



Knit One, Stab Two

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I love horror films. I love knitting. I love feminism. My academic research explores the representation of women both behind and in front of the camera, reflecting upon how, when, and why women are written into or excluded from film histories. The impetus for this particular project came out of a response to re-reading 'When the woman looks' (1984), Linda Williams' canonical essay on horror film and gender. Here, I have brought together my three passions to ask, what happens when the woman knits? Or, to be more precise, what happens when the woman knits in a horror film?





Creator's Statement

The History of Horror Film is a Feminist Audiovisual Archive

I love horror films. I love knitting. I love feminism. My academic research explores the representation of women both behind and in front of the camera, reflecting upon how, when, and why women are written into or excluded from film histories (Peirse 2020; 2022). The impetus for this particular project came out of a response to re-reading 'When the woman looks' (1984), Linda Williams' canonical essay on horror film and gender. Here, I have brought together my three passions to ask, what happens when the woman knits? Or, to be more precise, what happens when the woman knits *in a horror film*?

The answer to this question can be found in my video essay 'Knit One, Stab Two'. It examines the representation of knitters and knitting in over sixty horror films made from the 1920s–2020s, from Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and East Asia. My video essay is a supercut, a method whose critical and scholarly dimensions are now increasingly acknowledged (Garwood 2020). In the supercut, 'extraction is both process and output, a method for discerning and demonstrating deep patterns within and across film/media texts' (de Fren 2020). My supercut reveals that knitting is a marker of social and cultural identity (Pentney 2008). When a woman knits in a horror film, systematic social and cultural patterns are revealed that speak to issues of nationality, race and ethnicity, gender, and age.

'Knit One, Stab Two' forcefully demonstrates the monolithic representation of race and ethnicity and of nationality. In her study of the online knitting community, Karen Patel argues that 'whiteness is automatic' (2020: 132). Here, the horror film reproduces this model. In addition, the featured films are predominantly from North America, the

UK, and Western Europe. As such, our horror knitters become a metonym for race and ethnicity representation and for national film industry representation on screen. They demonstrate not only the dominance of the anglophone in our global understanding of horror film, but also the genre's preference for white characters—and the concomitant erasure of people of color—throughout more than a century of horror film history (Means Coleman 2011).

My supercut also has much to offer in terms of thinking through the intersections of gender and age. While I discuss a small subset of horror films that feature male knitters, they are very much in the minority. When there is knitting in a horror film, there is, almost inevitably, a woman wielding the needles, and, more often than not, a woman of a certain age. Early on 'Knit One, Stab Two,' I reflect on a strand of horror films that feature young people using knitting needles as weapons, not least Laurie Strode in *Halloween* (1978). Nonetheless, the number of young horror knitters is small, and, overwhelmingly, horror represents knitters as in their 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and older. As such, the horror knitter becomes the woman who you have been culturally conditioned not to be interested in: the aging woman, the background character, the person who watches the protagonist but never plays the protagonist. Here, horror reflects society—and vice versa—in that knitting is associated with white, aging women whose whole world is domestic, an identity that has long been dismissed as lacking intellectual and political value. In illuminating the aging woman on screen, 'Knit One, Stab Two' thus speaks to the growing body of feminist approaches to videographic criticism (Alarcón Zayas 2023; Bean 2023; Bird 2023; Fernández Romero and Zecchi 2024; Ford 2023; Fowler 2023; Grant 2023; Lacurie 2024; Laird 2023; Lavalette 2024; Peirse 2024; Tafakory 2023; Ways of Doing 2024).

However, there is more to this work than a reflection on representation. The primary aim of my project speaks to Katherine Groo's determination to 'remix' film history. Groo argues that 'the remix is a metahistorical work, a mode of historical expression that is fundamentally about film artefacts and historical telling' (2012). This project treats horror film as a feminist audiovisual archive, as a limitless bank of potential material to be deployed in the feminist remaking of our film histories. In so doing, it demonstrates the potential for videographic work to disrupt stereotyped representations of women across over a century of horror cinema.

I create this archive in two main ways. First, in the list of films at the end of the video essay, I reject the standard academic practice to automatically cite the director as author of the work. Instead, I choose to credit the most senior woman in a production role on the project. This video essay includes excerpts from sixty-six films, and you can see in my credits that only seven are directed by women. This demonstrates the male

stranglehold on this most prestigious filmmaking role. This approach also illuminates the rarely discussed work of the woman set designer, costume designer, and art director, while also demonstrating how, time and time again, women are restricted to writer, editor and producer—roles which are designed to support the creative demands of the (male) director.

I then re-edit many of the films to suit my feminist predilections. *Bless the Child* (2000), *Daughters of Darkness* (1971), *The Crazies* (1973), and *Werewolves Within* (2021) initially present white aging women knitters as stereotyped ‘dithering’ and incurious older women, who are, in the words of knitting theorist Joanne Turney, ‘valuable but not valued’ (2009: 162). However, this dismissal of their identities leads the audience to be blind to their potential power, a blindness shared by the younger (and frequently male) characters. This biased perception then costs these characters their lives, as these women rise up with murderous intent. In these four films, when the woman knits, she prepares to kill. Inspired by this, in ‘Knit One, Stab Two’, I respond to the subversive message of these four films. I re-edit the representation of *all* the women knitters in *all* sixty-plus films in the supercut. I zoom in on the knitting women to bring them to our attention, I change the color balance of the image to bring them out of the shadows, I re-centre them within the frame, and I slow down shots to linger on their faces, reversing and looping these often one- or two-second images so we stay with them for longer.

In short, my editorial practice utilises videographic methods to create alternative feminist film histories. In so doing, it ensures that these women are no longer lost, in passing, invisible.

‘Knit One, Stab Two’ credits

Written, Directed & Edited by Alison Peirse

Narrated by Tanya Vital

Original Soundtrack by _HEAVYLEG

Artwork by _HEAVYLEG

Spanish Subtitles by Valeria Villegas Lindvall

Bahasa Indonesian Subtitles by Sevita Amanda

Italian Subtitles by Matteo Pennacchia

Brazilian Portuguese Subtitles by Carlos Primati

Knitting Consultation by Helen Hands

Acknowledgements

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Biography

Alison Peirse is a Professor of Film Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. She researches horror film, feminist film historiographies, and videographic criticism. Her third book, *Women Make Horror: Filmmaking, Feminism, Genre* (2020), was the subject of a screening series at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, in the summer of 2022. You can find out more about her work at www.alisonpeirse.com.

Comentario de la autora

La historia del cine de terror es un archivo audiovisual feminista

(Texto traducido por Valeria Villegas Lindvall)

Siento un amor profundo por las películas de terror. Y por tejer. Y también por el feminismo. Mi trabajo académico explora la representación de las mujeres delante y detrás de la cámara, ponderando cómo, cuándo y por qué su labor ha sido incluida o bien, obviada, en la historia del cine (Peirse 2020; 2022). Este proyecto surge como respuesta a mi relectura del ensayo canónico sobre cine de terror y género ‘When the woman looks’ (1984) de Linda Williams. Por tanto, en este trabajo, mis tres pasiones confluyen en una interrogante: ¿qué pasa cuando las mujeres hacen punto? O, mejor dicho: ‘¿Qué pasa cuando las mujeres hacen punto *en las películas de terror*?’

La respuesta a esta cuestión es un tema central en mi videoensayo ‘Knit One, Stab Two’ (‘Punto derecho, punto revés y apuñala’). Este trabajo se acerca a la representación de quienes hacen punto y a la vez a la actividad de tejer en sí misma, siguiendo dicha temática a través de más de sesenta cintas de terror a lo largo de cien años (desde los años veinte del siglo pasado hasta los años veinte de este siglo) realizadas en América Latina, Europa, Medio Oriente, América del Norte y el Este de Asia. Este videoensayo es un *supercut*, un formato cuyas dimensiones críticas y académicas son cada vez más reconocidas (Garwood 2020). En los trabajos de *supercut*, ‘el acto de extracción es tanto

un proceso como un resultado, [y constituye] un método para discernir y visibilizar unos patrones recurrentes en un mismo texto cinematográfico/mediático, o poniendo en comparación varios textos' (de Fren 2020). Mi *supercut* pone de manifiesto que hacer punto revela cuestiones de identidad sociocultural (Pentney 2008). Cuando una mujer hace punto en una película de terror, se ponen de relieve aspectos relacionados con la nacionalidad, la racialización, la etnicidad, el género y la edad.

'Punto derecho, punto revés y apuñala' demuestra con contundencia la naturaleza monolítica de las representaciones de raza, etnia y nacionalidad. En su estudio sobre unas comunidades en línea de personas que hacen punto, Karen Patel argumenta que 'la raza blanca se asume por defecto' (2020: 132). En esta instancia, el cine de terror reproduce dicho modelo. Cabe mencionar que las obras aquí incluidas provienen, predominantemente, de América del Norte, el Reino Unido y Europa occidental. Es así que nuestras tejedoras del terror llegan a ser metonimia de representaciones de raza y etnia, reflejando sus respectivas industrias cinematográficas nacionales. Demuestran no sólo el predominio anglófono en nuestra concepción global del cine de terror, sino también su preferencia por personajes blancos—y la consecuente omisión de personas racializadas—a lo largo de más de un siglo de historia del este género cinematográfico (Means Coleman 2011).

Asimismo, mi *supercut* contribuye a la reflexión sobre la interseccionalidad entre género y edad. En este trabajo analizo un grupo de películas que incluye también a hombres que hacen punto, pero se trata de una muestra reducida, ya que dichas representaciones son minoritarias. Cuando se representa a alguien tejiendo en el cine de terror, casi inevitablemente la que empuña las agujas es una mujer, y con frecuencia, una mujer de cierta edad. Sin embargo, al principio de 'Punto derecho, punto revés y apuñala' reflexiono sobre una serie de cintas de terror que muestran a gente joven usando las agujas como armas, entre ellas Laurie Strode en *Halloween* (1978). No obstante, el número de personas jóvenes que tejen es reducido: en su inmensa mayoría, el tejer en el terror está relacionado con personas de 30, 40, 50 o 60 años o hasta mayores. Por ende, la tejedora del terror suele ser aquella mujer ignorada por cuestiones culturales: la mujer mayor, el personaje del fondo, la persona que observa a la protagonista, pero que nunca desarrolla un papel principal. Por tanto, el terror refleja a la sociedad, y a su vez el tejer se asocia con las mujeres blancas de edad avanzada cuyo mundo es enteramente doméstico, una identidad que ha sido desestimada dada la supuesta falta de valor intelectual y político que se le ha atribuido históricamente. Al resaltar la presencia de las mujeres de edad avanzada en la pantalla, 'Punto derecho, punto revés y apuñala' se suma a la creciente producción que adopta un acercamiento feminista a la crítica videográfica (Alarcón Zayas 2023; Bean 2023; Bird 2023; Fernández Romero and Zecchi 2024; Ford 2023; Fowler 2023; Grant 2023; Lacurie 2024; Laird 2023; Lavalette 2024; Peirse 2024; Tafakory 2023; Ways of Doing 2024).

Sin embargo, el enfoque de este trabajo no es sólo la representación. El objetivo principal de mi proyecto es seguir a Katherine Groo en su determinación de hacer un ‘remix’ de la historia del cine. Groo argumenta que ‘el remix es un trabajo metahistórico, un modo de expresión histórica que se centra, fundamentalmente, en los artefactos cinematográficos y la escritura de la historia’ (2012). Este proyecto se aproxima al cine de terror como si fuera un archivo audiovisual feminista, como un banco ilimitado de material que posee el potencial de poder ser usado para la reescritura feminista de nuestras historias del cine. De ahí que también se ponga en evidencia el potencial del trabajo videográfico para desmontar las representaciones estereotipadas de las mujeres a lo largo de más de un siglo de cine de terror.

Este archivo se articula según dos principios fundamentales. En primera instancia, para la filmografía al final del videoensayo, rehúyo deliberadamente la práctica académica de citar al director como el autor del trabajo y, en su lugar, cito a la mujer con mayor experiencia dentro de la producción de la película en cuestión. Este videoensayo incluye fragmentos de más de sesenta filmes, de los cuales solamente siete han sido dirigidos por mujeres, hecho que demuestra el predominio masculino en esta posición de prestigio. Esta práctica también visibiliza la ignorada labor de las mujeres en la escenografía, el vestuario y la dirección artística, y al mismo tiempo recalca que de modo reiterado y constante, las mujeres se limitan a la escritura, la edición y la producción— roles diseñados para apoyar y realizar las exigencias creativas del director (por lo general un hombre).

En segundo lugar, he reeditado varios de estos filmes según mis predilecciones feministas. *Bless the Child* (*La hija de la luz*, 2000), *Daughters of Darkness* (*El rojo en los labios*, 1971), *The Crazies* (*El día del apocalipsis*, 1973) y *Werewolves Within* (*Un hombre lobo entre nosotros*, 2021) presentan a mujeres que tejen, blancas y de edad avanzada, como encarnaciones del estereotipo de la viejecita olvidadiza y apática, que son, en palabras de la experta en la teoría de los tejidos Joanne Turney, ‘valiosas pero no valoradas’ (2009: 162). Sin embargo, este desdén hacia su identidad supone que tanto el público, como también los personajes más jóvenes (y con frecuencia, masculinos) en la trama de las películas, no vean el poder de estas mujeres. Esta percepción sesgada suele costarles la vida a estos personajes, mientras las mujeres en cuestión suelen alzarse victoriosas en sus sanguinarias intenciones. En los cuatro filmes citados, cuando las mujeres tejen, también se preparan para matar. Encontrando inspiración en este hecho, en ‘Punto derecho, punto revés y apuñala’ respondo al mensaje subversivo de estas cuatro cintas. Reedito así la representación de *todas* las mujeres que hacen punto en cada una de las más de sesenta películas incluidas en el *supercut*: utilizo la técnica del *zoom* para que la atención del público se centre en ellas; ajusto el contraste de colores para sacarlas de las sombras en las que suelen habitar; las centro en el cuadro, ralentizando

las tomas para enfocarme en sus caras, revirtiendo y poniendo en bucle sus imágenes que no suelen durar más de uno o dos segundos, para que nos podamos fijar en ellas por un tiempo más prolongado.

En resumen, mi práctica de edición se sirve de unas técnicas videográficas que tienen la función de crear unas historias del cine alternativas y feministas. En este proceso, me he asegurado de que estas mujeres no se pierdan, evitando que se queden como presencia pasajera e invisible.

‘Punto derecho, punto revés y apuñala’ créditos

Escrito, dirigido y editado por Alison Peirse.

Narrado por Tanya Vital.

Banda sonora original de _HEAVYLEG.

Ilustración de _HEAVYLEG.

Subtítulos en español por Valeria Villegas Lindvall.

Subtítulos en indonesio bahasa por Sevita Amanda.

Subtítulos en italiano por Matteo Pennacchia.

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Biografía

Alison Peirse es Catedrática en Estudios de Cine en la Universidad de Leeds (Reino Unido). Su investigación se centra en el cine de terror, las historiografías feministas del cine y la crítica videográfica. Su tercer libro, *Women Make Horror: Filmmaking, Feminism, Genre* (2020), ha sido objeto de un ciclo de proyecciones en el MoMa (Museum of Modern Art, Museo de Arte Moderno de Nueva York) durante el verano de 2022. Más información de su trabajo puede encontrarse en www.alisonpeirse.com.

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Review by Melissa Lenos, University of Pittsburgh

As a fellow lover of horror films, knitting, and feminism,¹ I was delighted to be asked to review Alison Peirse's compelling and gorgeous "Knit One, Stab Two." Peirse moves from the literal trope of knitting needle-as-weapon (with several truly excellent "needles through eyeballs" examples) to more nuanced uses of the activity to convey meaning in horror: historically, film presents knitters as older, cisgendered, white

¹ The number of inhabitants of this very specific Venn diagram of interests is massive—of that I am certain.

women. But Peirse notes that the subversive nature of horror specifically allows the genre to simultaneously activate that traditional stereotype and shred its boundaries.

Peirse identifies spaces in which gendered rebellion is made graphically explicit in horror film. Horror cinema's seeming inability to surrender the shorthand of knitting as a "granny activity" is reflected in Peirse's questions surrounding the cultural and economic positions of women in film: read as "lacking in intellectual and political value." If older, cis, white women are archetyped as passive by their crafting, there can (for horror fans) be a delight in seeing that trope upended in favor of the nonthreatening granny suddenly plunging her needles into unsuspecting men.

I'm also inspired by Peirse's project to ponder the question of knitting complexity as a secondary factor in the trope's language, whether it contributes to the tension between the knitter as Nice Nonthreatening Lady and the knitter as Definitely Unstable, Possible Murderess.² For the knitting audience member, there is also always the instinctive marking of the "knitting that is not actually knitting," which Peirse touches upon with some of her examples of men (and male dogs) knitting in film history. In 2020, *Interweave* published an absolutely incomplete list of "Six Times Hollywood Got Knitting Wrong"—as with viewers who participate in any skilled activity, spotting the actor who has never before held knitting needles (or clocking the screenwriter who doesn't know that knitting and crochet are two different activities) is something of a sport. That said, with Peirse's argument in mind, the (un)intentionality of the failed knitter creates another potential layer to the meaning: from the reading of knitting as gendered/classed activity to our anticipation of a character's level of ability, stability, and thus level of threat.

"Knit One, Stab Two" manages to cover an impressive amount of ground on knitting in horror history—ranging from the iconic Laurie Strode stab across international examples, clips from early cinema, animation, exploitation, and experimental film. The editing and sound design are striking and precise, and Peirse's rhythmic multi-screen structure mirrors the soothing tempo of the physical act of knitting, the rows and columns of images shaping a pattern that both demonstrates and complicates her argument.

This project spans that rare and lovely bridge of delving into an under-explored topic in videographic work in an engaging—and beautiful—piece that leaves this reviewer wanting both more work from Peirse and more videographic essays on crafting in media.

² What is Countess Elizabeth Báthory (Delphine Seyrig) knitting in that hotel lobby in *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kümel, 1971)? Why is whatever it is double-stranded with a heathered wool? Where did she get double-pointed needles that long? Did she have them custom-made? Would she friend me on Ravelry? Reader, I am made of questions.

Review by Martha Shearer, University College Dublin

The great strength of this very slick and entertaining work is its use of the supercut form as a means of reading against the grain. The accumulation of knitting women in the video essays draws our attention, through sheer volume, to figures that are otherwise marginal within their own narratives, that we're not supposed to pay attention to, whose function within the genre depends upon their relative lack of visibility and status. And that refocusing of our attention on those figures is reinforced by the work that has been done to highlight and linger on them formally, as described in the supporting statement. As such, this work uses videographic form to not only analyze horror but also to reimagine the genre, to point towards its feminist possibilities. I do wonder to what extent horror can be necessarily read as subversive to the extent suggested here, but the essay usefully holds in tension the idea that on the one hand, the genre relies on a misogynist construction of the ageing woman that renders her only of interest when fully monstrous and on the other, that her very marginality is the source of her potential power.

What's also useful about this piece is how it calls attention to knitting as craft, as a form that isn't valued because it's understood as mundane, domestic, and feminized. I wonder then what connections might be drawn to the ways that women's labor in film production has historically been both possible through a connection to domestic craft (e.g. editing) but also marginalized for those same reasons. The decision to credit the most senior women in production roles rather than the director here both points out that marginalization and prompts ways we might develop these connections further.

