

## Editorial

This issue on 'European Horror Film' has its origins in a one-day symposium on 'Eurohorror' held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London on Halloween 2013. Sponsored by the Centre for Film and Media Research at the University of Kent, the symposium brought together academics, film historians and programmers to discuss this critical concept and the discursive practices associated with commercial, popular and scholarly constructions of 'Eurohorror'. Rather than re-rehearsing familiar narratives about 'Eurohorror' erected around an established canon of films, directors and themes, or reclaiming a particular text or filmmaker from obscurity, the brief to participants was to historicise the term since it is more often than not conflated with related cinematic categories such as 'Euro Trash' or 'Euro Cult',<sup>1</sup> and to think about the critical intersections and interactions between various fields of cultural production associated with it – fanzines, small niche VHS and DVD distributors, spaces for dissemination – to approach it from fresh perspectives so as to chronicle stories that have not yet been told. The ultimate aim, therefore, was to map out a richer and more nuanced picture of the cultural histories of 'Eurohorror', and, by extension, European horror film.

Speakers responded to the task: film historian Jonathan Rigby, contributing consultant to the BBC4 documentary *Horror Europa with Mark Gatiss* (2012) and the BFI season 'Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film' (August 2013 – January 2014), traced the development of a Euro Gothic sensibility from the silent era to the dawn of the twenty-first century with particular emphasis on the ways in which British horror traditions have shaped developments in continental Europe horror film industries; Peter Hutchings also examined unexplored two-way connections between British horror and continental horror to argue for a less exoticised understanding of what Eurohorror actually means as a concept; Ian Olney presented a specific case study, the examination of a cycle of Eurohorror possession films made in the wake of *The Exorcist* (1973) to show how these European takes on William Friedkin's film upended the conventions of American horror cinema and lend themselves to a queer reading, offering the potential for multiple

readings and reading positions;<sup>2</sup> Antonio Lázaro-Reboll focused on the role of US fanzines in the 1980s and in the early 1990s in shaping modes of consumption and of connoisseurship around 'Eurohorror' films for Anglo-Saxon fans and beyond; and, Josh Saco, genre programmer of independent UK-based Cigarette Burns committed to the 'screening 35 mm and 16 mm genre magic', as its website publicises, shed light on the current archival and collector culture surrounding the preservation as well as fetishisation of Eurohorror in celluloid. Courtesy of Cigarette Burns, the ICA event concluded with the screening of Italian *giallo* film, *La Notte che Evelyn uscì dalla tomba/The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* (Emilio P. Miraglia, 1971), although the immersion in Eurohorror and the Halloween high spirits continued until the late hours when participants attended a live concert given by Fabio Frizzi, the composer behind Italian horror director Lucio Fulci's *Paura nella città dei morti viventi/City of the Living Dead* (1980) and *E tu vivrai nel terrore! L'aldilà/The Beyond* (1981).

With this varied exposure to the riches of Eurohorror past and present and its imbrication in a complex network of discursive practices (visual, aural, performative and written), four commissioned pieces were requested that interrogated received notions of Eurohorror and that assessed its theoretical currency for the study of European horror film. But before providing a summary of the articles included in this special issue, it is worth dwelling on the circuits of knowledge – popular and academic – in which this category has circulated over the last two decades to provide a conceptual framework for its study and to delineate a critical lineage associated with its exploration.

As 'a term that has been primarily used by reviewers and fans – and fans who are reviewers',<sup>3</sup> narratives of Eurohorror were initially shaped by American and British fanzines and the specialist genre press of the 1980s and the early 1990s, and from the mid-1990s onwards it was disseminated in books, TV programmes and DVD extras material directed to the general horror fan and the connoisseur alike. Arguably, the work of Pete Tombs in the UK, for instance, has informed the cultural history of Eurohorror over the last two decades. His volume *Immoral Tales: European Sex and Horror Movies 1956–1984* (1995), edited in conjunction with Cathall Tohill,<sup>4</sup> and his series *Eurotika!*, for UK TV Channel 4, created with Andy Starke, provided British audiences with a window on to horror genre filmmaking across Europe over twelve documentaries and twelve representative films. Tombs's commercial enterprises with the specialist video label Pagan Films (together with Peter Salvage) and *Eurotika!*, and, subsequently, the DVD label Mondo Macabro, have been fundamental in the assembling of Eurohorror collections for many fans.

More recently, the BBC4 documentary *Horror Europa With Mark Gatiss* (2012), presented by the British actor, followed in its script the footfalls of the narratives forged by reviewers and fans in the 1990s around specific directors, films and figures. To a certain extent, *Horror Europa With Mark Gatiss* echoed in its approach the BFI Screen Guide *100 European Horror Films*. In the 'Introduction' to *100 European Horror Films*, the editor Steven Jay Schneider advocated for

the identification of ‘a canon of key directors, actors, films and cycles ... in the cultural and critical re-appraisal and “opening-up” of Eurohorror cinema’.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, *Horror Europa With Mark Gatiss* focused on the ‘stories behind the classics of European horror cinema’ and on representative films of key horror-auteurs.<sup>6</sup> But the principal thesis of the documentary was to present the ‘classics of European horror cinema’ as reflections of ‘the continent’s turbulent twentieth century’, providing therefore a symptomatic reading of the films included in the programme. In this respect, *Horror Europa* is close to the critical practices of some contemporary strands of horror film scholarship whereby symptomatic interpretation, canon-making and auterism configure reading formations of Eurohorror.<sup>7</sup>

Recent scholarly work by two of the contributors to this issue, Peter Hutchings and Ian Olney, offer not only fruitful points of entry for considerations of the term and its constructedness as a critical category but also historically and theoretically inflected approaches to Eurohorror. In ‘Resident Evil? The Limits of European Horror: *Resident Evil* vs. *Suspiria*’ (2012), Hutchings argues that Eurohorror:

exists as a critical and as a specialized subcultural category, knowledge and discussion of which circulates among a relatively small (although growing) band of critics and fans, and that often underpinning its use is an attachment to a particular set of attitudes about cultural value that has its own distinct history.<sup>8</sup>

Hutchings reminds us that this distinctive cultural and historical specificity bounds up Eurohorror ‘with the burgeoning popularity of home video technology during the 1980s’, making it ‘in part at least ... a video-based concept ... This particular formation of “European horror”’,<sup>9</sup> emerging around an Anglo-American fan culture which privileged the marginal, obscure and transgressive status of the Eurohorror film, might be labelled, according to Hutchings, as ‘the ‘old” Eurohorror’.<sup>10</sup> The question, Hutchings noted, is ‘how effective some of these initial constructions of Eurohorror still are, such is their dependence on notions of marginality and obscurity’<sup>11</sup> given the commercial availability of most of these films in DVD and Blu-ray. In the second half of the article, however, Hutchings gives a new lease of life to the term Eurohorror and opens it up to contemporary formations of European horror production by using the label ‘the “new” Eurohorror’,<sup>12</sup> which he defines as ‘an umbrella term covering a variety of different practices’, and whose very nature is ‘fractured, fragmented and dispersed unevenly across Europe’.<sup>13</sup> This distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ is valuable to explore the (dis)continuities and interrelations between distinctive manifestations of European horror from the late 1950s to the turn of the twenty-first century and historically sensitive to the diverse moments of production, distribution, exhibition and reception of Eurohorror films.

As the first monograph to focus solely on Eurohorror, Olney’s *Eurohorror. Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture* (2013) is devoted to ‘old’ Eurohorror – that is, ‘horror movies [which] which emerged from countries like Italy, Spain and France’<sup>14</sup> between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s

– although his interest lies in examining the appeal of these films for contemporary American audiences through the lens of theories of spectatorship and of identity politics. Olney's main point of contention is that through the viewing of Eurohorror films contemporary American fans are able to 'define themselves on a personal and social level while challenging cinematic and social norms – all spectatorial activities that contemporary Hollywood movies do not generally facilitate'.<sup>15</sup> While the case for a performative theory of Eurohorror cinema is made in the first part of the book, Part two puts the theory at work in the close reading of three genres characteristic of Eurohorror, the *giallo*, the S&M horror film and the cannibal and zombie film, to account for the complex character and radical potential of many European horror films. Olney's take in *Eurohorror* certainly moves away from habitual readings of the term and considers other ways of reading the cinematic allure of Eurohorror for contemporary viewers.

The first article in this special issue is by Olney himself. In 'Haunted Fascination: Horror, Cinephilia, and Barbara Steele', Olney analyses the allure of the English actress for fans and critics. Conventionally viewed through the theoretical perspective of star studies as a cult icon and feminist studies as an embodiment of the monstrous-feminine, Olney turns to cinephilia studies to argue that Steele's 1960s Gothic horror roles functioned as allegorical mediations of viewing practices that defined cinephilia. While Olney focuses on the historical specificity of Steele, his article considers the special kinship between the horror genre and cinephilia and the ways in which horror can teach us about cinephilia and cinephilia has something important to teach us about horror.

Hutchings returns British horror to narratives of Eurohorror in 'Putting the Brit into Eurohorror: Exclusions and Exchanges in the History of European Horror Cinema'. His point of departure is that British horror cinema is often excluded from critical work dealing with European horror cinema. (Certainly, and notwithstanding the different critical projects driving these works, *Immoral Tales*, *Eurotika!*, *100 European Horror Films* and *Eurohorror*, omitted British horror.) Despite the fact that British horror had less presence in the international co-production that characterised much of old 'Euro Horror', he makes a compelling case to put the Brit into Eurohorror by mapping an atlas of influences and of connections ranging from co-productions to the movement of creative personnel to the work of a specific British actress like Suzie Kendall in a number of Italian *giallo* films. As he did in the above-mentioned 'Resident Evil' piece, Hutchings reflects on the limitations of Eurohorror as a category, particularly in its idealisation of continental European horror production, and gives researchers of Eurohorror a rigorous and nuanced example of a historicised scrutiny of this cinematic tradition.

One of the discursive sites in which Eurohorror was idealised, through its celebration and fetishisation, was the horror film fanzine of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which is the object of Lázaro-Reboll's article. In 'Making Zines: Re-Reading *European Trash Cinema* (1988–98)', he argues that discussion of the horror film fanzine culture of this period has been largely dominated by an

emphasis on questions around the politics of taste, considerations of sub-cultural capital and cultism in fan writing, and processes of cultural distinction. For Lázaro-Reboll, Jeffrey Sconce's concept of 'paracinema', in particular, has come to shape the conceptual approach to fanzines. His article shifts the focus away solely from paracinematic positions regarding film viewing and reading in order to refocus attention on other areas of fanzine production so as to provide a more nuanced and richer historicisation of these publications and the ways in which they contributed to the circulation, reception and consumption of European horror film. By using the fanzine *European Trash Cinema*, edited by Craig Ledbetter between 1988 and 1998, as his case study, Lázaro-Reboll proposes a return to the actual cultural object – the printed zine – to examine in detail the networks of producers converging around, and writing about, Euro horror films and related European trash cinematic forms, as well as the contents within the publication, from cover artwork to editorials to film reviews and feature articles to the advertisement of mail order catalogues.

In the final piece of the special issue, 'Horribly Local? European Horror and Regional Funding Initiatives', Russ Hunter takes his cue from Hutching's considerations on 'new' Eurohorror. Hunter looks at funding practices across Europe, from the traditional co-production agreements to the presence of regional and intra-regional funding sources, to examine how they contribute to make horror films distinctively local. The three films he uses as case studies – the British-German co-production *Creep* (Christopher Smith, 2004), the British *Salvage* (Lawrence Gough, 2009), and the Norwegian *Trollhunter* (André Øvredal, 2010) – reveal the dynamics of funding opportunities for horror film projects and give film studies researchers a glimpse of production trends shaping contemporary European horror cinema in the twenty-first century.

Two other articles complete this journal issue, Lorraine Yeung's 'Spectator Engagement and the Body' and Dick Hebdige's 'HOLE: Swimming ... Floating ... Sinking ... Drowning'. While the former remains in horror film territory with her investigation of the hitherto relatively unexplored emotive potency of horror soundtracks via theories of affect and of emotion, the latter focuses through a detailed intermedial survey on a recurring trope in the sunshine noir, the body in the swimming pool as metonym for trouble in paradise. The book review section is devoted to some of the latest publications on horror film scholarship. By way of closure, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the journal for the constructive comments on the six articles included in this issue.

Antonio Lázaro-Reboll  
Volume 15 Editor

## Notes

- 1 For example, a recent volume uses three terms interchangeably in the same statement as part of its introduction to the topic: 'During the socially turbulent times of the 60s' and the 70', another type of European film was being introduced to world

- moviegoers, the *Euro-horror* and *exploitation*, or 'Eurocult' film' (p. 5, my italics). See Danny Shipka, *Perverse Titillation. The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France, 1960–1980*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011.
- 2 See Ian Olney, 'Unmanning *The Exorcist*: Sex, Gender and Excess in the 1970s Euro-Horror Possession Film', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 31:6 (2014): 561–71.
  - 3 Steven Jay Schneider, 'Introduction', *100 European Horror Films*, London: BFI, 2007, p. xx.
  - 4 The book was published by Titan Books in the UK and by St Martin's Press in the USA.
  - 5 Schneider, 'Introduction', *100 European Horror Films*, p. xx.
  - 6 Among the films and directors included were *Eyes without A Face* (Georges Franju, 1964), *Blood and Black Lace* (Mario Bava, 1964), *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kümel, 1971), *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* (Jorge Grau, 1974), and *Deep Red* (Dario Argento, 1975).
  - 7 See Joe Tompkins for a thought-provoking discussion of the ways in which specific critical operations mobilised by some horror film criticism in academia such as canonical recycling, political auterism and symptomatic interpretation, 'sustain discursive power relations between scholastically credentialed and 'nonexpert' reading subjects'. Joe Tompkins, 'The Cultural Politics of Horror Film Criticism', *Popular Communication. The International Journal of Media and Culture* 12:1 (2014): 32.
  - 8 Peter Hutchings, 'Resident Evil: The Limits of European Horror', in Patricia Allmer, Emily Brick and David Huxley (eds), *European Nightmares: Horror Cinema in Europe since 1945*, London: Wallflower Press, 2012, p. 15.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
  - 10 *Ibid.*
  - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
  - 12 *Ibid.*
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
  - 14 Ian Olney, *EuroHorror. Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013, p. xi.
  - 15 *Ibid.*, p. 99.