’s storyworld which centres on the sexually transgressive space of a brothel island, surrounded by demons and the dead, and which involves events such as jealous murders, parenticide, incest, abortions, torture, and rape, all set within nineteenth century Meiji Japan. The monstrous threat of ‘Imprint’, the unnamed female *yūrei* depicted as a ‘grotesque, deformed figure’ (Wee 2014:31), blends ‘sexual treachery, selfish desires, fear, and despair’ (ibid), representing attributes prevalent within Edo gothic *Kabuki* tales. Lastly, ‘*Kabuki* has a heightened register in which technically straightforward narratives are embellished with the uncanny’ (Hand 2005:21). The uncanny narrative cycle that retells events within an abject feminine space is the driving force of ‘Imprint’, whereby ‘constant changes to the story of character Komomo’s death... foreground the impossibility of singular narrative truth’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:104). Consequently, the episode ‘*arrest[s]* the enigma [of the text]’ (Barthes 1974:76), keeping the narrative ambiguous and unresolved via its hermeneutic coding (ibid:31), and fostering multiple readings of the abject female body.

‘Imprint’ opens at night: a dead baby lies in a basket in the reeds of a river, as a boat occupied by men travels to an unknown destination. Juxtaposed to native peasants, American journalist Christopher (Billy Drago) acts as the transnational outsider within the diegesis. Travelling to a brothel in this foreign and dangerous land in an attempt to find his love, a Japanese woman named Komomo (Michié), Christopher is warned by the locals that this is a place full of demons, representing a Japan that is both sexually alluring and dangerously monstrous, but also wholly Other. Suddenly a swollen, drowned pregnant woman hits the side of the vessel: the corporeal state of the woman and child establishes the central themes of sex and horror (Kristeva 1982:2, 71, Lechte 2003:185). Both life and death are conflated onto the Japanese female body, supporting claims of (self-)Orientalism in its imagery and gendered relations.

Whilst not apocalyptic like *TWD*'s spatialisation, Japan is represented as an abject space as the exotic, foreign brothel acts as a trap and a threat to Christopher. Informed by the disfigured concubine (Miyuki Konno) sent to his room that his beloved Komomo committed suicide, Christopher demands to know how this took place. She informs him that Komomo, no longer able to wait for him, hanged herself. The episode then provides flashbacks to her death. Falsely accused of stealing, Komomo is tied up. With the rest of the women watching on, a concubine tortures her. Red-hot incense candles are stuck into her armpits, whilst needles are stuck into her fingernails and gums. Her body, semi-exposed/naked, is both disfigured and eroticised via these traumatic, phallic invasions. In the episode's finale the disfigured woman reveals to Christopher that she is the assailant who took Komomo's life, but also a conjoined twin – the sister being an id-like hand attached to her head – and a demon. Trying to defeat the island's monsters, Christopher shoots her in the head. The demon turns into Komomo, pulling out brain-matter from the gunshot exit-wound before dying.

Within (self-)Orientalist readings Japan and its indigenous inhabitants are coded as Other, juxtaposed to the West 'based upon... ontological and epistemological distinction[s]' (Said 2003:2). Reading Christopher as the Western protagonist, represented in a symbolic and cultural binary to the horrifying exotic Orient, reiterates colonial rhetoric (Said 2003:2-3). Moreover, aesthetically and generically, 'Imprint' is (para)textually clustered with extreme Asian cinema by *MOH*, reinforced by Miike's auteur status, whilst indulging claims of self-Orientalism in an apparent bid to please Western TV audiences. Consequently, 'Imprint' allegedly became even more extreme and thus more blatantly 'Japanese' (Schilling 2006, England 2006:10). However, Miike's role as an auteur may be undermined, as he is not the sole author of 'Imprint'. Shimako Iwai, a writer and Japanese celebrity whose work has often been seen to speak to women/girls through the genre *shojo shosetsu*<sup>101</sup> (Ashby 2001), is the author of the source novel. Furthermore, writers hold more weight in Japanese TV than directors (Tsai 2004:47). Shimako features not only as an extra in the TV episode but is interviewed in the DVD extras, offering additional 'filters of meaning' (Kompere 2006:349). This complicates the Western masculine discourse of 'Imprint' in terms of its 'quality' auteur figure Miike, its cult sensibility, and its branding as horror/'Asia Extreme'. Although the

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<sup>101</sup> *Shojo shosetsu* (girls' novels) a genre 'developed from stories published in girls' magazines that targeted those same privileged and educated girls as readers. These stories feature shojo characters and are often set in girls' schools. A close bond between two girls – e.g. a junior and a senior student – is an important element of such stories' (Uchiyama 2014:212).

marginality of Shimako and her novel may be sources of subcultural capital<sup>102</sup>, by considering the TV incarnation of ‘Imprint’ as an adaptation of a feminist novel, a feminist perspective on abjection within patriarchal culture begins to manifest itself more clearly (Staiger 2000:167).

Concurrently, whilst an Eastern female sexual threat to the Western male lead may be in accordance with Orientalist discourses, this bequeaths cultural status to the latter but is not afforded to the former based on her abject Othering (Staiger 2000:73). But abjection is not morally prefixed (Kristeva 1982:4). Considering the females of ‘Imprint’ as abject but simultaneously active against patriarchal order (Williams 1992:568, Wood 1986:74-5, Dolar 1991:19) allows for feminist subtexts that afford the abject female body(-politic) a degree of agency. The trauma of the female body throughout ‘Imprint’ can be read as allegorically linked to the longstanding socio-political trauma enforced on women by Japanese and global patriarchy (Lowenstein 2005:5). Here ‘personal identity extends to the realm of national identity’ (ibid:10). Miike himself has commented on his depictions of violence as revealing ‘repressed aggressions in the domestic landscape’ (Frey 2016:24), and he frequently focuses ‘on those who are in some way marginalised from mainstream culture’ (Taylor-Jones 2013:202). This reframing of discourse around the female body stresses the need to explore those processes/aspects that colour the *linkage* between self and Other. That is to say, the self-Other dynamic offers just as much potential for socio-political understanding as the points of alien-ness and exclusion which bookend abjection. For instance, the transcultural link in ‘Imprint’ between a white Western, male self and a Japanese female Other suggests that the former is threatened by the foreign abject world and those who dwell in it. However, the ambiguous and unfinished nature of abjection (Kristeva 1982:9, McCabe and Holmes 2011:78), reinforced by polysemic narrative structure, plot, and representation (Barthes 1974:75-6), means that one can remap this transcultural relationship to reconfigure the axis between self and Other. In this recoding, the Japanese female, despite her horrifying aspects, becomes a form of traumatised self, whilst (transcultural) patriarchal masculinity is Othered, contextualised by the feminist stance of the original novel. The extremity of the rape and torture potentially demonstrate a radical feminist politics (Frey 2016:36-7). This is not to reduce comparative analysis only to binaries that offer Orientalist or Occidentalists monsters, however. Rather, abjection’s post-structuralist underpinning addresses (trans)cultural nuances that shape

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<sup>102</sup> Shimako’s status is not lost on fans, as online posters ask if the original source material is available in English. Knowledge about the source text is offered by one fan who states that, ‘[a]s a fairly avid Japanese book collector, I’m 99% sure that there’s no translation for this novel’.

relationships between self and Other (Chan 2004:10, Young 2004:167, Bhabha 1990b:292). The disruptive potential of body politics mapped onto the reconfigured/recontextualised Japanese female body can be understood via Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque corporealism (1984:317).

Whilst Japanese culture has an extensive heritage of 'utopian longings' (Napier 1991:1), offering 'voyages to various fantastic countries' (ibid:4), Bakhtin's model frames 'Imprint' as a dystopian diegesis, problematizing patriarchy in its multiple guises. As highlighted in the Literature Review, Bakhtin argues that the grotesque body is one of 'gross exaggeration and hyperbole' (1984:301). As Taylor-Jones comments, '[b]odies in Miike's films are often the site of... transgression of social and behavioral boundaries' (2013:205). Such are the feminine abject bodies depicted in 'Imprint'. As both concubines and demons they threaten corporeal/cultural order through the inversion of the pure, clean, and rational upper stratum by a lower stratum linked to the underworld, 'defecation and copulation' (Bakhtin 1984:317). Furthermore, the carnivalesque site inverts societal order, subverting cultural powers within its grotesque space (ibid:7). This feminine heterotopic locale subverts patriarchal order via the brothel's otherworldly setting. A site 'with no real place', it fractures the 'real space of [patriarchal] society' (Foucault 1986:24). Such ambiguity within the text, whereby temporal and spatial order situates Christopher in the past and present, demonstrates how within the grotesque space 'the confines between the body and the world [collapse]' (Bakhtin 1984:315-17).

Wee notes that much of postwar *kaidan* cinema, effected by Allied Occupation censorship, 'used popular Japanese myths of the *yūrei/onryō* to articulate and explore contemporary sociocultural and political concerns – especially with regard to issues of gender, social roles, and national identity' (2014:43; Richie 2005:107, Yoda 2006) approached largely from a female perspective (ibid:45). Women are still depicted as victims of male power and cruelty, but it is after their deaths that they become empowered through acts of ghostly vengeance. Wee adds that whilst death empowers the female body, offering socio-political commentary, these depictions 'also play... into the... patriarchally inflected fear of the feminine' (ibid:46). 'Imprint', akin to a *kaidan* text, provides similar socio-political subtexts. Consequently, while the text 'looks back' via its 'traditional' Japanese ghost story aesthetics/themes, it does so through modern socio-political subtexts. These focus on a tacitly feminist rejection/disavowal of traditional female roles and women's modern treatment by men (e.g. McCurry 2016),

making connections between the past and present (Cooke 2015:120) through which the fantasy setting ‘invite[s] comparison with the viewer’s own world’ (Jowett 2010a:109).

For instance, one can consider the concubine’s hair and its social significance (Obeysekere 1998:xii). In exploring the Edo and earlier periods of Japan, Gary Ebersole illustrates how female hair holds symbolic and mythic value: ‘it was believed that *kami* [Shinto ghosts/spirits] of the plague were especially attracted to the coiffure of geisha and prostitutes’ (1998:76). The sexual power and danger attached to female hair with its abject potential allows the female to become a conduit to talk to, and attract, the benevolent dead in ‘Imprint’.

Moreover, ancient rural Japan seen as the land of the dead (ibid:90-1), combined with the abject female body, further conflates female sexuality with death. As Ebersole remarks, ‘the hair of geisha or prostitutes (i.e., women who are excessively active sexually) is especially attractive to the *kami* of disease, who bring death, disfigurement or infertility’ (ibid:97). This is echoed by Alf Hildebeitel who, using Mary Douglas (1966:35), writes that hair’s association with impurity has the potential to make it ‘matter out of place’ (1998:1). Offering socio-cultural commentary on the status of women in Japanese culture, the female concubine of ‘Imprint’ as a male possession is also intrinsically threatening to patriarchal control; a transcultural threat, I would argue, to both Western masculinity *and* native patriarchal institutions.

To think of abjection transculturally ‘allows us a way to consider how elements from films evolve and adapt away from their source text in specific national and institutional contexts’ (Smith 2015:110). My Bakhtinian reading of ‘Imprint’ rotates, and thus transmogrifies, self and Other along different, albeit interrelated, axes: race and gender are not placed in two essentialised Western/Eastern positions. Rather, the ambiguity present in abjection allows for ‘an ambivalence in the act of interpretation’ (Bhabha 1994:36; Smith 2015:112) whereby transcultural dislocation can consider Miike and Shimako as (co-)authors of ‘Imprint’ (Sandvoss 2007:22), fostering heterogeneous readings (Chow 2012:162). Yet, paratextually Showtime appropriates the ‘extreme’ connotations manifest in the graphic visuals and by those who create them, linking its brand-specific abjection to art horror, cinematic transgression, and ‘quality’ TV discourse. Here, Showtime welcomes the ambiguity of abjection as a marker of artistic status that reinforces its brand image. Such connotations draw on the aesthetics of the

abjection being represented as something that remains unseen anywhere else on television. The artistic discourse ascribed to abjection and linked to premium cable differentiates it from the ongoing melodrama of AMC's *TWD*, and the PSB/youth TV horror of *ITF*. Along with such ambiguity, it is also important to consider how different genres' narrational modes and, more specifically, the hybridising of genres, impacts on texts. Such is the case for the (J-)horror and (J-)drama *MOH* episode 'Dream Cruise' as it blends abject horror's themes of suffering (Kristeva 1982:140) with themes of melodrama.

### **3.4. 'Dream Cruise': Japanese Horror and Japanese (Melo)Drama - Genre Hybridity as Recoding Gender**

Totaro writes that the vengeful ghost of 'Dream Cruise' is in the spirit of the golden age of pulp horror, utilising 'morality tales, ironic fate, revenge, and gruesome forms of poetic justice (with twist endings)' (2010:88), reiterating how the ambiguity of abjection and its graphic visualisation are core components of Showtime's brand-specific abjection that lay claim to quality TV status. However, this episode also evidences a merging of horror and melodrama as body genres (Williams 2004), complicates the genre-based 'purity' fostered in *MOH*'s paratextual framing, which is premised on 'an overt engagement with horror conventions, graphic cinema-style body horror, and unsettling ambiguity' (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11). By considering how melodrama serves a key narrative function, the ambiguity of abjection spills out over the horror genre's theme of suffering into new genre realms that utilise other generic themes and codings. The text strongly engages with hermeneutic codes centred on the uncanny oceanic space, as the story focuses on a love triangle between American lawyer Jack (Daniel Gillies), his Japanese lover Yuri (Yoshino Kimura), and her controlling husband Eiji (Ryo Ishibashi), whom Jack works for. Yuri's domineering and dangerous husband, who suspects an affair, forces all three onto his boat and out to sea where they are then subjected to a series of ghostly uncanny returns. Ultimately, the proairetic narrative drive of typical J-dorama themes – romance, female empowerment, and enigmatic resolution (Barthes 1974:203) – displaces horror from the diegesis.

The beginning of 'Dream Cruise' offers central uncanny and abject tropes that structure the narrative, in the form of a flashback/dream. The dream, as an uncanny space, provides a psychological ambiguity (Jentsch 2003:125) 'linked with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts' (Freud 2003:148). Throughout the text, characters are unaware if the space they are in is real, a flashback, or a dream-like Other space. Likewise, temporality collapses as the past and present become entwined: during a dream Jack is pounced on by his deceased child brother, Shaun, who drowned at sea many years before. Moreover, the sea is central to the horror elements of the episode. Not only a threat in-and-of-itself through the act of drowning, it is also the uncanny location where the dead return.

Additionally, the threat of long black hair, common in J-horror and 'operat[ing] independently of the bearer' (Vlamain 2008b:1) is prominent in 'Dream Cruise'. Initially reinforcing representations of the female ghost as the monstrous threat, the hair caught in the boat's propeller wraps around Eiji's arm pulling him towards the now-operating blades (activated by the malevolent spectre, his ex-wife Naomi (Miho Ninagawa)). But such Othering ascribed to the ghostly female and to their disembodied hair is subverted since we later learn that it is Eiji who murdered Naomi. As Colette Balmain remarks, one can 'interpret the disembodiment of female hair and its embodiment by evil spirits (*kami*) as a form of (feminist) protest against male oppression' (2008b:6). Thus, the act of female revenge complicates simple distinctions between self and Other (ibid), being reiterated throughout the text. Naomi is both the uncanny threat to Yuri but is also aligned with her as a shared victim of patriarchal domination and Eiji's exploitation. Balmain adds that

[i]n Japanese horror cinema, hair stands as metonym for the social body's constraint by the wider political body... [D]ishevelled or disorderly hair associated with these vengeful ghosts offers a form of liberation from the body politic and a feminine/feminist protest at the subjugation (and domestication) of woman... in contemporary Japan (ibid:2).

Citing Mary Douglas, Balmain argues that 'hair out of control is "matter out of place", and as such subverts traditional conceptualisations of woman as articulated through the continuing discourse of *ryōsaikenbo* (good wife, good mother)' (ibid:2-3, Olivelle 1998:16). Hence, the

abject women of both episodes disrupt patriarchal order in response to their subjugation by men.

Societal roles in a politically-changing Japan have been a prominent theme of modern J-horror films (McRoy 2008:75-6,85) with ‘many of the distinctive horror elements found in contemporary sets of Japanese films... [deriving] from, and organized by, the dominant values, themes and aesthetic practices that have long been expressed in earlier cultural articulations’ (Wee 2014:29). Yet, while contemporary J-horror may link the female supernatural threat to a rejection of patriarchy and women’s roles, as previously argued in relation to ‘Imprint’, other kinds of Japanese drama also offer constructions of female empowerment. One must acknowledge that although *MOH*, through the paratextual and generic framing of its title, branding, title sequence, and anthology structure, brings horror to the fore, it is not the sole genre present. While ‘Dream Cruise’ evidences an abject female threat galvanised through the uncanny space of the ocean and utilising J-horror tropes, it also appropriates forms drawn from other TV genres, namely melodrama. This genre has been fundamental to the understanding of popular Japanese television dramas, known as J-doramas. This is not to say that the melodrama in this case is somehow purely ‘Japanese’. Such genre aesthetics and techniques are globally popular and may be localised/hybridised by transcultural viewers (Davis 2008:48,51). However, J-dorama tropes are important contextualising elements for analysing the episode.

Furthermore, whilst ‘Dream Cruise’ may be paratextually aligned with horror through *MOH*’s branding, Kim writes that ‘East Asian dramas...force audiences of one culture to recognize the artistic creations of other cultures as different from their own and to engage with them as such’ (2014:4), adding that ‘[w]hen they cross borders, new audiences are exposed to foreign stars, settings, customs, manners and beliefs. Thus drama is the ideal focus when considering the ways in which cross-border television impacts upon transcultural understanding’ (ibid). Targeting female audiences and staying away from social issues/debates, J-doramas grapple ‘with themes of unrequited love and young men and women in search of love’ (Han 2008:27-8). However, it is through the hybridising of J-horror *with* J-dorama that the respective genres shape one another here; constructing narrative impetus in the former, whilst politically-infusing the latter.

While melodramatic elements, linked to feminised and ordinary television (Bonner 2008:175-6, Kelly 2011:125) potentially undermine the masculine quality/cult/horror status constructed by Showtime’s *MOH* (especially within a Western context), it is through the very ambiguity of

abjection – crucial to the channel’s premium branding – located within the transnational co-production of this episode that melodramatic elements, central to J-dorama (Tsai 2004:45), give the episode its narrative drive. We learn that Jack is having an affair with Eiji’s wife, Yuri. But rather than position this as morally troublesome, such infidelity is used as a catalyst for feminine emotional and psychological growth. Yuri explains that she married Eiji for a materialistic lifestyle and financial wealth; common tropes of women in J-doramas (Siriyuvasak 2004:190, Tsai 2004:45). But in doing so, she sacrificed autonomy and agency. It is through her affair with Jack that she can escape the dominance of Eiji and subvert her ‘trophy wife’ status. Moreover, Naomi, whilst representing the haunting *onryō* symbiotically linked to the sea, and the monstrous threat to the couple, is also a victim of Eiji’s overtly masculine/patriarchal stance. When Yuri is about to drown, a flashback occurs – the sea acting as a vehicle for temporal return – whereby she sees Eiji explaining how he married Naomi for her family’s wealth. However, when Naomi asserts her own agency/power, informing him that he will see none of the fortune, he bludgeons her to death on the boat, throwing her corpse into the ocean. Consequently, we see how Naomi’s abject state is tied to the ocean, as is the death of Shaun, Jack’s brother. But we are also shown the intrinsic link between Yuri and Naomi: both are modern women oppressed by a domineering male seeking to destroy/control their empowered feminine positions. They are thus both wronged women, a tradition of the Japanese ghost story (Balmain 2008a:47, Rawle 2014:224), but simultaneously modern women, a tradition of J-dorama.

Lastly, and unlike ‘Imprint’, it is through the romantic relationship between Jack and Naomi that narrative resolution is restored (Barthes 1974:19). As Jack and Yuri seek to get away from the monstrous Naomi, Yuri informs Jack that they must jump into the ocean to escape. When Jack is at first unable to do so, due to the trauma of seeing his brother drown as a child, Yuri asks him to do this for her. It is this action and his commitment to her that saves the couple. In the sea, a ghostly Shaun then drags Naomi down into the ocean, bringing her to peaceful rest and leaving the couple to survive. Consequently, the ocean is no longer a space of uncanny return, nor is Japan a perpetually abject place, instead becoming a site of spatial and temporal order. The last scene sees Jack and Yuri on a yacht – Yuri maintains her wealth alongside her feminine emancipation – and while they throw flowers in the sea as a remembrance to Shaun, we learn that the couple are pregnant. The ocean is now a space for potential life rather than looming death as the narrative’s proairetic code is closed down (ibid:203). This analysis

evidences how J-dorama's strong melodramatic underpinning of 'Dream Cruise' is linked to horror within the text. They shape, inform, and heighten each other's generic sensibilities (Tudor 2003:8, Buscombe 2003:24).

Such transcultural negotiation, linked to the episode's generic hybridity, is also reinforced by the text's actors who can be understood as 'subcultural celebrities' – 'mediated figures who are treated as famous only by and for their fan audiences' (Hills 2003:61) – coded/read through J-horror and/or J-dorama fan discourses. Ryo Ishibashi has appeared in 'Asia Extreme'/J-horror vehicles *Suicide Club* and the *Ju-On* remakes *The Grudge* and *The Grudge 2*. Most notably, he starred in Miike Takashi's *Audition*. Miho Ninagaw also features in the J-horror film *Marebito*, directed by the creator of the *Ju-On* franchise, Takashi Shimizu, and in Miike's 'Imprint'. These are roles that are likely to be recognised by transcultural audiences who not only make connections between 'actors and fictional personae' (Hills 2010g:234) but also connect the generic corpus they are situated in, reinforcing the (J-)horror framing of 'Dream Cruise' via generic embodiment. However, one must note that the Japanese actors in 'Dream Cruise', whilst being in other J-horror vehicles, are also celebrities within Japan as well as neighbouring pan-Asian countries (Gössmann and Kirsch 2008), and for J-dorama fans from other parts of the world (Lukács 2010:179-99). Thus, recognition for their previous TV drama work from differing subcultures with different 'knowledge and textual expertise' (Hills 2010g:238) can shift genre readings of the text. Yoshino Kimura has been in very little else that might be considered horror. However, she has been a prominent actress in TV dramas, TV films, and drama cinema. Ryo Ishibashi has been in many television dramas, both series and made-for-TV films. Whilst Miho Ninagaw has featured less in J-doramas, she has acted in a range of film and television titles. Therefore, their respective preexisting oeuvres do not solely articulate a genre embodiment focused on horror, but allow for a range of genres to be read intertextually (Jancovich 2015, Gray 2010:132-3). To conclude, despite the self-conscious neo-cult sensibilities of *MOH*, Norio has created a text that is elastic in its implementation of genre. Yet we see Showtime use the episode's abjection to (para)textually position it within *MOH*'s horror corpus and serve its premium cable brand image (Jowett and Abbott 2013:82). Yet, whilst no genre is ever unequivocally 'pure', I have argued that J-dorama conventions underpin the proairetic resolution here, thus offering a socio-cultural reading of the female body of 'Dream Cruise' that ties into the abject ambiguity of the text's horror hermeneutics (Barthes 1974:29).

### 3.5. Conclusion

Extending Part I's analysis of various industry players' engagement with the construction and aestheticisation of textual abjection that codes monsters within wider cultural contexts (Williams 2011c:69), this Chapter has evidenced how brand-specific abjection (Hills 2010d:132), in this case for the premium cable brand of Showtime, shapes meaning at a paratextual level around *MOH*. This is also developed within the episodes themselves, framing female Japanese bodies as horrifying and monstrous Others. However, 'the importance of the body as a metaphorical construct in Japanese society' (McRoy 2006:216) provides a number of readings of the same texts precisely because of the ambiguous nature of the abject body and generic hybridity (Tudor 2003:8, Buscombe 2003:24). This not only considers how abjection is cultural (Kristeva 1982:14), but how it can operate *transculturally*. Contextualising these episodes' monstrous females within accounts of transcultural meaning and genre-blurring highlights bodily trauma as a platform for ideological discussions around gender, seeing context itself as multi-layered (Barker et al 2007:7). Women in both episodes are victims *and* empowered figures, wronged by patriarchal society but also responding to it. Such fluid readings go beyond (self-)Orientalist arguments that simply oppose a Western/Male/Self to the Eastern/Female/Other, looking at how female abject bodies can be recoded. This is not to say one reading is 'truer' than the other. Rather, such an approach stresses the post-colonial factors present in the making, marketing, reception, and clustering of texts transnationally. It also highlights the need to explore and self-reflect on the wide array of potential paratextual filters which can shape abjection and aid in formulating abject spectrums, including but not limited to: the wider industry, directors, writers, genres, marketing, formatting, actors, and other fans. As such, the ambiguity of abjection that allows for multiple readings can be harnessed and strained under specific industry rhetorics and marketing to connote quality TV. In this case, Showtime frames the texts' abjection as non-mainstream in several ways (Wee 2014:9-10): as non-TV in its cinematic horror, as non-TV by being produced by filmmakers, and as non-Western TV by stressing the 'Japanese' qualities of texts and producers.

While both episodes offer elements that may be read as staples of horror, J-horror, and/or ‘Asia Extreme’ cinema, albeit also complicating such tropes, Part II will analyse how these two TV horror texts were met with praise and criticism by J-horror/‘Asia Extreme’ fans online. As Hills identifies, ‘self-conscious cult TV [such as *MOH*] designed to generate audience engagement does not always win the affection of established fan bases’ (2013:291). Chapter 4 will show how fans were sceptical of ‘Imprint’ being banned, and thus becoming ‘Only-Click TV’, seeing this as a marketing ploy to entice audiences, whilst Chapter 5 will challenge previous arguments that ‘Asia Extreme’ fans simply desire the most transgressive material possible (Pett 2017), with a particular fan group presenting anti-fan readings of the inauthenticity of both these *MOH* episodes. Conversely, Chapter 6 will explore how fans on Tumblr offered alternative responses, championing *MOH*’s abject visuals in their own fan imagery, whilst also sometimes recoding these episodes’ abject bodies as comedic.

To conclude, Part I has offered three case studies that present and analyse abjection in different ways, evidencing the flexibility of the model. This includes the subjectivity of abjection providing civic potential in sympathetic monsters in *ITF*, abject landscapes that support a transmedial remit in *TWD*, and the shifting positionality of self and Other within abject relationships through ambiguity in *MOH*. I have also shown how graphically abject horror fits within different industry models as they vie for quality status. This includes abjection as social realist PSB TV horror (*ITF*), as seeking to elevate US basic cable to premium status (*TWD*), and as aesthetically concordant with premium cable’s branding (*MOH*). However, textual abjection is dialectical (Hassler-Forest 2016:10). It is read, felt, and responded to in different ways by different individuals, in different (sub)cultures. It is therefore also necessarily phenomenological. This will form the focus of Part II, where I will use netnography to analyse audiences’ responses and affective engagements with the same three case study texts to develop my abject spectrum model through a series of audience studies. Therefore, the next Part of the thesis builds from the preferred readings of my textual analysis in Part I (Fiske and O’Sullivan 1994:240) to see how audiences have engaged with and responded to these texts. Consequently, I move away from Chapters that look at the case studies individually to thematically structure my analysis of all three case studies together and comparatively. Chapter 4 discusses how abject spectrums can operate beyond audience-diegetic relationships by analysing the formatting, formal/informal circulation, and consumption patterns in relation to my case studies. This also demonstrates how the abject spectrum model can be active prior to a text’s broadcast, in its remediation, and after a series has finished/been cancelled, thus exemplifying

the socio-temporal range of audiences' experiences of abjection. Chapter 5 then analyses how audiences' abject spectrums move between affective, aesthetic, and ideological dimensions, as the model allows for polysemic readings (*ITF*), that are informed by self-identity and shaped by ergodic intratextual/transmedial consumption (*TWD*), and that can be shaped by wider intertextual frameworks such as genre and transcultural fandom (*MOH*). Lastly, and moving beyond audiences' online writing, Chapter 6 explores how the case studies' abject imagery is harnessed in Web 2.0 image cultures. These user-generated memes and GIFs work to visually articulate abject spectrums that reflect and/or refract previous fan responses studied in Chapters 4 and 5, adding further breadth and depth to the application of my audience-based model of abjection. But before I analyse how audiences' abject spectrums engage with the on-screen abjection, Chapter 4 considers thematically how audiences create meaning and value around all three case studies via their formatting, formal and informal circuits of distribution, and how the texts are consumed domestically/transnationally. Consequently, the following Chapter demonstrates how abject spectrums (re-)form pre-textually, paratextually and extra-textually, as well as after the text has been in active production, i.e. during what William terms 'post-object' fandom (2011b).

## **4. Haunted Pathways: Routes of Consumptions and its Impact on Abject Spectrums via Formal and Informal Ecologies of *ITF*, *TWD*, and *MOH***

### **4.1. Intro**

Part I explored how abjection provided a conceptual schema for critically analysing *ITF*, *TWD*, and *MOH*, triangulating theory, cultural context, and the industry rhetoric oscillating around various bids for quality TV horror status. Avoiding textual determinism (Duffett 2013b:60), Part II builds on this to explore how these texts are engaged with by online audiences. Therefore, as discussed in the Methodology, I utilise netnography to analyse ‘technologically mediated interactions in online networks and communities and the culture... shared between and among them’ (Nimrod 2011:229). Whilst audience-text relationships are often at the fore of academic analysis, it is vital to note the significance distribution and consumption practices have in shaping both variables in this equation (Miller et al 2011:197, Cunningham and Silver 2013:10, Faltsek 2011:405). As Lobato notes, ‘[t]he circuits through which texts move are of paramount importance to the processes of reception’ (2007:114). Furthermore, ‘[d]istribution determines who gets to watch... [TV texts], under what circumstances, and why’ (ibid:115). Therefore, this thesis not only studies how screen abjection is responded to (see Chapters 5 and 6) but how the material formatting and digitisation of the case studies as objects of consumption effects abject spectrums as part of the phenomenological, in-process and on-going relationships audiences have with the texts.

While the TV III paradigm and popularity of DVD/Blu-ray formats has aided in the transnational flow of content moving beyond national borders (Hilmes 2009:53, Gillan 2011:87, Shimpach 2010:51-2), informal digital routes of ‘Only-Click’ distribution evidence nuanced cross-border media flows (Lobato and Thomas 2015:4), fitting within the milieu of convergence culture (Smith and Pearson 2015:1, Hjort 2010:13-4, Pieterse 2003:271). Informal media distribution can be defined as undercutting formal media systems, operating ‘in unregulated spaces’ (Lobato and Thomas 2015:1), and relying on ‘informal agents acting outside the already established... industry’ (Pardo 2015:31). This Chapter analyses how different instances of Only-Click TV shape transnational/transcultural audience engagements

with each of my case studies (Allen and van der Berg 2014:3). Indeed, transcultural fans play salient roles in the process of informal distribution (Driessen 2015:183, Dhaenens and Van Bauwel 2014:184), operating in online communities that by their very nature are transnational (Lee 2014:195-7, Nikunen 2014:257-8, Kustritz 2015, Athique 2016:8-9). Thus, I begin by conceptualising Only-Click TV as an informal fan practice based around textual acquisition, fostering meaning-making and value around ‘prized content’<sup>103</sup> (Lotz 2014b:12-3). Located within a transcultural paradigm, I also explore how Only-Click can be temporally-oriented, allowing fans from different territories to consume and discuss broadcast TV horror at the same time. But whilst markets for TV distribution and international sales have been seen as a highly regulated/formal system (Quail 2012:5, Lobato and Thomas 2015:17) that Only-Click methods can undermine, Only-Click has also been utilised within official systems of dissemination.

This Chapter begins by analysing how the BBC sought to engage with viewers’ media consumption patterns thanks to BBC3 going online-only in 2016<sup>104</sup> (Dowell 2015a). Concurrently, *ITF* was cancelled after two series, making it an Only-Click ‘post-object’ text (Williams 2011b) within the BBC’s formal industrial strategies. Considering how both *ITF* and its fandom moved into an abject state (McCabe and Holmes 2011:78), I discuss how ontological insecurity galvanised the online community into fan activism to de-abject-ify the text, and thus themselves, as a form of subcultural ritual. Such rebuttal highlights how fans do not always readily accept Only-Click as a post-televisual format, especially if it is seemingly enforced by the industry itself. It also highlights how abject spectrums can be informed by the *state* of the text as well as diegetic content.

However, during times of broadcast and between seasons, Only-Click can provide a transcultural experiential homology by allowing fans from different cultures to consume TV episodes at the same time; what Matt Hills terms ‘just-in-time fandom’ (2002a). Thus, Chapter 4 also considers how Only-Click supports the complex serialisation of *TWD*’s apocalyptic hyperdiegesis (Abbott 2016a:113). In Chapter 2 I argued that abject spectrums are both ‘semiotic and procedural’ (Sicart 2013:47). The procedural not only stems from narrative development, but also from the process of transmedia extension. But whilst Only-Click facilitates the acquisition of TV horror unavailable via traditional means, aiding in transcultural communication between fans, and allowing them to perform subcultural capital, the model is

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<sup>103</sup> Amanda D. Lotz refers to ‘prized content’ as ‘programming that *people seek out and specifically desire*. It is not a matter of “watching what is on”; prized content is deliberately pursued’ (2014b:12).

<sup>104</sup> It was first set for the Autumn of 2015 (Plunkett and Sweney 2014), but was then pushed back.

not without its limitations. Therefore, I discuss what Only-Click cannot offer audiences compared to traditional forms of textual distribution such as DVD. Aiding in extra-textual knowledge about *TWD*, this format also allows for the temporally condensed consumption patterns linked to binge-viewing.

Lastly, considering Showtime's pulling of 'Imprint' from broadcast, the Chapter explores how Only-Click discourse was subsequently incorporated into the branding of this text on DVD, further reinforcing its 'extreme' coding. However, fans were hesitant about, and sceptical of, 'Imprint' not being aired on/as TV, viewing this as a ploy to create hype around the episode that would result in increased DVD sales. This resistance shows how audiences themselves negotiate informal and formal Only-Click TV, and how abject spectrums can be active prior to the release of texts. Resultantly, I demonstrate how the distribution, consumption and home media formats of twenty-first century TV horror can play just as important a role in meaning-making for audiences as the content of the texts themselves. I begin, though, by defining and developing the concept of Only-Click TV.

#### **4.2. What is Only-Click TV?**

Online technologies and media have become fundamental to textual dissemination and consumption. This has had significant effects on what content is available, who gets to watch it, and the shaping of social networks (Crisp 2015:10). Furthermore, within convergence cultures (Newman 2012:468), both formal and informal dissemination/consumption practices take place (Evans and McDonald 2013:158), providing what Holt and Sanson term 'connected viewing' (2013:1) or 'the broader ecosystem in which digital distribution is rendered possible and new forms of user engagement take shape' (ibid).

As noted in the Literature Review, Only-Click facilitates textual consumption when other forms of acquisition are arrested. In some instances, the TV text is no longer being broadcast. For example, the *Snowblood Apple* forum – when it was active – had an entire thread devoted to J-horror TV. Transcultural fans discussed the televisual incarnations of *Ringu*, *One Missed Call*, and *The Grudge*, as well as J-horror TV anthologies such as *Dark Tales of Japan* and *Tales of Terror from Tokyo and All Over Japan*, noting the scarcity of these artefacts, especially *Ringu* (Meikle 2005). Whilst the scope of my research does not allow me to explore this in

detail, Only-Click practices can aid in collecting rare content from around the world (Crisp 2015:172, Pardo 2015:26, Lobato and Thomas 2015:41) – for more on this, see the Conclusion. Rare transnational TV content facilitated subcultural status within the *Snowblood Apple* forum due to the obscurity and exclusivity of specific texts (Smith 2017b:27), especially since J-horror films were becoming mainstream through their Hollywood remakes (Richards 2010:9, Xu 2008:191). This also highlights how Only-Click distribution has imbued certain TV texts with value. Noting the informal labour of uploading content for downloading (Newman 2012:473), drama and comedy are far more prevalent as Only-Click than ‘ordinary’ TV genres (ibid:466, Green 2008:97-8, Stewart 2016:697). Thus, beyond formal, textual bids for quality status (explored in Part I), Only-Click can also act as a marker for quality TV, especially from a bottom-up and audience-driven vantage point. This suggests one reason why versions of twenty-first century TV horror may have proven popular in this digital form.

Only-Click practices are also popular when content is being broadcast but remains unavailable in a given territory and/or is only available via premium subscription (Vonderau 2013:112). Likewise, certain on-demand post-TV streaming services or specific content on them, such as BBC iPlayer, Netflix and Amazon, are available in some countries (Gonring and Crisp 2015:4) but geo-blocked in others (Green 2008:96, Quail 2012:7-8, Newman 2012:468), making Only-Click a necessary contingency for those seeking access. This is frequently a point of discussion for transcultural fans of all three of my case study texts. Fan groups discussed which territories the respective TV horror text was available in, and where it was not. Whilst this does not directly indicate which regions were most likely to partake in Only-Click consumption, some fans noted they would have to covertly download content in order to watch it, highlighting an understanding of how place informs different viewing practices and textual flows within transcultural fan cultures (Nikunen 2014:254). Moreover, whilst digital media, both formal and informal, aids in non-linear TV distribution (Evans and McDonald 2013:162-3, Lotz 2017:2), Only-Click can re-instil synchronicity with episodes’ TV transmission. As a ‘just-in-time’ fan practice (Hills 2002a:178), Only-Click acquisition allows audiences ‘to demonstrate the “timeliness” and responsiveness of their devotion’ (ibid), something I will return to later.

This Chapter will now analyse how each case study is shaped by Only-Click discourse. But while Only-Click might be initially considered as an informal audience practice, it is crucial to remember that digital informal economies are not entirely removed from formal practices (Lobato et al 2011:902, Schwarz 2015:66). Rather, they are ‘inextricably intertwined and interdependent’ (Crisp 2015:154). Hence, as rituals, both formal media and informal Only-

Click can bring habitual stability and order to a community, shaping meaning around consumption practices (Lobato et al 2011:902). Acts of consumption create a '[p]ractical consciousness [that] is the cognitive and emotive anchor of the feelings of *ontological security* characteristic of... human activity in all cultures' (Giddens 1991:36). Anthony Giddens notes that the 'chaos' of modernity generates existential crises (ibid), but combatting this, self-identity can be affectively tied to the familiar (Mainwaring and Clark 2012:109). Rebecca Williams notes that '[t]he rhythms of television are particularly well suited to this process, given the predictability and repetition of their schedules that "regulate everyday life" and work to "manage crises and insecurities"' (2016:144).

Locating media economies on a spectrum of formality and informality (Lobato et al 2011:902), considering both top-down and bottom-up players (Lobato and Thomas 2015:5-7), acknowledges how 'the formal and the informal are connected in complex ways: developments in one part of the economy typically have knock-on effects elsewhere' (ibid:11). In recognising audiences' digital consumption and textual engagement, media companies are also adopting informal practices into their formal structuring of packaging, distribution, and business models (Holt and Sanson 2013:4, Pardo 2015:23,36), such as official same-day broadcasts of season seven of *Game of Thrones* in the US and UK (Boyle 2017) or Netflix offering new series in their entirety in order to foster binge-viewing (Jenner 2016:263).

Evidently, each of the industry players behind my case study texts engages with Only-Click practices in a different way. With *ITF*, the BBC utilised a cultural appropriation of Only-Click in the formal restructuring of BBC3 (Woods 2016:47, 245-6). Lobato and Thomas explain that, '[l]ike most other media organizations, the BBC is engaged in a series of complex interactions with the informal realm' (2015:37). They argue that the continued development of the BBC's streaming and catch-up service iPlayer (Evans and McDonald 2013:166-7), based on viewer consumption control (Just et al 2017:995), is 'an attempt to incorporate previously informal practices within a formal, regulated architecture' (2015:38). Consequently, this has not only impacted on content, such as BBC3's commissioning of youth drama/TV horror in an attempt to attract younger digital audiences (discussed in Chapter 1), but has also sought to appropriate the youth audience's consumption habits/rituals (Woods 2016:7, Just et al 2017:994).

But despite the BBC's various digital innovations, its digital channel BBC3 is now online-only (Dowell 2015a), reportedly as part of a bid to cut costs (BBC 2014a;2014b), and to make BBC3 more in tune with online services such as Netflix and Amazon (Nissim 2014, Plunkett 2014,

Bennett 2013:4-5, Popple 2015:136, Hendy 2013:114-7), rendering BBC3 content Only-Click<sup>105</sup>. As a result, BBC3 has turned into a form of almost ‘undead’ TV (Plunkett 2015), resembling a recognisable form of traditional media yet continuing in a different state, and one that may be a threat to conventional TV. Despite being part of a popular grassroots ritual (of informal digital distribution), *ITF* fans rejected the BBC’s Only-Click turn, highlighting the complex meanings of consumption patterns, digital markets, and community ordering (Haritou 2015:50).

### **4.3. Undead TV and Abject Fandoms: *ITF* Fans’ Ontological Insecurity, and Protests Against ‘Formal’ Only-Click TV**

After just nine episodes over two series,<sup>106</sup> the BBC rejected greenlighting a third season of *ITF* (Brew 2015, Jeffery 2015). Rebecca Williams writes that ‘once... original fan objects cease to offer any new instalments... [the] fan moves into a period of post-object fandom’ (2011b:269). Williams adds that ‘[r]ather than considering post-object fandom as indicating that fandom is “over,” the term is intended to allow us to consider the differences in fan practices... between periods when objects are ongoing or dormant’ (ibid). As I’ve explained, ritualistic consumption provides fans/consumers with a degree of ontological security. Conversely, fans may experience ontological insecurity when a text is no longer active. Resultantly, they fall into a potentially abject state since abjection signifies a threat to identity, structure, and position (Kristeva 1982:3). The ‘death’ of *ITF* (ibid:4), which fan-identity had been anchored to, created anxiety/insecurity towards the abject situation that the series and its fan community found themselves in (Lechte 2003:10). Thus, following longitudinal online audience responses, *ITF* fans’ abject spectrums can be located alongside the state of the text, displaying in-process affective engagement as gradational.

Importantly, not all fans will feel insecure/abject when a TV show is cancelled (Williams 2011:274). Rather, ontological insecurity is more likely to occur in fans who had been keenly following the text while it was active. Those who only encounter the text in its dormant

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<sup>105</sup> The decision galvanised digital protests by audience members (BBC 2015, Dowell 2015b, Ridley 2015) through sites such as: [www.savebbc3.com](http://www.savebbc3.com), [www.facebook.com/save3](http://www.facebook.com/save3) and [www.change.org/p/to-the-bbc-trust-savebbc3](http://www.change.org/p/to-the-bbc-trust-savebbc3)

<sup>106</sup> Three and six episodes, respectively

afterlife, e.g. via DVD boxsets or reruns, ‘find’ the text very differently and therefore attach different meanings to it (ibid, Marshall 2009:47, Gray 2008:40-1). The phenomenological and subjective nature here indicates that for some, the text as post-object does not operate on their abject spectrum. Rather spectrums will be coded via other audience-text relationships such as storylines, representations, generic clustering etc. Similarly, C. Lee Harrington argues that texts not offered a ‘good death’ (2012:581), which resolves the text’s ‘narrative... in an appropriate and meaningful way’ (ibid:582), can cause fans’ moral economy to be disrupted, leaving fans feeling highly dissatisfied (Corrigan and Corrigan 2010). Ontological insecurity arises out of an industrial scenario which does not allow for temporal/textual ordering and adequate fan-cultural resolution. Fans themselves are left in an abject state seeking order and the reestablishment of affective textual borders. This is evident for those *ITF* fans who challenged the dormant stasis of the series, creating and using online activist sites in an attempt to prevent the text from remaining Only-Click. In this instance, both the BBC and their Only-Click strategy became ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966:35), galvanising fan activism (ibid:48).

Fan activism has been recognised as fans taking active stances in an attempt to keep their favourite texts alive (Savage 2014, Barton 2014, Aloï and Johnston 2015:7-8), and/or to challenge unwanted elements of the text itself (Cochran 2012, Jones 2015, Jenkins 1992), sharing similarities with traditional forms of political/civic protest (van Zoonen 2005:16, Burwell and Boler 2008, Punathambekar 2012, Duncombe 2012, Jenkins and Shresthova 2012). Paramount to this has been the rise of online media practices (Sperb 2010:26-7, Schulzke 2012, Earl and Kimport 2009:226-7, Jung 2012, Gaby and Caren 2012). Unlike some traditional forms of political action, this allows for cheap, low-level entry, encouraging community formation and fast mobilisation (Bennet 2012b, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Dutton et al 2011:298), as well as proving especially popular with younger demographics and fandoms (Jenkins 2012, Wilkinson 2012, Kligler-Vilenchik 2016). Moreover, fan activism produces *new* sites for fan engagement, allowing fandoms to grow in distinct ways (Kligler-Vilenchik et al 2012).

Significantly, fan activism had started prior to the cancellation of *ITF*. As early as the first series (31<sup>st</sup> March 2013), posts on the ‘In The Flesh’ Facebook group evidenced concern about the continuation of the text, stemming from dialogue between *ITF*’s creator Dominic Mitchell and fans (see also Chin and Hills 2008:253, Schulzke 2012). Yet this insecurity was annulled on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2013 when a post indicated that a second series would be produced. Thus, *ITF*’s TV seriality was restored, and fans’ ontological security along with it. One sees a stark

shift from fan activism tackling the abject state of the text, to a state of stability where posts focus instead on narrative predictions and anticipation. Yet, concerns arose again after series 2 when there was no news of a third series – fan anxiety was swiftly channelled into activist rituals. This highlights how abjection is not felt monolithically or in a binary manner, i.e. either experiencing it or not. Rather, abject spectrums’ nuances work with ebbs, flows, and degrees of ontological (in)security (Arya 2017:13).

Notably, the scope of *ITF* fan activism has been international. On the Facebook ‘#saveintheflesh campaign group’ a ‘Selfie Campaign’ was adopted to ‘show the BBC that the show has affected people of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds and needs a third series’<sup>107</sup>. Posts show fans from North and South America, Africa, Europe, Australasia and Asia all implementing this strategy of performing their allegiance to the group and the text. Photos, displayed within fan spaces, lend a degree of corporeal authenticity to the practices of fan online activism – something one would see in ‘real world’ activism – going beyond the ‘imagined audience’ (Anderson 1991:6) to strengthen social dimensions of this post-object fandom (Williams 2015:42-5, Deller 2014:243, Benkler 2012:19-21).

Furthermore, the use of several hashtags stresses cross-platform activism (Dutton et al 2011:288). The ‘#saveintheflesh campaign group’ Facebook page prefixes its title with a communal hashtag, thus aligning itself with platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr that also use hashtags within their communicative infrastructure (D’heer and Verdegem 2014). Campaigns promoted through the various Facebook groups not only help to create solidarity via posters using the same hashtags, but also anchor the content of tweets within a shared activist framework. Evidently, hashtags aimed at/about the BBC, BBC3, the BBC Trust, and BBC America, including #saveintheflesh, not only highlighted the purpose of fan activism, but also targeted various BBC Twitter accounts that fans believed could save the show.

These hashtags are also often linked to the wider industrial backdrop of BBC3 becoming online-only. Posts are frequently paired with hashtags such as #saveBBC3, situating the ontological insecurity of the fan object within wider anxieties about UK broadcasting, and incorporating links to petitions that support the continuation of BBC3 as a digital TV channel. Consequently, fan activism can be seen to have wider political significance (Schulzke 2012).

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<sup>107</sup> Fans take photos of themselves and/or with friends with signs displaying the group’s hashtag, their name(s), age(s), and nationalities.

At this point, the BBC is neither wholly championed or Othered within the fan community due to the ambiguous state of *ITF* and BBC3.

However, around 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014, when BBC3 gave an official statement informing fans of the cessation of *ITF*, the dormant state of the text meant that fans rejected the BBC in search of other media producers who could rescue the show from its Only-Click status. Temporally-contained strategies sought to create the loudest collective voice possible, often trying to orchestrate fans into tweeting on ‘Social Media Sundays’<sup>108</sup> or when other BBC3 programmes were being broadcast in a bid to get *ITF* hashtags trending. Thus, transnational and cross-platform activism becomes temporally homogenised and focused around set points of protest, creating a fandom-led ‘just-in-time’ fan practice. Other strategies tried to cast the spatial net as far and wide as possible, for example using Amazon ‘review bombing’ where fans voiced their petition in *ITF* DVD review comments in a bid to reach a wider readership (Dutton et al 2011).

Concurrently, ‘reiteration discourse’ is utilised within such activism ‘to valorize’ *ITF* (Williams 2015:79). Fans on the Facebook pages argue that the progressive quality of the show, tackling issues such as homophobia, xenophobia and wider political issues, its wide transnational appeal, and its lack of narrative resolution, all make it worthy of being brought back on either BBC2 or BBC1, thereby sidestepping issues around the fate of BBC3:

‘In The Flesh is the most incredible, representative show, with a great fanbase, and amazing (as yet unresolved) plots!!’

‘Because it is important to show representations of pan sexuals’.

‘This show is extremely important on many levels, and it is flawless through and through -- a true work of art’.

‘it is popular across the world’.

Fan activism also refocused from fan-centric sites to general activist online spaces, such as [www.change.org](http://www.change.org)<sup>109</sup>. Fans’ online petitions soon turned to Netflix and Amazon to bring back the dormant *ITF*. As one fan writes, ‘due to Amazon and Netflix our chance of a 3rd series is

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<sup>108</sup> The last Sunday of every month.

<sup>109</sup> These are ‘large websites that host or directly link to many implementations of protest tactics that are often independent of particular causes or social movements’ (Earl and Kimport 2009:229). Such sites are popular with media fandom-based protests (ibid:221, 236, Scardaville 2005:884).

far from over so we need to carry on with our social media presence, in fact it is more important than ever’.

By creating multiple points of protest, *ITF* fans unwittingly create the potential for splintering within their activist practices (Millward 2012:640). For one poster, this creates a sense of confusion: ‘Guys, there is so much going on right now, I am confused’. Resultantly, the more the group seeks to extend their spatial network of cross-platform campaigning, the more posters within the fandom must reiterate to the group what strategies are being utilised and where. Frequent posts explain various forms of protest in a bid to centralise and co-ordinate this fan activism. Moreover, aiming petitions at both Netflix and Amazon provoked fan debate:

‘[I] really think the in the flesh campaign should start focusing more on amazon prime than netflix... [T]rying to push both at once divides attention when more of it could be focused solely on the one with potential to work’.

‘[W]e have the best chance with amazon and everyone is focusing on Netflix’.

The fragmentation of online petitions meant a potential rejection of Netflix in favour of Amazon Prime because the latter had picked up *Ripper Street* for its third series from the BBC (Williams 2015:167). Significantly, some of those participating in this transnational fan activism cannot use Netflix in their country due to geo-blocking (Stewart 2016), bringing the potential saving of *ITF* back to an unwelcome Only-Click TV rhetoric. For these fans, Amazon Prime is the better option, and they can personally invest in this protest strategy. Therefore, fans’ own neoliberal consumption patterns also shape their activist strategies (Brough and Shresthova 2012).

Focusing on weakness rather than strength, fans sometimes note the fragility of the group and its endeavours: ‘I don't think we're in any position to be picky. Rather than trying to pick and choose who we want to renew it, I think we should be focusing first on getting it renewed at all’. Moreover, with posts giving updated signature numbers for the respective online petitions, fans often remarked that Amazon Prime needed more attention:

‘The Netflix petition is really flying but I know that from reading some of the comments here, people are concerned that we should be looking more at Amazon and I agree’.

‘Netflix petition has just reached 20k. and that's really amazing, i'm proud of us. but i think that for now we should focus more on Amazon one’.

However, considering the temporality of fan activism it becomes apparent that there are moments when fans themselves recognise that their group is becoming less active. At these moments of abatement, posts seek to rejuvenate the fandom:

‘guys, we're really slowing with these petitions... i know it's hard but we should really push, otherwise we won't succeed’.

‘Please scroll down the page and participate in as much as possible. We have to strike while the iron is hot and keep the momentum going’.

‘The petition seems to have slowed down, so I want to urgently remind you that our time is now, and it is running out’.

This critical self-reflection indicates how fans assess their endeavours and adjust their strategies accordingly, whether this means re-targeting their activism and/or attempting to mobilise fellow fans’ actions. But as time moves on, so too do some fans (Williams 2015:125), often migrating to other fandoms. Hills’ ‘cyclical fandom’, where the ‘self-reported level of affective “intensity” and activity... shifts away from discarded objects and toward newly compelling [fan] objects’ (2005d:803) also manifests in fan activism. Whilst fans may seek to reduce the affects of on-screen horror by increasing phenomenological distance (Hanich 2010:96) from its diegesis, they can also seek to move out of an abject state related to condition of the text itself when the rituals of activism appear not to be working, instead looking for more stable/secure affective relationships with other texts or fan objects. Thus, ontological insecurity can be abated by relocating the affective anchor that self-identity is moored to. Resultantly, abjection can be affectively sidestepped by fans as much as it can be tackled head on. This sees ‘some [fans] choose to follow those [actors] who play [championed characters]... across different fan objects’ (Williams 2015:133). For example, *ITF* fans discussed subsequent productions featuring Luke Newberry, who plays Kieren, posting #lukefornewt in support of the news that Newbury wished to play the lead role, Newt Scamander, in the *Harry Potter* spin-off *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (Jones 2015, Hegarty 2015). Others go on to talk about other twenty-first century TV horror such as *TWD*, *Misfits*, and *American Horror Story*,

alongside other telefantasy vehicles. Thus, another reason for fans' propensity for multi-fandom affinities (Cherry 2010:71, Hills 2014b:9) is that it reduces the risk of ontological insecurity and abject uncertainty when fan identity is linked to multiple texts rather than being highly dependent on a singular object.

This also indicates that despite the growth of informal media consumption (Newman 2012:464, Cunningham and Silver 2013:3, Jenner 2017:308), traditional TV viewing practices still hold prevalence for audiences in some instances (Kompere 2010:79). Moreover, this also relates to the brand identity of the broadcaster concerned. While the BBC's status as a public service broadcaster has involved innovating in distribution to citizens in an ever-changing technological landscape, e.g. the introduction and development of its catch-up service iPlayer (Evans and McDonald 2013:167, Evans 2015:112), its brand echoes with traditional formal viewing practices (Quail 2012:2), alongside BBC3's brand identity, which Chapter 1 argued manifests in *ITF*'s use of British social (sur)realism (see page 120). Moreover, subsequent BBC3 online-only TV has not proven popular, appearing to suffer from a lack of viewer awareness (Woods 2016:55) as, for example, in the poor performance of the *Doctor Who* spin-off, *Class* (Williams 2016). Despite offering a transmedia extension of the BBC's flagship telefantasy text (Hills 2013g:2) which has successfully coalesced cult with mainstream (Hills 2010d:203) and has a longstanding and diverse fandom (Booth 2013a:11-2), *Class* was an industry failure with low viewing figures (Baugher 2016, Hill 2017), leaving it in a state of cessation after just one season (Leane 2017). When the text was broadcast via the TV I/II platform (see Hills 2010b) of BBC1 it was given a late-night slot, reportedly because of its occasionally violent content (Dowell 2016), further marginalising it in line with mainstream channels' traditional treatment of horror. Thus, while horror has become a popular and lucrative TV genre in the twenty-first century, it is rarely without its commercial failures. Nor is Only-Click TV an industry model that always guarantees success. Yet it is a pertinent practice for those who cannot view actively broadcast TV horror in their territory, affording them not only up-to-date textual knowledge, but allowing them to discuss this knowledge with others in the fan community. This is certainly the case for *TWD*. Whilst some producers such as the BBC choose to appropriate informal Only-Click formatting, AMC offers more formal distribution strategies playing on the hindrances and difficulties of informal distribution. Not only being transmedia-rich, as discussed in Chapter 2, *TWD* is also home media format-rich in terms of multiple DVD/Blu-ray sets being marketed to (fan) audiences. Such formatting relates to AMC's basic cable political economy whereby bids to try and sell to the widest possible

audience further reduce some of its financial risk (Dawson 2011:39), as well developing a collectors' market by offering multiple versions to fans which the channel can extract the maximum profit from. Conversely, such strategies do not readily suit PSB as they run the risk of being marked as highly-visible commercial exploitation counter to PSB's ideological standpoint. Nor does home media formatting suit premium cable, as it can weaken the rationale for subscribing, potentially cheapening texts as less exclusive. However, DVD/Blu-ray can offer extra-textual knowledge impacting on audiences' abject spectrums and encouraging additional fan consumption.

#### **4.4. *TWD*'s 'Slow Apocalypse' and Transcultural 'Just-in-Time' Fandom**

Whilst *TWD* can be considered a transmedia commercial success (Bishop 2015:1, Hart 2014:335), reports of extremely high global download volumes *during* broadcast evidence its Only-Click following (Wallenstein 2015, Spangler 2015, Sweney 2014, 2015). Jason Mittell writes that 'serial... [television] is a temporal system with story instalments parcelled out over time with gaps in between entries through a strictly regimented time' (2015b:27). Systematic gaps allow for continued engagement with a serial by fans who will discuss it with others, developing textual criticism and theorisation, and consuming paratexts (ibid), with 'everyone at the same point of the story' (ibid:40). 'Quality' TV horror serialisation (Evans 2015:114) is used in the structuring of *TWD*, demonstrating 'the potential for the zombie narrative to offer complex social commentary that shifts and develops with the series as the zombie apocalypse slowly unfolds over time' (Abbott 2016a:113). Such affective and temporal structuring encourages Only-Click practices for transnational audiences, who want to keep up-to-date with fellow fans in order to engage with community discussions (ibid:35). Matt Hills terms this 'just-in-time fandom' (2002a:178), explaining

that practices of fandom have become increasingly enmeshed within the rhythms and temporalities of broadcasting so that fans now go online to discuss new episodes immediately after the episode's transmission time... in order to demonstrate the "timeliness" and responsiveness of their devotion (ibid).

Consequently, Only-Click TV has proven to be an invaluable grassroots tool for fans seeking texts unavailable by traditional means. Only-Click enables fans outside the broadcast territory,

national or otherwise, to consume and engage with content *as* it is being disseminated, shaping meaning-making in the process. However, whilst this opens up textual interaction for certain audiences, Only-Click TV is limited in other ways, namely in relation to extra-textual features. While Only-Click can afford ontological security, allowing transcultural fans to partake in rituals of consumption central to the community, formal DVD/home media formats provide a different form of ontological security, offering paratextual knowledge linked to forensic fandom: ‘a mode of television engagement encouraging research, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation’ (Mittell 2009b) that is symptomatic of complex TV.

As Hills notes ‘[c]ontra downloads, which viewers may watch while a show is actively in production, DVD releases tend to offer a “completeness” which makes them worthy of fan attention’ (2007a:57). Unlike the abject state of fans due to *ITF*’s cancellation, DVD ‘offers a more “trustable” or “ontologically secure” re-versioning of broadcast TV’ (ibid:58). Thus, despite the rise in (in)formal streaming and downloading (Cunningham and Silver 2013:79), DVD still holds salience for twenty-first century TV horror’s fan consumption (Kompere 2010:80).

Mittell argues that ‘collecting episodes... in bound volumes of DVD box sets drastically changes the serial experience, as screen time becomes far more controllable and variable for viewers’ (2015b:35). The format is also well-suited to fans re-watching texts (Kompere 2005:197), which this thesis has argued is central in (re)forming abject spectrums. Moreover, while a range of transmedia forms utilise different instalment structures (Hassler-Forest 2014:95, Dittmer 2014:125)<sup>110</sup> which can temporally (re)structure *TWD*’s narrative, DVD and VOD (Jenner 2016:260-1) additionally encourage binge-viewing (ibid:263). These formats are not restricted to temporal weekly broadcast rhythms, making entire seasons readily accessible. This resonates with complex TV that requires focused attention to follow multiple storylines and in-depth characterisation (Jenner 2017:312, Mikos 2016:312), and bestows binge-worthy texts with value as ‘the kind of focus demanded by these “quality” and “cult” texts may not be necessary or wanted with other television’ (Jenner 2017:314; Bennett and Brown 2008:3, Klinger 2008:21,2010:10-11, Bertellini and Reich 2010:103-4). Such bingeing can greatly speed up audiences’ traversing of the ‘slow apocalypse’ of *TWD* (Abbott 2016a:114).

However, unlike Only-Click’s digital files, DVD provides ‘commodity fetishism’ (Kompere 2006:338) not only through the aesthetics of cases and sleeves (ibid:345), but also by engaging

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<sup>110</sup> E.g. episodes, box sets, comics, omnibuses, collectors’ editions etc.

with rituals of collecting (Crisp 2015:174). *TWD* can be accessed through informal flows of dissemination, formal broadcast via AMC in the US and FOX UK in the UK, online streaming via Amazon Prime, plus multiple DVD editions (Kompare 2010:80). Not only is the series reformatted to DVD after the initial broadcast, multiple cycles of boxsets have been commercially released across the franchise's duration<sup>111</sup> (see Figs.1. and 2.). There are 'limited edition' statuette-casing versions of boxsets, depicting iconic zombies from the series (Fig.3.). And an 'Exclusive Steelbook Edition' of each series on Blu-ray offers exclusive artwork drawn by cult cartoonist Jock (Fig.4.). Such aesthetics and packaging paratextually inform audiences of *TWD*'s abject storyworld. The 'exclusive' label attached to the latter two iterations also connotes subcultural capital via the (artificial) scarcity of these releases (Schauer 2012:36), representing the TV series via works of art (Hills 2007a:45). Thus, the aesthetic value of abjection discussed in Part I can also be engaged with through the paratextual packaging of TV horror that resonates with the collecting sensibilities of fans (Geraghty 2014:1-2).

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<sup>111</sup> *TWD* has boxsets of series 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 1-5, 1-6, and 1-7, each with different artwork.

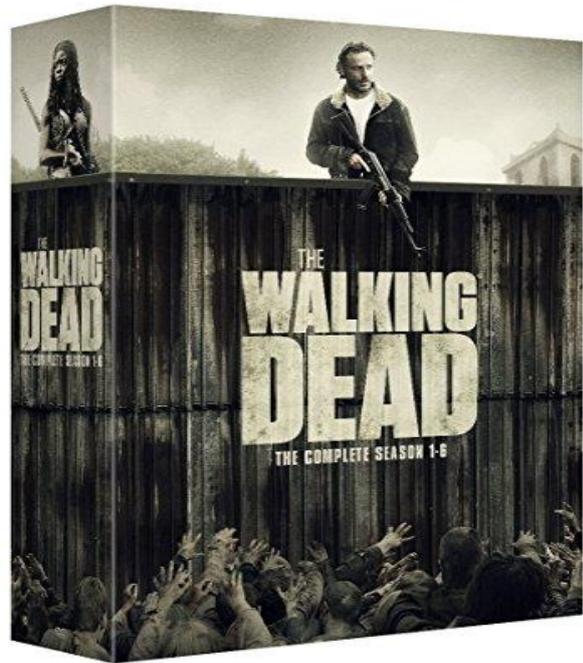
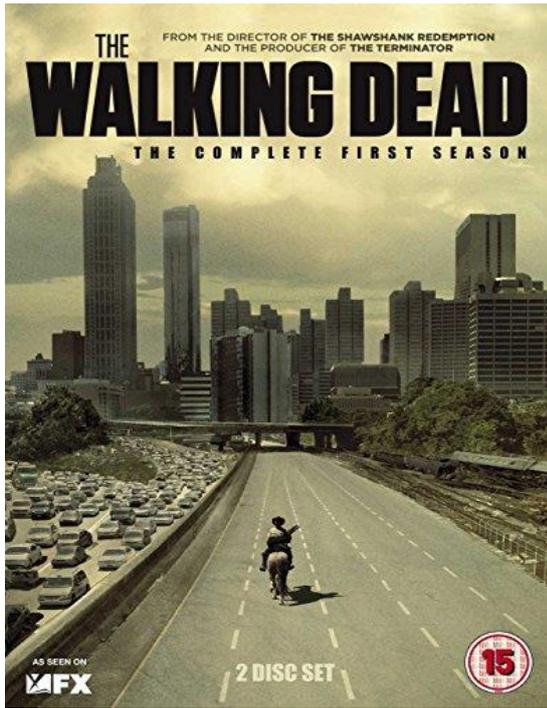


Fig.1. The UK DVD cover of *TWD* the complete first season. Fig.2. The UK DVD boxset of *TWD*, seasons 1-6

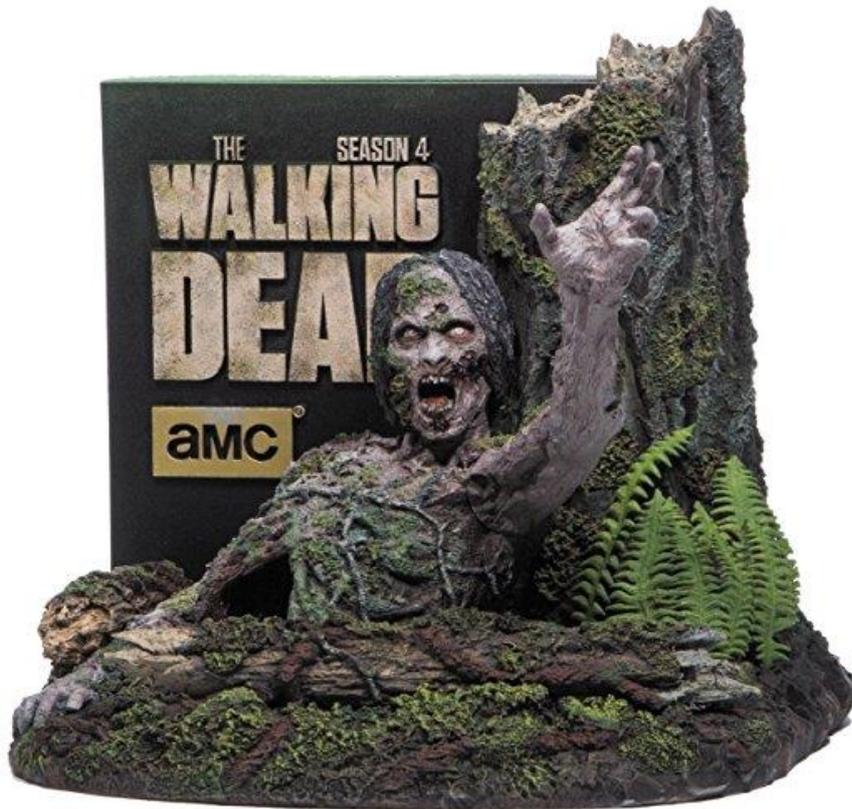


Fig.3. Limited edition season 4 DVD box set of *TWD*.

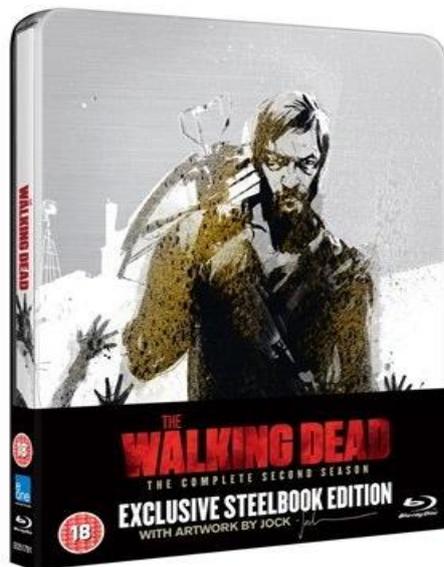


Fig.4. Limited edition steelbook Blu-ray cover for the second season of *TWD*, designed by Jock.

Furthermore, unlike Only-Click TV (Crisp 2015:172), ‘additional features included on most DVDs amplify various elements of their central text, thus producing new media experiences’ (Kompore 2006:346). With *TWD*, DVDs provide extra scenes, thus offering additional diegetic information such as explaining what happened to the Hispanic group from season one who stayed in Atlanta (Simpson 2014:55). They also provide interviews with the cast, crew, and creators, and further detailed information about certain diegetic objects such as Dale’s RV. Thus, these extra-textual features reinforce *TWD*’s complex narrative by offering further layers of meaning.

Additionally, DVD as a home media format allows for narrative and/or aesthetic transmogrification by adding or changing scenes (Mittell 2015b:38-9), something which can (re)shape audiences’ relationships to events and characters, offering nuanced considerations of seriality via different incarnations of a text. Such is the case with *TWD*’s sixth series’ finale. Noting the central human antagonist’s propensity for swearing in the comic, ‘fans... were disappointed by the relatively sanitized language used by Negan during the season finale’ (Casey 2016). However, two versions were shot – one for television broadcast and one for the DVD release. Not restrained by industry regulation, the latter offered an uncensored ending more ‘authentically’ aligned with the comic book series (Mathews 2016). Not only does this allow producers to react to and counter fans’ criticism that the basic cable TV version of Negan was not faithful enough to the comic, it also becomes a strategy to ensure that the dedicated fan audience consumes both initial broadcast/Only-Click episodes *and* commercially-available boxset versions (Caldwell 2008:162). Since being made aware of textual alterations prior to the official DVD release of season six, fans wishing to be the first to compare and discuss these different versions would need to pre-order or buy the DVD/Blu-ray on the day of release to engage in just-in-time fandom. Thus, fans’ affective intensities can result in just-in-time engagements with informal *and* formal economies, considering that ‘[t]he transmedia/non-transmedia nature of a text is determined not only by its narrative design but by distribution [and packaging] as well’ (Catania 2015:218). While Only-Click television can expedite and temporally order fan participation, one must also consider transmedia/official aspects that it cannot always engage with.

However, despite *TWD*’s transmedia and home media format richness, not all facets in this matrix are available in all territories (Catania 2015:205-6, Scott 2013:326). Consequently, whilst fans from some parts of the world may be able to engage with *TWD* as tentpole TV spanning a wide range of media, others can only engage with *TWD* as a TV series, impeded

from partaking in *transmedia fandom*, just-in-time or otherwise. Much as Chapter 2 argued that different phenomenological and textual consumption trajectories shape and colour the abject hyperdiegesis of *TWD*, one must also consider how transmedia distribution shapes audiences' intratextual and ergodic relationships with the storyworld (Aarseth 1997:1-3). How can one know about the Governor's back-story if the novel has not been translated into a language one can read? Therefore, the transmedia limits of *TWD* offer multiple points of non-entry, accounting for the myriad diversity of audience types (Goggin 2014:84), and the semiotic sequencing that takes place in consumption patterns.

To summarise, texts are not aired around the world at the same time. Thus, transcultural fans participate in Only-Click practices in order to adhere to 'just-in-time' fandom and access texts as soon as they have been made publicly available in another industrial territory. Yet, whilst trying to compete with informal circulation either by assimilation or one-upmanship, the contemporary TV industry may also try to encode Only-Click's symbolic value into its own branding. For instance, *MOH*'s 'Imprint' makes discursive reference to the episode being 'banned' from US TV on its DVD cover. Here, informal discourse is used to reinforce the neo-cult sensibilities of the text and Showtime's branding. However, similarly to *ITF*, fans negotiate this industry appropriation of informal strategies, sometimes questioning the authenticity of Only-Click discourses.

#### **4.5. *MOH*'s Neo-Cult Marketing: Only-Click Horror as 'Asia Extreme' and Fan Scepticism**

As I argued in Chapter 3, Showtime sought to frame both Japanese episodes of *MOH* under the pre-existing Western rubric constructed by Tartan's 'Asia Extreme' label, i.e. as markers of quality twenty-first TV horror oscillating around cinematic discourse (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11). Such paratextual 'discourse established layers of relevancy and hierarchies of meaning about the show, in their turn, influencing audience's expectations' (Picarelli 2015:134). Premised on offering extreme diegetic horror and East Asian abjection, these transnational sentiments are supported/heightened by the Only-Click circulation of 'Imprint' (Hills and Sexton 2017). And as discussed in the previous Chapter, Miike's episode pushed graphic visuals and subject matter to the limit, being deemed unsuitable for broadcast by Showtime (Hendershot 2011:150) resulting in it being solely disseminated on DVD in the US,

and airing in the UK via the digital channel Bravo<sup>112</sup>. Engaging with just-in-time rhetoric, the *Snowblood Apple* forum noted that ‘For UK members [of the forum]... Bravo are going to be showing [the series] starting Friday 13<sup>th</sup>’. Fan debates around formal/informal circulation tie into the spectacular nature of the episode. Located within wider industrial contexts, fans on the forum discuss North American culture pertaining to the censorship of ‘Imprint’:

Showtime has decided that it’s *too* disturbing/whatever to air, which I find really odd considering the earlier episodes *and* the fact Showtime is a cable channel... [B]asically Miike did what was really the idea of the show.

This was a movie that I really wanted to see and the fact that it’s banned in the U.S. makes me even more curious to see it!

[W]hat happened to the Land of the Free?... Ok, I can see some sense to certain bans... but these are works of art.

True, banning shouldn’t exist when it comes to forms of art. Art is made for a reason right? Art is a representation of an individual. People (in the U.S.) don’t often accept artistic creativity from foreign countries because to them, it isn’t the norm.

Such rhetoric positions ‘mainstream’ American media/audiences as lacking in cultural capital in comparison to transcultural fans (Hills 2005b:168-9), reiterating geographical dichotomies whereby populist American media/culture is articulated against world and/or Japanese cinema perceived as art (Badley and Palmer 2006:2, Wee 2014:2, Dew 2007:67-7). Auteur positioning further reinforces the pre-existing Western frameworks surrounding Miike (Rawle 2014:226), as discussed in Chapter 3. For others, however, censoring ‘Imprint’ in North America is actually deemed to be a suitable strategy:

‘the whole fetus thing wouldnt [sic] go well with american viewers’.

‘I imagine it has more to do with the aborted foetus theme than anything else... If Showtime has any religious backers that might well cause a little upset’.

Consequently, Only-Click formatting makes sense for these fans given Showtime’s presumed addressing of mainstream/non-fan audiences and their perceived inability to ‘handle’ such graphic horror. Importantly, fans’ language stresses the company’s actions in this: by

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112 Targeting niche audiences, ‘Bravo serves one of the youngest and most affluent audiences in cable television, and has score notable success with its intermedia strategies’ (Turner and Tay 2009:14).

discussing how ‘other audiences’ might be effected by such content (Barker et al 2007:130) fans consider what they view as Showtime’s cultural responsibilities. Illustratively, fans privilege ‘knowledge over affect’ (Hills 2005a:75), discussing anticipated issues around the ‘literalist readings’ which could be made by non-fans/mainstream audiences (ibid:74). This highlights not just fans’ engagement with abjection at a textual level, but also industry discourses around abject content, subsequently shaping, in part, (pre-)readings of ‘Imprint’ (Geraghty 2015:11, Gray 2010:119-20). Therefore, these para-/pre-textual understandings of ‘Imprint’ serve to anchor later textual analyses of the episode as Only-Click and DVD-only.

However, fans somewhat misread the political economies at play. Showtime, as a premium cable channel, is not targeting a mass audience. Therefore an imagined ‘mainstream’ audience is unlikely to view ‘Imprint’ via the channel given that access to content is by subscription. Rather, with ‘the producers feeling that Miike's piece is too graphic to be aired’ (Brown 2006), potential complaints could have damaged Showtime’s brand image. Consequently, the brand-specific abjection of the text (analysed in Chapter 3) has some potential to harm the overarching branding of the channel, perhaps leading to cancelled subscriptions. Thus, cult/quality horror does not always marry well with other discourses of quality TV. However, while pulling ‘Imprint’ serves, in part, to protect Showtime’s brand image, the act also increased the episode’s cult notoriety when it was released on DVD, thus attracting niche demographics (Mathijs and Sexton 2011:30).

Despite Showtime self-censoring the episode (Kehr 2006), the DVD cover claims that the text was ‘banned from cable broadcast’ (see Figs.5. and 6.). While semantically similar, the latter offers connotations of danger and exoticism (Sexton 2017) by suggesting an enforced removal leading to textual exclusivity. Consequently, ‘by virtue of the fact that it makes certain media texts scarce, hard to find, and thus subculturally desirable and distinctive’ (Hills 2005a:103), these claims reinforce pre-existing branding around Miike, Asia Extreme, and Showtime itself (Martin 2015:44), furthering the neo-cult sensibilities of the text (O’Reilly 2005:583):

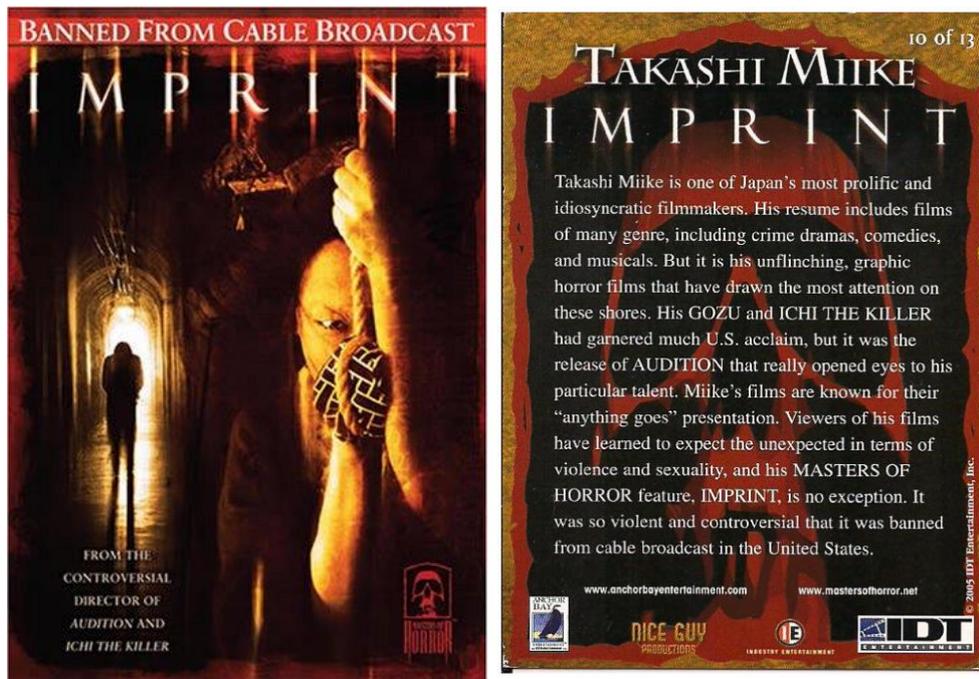


Fig.5. The front of the US DVD cover explains that the episode was ‘banned from cable broadcast’. Fig.6. The back of the DVD explains that the episode ‘was so violent and controversial that it was banned from cable broadcast in the United States’.

Recognising Showtime’s agency in the kind of material that it can show as a subscription-based cable channel (Jowett and Abbott 2013:10-1, 81) – i.e. content explicit in subject matter and imagery, and not regulated by the FCC, unlike network TV (ibid:11) – some fans were perplexed and/or frustrated that Miike’s episode had been denied to them. Others were sceptical as to *why* the director’s contribution was not being broadcast:

‘I’ve heard (read) speculation that pulling Miike is just a marketing ploy for the DVD’.

‘The sounds like moneyspinning to me... Make a big fuss about how it’s got to be pulled ‘cos it’s “too scary” to show on TV, then put out as a *separate DVD*?’

Here, the interlinking of informal Only-Click distribution, supposedly due to banning, with a subsequent official and commercial DVD release aimed at an established niche fandom is read as problematic. Moreover, whilst in reality this was an instance of self-censorship, fans discuss the cancellation of the episode as a ‘ban’. As such, these viewers use the (artificial or questionable) act of ‘banning’ in their meaning-making surrounding the text at a pre-textual level, whilst also performing their own stances on censorship (Barker et al 2007:38-9). These

debates were largely carried out by US and British audiences, where negotiations of formal and informal circulation were taking place. For fans residing in territories where Only-Click TV was their sole option because *MOH* was not being broadcast anyway, this context of consumption meant that ‘Imprint’ being pulled did not affect them. Thus we can see how, within a transcultural fandom, quite different Only-Click TV contexts manifest, and how fans play a salient role in the transnational circulation of media content (Athique 2016:145).

#### 4.6. Conclusion

Jason Mittell remarks that ‘texts only come to matter in their consumption, circulation and proliferation’ (2015b:7). Evidently, Only-Click television within the digital realm of fandom presents an ‘aesthetics of multiplicity’ whereby personal, (sub)cultural, and industrial narratives contextualise meaning around the informal/formal transnational textual acquisition of twenty-first century TV horror texts (Ross 2008:21-2). Resultantly, Only-Click TV is not a homogeneous practice ‘underpinned by a unified set of motivations that result in a similarly predictable set of outcomes’ (Crisp 2015:2).

For some, this practice comes out of a frustration that television texts are simply unavailable in their territory via traditional televisual technology; all three of my case studies have been broadcast in particular regions/countries and not in others. In some instances, it can be the pivotal tool in uncovering hidden TV gems from yesteryear and/or from other lands, facilitating and encouraging transcultural fandoms. In other examples, there is a temporal necessity of Only-Click consumption as it offers the only viable option to consume texts within a timeframe concordant with wider audiences, allowing for just-in-time interactions with texts and other fans. Recognising the saliency of these informal practices for audiences, the BBC have ingrained Only-Click in their PSB distribution model, illustrating the interlinked nature of formal and informal media economies (Lobato and Thomas 2015:3). Not only does this Only-Click strategy attempt to tailor consumption patterns to grassroots (fan) rituals but it also illustrates the institution’s efforts to align themselves with post-TV distribution, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Yet Only-Click TV can often be marked by an industrial lack. As seen with *TWD*, whilst it can reduce temporal and spatial distance for transnational audiences, as a digital file it often lacks

the extra-textual features (Hills 2007a:57) of national broadcasting (or DVD release) which also frame meaning and add value to a text (Kompare 2005:210). This can prompt fans to buy official releases over and above, or even after, illicit consumption. This proves especially salient to basic cable channels, as multiple home media formats can cast the widest possible net for gaining commercial revenue from the largest audience, but it can also frame particular editions as exclusive, providing subcultural capital within fan communities even while further surplus value is extracted from these dedicated viewers.

Comparatively, as a premium cable channel Showtime's pulling of 'Imprint' highlights that whilst graphic TV horror may attract quality TV status, it can still potentially subvert wider brand value. Thus, Only-Click sidesteps this issue as the episode becomes 'prized content' that certain audiences will want to see (Lotz 2014b:12) via alternative means not bound by domestic viewing taste structures. Furthermore, similar to once-banned video nasties and cult films that are now available on general release (Hills 2015a), Showtime's framing of 'Imprint' as illicit by highlighting that it was, at one point, 'banned' – even if this was an artificial state of affairs generated by the channel brand itself – constructs a paratextual framework for the episode's commercial home media release.

I have shown how industry dialogue surrounding Only-Click TV is negotiated by fan audiences. Some fans do not readily accept a text being rendered as Only-Click by industry players. Instead, fans seem to value grassroots informal dissemination over top-down and enforced Only-Click TV. Fan rebuttal seems especially heightened during times of ontological insecurity linked to emergent post-object fandom, as was the case immediately following *ITF*'s cancellation. Thus, if Only-Click TV arises due to producers and/or channels 'killing' a horror text in an untimely and abrupt manner, the abject state that fans can find themselves in, tied to the status of their televisual fan object, can galvanise activist strategies seeking to restore ontological security to both media objects and fan identities. Consequently, '[a]nalyzing interactions between formal and informal media worlds requires us to think holistically about the media environment' (Lobato and Thomas 2015:19).

Having considered how my case studies are linked to industry relationships with the informal discourses of Only-Click television, and engaging with consumption patterns that shape abject spectrums at pre-, para- and post-textual levels, I now move on to address how audiences respond to the case study texts' on-screen abjection. Chapters 5 and 6 consider how self-identity, both as a fan and via wider identity politics (Sexton 2017:8), informs audiences' abject

spectrums, analysing online readings of *ITF* as British social (sur)realist horror, *TWD* as tentpole/transmedia horror TV, and *MOH* as transcultural neo-cult/Asia Extreme TV.

## 5. When Abject Worlds Collide: Audiences' Abject Spectrums as Polysemic, Intratextual, and Intertextual

### 5.1. Intro

The last Chapter considered how media ecologies of dissemination/consumption, and paratexts shape abject spectrums at a pre-textual (*MOH*), transmedial (*TWD*), and post-object level (*ITF*). Furthermore, I discussed how Only-Click TV shaped meaning and value for transnational audiences in providing routes for consumption not afforded by formal and traditional broadcast. I now turn my attention to audiences' responses to the texts' diegetic abjection. Part I provided detailed textual analysis of my case studies via Kristeva's abjection model (Nowell-Smith 2000:11), locating them within the horror genre<sup>113</sup>. This allowed me to address, in detail, how each channel (BBC3, AMC, Showtime) specifically utilised abject imagery within their bids for quality status, to culturally contextualise the abject Other that engaged in wider societal anxieties, and to offer abjection as a reading strategy. Thus, textual analysis served a range of readings of the case studies (Creeber 2006b:34, Geraghty 2003:36), 'supported and developed around... wider contextual or extratextual framework[s]' (Creeber 2006b:35). However, '[m]eaning comes into being only with the person who experiences it' (ibid:15). Moreover 'neither signification nor information guarantees meaning' (ibid). Therefore, this Chapter aims to analyse the meeting of textual worlds with audiences' worlds.

As argued in the Literature Review, abjection is a process 'central... within the project of subjectivity' (Tyler 2009:80). Resultantly, 'Kristeva theorizes abjection in phenomenological terms associating it with bodily experiences' (Arya 2017:10). This is vital to abject spectrums: the ongoing process of readings and responses to on-screen abjection are informed by individual life experiences located culturally and socially (Casebier 1991:4, Filmer et al 1998:32). In developing abject spectrums, I use abjection's first-person perspective (Arya 2014:10) to analyse how online audiences make sense of my case studies in terms of how they

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<sup>113</sup> Here, '[g]enre provides the conceptual space where... issues of texts and aesthetics... intersect with those of industry and institution, history and society, culture and audiences' (Gledhill 2000:221), contextualising horror's use of abjection's themes of suffering (Kristeva 1982:140).

make them feel (the affective), how they read them culturally (the ideological) (Stephens 2012:530), and how they respond to their textual qualities (the aesthetic) (Arya 2016), with each case study presenting different forms and balances of engagement (Duffett 2013b:29, Busse and Hellekson 2006:6). This is not to say that individuals cannot be fans of multiple texts/fandoms (Cherry 2010:71), nor that they can't combine these dimensions in their responses, but it remains possible to analyse how specific fan and anti-fan discourses, reproduced by particular audiences, frame texts, hence illuminating different facets and components of the abject spectrum model. This model is a gradational continuum that locates responses to on-screen abjection between the affective, ideological and aesthetic, and that also factors in the in-process dynamics of individual experiences, the continuation of cultural history, and the potential for texts' narratives to develop intratextually and transmedially (see the Introduction: page 13 for a diagram of this).

Beginning with *ITF*, fans evidence strong affective ties to the abject Other in line with the structuring of social (sur)realism (see Chapter 1) (Creeber 2009b, Woods 2015). The generic hybridity of TV drama-horror-social-realism is used by fans as a marker of 'quality' discourse reinvigorating the zombie genre (Hunt et al 2014:2). Moreover, the I-zombie abject body is not only celebrated as a more nuanced type of zombie (Abbott 2016a:7), but the very corporeal and existential ambiguity that Kieren and others find themselves occupying also allows for multiple cultural-political subtexts to be engaged with. Consequently, fan readings highlight how horror's abjection is polysemic, permitting multiple abject spectrums to operate in relation to a single text. They also demonstrate how within the abjection spectrum, responses can be blended, as we see affective responses merge with ideological readings.

The Chapter then considers *TWD* to discuss two salient factors of abject spectrums. Firstly, *TWD*'s transmedial nexus – that Chapter 2 argued utilised abjection within its (hyper)diegetic geography – provides the framework for abject spectrums' phenomenological dynamics to operate along *ergodic intratextual pathways* (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:7). As an extensive franchise (Lowder 2011:xiv-xv), it cannot be assumed there is a universal *TWD* parent text, with every other iteration being simply paratextual. As each iteration is a 'textual shifter' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:234), differences between transmedia texts can reinforce and/or subvert readings (Fischer 2011:77-8). In this case, whilst *TWD* has been commended for its quality TV attributes and multicultural ensemble cast (see Steiger 2011, Teurlings 2017:6),

audiences of colour have noted the marginality of black males within the storyworld. This ‘discursive prioritisation’ (Hills 2015b:152-3) sees audiences address and politicise the racial milieu of *TWD* against the backdrop of wider racial relationships in the US, instead of engaging with post-9/11 discourse and themes of white masculinity-in-crisis (see Chapter 2) (Connell and Gibson 2003:207-8, Brough and Shresthova 2012, Forman 2004:2-3). Considering this in relation to *FTWD*, black audiences deconstruct black masculinity not in terms of marginalisation and servility as others do with *TWD*. Instead, anti-fan readings criticise representations of race by the Othering of the black body via their speedy abject zombification. Conversely, audiences of colour champion *TTTWD* for revising race representations not seen in other *TWD* vehicles and offering character development uncommon in video games. Resultantly, there are multiple forms of *TWD* fandom and anti-fandom (Hills 2013a). Therefore, secondly, by analysing the range of online posts around the black body in *TWD*, *FTWD* and *TTTWD*, I illustrate how the phenomenology of audience identity – the lived experience of race – can shape/inform abject spectrums and the ‘discursive prioritisation’ of reading screen-abjection (Gatson and Reid 2011, Brown 2001:58), and that racial discourse ascribed to the franchise is not uniform. Resultantly, in this section of the Chapter, abject spectrums were less concerned with affective or aesthetic responses, but predominantly focused on the ideology of textual representations.

Finally, I address how abject spectrums function via *intertextuality* through Asia Extreme/J-horror transcultural fans’ discursive clustering that informs their critiquing of ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’ as neo-cult TV horror (see Chapter 3) (Hills 2013e). These informed audiences use their own experiential trajectories to evaluate these episodes as (in)authentic in relation to an existing filmic body of work (Martin 2015:144,156-8), drawing on a constructed notion of Japan as a ‘cult geography’ (Hills 2002a:145). The Chapter analyses critical fan discussions that represent both fan and anti-fan positions on the forums *Snowblood Apple* and *The Doll Master*; sites that encourage fans to perform detailed knowledge of Asia Extreme cinema and J-horror as genres (Duffet 2014:169, McBride and Bird 2007:175, Halberstam 2011). But, as noted in the Literature Review, Kristeva’s abjection model does not account for transcultural dynamics and relationships. Thus, I revise Bhabha’s postcolonial third space to analyse fans’ responses to the episodes’ screen abjection as a form of ‘cultural translation’ (Bhabha 2010:2, Rosbach 2015:87) authenticating a particular narrative of Japan within fan discourse. As such, ‘audience discussion, as paratext, works to cast a formidable shadow... [across] the receptions of... films [and TV programmes]’ (Gray 2010:119), whereby their construction of Japan links

the culture's horror film output to abject spectrums and responses to the *MOH* episodes. Consequently, '[p]ostings need to be analysed... as a specific textual production of fan identity, one that is aimed at a readership assumed to be made up of other [J-]horror fans' (Hills 2005a:78), and that challenge 'Asia Extreme' discourse that comes from both Tartan and Showtime's brand-specific abjection (Pett 2013). In this instance, abject spectrums show a heightened focus on the aesthetics of abjection in their refuting of quality status. Whilst the cultural, extreme, and/or genre aesthetics of these episodes are questioned, and even rebutted, by contrast *ITF* was largely praised for its blending of British social realism with the horror genre, facilitating a blending of affective and ideological responses in these fans' abject spectrums.

## **5.2. *ITF*'s Undead Sympathetic Other: Fan Positionality, Politics and Abject Embodiments**

In the last Chapter, I discussed how during times of ontological insecurity, especially after its cancellation, *ITF* fans on the Facebook groups 'In The Flesh' and '#saveintheflesh campaign group' implemented activist practices to try and save their beloved text and tackle their own abjection. However, during periods when the show was active, thus during times of ontological security, fans on the same pages, as well as the *Previously TV* forum, turned their attention to diegetic discussions, focusing on the aesthetics of the text, and taking an I-zombie stance (Abbott 2016a). Thus, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 serve to illustrate the ongoing lived experiences of fans' affective relationships with the shifting ontological (in)security of the series.

And as evidenced in Chapter 1, *ITF*'s social surrealist aesthetics (Creeber 2009b:429-30) deal with social realist subject matter through the marginalisation of the sentient undead (Sexton 2014:35, Hallam and Marshment 2000:190, Woods 2016:94-6). As Abbott notes, '[t]elevision... has become a space that allows for a slow and complicated exploration of identity to be developed over time and for audiences to become increasingly involved and implicated within the... [monster's] story' (2016a:149). Taking the subjective position of 'the I-zombie, in which the zombie is not only sympathetic but is also the narrator or focalising perspective of the text' (ibid:163) provides the audience with the perspective of what it feels like to be (treated as) abject, providing an existential underpinning through which the lead character of Kieren negotiates his identity.

Kieren's sexuality as the locus for conveying socio-cultural issues is key in fan communal interactions, informing fans' readings of the series. Several posters on the Facebook fan groups note how the use of make-up by the undead to hide one's true identity evokes a time when homosexuality was illegal and thus 'veiled for fear of punishment, both legal and physical'. Likewise, another poster notes how Roarton locals fear being bitten by 'rotters'; becoming infected is interpreted as referencing previous cultural anxieties surrounding AIDS and homosexuality (Cocarla 2014:68, Elliott-Smith 2014a:153, 2014b:144). Readings of the partially dead syndrome (PDS) body as overtly sexual emerge not only in relation to wider cultural anxieties, but also through the relationships Kieren has with Rick and Simon, as well as Amy's relationship with Philip (which Chapter 1 argued can be read as queer; see Duffett 2013b:78). Evidently, character development and identity politics mapped onto abjection are primary sources of pleasure for many fans, whilst presenting abject spectrums forming strongly emotive responses:

Gay zombies talking about their feelings? Hell yeah! More please.

[G]ay zombies made me cry.

Thus, while he is Othered diegetically, for many fans Kieren's marginalisation becomes an affective anchoring between audience and text. Interestingly, several fans read Kieren not through queer discourse but through medical discourses surrounding mental illness. This stems from the shifting cultural issues that are embodied by Kieren et al from series one to series two (see Abbott 2016a:112). Seriality allows for both characterisation and subtext to develop, adding to the polysemic ideological readings by fans (Booth 2012a:310, Jowett and Abbott 2013:53-5):

You know, in the first season everyone was saying it was really about being gay. And I saw that too especially since Kieran is gay. But now it seems more like commentary on mental illness. With the "attack" on the school the previous episode and then the hospital had a definite One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest feel.

Kieran being gay seemed a lot less important to me then the issues of family and society. I'm inclined to agree that it's more about mental illness.

The mental illness metaphor makes so much sense especially with the issue of medication.

Keiran's zombie journey translates very nicely to the idea of a person who has been hospitalized for a violent outburst related to mental illness being released back into their community.

Other fans conflate multiple Otherings onto the abject body. The conservative politics of patriarchal institutions in *ITF* which threaten Kieren and PDS patients are read as allegories of bigotry in wider society. As one user remarks, *ITF* is 'a commentary on prejudice', whilst another argues it is an allegory of 'modern life, feelings of alienation, prejudice, politicians with hidden agendas, drug abuse etc'. This echoes Travis Sutton's argument in Chapter 1, linking queer and disabled bodies via their contrast to the heteronormative/abled figure that occupies a position of power within identity categorisation (2014:75), but expands the idea out to account for other marginalised positions. The ambiguity of the abject undead body fosters multiple readings in terms of how it is read against a backdrop of mistreatment by human characters, groups, and institutions (Sconce 2014). This is supported by fans who argue that:

[Zombies] can be read as pertinent to any minority group.

[*ITF*] is about mental illness, homophobia, PTSD and soldiers and any number of things all at once, not just one [of these elements].

*In the Flesh* isn't just another zombie drama. It talks about rehabilitation, the mentally ill, the LGBTQIA+ community, depression, denial, loss, bullying, abuse, oppression, family, friendship. It makes you laugh and cry... It isn't filled with mindless zombies and gun-toting heroes.

I hate Zombie stuff. Shows, movies, books - none of them do anything new, and they are usually overwhelmingly bloody and short on plot. *In the Flesh* is different - it stood the Zombie myth on it's head, and presented us with a new story in which we not only had an amazing plot, but we could care about the characters and their development, as well as using the medium look at things like mental illness and representation.

*ITF*'s representations of marginal identities, cultural-political subtexts and issues are presented as markers of 'quality' here. Moreover, praise for *ITF* is combined with criticism directed against an allegedly saturated, exhausted and formulaic corpus of other zombie texts (Hunt et al 2014:2), evidencing how anti-fan aspects can bleed into fan discourse (Hills 2013f:vii). Such anti-fandom of 'normal' zombies also ties into *ITF*'s British social (sur)realist aesthetics and themes:

[It's] very midlands/northern and more like a melodrama. Don't expect attacking hordes or any of the normal tropes as it's all about loss and coping but not in that tired "Shit's getting weird and we're all going crazy!" way, more like a Mike Leigh film with people trying to go about their lives while bottling up everything in silence.

[A] very English way of looking at zombies.

Not only is geographical discourse linked to the text's social (sur)realism (Hallam and Marshment 2000:193, Lay 2007:235, Woods 2015:238), but comparisons to Leigh as a social realist auteur (see Porton 2003:165-6, Watson 2004:186, Carney and Quart 2000:234, Lay 2002:89-90) anchor fans' genre expectations whilst also situating *ITF* within the realm of quality British TV/film. Furthermore, frequent comparisons are made by fans between the Human Volunteer Force – the right wing militia opposing the reintegration of PDS sufferers back into the community – and the English Defence League, United Kingdom Independence Party, and the British National Party, three of Britain's most far-right political movements (Abbott 2016a:113). This further politicises the PDS body, contrasting right-wing British antagonists to the left-wing ideologies of Kieren, Simon, and Amy.

Lastly, much like Kieren scouring the internet for information about Maxine Martin, Blue Oblivion, and the Undead Prophet (see Chapter 1), fans discussing storylines mirror such processes of media consumption. Amelie Hastie argues that cult television texts<sup>114</sup> are 'invested in knowledge; ...their narrative tropes and their often open-ended nature... invite fans to participate in this world of knowledge and to construct further "knowledge" about these worlds' (2007b:89). Such an 'epistemological economy', according to Hills<sup>115</sup> (2012e:29), invites 'fan and... scholar-fan participation in (extra-)diegetic worlds of knowledge' (ibid). *ITF* fans 'investigate' the cause of the Uprising, Kieren's role within this, what Blue Oblivion is, and various patriarchal, reactionary threats to the undead (Booth 2010b:119; Zittoun 2013:143). As one fan states, '[t]his is a groundbreaking show with unanswered questions!'

Evidently, the fan community's engagement with the undead as nuanced, polysemic (I-)zombiedom fosters a range of politicised subtexts via the ambiguous abject body. This illustrates how textual abjection does not have a one-to-one relationship with audience responses and interpretations, demonstrating the need for a theory of abject spectrums that

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<sup>114</sup> Such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, and *Twin Peaks*.

<sup>115</sup> Evident in the BBC TV series *Sherlock*.

gradationally oscillates between or blends affective responses (e.g. crying), with thematic/ideological readings (the undead as subtextual) (see fig.1.).

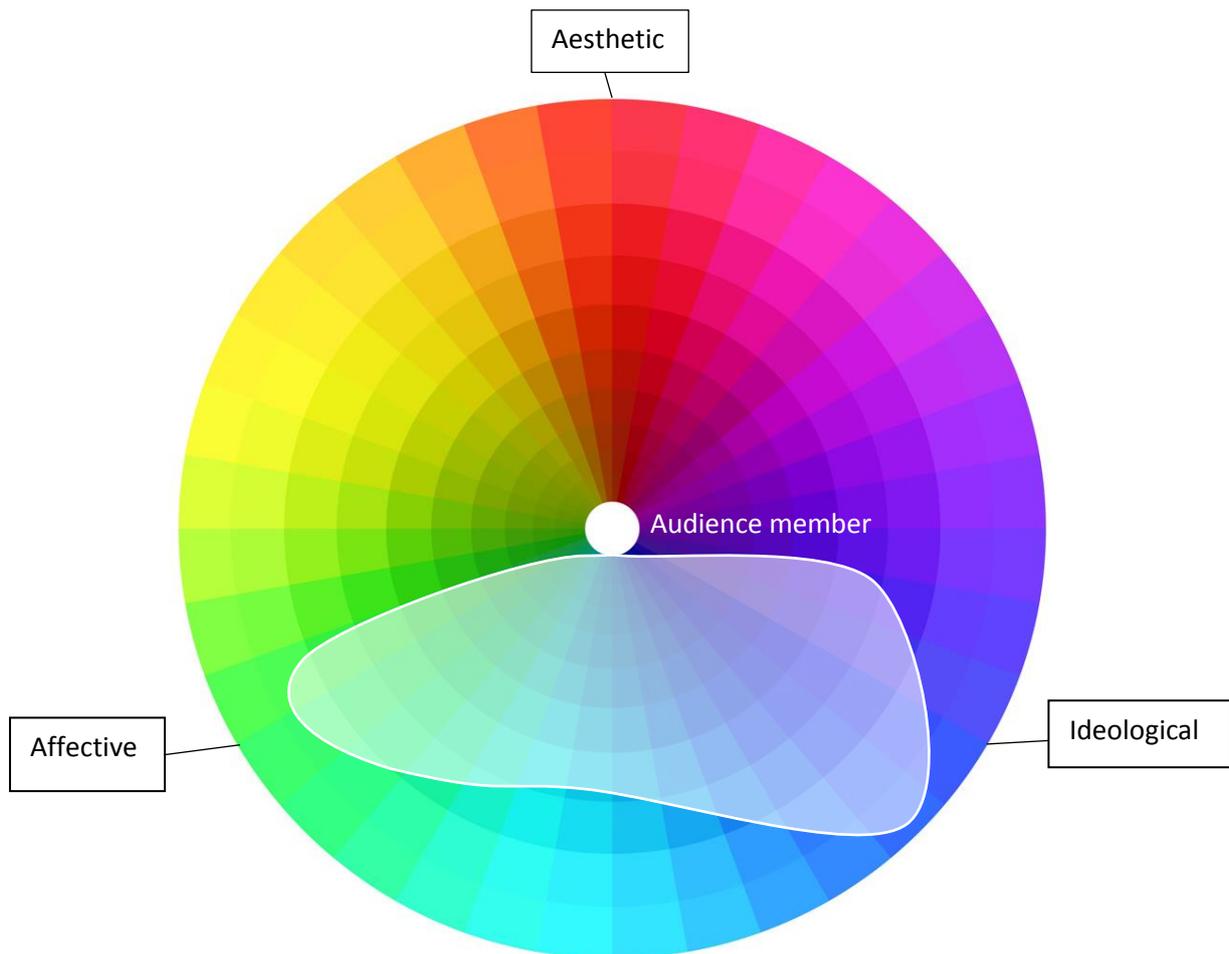


Fig.1. A diagram of what an individual's abject spectrum may look from the online audience responses to *ITF*, evidencing an active affective and ideological response to the text.

At times, audiences' abject spectrums can be more heightened emotionally or affectively, e.g. concerning the melodrama of Kieren forming romantic relationships, or Amy dying at the end of series. At other times, whilst still operating affectively, abject spectrums can focus more on the ideological framing of the undead, taking the I-abject position discussed in Chapter 1 that sees audiences align themselves with mistreated PDS sufferers. Moreover, fans follow characters through the seriality of the text: as characters and stories develop then so too does the fandom. However, while fandoms can be 'a continuing part of an individual's life, one that can have a profound impact on their sense of identity and self-narrative' (Williams 2015:6, Yockey 2012), fan identity is only one facet in the complex matrix of identity politics (Duffett

2013b:80). Whereas *ITF* fans focus on praising the text, I now consider how other facets of identity and phenomenological existence can shape abject spectrums whereby anti-fans of *TWD* draw on their racial identity in their affective engagement with its TV horror.

### **5.3. *TWD* (Anti-)Fans' Discursive Prioritisation: Intersections of Race and Self-Representation**

*TWD* has a huge fan following (Jenkins 2013b:375, Hassler-Forest 2014:97-8, Blumberg 2011:36) that has grown with the franchise (Booth 2015a:67, Jowett and Abbott 2013:12). However, audiences have also questioned the TV series' racial representations (Nyong'o 2012, Steiger 2011:100, Johnson 2015:260-2), challenging the lack of black protagonists in *TWD* whilst still engaging with its storyworld and characters (Jowett and Abbott 2013:50, 53, 55).

Whilst academics may focus on, and thus validate, certain aspects of *TWD* (Brown 2001:139, Calbreath-Frasieur 2015:224), such as strong visual aesthetics, slow-burning storylines, and complex narrative that form over transmedia networks (Smith 2011:157, Teurlings 2017:15, Hassler-Forest 2014, 2016:161), fans can explore, authenticate, and/or challenge other elements. Hills highlights how '[f]or some fan audiences... elevating "homoerotic subtext", or "not-so-subtext", to the status of narrative focus means selecting out one thread of polysemic textual material for communal and discursive prioritisation' (2015b:153). Whilst the previous section showed how abjection's post-structuralist framework allows for polysemic codings in relation to wider culture that are read through abject spectrums, the model also accounts for how these spectrums, formulated at a psychological level, are informed by an individual's lived identity. Thus, textual abjection can be read against and through one's phenomenological history. With *TWD*, many black audiences find the position of Grimes deeply problematic, since the show's focus on a white male lead repeats black male marginalisation. These anti-fan arguments not only show close engagement with the series, but are framed by wider civic issues around the mistreatment of black and ethnic minorities in North America by patriarchal institutions such as the police and armed forces.

Concurrently, such mistreatment has given rise to online civic engagement from marginalised black voices and supporters of these causes (Jenkins 2016:5-6, Jenkins and Shresthova 2016:265-6). Jenkins explains that, 'new media has provided tools and infrastructures by which

marginal groups [can] engage and participate in the public sphere' (2016:24). Similarly, fans at the margins have been afforded 'more room for blatant disruptive strategies' (Dhaenens 2012:444-5). Whilst this cannot account for those impeded by the digital divide (Kompore 2010:81, Dawson 2010:96-8), and whilst certain online spaces refute racial discourse (e.g. Fu 2015, Massanari 2015, Young 2014), ethnic minorities engaged in fandoms may use identity politics to raise issues of both fan and racial disempowerment (Kligler-Vilenchik 2016:132). Thus, the Chapter analyses the cultural context of audiences' own subject-in-process whereby their racial/anti-fan self-identity is performed via responses to textual representations that chastise certain *TWD* vehicles (*TWD* and *FTWD*) whilst championing others (*TTTWD*). As a result, the abject spectrums presented in this section display heightened ideological readings of *TWD*'s characters of colour over and above other responses, providing the schema by which these texts are critiqued. This also demonstrates how audience responses towards the intratextual franchise are far from monolithic.

On the fan website *The Nerds of Color*, a 'community of fans who love superheroes, sci-fi, fantasy and video games but are not afraid to look at nerd/geek fandom with a culturally critical eye', racial depictions are frequently debated. Whilst one fan puts forth the notion that *TWD* 'isn't just a great comic book, it's a revolutionary comic book; one that fundamentally altered the zombie landscape and helped usher in the zombie Golden Age of today', they also critique the TV series. Criticism involves the reductive characterisation of black males in *TWD*, with its 'repeated inability to depict more... [than] one ass-kicking Black man at a time'. They highlight how

[a]fter three seasons... [a] weird pattern borders on the comedic cliché and show in-joke: a central Black male character can only be introduced if the show's previous Black man is bumped off, a pattern I (and others) have dubbed the "One Black Man at a Time" rule. The Rule has come into effect no less than three times over the course of *The Walking Dead*.

As observed by others (Pierce 2015, Murphy 2015, Berry 2013, Clarson 2015), *TWD* grants black male characters limited agency and representation (Deggans 2012). Fans note that 'in the TV show there is a running joke of how "There can be only one." black man, after T-Dog gets written out and replaced by the black prisoner'. Arguments are also aimed at the show's zombie hordes, which are said to lack ethnic minority walkers (Cunningham 2010).

One fan laments that '[m]y relationship with this show is over. I wanted to love it, but it kept telling me by virtue of its depiction of Black men, I wasn't its "target" audience. I am a Black man who does not see himself represented well, if at all, on this show'. Such declarations offer a response where identification is refuted (Brown 2001:118-9), but also highlight ongoing relationships where fans attempt to 'stick it out', watching the series in the hope that black male characterisations will develop (Hills 2014b:10,15). This anti-fan response has developed over the course of the series. Issues of black masculinity and representation are crucial for this audience member:

The message such shows promote is a toxic one; serve and remain subservient, don't aspire, consume, follow, protect assets that are not your own... I am not confused about the role of Black men in American society for the last four hundred years. We have no role. And I recognize television will reinforce this perspective as long as people of color are not allowed to write on television, to create new media which is more accurately representative of how we think, feel and behave.

This not only addresses 'the legacy of black representation in American media, the ideology of the producers, and American social realities' (Acham 2013:103), it subverts the quality 'author function' of Robert Kirkman (Jenkins 2013b:375). Anti-fans criticise the show's creators as white men, hegemonic in the industry, unable to create strong black male characters (Gilliland 2016). Similarly, noting diegetic racial commentary by T-Dog who discusses his precarious position as a sole black male, only for this rhetoric to be blamed on his semi-conscious state, a fan explains '[i]t is in that moment that, as viewers of color, we are reminded that white dudes are writing this, because despite T-Dog's realization being very much in line with the world we know, on TV such a notion can only be the product of temporary dementia'.

Another fan remarks that '[f]or all its strengths, the social dynamics on *The Walking Dead* replicate many problems from modern society. These issues of power are not thoughtfully explored and it seems a missed opportunity for an otherwise expertly crafted show'. Power relationships in *TWD* are read as paralleling the position of disempowered ethnic minorities in real-world North American culture. Furthermore, fans were unhappy with the killing of Tyreese – a black male – during Black History Month (Carey 2015), using hashtag combinations such as #thewalkingdead, #racist and/or #blackhistorymonth to engage with the topic on Twitter (Kuo 2016, Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016:85-6). Here, 'just-in-time' fandom occurs in relation to both TV seriality and real world temporality (Hills

2002a:178-80). Conversely, the same context of Black History Month was used to champion the series when Rick and Michonne's interracial romantic relationship developed.

But as explored in Chapter 2, the tentpole/transmedia matrix of *TWD* provides fans with a wealth of narratives taking place within the abject post-apocalyptic landscape. I want to continue my focus on audiences' engagement with *TWD*'s representations of ethnic minorities while addressing *TWD*'s transmedia extensions. Moreover, within this expansive transmedia network 'what can be counted as "text" and "paratext" is potentially destabilized' (Hills 2012e:38). Likewise, it is not the case that '[i]n order to understand the full story of many transmedia franchises, a consumer must seek out each text that contributes to that overall narrative' (Calbreath-Frasieur 2015:222). Rather, audiences negotiate *TWD*'s storyworld via which texts they consume and in what order, stressing the phenomenological dimensions of transmedia interaction (Hills 2014b:9). Such instability in patterns of consumption means that each textual iteration subtly alters 'the horizons of meaning' (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:19) of the wider textual corpus. Thus, I consider the transmedia 'malleability' (ibid) of *TWD*'s abject imagery (see Chapter 2) to highlight the ergodic intratextual potential of abject spectrums.

Akin to *TWD*, much has been written in journalistic pieces and by fans about the problematic depictions of black masculinity in *FTWD*. Whilst it has been lauded for its racial diversity, the systematic deaths of black males have also led to criticism (Kelly 2015, Nededog 2015), resonating with real-world treatment of the black-body-as-Other, and inferring strong political subtexts. One individual argues, in light of the Ferguson protests in 2014, that 'We – people of color, and black people in particular – are this country's zombies. We are the horrifying shadow suburbia is afraid will slip through the window at night. We are the reason for the U.S. history of stockpiling guns, dating back to fears of slave rebellions'. Whereas the marginality of the black self in *TWD* elicits criticism from audiences, *FTWD*'s problematic depictions reside in its Othering of the black body. Thus, whilst abject I-zombie positionality in *ITF* is championed by fans as nuanced and humanising the Other, this black audience member finds being made abject in *FTWD* highly problematic. This is not to essentialise racial identity but rather to consider how wider cultural events become common reference points for challenging representations within the series. They add that,

The first character killed off was black. Not just black – but a black drug dealer. And a weak black drug dealer who is fought off by his jonesing white client... [F]rom the

very start, the show has introduced an ineffectual black thug as the first zombie to die. A thug's black body laid out on the street (As a culture, that's how we like men's black bodies: laid out dead on the street).

Acknowledging the series' multicultural cast, anti-fans argue that this comes at the cost of subordinating black masculinity. In citing the #blacklivesmatter protest slogan, they discursively link wider civic issues with problematic depictions of race on North American television. Signs and symbols from political campaigns spill over here, appropriated by subsequent fan/civic engagement around related issues (see Jenkins 2016:6, Jenkins and Shresthova 2016:265-6). Others concur, referring to the stereotypical treatment of black characters that comes with the horror genre<sup>116</sup> (Peirce 2015) as a reason for 'quitting' the series. Likewise, others asked '[w]ith the current sociopolitical climate, do we really need to see police brutality and racial tropes become part of a zombie plotline?'. Thus, whilst *FTWD* fictionalises police brutality (Goldberg 2015), its resonance with real-world events is deemed insensitive by critics rather than politically engaged. Moreover, such points of contention are largely informed by affective responses to the racial dynamics of *TWD* (Robinson 2015). This evidences not just audience responses to textual representation but, more importantly, shows how ongoing relationships to fictional abjection can intersect with wider cultural frameworks of the abject (see fig.2.).

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<sup>116</sup> Such tropes and representations are knowingly subverted in the 2017 horror film *Get Out*, providing a social commentary of mistreatment of black citizens by the rich, white, and powerful in North America (Bakare 2017, Johnston 2017).

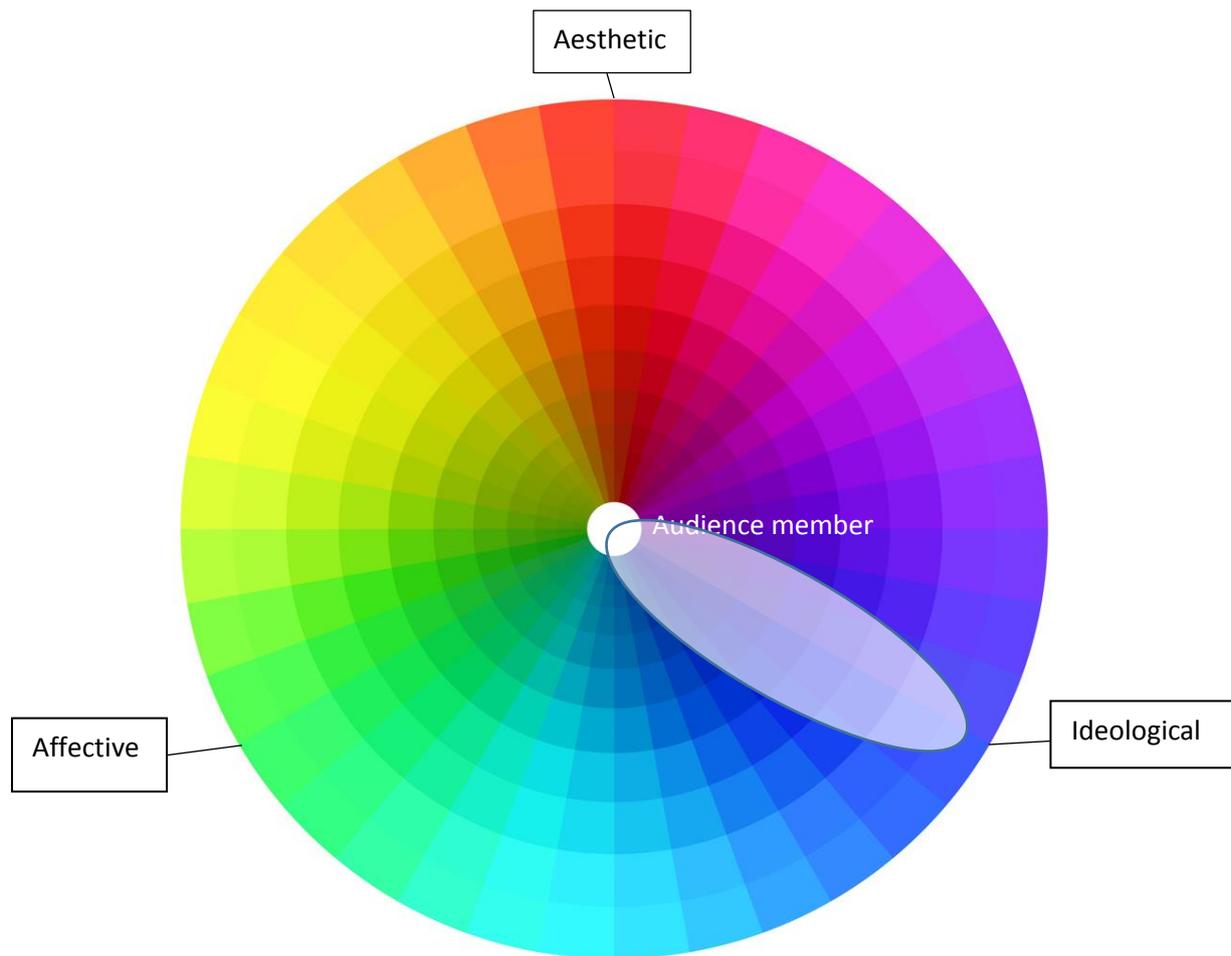


Fig.2. shows abject spectrums of black anti-fans' strong ideological readings of black characters in *TWD* which are read against and contextualised by wider cultural mistreatments of young black males in the US.

Critical engagement with racial politics is mapped onto topics such as the treatment of black males in wider society, traditional depictions of black masculinity, the marginalisation of ethnic minorities, and hegemonic media industries, showing a civic awareness that challenges *TWD*'s abject storyworld (Van Zoonen 2005:6). However, other *TWD* texts, and fans' relationships with them, illustrate that racial discourse attached to the franchise is not monolithic. On the Telltale 'Community Forum' – producer of *TTTWD* series – intersectional identity and racial politics are differently played out. Racial representations within *TTTWD* become strong narrative loci within discussions, in threads such as 'What if Lee was white?', 'Why most of the characters in the game are Caucasian?' and 'Was Clem African-American?', as well as wider cultural debates about race and gender featuring in threads such as 'Racism in America',

‘Excuses for racism’, ‘Race and Racism’, and ‘Transgender and transrace’. Fans of *TWD*, alongside being fans of other Telltale games, frequently post on both diegetic and cultural race relations, with arguments from one often informing the other. Arguments frequently circle around marginalised characters and players, the need for greater racial/cultural diversification in media, and post-racial debates that reject race as an issue (Johnson 2015:267-8). Many *TTTWD* players who identify as black, champion the black male lead Lee, seeing both his visibility and ludic dimensions of character development as markers of quality that are notably absent from the television series:

[W]ith Lee, the game broke so many unfortunate traditions in gaming. And with the Walking Dead in general. After that travesty that was T-Dog's character, I was glad to have Lee.

He's black but the whole narrative isn't focused on 'the black experience'... There is the urban joke at the farm... the implication is that Lee constantly has to deal with little prejudices that are inevitably frustrating.

There's a real surfeit of white, male 20-30 something male protagonist in games, because that's the demographic most developers aim for. The principle behind concepts like 'affirmative action' is to be a correcting course against those tendencies.... Race *is* an issue.

Lee not only subverts hegemonic identities in video games and television (Brown 2001:122, Jansz and Martis 2007), he is also read as a civic device for affirmative action. His characterisation raises wider cultural issues, shifting Lee from being a marker of ‘quality’ to a political symbol highlighting the absent black body in *TWD*. Conversely, others argue that Lee’s racial representation reinforces racist stereotypes:

Lee starts out in the back of a cop car after murdering his wife's lover, and a lot of the options you have as you play Lee don't cast him in a positive light.

Concurring with previous studies analysing online fandoms (Scodari 1998), ethnic minority fans on the forum were frequently compelled to demarcate, and thus perform, their racial identity, an act which often led to them further justifying their responses to the game. Other fans commended the characterisation/emotional depth afforded to Lee, yet by acknowledging their whiteness they also sought to insulate themselves from further debate:

Lee is extremely nuanced and that's what's great about his character, but I feel uncomfortable saying more because... I'm white and I don't think it's really my place to say if his representation was negative or not.

The one and only time I thought about Lee's skin colour during the game was Kenny's comment about picking the lock. Other than that, it's mostly just people talking about it on forums. Maybe it's because I'm white, I don't really care about Lee being black. I understand why people do though.

[G]uys, skin color/gender/ability might not matter to YOU, when YOU see people who look like you all the time, but it does matter to lots of other people. I'll admit that I probably can't understand even close to entirely because I'm white what it's like to try to find positive media as a person of color, but I am a minority in at least two other ways that impact my life on a daily basis.

These debates often result in intra-fan conflict (Hills 2014a:98, Scodari 1998:175-7), yet they also highlight other forms of intersectional politics (Gatson and Reid 2011, Stanfill 2011, Scodari 2011, Ferreday 2015, Scott 2017) including race and gender (Brown 2001:132). Whilst there is a recognition of black marginality and the need for more positive representations as well as greater visibility, some fans attempt to racially depoliticise Lee's body:

[S]o in order to relate to a character he has to be the same race of you? I am white and could totally relate to Lee.

I don't see what race has to do with it. Personally, three of my favorite survival horror... main characters are black - and I'm not. A good character is a good character, doesn't matter what they look like.

I think it would be cool to see less white adult males as the main protagonist in Video Games, but I really don't care that much. If it's a good character it doesn't matter the race.

For some, the speculative dystopian fiction of *TWD* is post-racial as its texts offer enough of a departure from the real world that *TTTWD* supposedly does not or cannot engage with contemporary cultural politics/issues. Resonating with previous audience-based research on *TWD*'s racial depictions (Johnson 2015:260-2), criticism is aimed at those who read the abject (hyper)diegesis through a civic discourse, with politicised responses being dismissed as overly emotive (ibid:272). Conversely, those who focus on racial representations within these texts

reject depoliticising interpretations, reading *TTTWD*'s narrative structures and character depictions as problematic both diegetically – there is a lack of black survivors in a largely black and ethnically diverse part of the U.S. and a reductive depiction of black masculinity – and culturally, given the fact that Lee, as a black male lead, doesn't reflect the large-scale marginalisation of such bodies within North American media. For instance, as a university lecturer he subverts the traditional hypermasculine depictions of black masculinity that have led to cultural fears and systematic Othering (Brown 2001:170-1).

For some, Lee's race is not a key point in his character construction. Rather, his character is conveyed through his relationship with, and role as protector of, Clementine, reiterating the male-centred serial/masculinity-in-crisis of the overall franchise discussed in Chapter 2 (Bennett 2015). Posts both politicise and depoliticise Lee, often in relation to posters' own senses of racial identity. However, this is not a simple racial dichotomy of black players' politicisation and white players' race refusal. Some black fans note that they do not necessarily read race into the game, instead valuing the quality of storytelling (Brown 2001:16,110). Likewise, to only speak of black and white fans is to neglect other forms of identity that shape players' affective engagements with the text and the gamer/fan community (ibid:8). One thread asks, '[w]ould you like to see more races, ethnic groups and nationalities?', and included transcultural responses asking for Irish, Latino, Australasian, and Asian characters, all debated in relation to diegetic southern U.S. geography. This evidences how audiences negotiate *TTTWD* at individual, textual, fan-cultural, and transcultural levels. Consequently, discourses of nationality are negotiated here through audience interactions with one another and the fan object (Athique 2016:15).

Therefore, despite the game providing reduced player agency<sup>117</sup>, myriad points of affective engagement – the gradational intensities of responses operating in abject spectrums – are informed by individuals' race and culture within fans' performance of self-identity, with the potential for multiple/fragmentary moments of character identification. Fans can frame the game not only through wider cultural politics resonant with their real world identity, but they can also reject such politicising stances, drawing on other aspects of personal identity and shaping how they play the game (Froschauer 2014, Booth 2014:26-7, Taylor et al 2015). Moreover, affective engagement can be carried over from *TWD*-as-hyperdiegetic. As Klastrup and Tosca note of networked transmedia consumption by fans, '[e]xperience is always

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<sup>117</sup> 'The same characters will eventually die or go missing by the end of the series no matter what the player does, and no matter how many times they play through the game' (Smethurst and Craps 2015:280).

informed by experiences in the past: in this case... prior engagements with the cultural product and interactions with others around this product. In sum... the cultural and aesthetic experience of transmedia objects is not fixed but in flux.’ (2016:108-9). Resultantly, ‘user engagement with transmedia worlds... [can recapture] particular experiences over and over again’ (ibid:109), or, as has been evidenced with *TTWD*, it can offer new experiences which challenge existing experiences related to that storyworld. Such ‘extended’ readings of *TWD*, made across media and by a range of audiences, reiterate the argument that ‘there can be no singular context... through which to read horror texts’ (Hills 2011b:110).

To conclude, whilst *TWD* as tentpole TV offers serial and thematic connectivity via ‘mastermind narration’ (Clarke 2010:124), the multiplicity of the franchise means audiences can enter the abject landscape from a number of texts and in a variety of ways (Hassler-Forest 2014:99-104). Some of these texts retell and remediate previous narratives, whilst others provide diverging narrative trajectories that enrich audiences’ understanding of the storyworld (O’Sullivan 2013, Jenkins 2013b:374), encouraging ‘forensic fandom’. Moreover, as serialised television and transmedia texts, *TWD* rewards repeat viewing, reading, and playing ‘by the discovery of recurring motifs’ (Hassler-Forest 2014:93; Gray 2008:42, Davis 2008:64-5, Klinger 2010:3-4, Linder 2014:ix). This repeatability, as argued throughout the thesis, provides the layering effect by which past experiences inform subsequent interactions. Abject spectrums are thus built upon new experiences, such as the consumption of paratexts, but also the re-experiencing of content we are familiar with (Duffett 2013b:81). As the data shows, one black fan’s abject spectrum moves from finding the representational/ideological framework of black masculinity in *TWD*’s T-Dog problematic to the nuanced and developed characterisation of Lee in *TTWD*.

Relatedly, consuming new texts and gaining new lived experiences operates alongside the movement of culture – the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 or the rise in racial-conflict between North American citizens and the police, for instance – and this also (re)moulds abject spectrums (see Click 2017). We see this in how audiences move from assessing black masculinity in *TWD* as problematic (given its passive role in relation to hegemonic white male heroes) to viewing the zombification of black males in *FTWD* as reflective of wider Othering present within culture. The relationship between the textual and cultural experiences accounts for individual and collective responses (Hills 2002a:108): for instance, there has been little criticism aimed at *TWD* over other racial or ethnic depictions – such as Korean, Latino, or Maori – but this is a period where these ethnicities are not necessarily at the forefront of wider mainstream civic

debates within North America. Such politicised and depoliticised bodies attest that what ‘one community sees as political, another may declare to be apolitical’ (Jenkins and Shresthova 2016:283). Thus, while serial television might reward consumers for transmedia and/or repeat consumption, audiences’ identities also inform the (repeat) motifs read in the mediated texts. As has been seen in all three *TWD* texts, race has become a ‘discursive prioritisation’ for many audience members, bringing characters of colour to the fore in reading TV/transmedia narratives by evaluating the abject storyworld and those who dwell within it against their own experiences. Consequently, for these audiences the black male body is ‘a moving point of reference’ (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:44). As an online and cultural nexus, these audience voices can overlap, harmonise, or refract each other to varying degrees. Nevertheless, individuals write/perform their own racial identity online through their relationship with *TWD* and its representations. Thus, this section has shown how it is not only trained academics who can undertake ideological readings of texts, but that audiences’ abject spectrums can focus on the thematic deconstruction of texts, especially when lived identity has also been politicised. During times of wider political unrest, these black audiences favour ideological responses. Thus, we see how in-process phenomenological, cultural, and transmedia contexts play salient roles in the shaping of abject spectrums.

Unlike my previous examples that rely on ongoing seriality and an expansive intratextual hyperdiegesis so that audiences can form affective engagements with characters and storylines (Jowett and Abbott 2013:53), *MOH*’s anthology TV horror does not utilise such structures. Rather, the text relies on fans’ paratextual knowledge of the genre ‘masters’ who have created episodes, the aesthetic spectacle of horror, and a closed narrative format (ibid:41-2). It is unsurprising, then, that online commentary critically engages with these aspects far more than focusing on the texts’ storyworlds. In this instance, the ‘discursive prioritisation’ of J-horror and/or Asia Extreme sees fans negotiate the ‘quality’ TV discourse of Showtime’s *MOH* (Arriagada and Cruz 2014:153, Bruns 2008:2), using their knowledge of this pre-existing textual cluster/cycle (Mittell 2004:16-17) to inform their fan and anti-fan stances towards the two East Asian episodes (Harman and Jones 2013, Gray 2003:65). Here, the audience explores aesthetics of abjection linked to graphic horror, reading such aesthetics as common in cinema but rare on television (Teurlings 2017). In this instance, abject spectrums operate through an intertextual framework. Subsequently, whilst abjection is culturally constructed, we also need to account for this model when it is negotiated in transcultural systems. Subsequently, I revise Bhabha’s theorisation of third space to consider how transcultural audiences construct and

authenticate a certain discourse of Japan that is informed by, and informs their readings of, related media content (Bhabha 1988:11-3). In doing so, third space is ‘pluralized and expanded to cover... [a] manifold [of] transcultural negotiations [and interactions]’ (Schulz-Engler 2009:155), beyond postcolonial/migrant examples (Bhabha 1985, 1988, 2000).

### **3.4. *MOH*’s Neo-Cult Brand Abjection Versus Transcultural Fans’ ‘Third Space Construction’ of Japan**

Whereas abject spectrums that operate within an ergodic intratextual system consider the procedural pattern of texts consumed within a transmedia nexus (e.g. *TWD*), in this section abject spectrums function within an *intertextual* system based on texts that are consumed and clustered within a generic corpus. This produces textual hierarchies that inform these transcultural fans’ abject spectrums in relation to the *MOH* episodes. As argued in Chapters 3 and 4, Tartan’s branding of East Asian material via textual clustering under the banner ‘Asia Extreme’ was subsequently appropriated by Showtime in *MOH*’s neo-cult TV horror (Hills 2013e). This is demonstrated in Miike Takashi’s extreme episode ‘Imprint’ which presents incest, prostitutes, infanticide, rape, and torture, and Norio Tsuruta’s ‘Dream Cruise’ which implements key J-horror generics such as the crawling female ghost covered in dark black hair. Both directors present a narration of nation reflecting genre and culture (Bhabha 1997:14) that mark the episodes as Japanese. But whilst this branding frames Miike as a genre-transgressing shock auteur and Norio as a heritage figure, such paratextuality is not passively accepted by online fans who evidence critical stances towards both film-makers and their films (see Barker et al 2007:130, Martin 2015:102-3,114). Whilst transcultural fandom ‘is tied to... positive recognition of the country of origin and its culture in general’ (Lee 2014:202), fans of Asia Extreme/J-horror cinema on the *Snowblood Apple* and *The Doll Masters* forums display anti-fan sensibilities in their affective engagements with the episodes (Chin and Hitchcock-Morimoto 2013). These forums evidence pop-cosmopolitanism in forming their ‘own intelligentsia... critics, historians, translators, and educators’ (Jenkins 2006b:170). Whilst this centres largely on Asia Extreme and J-horror film, these fans are also heavily interested in wider Japanese culture, cinema, and media<sup>118</sup>, using both popular culture and pedagogical

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<sup>118</sup> For instance, on threads such as ‘History of Japanese Horror Films’ and ‘Japan Society Film Center’.

arguments as part of their fan identity (Hills 2002a:2, Sandvoss 2005:147). But for Huddart, ‘the pedagogical is [also] caught up in the logic of the performative’ (2006:109) that forms third space meaning-making.

Noting the postmodern/postcolonial potential for disrupting traditional colonial borders (2004:346), Bhabha warns against overstating completely borderless integration. He argues, via hybrid global flows and the meeting of cultures through contact zones, that conceptual language and discourses, images, and exchanges of signs circulated through cultural commodities all ‘limit’ space (ibid, see also Athique 2016:15). Within third space these limitations of culture occur through acts of translation that create ‘sites of meaning’ (Bhabha 1990a:4) through ‘cultural discourse’ (ibid). When applied to transcultural fandom, then, we can ask what discourses are present that create knowledge and meaning through fans’ translations of texts (Rosbach 2015:87): how does this inform a liminal understanding of the culture that the championed media comes from, and how does it instil value in both the fan objects and indigenous space? By analysing third space and its cultural translations, my research is able to go beyond reductive orientalist readings of transcultural horror fandom (see Pett 2017) to consider how responses are contextual.

As noted in the Literature Review, the ‘[t]ransparency of references’ create a colonial presence in the colonial text (Bhabha 1985:150) but indigenous texts foster alternative references whereby transcultural fans can reinscribe cultures through textual knowledge/interaction using screen media images (ibid:152), via what Matt Hills terms ‘cult geographies’ (2002a:145). For Edward Soja, ‘Thirdspace’ sees a ‘recombination and extension’ of the “‘real” material’ of Firstspace experience with the “‘imagined” representation of spatiality’ (1996:6), where Japan is both real as a place and producer of content, and also symbolically imagined by transcultural fandoms (Annett 2014:205-6).

Hills analyses fans’ ‘reading-for-cultural-difference’ as a means of evidencing quality in J-horror films compared to their ‘mainstream’ Hollywood remakes (2005b:168). Yet posts can indicate reading-for-cultural-difference strategies that, whilst still performing subcultural capital (ibid:168-9), overtly critique what is wrong with the episodes. In the process, transcultural fans’ abject spectrums are informed by ‘scopic regimes’, i.e. discursive reading strategies that construct Japan and Japanese content through an intertextual matrix of discursively clustered texts (Urry and Larsen 2011:2). As Gray writes, ‘genres and texts... change meanings as they travel the planet, according to their different paratextual entourage’

(2010:65). Again, we see third space formations whereby screen language – the brand-specific abjection that operates both diegetically and paratextually (see Chapters 3 and 4) – intersects with fan language and phenomenological experience around the corpus of Asia Extreme and J-horror texts that are canonised within the community (Mowitt 2005:28). In this instance, abject spectrums are shaped by discursive clusterings of particular cultural/generic texts (Mittell 2004:16-17).

Bhabha suggests ‘all forms of culture are in some way related to each other, because culture is a signifying or symbolic activity... [through] interpellative practices’ (1990c:209-10). It is through online enunciation that fans deconstruct ‘Asia Extreme’/J-horror content but also construct a ‘purified’ form of Japan in the process via textual clustering. Thus, abject spectrums function at an intertextual level pertaining to this generic corpus. As discussed in the Literature Review, ‘the purification of space, through the maintenance of territorial boundaries and frontiers... aims to secure both protection from, and positional superiority over, the external other’ (Robins 1991:43; Hebdige 1979:39). As such, this Chapter analyses how transcultural fans’ authenticate and/or delegitimise *MOH*’s Japanese/American co-produced texts. These audiences’ abject spectrums focus predominantly on the aesthetics of on-screen abjection over the episodes’ ability to elicit affective responses and/or to offer ideological subtext (see fig.3.).

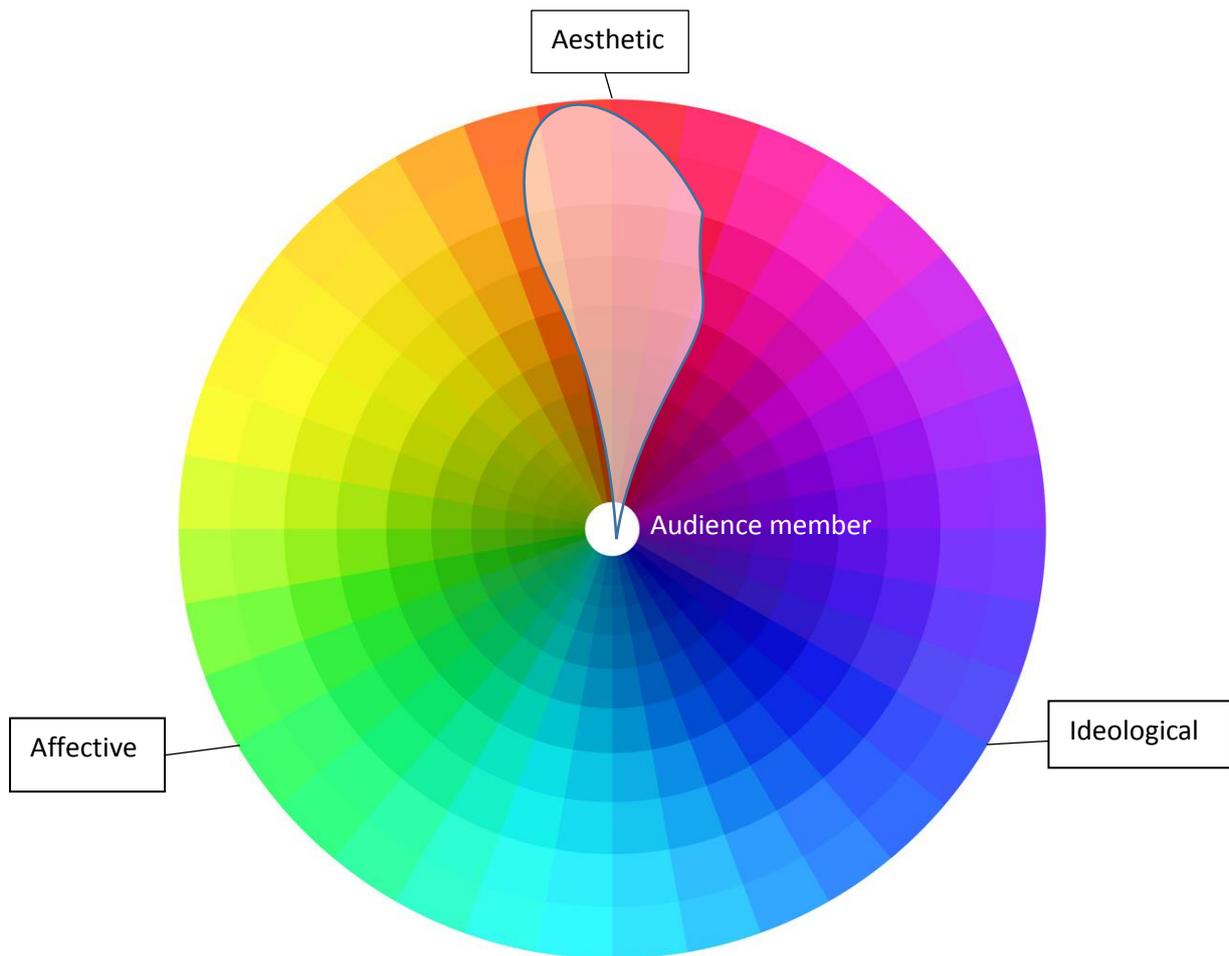


Fig.3. An abject spectrum that illustrates how the aesthetics of abjection are being responded to, with audiences largely reading *through* the text since we can see that for these individuals the text is not causing emotive affects.

While posters frequently make reference to ‘his’ films, recognising an authorial oeuvre, this also provides the basis through which Miike is critiqued (Gray 2010:108-9). Fans note that what they ‘love about his movies so much is that they are so different’, and also that Miike’s ‘movies are different from the norm and very different from each other’. However, for others, Miike ‘lacks the consistency of [Takeshi] Kitano who makes constantly great movies... I’m always interested to know what he’s up to... [b]ut to me he’s a little overrated’. Comparisons to other cult figures such as Takeshi group Miike’s work aesthetically with similar Japanese directors, but the thread also comments on his extensive and prolific output (Mes 2006:10, Storms 2013:11). Quantity does not simply equal quality in fans’ eyes: ‘maybe some quality control would be nice’, argues one poster. In fact, Miike’s volume of output is read as implying a lack of authorial voice, with some arguing that he fails to offer subtext in his films, and that

he ‘has [very little]... vision at all... just shock, and that’s it’. Such criticisms position Miike as ‘a director-for-hire’ (Mes 2003:10), rather than a visionary auteur.

In Norio’s case, the volume of fan discussion is far less than that related to Miike. Instead, the clustering of films provides meaning-making around a wider J-horror canon, reinforced by Tartan’s branding (Gray 2010:35-6), with fans discussing aesthetic and thematic discourses as markedly Asian. However, such putative clusterings are not wholly accepted by all fans, although posters still use their knowledge of the Asia Extreme and J-horror catalogue as a means of shaping and performing fan identity, critically engaging with these directors (Kahn-Harris cited in Hagen 2014:227). Thus, fans generate multiple meanings through the act of discursive/generic clustering, going beyond affirmational audience types – the masculinised ‘fanboy’ or the art-house patron – that are assumed and targeted by Tartan (Smith 2013), and displaying *appropriation* of ‘Asia Extreme’ as a paratextual knowledge structure (Pett 2013, 2017), hermeneutically constructing discourses of Japan.

Concurrently, the very structuring of the *MOH* anthology series creates a format that encourages viewers to compare episodes and their respective directors, allowing for ‘the ornamentation of connoisseurship’ (Frey 2016:90) through which fans perform/construct their online identities. For instance, Miike’s name is discursively aligned with other (Western) horror directors in an example of (inter)textual clustering led by genre figureheads, thereby raising certain expectations about the director’s contribution to the series: ‘John Carpenter, Tobe Hooper, Takashi Miike, John Landis, Dario Argento, Stuart Gordon... what do they all have in common. They’re Master[s] of Horror, of course’. However, Norio is singled out in online fans’ posts, differentiating his name and his body of work from these horror ‘Masters’. Both fans and anti-fans use connoisseurship discourses to mark out what are seen as (in)authentic texts and directors, whilst performing fan authenticity (Hills 2005a:80,203).

Prior to the release of ‘Imprint’, some fans were excited about Miike’s contribution: ‘I... think it’s DAMN cool that he’s even recognized over here for being a “Master of Horror”’. Others take both fan and anti-fan stances in the same post: ‘I bought... [‘Imprint’]... because of my love/hate relationship with Miike’. Once the episode had been viewed, posters evidenced a range of responses. Some saw ‘Imprint’ in a positive light:

Highly recommended as with Takeshi Miike stuff [sic].

Certainly not for people that are kind of squeamish... Still, a good episode of a great series.

I've only seen "Imprint" and "Pick Me Up" out of this series. I thoroughly enjoyed the former and hated the latter.

I thought it was pretty good – had some great cinematography in it and some pretty horrific censor baiting imagery (it is supposedly Masters of Horror after all).

Points of fan praise largely revolve around the cinematic aesthetic of 'Imprint', its abject spectacle, and high production values that link the text with quality cinematic horror/television (Abbott 2009:14, Newman and Levine 2012:4, Jowett and Abbott 2013:11). However, others reverted back to previous criticisms of Miike, namely that he is not genuinely an auteur (Rawle 2014:226):

[W]hat a piece of tripe... Score one for the "Miike is overrated" crowd. I thought the episode was garbage... I think it was a stupid decision to do this kind of episode in full English dialogue. Billy Drago's acting was horrible in those parts he had to actually talk (he was a cool looking character through). The English by others (ie Japanese) went from very bad to pretty good, but it wasn't natural to me at any point to watch this kind of episode in English... The episode was very brutal. Too brutal for me... Too much violence for the sake of violence. Too bad script and too bad acting. The episode *looked* good though.

I think Imprint is the first Miike film to have actually disappointed and bored me. Billy Drago's acting irritated me too and the Japanese actors should have spoken their native language with English subtitles (oh well, I guess that wouldn't be mainstream enough for a TV series...) and the violence just got tiresome. Seriously, the torture scene *bored* me.

I... felt rather uncomfortable with the overly long torture scene... and... well, pretty much everything in the final act. really. It seemed to me like Miike was throwing things in just for shock value. Yes, I know... that's his reputation, but when he stops being creative and starts trading solely on cheap "gotcha" moments, that's when he needs to seriously consider retiring.

As noted, transcultural fans' abject spectrums showed strong aesthetic responses to the on-screen abjection over subtextual and/or emotive readings. Criticism of the infamous torture

scene illustrates how fans do not necessarily see the extremity of East Asian imagery as a marker of textual, generic, or cultural quality (Pett 2017:40-1). Fans can be, and are, critical of such visceral imagery. Interestingly, while many comments criticise the choice to have Japanese actors speaking English rather than Japanese, finding this dialogue highly problematic, unnatural and inauthentic to Asia Extreme horror which should be spoken in its native tongue and accompanied by subtitles (Lee 2014:197-8), the second comment ascribed such a choice to television as a ‘mainstream’ medium. Thus, despite the graphic ‘quality’ TV horror of *MOH* being markedly non-mainstream (Totaro 2010:87, Jowett and Abbott 2013:9-13), for these fans the fact that the episode was not in Japanese, but in ‘mainstream’ English, makes it inauthentic. Rejecting the neo-cult niche targeted by Showtime through paratextual and textual material, posters perform anti-fandom of both the text and the medium it was constructed for, highlighting the arbitrary distinction of cult versus mainstream as shifting markers (see Thornton 1995:99-101, Hannerz 2013).

Moreover, the central cause of the episode being pulled from broadcast, violent abject imagery, becomes a negative aspect for these posters; it is either viewed as violence with no subtext (reiterating previous fan arguments), as Miike selling out by playing on his *Western* reputation as a shocking auteur, or simply as boring. In these instances, the aesthetics of abjection are challenged. What is evident from all posts, however, is fans’ pre-existing knowledge of Miike and his work, located within a transcultural fan context: this paratextual repertoire tends to conflate, rather than contrast, fan/anti-fan stances (Jones 2015, Hannerz 2013:51, Duffett 2014:169 Gray and Murray 2016:361, Gray 2010b, 2017:81). But whereas ‘Imprint’ and Miike were criticised for narrative content yet largely praised on aesthetic grounds, Norio’s heavy use of J-horror iconography alongside his use of drama became a locus for fan/anti-fan engagement.

Prior to the broadcast of ‘Dream Cruise’, some fans were pleased with *MOH*’s choice of Norio, explaining how they ‘liked Premonition, [and] Ring o was okay’. One poster makes the interesting remark, ‘Tsuruta? He’s a good director but neither *Ring o* nor *Kakashi* were actually scary, he’s a much better at drama’. This evaluation of Norio forms around him being more skilled within drama than horror. Interestingly, as Chapter 3 argued, ‘Dream Cruise’ evidences strong J-dorama elements within its horror narrative, given its use of melodrama, female emancipation, and its focus on wealth/spending power.

Other fans, however, thought this was ‘a strange choice of director!’, professing ‘they would have preferred to see one of my favourite directors get that opportunity.... [Kiyoshi] Kurosawa’. Others concurred: ‘he’s not the greatest choice for a Master of Horror episode.... [Hideo] Nakata, [Kiyoshi] Kurosawa, or maybe even [Takashi] Shimizu would have been better’. Thus, while neo-cult TV seeks out pre-existing fans (Hills 2013e:291), this targeting is in turn met by pre-existing fan knowledge (Duffett 2013b:80), encouraging an analytical comparison between industrial and fan-led paratextual framings. Some posters evidence strong anti-fan rhetoric with regard to Norio’s selection, referring to his previous work:

Now we know that Garris and Showtime are just plucking names out of a hat. Norio Tsuruta?... [A]t least we know in advance that the token Japanese segment will probably be disappointing.

They seem to be going for stranger and stranger “Masters” of horror. When the real masters are busy they have to go for alternatives.

[I]t’s sort of a misnomer calling it *Masters of Horror* now, isn’t it? It ought to be called *Semi-Reasonable Directors Who Don’t Have Anything Better To Do of Horror*, but that’s not quite as catchy.

Such bewilderment at Garris’s choice of Norio also shows that fans position J-horror/Asia Extreme directors hierarchically, further demonstrating how these audiences critically engage with the textual cluster (Martin 2015:144, 156-8). Moreover, posters seem suspicious of Norio’s involvement, reading it as a ‘token’ Western gesture by Garris to reach out to the J-horror fan community. When the TV episode was aired, those who disliked ‘Dream Cruise’ largely did so based on arguments that it was too derivative of J-horror film. Resultantly, these fans’ abject spectrums typically centred on the aesthetics of abjection within the episode, culturally translating it as imitative of J-horror rather than as autonomously artistic:

I thought it was okay but overly derivative and thus somewhat painful at the same time... The ghost was, yet again, a crawling and moaning black-haired woman in a water-soaked outfit, out for revenge against the living... The whole thing could’ve used more running time and some better development overall... but it could be worse. It’s certainly better than several of the MoH Season 1 episodes.

The generic attributes of J-horror often praised by fans are, in fact, the very things that make ‘Dream Cruise’ problematic for these posters. Conversely, those who defend Norio do so based on the episode’s status as an adaptation of ‘quality’ source material:

The two lead actors are Ryo Ishibashi and Yoshino Kimura. The storyline to me sounds pretty good and it will be directed by Norio Tsuruta and has been adapted from a Koji Suzuki story.

Norio Tsuruta’s episode... was aired couple days ago. Did anyone catch it? I’ve heard so much negativity about the ep[isode] so I won’t bother to check it, though. I just realized it’s based on Koji Suzuki’s short story.

The involvement of Ryo Ishibashi and Yoshino Kimura in ‘Dream Cruise’ is discussed by fans. Both had appeared in previous J-horror vehicles providing cult celebrity status grounding the episode within the genre (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:53, Hills 2003:6, 2010g:238). Moreover, citing the original author of *Ringu*, Koji Suzuki, adds a lustre of legitimacy and quality to the text given *Ringu*’s figurehead status within the J-horror canon (Newman and Levine 2012:4, Dew 2007:66).

To summarise, unlike fans presenting a ‘rejection discourse’ that argues ‘shows are past their “golden ages”’ (Williams 2015:103), rejection discourse here means fans disavowing these episodes as a result of the TV series’ use of J-horror and Asia Extreme cinema in its attempt to create neo-cult horror TV. Constructed by the fandom itself as being self-consciously cult (Hills 2013:291), *MOH* is read as appropriating fan objects’ themes, aesthetics, tone, and/or producers. This creates an unusual form of anti-fandom that, due to extensive knowledge about J-horror’s texts/genre, rejects TV episodes that are seen as inauthentically copying favoured objects. But in the process, fans reinforce a third space construction of Japan via ‘grid[s] of... [their] own choosing’ (Soja 1996:140) that also form part of their fan identity. Japan as a communally-constructed space comes into being via the hermeneutic practices of this transcultural audience, framing their engagement with other genre texts. Thus, it is not only wider culture that is fundamental to abject spectrums, but also genre as an intertextual grid of knowledge that shapes responses to screen abjection (Athique 2016:151).

### 3.5. Conclusion

This Chapter has analysed online posts that explore how various audiences' reading and responses help demonstrate my abject spectrum model acknowledging individual, (sub)cultural, and spatio-temporal factors as shaping responses. With the model providing a responsive field that oscillates and/or blends affective, ideological, and aesthetic reactions, I have demonstrated how audiences watching the case studies evidence difference responses to their on-screen abjection whilst also highlighting how different contextual factors such as wider culture, phenomenological lived identity, ergodic intratextual pathways, intertextual clustering, and transcultural translation of texts can all play a part in shaping individuals' abject spectrums. Consequently, the Chapter has shown that

audiences can discursively reframe and reshape textual material via narrative discourses, shifting subtext to text, reading through specific characters and relationships, emphasising narrative (in)coherence, or elevating seriality and continuity into key storytelling principles. In such a process, the "text itself" does not become wholly irrelevant... but neither is it a determinant of narrative activations (Hills 2015b:153).

With *ITF*, the hybridised aspects of horror and social realism ask fans to read the marginalised zombie body through both a humanistic and political lens. Thus, the queer potential of abjection in its ability to subvert order and dominant oppression are points of viewer identification through I-zombie subjectivity. Moreover, the abject ambiguity of the undead body allows for a range of ideological readings to be made. This polysemy of readings strengthens the case for *ITF* as 'quality' horror TV, as multiple arguments for such status are made alongside its ability to emotionally move audiences. For these audiences, *ITF*'s subversion of horror tropes around the sentient zombie facilitates a strong engagement with the text's thematic potential and emotive qualities within their abject spectrums.

Whilst *ITF* fans demonstrate melded affective/ideological abject spectrums, in comparison, *TWD*'s marginalising of the black male body within its narrative is brought to the fore by audiences of colour. Here, abject spectrums greatly diminish affective or emotive responses, but present strong thematic/ideological responses to the TV horror that provide an overriding discursive prioritisation in reading strategies. Moreover, these readings are informed by individuals' ethnicity and lived experience of race as linked to wider cultural relations between African-Americans and the State, intersecting with diegetic representations of race. Considering the negotiation of fans' self-identity in textual and cultural contexts, the Chapter

has examined racial discourses which (re)frame narratives (Hills 2015b:168). With *TWD*, anti-fan discourse is aimed at subordinated black males who assist the white male hero. With *FTWD*, criticisms shift to the black Other zombie body. The former stresses the inability to survive or take agency in the abject landscape. The latter is about being abject within a culture. In doing so, one might interrogate discourses of ‘quality’ ascribed to *TWD*/male-centred serials (Clark 2014).

Conversely, *TTTWD* as a textual shifter moves these ideological debates onto its black male lead. For many black fans, the game tackles the very issues of the previous two texts in both its representations of race and its ludic qualities as a video game. Conversely, a number of non-black players’ abject spectrums showed a refuting of ideological readings in favour of stressing emotive and immersive qualities of the gamer in general. This is not to essentialise black identity (Brown 2001:53): rather, I have analysed audience negotiations with particular representations of black masculinity across a transmedia franchise and during a time of wider cultural sensitivity. Audiences engage with the systems and characterisations of abjection within the (hyper-)diegesis, but do so informed by their own experiences and perceptions about their position in society. By mapping the franchise onto wider public discourse about the treatment of black men by patriarchal institutions and forces, these popular cultural texts can be ‘mobilised subversively... consumed in different ways by various social groups’ (Connell and Gibson 2003:273). Moreover, the Chapter considers how the phenomenological dynamics of intratextual consumption shape abject spectrums. The model highlights how any ‘additions to that textual set may play into and reorder the relations between texts which previously comprised that set, and consequently, modify the cultural and ideological business that is conducted around and in relation to those texts’ (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:52). Consequently, texts and responses to them can be ‘overridden’ by subsequent textual consumption (ibid:57), whether that involves new original stories, remakes, adaptations, or the re-consumption of older content.

Lastly, I examined how abject spectrums operate at an intertextual level whereby Asia Extreme and J-horror transcultural fans use their fannish sensibilities and textual experiences within anti-fan rhetorics directed at *MOH*’s Japanese episodes’ abject aesthetics (Giuffre 2014:53). From an industry and audience perspective these genre texts exist within established transcultural frameworks of auteurist ‘knowledge’. This is most pronounced in the ‘transnational commerce of... popular auteur[s]’ Miike and Norio prior to their *MOH* offerings, given how they have been framed in relation to these TV episodes as discursively neo-cult.

This supports the argument that ‘the transnational commerce of a popular auteur ... is a fluid process dependent upon various factors, including the diverse ways in which subsequent films [or other textual output] are placed in relation to existing configurations of the film industry, public culture and audience response’ (Lee 2008:216).

However, the Chapter questioned and developed pre-existing discussions of Orientalist abjection framed in the West by Tartan’s Asia Extreme brand, analysing fans’ responses to both directors as well as mixed readings of the two episodes as forms of neo-cult/J-horror TV. Through nuanced anti-fandom, we can see how fans display critical stances towards both directors in relation to a fan-generated hierarchy of East Asian/Japanese filmmakers clustered together within J-horror. Such audiences’ abject spectrums display strong aesthetic readings of the episodes premised on textual content, how this relates to the directors’ previous work, and in comparison to a wider intertextual generic canon. Since these responses dominate online discussions, spectrums that evidence ideological and/or emotional responses do not manifest in these forums (though they do on Tumblr, as discussed in Chapter 6). Elements of both fan and anti-fan relationships further make themselves present when fans ‘translate’ the respective *MOH* episodes, with ‘Imprint’ being both championed and chastised as a ‘Miike’ vehicle, whilst responses to ‘Dream Cruise’ largely centred on it being a markedly J-horror text that faltered in its use of culturally-demarcated genre codes. Such fan-cultural and transcultural responses, whilst still adhering to the notion of ‘reading-for-cultural-difference’, read critically and contextualise differences within a framework of quality that considers canonical cinematic material as the barometer by which these TV episodes should be judged. In this case, abject spectrums are framed by (trans)cultural, generic, and aesthetic markers through which the episodes are (de)valued. Resultantly, discourses of Japan as a cult geography are hermeneutically sealed within third space via transcultural fans’ knowledge frameworks, authenticating certain ‘Japanese’ content/representations whilst rejecting incorrect material/depictions that subvert their construction of ‘Japanese’ space (Athique 2016:11,149). Therefore, we can see how Japan is both a real-world Firstspace and symbolic Thirdspace through communal fan constructions/discussions.

Whilst Chapter Five has explored a range of audience voices, I have focused methodologically (and conventionally) on the *logos* of online postings. However, digital media offers other forms of communication and fan/audience performance. As such, my final Chapter will look at *ITF*, *TWD* and *MOH* fans’ vernacular visual and social media practices. I will focus on sites such as Tumblr and Twitter – where fans utilise images, GIFs and memes (Burgess and Matamoros-

Fernández 2016:83) as ways of dynamically engaging with these texts and their on-screen abjections – in order to further locate individualised abject spectrums which are demonstrated visually *through* online image posts. With *ITF*, fan posts use differentiated visuals relative to the ontological (in)security of the text: when the show is active, fan imagery centres on the characters’ relationships. When the show re-enters production and fans’ ontological security is reinstated, posts use film location images and the actors’ – who play the beloved characters – photos to reinforce a sense of forthcoming diegetic activity. However, when the text becomes post-object (Williams 2015), fans use images of the characters in their undead state as part of their activist language to highlight how the series needs saving. By analysing *ITF* fans’ image posts, I study abject spectrums in a longitudinal form representing in-process and ongoing affective engagement. With *TWD*, black audiences’ anti-fan readings of representations in the series are given visual impact when textual poaching extracts images of black male characters from the text and reframes them within critical memes. Lastly, *MOH* image posts present an aesthetic reevaluation of the episodes as quality TV horror. Again evidencing abject spectrums, these posts use screen grabs from the episodes as visual citations of the most abject parts of the texts. Posters use the tagging feature of Tumblr to denote how this made them feel affectively, grounding them within, rather than outside, of these transcultural fans’ third space discourse of Japan. Thus, Chapter 6 develops the abject spectrum as an audience-centric model by paying attention to popular and image-based Web 2.0 practices which have been neglected in previous TV horror scholarship.

## 6. Screen Grabs and Capturing Audience Responses: Online Image Culture and the Visualisation of Abject Spectrums

### 6.1. Intro

Chapter 4 explored meaning-making around consumption practices via formal and informal flows of Only-Click TV (Harries 2002:172), demonstrating how audiences' abject spectrums are active pre-textually, during broadcast and in response to home media formats and post-object paradigms. The previous Chapter analysed audiences' affective engagement with on-screen abject imagery that evidenced how abject spectrums are polysemic, socio-temporally contextualised, and shaped by phenomenological experiences of intratextual and intertextual networks. Yet both Chapters solely address online writing. Netnography can also investigate posters' 'images, drawings, photography, sound files... and other digital artifacts' (Kozinets 2015:5), and how the textuality of this content enacts identity performance. Concurrently horror, as a body genre (Williams 2004:729), presents a system of excess and spectacle (ibid:728) – ever more frequent in twenty-first century TV horror (Jowett and Abbott 2013:10-3, Abbott 2016a:97) – which offers strong visual figures that are engaged with in creative ways through fans' image-based posts on social media (Woods 2016:84). Resultantly, online image texts can exhibit abject spectrums, as audiences perform a sense of how the text makes them feel and/or how they read that text, also visually bookmarking key images, scenes, and/or characters by screengrabbing from the text itself.

Beginning with *ITF*, as the last two Chapters have shown, the championing of quality by fans has stemmed from Kieren et al's abject construction, facilitating queer discourse that challenges the Othering of marginalised bodies/identities. Moreover, the text's discursive social (sur)realism situates the audience with the sympathetic monster (Woods 2016:94), stressing the subjective nature of abjection (Maylan 2017:278-9) via the I-zombie stance (Abbott 2016a). Resultantly, the series' character-driven components are central to fan engagement (Clarke 2013:48-9, Booth 2012a). Visual posts reiterate this, underscoring the melodramatic relationships between Kieren and other PDS sufferers, and recoding them as non-abject in the process. Furthermore, where Chapter 4 presented fans' ontological insecurity as linked to the abject state of *ITF*, whilst Chapter 5 focused on communal discussions about the narrative during moments of ontological security, Chapter 6 looks at how fan images

navigate these affective positions. Specifically, I consider how images of the second series being filmed, acting as a form of ‘pre-textual poaching’ (Hills 2010d), provided reassurance to fans about the ongoing status of the text at that time. Thus, my analysis of visual data engaging with abject spectrums shows how the shifts in *ITF* fan imagery display *ongoing* phenomenological affective relationships with the series.

Building on the rebuttal of racist characterisation in *TWD* by fans of colour analysed in Chapter 5, and highlighting ideological deconstructions of screen abjection, the second section displays how this is further heightened in visual postings. Not only does this reinforce anti-fan discourses criticising black male marginality, but this rhetoric is brought to the fore in user-generated imagery, namely meme culture. As one fan comments, *TWD* has such a ‘blatant “Black Man problem,”... [that] it has spawned a million memes’. In visual memes, the structured absence and ineptitude of the black body is distilled from *TWD*’s serial narrative via textual poaching. (Anti-)fans also discursively play with the intratextual structures of *TWD*’s different series by editing images that bring sporadic black characters together, using their ironic collective presence to reinforce their marginalisation, and therefore validate audiences’ readings.

If the previous two examples present harmony or exaggeration of (anti-)fan sentiments between online writing and images – they often support each other in the same post – visual posts surrounding *MOH*’s ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’ illustrate alternative affective engagements. Chapters 4 and 5 evidence anti-fan discourse towards these texts, their creators, and Showtime as inauthentic, supported by an intertextual juxtaposition to championed Japanese filmmakers and their texts, which presented audiences’ abject spectrums with heightened responses to the aesthetics of the episodes’ abjection. By considering transcultural translations of abjection, the previous Chapter nuanced Bhabha’s third space model to demonstrate how the ‘scopic regimes’ and knowledge frameworks of transcultural fans on the *Snowblood Apple* and *Doll Master* forums constructed discourses around Japan as a cult geography, with the sites providing a ‘contact zone’ that presents translation taking place via posters’ writing. However, Tumblr provides an alternative contact zone that sees fans instead offer positive, authenticating readings of the episodes, stressing how fandom can provide shifting contexts around the third space construction of Japan. As Sandra Annett notes in her application of Bhabha, ‘understanding... transcultural fan community is not about “adding up” all of these [Asia Extreme/J-horror] texts and arguments into a single holistic vision, but a process of “adding to a conversation that is continually ongoing”’ (2014:206). Likewise, considering the ‘effects of

cultural negotiation in [third space] translation not only offers new perspectives on the texts under study but also provides insight into the [sub]cultures and... practices involved' (Rosbach 2015:78). Therefore, comparing two transcultural audiences in two different spaces – fan-created forums and the social media site Tumblr – who translate the texts and Japan via two different practices (writing and visual posts) shows how the textuality of translation shapes the meanings of these episodes, their creators, and Japan. Alongside image construction, this Chapter considers the salience of social media curation, a relatively underexplored area (Stanoevska-Slabeva et al 2012:2), to analyse how posters select, highlight, and share meaningful content with likeminded audiences (Hogan and Quan-Haase 2010:313, Zubiaga et al 2014:2) within a quotational discourse (Bore 2017:13). Here, fans champion twenty-first century horror texts by highlighting the most visually abject and affective parts of their respective narratives as markers of 'quality' horror (Gillan 2016:15). Moreover, certain images pertain to a 'knowing' audience, stressing (and imagining) other fans' repeat viewing.

Conversely, an alternative type of post selects key moments from the episodes but (re)frames them as comedic, undercutting the abject effect of the episodes altogether. Thus, I consider how abject spectrums are not only polysemic, but also that a range of affects may be present in responses to on-screen abjection. While image posts still reveal the abject imagery of the *MOH* episodes, some display humorous and parodic responses (Booth 2012b:76-7). Therefore, the visuality of online image culture can present the phenomenological qualities (Bollmer and Guinness 2017) of audiences' abject spectrums both in snapshot form – a post which highlights an instance in the text that an individual found emotionally, ideologically, and/or aesthetically salient – and via an ongoing engagement with the case studies that demonstrates shifting affective responses over time. This is evident in *ITF* fans' use of programme imagery.

## **6.2. Fleshing Out Ontological (In)Security: *ITF*'s Supportive Fan Imagery**

Faye Woods argues that the 'authenticity' that stems from British youth television is displayed by 'its frank attitude towards "explicit" content – swearing, sexuality, drink and drugs... combined with a tendency towards emotional bleakness and a fondness for the mundane everyday' (2016:69). Such authenticity manifests in *ITF* (see Chapter 1) (ibid:70). She notes that the candidness surrounding controversial subject matter is 'balanced on a sliding scale with an investment in emotion and intimacy, a drawing close that connects with the melodrama

inherent in explorations of the intensity of youth experience' (ibid). It is melodrama, over candid bleakness, which dominates fans' *ITF* imagery.

Fan posts champion the text's emotive characteristics (Moriomoto forthcoming), focusing on Kieren, Rick, Simon, and Amy. Moreover, rather than engaging with sympathetic monsters (Abbott 2016a:169) as allegorical of wider cultural Othering (see Chapter 5), abject spectrums indicated strong affective/emotive ideological blending. Fan imagery stresses the melodramatic and romantic intimacy between friends, subduing ideological readings and muting the horror genre coding of the parent text in the process. Moreover, the queer romances of Kieren and Rick, then Kieren and Simon, as well as Kieren and Amy's friendship as 'best dead friends forever', all dominate in both fan art and online visuals where posters upload their own edited images, screen grabs, and/or reposts of BBC3 stills. As a result, images shift away from framing the undead body as abject (Kristeva 1982:5), instead displaying zombie characters as markedly human and focusing on the presence of friendships and relationships over the characters' troubled pasts (see Figs.1-6).



Fig.1. Shows Rick and Kieren together smiling with the text 'Ren + Rick 4ever'.



Fig.2. Shows Kieren shouting at Rick's Father Bill after Bill had killed his son, with Kieren's dialogue superimposed over the image



Fig.3. Kieren and Simon kissing



Fig.4. shows collaged images of Kieren and Simon looking at each other, and the two conversing together



Fig.5. Kieren is removing Simon's make-up, asking him to be who he truly is



Fig.6. Kieren and Amy laughing together with Amy's line 'You're my best dead friend forever' superimposed over the image

Whereas slash fanfic and art queers textual content by creating same-sex/non-heteronormative love interests between characters (Tosenberger 2008a:185-6, Keft-Kennedy 2008:57, Barnes 2015:70), *ITF* fans do not engage with canon subversion (see Tosenberger 2008b), primarily since, much in the way that '*Glee* already "slashes" itself... [by] depicting in canon the kinds of homosexual relationships that used to be the domain of fanfiction' (Ellison 2013:114), the

series itself focuses on queer relationships (Elliott 2016:107). *ITF*'s queer love interests – which Chapter 1 argues address both homosexual (Kieren and Rick/Simon) and heterosexual relationships (Amy and Philip) – are selected and brought to the fore in fan-created ‘shipper’ visuality<sup>119</sup> (Duffett 2013a:198). Such sentiments reinforce arguments made in the Literature Review and Chapter 5 concerning the deep affinity that fans share with the text's characters (Booth 2012a:310). Here, authenticity and quality pertain to characters' relationships rather than to the spectacle of horror. However, as discussed in the previous two Chapters, fan discourse and discussions are concerned with the relative ontological security of *ITF* that links to shifts in fans' ongoing object spectrums. Anxiety manifested in fans' responses between the first and second series, as they feared that *ITF* was not just ‘dormant’ (Williams 2015:191) but already cancelled and ‘post-object’ (Williams 2011b:269). However, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2013 a second series was confirmed (Fig.7).

Reaffirmed ontological security shifts fan discourse away from protest, and also temporarily away from diegetic character relationships. Instead, fans focus on extra-textual qualities such as filming/shot locations and the actors who play beloved characters, providing markers of fan (and textual) authenticity.



Fig.7. BBC3 image post tweet of Kieren half in his undead form and half human, indicating the second series will return in 2014

<sup>119</sup> Mark Duffett explains that, ‘[s]hippers are fans who are much more interested in the triumphs and tribulations of romantic relationships than in other aspects of the dramatic text’ (2013a:198).

*ITF* fans during this period of filming ‘desire foreknowledge... as soon as possible, trading rumours along with “set reports” and photos’ (Hills 2010d:71), with fans ‘pre-textual poaching’ involving shared images of set locations that added weight to their hypotheses (ibid:70; Gwynne 2014, Bennett 2014a:10) (Fig.8). But since fans are emerging from a state of disempowerment and ontological insecurity, these visuals also provide emotional restoration and proof that there is still life in the series, rather than simply acting as spoilers (Jenkins et al 2013:301).



Fig.8. A fan post on Twitter offers a photo of where *ITF* is filmed

Matt Hills notes that with new *Doctor Who*, ‘public filming puts spoiler-gathering fans in opposition to official PR strategy’ (2010d:70). However, during *ITF*’s production, BBC3 offered ample extra-textual/behind-the-scenes images (see Figs.9-12). Shifting from diegetic to non-diegetic visuals added further ontological reinstatement, being used by fans *alongside* pre-textually poached imagery. BBC3’s bids to attract, and align themselves with, young digital audiences, beyond the realm of amalgamating informal and formal media economies (Chapter 4), sees an aesthetic affinity between poached images and official posts, suggesting industry attempts to appease fans, authenticating the *ITF*/BBC3 brand in the process (Woods 2016:243-6).



Fig.9. Luke Newberry and Emily Bevan on their mobile phones whilst on the set.



Fig.10. Emily Bevan and Luke Newberry on Set. BBC3 tweeted '1st peek behind the rainy scenes of [#IntheFlesh!](#) [@Lukewberry](#) tries not to smudge his makeup. He'd suit a smokey eye.'



Fig.11. Emmett Scanlan on set having his hair fixed. BBC3 tweeted 'Looking 4 great hold every time you go out to eat (someone)? Zombie Xtra: stays firm even while slaying. [#InTheFlesh.](#)'



Fig.12. Luke Newberry on set during filming for the second series of *ITF*. BBC3 tweeted 'Gotta keep warm when you have Partially Deceased Syndrome! Here's [@LukeNewberry](#) getting cosy on the [#InTheFlesh](#) set.'

Furthermore, fans also post images of the actors *beyond* set locations, reinforcing the authenticity of the emotional friendships they have with one another (see Figs.13-16). Stein argues that,

[f]ans build on circulating star texts just as they do the characters those stars bring to life, often combining the two or muddying the supposed distinction between fictional and real. Fans make star-focused... fan art... creating star texts as flexible and multiplicitous as any other fan texts (2015:139).

Fans frequently post pre-textual visuals of actors Luke Newberry, Emily Bevan, Harriet Cains, and Emmett Scanlan, and the show's writer Dominic Mitchell, in fun and convivial settings. Such photos are often taken from the cast's social media profiles (Murray 2004, Ellcessor 2009, 2012, Bennett 2014c, Chin and Hills 2008), authenticating their friendships on- and off-screen, and heightening fan-text engagement (Hills 2010g:234).



Fig.13. Harriet Cains, Luke Newberry and Emily Bevan



Fig.14. Luke Newberry, Emily Bevan (above), Harriet Cains (below) and *ITF*'s creator Dominic Mitchell taking a photo together.



Fig.15. Luke Newberry, Harriet Cains and Dominic Mitchell taking a photo at the Royal Television Society North West Awards 2013.

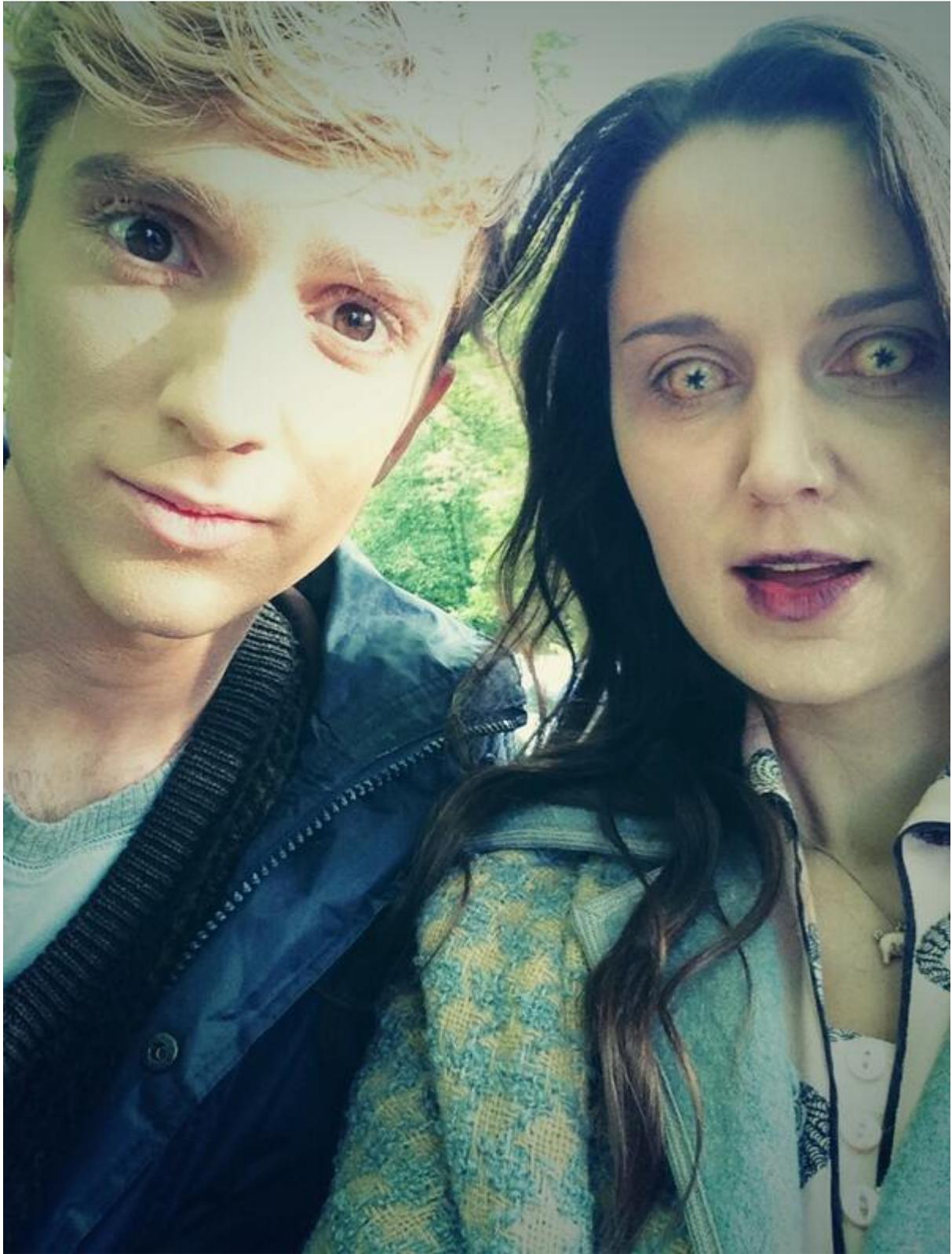


Fig.16. Luke Newberry and Emily Bevan in make-up, taking a photograph together

During broadcast of the second series, fan posts returned to focusing on the relationships of characters within the storyworld, as previously discussed. However, as Chapter 4 argued, when *ITF* became ‘post-object’ then fans endeavoured to move out of their abject state through activist strategies. This included the campaign #saveintheflesh. Alongside textual commentary, images were also used in these strategies. Stressing the ensemble cast as an indicator of quality TV (Lay 2007:236-7), protest imagery also used the relationships of the characters, and how they attempted to save one another, as emotional anchors and visual catalysts for activist engagement (see Figs.18-20). Furthermore, during times of ontological security then fans’ visuals tended to focus on the characters in non-abject states. Activist imagery, however, saw a return of PDS characters, with this imagery emphasising the horror aspects of the text (fig.17.). Here, the undead body mirrors the potentially ‘undead’ state of the text itself:



Fig.17. A fan activist image post shows Kieren, Rick, and Amy in their undead state, with Jem crying and Simon looking pensive, alongside the hashtag #saveintheflesh.



Fig.18. A fan activist image of Simon lying on top of Kieren with the text 'We need you!' directed at the audience. Information about getting the hashtag trending is given, alongside a call to sign and share fan petitions (see Chapter 4).



Fig.19. A fan activist post using an image of Simon grabbing Kieren with a speech bubble superimposed to reflect the necessity and immediacy for audiences to partake in activist strategies.

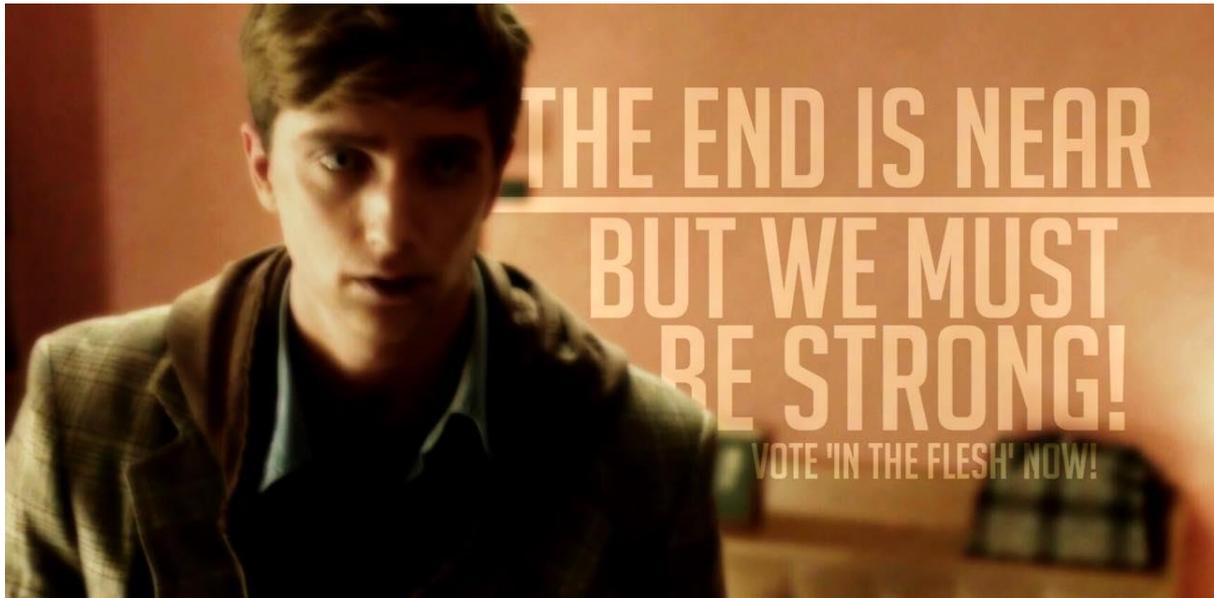


Fig.20. A fan activist post of Kieren. The superimposed text highlights the abject state of the text and the need for fans to come together.

Building on previous Chapters, this section evidences *ITF* fan engagement that, whilst oscillating around the text's sympathetic monsters, is also crucially related to fans' ontological security. When the text is read as active, posts focus on the liveness of the characters and their relationships. During times of uncertainty, extra-textual qualities of the actors who play the characters help to emphasise that the show still has life in it. But as the text becomes 'post-object' then characters are increasingly shown as abject/undead, needing the audience to keep them alive, literalising the 'zombified' text (Williams 2015:168) and potentially the fandom (Whiteman and Metivier 2013:294). Lastly, and by way of introducing my next case study, posts on Twitter edited *ITF* together with *TWD* in the form of a meme that suggested the multi-fandom of both zombie series (Hassler-Forest 2016:3) (Fig.21):



Fig.21. Meme image shows Daryl indicating there is a 'walker' – a term commonly used in *TWD* to refer to zombies, spliced with an image of Kieren Walker, to the bemusement of Daryl.

Much like zombie contagion, a meme, 'similar to a gene that transmits biological information... refers to an idea, belief or image that spreads virally within a culture... [M]emes can self-replicate and mutate as they carry cultural ideas and information' (Harlow 2013:63). Here, humour is derived from the vernacular used in *TWD* to demarcate the zombie Other, a 'walker', being spliced with the undead protagonist's surname from *ITF* (Kieren Walker). However, 'memes are not just for... entertainment' (ibid:64), and anti-fandom towards *TWD*'s marginalisation of black males has used memes as a political tool for activism (ibid).

### **6.3. From the Margins to the Foreground: Textual Image Poaching of *TWD*'s Black Males**

If user-generated/shared visuals show an audience-character affinity in *ITF* fandom, *TWD* images reiterate affective discord between on-screen and real world identities. As shown in the previous Chapter, online posts by black audiences – informed by their self-perceived cultural marginality and mistreatment – challenged racial representations in the TV series, presenting abject spectrums charged by phenomenological identity. In the process, (anti-)fans recode and

re-evaluate the ‘tentpole TV’ text (Hills 2015b:153). Building on this, I explore overarching online images as alternative ‘grids of intelligibility’ (Newman 2010:60) that present intratextual reading strategies of black marginalisation. Here, the trials and tribulations of white protagonists are absented (although a plethora of other images and memes stress whiteness) in favour of focusing on the text’s reductive racial scripts (Simpson 2017:135-6). *TWD* imagery is poached from by audiences who ideologically reinscribe the abject space as reflective of wider race-related issues in the US.

Henry Jenkins notes the tentative relationship between fans and industry, as the former partake in textual poaching from the latter’s content (1992:32-3) by writing fanfic and producing fan art<sup>120</sup> ‘which extends the body of the primary text in directions never predicted by the program’s producers’ (ibid:33). Similarly, internet memes<sup>121</sup> of popular culture provide individual creativity and shared (sub)cultural experience, utilising remix culture to encode meaning (Shifman 2013:365-7). Moreover, we can understand both *form* (memes’ textual dimensions) and *content* (memes’ ideologies) (ibid:365) as engaging with audiences’ abject spectrums that display thematic readings of *TWD* concordant with Chapter 5’s abject spectrum evidenced in logocentric form.

One of the most generic “‘expectations” for many Internet memes... is that they be humorous in some way’ (ibid), acting as ‘a mechanism through which we erect and maintain symbolic boundaries’ (ibid). Political messages can also be translated into ‘memes’ utilising humour for civic engagement ‘to comment on a current issue’ (Jenkins 2016:43), providing (counter-)responses to hegemonic and/or emerging cultural phenomena (Shresthova 2016:66-9, Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson 2015, Jungherr 2012). Furthermore, because of the low-level barriers to creating content (Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson 2015:5), combined with easy spreadability via social media (Jenkins et al 2013:28, Bayerl and Stoykov 2016:1008), memes are evidence of active audiences engaging with media culture. A diverse range of memes engage with *TWD*’s characterisations of black masculinity, or lack thereof. In doing so, these memes reinforce the discourse evident in the *logos* of black audiences analysed in Chapter 5 (Bayerl and Stoykov 2016:1007). Makers of these memes ‘actively intervene in the formation and propagation of [*TWD* and the black male body]... and leave their own mark by modifying it’ (ibid). This is done by isolating the body, undermining textual context/ideology, and hence

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<sup>120</sup> Often creating erotic content.

<sup>121</sup> The term meme was first introduced by biologist Richard Dawkins (1976). In exploring evolutionary theory, Dawkins defined memes as ‘small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread from person to person by copying or imitation’ (Shifman 2013:363)

opening up a space for ‘context flexibility’ (ibid:1014). This largely oscillates around T-Dog being the central black male and yet marginalised in comparison to *TWD*’s white characters, reduced to a racial stereotype (Johnson 2017:17) (see Figs.22-26):



Fig.22 and 23. Memes of T-Dog superimposed with text indicating stereotypical representations in *TWD*.

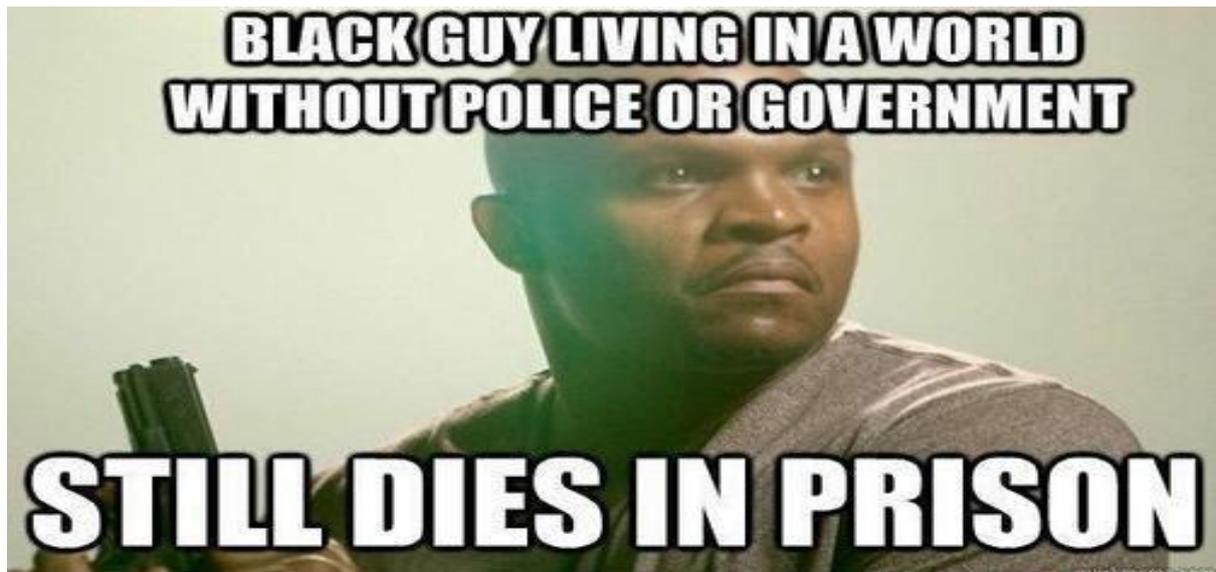


Fig.24. Meme of T-Dog superimposed with text indicating more stereotypical representations in *TWD*.



Fig.25. Meme of T-Dog highlighting his servile role within the group indicative of black oppression in the US.

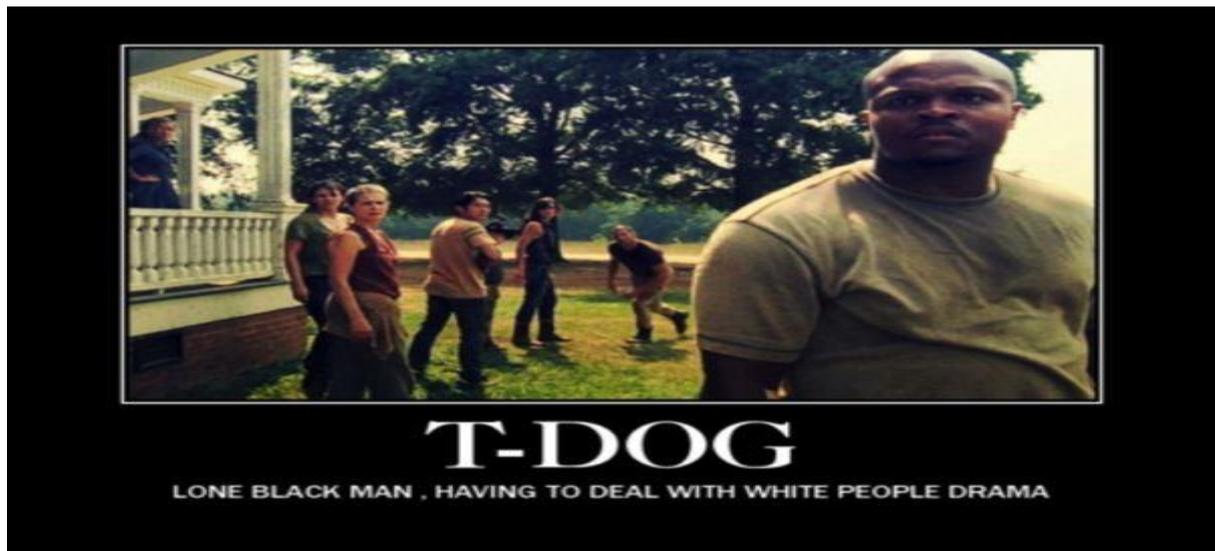


Fig.26. Meme of T-Dog juxtaposing him to the rest of the group.

Moreover, if tentpole TV provides thematic and character consistency branching out from the parent TV text into ancillary narratives featuring ‘echo’ characters (Clarke 2009:447-53), fan images invert such uniformity by highlighting the reductive racial constructions of secondary characters across *TWD*’s franchise, e.g. *FTWD*’s Victor Strand (Fig.27):

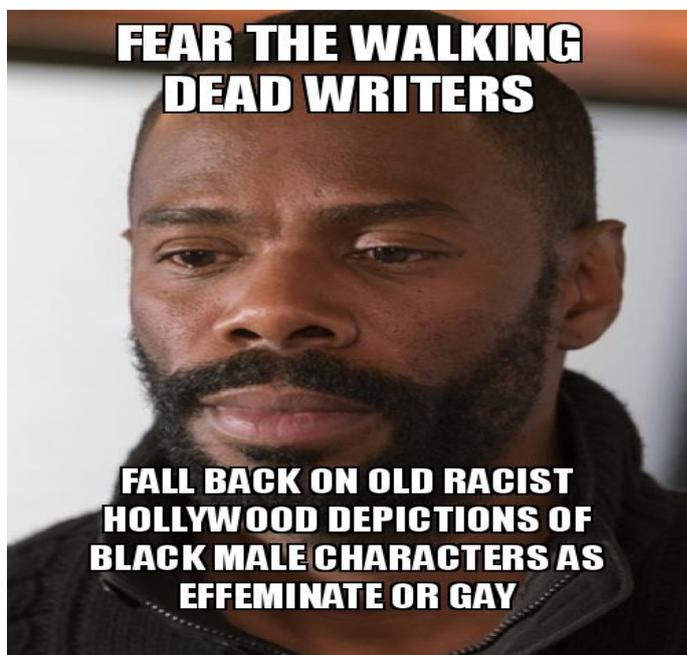


Fig.27. Meme of Victor as a racist stereotypical representation of black masculinity traditional of Hollywood.

No longer peripheral, posters' image-poaching centres on black male bodies, 'disconnecting' textual content so that it can be recontextualised to provide new frameworks of meaning. These posts focus less 'on the look and feel' of *TWD*'s horror (Gillan 2016:12) – what Jennifer Gillan terms 'textural poaching' (ibid) – and more on appropriating 'elements of a story world or a characterization' (ibid). Memes also allude to how *TWD*'s interracial dynamics resonate with black males' disempowerment by hegemonic white patriarchy, both within wider culture and diegetic post-apocalyptic spaces where oppressive institutions are no longer functional, i.e. prisons. Similarly, other memes comment on the silence of T-Dog, delineating his lack of character development. And just when emotional depth is afforded to him in *TWD* then he is actually killed off. Related memes comment on wider media and cultural representations of the black body which *TWD* is said to accord with, as discussed in the previous Chapter (Bayerl and Stoykov 2016:1015-7) (see Figs.28-33):



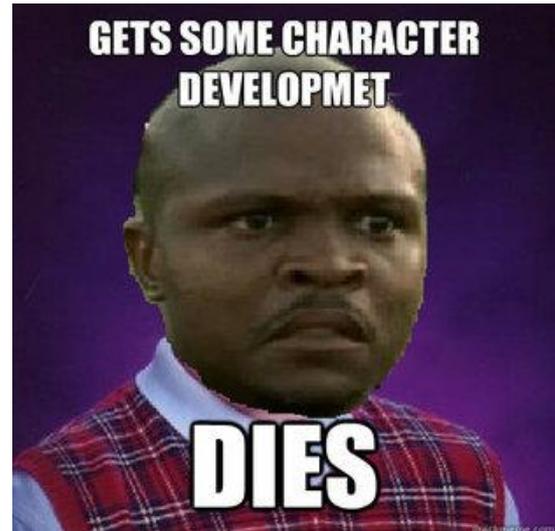
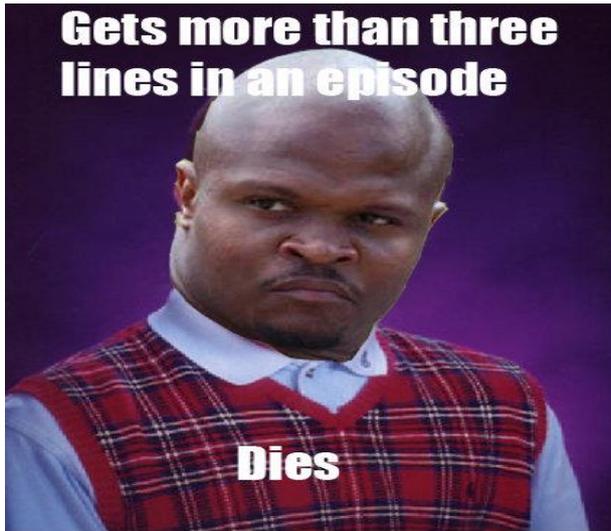
Fig.28 Meme of T-Dog superimposed with the text 'What would T-Dog say? Probably nothing', highlighting his silence. Fig.29. Meme of T-Dog reinforcing his marginality.



Fig.30. Meme of T-Dog stressing his marginality by indicating his lack of screen time.



Fig.31. Meme of T-Dog noting his marginality but also the lack of ethnic minority zombies in *TWD*.



Figs.32 and 33. Memes of T-Dog that highlight how the character development of black males in *TWD* is narratively linked to their deaths.

Other memes play with horror's propensity to kill off black characters before white characters (Coleman 2011:XIII-XIV), echoing criticisms of *FTWD* evidenced in Chapter 5, and illustrating how cultural dynamics inform genre expectations and evaluations (Mittell 2004:14-7). These memes focus less on the reductive representation of T-Dog. Rather, his ability to last this long is made into a point of humorous praise (see Figs.34-35). Somewhat different to the serious tone of anti-fan writing in the previous Chapter, the humorous recoding of the black male body via textual poaching suggests that '[t]his criticism can still be described as a potentially pleasurable form of engagement' (Atkinson and Kennedy 2015:14), with posts identifying and critiquing the 'narrative function' of the series (Hills 2015b:152-3).

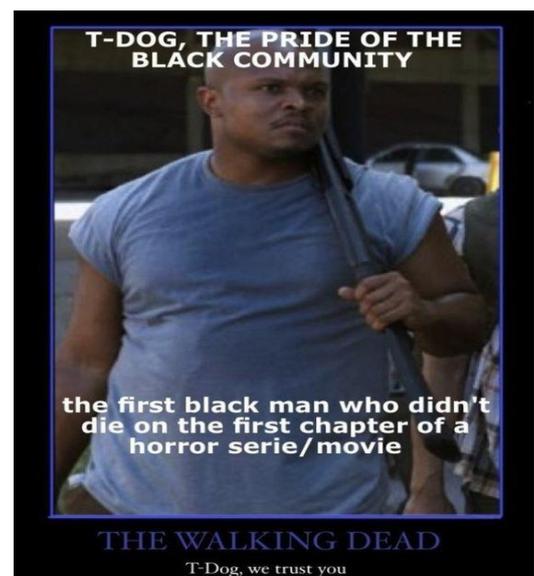


Fig.34 and 35. Memes highlighting the longevity of T-Dog in *TWD* as atypical of characters of colour in the horror genre.

The other central discourse emphasised in these memes is *TWD*'s formulaic structuring, and minimal visibility, of black males. These examples utilise the visuality and structural content of memes to splice together the respective males of the series during moments of threat and fear as a wider commentary on the text's 'black male quota', discussed in Chapter 5 (see Figs.36-43). Within the series' narrative these characters do not come into contact with one another, yet intratextual narrativisation is created through these memes by incongruously grouping the characters together. Such meta-commentary also visually verifies audiences' ideological claims of marginality and the killing off of certain characters. This textual poaching brings to the fore posters' perceived racial subtexts and narrative structures in *TWD*, subtexts which their image-based appropriations work to highlight:



Fig.36. This meme highlights how the systematic death of a black male in *TWD* is followed by the introduction of another black male.

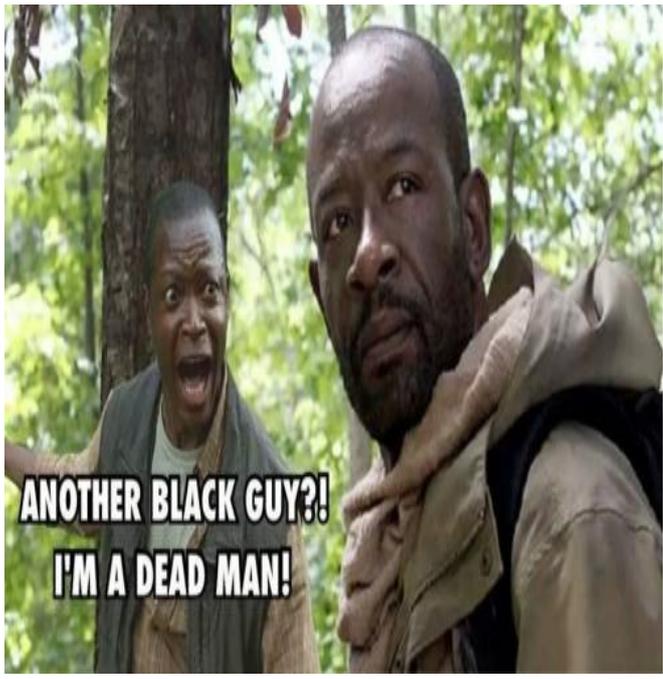
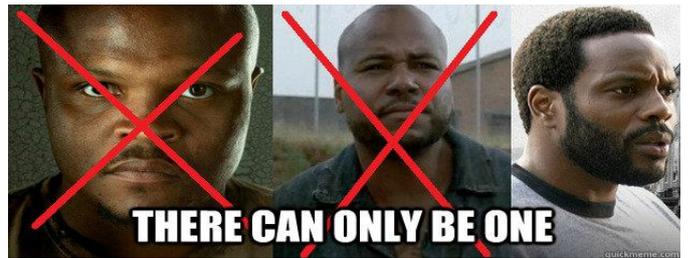
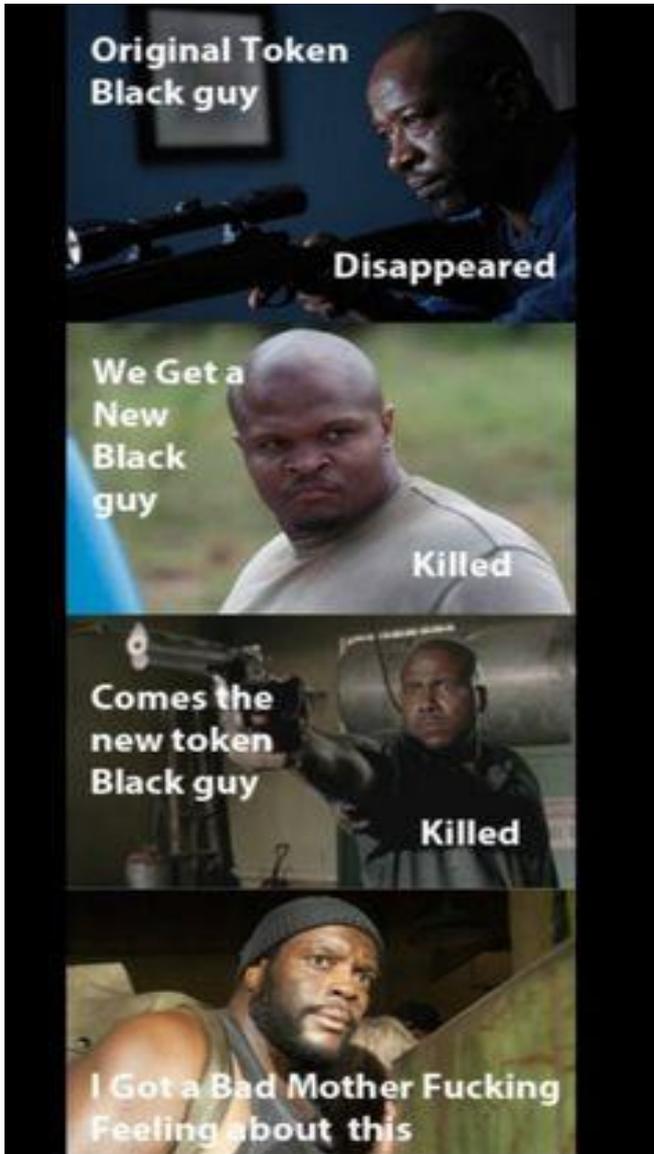


Fig.39-43. Memes indicating the 'black male quota', where there can only be one lead black male in the series, and their systematic deaths.



Figs.37 and 38. Memes bringing together black males in *TWD* to verify their propensity for being killed off... and being killed off.

Other memes use pre-existing vernacular, recognised visual markers, and/or intertextual references to engage with *TWD*'s racial representations (see Figs.44-50). These posts may appeal to a range of audiences, such as *TWD* (anti-)fans, fans of other cult media such as *Star Trek*, *Futurama*, and/or *Star Wars*, and 'MemeGeeks' who place such texts 'in the meme canon'<sup>122</sup> (Milner 2014). Lastly, 'casual users' who do not make memes but readily share them through social media sites may simply find the images/content funny (Bayerl and Stoynov 2016:1009-10). Moreover, images are not restricted to one site or audience type as the spreadability of online media fosters myriad applications (Jenkins et al 2013:2-3), recontextualising the black body in the process.



Figs.44-46. Memes using popular culture and meme vernacular that questions *TWD*'s black stereotyping.

<sup>122</sup> This audience's main interest 'in memes overall is part of a larger interest in the Internet and computer culture' (Milner 2014).



Fig.47. Meme showing all black male characters (as *Star Trek*'s expendable 'redshirts') serving the *TWD*'s white male hero Grimes. Fig.48. Meme stressing *TWD*'s systematic replacement of black males.

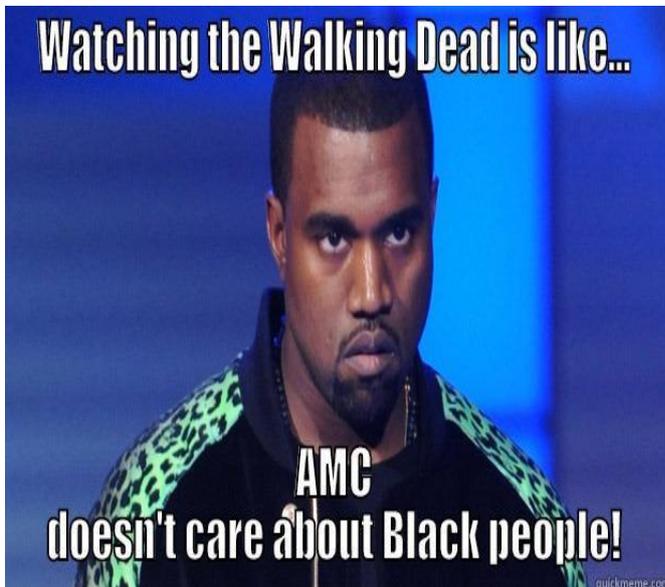


Fig.49 and 50 Memes using popular culture and meme visual vernacular positing that *TWD* is racist.

Finally, some memes offer a direct visual comparison between the comic book and TV series' characterisations of black masculinity: the former are strong depictions integral to the survival of the group, whilst the latter are framed via the silent and disempowered body of T-Dog. Specific characters (Hills 2015:153) such as Tyreese, using his alternative comic book representation, are deployed to challenge prevailing incarnations in the TV series (Fig.51).



Fig.51. Meme showing how Tyreese in the comic series has become disempowered as a black male in his TV series depiction, becoming another T-Dog.

These examples offer playful remixes of *TWD*. Echoing Dominique Johnson's audience-based research on the TV characterisation of Michonne (2015:260-1), both blogs and memes read the black body as afforded a problematic 'non-ontology' which 'reflects on the paradigmatic grammars of suffering that render blackness increasingly unintelligible in an effort to delineate a relation of power, rather than to define a particular... subject-position' (ibid:263).

But whilst image posts can support racial and civic discourse, memes might be read as shallow or superficial in their engagement compared to traditional political commentary (van Zoonen 2005:11). It is also '[h]ard to tell what effects civic engagement through social media will have or how effective it is' (Jenkins 2016:6), with allegations of clicktivism/slacktivism stressing alleged disengagement with 'real-world' political practices (Kligler-Vilenchik and Thorson

2015:2). However, the continued uploading and sharing of memes keeps oxygen flowing to the critical discourse surrounding black masculinity in the TV series, publicising and reinforcing critical arguments (Bayerl and Stoykov 2016:1010). Meme imagery is also used to support explicitly politicised arguments; some memes were posted on *The Nerds of Color* website accompanying articles on the series' racial issues, evidencing pro-civic engagement. However, these memes can also be found on sites such as *knowyourmeme*, recontextualised to make fun of the disempowered silent black body, especially on sites that use these images to reinforce racial stereotypes (see Nakayama 2017, Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016). Whilst amusement is a core intention for memes, the broader their dissemination, the more indistinct their discourse becomes. Flexibility in content and dissemination concurs with the argument that 'humour as success criterion... may be a double-edged sword for political memes' (Bayerl and Stoykov 2016:1017). Social demarcations between different viewers and responses to the memes also depend on audiences' 'familiarity with the original series and/or an individual or social... sensibility that may enhance reading the new meanings created by the [meme] text as resistant or not' (Dhaenens 2012:446). However, what is found in these posts typically represents a critical bringing to the fore of black male marginality; something not present in *TWD* itself. Thus, whilst perhaps not definitively leading to forms of wider fan activism where fans' detailed knowledge is used in civic action (Kligler-Vilenchik 2016:109) or where imagery is used for outwardly oriented 'politicised' fandoms' 'desire to change wider society' (Dean 2017:413), we can still see how close engagement with *TWD* offers 'a resource around which young people are making connections to civic and political worlds' (Kligler-Vilenchik 2016:107).

Such myriad commentary and usage of digital media at a grassroots level concurs with Jenkins and Shresthova's argument that 'no one instantiation of the message is likely to reach all potential audiences, while deploying diverse communication practices is likely to accelerate the spread and extend the reach of... [a] shared agenda' (2016:262). It is by analysing these multiple iterations of racial engagement with(in) *TWD* that civic issues inflecting the abject storyworld can provide overarching arguments around racial representation. But whilst the previous examples of stereotypical racial scripts stress marginalisation, disempowerment, and even outright racism, two memes found in relation to *TTTWD* highlight its subversion of generic/racial tropes, echoing fan sentiments in Chapter 5. Rather than offering black bodies as visual fodder for spectacular, albeit inconsequential, deaths, *TTTWD* contains a black protagonist who plays out the entire narrative (Lowenstein 2011:114) (see Figs.52-53):

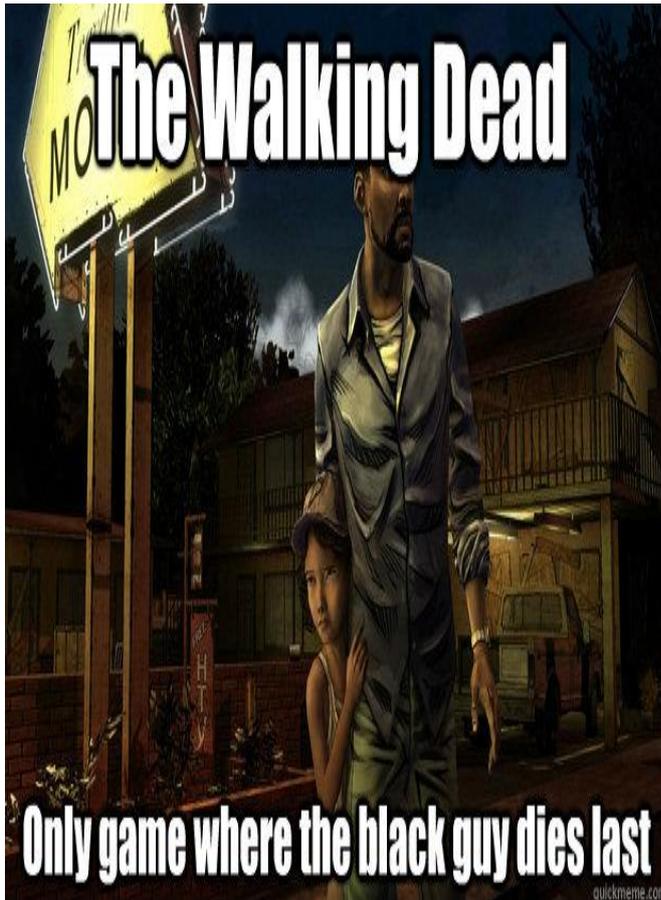


Fig.52 and 53. Memes that indicate the atypicality of Lee as a black male surviving the longest in a horror video game.

Thus, similar to fan trailers and fan vids (Brooker 2002:178, Kernan 2004:13-4, Johnston 2008:11-2), image posts can not only bring to the fore championed characters and/or problematic representations as an act of ‘discursive prioritisation’ (Hills 2015b:152-3), but by acting as a visual intensifier they can also stress the generic attributes of texts. This is the central discourse when looking at Tumblr posts of *MOH*’s ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’.

#### **6.4. Tumblr Terror: Textural Poaching and Curatorial Fan Engagement with Abjection in *MOH***

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, online written commentary posted on the *Snowblood Apple* forum displayed both fan and anti-fan stances towards ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’ (Hills

2005a:ix). Subsequently, the *logos* of this knowledgeable transcultural audience nuanced third space discourse by authenticating a particular construction of Japan born out of canonised discursive clusters of indigenous media and the scopic regimes that informed their reading strategies. Shifting my focus onto Tumblr's image-based fan practices (Booth 2015b:25) identifies very different knowledge structures (Bruns 2008:235) and abject spectrums whereby fans cache scenes and spectacle from the episodes, presenting layers of meaning via accompanying text and tags (Stein 2015:158, Bruns 2008:172-3). Reframing the episodes within the creative and curatorial Tumblr space<sup>123</sup> sees audiences' abject spectrums evidence strong aesthetic readings. However, this is combined with equally strong affective responses where posters describe how the texts made them feel when they watched them. This also stresses how diegetic abjection – horror manifested within the narrative – does not have any kind of one-to-one ratio to audience affect. Thus, while *ITF* fans demonstrate how abject spectrums emerge via polysemic readings, *MOH* fans display how affective responses can be equally diverse. What one individual may find frightening, another individual can find humorous. Fans can affectively 'play' with the episodes, visually illustrating their individual responses to the texts which can subsequently become frames of understanding for others. This emotional elasticity nuances Horror Studies that have overstressed the genre's *horrifying* aspects/affects, whilst also considering the phenomenological distance of these particular audiences and their produsage of content (Booth 2015b:21).

Analysing Tumblr GIF fic<sup>124</sup>, Paul Booth argues that fans' appropriation and appreciation of their championed media as a source for creativity is based on the 'pastiche... [of] both... semantic reproduction of textual elements and syntactic appropriation of ideological moments from the media text' (ibid:26). Gillan explains that through disconnecting textual imagery from the narrative, visual posts such as GIFs 'convey the textural feel of a series' (2016:14) via 'textural poaching'. Textural poaching often focuses on 'moments of excess... [as they] can be easily extracted from the narrative because they feel like separate modules' (ibid:15-6). Thus, the graphic abject viscosity of these episodes makes them suitable for such practices.

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<sup>123</sup> As a 'social media curation site' (Hall and Zarro 2012:1), Tumblr provides a space whereby fans collate and position a range of posts, images, and texts from multiple fandoms (Perez 2013:151).

<sup>124</sup> Gif is short for graphics interchange format. They 'are made from ripped video footage that is edited in an image software programme before being exported in gif format' (Perez 2013:151). Gif fics are 'the combination of multiple GIFs together to create a story line. Although the narrative may be unique to the GIF fic, each of the images is a pastiche of a particular moment from the original text' (Booth 2015b:26).

Since Tumblr images come ‘without substantial text to contextualize or expand upon the visual’ (Thomas 2013) viewers fall back on their own experiences and/or knowledge in their interpretations. Not only do tags denote the episodes’ name and respective directors such as #mastersofhorror, #imprint, #dreamcruise, #takashimiike/#miiketakashi, and/or #noriotsuruta/#tsurutanorio (the names of the authors who originally wrote the texts do not feature at all, keeping the focus on directorial discourse), but #mastersofhorror situates posts within content that relates to the series as a whole. Resultantly, when one searches ‘#mastersofhorror’, Tumblr’s interface reinforces the anthology structure of the series with posts/images from both seasons’ episodes.

Moreover, tags such as #japan #asia #jhorror #asianhorror hermeneutically seal these texts within clearly defined national borders, with no posts making reference to ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’ being American/Japanese co-productions (Bhabha 1998a:123-5). The ‘national’ is reified within the global (Nikunen 2014:251) through this ‘folksonomy’ of fans; ‘a system of categorization emerging from within the wider community of knowledge users’ (Bruns 2008:187). Whereas the intertextual formation of championed Asia Extreme/J-horror via anti-fans’ translation in Chapter 5 positioned the episodes *outside* an ‘authentic’ cluster of Japanese genre texts, fans’ Tumblr posts in their third space translations of the episodes work instead to authenticate these texts’ abjection within a nationally codified body of work. In effect, we see a resituating of cultural borders between two transcultural fans groups: the *MOH* episodes are alternatively seen as reflecting/authenticating or imitating/appropriating Japanese identity (Bhabha 1994:153). Furthermore, the reblogging function of Tumblr fosters ‘reiteration discourse... repeatedly inscribing particular elements... while marginalising other[s]’ (Bore 2017:14), which can also reinforce third space constructions. Consequently, fans curate meaning around the episodes, ‘select[ing] which... [images] to display, where to place them, and what narrative to tell about this selection’ (Hogan 2010:381).

Posts also focus on the most abject scenes, reinforcing aesthetic, graphic, and generic discourses of horror (Jowett and Abbott 2013:11) by utilising the ‘quotation culture’ of appropriated images (Bore 2017:13) that sees fans visually cite textual elements from the *MOH* episodes. Thus, fan image posts serve as phenomenological markers of affective experience with regards to on-screen abjection (ibid:14). Unsurprisingly, the highly graphic nature of ‘Imprint’ versus the restrained J-horror aesthetics of ‘Dream Cruise’ means that the former features far more heavily on Tumblr than the latter.

While fan art centres on the blue-haired *yūrei*, the violent red-haired concubines, or Komomo in a peaceful/docile state, the majority of Tumblr ‘Imprint’ posts focus on the torture scene which posters on *Snowblood Apple* were critical of (Pett 2017). Some posts also use the DVD’s cover to reinforce the graphic aesthetic sensibility established by Tartan and continued by *MOH*, showing alignment with the neo-cult sensibilities of Showtime, the series, and the episodes (see Chapter 3 and 4) (Fig.54).

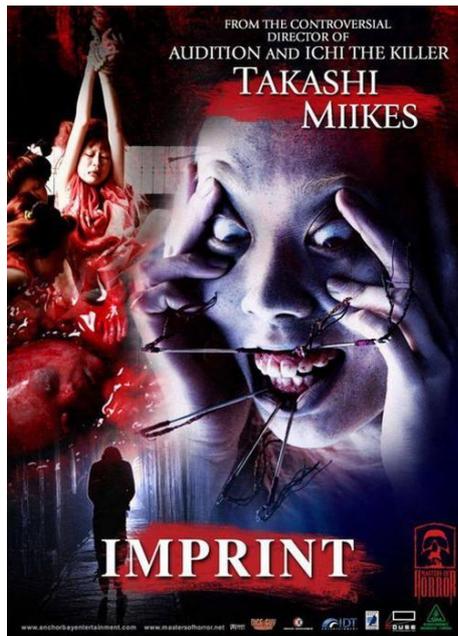


Fig.54. US ‘Imprint’ DVD cover focusing on the torture of Komomo

The objectification and fragmentation of Komomo’s body via the phallic invasion of needles shifts away from the female revenge/empowerment analysed in Chapter 3. Instead, bodily female trauma is frozen in still imagery or offered limited movement via GIFs (Booth 2015b:33, Gillan 2016:10) (see fig.56-61). The uncanny narrative is halted as posts utilise the episode’s abject aesthetics centred on the female victim to serve as a singular frame of reference (see also Booth 2012b:70). Consequently, a ‘semantic pastiche of... [these] particular moment[s]’ (Booth 2015b:31) provides a ‘syntactic connection to the ideological meaning of the original [text]’ (ibid). But as illustrated in Chapter 3, ideological meaning mapped onto the Japanese female body can shift axes, thus reframing the abject relationship between self and Other. By contrast, the textural poaching of these posts and GIFs dismantles narrative, ‘unseating the ideologies [of the text]’ (Stein 2015:65). These images focus on and highlight

the trauma of the Japanese female body inflicted by the concubines, with nothing discursively aligning this to the plight of women under patriarchy. Favouring such excessive scenes (Gillan 2016:15) instead reinforces the ‘Miike-as-auteur’ Western rhetoric (Martin 2015:42). Thus the female body remains ambivalently Other in its textually abject state, whereby abject spectrums, in this snapshot, reduce the ideological potential of on-screen abjection in favour of exaggerating its aesthetic and affective qualities (see Fig.55).

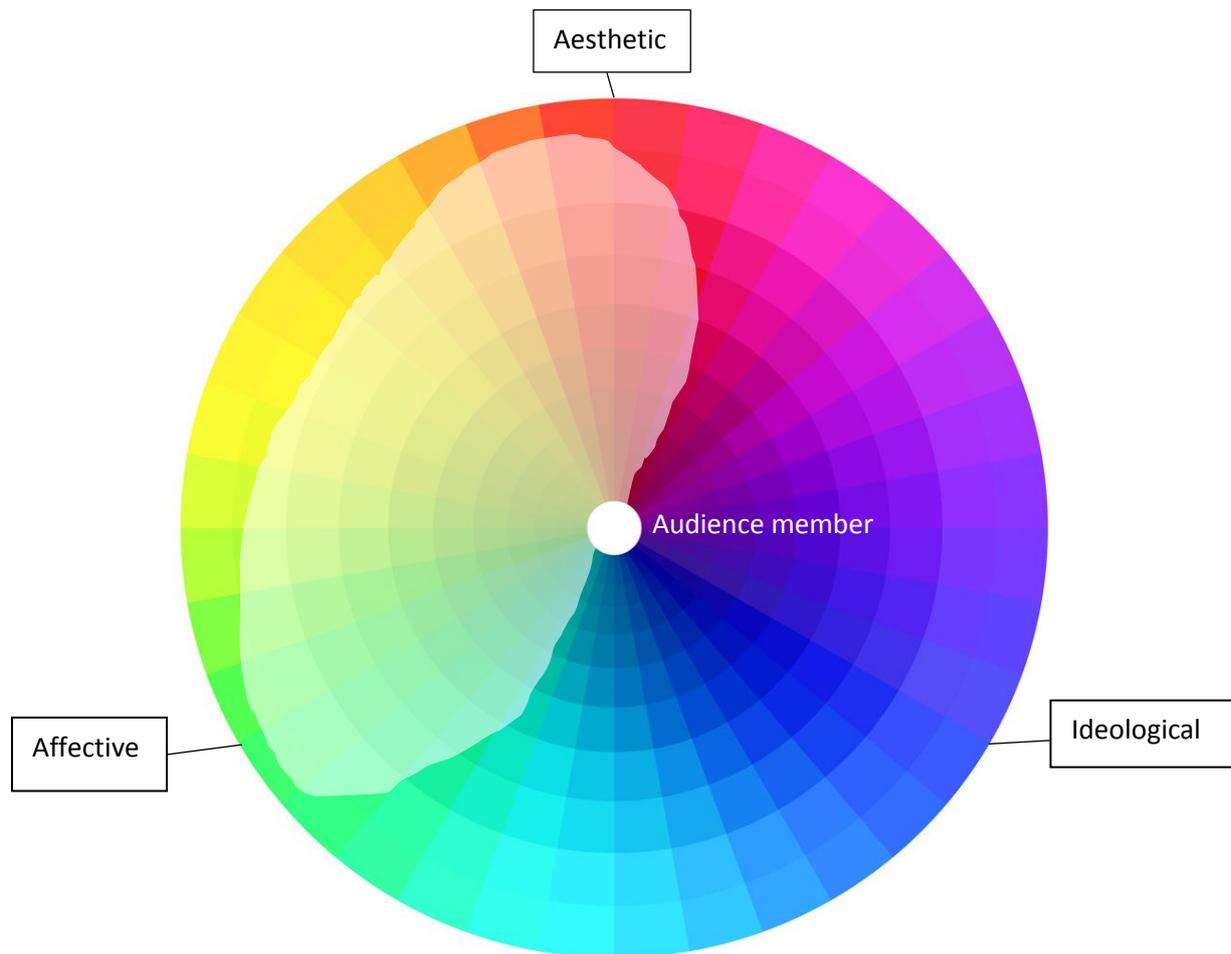


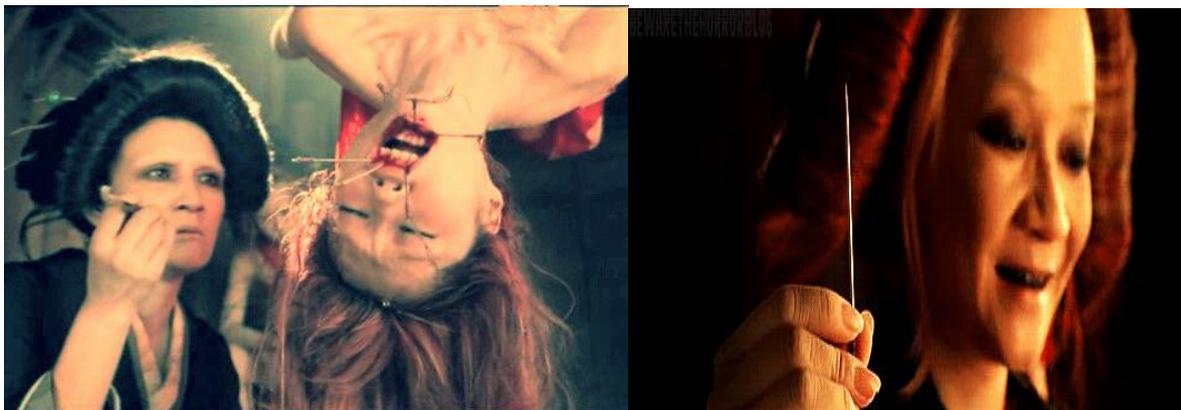
Fig.55. Shows an abject spectrum that evidences strong engagement with the aesthetics of on-screen abjection to which elicit strong emotive responses. This is markedly different from anti-fans’ abject spectrums of the episode in Chapter 5 (see page 233).

Fans present, and therefore align themselves with, graphic horror, performing subcultural capital in the process. The reblogging functionality of Tumblr further perpetuates these images/scenes as subculturally significant, reinforcing semantic pastiche as a semiotic anchor

for fans' affect; this is what Louisa Ellen Stein terms 'individual collective affirmation' (2015:155). Moreover, adding notes to reblogs performs 'communally shared emotion, registered through asynchronous authorship' (ibid:156), providing a palimpsest dynamic to images (Bruns 2008:235) that highlights individual/communal fan knowledge. Fans can re-post depictions concordant with their readings and affective relationships with the text.



Figs.56 and 57. Posts that focus on Komomo's tortured body



Figs.58-61. Image posts that highlight and stress the phallic invasion of Komomo's body by the concubine's needles.

Posts also use a range of accompanying tags alongside the aforementioned core examples. Unlike written posts that see ‘Imprint’ as a TV mainstreaming of ‘Asia Extreme’ film, Tumblr tags use #cult to demarcate the marginality and/or cultural value of the text and, thus, the posters themselves. Several also use #torture to denote the images presented and/or written text or tags about the affect of viewing the episode. Contra ‘knowledge over affect’, dynamics stressed in the forums (Hills 2005a:75, Barker et al 2016:29, 36, 88) Tumblr fosters ‘feels culture’ (Stein 2015:156) whereby a ‘reblogged and additively transformed post makes visible communally shared emotion’ (ibid). Consequently, while abject spectrums pertain to private/internalised emotional responses to screen abjection, within certain spaces they can be publically celebrated (ibid):

#FUcked up horror movies.

This is probably the most disturbing movie I have ever seen in my life.

...pretty disturbing.

ommgf why did I just watch this??? My insides hurt. Like I feel really nauseous. And I watched it on cable tv so most of the graphic stuff was cut or blurred. BUT STILL.

Stein notes that ‘[a]lthough tags are intended to help with categorizing, archiving and retrieval, Tumblr users often include tags to capture their momentary response to an image... Emotion-oriented tags often intertwine with tags that function as analysis’ (2015:158). Such posts, whilst highlighting/performing corporeal effects of abjection (Kristeva 1982:3-4, Sobchack 2004:80), also present a sense of accomplishment (Hollows 2003:55). Unlike written commentary on *Snowblood Apple* that plays down and/or dismisses violent imagery, Tumblr posts exaggerate such textual content and posters’ abject responses. Therefore, posts’ text and tags, whilst punctuating images with meaning, also personalise them. This indicates how social context shapes abject spectrums as they are negotiated and performed when responses are championed and/or disdained. This means an individual may perform their abject spectrum according to wider (fan) communal influences, and that spectrums can become informed by social (media) contexts that shape readings.

However, whilst some discuss their horrified responses to ‘Imprint’, presenting the most disturbing scenes, others offer contrasting affective responses. One poster notes that although they know the text ‘is supposed to be horror’, they found the conjoined twins to be comedic,

repeatedly consuming the scene (Fig.62) for ‘10 whole minutes of replaying and laughing’. Socio-temporal factors can shape affect, such as contemporary audiences laughing at old horror (Hills 2005a:209) or replaying scenes that can transmogrify abject objects into comedic elements (Staiger 2000:2,179-81, Paul 1994:410). However, laughing at abject imagery is a complex response and must be considered further in Horror Studies (Staiger 2000:186) as a potential position within abject spectrums. As Kristeva comments, ‘laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection’ (1982:8). By rendering the object manageable (ibid:107), ‘we laugh to defuse a threat’ (Eitzen 1999:98). This potentially undermines Showtime’s brand-specific abjection and its premium cable branding, since the spectacle of abjection that ‘quality’ horror is supposedly attached to is in fact destabilised by some viewers and reconfigured as parody.

Whilst fans seek cultural distinction by sharing knowledge (Booth 2010b:133), and not being scared in the way that non-fans are perceived to be (Hills 2005a:74), subverting the normative/intended functions of horror can also be performed by posters in order to juxtapose themselves against non-fans’ presumed literalist responses (Eitzan 1999:95, Booth 2015b:37-41, Martin 2015:50). To performatively laugh in the face of screen danger can also construct a masculine identity that subverts the feminised and abjected Other of the imagined/projected audience, potentially reducing a text’s artistic value to camp or parody (Pinedo 1997:48). However, laughing at abject imagery can also signal ‘a relief of *tension*... to mitigate its horror’ (ibid), counteracting textual immersion and its constricting of phenomenological distance (Hanich 2010:97). To laugh is to view ‘from arm’s length’ (Eitzen 1999:85). Lastly, the abject id-twin in ‘Imprint’ might be read as a ‘gross-out’ moment. Whilst still stressing the excessive spectacle of the texts (Booth 2012b:77), since such moments are premised on ambivalence (Paul 1994:419), horror can readily evoke comedy (or vice versa). Such an outrageously shocking twist, whilst consistent with Miike’s canon, may seem incongruous within a ‘high-end’ TV narrative (Eitzen 1999:95, Nelson 2007b:2, 161). In this case, potential laughter might even stem from the sheer unexpectedness of the scene:



Fig.62. Image of the monstrous conjoined twin.

Other Tumblr image-posts focus on the blue-haired female demon, largely presenting her as a child, and using tags such as ‘#blue hair’ or ‘#little girl’, with one post referring to the tag ‘#parasitic twin’ (see Figs.63-65). Although there are posts that depict her as an adult, most of these utilise a collage format that reinforces the trauma of the female body as abject (Hogan 2010:381) (see. Figs.66-68).



Fig.63-65. Images of the blue haired demon as a child.



Fig.66-68. Image posts of the blue haired demon as an adult collaged with other abject scenes in the episode.

Interestingly, several posts make reference to the toy windmills seen in 'Imprint', highlighting the importance of experience in shaping abject spectrums (see Figs.69-70.). Because posts take still images or GIFs out of the narrative, such de-contextualisation leaves representations in an uncertain state. If one has not seen the episode then the windmills are not textually anchored to the horror of 'Imprint', thus symbolic meaning is likely to be more slippery since these images are not at all excessive when compared to previous examples. Yet, if one has seen the text then the objects become powerful diegetic markers linked to the deaths of aborted fetuses and the murder of Komomo. These posts highlight the arbitrary nature of abject coding beyond the realm of bodily aesthetics. Moreover, such potential for horror can only be extrapolated by a 'knowing audience' (Redmon 2015). Viewers must go through the consumption process of suffering in order to understand these totems (Kristeva 1982:140), or be informed about them by other knowing audiences, adding phenomenological layering (Gillan 2016:13).



Figs.69 and 70. Scenes in 'Imprint' that use the recurring motifs of windmills.

Other posts focus on extra-textual features, such as tagging the episode's actors Michie Itō and Youki Kudoh, who play Komomo and the unnamed female demon respectively, or behind-the-scenes images (see Figs.71-72). This includes locating 'Imprint' on a Miike Takashi tribute Tumblr blog, along with posts that combine images from the episode with other Miike films such as *Audition* and *Ichi the Killer* (Fig.73), thereby situating 'Imprint' within his established Western canon, again highlighting how abject spectrums can be intertextually formed, and locates the episode within the Japanese corpus, unlike other audiences presented in Chapter 5. As one fan remarks, 'Takashi Miike's "Imprint" is one of my favourite movies. I have quite a few others of his on DVD, including Visitor Q, which is without doubt the most fucked up movie I've ever seen! watching 'The Great Yokai War' this morning'. Such posts focus less on 'Imprint' as Asian/*Kaidan* horror, instead looking to cluster content within the auteur rhetoric of Miike through curating specific work/scenes/images and hence visually authenticating the director's work. Thus, posts are not only about recognising the abject female body, but can also function as curatorial practices utilising wider textual clustering (Mittell 2004:16-17). In the process, posters perform 'knowledge and textual expertise' (Hills 2010g:238), constructing and curating their own online presence (Madden et al 2013:63, Balzer 2015:110-1, Zhao and Lindley 2014:2431).

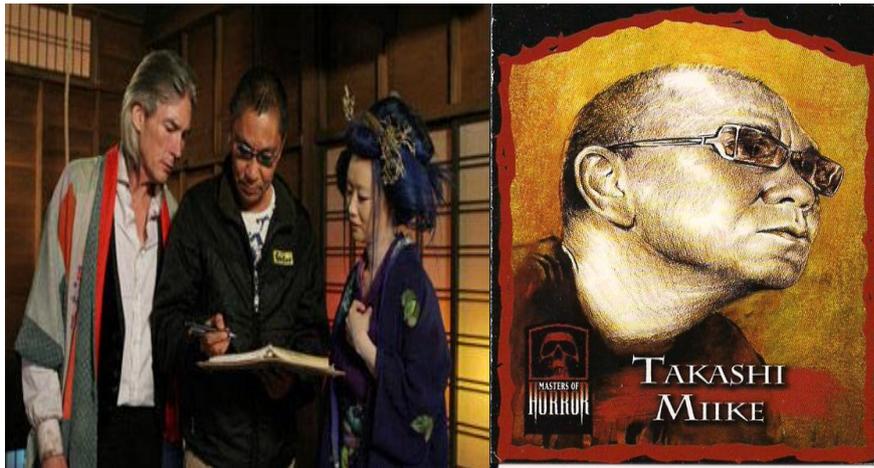


Fig.73. The blue haired demon of 'Imprint' (right) situated next to other infamous Miike vehicles: *Audition* (left) and *Ichii the Killer* (centre).



Fig.71. Miike Takashi discussing scenes with Billy Drago and Youki Kudoh. Fig. 72. US DVD inlay of 'Imprint' showing a portrait of Miike.

Such varied posts highlight how the abject visuality of 'Imprint' is read, used, and positioned by fans. While much of this focuses on the female body as a marker of horror and trauma, the ideological impetus previously evidenced in Chapters 3 and 5 is not overt. Abjection becomes textural in these image posts (Gillan 2016:12); aesthetic and affective rather than clearly ideological. Posts highlight visuals that situate 'Imprint' as 'quality TV' and as a Miike vehicle.

'Dream Cruise' posts, on the other hand, focus more heavily on the abject nature of the text's monster: the revenging *yūrei*, Naomi; a source of anti-fan rhetoric towards the episode for *Snowblood Apple* forum posters. As previously noted, the volume of posts on 'Dream Cruise' is far less, but much like the posts concerning 'Imprint', fans support key horrifying scenes with tags such as #horror, #scary, #terror, and #creepy. Contra Chapter 5, these tags add value to 'Dream Cruise' as an effective text in its endeavours to operate as a J-horror vehicle, and

images are created by splicing together textual content that semantically stresses valued generic attributes – the monstrous Japanese female ghost covered in black hair, and crawling towards their victims – within the fandom (Booth 2015b:35) (see Figs.74-76).



Fig.74-76. Key scene depicting Naomi as a vengeful *yūrei*.

Interestingly, despite Eiji being the central (masculine) threat, he is not depicted as such, if at all, in Tumblr posts. The episode's generic hybridity that utilises heterosexual romance and empowered females central to J-dorama (Han 2008:27-8), combined with the domineering male seeking to control and/or destroy female agency, is subverted, instead bringing to the fore central J-horror tropes of the monstrous *onryō* as texturally 'excessive' (Gillan 2017:15). Other posts show the text's North American neo-cult DVD cover, with some providing a synopsis of the episode alongside a collage of stills from the opening scene (Fig.77) – a type of post not seen with 'Imprint'. Perez notes that due to the limited space afforded to Tumblr posting, 'exposition and set-up are often explained in an attached author note or left to the reader's imaginations' (2013:152). Exposition highlights key narrative and thematic traits of the episode that reinforce its J-horror status, though this is comparatively restrained compared to 'Imprint'. As one fan summarises: '*Absolutely terrified of the sea, an American lawyer reluctantly goes on an ocean cruise to be near the wife of a client, with no idea of the grim situation that awaits them all*'.



Fig.77. Image post splicing together images from the opening of 'Dream Cruise' in a montage format

Lastly, like fans who subvert horror imagery in 'Imprint' by recoding responses as comedic (see Staiger 2000:179-81, Eitzen 1999:95), some 'Dream Cruise' posts offer similar readings (Fig.78). Showing the scene where the severed limb of Eiji returns and strangles Jack, the poster humorously remarks 'If I had a nickel for every time I had to fight a dismembered arm on a boat in the middle of the ocean'. Isabel Pinedo argues that 'comedy and terror are closely tied in recreational terror' (1997:46). In not only providing 'comic relief' by creating 'distance to stave off terrorism at strategic points [during the narrative]' (ibid), if comedic elements additionally produce 'an excess of distance, the result is parody' (ibid:47). Extending this to the textuality/texture of fans' Tumblr posts, one sees such parodic distancing taking place, whilst still showing active engagement with the original text (Booth 2015b:36). Like 'Imprint', posts recognise the abject threat within the diegesis but render it impotent (or drastically reduce its affective impact) through the act of comedy/laughter (Gray 2010:78). Resultantly, the affective potentiality of the text's abject aesthetics/Other is thinned out for these individuals' abject spectrums.

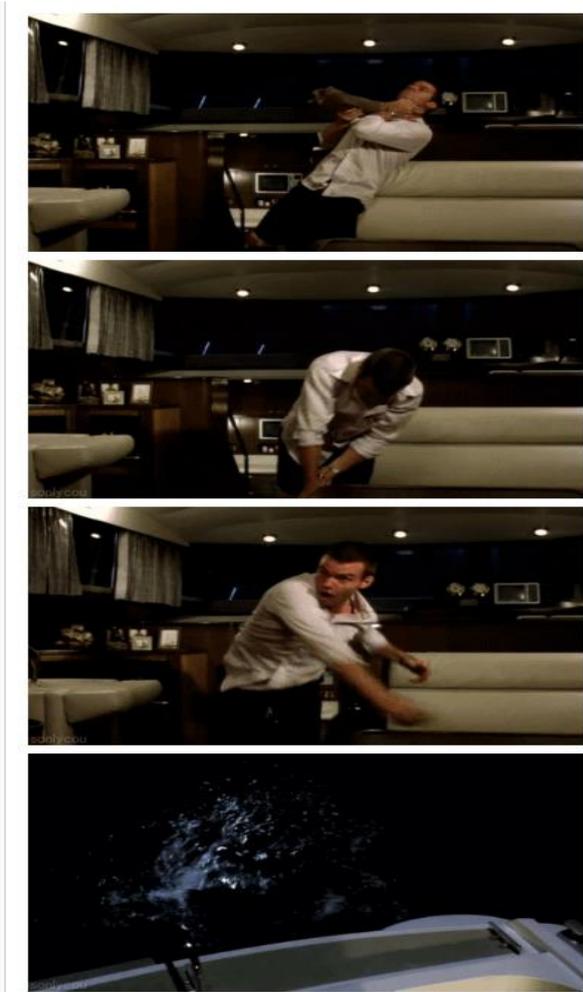


Fig.78. Image post montage of Jack fighting an undead severed hand.

This Chapter has shown how fans use textual content in their own posts to consolidate the text, distilling it down to key elements, while curating certain aspects at the same time as subduing others, (re)situating episodes within a range of different and/or overlapping frameworks (Gray 2010:144-6) such as storylines, character relationships and representations, subtext, genre, and affective modes. Moreover, fans ‘are engaged in gathering, processing, selecting, commenting on and distributing information to people they are connected to’ (Thorsen 2013:130). Consequently, the Chapter acknowledges how Web 2.0 curation evidences meaning-making around and through abject imagery. Resultantly, it further evidences the need to consider horror along a dynamic spectrum of abjection rather than via fixed/static audience-text relationships. The abject spectrum acknowledges the ebbs and flows of responses, buttressed by experiences and intertextual fields that facilitate a range of individual emotional responses (Hills 2015b).

## 6.5. Conclusion

In not only stressing the myriad and contextual nature of abject spectrums, Part II has considered how on-going abject spectrums operate pre-textually (Chapters 4 and 6), diegetically (Chapters 5 and 6), and after the text has been broadcast (Chapters 4 and 6). It has also considered how the individual acquires or encounters TV horror texts, and in what format (Chapter 4). Furthermore, in conceptualising audiences' abject spectrums and their gradational responses to texts, each case study has shown specific qualities of the model: *ITF* evidences how abjection is polysemic, *TWD* stresses how responses can be reflected and/or refracted over intratextual/transmedial grids, and *MOH* shows how meaning-making is not confined to the text itself but can operate intertextually and transnationally with other texts within discursive clusters. As such, Part II has demonstrated how in-process responses can move between, and incorporate, ideologically deconstructive abjection, aesthetically evaluative abjection, and affectively-related abjection linked to the viewer's phenomenological distance from a text. Furthermore, once viewers have come into contact with the (fictionally) abject repeatedly, and/or consumed other abject/generic texts, then this leaves room for modified responses (Paul 1994:419). Building on this, my final Chapter considered the relationships between case study texts' imagery and audiences' visual texts which make the female abject body even more visible whilst challenging the *logos* of anti-fan interpretations (Gillan 2016:21, Pink et al 2015:64).

In relation to *ITF*, fans' image posts illustrate abject spectrums' in-process connections to the condition of the text. Body-centric corporeal markers frame the status and ontological (in)security of the fan community relative to the state of *ITF*. The more stable the series – i.e. during broadcast – the more a focus on PDS characters stresses the emotional relationships that they share with others, presenting them as markedly human (Woods 2016:88). Such image posts genre-shift the body from horror to melodrama and confirm strong affective ties to characters within fans' abject spectrum. Moreover, the abject spectrum's affective realm is not definitively tied to '[t]he pleasure of... getting the shit scared out of you' (Brophy 1986:5). The text can be responded to across a much broader range of emotions; as noted in the Literature Review and Chapter 5, TV horror has sometimes made audiences cry (Carroll 1999b:38-42). When announcements are made of another series of *ITF* then pre-textual poaching and fans'

image-posting use the lead actors and their close relationships to reinforce the authenticity of diegetic bonds between characters. Such posts by both fans and BBC3 reinforce central themes that have been championed by the audience as markers of quality. However, when the show is cancelled, activist posts focus instead on the zombified body, calling on fans to save *ITF* and its characters from their markedly abject state.

Considering how the black body in *TWD* is ideologically reinscribed via anti-fan writing in Chapter 5, here textual poaching of canonical imagery and meme culture brings to the fore the programme's secondary black bodies. Political humour distils those characters that 'show' the silent black body, reinscribing such characters within a critical discourse that is mapped onto *TWD*'s storyworld. Moreover, meme culture's remixing reinforces such sentiments by bringing together repeatedly marginalised black males, providing strength in numbers to the reading strategies put forward in these posts that evidence new grids of anti-racist and critical meaning. Considering how race is read in *TWD* highlights how self-identity and phenomenological experiences can anchor the abject spectrums that screen representations are read through.

Lastly, unlike *ITF* and *TWD*, *MOH* Tumblr posts differ strongly from commentary on *Snowblood Apple* as fans champion the very same abject aesthetics as affectively powerful that are chastised by *Snowblood Apple*'s anti-fans. Subsequently, the Chapter has argued that Tumblr offers a different third space contact zone through which transcultural fans can translate the episodes as operating *within* a discursive cluster of Japanese horror texts, compared to Chapter 5 where we saw anti-fans position the same texts as inauthentically *outside* the cultural borders of 'Japan' set by the community. This is not to say one reading is truer than the other, but rather that third space provides a salient schema for examining how and why these texts are read as culturally different (Hills 2005b:168-9), or not. Meaning and value (re)inscribed through acts of cultural translation are not homogenous (Bhabha and Burgin 1992:71:76, Rosback 2015:77).

Tumblr users reinforce established paratextual (DVD-cover) framings of the episodes (Booth 2015b:27), authenticating these texts as quality Japanese horror vehicles by stressing their abject *textural* qualities. Despite being US/Japan co-productions, fan image posts hermeneutically mark these as 'Japanese' texts. Using key excessive moments from the episodes themselves, images and GIFs reiterate Miike's pre-existing Western 'auteur' position and 'Dream Cruise's' J-horror qualities, muting its J-dorama facets. Other posts also decontextualise the texts' graphic abject horror to perform laughter as a response to such

imagery. These posts distil screen abjection, archiving it within the curatorial Tumblr space, showing how abject spectrums can be qualified and developed beyond a viewing of the text, and how they can subsequently be shaped by wider communal and technological contexts. I now turn to my overall Conclusion to discuss the overarching arguments of the thesis, limitations of my research, and avenues for future studies.

## Conclusion

### 1. Intro

My research has addressed the marked shift in graphic TV horror in the twenty-first century, located within changing TV industries, and distributed and consumed on a transnational scale via different media ecologies. Furthermore, the thesis has employed a Kristevan approach in its textual analysis of abjection in three case studies: *ITF*, *TWD*, and *MOH*, and built on this to conceptualise an ‘abject spectrum’ model that addresses audiences’ responses to these texts. I also applied Bhabha’s third space to Fan Studies to analyse transcultural readings, and conceptualised online image culture. This conclusion summarises the thesis’ central arguments whilst offering avenues for future research. It is organised into four sections: firstly, I summarise how the aesthetics of abject horror are reflective and refractive of previous notions of ‘quality’ TV. With cinematic aesthetics becoming the norm for TV horror, this potentially destabilises audiences’ and academics’ claims of unusual or elevated ‘quality’ status. Thus, I turn to other forms of TV horror that subvert this mode of televisuality. I also acknowledge the growth of post-TV, which despite being omitted from my thesis (see Methodology), offers a new media paradigm that whilst disrupting television’s ontology offers a significant area for TV horror studies. For instance, the huge success of Netflix’s *Stranger Things* provides graphic abject imagery but compounds this with nostalgia for the 1980s (Lawson 2016). Thus, for audiences growing up during this era, the text asks them to remember popular culture of that time whilst simultaneously presenting a retro imagining of the 1980s to audience born after this time. Presenting screen abjection in a past period offers an interesting area for TV, Horror, and Fan Studies whereby the phenomenological histories of audiences engage with textual constructions of a particular era. Secondly, the thesis has predominantly focused on Only-Click TV during times of broadcast. Therefore, I consider the archive qualities of this format and the value created for audiences. Thirdly, addressing abjection’s role in the textual analysis of horror and its various reading strategies, I suggest how other genres may also use abjection. Concurrently, I develop my abject spectrum model as a tool for audience research that discusses phenomenological dynamics of initial and subsequent TV/media experience. Highlighting the interdisciplinary dynamics of abjection, I discuss how Trauma and Memory Studies can aid in

understanding TV horror's abjection. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of my work: these include a lack of follow-up interviews, as well as not fully considering gender within my audience research, and limits to the type of abject monsters I have analysed, offering avenues for future research. I now turn to the aesthetic qualities evident in my case studies as bids for quality status.

## 1.2. The Aesthetics of Abjection as Quality TV

Abjection 'is an aesthetic judgement' (van Alphen 2016:119), provoking 'new ways of thinking about art and aesthetics' (Arya 2014:83) in traditional media<sup>125</sup>. I have contended that twenty-first century TV horror can also be included in this corpus. The Literature Review's historical account explained that horror had struggled to fit within televisual discourse due to the incongruous nature of the genre in the home (Branston and Stafford 2003:87, Gunter et al 2003:1-2, Wheatley 2006:14), resulting in TV horror being aesthetically devalued in comparison to film (King 1981:253, Magistrale 2003:182-3, King 2005a:111).

Consequently, graphic twenty-first century TV horror appears even more striking due to the restrained imagery and emphasis on suggestion that has traditionally governed TV horror's construction (Hills and Williams 2005, Johnson 2005:104, Jowett and Abbott 2013:5). But whilst graphic TV horror evokes value due to its differentiation in visuality from previous cycles of horror television, its aesthetics resonate with well-established 'quality' TV discourses. Thus, this form of genre TV is not so different from other television drama. Moreover, whilst graphic visual abjection began as ground-breaking (Wells-Lassagne 2017:127), these aesthetics have become more commonplace in texts such as *Ash vs Evil Dead*, *Penny Dreadful*, *Hannibal*, and *Hemlock Grove* (Calvert 2014:186).

Therefore, beyond simply 'showing' viewers something they have not seen before, the aesthetics of TV horror can be interrogated further to analyse how graphic abjection fosters bids for quality. Utilising high production values (McMurria 2003:83, Abbott 2009:14), visual style (Feuer 1984b:32-3), narrative complexity (Shimpach 2010:36), and/or serialised

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<sup>125</sup> Such as painting (e.g. Welles 1994, Chare 2016, van Alphen 2016), sculpture (e.g. Gutiérrez-Albilla 2008:74-6, Wark 2016), photography (e.g. Cohen et al 2006, Arya 2016, Mey 2016:153-4), mixed-media (e.g. Barrett 2016), literature (e.g. Alaei et al 2014, Thomas 2016), theatre (e.g. Georgelou 2014, Watt 2016), and film (e.g. Lechte 2016:26).

character development (Feuer 1984b:36-7, Nelson 1997:31), industry players make bids for quality TV horror. Here, I want to re-consider and re-summarise these attributes in relation to my case studies.

For *ITF*, horror is combined with social (sur)realist aesthetics (Woods 2016:94) (Chapter 1). This genre hybridity not only grounds the text within a national screen tradition, but its abject aesthetics are a counterpoint to the gloss of American youth TV that has dominated terrestrial TV in the twenty-first century (ibid:29). Furthermore, *ITF*, along with another BBC3 telefantasy horror *The Fades*, won a BAFTA award (Jeffery 2014), suggesting official recognition of this TV horror text and bequeathing it with artistic cachet (English 2005:167).

*TWD*'s quality centres on narrative complexity and character development (Teurlings 2017:8-9) (Chapter 2). Creating a transmedia-rich nexus, the franchise's masculinity-in-crisis is a tentpole theme that fosters the loci for central character development in *TWD*, *FTWD*, and *TTTWD*. Moreover, narrative complexity is heightened through paratexts offering a range of stories within the hyperdiegesis, providing further character enrichment (for instance, of The Governor). Its use of graphic abject visuals also elevates it beyond its basic cable status in bids to position it with more filmic premium cable. AMC have taken this one step further by incorporating premium cable structuring within this business model by offering a premium advert-free service (Spangler 2017).

*MOH*'s closed episodic narratives favour graphic cinematic abject imagery (Totaro 2010:87) (Chapter 3). The episodes' cult/quality TV status within a Western context is twofold: firstly, as non-mainstream TV offering 'cinematic' visuals crafted by film auteurs (Jowett and Abbott 2013:168), and, secondly, due to the fact that said film directors are themselves non-Western. Thus, despite being transnational co-productions, both episodes are framed as markedly Japanese. This manifests in the paratextual marketing of the episodes as brand-specific abjection (Hills 2010d:132) aimed at cult, Asia Extreme, and/or J-horror fans (Hills 2013e, Johnson 2005:95-7) that uses the aesthetics of graphic horror to support Showtime's brand image as a premium cable channel.

The aesthetics of abjection show how each text is engaged with aspects of 'quality' TV discourse that seek to make them visually eye-catching, stylistic, and unique (Jacobs and Peacock 2013:1). Part of this stems from how each example combines abject horror with other genres and TV merits (see Jowett and Abbott 2013:157, Wells-Lassagne 2017:138,140). Likewise, 'TV horror as art encourages concentrated viewing, challenging the glance theory of

TV' (Jowett and Abbott 2013:159). This heightens bids for quality as it necessitates detailed attention and repeat viewing (discussed later).

But in stressing how the graphic visuality of twenty-first century TV horror is becoming ever-more common, discourses of cinematic TV can be questioned. Michael Newman argues that '[f]ilm and television can no longer be understood so easily in terms of space... or materiality... or aesthetics' (2014:75), due to technological developments conflating both media into becoming 'simply [digital] video' (ibid:74). Furthermore, my focus on graphic horror TV potentially legitimises certain television whilst neglecting other types (Hills 2006b:19, Creeber 2006d:85, McCabe et al 2011:108, Cardwell 2006:75-6). Abbott notes that despite technological and budgetary constraints that made it markedly non-filmic (2013:vi), twentieth century TV horror was often visually experimental (ibid:vii). Twenty-first century TV horror texts that are discursively televisual/non-cinematic (Ellis 2006:12), and use 'ordinary TV' aesthetics (see Booner 2003,2008), may, on the one hand, be read as 'low-cultural' TV horror (see Hills 2007a, 2010c). On the other hand, more experimental forms of TV horror offer new bids for quality status that subvert cinematic TV as a dominant categorisation of quality television. Thus, further research into the adopting of, and experimenting with, 'ordinary' TV horror can serve to question longstanding quality TV schemas that often position 'quality' against lowly forms of television that are in fact socially and historically constructed, and thus are open to change. This is especially so when, as this thesis has addressed, cinematic TV has become more common. For instance, while there has been some discussion of *Dead Set's* satirical subtext about reality TV and zombie television audiences (Jowett and Abbott 2013:193-6, Abbott 2016a:106-8), to date there has been little analysis of BBC3's horror reality show *I Survived a Zombie Apocalypse (ISAZA)* (Virtue 2015, Walker-Arnott 2015). Moreover, research into 'ordinary' TV could benefit from exploring how reality TV tropes may provide pleasures for fans of the genre (see Tincknell and Raghuram 2002, Holmes 2004, van Zoonen 2004) and how this can also destabilise ideas of quality TV demographics, which as discussed in the Literature Review, have largely centred on masculine discourses/male fans (Abbott 2010a:91, Feuer 2007:147, San Martin 2003:33, Hart 2004:214, Einav 2004:221). If these new forms of TV horror are innovative but also aimed at fans of 'ordinary' TV genres, then this asks us to question quality in both texts and audiences as intrinsic. Instead, as Part II attests to, it further stresses how different audiences can read and negotiate quality in textual content.

Likewise, I omitted post-TV horror due its highly diverse conceptualisation that included streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu, but also web TV (Smith-Rowsey

2016:69); its subversion of linearity in content flow (Arnold 2016:50); and its supplanting of channels by online portals that disrupt TV's ontology (Lotz 2017:8-9). However, these are popular platforms and they have had profound effects on textual construction. Netflix's *Hemlock Grove* has garnered a strong cult following (Lindsey 2016:177, Lotz 2017:27), and is also strongly marketed through its executive producer Eli Roth (see Fig.1). Thus its non-TV status is twofold: echoing the paratextual framing of *MOH* that evokes premium/cinematic horror qualities and 'name' auteurism or showrunner status (Chapter 3), whilst also stressing its non-linear/full season distribution (Alexander 2016:85).



Fig. 1 – Netflix adverts of Season 1 and 2 of *Hemlock Grove* that highlight Roth's involvement

Conversely, like *ISAZA*, YouTube original series *Fight of the Living Dead* uses reality TV genre codes alongside featuring YouTube celebrities (Giardina 2015) (see Fig 2.). In this instance, post-TV horror moves away from perhaps old-fashioned 'cinematic' TV horror and

is instead sold through non-TV celebrities who are native to YouTube and popular with audiences of this media platform (Tolson 2010, Smith 2014, Marwick 2016).



Fig. 2 – YouTube advert for *Fight of the Living Dead* that promotes its celebrity line-up

Lastly, whilst the thesis applied abjection to horror video games (Chapter 2), post-TV has seen a rise in video game streaming where audiences watch others play on sites such as Twitch.tv (Anderson 2017). Whilst still presenting video game textuality, this revises engagement whereby an audience is created that has no player agency yet watches others tackle themes and images of abjection. This new context of consumption of textual abjection as a form of the ‘meta-ject’ needs further consideration as it complicates abjection spectrums. Research could look at whether watching someone else play horror video games potentially increases abject affect since individuals are powerless in developing the narrative. Likewise, audiences may feel a vicarious or projective affect in relation to player-based emotions; if the player is displaying signs of reduced phenomenological distance and corporeal reactions to playing the game, audiences may incorporate this into their own abject spectrums. On the other hand, phenomenological distance may be extended as this revised form of second screen engagement – watching through your screen someone else watching through their screen – may insulate viewers from emotional affect. If this is the case, then we need to ask what other readings and responses are present in this mode of audience-text relationship that can add further nuancing of abject spectrums to this specific context. Since twenty-first century post-TV forms further evidence horror’s contemporary variety – something that this thesis has argued complicates and problematises TV’s ontology at a textual level – then questions need to be asked about how

audiences' relationships to post-TV horror are forming. Specifically, post-TV may undermine my Only-Click concept since it is digital in both formatting and distribution. However, geo-blocking of Netflix, for instance, means fans may still partake in online informal media acquisition if content is not formally available in their region. Similarly, Chapter 4 noted how Only-Click TV serves just-in-time fan engagement with the text and community. However, with post-TV's propensity for distributing a TV series in its entirety, future research needs to explore the socio-temporal effects on audience discussions. Thus, post-TV presents future research with new types of screen horror which may challenge and/or nuance traditional Quality TV discourse by offering new *platforms and screen interfaces* which can (re)shape audience responses to textual abjection. Its shifts in dissemination strategy might also effect the ways in which *audiences engage* with the texts and discuss them with others. These future avenues of investigation all potentially subvert TV's ontology due to their overlap with digital media platforming. As such, my focus on *the rise of graphic TV horror in the twenty-first century as overtly televisual* has deliberately not addressed this rival phase of horror media. Building on how my case studies utilised abject aesthetics to evoke 'quality' TV discourse, the thesis considered how socio-material aspects of TV – formatting on DVD/blu-ray, distribution, and informal circulation – shaped meaning and value. I now turn to some concluding remarks on these topics.

### **1.3. Only-Click TV: From Dissemination to Archiving**

Recognising Web 2.0's abilities to circulate media content both formally and informally (Lobato and Thomas 2015:3-5), Chapter 4 explored the salience of digital media in the dissemination and consumption of TV horror in the twenty-first century. Digital media is central to providing informal avenues of consumption for audiences – both domestic and transcultural. During times of broadcast when content is not available, Only-Click TV allows transcultural audiences access to TV horror that is not being aired in their region due to geo-blocking (Stewart 2016), as well as providing access for domestic audiences who may not be able to view content that is only available via payment requirements. In the case of *MOH*, Showtime is a premium cable channel requiring subscription in the US which some audiences may not be willing to pay for, whilst the series was simply not broadcast in other countries. By partaking in Only-Click practices, audiences not only gain access to texts – free of charge – but

can engage with other fans around the world ‘immediately after the episode’s transmission time... in order to demonstrate the “timeliness” and responsiveness of their devotion’ (Hills 2002a:178). Consequently, Only-Click serves as a consumption tool and as a social tool.

But the thesis also noted (see page 64-6) that rather than being part of the newness of just-in-time fandom, some audiences use Only-Click to look backwards to TV of yesteryear, coming to a text when it is no longer active (Williams 2011:274). Whilst TV Studies has often focused on contemporary/present moments (Holdsworth 2011:131), Only-Click TV serves historical and archival functions (Garde-Hansen 2011:7). For instance, TV J-horror that has no formal DVD release, BBC3’s piloted episode of hospital horror *Pulse*, or the Argentinean TV horror series *Epitafios* only available via region 1 DVD can all be downloaded and stored in fans’ personal catalogues. This sees audiences using informal media ecologies to find rare texts which in turn can yield subcultural capital (Hills 2005a:115). Thus, we can consider how Only-Click functions as a curatorial device that archives content not readily offered by official means, allowing ‘fans to keep an alternative, even oppositional, temporality to [mass] media time’ (De Kosnik 2016:155) that provides ‘interpersonal connections and cultural networks that exceed any given media property’ (Lothian 2012:546), and sustains fans’ value systems (Johnson and Fong 2017).

However, whilst Only-Click stems from informal practices of media acquisition, it is not entirely divorced from formal distribution. Industry players can combat informal formatting by providing extra-textual material, evident in content-rich DVD versions of *TWD* that offer a plethora of added content. Industry players can also formalise otherwise informal Only-Click TV. For instance, in the case of *ITF* the BBC ultimately made BBC3 itself online-only in an attempt to mirror youth audiences’ digital consumption patterns (Bennett 2013:4-5, Hendy 2013:114-7, Popple 2015:136). And previously Only-Click TV can also be reformatted into formal DVD distribution. For instance, previously ephemeral or ‘lost’ British TV horror, thus only available by informal means, has been released by the BBC and BFI on DVD, tied to the Gothic heritage of Britain (Wheatley 2006:22-4, Hills 2005a:121). Resultantly, such dynamism between informal and formal media ecologies also stresses the need to consider how official and pirate paratexts shape meaning for audiences (Denison 2017).

Whilst the thesis has explored Only-Click meaning-making around the formatting, distribution, consumption practices of my case studies, further research could explore Only-Click communities within site-specific groups (Crisp 2015:111-3). These may be based around

certain genres (Denison 2017) or more general spaces (e.g. Schwarz 2015). Similarly, further nuance could be given in considering both formal and informal Only-Click streaming and downloading (Gonzalez 2017, Yu et al 2017), as despite the digital flow of content in terms of distribution and consumption, there are structural differences between the two. We might note a degree of ephemerality to streaming as a format since content can be taken down or blocked on sites that means audiences cannot access it. Download, on the other hand, provides users with a file that is then permanently theirs. Thus, since textual acquisition can be important in terms of yielding subcultural capital, analysing these formats and the discourses attached to them by audiences can aid in offering a deeper understanding of audiences' meaning-making as Chapter 4 has aimed to do.

Beyond industry bids for quality status, and the flows of dissemination and consumption of twenty-first century TV horror, the thesis also evidenced how abjection is salient for horror in terms of both representations and audience affect/experience. As Pinedo notes of the former, '[t]he monster signifies what Julia Kristeva calls the "abject", that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules"' (1997:22). And as Jack Morgan notes of the latter, 'horror's primary illusion is... the fall into abjection' (2002:70). I'll now summarise and discuss how abjection can serve both textual analysis and audience-based research.

#### **1.4. Screen Abjection: TV Horror's Semiotics and Reading Strategies**

My research has argued that abjection is useful in locating and unpacking texts within wider cultural contexts whilst stressing horror's theme of suffering (Kristeva 1982:140, Arya 2014:132). Whilst each case study is different – *ITF* is set in the English North reintegrating the sentient undead back into a conservative community; *TWD* takes in a US post-apocalyptic landscape that sees humans try to survive after the fall of patriarchal society; and *MOH*'s Japanese episodes have American men threatened by monstrous East Asian females in otherworld spaces – abjection has been fundamental to analysing storyworlds, characters, and wider contexts (Arya 2014:133). Abjection also offered different reading strategies that shaped the meanings of *ITF*, *TWD* and *MOH* for fans.

Those deemed abject and/or to embody abjection function as key textual components, especially when positioned in opposition to those coded as non-abject. Within the horror genre,

‘the monster... is archetypically abject and occupies interstitial states between different categories, thereby transgressing the idea of a discrete boundary’ (Arya 2014:15). Yet abjection is not morally prescriptive (Kristeva 1982:4). This allows one to take the perspective of those treated as Other. With *ITF*, the Other is both undead and queer. But whilst homosexuality has historically been coded as abject (Arya 2014:4), the text utilises I-zombie storytelling where ‘the audience [are] implicated within the perspective of the undead’ (Abbott 2016a:144). This perspective constructs the undead as sympathetic (ibid:149), allowing the series to explore relationships between abjection and discrimination.

Abbott’s I-zombie model is a pertinent influence on the I-abject subject position which Chapter 1 argues is a primer for audience readings of, and identifications with, *ITF* characters, informing my reading of *ITF*’s fans in Chapter 5. However, this I-abject process is not limited to horror. Creed and Hoorn argue that ‘the female artist must confront herself as an abject being’ (2016:90). Likewise, beyond the gendered sphere, I-abject positionality offers an individual perspective on a collective identity and/or treatment of that communal identity (Ashuri 2010:188), allowing texts to make wider cultural commentaries on race, class, or sexuality, for example, from a particular standpoint (Arya 2014:145, Hallam and Marshment 2000:190, van Alphen 2016:120-2).

Moving away from subjectivity, Chapter 2 applied abjection to geography. Since abjection is coded as feminine (Kristeva 1982:2), *TWD*’s abject storyworld provides the physical and symbolic terrain that its central hero Grimes must negotiate masculinity within. Significantly, such themes provide the tentpole consistency of *TWD*’s transmedia franchise. As such, we see similar crises-in-masculinity across *TWD* (para)texts, including *FTWD*, spin-off novels focusing on male characters, and the video games *TTTWD* and *TWD:SI*. However, despite the gendered negotiations between male characters and symbolically feminine monstrous space, abjection pertains to ‘duration, or a process that involves time’ (Arya 2014:4). In *TWD* this duration appears to be endless in the ongoing apocalypse. Yet, ‘[w]hat is... transgressive is relative to culture and society’ (ibid:84) given ‘shifting notions of what comprises abjection’ (Arya and Chare 2016:11). The thesis thus explored how socio-political subtexts around abject discourse within the *TWD* franchise were subject to change (see also Abbott 2016a:113-8), moving from post-9/11 masculinity-in-crisis in *TWD* to state oppression in *FTWD*, thereby shifting from an internal to external Other (Arya 2014:40). Thus, whilst textual analysis uncovers semiotic meaning, abjection’s post-structuralist bent can address shifting meanings

across storylines and series, making it useful for analysing TV horror's serialisation and intratextual structures.

If *TWD* shifts how the abject Other is coded across its transmedia nexus, Chapter 3's textual analysis, informed by the ambiguity of abjection (Wark 2016:34), shifted how the monstrous feminine could be read in 'Imprint' and 'Dream Cruise' as transnationally co-produced episodes. Both texts offer examples of the Japanese monstrous feminine in transcultural relationships with American men. But by using Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque (1984:311-7), 'Imprint's' abject female body can be shifted from acting as an exotic Other to instead appearing as a feminist commentary on the patriarchal oppression of Japanese women. This argument is supported by the original source novel having been written by the feminist author Shimako Iwai. 'Dream Cruise', on the other hand, provided female agency within modern day Japan by hybridising J-horror with the female-orientated J-dorama (Han 2008:27-8). Rather than simply being Orientalist in their depictions of the East as alluring and barbaric, my polysemic Kristevan reading demonstrated how both horror texts also evoke wider (trans)cultural gender issues.

National discourses surrounding my case studies have included constructions of British, American, and Japanese identity in *ITF*, *TWD*, and *MOH* respectively. Future research may look at how abjection in TV horror from other parts of the world engages with various forms of national identity<sup>126</sup> (Bird 2003:21, Polan 2007:262). Furthermore, while the thesis limited itself to horror texts, subsequent research needs to explore non-horror media (e.g. Arya 2014:130-1, Lechte 2016:23, Mey 2016:145). For instance, one could study 'green' films<sup>127</sup> (Parham 2016:38-9). Creed and Hoorn explain that, '[a]nimals... have a special relationship to the abject in human culture and artistic representation' (2016:90). As such, art can 'focus directly on the image of the animal and the animal/woman to raise ethical questions about the treatment of animals' (ibid:96).<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> For instance, the rise of TV horror in Spain (see Rodríguez-Ortega and Romero 2017), or French TV horror *Les Revenant* (see Abbott 2016b:164, Andrea 2016:76-7).

<sup>127</sup> John Parham defines green film as cinema – fiction, documentary, and art film – that discusses various environmental and ecological issues (2016:38-9).

<sup>128</sup> Texts such as Bong Joon Ho's *Okja* that humanises the animal (Debruge 2017, Kermode 2017, Robey 2017), Simon Amstel's *Carnage*, a science fiction mockumentary about veganism being the norm in the future 'where meat, eggs and dairy are outlawed' (Benwell 2017), or PETA's shocking exposés showing the brutality of animals being slaughtered for food (Simonson 2001, Deckha 2008) would all make productive case studies. These examples not only highlight the abject horror of the meat industry but engage with food revulsion, an exemplar of abjection (Kristeva 1982:3-4).

Likewise, similar to my discussion of *Stranger Things*' construction of the past, we might also look at how previous real world traumas have been mediated. Trauma has strong connections to the horror genre (Lowenstein 2005:2-3, Wetmore 2012:16, Briefel and Miller 2011b:7, Blake 2008:2), but also includes texts that deal 'with a world-shattering event or events of the past, whether personal, public, or both' (Walker 2001:214). Whereas my research has focused on fictional abject monsters, trauma media remediates real world abjection (Elsaesser 2001:195, Collins 2011:7, Traverso and Broderick 2010:3) in fictional and documentary form (Elsaesser 2000:35, 2001:197, Perea 2010:42, Walker 2010). Trauma media can locate abjection in the past as something to be worked through, such as in films that depict the Holocaust (see Holdsworth 2010).

We might also consider how abjection relates to television news broadcast and photojournalism (Taylor 1998:2, Hills 2005a:130-6). Since '[f]atalities are shown as spec/tacularised news of conflict and war from other parts of the world' (Mey 2016:145), abject imagery fits alongside the representation of Others within the construction of news narratives (van Alphen 2016:120-1). Moreover, depending on the ideological leanings of the specific news institution, abjection and the Other may be coded very differently (Creeber 2006c:46). However, given my particular focus on graphic TV horror, instead of considering horrifying photojournalism I have considered how audiences respond to fictionalised screen abjection via abject spectrums.

### **1.5. Abject Spectrums: The Phenomenology of Responses to Horror**

While the thesis argued that abjection serves as a textual analysis schema and theory for understanding audiences' responses, my audience-based research does not legitimate my textual analysis *ex post facto* (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:63) and avoids 'audience conjectures' (Stromer-Gallery and Schiappa 1998:28). Rather, highlighting different (anti-)fan readings of my case studies offered insights into audience-text relationships (Thomas 2002:59). To address audiences' different discursive reading strategies (Hills 2015b:153), and evidencing the dexterity of abjection that accounts for polysemic readings, I developed the abject spectrum model. Kristeva's 'phenomenological investigation of the abject... involves conscious experience from the first-person point of view' (Arya 2014:10). Resultantly, abject spectrums pertain to phenomenological, ideological, aesthetic, and corporeal responses of audiences towards screen abjection (Stephens 2012:530, Harris 2009:34), located within on-going

cultural contexts, and potentially in transmedia matrixes (see Introduction page 13 for diagram). Furthermore, the subject is ‘always in process... This lack of finish means that it is viable to envisage change in identity’ (Chare 2016:57-8). Given this, Part II of the thesis analysed how in-process phenomenological abject spectrums shape audiences’ responses to the screen abjection of my case studies.

Moreover, ‘for Kristeva, both the human subject and all systems of language are heterogeneous’ (Barrett 2016:134). Chapters 4-6 utilised netnography to evidence abject spectrums performed online within communal systems and at specific sites (Bore and Hickman 2013). This included the scriptural *logos* of audiences writing about the case studies and how they read/felt about them, but also addressed the use of image posts as user-generated texts (Bollmer and Guinness 2017).

For *ITF*, the longitudinal remit of my analysis examined audience responses to the text related to their ontological security and its continuation/cancellation. Fans’ abject spectrums shifted with the status of the series. When the show was being broadcast, secure audience readings focused on the storyworld, characters, and subtextual meanings (Chapter 5). Fans also frequently aligned themselves with the I-zombie perspective of Kieran in how they read the text. This evidenced the multi-coding potential of abjection’s ambiguity as fans discussed what this TV horror meant, seeing the text as allegorical of homophobia, xenophobia, far-right politics, mental illness, and/or oppression. Times of ontological insecurity occurred when the text was not being produced and primarily when it was cancelled (Chapter 4). With fan identity destabilised, becoming abject itself, fan activist strategies stressed the text’s quality and a need for its restoration. Turning to the *ITF* image culture (Chapter 6), visual posts typically paralleled the status of characters: when the show was active then images centred on the lead characters and their relationships. When there was a degree of uncertainty, e.g. during the filming of the second season, posts used pre-textual posting (Hills 2015c) and the actors’ friendships to re-install textual qualities championed in the diegesis. When *ITF* was cancelled, fan activist imagery used the abject visuals of undead characters as indicators that the show needed saving.

When analysing the abject landscape of *TWD* as a transmedia hyperdiegesis predominantly occupied by males struggling with gender scripts, focusing on audiences of colour saw racial discourse brought to the fore. Anti-fans read *TWD* as emblematic of black oppression in the US, representing the repressive power of American white patriarchy. This was supported by

memes that used image posts to discursively subvert character representations from the text by superimposing text that commented on black male character typecasting and ineffectiveness. Anti-fans read *FTWD* as emblematic of Black Othering concordant with the real-world mistreatment of poor black communities by the state and police. Audiences of colour hence read these series not as male-centred serials, but as texts that were representative of the legitimisation of ‘racial hierarchies existent in US society’<sup>129</sup> (Yuen 2017:7; Carrington 2016:13-5). Vehement objections to these representations of black males by audiences of colour mapped onto their experiences of living in North America during a time of civil unrest, highlighting how fan/audience identities intersect with other aspects of one’s being. As Imogen Tyler remarks, ‘[a]bjection has effects on real bodies, abjection hurts’ (2009:90).

Conversely, *TTTWD*’s black male lead is championed by fans of colour for offering a character type unusual in video games, and one who is also atypical in terms of having detailed character development. The data showed how these abject spectrums were informed by individuals’ ethnicity but also their perceived and lived experience of race in wider US culture. Moreover, the ergodic pathways of how audiences chose to consume *TWD* texts and paratexts (Klastrup and Tosca 2016:108) meant that it could be *both* racially problematic for some audiences and also racially innovative or progressive for others. But what this stresses is that self-identity can have a strong presence in responses to texts for certain individuals, at certain times, in certain places; as noted in Chapter 5 audiences of other ethnicities did not present such a strong anchoring of self in their responses to *TWD*. Addressing (anti-)fans of colour chimes with the need in Fan Studies to address how race shapes textual meaning and how, as an identity marker, it impacts on fan community engagement (Wanzo 2015). Further research could turn to texts that offer more varied and developed representations of race and culture (Yuen 2017:65), for instance studying post-TV dramas such as Netflix’s *Luke Cage* (Thomas 2017:143-4, Hemphill 2017, Lynch 2017) to see how audiences engage with its superheroic depictions of ethnicity.

In considering how abjection functions transculturally, Showtime’s neo-cult strategy of attracting Asia Extreme/J-horror fans through pre-/paratextual brand specific abjection, use of Japanese film auteurs, and graphic horror meant engaging with a fandom heavily invested in this film cycle and who were highly knowledgeable about it. Applying abject spectrums to genre as an ergodic intertextual process means examining how the lived experience of genre

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<sup>129</sup> These audiences of colour’s challenging of racial marginalisation are not misguided. Nancy Wang Yuen evidences how in 2013, ‘actors of color played only 6.5 percent of lead roles in broadcast television shows and 16.7 percent of lead roles in [Hollywood] films’ (2017:5), despite ‘African Americans watch[ing] more television than.. any other racial group’ (ibid:64).

also shapes responses (Mittell 2004:16-17). Moreover, in this case, aesthetics of abjection come to the fore in these spectrums as tied to the representation of a culture, i.e. Japan. Consequently, third space rhetoric can be revised to transcultural fan audiences and how they ‘translate’ Japan through the texts they consume, the media validated within the community, the knowledge frameworks that inform their abject spectrums, and the texts they omit such as ‘Imprint’ and ‘Dream Cruise’ which are read as inauthentic compared to championed Asia Extreme and J-horror films. Transcultural fans on the forum *Snowblood Apple* used their own experiences/constructions of ‘Japan’ through indigenous film content they marked as authentic, differentiated from Western media (Hills 2005c:168), to inform their readings of the *MOH* episodes. Furthermore, some fans challenged the auteur status of Takashi and Tsuruta prior to seeing their episodes, undermining their oeuvres as part of the canon that this fandom oscillates around. Consequently, these fans’ anti-fan readings marked the episodes as inauthentic in their representations of genre and culture, use of questionable producers, and blatant attempts to appropriate film genre(s) for a television audience.

Conversely, Chapter 6’s focus on Tumblr evidenced strong fan adoration for the episodes. Utilising quotational practices (Bore 2017:13), by appropriating key abject moments of the texts these image posts stressed visuality as an indicator of ‘quality’ horror through textural poaching (Gillan 2016:10). Furthermore, whilst *Snowblood Apple* fans performed ‘knowledge over affect’ via their readings of abjection (Hills 2005a:75), Tumblr image posts evidenced far more corporeal affects of individuals’ abject spectrums as users noted which scenes were the most abject and how they made them feel (Barker et al 2016:90-1,98). Thus, the aesthetics and affects of TV horror abjection can be contested or praised as a result of prior experience/knowledge in relation to the discursive cluster that texts are located within. Moreover, when that cluster is framed by transcultural discourse then the *Snowblood Apple* group claims an authority to represent ‘Japan’ as the texts’ country of origin. But since discursive clusters are open to contestation, offering alternative third space discourses of Japan, Tumblr image posts can be seen as equally valid.

While there has been some recent and much-needed work analysing Western audiences/fans’ empirical engagements with Asia Extreme cinema (Barker et al 2007; Pett 2013, 2017), challenging pre-existing accusations of Orientalist readings (Shin 2009:86-7) – which my thesis also does – to date there has been no research into Japanese fan responses to these

films.<sup>130</sup> Toshie Takahashi's ethnographic research into Japanese audiences adds to 'the "internationalisation" of media studies' (2010:8), and questions homogeneously conceptualised Japanese culture by evidencing 'the dynamics and diverse nature of Japanese life... pay[ing] particular attention to the Japanese emic concept *uchi* (social group)' (ibid:9, Chun 2011). But it does not focus on horror fandom. Since Asia Extreme and J-horror are located via Western industry paratexts (Dew 2007:53-4, Martin 2015) in the US and UK, and via transcultural fans' constructions of meaning (Hills 2005c), focusing on the indigenous culture from which such media hails would be important in terms of making cross-cultural comparisons of the marketing and distribution of Asia Extreme and J-horror cinema, as well as analysing how domestic audiences have read and responded to this body of work (Davis 2001:56) and its TV horror offshoots. Such considerations would also aid in moving away from the Anglophone focus of Fan Studies (Chin and Morimoto 2013:93) in future research, offering a richer cultural contextualisation to abject spectrums.

Lastly, I factored repeat experiences into my concept of audiences' abject spectrums. The layering effect of repeat consumption means we are effectively different individuals for every repeat viewing, reading or playing precisely because we are informed by previous experiences. This can alter our phenomenological distance and the modes of affect. For instance, what was once the dread of the *unknown* can become the dread of a *known* scene or storyline. Similarly, a startling shock, whereby a 'threatening object or event... ruptures the situation suddenly and unexpected' (Hanich 2010:127) can lose its impact since we know what will happen. Repeat viewing is likely to manifest in fans as they often repetitively consume favoured texts (Duffett 2013a:26).

Considering this in relation to Trauma Studies, the theory stresses history and memory (Elsaesser 2001:194). Like abjection it links individuals to wider culture (Pollock 2009:45-6, Traverso and Broderick 2010:4), and addresses monumental events and on-going/everyday traumas (Turim 2001:2016, Kansteiner 2004:194). Trauma is tied to one's identity, also bringing in other markers of self that frame this state (Garde-Hansen 2011:33) such as nation, race, gender, sexuality (Elsaesser 2001:194, Perera 2010:33, Walker 2010:52). Consequently, trauma has been useful in postcolonial and cross-cultural examples (Rothberg 2008:226) which my abject spectrum model also attests to. Trauma 'denotes the reoccurrence or repetition of the

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<sup>130</sup> Alvin Lu notes that in Japan, J-horror is 'largely a teenage girl-based phenomenon. The genre's core fans are readers of girls' horror comics' (2002:38). However, no audience-centric research provides empirical data to explore this.

stressor event through memory, dreams, [and/or] narrative[s]' (Visser 2011:272). The latency of traumatic events retold later as texts and/or by individuals (Elsaesser 2011:197, Walker 2010:48-9, Traverso 2010:179-80) can thus shape abject spectrums. Whereas my research has focused on immediate responses to horror that utilise Web 2.0 affordances (Kozinets 2015:166), the phenomenological framework of abject spectrums is also shaped by memories of past experiences and events (Radstone 2001:191). Furthermore, individuals' primary experiences of a traumatic event strongly differ from those who experience it solely from a mediated secondary position (Collins 2011:5-6, Kansteiner 2004:221, Visser 2011:275). This is evident when comparing *TWD* antifans and *ITF* fans. The former dislike the text because of their own primary experience of racial mistreatment, whilst the latter take a position that champions the series for its challenging of traumatic Othering. Thus, future research could address the proximity that an individual feels towards a mediated traumatic event (Kansteiner 2004:208, Perera 2010:33, Traverso and Broderick 2010:8), and how this affects abject spectrums that may guide differing responses (Stephens 2012:531). Finally, I will now turn to the limitations of this research.

### **1.6. Dead Zones and New Frontiers: Research Limitations and Future Research**

Whilst stressing the phenomenological core of abject spectrums, the scope and diversity of this research meant that in-depth and one-to-one interviews were not feasible. Thus, I have relied in this instance on online content to evidence the concept via netnography (Kozinets 2010:25). Yet, interviews of a small sample size have been salient in other phenomenological research (Zepeda 2011:51-2, Shaw and Hector 2010:129-30, Orbe 2000:612, Englander 2012:20, Groenewald 2004:46-7), allowing respondents to voice and explain their experiences (Halldórsdóttir and Hamrin 1996:29), and researchers to ask questions 'in direct response to... participants' descriptions' (ibid:31). Focusing on specific groups/individuals offers more detailed phenomenological constellations through which to explore detailed meanings around on-screen abjection. It can delve deeper into the effects of repeat viewing and allow respondents to discuss key memories that structure their abject spectrums (Sorrell and Redmond 1995:1120, Crist 2003:203, Zepeda 2011:53). It can also enquire into how subjects feel when adopting an I-abject position (Harris 2009:42-3). However, in considering how trauma may play a factor in developing the model, the ethical consideration of asking others to

discuss their traumatic past must be addressed to ensure that no emotional or psychological harm comes to participants (ibid:49, Oliver 2010:120, Shaw and Hector 2010:130). Therefore, developing an interview methodology in future work on graphic TV horror would allow a more detailed understanding of how audiences read and respond to screen abjection, and provide a more detailed examination of abject spectrums.

Similarly, while my research has addressed certain phenomenological experiences linked to identity – fan, racial, (trans)cultural – other experiences were not covered. Specifically, males and females both posted online about all three of my case studies and engaged in community dialogue<sup>131</sup>. However, this gender identity was not explicitly explored by me on the whole, largely because it has already been researched extensively in Fan and Cultural Studies (Brown 2001:98-101, Brooker and Jermyn 2003:213, Janz and Martis 2007:142). Yet gender clearly does inform abject spectrums (Chamarette 2015) and this is something that I may have unwittingly downplayed in my analysis. Gender has been central to analysing female audiences' engagement with on-screen representations (Brunsdon 1998:108, Mumford 1998:124 Creeber 2006a:5), and it has been hybridised with other aspects of identity such as race (e.g. Bobo 2003), and/or sexuality (e.g. Gwenllian-Jones 2003). Furthermore, TV fandom has often been discussed in relation to female fans, often linked to fanfiction practices (e.g. Brown 1990, Bacon-Smith 1992, Penley 1997, Bury 1998, 2003, Hellekson and Busse 2006:7, Busse 2006), whilst horror fandom has largely been read as a male or masculinised practice (Clover 1992:23, Chibnal and Petley 2002:4, Duffett 2013:193, Hills 2014a97, Barker et al 2016:62). Analysing graphic twenty-first century TV horror may call for a need to revise such gender constructions around the conceptualisation of horror fan demographics (see Cherry 2002), and my online data certainly points to a more diverse set of fan identities surrounding TV horror (Duffett 2013:197). Likewise, future research could turn to examples of horror that specifically address gender. For instance, Netflix's *XX* explores horror from a female perspective (Budowski 2017, Bishop 2017), and audience study in relation to this post-TV horror could be highly fruitful.

Moreover, if fans, and indeed anti-fans, are 'the most visible and identifiable of audiences' (Lewis 1992:1), then my research has been somewhat limited in terms of focusing on intensely engaged audiences. But what of other audiences who may watch graphic TV horror just once or more casually? What of their abject spectrums? Barker et al (2016) in their attempt to offer

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<sup>131</sup> For instance, the main two administrators for *Snowblood Apple* were a man and a woman. Of the sixteen blogs looking at Black audiences' responses to *TWD* and *FTWD*, seven were written by men, nine by women.

a more representative sample of viewing positions of audiences who have watched *Alien* provide a range of reading positions. However, their case study circulates extensively within popular culture as both a landmark film and as one that has been parodied extensively (ibid:4). By contrast, my case studies are comparatively less well known, therefore gaining a more varied audience range that can offer more detailed and diverse abject spectrums may be harder to access since casual audiences would be hard to track down.

Lastly, the abject monsters analysed in this thesis – zombies, demons, and ghosts – have been considered from secular positions. That is to say, audiences read them as purely fictional. However, audiences' spirituality can evidently influence abject spectrums. For instance, reality/documentary horror such as *Most Haunted*, *Ghost Watch*, and *Haunted Homes* present themselves as non-fiction (Freeland 2004, Hill 2010), using real-world ghost sightings as a marker of abject authenticity (Baker and Bader 2014:571). Similarly, beyond Western secular society other regions of the world are still heavily spiritual, informing cultural rituals, beliefs, and symbols (Ancuta and Campos 2015:i-ii). For example, Philippine horror films tap into real-world cultural beliefs (Baumgärtel 2015:3). Future research would benefit from analysing how these phenomenological components – experiencing and/or believing in spirits – when compared to secular/atheist readings might significantly shape audiences' responses to forms of TV horror. This would also aid in studying a wider breadth of cultures, going beyond Anglophonic audience research, and moving away from looking at mediated cultural depictions of other cultures (e.g. Chutikamoltham 2015) to seeing how indigenous audiences respond to their own national-cultural imagery (Visser 2011:279, e.g. Downes 2015). Whilst this section highlights the shortcomings of my research and also how my abject spectrum model would benefit from other approaches and audience-text case studies, the decision to use netnography for three case studies still presented fruitful data. My analyses of *ITF* showed how abject spectrums evidence polysemic readings of texts, but also how audience-text relationships can be shaped by ontological (in)security over a longer period of time. Addressing *TWD*'s transmedia franchise demonstrated how audiences' self as a lived experience can be central to reading textual representations but also how the ergodic dynamics of (transmedial) intratextuality shaped the development of abject spectrums. This allows *TWD* to be both racially problematic and nuanced. Lastly, looking at how transcultural Asia Extreme and/or J-horror fans aesthetically read the abjection in *MOH*'s Japanese/US co-produced episodes showed how abject spectrums can operate at an intertextual level whereby responses are informed by audiences' consumption and knowledge of a pre-existing and canonised discursive

cluster of film texts. Moreover, the authenticating of certain indigenous horror and the rebuttal of inauthentic genre texts evidences how Japan as a ‘third space’ construction functions to give both texts and community a degree of legitimacy.

## **1.7. Conclusion**

To conclude, despite previous arguments putting forward the notion that horror is not suitable for television (Branston and Stafford 2003:87, Gunter et al 2003:1-2, Hills 2005a:111, Newman and Levine 2012:17), this thesis has illustrated how its graphic re-envisioning began with premium cable texts such as *Carnivále*, *Masters of Horror*, and *Dexter* that were not constrained by traditional regulations and political economies (see Marc 2008, Aloï and Johnston 2015, Kooyman 2010, Totaro 2010, Howard 2010, Houwen 2015) becoming a prominent and important category in the latter part of first decade of the twenty-first century TV as other TV industry players took up the genre and propagated it further within the televisual landscape. Thus, what was once rare is now perhaps almost a staple of ‘quality’ TV. Furthermore, the thesis has analysed why this underexplored form of television matters from industrial, cultural, (sub)textual and audience-based perspectives (Nichols 2000:34). The thesis utilised abjection not only as a reading strategy for my case studies that evidenced ‘quality’ TV discourses (Part I), but also formulated the abject spectrum model to account for diverse audience responses to TV horror’s abjections (Part II). Moreover, the thesis analysed how informal media ecologies create Only-Click TV to circulate twenty-first century horror television transnationally which, in turn, allows transcultural audiences to consume this content. Consequently, this thesis has aimed to better serve and understand audiences in Horror Studies (Hills 2014a:90). Additionally, in arguing that audience identities are hybridised, the thesis introduced Bhabha’s ‘third space’ to Fan Studies to analyse how audiences of colour and transcultural fans generate and occupy sites of meaning around racial and cultural representations. Furthermore, revising third space within an online context addressed the saliency of Web 2.0 image cultures of GIFs and memes that shape and perform textual meaning for participatory audiences.

In my Introduction I explained that, at the turn of the millennium, and in a ‘changing landscape of television’ (Jowett and Abbott 2013:xiii), horror had found ‘new prominence’ (ibid) in its utilisation of ‘graphic and nihilistic conventions of the genre’ (Abbott 2016a:97). The rise of

graphic horror television has indeed seen it move from the marginal depths of TV culture to become a popular behemoth that shows no signs of slowing down or declining. Moreover, as television continues to act as a changing, growing, and transmogrifying object of study then so too does the horror content it produces. Such developments continue to prompt new research that – like this doctoral thesis – seeks to better understand the genre, its evolving TV habitat, and its myriad audiences.

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