

# 3 The Affective Nature of Horror

*Filippo Contesi*

Perhaps contrary to appearances, the nature of horror is in many ways a poorly investigated issue in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind and cognitive science. To be sure, a substantial amount of work has been published on the horror genre in art and its effects on audiences. However, the nature of horror as an affective phenomenon has been much less investigated.<sup>1</sup> My aim in what follows is to probe this latter issue further. My approach will be to find the most coherent and widely applicable notion of horror that makes best sense not only of common uses of the word but also of the way the affective phenomenon works in the relevant contexts. I will start from a critical take on the discussions that have been conducted within aesthetics, before applying some of the lessons we learn there to an understanding of horror more generally. I will also argue that there is no good reason overall to distinguish between horror in art, or in the artistic genre, and horror elsewhere. I will argue against the view that horror, both within and outside art, is an emotion that in all occurrences is always (or even typically)<sup>2</sup> marked by fear or disgust (let alone a combination of the two). Nor, I will argue, is horror a mood as has been suggested more recently. Finally, I will sketch an alternative account according to which horror is primarily, typically individuated by a set of (output) affective reactions characteristic of a number of other affects which include fear and disgust.<sup>3</sup> My aim throughout will be to get clearer on the nature of horror as an affective phenomenon, with the hope that this may provide more solid foundations for future investigations into all sorts of issues connected with horror, both within art and outside of it.

## Art, Reality and Genre

Horror has a long and famed history as an artistic genre in literature, and more recently film, as well as in other forms of art.<sup>4</sup> Customarily, the genre is described as an evolution of 18th-century Gothic fiction, especially in English, and traced back to novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The list of the genre's characteristic features is a matter of no small controversy. However, among the most plausible candidates is certainly the presence, in the fictional narrative, of supernatural or preternatural phenomena, and of physical violence and death. Especially in the philosophical literature, though, the horror genre is frequently defined more in terms of the effect that artworks in the genre have (or are intended to have) on appreciators than on their characteristic themes. This is for instance the approach that Noël Carroll's (1990) foundational discussion takes. According to him, the "cross-art, cross-media genre" (Carroll 1990, 12) of horror "is essentially linked with a particular affect – specifically, that from which it takes its name" (15).<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, if the genre is called after the affect, then it is likely that that is because the affect is (perceived to be) characteristic of the genre. Nonetheless, Carroll appears to deny this latter claim. Although he acknowledges an essential link between the affect and the genre, he also insists that the affect that is characteristic of the horror genre must be distinguished from other referents that the word ‘horror’ has in common parlance. He calls the former (i.e. the affect that the horror genre is designed to elicit in audiences) ‘art-horror’ and “presumes” that it is an emotion (1990, 15). Moreover, the emotion of art-horror, is, according to Carroll, different from two other affective phenomena. Firstly, it is different from the affect that is appropriate to real horrific events such as the Holocaust. Carroll calls the latter ‘natural horror’. Secondly, art-horror is, for Carroll, distinct from the affective response that is appropriate to horrific stories or imagery in art that lies outside the horror genre, especially those that precede what Carroll calls the “coalesc[ing]” of the horror genre in the 18th century (1990, 13).

Although these distinctions might be understood as aiming at methodological caution in the investigation of the horror genre, they also run the risk of providing an unnecessarily partial angle from which to investigate horror (certainly as an affect, but perhaps also more widely as a genre). It is, for instance, unclear why we should hold that the genre and the affect are essentially linked, without drawing the consequence that the affect is one of, or perhaps *the* characteristic response that is appropriate to works in the genre. Indeed, the essential link seems to be justified by the following just-so story:

**Horror Just-So Story (HJSS):** There existed an affective response named ‘horror’ that some things warrant in real life. Then came representations, some of them artistic, of real-life horrific events, which also elicited horror. Finally, an entire artistic genre developed to elicit horror in those appreciators who seemed to find some value in that kind of experience.

On HJSS, one and the same affect is the link between Carroll’s “natural horror” and the affects warranted by art within, as well as outside the horror genre (and both preceding, and subsequent to, the genre’s formation). Indeed, that would also explain why the horror genre is named after the affect, i.e. by understanding the genre as expressing or eliciting the affect in an especially poignant way.

If, moreover, works in the genre were (intended)<sup>6</sup> to warrant an emotion that is exclusive of the genre (as Carroll says), then that of horror would look like a unique case. In particular, it would be a different case from that of other genres that are ordinarily defined in terms of the affects they warrant. Take the definition of tragedy on which Carroll models his account, i.e. the one in terms of fear and pity often attributed to Aristotle. On that definition, the characteristic affects of tragedy are the ordinary emotions of fear and pity. Similar is the case of comedy, which shares humour with both real life and other art genres.

Here, one might suggest the possibility that perhaps the affects elicited by (representational) artworks are, as a rule, not of the same kind as those elicited by real-life events. If that were true, it would perhaps be easier to accept that the horror genre should warrant a distinct affect from the one warranted by real-life counterpart events or characters. There are three main problems with such a possibility, though. First, it would still not explain the difference between the case of horror and those of other

artistic genres such as comedy and tragedy. Also unexplained would remain the difference that Carroll postulates between the affects warranted by art within and outside the horror genre. Thirdly, and finally, there are serious problems with the view that artistic representations warrant a different kind of affective response from the one warranted in real life. Although such a view has sometimes been defended (e.g. for fear),<sup>7</sup> it is a view which is difficult to embrace whilst holding a view of the relevant affects as relatively stable and evolutionarily useful mental mechanisms. One who holds such a view, in fact, faces the challenge of having to explain the evolutionary usefulness and feasibility of the development of multiple kinds of affects sharing such a great number of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural features.<sup>8</sup>

### **Horror, Disgust, Fear**

The upshot of the previous discussion is that the investigation into the affective nature of horror should look within the horror genre as well as outside of it, and both in art and in real life. So, what is horror? Disgust and fear are perhaps the two affective phenomena most often associated with horror. Indeed, according to what might be called ‘the received view’ in analytic philosophy of art, horror fictions are designed to warrant a combination of fear and disgust. Carroll (1990, 27) holds such a view, and many others have since agreed with him.<sup>9</sup> Although widespread, however, the view is not especially well-defined. The affective response that is warranted by horror fictions is often cashed out as if it is a mixed emotion, or an “emotion blend”, composed out of (some of) the (features of the) two emotions. If that were true, however, its features, including its typical intentional objects and its physiological, phenomenological etc. responses, would be quite difficult to characterize.<sup>10</sup> To start with, it is unclear whether the features of the two emotions would add up to one another, or instead merge and hence produce different features.

Moreover, as for instance Jenefer Robinson notes, features of different emotions can be insufficiently compatible and hence unable to blend (2014, 74). In the case of horror, it would be difficult to tell what, for instance, the physiological reactions of a fear-cum-disgust emotion blend would be like. For one thing, in fact, fear and disgust are typically associated with opposite heart-rate patterns: one increasing, the other decreasing (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2008, 758–759). Furthermore, fear and disgust have different kinds of things as their typical intentional objects, and each of them likely evolved for different purposes. Fear is a defence mechanism against more clearly identifiable, imminent threats, such as attacks from predators or other physical accidents. By contrast, disgust primarily protects us from longer-term and less immediately identifiable threats posed by a set of potentially pathogenic substances. Again, it is unclear what the intentional object of an emotion blend of fear and disgust would be like. The two kinds of objects have such different features that it seems quite difficult to make them compatible. Indeed, most things in real life are either fearsome or disgusting, although there are some that can be construed as objects of both fear and disgust: e.g. crawling or slithering objects such as spiders or snakes (cf. e.g. Vernon and Berenbaum 2002). Even in these latter cases, however, it seems far from clear that the response they warrant is a blend of fear and disgust, rather than simply the co-occurrence, or juxtaposition, of fear and disgust. Of course, fictional creatures can, by definition, push the boundaries of the real. As we will see later, however, there are also cases of horror fictions that are not easily characterized as being both fearsome and disgusting.

The alternative to fear and disgust being blended in horror is that horror fictions do not warrant a single emotion but two distinct kinds of affective response concurrently. This latter is indeed a more plausible alternative than the emotion-blend hypothesis, and might well be the one Carroll and others have had in mind (Contesi 2020, 49). One immediate issue with such an option is that it might initially sound as a little odd to call two distinct emotions with a word in the singular: ‘horror’. Indeed, that may appear as even more problematic given what I argued for in the previous section, i.e., that we should aim to preserve the unity of the affective phenomenon of horror across real life and different artistic genres. If horror fictions typically warrant fear and disgust, and the affect we ordinarily call ‘horror’ just is the affect that horror fictions are characteristically meant to elicit, then horror as an affect actually turns out to be two emotions we already have distinct names for. Although a little counter-intuitive, that is not an obviously unviable option. Consider for instance how a knife is, in a sense, the combination of a blade and a handle.

So, is horror really just the co-occurrence of fear and disgust? Carroll argues that audience reactions to horror fictions parallel the reactions displayed by many of the characters in those fictions, and in particular those we might call ‘victims’ and ‘bystanders’. Those characters, he notes, recurrently display fear and disgust for the horror monsters. However, the last part of Carroll’s picture here is notoriously controversial, as many have argued that horror fictions do not necessarily have monsters as protagonists (see Gaut 1993).

I do not want to take sides on the necessity of monsters for horror fictions, as that is not, at least for my purposes, an especially consequential issue. For a start, the notion of a monster (generally speaking but also, in particular, as Carroll defines it as a being “whose existence is not countenanced by science” (Carroll 1990, 68)), allows Carroll sufficient room for manoeuvre in many of the alleged counterexamples raised against his theory. It has for instance been argued that psycho-slasher fictions, such as those in the Hannibal Lecter horror saga, have apparently normal human beings as protagonists. Carroll has responded that Dr Lecter actually appears to have such unusual features for an ordinary human being (e.g. powers of memory and psychological insight, almost superhuman strength etc.) to stretch his categorization as such (Carroll 1995). Secondly, it is possible to reframe Carroll’s point about fear and disgust being the characteristic audience reactions to horror fictions, without requiring that the object of such reactions always be the monster. One can simply posit that fear and disgust are the characteristic audience responses that horror fictions aim to elicit, as directed at various elements of the fiction (or of the ways in which these are represented).

A greater problem with the fear-cum-disgust theory is that there are some horror fictions that do not involve either fear or disgust in any significant way. One case in point are fictions where disgust does not play much of a role if any. Consider for instance Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843), *The Black Cat* (1843), *The Premature Burial* (1844), *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846), or Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). The horror sub-genre these works are usually classified in is “psychological horror”. The same point can be made about some classic films adapted from some of the above novellas, such as *The Innocents* (1961).

Similar cases are some Val Lewton films – for instance Tourneur’s *Cat People* (1942). The film tells the story of a woman who fears (with good reason, considering the way the story unfolds) that she belongs to a race of people who turn into aggressive felines when they are angry, jealous, or sexually aroused. The film involves some violence

and aggression towards humans by felines (including a killing), but it always stays very far from the kind of gruesome displays that one is accustomed to encountering in many other horror fictions. Moreover, the “monster” herself, the woman-feline Irena Dubrovna, is hardly disgusting in either feline or woman form.

Indeed, many of these examples of horror without disgust are from earlier stages of the horror genre. The closer we come to our days, the more disgust appears to play a role, and the fear component to recede. However, fear rarely disappears completely from fictions in the horror genre.<sup>11</sup> However, there are exceptions. Some splatter films, such as Herschell Gordon Lewis’s cult classic *Blood Feast* (1963), reduce the fear component to an insignificant level to emphasize the display of gore for gore’s sake. The film’s plot is sufficiently standard for a horror. A serial killer, the owner of an Egyptian-inspired catering business, is on the loose torturing and killing several women in gruesome ways. He is eventually identified by police and dies whilst being chased. However, the audience early on (even before seeing the film’s title credits) learns about the seriality of these murders and discovers the identity of the killer. This dramatic device in itself reduces the audience’s surprise and fear at the handful of murders occurring subsequently on screen. Similar effects are reached by other filmic devices: the relative slowness of dialogue and action, often very artificial-sounding, the relatively abundant humour, the sudden, abrupt ways in which the murders occur, as well as the unrealistic sounds that play over them. Finally, another way in which *Blood Feast*, and other horror fictions, moderate fear elicitation in the audience is by, in various ways, hindering audience sympathy for horror victims.

Other cases of horror without fear can be found outside film. Consider for instance, paintings of religious or mythological violence such as *The Martyrdom of Isaiah the Prophet* (1470), or Jaume Huguet’s *Martyrdom of St Bartholomew* (ca 1480); or Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (ca 1620), or some of Géricault’s “Anatomical Pieces”, such as *Heads of the Executed* and the *Study of Arms and Legs for The Raft of the Medusa* (ca 1819). Beyond art, there are cases of (images of) real-life horror. Consider for instance photographs of guillotined men such as some of those taken immediately after the infamous Pollet brothers’ execution in France (1909). Or, finally, think about the case of someone coming across the dead body of their cat which had disappeared months before (Solomon 2004, 117), or of the common use of ‘horrible’ to refer to someone or something that we find very ugly.<sup>12</sup>

## The Affective Nature of Horror

I have argued that a good understanding of the affect that is distinctive of the horror genre requires a careful and broad examination of horrific phenomena, both within and beyond the artistic genre. By means of this kind of examination, I have shown that neither of the two components of the standard philosophical account of horror, i.e. fear and disgust, are necessary components of the affective response of horror. Horror does not coincide with fear nor with disgust, nor is it an emotion whose necessary constituents are either fear or disgust. In this final section, I will sketch an alternative understanding of horror.

This alternative understanding of horror starts from acknowledging that both fear and disgust often co-occur with horror, both within and outside art. The occurrences of each of them, in fact, often include the affective response of horror as part of their responses. Indeed, I will argue that horror is primarily, typically individuated by a

particular set of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural affective reactions, which are shared by different affects including fear and disgust (as well as possibly some others such as shock).

The set of affective reactions that primarily individuates horror is best described as a freezing, or freezing-like reaction, in the face of something we are deeply shaken and distressed by. In what is probably the most famous foundational critical text on horror, Ann Radcliffe thus distinguishes terror from horror:

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.

(Radcliffe 1826, 149)

More recently, literary scholar James Twitchell's celebrated monograph on the topic states that in horror "we pause momentarily . . . frozen between fight and flight" (1985, 10).

This kind of reaction is sometimes an (extremely early or late) component of the fear response. As such, it is also referred to by such terms as 'tonic immobility' or 'playing dead'. Such reactions are often warranted in those moments, during confrontations with imminent threats, when the threat is either not yet fully comprehended, or when neither fight nor flight appear feasible response strategies. In the former scenario, freezing-like reactions facilitate readiness to action, while also allowing for maximum acuity of attention. In the latter scenario, by contrast, the same reactions can be useful when the best hope of defusing a threat is to appear to the source of the threat as completely inoffensive to it (or even dead) (Bracha et al. 2004, 449). In even more extreme scenarios, tonic immobility can turn into collapsed immobility (or "fainting"), which is characterized by such symptoms as (even) less mobility than is the case in tonic immobility, loss of muscle tone, lower to suspended consciousness, and hypoxia. Indeed, although sometimes associated with fear, such immobility responses diverge in some respects from fight-or-flight or more standardly investigated fear responses. Physiologically, for instance, tonic (and, even more, collapsed) immobility are associated with bradycardia, or a decrease in heart rate (see Kozłowska et al. 2015).

So, I propose to understand horror as primarily, typically<sup>13</sup> individuated by the set of physiological, phenomenological and behavioural reactions like, and connected to, the immobility responses just described. However, this latter set of reactions is not exclusively a component of fear episodes. It can also feature as a component of disgust (and possibly also of other affects such as shock). These are reactions that often feature in horror fictions, as well as in other horror-warranting scenarios. Moreover, as I argued, neither fear nor disgust are necessary components of horror. Finally, the immobility reactions in question often have enough differences with what are considered as typical responses of fear (such as in their abovementioned heart-rate patterns), to make them compatible with different affects such as disgust.

Some support for the view I am putting forward comes from a founding figure of modern emotion theory. In Chapter XII of his classic essay on expressions of emotions, Charles Darwin (1965/1872), says he "endeavour[s] to describe the diversified expressions of fear, in its gradations from mere attention to a start of surprise, into extreme terror and horror". In doing that, he introduces two photographs of different facial expressions from Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne's *Mécanisme de la physionomie*

*humaine*. Darwin labels them, respectively, “Terror” and “Horror and Agony” (Darwin 1965, fig. 20–21). He explains his choice of labels by reporting a little experiment in which he showed the latter “photograph to twenty-three persons of both sexes and various ages”. The results of his experiment were that thirteen respondents answered “horror, great pain, torture, or agony”, six answered anger, three extreme fright, and yet another one of them answered disgust. Although Darwin takes these results to support the view that horror is a combination of extreme fear and pain, a more sensible interpretation of the results of his experiment, I suggest, would be that the facial expression of horror is attributed to a *variety* of negative affects: from pain, to fear, to anger and disgust.

The view of horror I am arguing for also bears resemblance to a couple of contemporary views. First, Solomon (2004) argues that the real affective phenomenon of horror is not the one experienced in response to horror fictions, but the one that is warranted by real-life events. In this latter sense, for Solomon, (real) horror is an emotion (or emotional experience) to be understood in primarily cognitive terms. This emotion is distinct from fear, disgust, dread or other affects, even though it often appears mixed with them. At the same time, continues Solomon, it is an experience so irredeemably unpleasant that it is not compatible with any degree of pleasure. Indeed, the affective response to horror fictions is different from real horror. In line with what I have been arguing, I agree with Solomon that horror is present in a multiplicity of eliciting situations and should not be reduced to other affects such as fear, disgust etc. Nonetheless, I question Solomon’s primarily cognitive understanding of horror, as well as his view that “real” and “artistic” horror are fundamentally different affective phenomena.

First, I will examine in some detail what Solomon’s categorization of horror as an emotion amounts to. At different points in the text, Solomon says he does not think it is important to distinguish between the categories of “emotion”, “emotional experience” and “emotion-related phenomenon”. This is mainly because:

The category of emotion is sufficiently indistinct, part [sic] from a small set of “basic” emotions (including fear), that I do not think such a question is either interesting or decisively answerable.

(Solomon 2004, 264)

In general, Solomon’s indistinctness worry about the category of emotion strikes me as a little too pessimistic, perhaps especially if seen with the benefit of hindsight (almost two decades after he was writing). Both in emotion theory generally, as well as in the philosophy of emotions in particular, nuanced accounts are available of different categories of affects: emotions proper, moods, sentiments etc. Similarly, there is quite a wide mapping of the different types of emotions, moods etc. At the same time, however, I share Solomon’s worry as it pertains to the particular case of horror. The boundaries of horror do appear to be a little more blurred than may be the case with other affects.

Nonetheless, I disagree with Solomon about the appropriateness of his “predominantly . . . ‘cognitive’” (2004, 113) analysis of horror. Indeed, Solomon appears to resist my own preferred understanding of horror in terms of a set of affective reactions:

[We do not] have to retreat to the merely physiological (the goosebumps that give “horror” its name: the word “horror” comes from the Latin *horrere* and the

French *horror* – to bristle or to shudder). It may well be that such physiological symptoms of both fear and horror may be produced by fictional representations (even when one knows that they are fictional), but such symptoms alone are not any emotion at all.

(Solomon 2004, 117)

Besides his general commitment to cognitivist theories (cf. Solomon 2003), his reason for rejecting an account of horror in terms of a set of affective reactions might be found in his claims that horror requires a substantial level of cognition. For instance, he claims that:

[Horror] can indeed be a “primitive” emotion, one that is barely articulable and in that sense noncognitive (or cognitively impenetrable, in the latest jargon). But it nevertheless consists of a horrified recognition that things are not as they ought to be, which in turn requires an implicit comparison (if only as “seeing as”) and an evaluative judgment or appraisal.

(Solomon 2004, 119)

And, later on, he adds that horror “is an extremely unpleasant and even traumatizing emotional experience that renders the subject (victim) helpless and violates his or her most rudimentary expectations about the world” (Solomon 2004, 129).

I agree with Solomon that horror is often accompanied by cognition. After all, horror is in my view a set of reactions that are often components of other affects, such as fear and disgust. These latter affects have substantial cognitive aspects to them, which inevitably end up accompanying the emotional experience of horror. In large part for this reason, I avoid *identifying* horror with a set of affective reactions of immobility or immobility-like states, and talk instead of horror being primarily, typically *individuated* by those reactions. Nonetheless, I do not see a coherent and precise way of outlining horror’s cognitive features, e.g. its formal object. Indeed, Solomon’s (already cited) attempts in this respect are either circular or too broad: horror “consists of a horrified recognition that things are not as they ought to be”, or “renders the subject (victim) helpless and violates his or her most rudimentary expectations about the world”.

The second point of disagreement I have with Solomon concerns his claim that there is a fundamental difference between real and artistic horror. Indeed, he claims that “pretend horror, or what Noël Carroll nicely calls ‘art horror,’ is derivative” (Solomon 2004, 108). I find his argument for this latter claim a little difficult to pin down with precision. However, his main reason seems to be that, contrary to artistic horror, (real) horror is not compatible with pleasure. In turn, that is because:

horror is necessarily an overwhelming emotional response to what is horrible. But the fact that horror is overwhelming . . . also means that it is not one of those emotions which can be “mixed,” and, in particular, it does not mix with pleasure. While fear and pleasure combine in various ways, horror, by contrast, does not.

(Solomon 2004, 123)

But why does real horror need to be overwhelming? Consider for instance Solomon’s own already cited example of one’s horrified discovery of the dead body of one’s own cat that had disappeared for a long time. Is that a necessarily overwhelming

experience? I submit that it is not, as all affects seem to admit of degrees, including horror.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in general, affects likely need to be moderated in their intensity to be compatible with pleasure in art; and so does horror (see Eaton 1982; Morreall 1985).

I have pointed to a lack of coherence in the cognitive components of horror. A similar observation appears, in part, to drive another contemporary view. Whilst maintaining Carroll's distinction between natural horror and art-horror, Andrea Sauchelli's (2014) view starts from the observation that the horror genre in art is broader in scope than one might think. In particular, Sauchelli is worried about the narrowness of Carroll's view that works in the horror genre are designed to warrant the emotion of art-horror as directed at horror monsters. Instead, he proposes to understand art-horror as a mood, which he labels "the H-mood", that works of horror are designed to evoke by the "artistic means peculiar to the form of art" such works belong to (Sauchelli 2014, 43). The difference between such an H-mood (as moods more generally), and emotions is that the former is not directed at a specific intentional object.<sup>15</sup> Moreover,

the H-mood is characterized by a feeling of tension related to a morbid inclination of our attention toward a set of unpleasant aspects of reality that, in the case of horror, include mostly death, murder, and evil forces.

(Sauchelli 2014, 43–44)

To defend his view, Sauchelli discusses a number of putative cases of works of horror in various art forms, from film to painting, from poetry to music. Some such cases might indeed justify a move away from horror monsters as a defining feature of works in the horror genre. Especially interesting in this respect are Sauchelli's cases of non-fictional works of art such as the "horror shockumentary" *Traces of Death* (1993). Nonetheless, such cases are not sufficiently compelling to justify an understanding of horror as a mood. Even though they may challenge a view of horror as directed at Carrollian monsters, such horror shockumentaries still arguably warrant, in their depiction of real violence and deaths, emotional responses directed at the (real) victims they portray.

Better suited to support his account of horror as a mood are non-representational works of art, which for their nature do not directly feature any obvious intentional objects of horror. Indeed, Sauchelli mentions some putative instances of horror music, such as songs by the metal bands Carcass, Cannibal Corpse and Mayhem, Krzysztof Penderecki's instrumental composition *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960), and Simon Heath's Atrium Carceri. Although one might argue about the inclusion of musical works in the horror genre, at least some of the works cited by Sauchelli can be construed as suggesting horrific affects. Nonetheless, Sauchelli's musical cases still present two difficulties when used as evidence for the view that horror is a mood.

Firstly, many if not all of them are not pure instances of non-representational art. The songs by the metal bands mentioned, for instance, feature lyrics that talk about horrific characters and events. Moreover, whilst Penderecki's *Threnody* and Atrium Carceri are works of instrumental music, they, too, have titles that make obvious references to potential as well as specific objects of horror: e.g. the consequences of the Hiroshima nuclear attack. Secondly, it is a commonplace puzzle about music that it can move us emotionally. Indeed, many have argued that even absolute (i.e. purely instrumental, non-representational) music often evokes, or even expresses, emotions such as fear and sadness.<sup>16</sup> To accommodate affective responses to (non-representational)

music, in other words, one needs not move away from emotions and replace them with moods as the affects it is intended to evoke or express.

Finally, even assuming that an account of art-horror in terms of moods can accommodate such non-representational cases, the account would not easily accommodate a wide swath of more standard cases (e.g. the Frankensteins, Aliens but also shockumentaries etc.), our experiences of which intuitively feature intentional objects. Sauchelli would probably respond to this objection by suggesting a reinterpretation of these latter cases in terms of moods. Besides its counter-intuitiveness, however, it remains to be seen whether such a reinterpretation would really succeed in providing an alternative mood-based understanding. Indeed, it is not obvious that the analyses Sauchelli suggests of specific artworks generally depart from more traditional accounts. In his discussion of Francis Bacon's *Head I* (1948), for example, Sauchelli says:

What is left of the human face is a pile of white material that is eating and regurgitating itself through a mouth with uneven sets of teeth. The expression of the mouth resembles that of a patient in agony. The entity depicted in the painting does not seem to have any possible escape route. The background is dark and empty, and there is no hope or friendly figure who may, in an act of mercy, put an end to the despair shown. Whatever the painting is supposed to mean, suggest, or evoke – the agony and despair of the human condition, or perhaps the inescapable loneliness and pain of our existence – the image can be sensibly taken as an example of art-horror.

(2014, 43)

The mauled and detached head depicted in Bacon's painting (perhaps, in fact, resembling more an animal than a human head) does appear as featuring a face expressing agony as well as ideas or feelings of loneliness and inescapability. Whilst one might well not consider it a monstrous head – at least not in Carroll's sense – it is either an object of horror directly, or it empathetically points the viewer's horror to the horrific predicament in which its owner is. Indeed, both such a predicament and the head itself fall into traditional types of intentional objects of horror. Still, the ambiguity between which one of them would be most relevant in understanding the horror warranted by Bacon's painting can be seen as suggesting the need for a departure from a traditional understanding of horror as an emotion. However, that ambiguity cannot be resolved by eliminating any role altogether for an intentional object but is, in my view, better taken as pointing towards the account in terms of (output) affective reactions that I have defended in this essay.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

1. This is, in some sense, less true elsewhere in the humanities, for instance in psychoanalytic circles influenced by Kristeva's (1982) work and in less cognitively inclined film studies (e.g. Aldana Reyes 2016). Also more discussed in critical theory and other sections of Continental philosophy is the nature of "affects". From the point of view of the present chapter, the problem with these broadly speaking Continental approaches is that they are not always compatible with analytic philosophy and cognitive science approaches. Indeed, the two different types of approaches sometimes appear not to be concerned with the same phenomena, even while they use the same labels. Thanks to a reviewer for their kind help with this point.

2. Horror, as well as affective and mental phenomena more generally, are very complex phenomena, difficult to account for in terms of strict necessary and sufficient conditions. Accordingly, it has been typically studied in terms of paradigmatic conditions (Carroll 1990, 38). In this essay I do not intend to depart from this approach, which I see (not too dissimilarly from the way scholars such as Carroll sees it) less as a different approach from the traditional one appealing to necessary and sufficient conditions, than as a reasonable adjustment of it. Thanks to a reviewer for pushing me to be clearer on this issue.
3. In what follows, I tend to follow the convention of calling ‘affect’, ‘affective response’, or ‘affective phenomenon’ instances of the general category of which emotions, moods, sentiments etc. are sub-categories. By contrast, I reserve the expression ‘(output) affective reactions’ to refer more specifically to one part of the former entities, i.e. the physiological, phenomenological, behavioural etc. components of an affect’s response (e.g. the facial expression of disgust, or the rush of adrenaline in fear, or the urge to retaliate in anger etc.). Finally, I refer to the affective phenomenon when I speak of ‘horror’ simpliciter (i.e. without qualifying it with ‘fictions’, ‘genre’ etc.).
4. It is typically the case that artworks in the horror genre are assumed to be fictional works (e.g. by Carroll 1990). I will follow this assumption where it does not affect my argument. Please note, however, that, as e.g. Sauchelli (2014, 41) points out, some horror artworks are non-fictional.
5. In what follows, I will discuss Carroll’s view in large part as an example of a view of the nature of horror that many have adopted. Accordingly, I will leave aside for the most part his own stance on neighbouring issues, that are in principle independent from his main view or have proved less influential.
6. Carroll talks about *intentions to warrant* to avoid cases in which intentions go awry: e.g. horror films that fail to be horrific. Nonetheless, provided that the range of cases discussed is restricted to successful horror films, then it does not change things much for my purposes to talk about the affective reaction that works in the genre *typically* elicit or warrant. Similarly coherent with my purposes would be to talk about affect expression. According to a view such as Peter Lamarque’s (2014, 185–200), for instance, what counts in art appreciation is not what affects art elicits, but what affects it expresses. Such a view, in turn, can be seen as a contemporary incarnation of Wimsatt and Beardsley’s (1949) influential attack against criticism’s “affective fallacy”.
7. See Walton (1978, 1990). It is perhaps worth noting that, although Walton explicitly talks of fear, his main example (Charlie’s green slime) appears to be from a horror movie (see e.g. Solomon 2004).
8. Carroll himself is a prominent defender of the sameness in kind between the emotions elicited by real life and in art. In Chapter 2 of Carroll (1990), he defends what he famously labels ‘thought theory’. Such a view, initially defended by Lamarque (1981), is now mainstream in analytic philosophy, due in large part to Carroll’s influential discussion.
9. In his chapter on “Horror” in the *Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, Aaron Smuts (2009, 505) presupposes, without ever questioning it, the view that horror fictions warrant fear and disgust. Or, to mention another example, Katerina Bantinaki (2012, 383) assumes the same view as “pretheoretical”.
10. I argue for this at greater length in Contesi (2020, 49).
11. This is true, at least if one discards horror comedy as a subgenre of horror (whilst maintaining a definition of the latter in terms of a characteristically elicited affect).
12. I am grateful to Greg Currie for this suggestion. One might worry here that appeal to linguistic usage puts the argument on slippery ground. The worry would be that occurrences of ‘horror’, ‘horrible’ and their cognates are in this case only extended uses of the words, and hence that one should not conclude anything about the nature of horror from such occurrences. After all, we often say, e.g., that “we feel horrible”, when we really are only exaggerating a much milder feeling of pain or discomfort. Moreover, I certainly agree that linguistic considerations are only partial evidence in the kind of investigation I am engaged in here. However, linguistic evidence, including concerning extended uses of words, cannot be discounted altogether. One can very often reconstruct with some plausibility the derivation of extended uses of words from their literal origins. In the case at hand, there is no obvious reason to prefer a connection between ugliness and fear to a connection between ugliness and other affects, such as disgust or general pain. It is certainly conceivable that

- one could draw a link between, say, an ugly face and the fear one might experience in encountering it. But the link between ugliness and disgust (or general pain) seems much more natural. Many thanks to Daniel Molto for raising this concern to me.
13. I add the qualification ‘typically’ here to insulate my claim from counterexamples that appeal to non-standard means of provoking the same affective reactions, such as drugs or surgical stimulation. Thanks to a reviewer for their kind help with this point.
  14. Korsmeyer (e.g. 2011, 97) responds in a similar manner to the criticism that disgust is too intense to be compatible with pleasure. Cf. also Carroll and Contesi (2019).
  15. Although Sauchelli does not cite her, Cynthia Freeland (2004, 189) hints very briefly at a similar suggestion: “Some recent movies herald a change in horror films during the past decade or so: *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), *Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), *The Others* (Alejandro Amenabar, 2001), and *Signs* (Shyamalan 2002). In these films the horror is subtle and lingering, a matter of mood more than monsters.”
  16. See Davies (1994) for an influential account of how music does this.
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