

Magical thrilling spooky moments in cinema

An Introduction

by Helen Stauffer and Michael Christopher



Screenshot Orlocks Hands (source www.archive.org)

Summary:

The introducing article.

Keywords:

Introduction, ghost, supernatural

Quotation:

Stauffer, Helen and Michael Christopher (2012) “Magical thrilling spooky moments in cinema: An introduction”, in: *manycinemas* issue 3, page 6-10

Take a step into a cinema hall, leave reality when you cross the entrance, take a seat and wait. The ultimate magic moment of film is when pictures appear in the dark, moving on the screen, changing form, and creating visual effects out of nothing. Directors and special effect artists make things possible that lay beyond reality. While narrated stories and literature help to create visions through description, film depicts them and creates images.

Cinema is a modern tale. The monsters of childhood (or past) come alive and haunt the protagonists on the screen, almost as a substitute for the viewer. How do they meet their fears? How does film show fear? And is there any escape? In literature most of these pictures are absolutely personal. The reader must create these monsters in his head. Film presents them as seen by the director. But even these monsters are able to enter the thoughts of the viewers, to go deep inside. *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Godzilla*, etc. have a common image of fear: the scar on the forehead of the creature of *Frankenstein*, the cape, coffin and teeth of the vampire lord or the saurian like statue and his sound over Tokyo. This all generates dread in the head of the people who share these cultural codes made by movies (even if the original descriptions are written in books). Next to these fear-creating-creatures, people are afraid of the disembodied. Ghosts are a common motif in cinema.



Screenshot Arabala (source VHS)

Fairy tales, myths, or literature adaptations are the main sources of thrilling supernatural moments in cinema. Bram Stokers novels *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* create modern thrilling tales which are used all over the world. Often, fairy tales are filmed for young consumers or as comedy. The Czech TV-Serial *Arabala* (CZ 1979-1981, Václav Vorlíček) lets the protagonists of popular fairy tales appear in reality. While the black wizard Rumburak tries to change the world of fairy tales by modification of the stories, narrated in television as bedtime-stories, the other protagonists try to live with the changing situation or to fight back to re-install the written order. Here, we can detect critic of the power of visual media: television has the ability to rewrite stories and to create new realities by manipulation.

However, not all stories are made for children: Terry Gilliam uses the stories of *The Brothers Grimm* (USA 2005) to mix the life of these famous brothers with the tales they collected through all the land. Herewith, he puts fiction into the historical reality and shows a world of monsters as a real possibility. The Korean film *Hansel and Gretel* (South-Korea 2007, original *헨젤과 그레텔*, dir. Pil-Sung) uses the story of one of Grimm's fairy tale, but locates it into today Korea. A young man has an accident deep in the forest where he follows a lantern to find a hut. Inside this hut, everything is fine, but as time goes by, the situation turns strange. He wants to escape to the civilization, but it seems that there is no way out. Pil-Sung's adaptation of this popular tale into a colorful Korean story is disturbing, especially because the spectator expects a narration he almost knows, but the story differs with every minute.



Screenshot *헨젤과 그레텔* (source DVD)

The tradition of *yōkai* (ghost, phantom, strange apparition) is narrated in Japanese folk tales and has also found its way into film. At most, Manga/Anime or Japan-Horrorfilms use this kind of monsters who sometimes are called *mononoke*. You can find some in *Mononoke Hime* (Japan 1997, dir. Miyazaki), the Golden Bear Award-winning anime of Miyazaki, in which the space of these mystic creatures is haunted by the people who want to exploit the nature the *yōkai*s live in. Only the “Princess of Mononoke” can lead the *yōkai* troops against the human invaders and re-unite the *yōkai*. In *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* (Japan 2001, dir. Miyazaki) *yōkai* also appears in the wonderland Chihiro travels to. The cinema of the Ghibli studio is full of creatures like *Ponyo*, *Totoro*, etc., but all of them have a kind character and there is nothing to fear. Even the atomic dinosaur like monster *Godzilla*, which stars in uncountable Japanese disaster films, is not evil at all. There is more than one truth in Japanese ghost stories.

The supernatural is a popular topic in many films of the African and Asian continent. In Ghana, the term *Juju* describes films in which supernatural power is used to force own interests. Souleymane Cissé tells in his film *Yeelen* (Mali 1987) an old Bambara epic, full of magic power. Film takes over the role of history keepers/story tellers of the West African societies: the griots. In West African cinema, there is often the effect that the invisible is visualized in the film. The spirit becomes a real surface and thus the belief of its power increases.

The Nigerian video industry produces many video serials. Some are centered around love tales, some are crime stories, and many of these films are supernatural. **Carmela Garritano** detects the effects of neoliberal capitalism on the Nigerian society in these occult stories of popular movies. *Blood-money, Big Men and Zombies* leads you deep inside the Nigerian video industry.

“When the shit hits the fan, the time to leave has come.” **Swantje Budensiek** explores the world of a Boer family in *Triomf*, a novel of Marlene van Niekerk and how the cinema adaption of director Michael Raeburn differs in its narrative style. The story reveals about the decay of Apartheid in South Africa and the ghosts of past that haunted back the different family members. But no real ghost appears. Instead of, a kind of uncanny moments haunt the

protagonists. Swantje Buddensiek detects these ghosts in the novel, but she misses them in the story's visualization.

Cen Cheng describes the dread shown in *Aftershock*, one of the few disaster films of China. This kind of genre is an alien tale in the prosperous China story of technological progress. Her article *No dread for disasters* shows the reader the plasticity of Chinese life.

Brenda Gardenour focuses in her article *Left behind* the phenomena of Child Ghosts in three different movies: *Rinne* (Japan 2005), *Dek Hor* (Thailand 2006), and *El Orfanato* (Spain 2007). She describes a journey into the dread of the human mind.

A step “Beyond the screen”, we are very happy to include this article, goes **Carrie Clanton** who explores the *Hauntology beyond the cinema*. She leads us to the uncanny moments of electronic music.

Have a good time!

Filmography

Arabala, Czech Republic 1979-1981, dir. Václav Vorlíček, Czech.

Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi, Japan 2001, dir. Miyazaki, Japanese, original: 千と千尋の神隠し, engl title: *Spirited Away*.

The Brothers Grimm, USA 2005, Terry Gilliam, English.

Hansel and Gretel, South-Korea 2007, dir. Pil-Sung, Korean, original: 헨젤과 그레텔.

Mononoke Hime, Japan 1997, dir. Miyazaki, Japanese, original: もののけ姫, engl. Title: Princess Monoke.

Yeelen, Mali 1987, dir. Souleymane Cissé, Bambara.