

**Angela Ndalianis:**  
***The Horror Sensorium: Media and the Senses.***  
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Angela Ndalianis is an Australian media scholar whose former publications include *The Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (MIT Press, 2004) and *Science Fiction Experiences* (New Academia1 Publishing, 2011). In *The Horror Sensorium*, Ndalianis shows how horror in different media forms engages our senses. The book analyzes a variety of engagements with media such as in movies, theme park rides, television series, novels, video games, and transmedia horror experiences such as ARGs (alternate reality games) in which the user is a VUP (viewer/user/player) participating in real life (marketing) stories. Her term “the sensorium” refers to “the sensory mechanics of the human body and to the intellectual and cognitive functions connected to it” (p. 1). The book concerns both perception and our making sense of such perception. Ndalianis thus avoids a dichotomy of sense versus meaning or sensory versus intellectual and regards the dualities as connected: When we perceive a disgusting monster, we are already interpreting our perception and reacting with disgust. The sensorium is “an interface” between, on the one hand, our physical and intellectual body and, on the other hand, an external world to which the media belongs.

The book has an Introduction and seven chapters. The Introduction explains the sensorium, and first chapter introduces New Horror. The other six chapters examine horror experiences in different media. First, describing the sensorium, the author draws from studies on affect, cognition, and emotions with key names being Giuliana Bruno, Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks, and Jennifer Barker. In later chapters, the well-oriented Ndalianis draws from a wide range of studies in art and new media. Now the interface between our

sensorium and the media is described in terms of “psychogeographic journeys that trigger affective responses” (p. 4), using Bruno’s metaphor of “geopsychic architecture” to describe the emotional shaping of a horror narrative. To see (and in other media experiences, to feel, touch, and engage) invites kinesthetic responses of feeling, smelling, and sensing, and although Ndalianis uses the term “viewer”, we *experience* rather than *see* horror.

Chapter One places New Horror in the new millennium following the metareflexive horror narratives of the 1990s (such as the *Scream* films). Comparing the original *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) to its 2006 remake, the author points to “bigger budgets” as well as greater attention to “the graphic punishment and destruction of bodies” (p. 23). While analyzing the sensory and haptic destruction of the body in New Horror, however, Ndalianis comments that the violence of the original *Hills* (1977) is more uncomfortable because it feels more like “‘real’ violence” (p. 25). A recurring trait of New Horror is often, paradoxically, that even if it belongs to an Experience Economy offering sensory and haptic experiences, these feel less “real”. Horror is both a sensory and an intellectual experience, which Chapter Five analyzes through *Planet Terror* (Robert Rodriguez, 2007) and *Death Proof* (Quentin Tarantino, 2007). Drawing on Bakhtin’s theories of dialogue in the novel and the social function of the Medieval carnival respectively, these films are carnivalesque works of New Horror, “cannibalizing” former genres as well as intertextually playing with, expanding, and paying homage to the slasher, carsploitation, girl gang, and rape revenge films. Our sensorium is addressed through a grotesque spectacle of zombies, altered bodies, and gleeful destruction, which become “theatrical performances that are about the carnivalization of the horror genre” (p. 121). Here, it is not so much a physical body that is on display as it is the medium itself, “a grotesque carnival that’s about the body of film as a medium: what we see is an illusion” (p. 126). The many-layered references of these films are an “Über-cinephilia” (p. 128) paying homage also to film theory (with Tarantino famously writing *Death Proof* in response to Carol Clover’s book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (1993)).

My favorite part of the book is Chapter Four, which provides an excellent analysis of the inner workings of the paranormal romance and its adaptations to film and television. Ndalianis points out that paranormal romance “exists on a continuum” with “love, sex and romance” at one end and “the horror, darkness and chaos that can lie at the core of eroticism” at the other. The two ends correspond to teen paranormal romance (to which *Twilight* belongs) and adult paranormal romance (the *Anita Blake* book series). In her essay “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess”, Linda Williams (1991) examined a correspondence between genre and physical reaction (melodrama/tears, horror/shudder, porn/arousal). Ndalianis points out that paranormal romance collapses the distinction between genres. It has its roots in the Gothic and the sentimental novel, but it also belongs to New Horror, mixing genres and emotions. The works in this genre combine multiple genres, and “its schizophrenic identity is reflected in how it’s presented in book-shops [...] under romance, horror, science fiction and fantasy, and crime” (p. 80). At one end, the dark eroticism of Bataille finds its way into popular horror, where episodes of *True Blood* provide

examples of “a sensory whirlwind” (p. 101). Drawing on Bataille and the aesthetics of disgust (Korsmeier), the author demonstrates how the horror experience engages the sensorium corporeally and intellectually. The first element, the corporeal, is central: “How and why it takes the form it does can’t fully be understood through any rational means, and yet it still exists and demands attention” (p. 105). It is this physical engagement that Ndalianis explains. Embedded in the experience is the question of “reality”: Are we really scared and really disgusted? How do “real” emotions feel, and how do we use them? To the first question, the author responds that these emotions feel real, yet the experience is also recognized as mediated and “gives rise to an aesthetic of disgust that allows critical distance, making it possible to analyze the object that is its source” (p. 104). To the latter question concerning how we use these emotions, Ndalianis gives no answer, her study being analytical, not empirical.

The chapters on video games (Two and Six) and alternate reality games (Seven) examine physical engagement with horror. Chapter Two examines the player’s immersion in game play and the need to link sensory perception to intellectual response in navigating one’s avatar through space, shooting monsters, and solving puzzles that require “a unified relationship between mind and body, the senses and cognition – and this relationship is felt intensely in gameplay” (p. 51). Whereas novels and cinema arouse disgust and sexual emotions that we feel but need not express as (re)action, video games address our sense of proprioception (awareness of the position of the parts of the body and the moving of our bodies) and equilibrioception (sense of balance). In games, in other words, our sensorium must react in the game, a story only unfolding if we play with our bodies. Chapter Six concerns the design of game space. Using *Doom 3* (2004) as example, the author puts the design of New Horror gaming in a new media historical perspective, describing how the development of new games aesthetics is linked to development in hardware and software. The aim is to design a realistic world miming the aesthetics of movies rather than of real life. *Doom 3* both mimics reality and incorporates a “techno-textuality” conscious of other media, earlier games, and its own aesthetics as groundbreaking media design. New Horror games are “games about games” (p. 150). Drawing on Bernard Perron (who himself draws on Ed Tan), Ndalianis outlines three kinds of emotions: art emotions (appreciating the art of the media), fiction emotions (empathetic and engaged in the story development), and game emotions (“emotions arising from our actions in the game” (p. 145)). The latter can take the form of frustration if one is not adept at killing monsters or of joy if one masters the motions of one’s avatar. Reality, representation, and authenticity in video games are less concerned with a real world as they are with the engagement of our sensorium.

Finally, the chapter “Transmedia and the Sensorium: From *Blair Witch* to *True Blood*” shows how horror media reaches out to engage with our sensorium in everyday life through marketing strategies. The premiere of the film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) was preceded by extended storytelling on the internet about a real search for a real witch, advertising the film with “21,222,589 hits to date” in *Variety* (171). Next, the film *A.I.* (2001) was preceded

by an alternate reality game (ARG) involving participants using various media and performing actions in real life to create an alternate story world. Transmedia storytelling is aimed at fans willing to become viewers/users/players (VUP), and keywords are viral marketing, pervasive stories using multiple media platforms, and audiences' real engagement in meta-appreciation. The collapse of boundaries is designed to sell a narrative through engagement of the sensorium (in action, feeling, sensing, and intellectually participating) and engaging audiences in world-building and storytelling. Ndiagnosis compares this to what Jason Mittell calls an "operational aesthetic" in which audiences take pleasure from both stories and the telling of stories. The selling of real *True Blood* drinks and advertisements aimed at vampire consumers in the real world is part of such marketing. Such gaming, however, does not aim at the very real horror and panic following Orson Wells' radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938 but at meta-conscious performance, amusement, and cognitive play.

*The Horror Sensorium* is both erudite and eloquent, with phrases like these (concerning video games): "Like ruins and fragments, these entertainment forms evoke the existence of a past in the present while simultaneously transforming the ruin into a restored majestic structure that still contains its past in the foundations beneath it" (p. 152). The book will be an excellent introduction to media and senses and to New Horror for both graduate and postgraduate students. It is highly recommended for anyone interested in affects and emotions in new media.

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