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Squash and Stretch:

The Animated Body, Body Horror, and the Phenomena of Childhood Fears

Delaney Sears

Vassar College

14 May 2021

A Senior Thesis in Media Studies

Advisor: Justin Patch

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I. Introduction

I don't remember when I first saw *Chicken Run*; the movie came out in 2000, when I was only two years old, but I'm sure we owned it on VHS. What I do remember, however, is refusing to watch it for the approximately 15-18 years that followed. It became a running joke in my high school friend group – they would threaten me with making me watch *Chicken Run* if they wanted to get me to do something. I think I also cried in the theater watching *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Wererabbit* (2005), created by the same stop-motion production company, Aardman Animations. I guess my parents thought second time would be the charm, but, like *Chicken Run*, I refused to watch it ever again after the initial viewing.

And for the full sake of transparency, I have not re-watched it for this thesis yet. I will before I inevitably write that chapter, but I am putting it off for as long as I can out of pure fear. I also made my housemates promise they would watch it with me to hold me accountable. For the record, and to defend my own horror expertise, I am not easily scared – horror is my favorite genre, I find 80s slashers fun, and gore no longer has an effect on me. I willingly take in "scary" media, nearly constantly, yet I am still hesitant to watch *Chicken Run*. At the time of writing, I am twenty-two.

As I was searching for a topic for this thesis, I realized that all of my classmates, family, and friends I talked to had a movie like that. A movie that, as a child, they were inexplicably terrified of and still refuse to watch as an adult. My housemate Zoë vehemently refuses to watch *E.T.: the Extra Terrestrial*, even to this day. My mom still tells stories about how my

older brother, now a film buff himself, would cry whenever King Louie came on screen in *The Jungle Book*. Countless friends of mine would argue with me over whether *The Polar Express* was creepy or endearing – to the point of passionate arguments. My favorite horror podcast even did an entire episode about childhood filmic fears akin to horror movies.[1]

With a simple question – "What was the movie that terrified you as a child?" – I almost always got an immediate answer. Very few mentioned "traditional" horror movies, which are the typical answers for "What movie scares you *now*?" The movies that trigger many of childhood fears are not movies intended to be scary. *The Polar Express* and *Chicken Run* were not made specifically to frighten children; as explicitly children's movies, they were produced with the intention to entertain, teach, or generally evoke positive emotions in the end – not lifelong terror.

It was in these discussions that I saw an overlap of children's media – specifically animation – and horror. And, as is so often relevant in cinema theory, the deep emotional reaction is rooted in the body – in this case, the animated body. When a child sees a body like theirs, in a movie actively made for them, transformed or negatively defaced in some way, it is unsettling. Horror theory, as rarely as it is associated with children's media, can be used to analyze what makes these "non-scary" movies viscerally frightening – and animation as a medium is inherently a part of this indescribable fear. This thesis explores this oft-unexplored relationship between children's media, animation, and horror theory, as well as how the medium of animation lends itself well to the concept of body horror, to illuminate some of the unexplored reasons behind childhood fears.

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[1] Dead Meat, "Childhood Fears (Dead Meat Podcast #49)," March 12, 2019, YouTube Video, 1:17:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s31nFNo_dQo&t=2423s.
I highly recommend watching/listening for more examples of common childhood fear films!

II. Animation, Horror, and the Unspoken Overlap

Before analysis of certain styles or genres of film can occur, the medium itself of film must be understood; specifically, and most importantly, the concept of identification that is vital to the medium. Film as a medium has been around for well over a century now, and there is cognitive reasoning behind why it became such a strong player in both the media zeitgeist and in everyday life. Susan Buck-Morss describes the experience of sitting in a movie theater, surrounded by darkness and focused only on the filmic image in front, as a phenomenon of perception, explaining that "the surface of the cinema screen functions as an artificial organ of cognition."[2] The theater screen is an extension of the viewer; all senses are heightened, and reality is "bracketed out" to let the image on the screen become an extension of the self.[3]

Buck-Morss says that this becomes a shared experience of everyone in the theater, that "[t]he crowd in a movie theater not only experiences the masses. It has a 'mass' experience."[4] What is seen in the movie theater is shared, and this leads to a lot of the mass understanding that comes from decoding certain movies. But as much as watching a movie is a collective experience between every member of the theater's audience, it is also a deeply personal one – because the film screen becomes practically a new appendage to the viewer, there is a deep emotional and visceral connection established. This leads to

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[2] Susan Buck-Morss, "The Cinema Screen as Prosthesis of Perception: A Historical Account," in *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. C. Nadia Seremetakis (n.p.: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 53.

identification – the viewer seeing themselves in the image on the screen. Whether it's to the protagonist or the villain – as is very common in horror movies, especially – the audience is connected to the film by personal identification. It is this personal identification that leads to such passionate connections, and visceral responses, to film and cinema – including the warm nostalgia that is so often associated with animated movies.

In *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon*, Norman Klein writes: "After all, any space or film that uses manipulated, interactive imagery must be called, by definition, a form of animation."[5] Since the burst of animation onto the feature film scene in 1937 with Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,* animation has been at the forefront of children's media and children's culture. In films from the Walt Disney Studios and beyond, animated children's movies are "presented to audiences as exemplary forms of entertainment that stimulate the imagination, protect innocence, and create a healthy sense of adventure" – all of which deemed are "good" for children.[6]

But, like Norman Klein says, animation is not limited to pen-and-paper drawings put in sequence; with the advent of new technologies and innovations, animation's definition has broadened to be any manipulated imagery that has limitations and reach beyond what the natural "real" world can create. There are many forms that this medium can take, including:

1. The "classic" 2D (2-dimensional) animation, also called cel animation, where individual frames were drawn, painted, and put together in sequence, made most popular by Disney movies like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*

[5] Norman M. Klein, *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* (London, 1993).
[6] Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 91.

2. The 3D CGI animation (3-dimensional, computer-generated imagery), first used in a feature film in Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995)
3. Motion-capture animation, which builds on the above 3D CGI, where human actors' movements are captured and then assigned to digital characters using motion-tracking and animation data
4. Stop-motion animation, where physical puppets or clay models are moved frame by frame to create movement sequences

As technologies evolve, of course, the boundaries between animation and live-action start to blur, and more categories and subcategories begin to emerge –but when it comes to the animation that is prominent in children's media, and in the films that will be analyzed later, these are the most notable forms.

In looking at animation as a medium, we must also look at children's media as a genre – especially because the two are often seen as congruent, even though they were not necessarily created to be so. Children's media has a definition just as broad as its descriptor suggests – media, whether TV, film, or otherwise, designed for younger audiences. Media "aimed at children, films about childhood, and films children watch regardless of whether they are children's films" – all can fit under the umbrella of children's media.[7] While children's media, like most other forms, is at its core meant to entertain, designing for children requires responsibility. This leads many production companies, like Disney, to create "teaching machines" in their films and TV, hoping to educate as well as entertain.[8]

[7] Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "New Perspectives in Children's Film Studies," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 39.
[8] Giroux and Pollock, *The Mouse*, 91.

And because Disney has become such a leader in the world of children's media, especially with film, animation has become intrinsically linked with the genre.

Horror, however, is rarely ever linked with children's media – as previously mentioned, shielding children from the horror genre is seen as a "protective measure" against subject matters or imagery that are deemed "unsuitable" for young audiences.[9] Very few parents would actively show their young child *Halloween* or *Friday the 13th* for this reason. However, an intersection of horror and children's media has existed for generations now. The basic definition of the horror genre is that it elicits emotional, psychological, and physical responses like fear, a shudder, aversion, and excitement.[10] The genre is dictated by the emotion it evokes. In using this basic definition of what constitutes "horror," we can see elements of horror in children's media tracing all the way back to the Brothers Grimm and other fairy tale originators.

Children's media and horror are often separated because of this assumption of "unsuitability," or the idea that the two genres have very different goals. The "typical" horror audience, at least according to theater statistics and cultural understanding, is very different from the intended audience of children's films; Carol Clover describes the "majority audience" as "largely young and largely male – conspicuously groups of boys who would cheer the killer on as he assaults his victims, then reverse their sympathies to cheer the survivor."[11] The people who see horror movies are stereotypically seen as more sadistic – not the audiences assumed to be going to see *The Little Mermaid* in theaters. Horror and

[9] McCort, *Reading in the Dark*, 8.
[10] Ibid., 10.
[11] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23.

children's media, however, have a shared basis. At their core, they are cautionary tales. Just as children's movies are seen as "teaching machines," educating children on morals and the importance of what is "good" and what is "bad," horror movies act as a warning against immorality as well. In the classic slasher horror movie, the first teens to die are the ones who acted nasty, had sex, or misbehaved – Carol Clover specifies that the Final Girl, she who survives the horror, is typically a "good" girl, a virgin, or in some ways morally above her peers who do not make it out alive.[12] If *Pinocchio* is ultimately a lesson against misbehavior and lying, *Friday the 13th* is just as much a lesson against distraction and sexuality. Children's media and horror have, ultimately, the same end goal – to act as a cautionary tale and warn against the implications of immorality.

This means children's media and horror are more closely linked than many people expect, at least when shown their visuals and audiences. When it comes to genre conventions, they could not be more visually different – children's media, especially animation, is often saturated with color and light, while horror typically relies on darkness and visual cues of unease. But because they have such similar end goals, there are a lot of similar tactics used to convey that cautionary air, and the following chapters will be analyzing the two genres in conjunction to explain just how hand-in-hand animation and horror can work – even when it is not necessarily intended by the creators. In fact, the juxtaposition of these two genres is unsettling in itself, as the audience's expectations of the two are extremely different and "happy" children's films are not, in their minds, supposed to inflict terror on young audiences.

[12] Clover, *Men, Women*, 40.

Childlike Expectations: Encoding and Decoding

This juxtaposition – that a movie not intended to be frightening can leave a lasting mark of terror on its young views – exposes a discrepancy in the encoding and decoding of these films. In "Encoding, Decoding," Stuart Hall highlights that pieces of media are *encoded* with messages, the intended message of the producer or creator, but might have different messages *decoded* by the consumer. "If no 'meaning' is taken, there can be no 'consumption'" – meanings and messages will always be ascribed to media, even if they are not what the creator intended, so long as they are being consumed by an audience.[13]

The concept of encoding and decoding becomes interesting when analyzing the effect of children's media – primarily because the people creating it (adults) are so different in worldview and perception than the audience (children). The patterns in encoding and decoding "exhibit, across individual variants, significant clusterings"[14] – so, while individuals can decode different messages from the same piece of media, patterns can emerge in groups. We decode based on experience, so audiences with similar ages, life experiences, or cultural understandings tend to decode the same media in similar ways.

Consequently, there seem to be patterns in how adults view children's movies and how children, the supposed intended audience, view them. Adults see the encoded message more clearly – it was encoded by other adults, after all – and look at the narrative to judge if a film is appropriate for children. To them, *Pinocchio* has a wholesome, educational narrative. It is not inherently scary! Children, however, seem to decode using emotional reaction – the visuals and emotions of *Pinocchio* are scary, therefore the movie is scary,

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[13] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 508.
[14] Ibid., 515.

even if that was not the encoded purpose. This leads to these interesting childhood fears – movies that children are shown because, to the adults, they are not scary, but then are read as terrifying by the children. When adults see a colorful, animated movie with important lessons, children can see a viscerally scary example of animated body horror.

Theory: Body Horror

The concept of body horror is often attributed to, as is implied by the name, the horror genre and the films classified as such. It stems from the idea of the spectator's body – the body of whoever is *watching* the film – being intrinsically linked to, and thus affected by, the bodies on the screen. Engagement is key to the success of film, and scholars argue that "in the cinematic experience we do not experience a film only with our eyes, but with our entire lived body, informed by its full personal history."[15] Film is not just a sensation of sight and sound – the spectator's body is engaged and watching a film is made an *experience*. "The mind cannot be independent from the input of bodily senses," either, meaning that the bodily experience we have spawns emotional and mental responses.[16] This builds off of Susan Buck-Morss's idea that the cinema screen is an extension of the self – a "prosthetic organ of the senses."[17]

Horror, as a genre, exhibits this in the most visceral way. Horror is one of the few film genres explicitly defined by a feeling or experience elicited from the audience. The common thread of films in the horror genre is the intended effect; they are designed to cause fear or discomfort, in simplest words. Instead of a descriptor like romantic comedy or Western, where the genre is defined around the films' plots or setting, horror is a genre

[15] Tarja Laine, "Cinema as Second Skin," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 4, no. 2 (2006): 94.
[16] Laine, "Cinema as Second," 97.
[17] Ibid., 55-56.

named for a *feeling*. Angela Ndalianis defines the recent years of horror films as a subsect of the genre: New Horror Cinema, defined by a "ritualistic violation of taboos," specifically the human body. The horror of the film is inflicted onto the body, and "the bodily destruction depicted onscreen unrelentingly weaves its way offscreen and onto the body of the spectator."[18] The pain, torture, and violation felt by the onscreen body causes a physical reaction in the audience – embodying the negative emotions that horror seeks to elicit – *because* film is inherently a full-body experience. New Horror Cinema just takes this visceral experience and amplifies it, turning a full-body experience into a full-body *feeling* as well. Whereas an emotional experience can affect the spectator due to personal experience, literally every spectator has a body – so the physical acts done onto the cinematic body are more directly linked to something we as an audience can feel, and it becomes a more visceral reaction.

According to Ndalianis, "[i]n New Horror Cinema, this bodily relationship is all the more marked in that the cinematic body—the audio-visual fictional world presented to us—reflects and amplifies the experience of the horrified, suffering and volatile bodies within the narrative space."[19] Seeing the body affected in a horrific way – usually some sort of manipulation, violence, or violation – will inevitably cause discomfort in the viewer. We feel what we see happen to a body directly in *our* body. This is described as "haptic visuality," caused by the combination of cinema's immersive nature and all senses of the viewer being so stimulated by the visuals and tactics of filmmaking.[20] So when we see the

[18] Angela Ndalianis, *The Horror Sensorium: Media and the Senses* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 16.
[19] Ibid., 23.
[20] Ibid.

extended scenes of torture in *Saw*, we feel it – whether it's in the physical signs of discomfort, in shivers, or by averting our eyes.

Body horror is closely associated with gore, torture, and other mainstays of the adult horror genre for this reason. Nothing is more viscerally abnormal about the body than when it is in shambles or mutilated or hurt in a way that is obscene or torturous. *Saw* (2004) and its subsequent sequels are often pointed to as the most modern example of extensive body horror – or, as many critics negatively labelled it, "torture porn." The villain of the *Saw* series, Jigsaw, puts characters in torture devices that bring medieval torment to the modern day. All of the traps are escapable, Jigsaw asserts – you just will have to mutilate your body to survive. Digging out a key from behind a sewn-shut eyeball to escape certain death by a bear trap affixed to the head[21], filling a beaker with ten pints of blood in a certain amount of time to escape a nail bomb[22] – the price of survival is permanent body mutilation. And with the *Saw* franchise, body horror is shown, blood and gore and all, in extended, unwavering scenes. The camera is focused on the mutilation, not shying away from it, not hiding it. The viewer is forced to watch it and confront every minute of the torture. It is not like a *Halloween* Michael Myers kill, where there is a quick shot of a knife and then, later, a dead and bloodied body. With body horror, the process and transformation of mutilating the body is just as horrifying, if not more so, than the lasting long-term effects of it.

But while body horror is one of the primary determining factors of New Horror Cinema, it is not restricted to just classic "horror" films. Body horror is vaguely defined,

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[21] Darren Lynn Bousman, dir., *Saw II*, Lions Gate, 2005.
[22] David Hackl, dir., *Saw V*, Lions Gate, 2008.

meaning that the only requirement for a film to incorporate "body horror" is for it to incorporate a body – even without blood splatter or torture, "if a text generates fear from abnormal states of corporeality, or from an attack upon the body, we might find ourselves in front of an instance of body horror."[23]

In her analysis of "scary" children's media, Jessica McCort notes an outstanding example of body horror *in* children's literature. In 1845 Germany, psychiatrist Dr. Heinrich Hoffman published *Struwwelpeter,* a collection of illustrated stories that acted as cautionary tales for its young readers. While most fairy tales and children's stories typically act as cautionary or disciplinary tales, McCort notes that Heinrich's explicit use of body horror is unmatched by other children's writers:

> For example, in "The Story of Little Suck-a-Thumb," a boy's misdeed of thumb sucking precedes the excessively cruel and perverse punishment of having his thumbs cut off by the terrifying scissor man. In other tales, a boy dies of starvation after refusing to eat his soup, and a girl burns to death after playing with matches.
>
> …Although the punishments vary in severity from story to story, Hoffman's tales consistently draw upon children's anxieties about and fascination with the grotesque and transgressive as a means to both delight and horrify.[24]

Hoffman utilizes the body, specifically the child's body, to inflict punishment on the abject child. It is not body horror in the sense of seeing an extended mutilation of the body, but it is body horror in how the body is punished for the child's misdeeds – and Hoffman goes into enough detail to get the same extended sense of discomfort and visceral unease.

Hoffman, however, is an outlier – body horror to this extent is rarely used (intentionally) for children's media. Even in horror movies, there is an unspoken respect

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[23] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (University of Wales Press: 2014), 52.
[24] McCort, *Reading in the Dark*, 37.

for the child's body. Brutal child deaths are rarely shown on screen – *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982) features one, or *Hereditary* (2018), but they use an onscreen child death as a very specific point of plot, shock value, or messaging. Hurting or mutilating a child's body must be a conscious choice, unlike the countless teen and young adult deaths that populate the majority of horror movie kills. Dr. Hoffman's use of body horror in *Struwwelpeter* led to controversy and backlash, centered around "Hoffman's representation of violence being inflicted on child victims," with critics arguing whether the content was appropriate as children's literature.[25] Body horror and children's media, then, have a tempestuous relationship.

Theory: Uncanny Valley

The model of the uncanny valley was originated by Masahiro Mori, who theorized that characters who resemble humans closely, but are not human, lead to uneasy feelings in human observers. Their likeability and familiarity by human observers increases as their human likeness increases, until a point just before 100% human likeness where the familiarity decreases sharply (see **Figure 1**).[26]

[25] McCort, *Reading in the Dark*, 38.
[26] Aline W. de Borst and Beatrice de Gelder, "Is It the Real Deal? Perception of Virtual Characters versus Humans: An Affective Cognitive Neuroscience Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, no. 576 (May 11, 2015): 2.

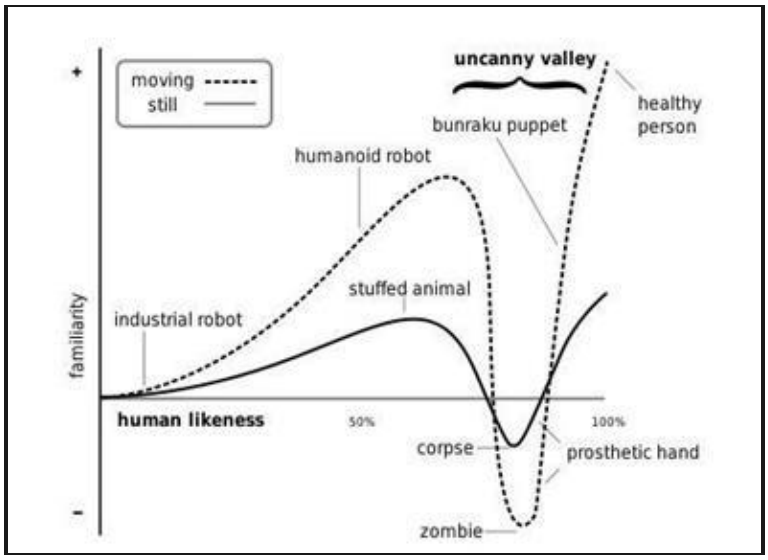

Figure 1

Original discussions of the uncanny valley were centered around humanoid robots, especially as their likeness to humans got closer and closer to realistic. But the same theory has been applied to digital characters and cartoons. Studies using computer-generated faces found that human response to the images fluctuated, and that the "drop in appeal was not found for the most realistic stimuli, as the uncanny valley hypothesis would predict, but rather for those on the border between cartoon-like and realistic."[27] The incongruence of the visual – being *close* to what we know to be real, but just distant enough from full familiarity – leads to an eeriness, unease, and discomfort in the viewer. In short, when an animated character approaches realism but falls short in some way, the uncanny valley is the reason behind the visceral discomfort in the watcher.

The uncanny valley is, in some circles, referenced to as the "valley of creepiness" – but what exactly is creepy? David Livingstone Smith poses that threat, as much as we associate it with fear, is not necessary for something to be creepy. Something is not creepy

[27] de Borst and de Gelder, "Is It the Real," 4.

because we find it dangerous; Smith argues that "it's because we are uncertain about what kind of thing it is."[28] The human brain categorizes everything it encounters; that which is uncanny or creepy, however, is unsettling because it does not fit into a pre-existing category. We fear them not because they pose a threat to us, but because they exist beyond our "established conceptual norms" – this is what Smith named the "Categorical Ambiguity Theory" of creepiness.[29] Our brains are trying to perceive these characters as human, because they are *close* to being humanlike, but there is a cognitive block because we know they *aren't* human. This is why characters can be *creepy* without being thematically *scary* – they do not pose a threat, but they cause visceral discomfort.

To avoid this discomfort, uncanny valley experts advise creating characters that do not "combine features on different sides of a boundary – for example, human and nonhuman, living and nonliving, or real and artificial."[30] This explains why not *all* animated characters elicit the uncanny valley, for those that are more concretely "cartoony" do not cross this boundary. "Cartoony" is barely a term grounded in concrete definition, and yet it is a descriptor that seems regularly understood. The closest published definition I could find was from dictionary.com, which defined *cartoonish* as "like a cartoon, especially in being one-dimensional, brightly colored, or exaggerated."[31] Pixar's animation style, with large eyes and bright colors, is cartoony – the exaggeration allows it to exist fully in the "nonhuman" or "artificial" worlds instead of on a boundary. And, as far as my research has

[28] David Livingstone Smith, "A Theory of Creepiness," *Aeon*, September 19, 2016.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Rina Diane Caballer, "What Is the Uncanny Valley?," IEEE Spectrum, last modified November 6, 2019, https://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/what-is-the-uncanny-valley.
[31] Dictionary.com, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/cartoonish.

gone, no one has complained about discomfort from the uncanny valley in relation to Pixar movies.

So it is not all animation that falls into the uncanny valley – it is the styles, or specific scenes, that position themselves in some way on that boundary between real and unreal. The uncanny valley is not necessarily inherent in animation, as it can be avoided. But when a character, or an animation style, or even a specific movement of a character, teeters on that edge between realistic and cartoony, or real and artificial, discomfort and unease are not far behind. And because the uncanny valley is tied to similarities to the human body, the discomfort caused in the viewer by the uncanny valley works together with the visceral reaction to body horror. We dislike characters that fall into the uncanny valley because their bodies are mutated, or manipulated from our idea of normal in some way – this, then, could prove to show that the uncanny valley is actually an *extension* of body horror, or vice versa.

Why it Matters: The Power in Bodies We Fear

And with this application of body horror and the uncanny to children's media comes the possible implications of such – the human body clearly has a lot of power in scaring a viewer, especially a child viewer. And so while certain bodies that are "scary" in children's movies may be based in transformation or fantasy – Ursula's transformation into a giant sea monster in *The Little Mermaid* scared me and many of the people I have talked to – we must also be aware of the bodies simply *associated* with fear, evil, or villainy. Even if the body is not directly what is supposed to be scary, association can hold a lot of power.

Continuing with Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, for example: she is scary outside of her physical appearance as she steals Ariel's voice and yearns to gain power through whatever

means necessary, but she is also one of many Disney villains who is fat. Her fatness is not directly attributed to her villainy or her scariness, but when enough villains or otherwise scary characters are given a certain body, that body can become associated with evil and fear. Multiple animated Disney villains are given this body so that fatness acts as a "proxy for all kinds of devious or despicable behavior" – *Pocahontas*'s Governor Ratcliffe is fat to represent his greed, and *Robin Hood*'s Sherriff of Nottingham is oversized as "an emblem of his corruption and buffoonery."[32] Fatness, and fat bodies, is thus associated with something to be feared.

Bodies associated with evil are not limited to animation, either. Controversy surrounding villainy and disability arose in 2020 with the release of *The Witches*. Directed by Robert Zemeckis, the villain of *The Witches* is the Grand Witch, played by Anne Hathaway – the Grand Witch is missing fingers, a substitute for the original book's witchy claws, in a way that resembles *Ectrodactyly*, a hand abnormality also called "split hand."[33] Backlash from the disabled community followed, worried that showing children a limb difference in association with a scary character might bring about a fear of those differences. Disability advocacy organizations explained that "Hollywood's tendency to disfigure evil characters, even unintentionally, can cause people to be afraid of those who don't look like them."[34] Those involved with the movie, including Anne Hathaway, subsequently apologized.

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[32] Sara Leo, "Online Fan Activism and the Disruption of Disney's Problematic Body Pedagogies," *Counterpoints* 477 (2016): 196.
[33] Rebecca Rubin, "Warner Bros. Apologizes After 'The Witches' Sparks Backlash From People With Disabilities," *Variety*, November 4, 2020, accessed March 19, 2021.
[34] Ibid.

Representations of disability, fatness, or any body types considered "othered" in villains of children's media is a topic broad enough for its own thesis. This is in no way a comprehensive analysis of the consequences of the bodies we teach children to see as "good" and "evil" – instead, I use these examples as a way of saying that the body has a lot of power in children's media. The bodies we choose to make "evil" or scary in any way will, intentionally or not, color perceptions of those bodies outside of the cinematic universe. The movies that will be analyzed in the following chapters utilize the animated body in a way that causes fear, even if unintentional. Fear is inevitable; the films to be studied in the following chapters are not meant to be scary, yet incite fear anyway. This should not prevent them, however, from having the same horror analysis. The fear from these movies and that derived from horror movies are the same emotion – and should be treated as such.

These theories of body horror, the uncanny, and the role of the medium of animation will be used to look at three "scary" or "creepy" animated children's movies and the animation techniques they represent: *Polar Express* and its use of motion capture and the clearest example of the uncanny valley; *Pinocchio* and the fear of surreal transformation; *Coraline* and how stop-motion creates unnerving movement echoing our fear of reanimation. All of these films, in different ways, embody the fear of bodily manipulation and distortion in a visceral way. By analyzing these "unscary" films with a visceral body horror lens, we start to see how childhood fears are not irrational; they are grounded in what we colloquially consider to be horror, but the boundaries of genre keep many from acknowledging them as such. These films prove that trying to avoid horror or things that scare us is a moot point; fear is everywhere, and it is more valuable to acknowledge what we fear than to avoid it in its entirety.

III. *The Polar Express*, Motion Capture, and the Uncanny

More often than not, when I ask peers around my age –we were the target audience of five or six years old when the movie was released in 2004 – about *The Polar Express*, I get a very repetitive answer: "The animation is just so creepy." Creepy enough that, for most of my peers, the movie is avoided around the holiday season. When I tried to play it on the TV in my house with four other students, one of them left the room, saying, "No, I can't watch it. I hate it."

The Polar Express is an adaptation of the short illustrated book of the same name; a mystical train makes its way to the North Pole and Santa's workshop on Christmas Eve, picking up children along the way who may or may not believe in the existence of the magical Santa Claus. The movie elongates the original story, adding more plot points and defined characters, but ultimately ends with the same messages of Christmas spirit, joy, and childlike wonder and belief in magic.

While there are some mildly unsettling scenes in *The Polar Express* – there is a room full of discarded toys that come to life and chastise the children for not wanting to play with them and thus rendering them obsolete, which is not exactly the epitome of Christmas cheer and joy – it is not these scenes that cause such a visceral reaction to the movie. It is the animation, and the word almost always used to describe the animation is simple: creepy. *The Polar Express* was produced in the midst of director Robert Zemeckis's experimentation with motion capture animation – a, at the time, revolutionary method of capturing actor's movements and transmitting the data to computer animation software.

The technology was meant to create a much more realistic animated character, allowing the real-life actors' movements to be translated to the animated body. Tom Hanks, by acting out most of the movie with small movement-capturing dots covering his body and performing in a black box theater, is able to play five different characters – and the actors perform the characters physically as well as vocally (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 2 – Tom Hanks wearing the mo-cap suit, and the *Polar Express* scene it created

Zemeckis pioneered using the motion-capture style for full-length movies, building on past experience with CGI animation. Before this, motion-capture technology had really only been used for characters like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*: *The Two Towers* (2002) and Jar Jar Binks in *Star Wars: Episode I* (1999) – individual characters that were not photorealistic humans. After the release of *The Polar Express*, Zemeckis continued to refine the technique with *Monster House* (2006, as producer), *Beowulf* (2007), and *A Christmas Carol* (2009), as it allowed the flexibility of animation with added realism and realistic movement of the characters. But it is with this attempt at realism that the unease starts to set in. Unlike other computer animated characters – like those in Pixar, for example – features aren't exaggerated or oversized. They aren't "cartoony." Proportions are, at least at

cursory glance, accurate to real life. Eyes are not bigger than normal, their noses and mouths are realistically rendered. So what is it about this animation that gives everyone who watches this movie the creeps?

It is with motion-capture, more than any other type of animation, that the uncanny valley is put into effect. Mentions of the uneasiness caused by the film's animation aren't unique to the now grown generation of kids who saw it in theaters – even though the emotional effects seem to last longer with those who saw it at a young age. Right after the film's release, multiple critics noted that even they were unnerved. "*The Polar Express* is at best disconcerting, and at worst, a wee bit horrifying," wrote CNN reviewer Paul Clinton, citing that the characters look lifeless despite the wholehearted attempt for them to look plucked from real life.[35] In the New York Times, Manohla Dargis wrote that the "largest intractable problem with *The Polar Express* is that the motion-capture technology used to create the human figures has resulted in a film filled with creepily unlifelike beings."[36] The characters are *close* to realistic, but not close enough to make the viewer comfortable with them.

Animation as a medium already positions itself at risk of entering the "dangerous" region of the uncanny valley model; animation implies movement, and Mori notes that the addition of movement will make any character fall deeper into the metaphorical valley (again, see **Figure 1**).[37] When the character skews even more towards human likeness, as happens in *The Polar Express*, the unease of the uncanny valley is not far behind. When it

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[35] Paul Clinton, "Review: 'Polar Express' a Creepy Ride," *cnn.com*, November 10, 2004.
[36] Manohla Dargis, "Do You Hear Sleigh Bells? Nah, Just Tom Hanks and Some Train," *New York Times*, November 10, 2004.
[37] Sahra Kunz, "The Problem of Realism in Animated Characters - Has the Uncanny Valley Been Crossed?," *Proc. International Conference on Illustration & Animation*, 2015.

comes to animated characters, realism and familiarity are not intrinsically tied to each other. If anything, the realism of characters like those in *The Polar Express* creates a barrier between the audience and the familiarity and identification that makes watching films so enjoyable.

In his study of CGI faces and characters, Karl McDorman notes that facial expressions are key to creating emotional connection, and that this is a recurring challenge for computer graphics: "The human face is capable of producing an astonishing variety of expressions – expressions for which sometimes the smallest difference changes the perceived meaning considerably."[38] So, when a digital face more closely resembles a real human face, we as the audience expect it to convey emotions in the same way. We know that when a human face has genuine happiness, a smile will lead to eye crinkles; when a person shows concern, their forehead burrows or their lips purse. The motion-capture technology is not this specific. Like all technologies that seem too good to be true, motion-capture animation has limitations. The data transferred to the digital characters is dependent on the sensors placed on the actors' faces (again, refer to **Figure 2**). But the sensors cannot be placed on *every* inch of the face or body; they cannot be placed on the inner corner of the eye, or the outer corner of the mouth, or the smile lines that draw together the nose and mouth. They cannot – or at least in 2004, they could not – track the pupils.

Where these sensors cannot be placed, nuance of emotion or reaction cannot be picked up. Thus, these missing gaps – the movement of the pupils, the inner corner of the eye – must be computer-animated in post-production. They are simply filled in, not crafted

[38] Kunz, "The Problem."

straight from the human source. And this was known to the production team: *The Polar Express*'s animation supervisor, David Schuab, writes in his breakdown of the animation process that "it is a stylized film with a painterly quality on every level…*not* designed for micro-expression levels of detail that would be required for photorealism."[39] But it is because of the lack of these "micro-expression" details that the characters feel empty. Their emotions feel lifeless, if you can even tell they have emotions – because those small facial indications are not there, the characters can barely convey any emotion convincingly.

Mori notes this emptiness in his initial uncanny valley theory – that although humanoid characters may seem "photorealistic on the surface, [they] may appear to lack qualities made visible through motion introduced to create the illusion of life, such as a sense of weight, physicality, and breath."[40] The characters seem emotionless and empty, making them both less believable and less likely to encourage audience identification.

Figure 3 – Hero Boy and Hero Girl in *The Polar Express*

[39] David Schuab, "'The Polar Express' Diary: Part 3 -- The MoCap/Anim Process," in *Animation World Network*, previously published in *VFXWorld*, February 2, 2005

[40] Chris Carter, "Hyper-Realism in the Adventures of Tintin," *International Journal of Computer Graphics & Animation* 9, no. 4 (October 2019): 2.

Figure 4 – Hero Boy, Hero Girl, and The Conductor in *The Polar Express*

But if Mori says that motion makes a digital character fall deeper into the uncanny valley, that "those on the border between non-human and human categories, especially if they are combined with human-like motion" are the most likely to provoke an eerie response,[41] then the bodies of *The Polar Express* prove that. Schuab notes that the performances captured were "sacred" according to director Robert Zemeckis, and that details and movements were not to be altered unless absolutely necessary to the story.[42] But what is natural movement for a living, breathing human body will inevitably not translate to a digital character, especially one that is already lacking believability and depth. For example, Sahra Kunz highlights the natural swaying of human bodies:

> In this film, the main "mark" of Motion Capture use is visible in a certain amount of swaying in the characters – this "swaying" is very characteristic of Motion Capture based performances, as a human will rarely be able to stand absolutely still – in real life this is perceived as "natural", but when translated to the large screen it becomes uncanny and very noticeable.[43]

The movement is human-like, but the character's body itself is not. There is a disconnect between the animated body, the body's movement, and the voice performance. Take the

[41] de Borst and de Gelder, "Is It the Real," 9.
[42] Schuab, "'The Polar," in *Animation World.*
[43] Kunz, "The Problem."

protagonist, for example, named simply "Hero Boy" – he is animated as a young boy, but his performance capture was done by forty-eight-year-old Tom Hanks. Not only is natural human movement being translated to a digital body, but an adult man's movement is being translated to a child avatar. The voice is that of a young boy, but the emotions conveyed in the vocal performance are not connected to the facial expressions of the animated counterpart. There is, in numerous ways, a visceral disconnect.

This disconnect is the source of a lot of the negative responses to *The Polar Express*. Cognitive studies about the uncanny valley show that "incongruent conditions" in digital characters like these lead to increased feelings of eeriness and unease in audience members.[44] For an animated Christmas movie created specifically for children, based off of a popular children's book, feelings of discomfort and unease were definitely *not* the intended reaction. It is here that we see a clear example of encoding and decoding dissonance. Robert Zemeckis set out to create a not-quite-real, not-quite-animated style that reflected the watercolor-esque illustrations of the original *Polar Express* book – he felt that this was key to preserving the emotional weight of the story.[45] What was decoded, or seen by the audience, however, was a story populated by emotionless, empty, and unsettling characters eerily chanting the joys of Christmas.

But does *The Polar Express*, and by extension motion-capture animation, embody elements of body horror? Yes, if you take into account just how broad a "body" or a manipulation of such can be. Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz analyzes the concept of body horror as an extension of human fears from a biological perspective – "body horror finds strength

[44] de Borst and de Gelder, "Is It the Real," 5.
[45] Anwar Brett, "Interview with Robert Zemeckis," *BBC*, 2004.

in the way it goes against what is considered normal anatomy and function in biological species."[46] One of the types of biological horror, and thus body horror, is metamorphosis – creatures that exist on the border between things we know to be real. The uncanny valley exists because of blurred boundaries and eerie disconnect between real and fake – in other words, a border between two realities we are more familiar with.

The characters of *The Polar Express* are not a mutation in the classic sense; we do not watch them transform from human to nonhuman, but instead they simply seem nonhuman to start. When discussing mutation as a form of biological horror – mutation and metamorphosis feed into each other – Cruz states that "[o]ne prominent manifestation of a physical abnormality is a loss of symmetry. We have a natural appreciation for symmetry, a balance in proportions…whereas the lack of it is often an undesirable trait."[47] This "balance" that is so desired in non-horrific characters is not seen in the kids of *The Polar Express*; they exist in that area of disconnect, where their voices and bodies and movements and facial expressions all seem to be from different realities. The entire movie exists on an unsettling boundary, whether it be between human and nonhuman, animation and live-action, or adult and child. It is in this disconnect that the audience, especially child audiences working solely on emotional reaction instead of plot, feels uneasy and uncomfortable watching *The Polar Express*.

The Polar Express is polarizing, to say the least. Initial reactions from those who live with me, one of whom had never seen the movie before, included, and I quote: "It's horrifying. It's their faces and it's creepy; they look evil and it gives me anxiety," and, "It's as

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[46] Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror Is Biological Horror," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40, no. 4 (2012): 161.
[47] Ibid., 165.

if you sculpted a robot out of butter. It's robotic yet smooth." I asked for visceral reactions – gut, instinctive responses without sugarcoating – and what I got proves that *The Polar Express*'s animation is the first thing many people notice about the movie. The technology, as innovative as it was for its time, overshadows the intended message and feel of the movie.

Susan Buck-Morss writes about how the image on the cinema screen begins an act of cognition – what we see on the screen leads to our emotional response.[48] But the image of *The Polar Express* – Christmas, joy, hope, and Santa Claus – does not match the emotional response. There is a disconnect in the psychological relationship between screen and audience, and that disconnect is not pleasant or enjoyable to the viewer. In this dissonance lies the psychological reason why audiences avoid *The Polar Express* – we are not *used* to having such a stark divide between what is on the screen and our emotional response. Disconnect is not a pleasant feeling, and it's definitely not the feeling that many go to the movies to achieve – that in itself places the film on yet another uncomfortable boundary. And so, as the most pointed-to example of the uncanny valley from the last two decades, *The Polar Express* exemplifies how animation, even when produced with good intentions, can elicit fear and unease through the visceral reactions of body mutation, causing the primary response to the movie to be horror, not comfort, and explaining why it becomes such a delicate topic around Christmastime.

[48] Buck-Morss, "The Cinema," 48.

IV. *Pinocchio,* Cel Animation, and the Surreal Transformation

Released in 1940, *Pinocchio* was Disney's follow-up to the wildly successful, and industry-changing, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Riding on a high from creating the first full-length animated feature in *Snow White*, Walt Disney set his sights on another fairy tale, this one a classic Italian children's novel about the puppet come to life, to continue the success. But as effective as *Pinocchio* was in continuing Disney's industry reign, and as much as it has been wholly solidified as a "classic" Disney movie, it too is a film that I have refrained from watching until recently. One of my closest friends cites *Pinocchio* as the source of some of her most memorable nightmares from childhood.

The plot of *Pinocchio* has been recreated and translated in countless movies, both animated and live-action, books, and theater. The basic story often remains the same: the old woodcarver Geppetto creates a wooden puppet whom he names Pinocchio. He wishes on a star that Pinocchio would become a real boy – a wish that the Blue Fairy grants, conditional on Pinocchio proving himself to be truthful and unselfish. Jiminy Cricket, now a staple character of the Disney Company, is assigned as Pinocchio's "conscience." Obstacle after obstacle keeps Pinocchio from proving himself – the mouth of a monstrous blue whale included – but he eventually proves his worth and is transformed by the Blue Fairy into a real boy.

The scariness of *Pinocchio* is not as generalized as in *The Polar Express* – the most terrifying part is only one scene, no more than twenty minutes long in total:

After meeting Honest John and agreeing to accompany him, Pinocchio is put in a cart of young boys – they're on their way to Pleasure Island, the carnival site of their dreams. None of the boys are older than ten. They have fun, explore the carnival, enjoy the freedom of free food and cigars and pool – as any young boy would. But then the doors are shut, and Pinocchio's friends start to go missing. Jiminy Cricket stumbles upon a warehouse full of donkeys, all screaming and crying and yelling for help. One is pushed aside to be hurt because "he can still talk." Before Jiminy Cricket can warn Pinocchio, we see Pinocchio's new friend Lampwick sprout a set of donkey ears. And then a tail. He turns around for one second and turns back with the full face of a donkey. Their laughs mutilate into donkey heehaws. As Lampwick grabs Pinocchio for help, his hands turn into hooves and his screams for his mama turn into brays. We are forced to assume that he, too, will join the corral of boys Jiminy happened upon earlier, but the audience never fully learns the fate of the boys who did not get to escape like Pinocchio. Pinocchio returns to normal only fifteen minutes later in the movie, but the other boys from Pleasure Island – including Lampwick, whom we saw entirely transform before our very eyes – are, for all we know, sold as donkeys forever.

Figure 5

Figure 6

The concept is scary on its own – surreal transformation and metamorphosis is a mainstay in horror and scary for adults, let alone children watching it happen to someone their own age. In *Philosophy of Horror,* Noël Carroll writes that one of the basic components of horrific beings and monsters is *fusion* – while it can encompass many things, the basic explanation entails "the construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions"[49] or "single figures in whom distinct and often clashing types of elements are superimposed or condensed, resulting in entities that are impure and repulsive."[50] Fusion can be applied to more than just metamorphoses like *Pinocchio*'s: vampires and zombies are a fusion of living and dead, werewolves a fusion of man and wolf, and *Nightmare on Elm Street*'s Freddie Krueger a fusion of dream and reality. Horror is so often dictated by what we as audiences know to be "normal" – we fear what is unknown or apart from the reality we are comfortable with. So when there is a creature that fuses two characteristics or entities that are not meant to be put together, it will inevitably cause distrust and discomfort.

Figure 7

Figure 8

[49] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (London: Routledge, 1990), 43.
[50] Ibid., 45.

The horror also comes with the choice of animal; there is no magic or whimsy to becoming a donkey. Whereas some fairy tales glamorize transforming into majestic animals – Disney's *Moana*, for example, features a main character who regularly metamorphizes into eagles, sharks, and other grand creatures – a donkey is a lowly work animal, one that is looked upon by society as lesser than. Turning into a donkey leads to work and slavery, as the audience sees when Jiminy Cricket enters the corral. Metamorphosizing into a donkey, then, is an unpleasant fate wanted by no one – every aspect of this transformation leads to terror.

Pinocchio proves that just because this type of transformation is animated and colorful, does not mean it does not affect viewers in the same way – if anything, *Pinocchio*'s animated nature gives the transformation a malleability and freedom that it would not have in a live-action setting. Because *Pinocchio* was the second full-length feature made by Disney, it employed the same early form of 2D animation that consisted of individual frames drawn and painted onto cels – pieces of clear drawing sheets – and then placed onto background paintings and photographed (see **Figures 9 and 10**).[51] This frame-by-frame process allows for malleability in motion and portrayal of animated characters, as the only limit, really, is what can be drawn by the artist's hand. The enjoyment of animated films, according to Maureen Furniss, comes from the malleability of this process:

> The squash and stretch of character animation relies heavily on metamorphosis, or the transitioning of one shape into another…Russian film theorist Sergei Eisenstein said that the metamorphic – what he called "plasmatic" – quality of some of the studio's early animated figures appealed to some primordial components of the human psyche…He suggested that metamorphosis can provide a means of

[51] Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, rev. ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 19.

> connecting to areas of the subconscious, increasing out enjoyment of animated imagery. [52]

With this in mind, then, it is easy to see how the metamorphoses allowed by animation leads to some of the scenes in children's movies that are most adored. Cinderella's dress magically changing into a silver gown before our very eyes, adorned by glimmers and sparkles, was possible in 1950 thanks to individual frame animation. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Aurora's dress could easily turn from pink to blue with a simple change of paint. Pinocchio himself benefits from this – his magical transformation from puppet to real boy was able to be drawn and shown in full.

Figure 9 – an artist paints on cels

Figure 10 – a *Pinocchio* cel

But while cel animation allows for a certain amount of magic to be added to the film, it is also partly responsible for why *Pinocchio*'s Pleasure Island is so viscerally terrifying. In a live-action movie, at least one made before the highly-technical CGI we have today, this

[52] Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 77.

sort of transformation would be obscured in some way – a camera cut, a cross-fade, or some other visual distraction would bridge the gap between before and after, keeping the transformation process itself decently disguised and focusing more on the end product of the transformation itself. In *Pinocchio*, because of the freedom given by animation, the entire transformation is on screen. It is an extended, unbroken view of surreal transformation – we see Lampwick's hands actively dissolve into hooves, and his face changes without the camera cutting or view changing.

When it comes to *Pinocchio*'s depiction of body horror, this metamorphosis is key – where *Polar Express* took the idea of mutation to a new level with discussions of the uncanny, *Pinocchio*'s transformation scene is more "classically" body and biological horror. Mutating from a human body to that of a donkey, slowly and permanently, is exactly the type of unwanted and terrifying body manipulation that constitutes body horror. And, like in *The Polar Express*, this form of mutation places the characters of *Pinocchio* in the basin of the uncanny valley. They are less tied to reality, as 2D animation is the most "cartoony" and fabricated of the animation styles, but the donkey-boy hybrid is still existing on that real-unreal boundary. We as an audience are made uncomfortable by a body we are familiar with (that of a human boy) teetering on the brink of an uncanny body (donkey-boy hybrid) for so long. The horror is less in the final product, a donkey wearing human clothes, and more in the in-between stage, the stage that holds so much uncertainty and uncanny boundaries. We are disconcerted by the uncanniness of the transformation, and horrified by the body horror it represents.

In fact, the slow transformation from man to animal, and the fusion that happens in the meantime, of *Pinocchio* is comparable to one of the most pointed-to examples of body

horror: David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986). In *The Fly*, a man named Seth Brundle becomes a hybrid of a fly and a man as part of a scientific experiment, losing the ability to be either one fully and existing on an unsettling line between the two biological – and bodily – worlds.[53]

The Fly is referenced in many works of body horror theory, and the reasoning used to explain why its treatment of the human body is so viscerally terrifying can also be applied to the Pleasure Island scene of *Pinocchio*:

> *The Fly* is also body gothic because it generates horror through Seth's metamorphosis. The film chronicles every change in his body almost religiously, from his initial hypersensitivity to the buzzing of a fly, which he catches in his sleep, to the more dramatic falling of his ears and teeth.[54]

If Seth's metamorphosis is the key to the dread of a classic horror movie like *The Fly*, then Lampwick and Pinocchio's transformation hold that same power. Just as "every change" of Seth Brundle's transformation was chronicled, so too was Lampwick's. The metamorphosis was not all at once – it started with Lampwick's ears, followed a minute later by his tail. Lampwick hears Pinocchio's transformation before he knows of his own because of their laughs turning into donkey brays, and it is not until he fully grasps what is going on that his donkey metamorphosis is complete. Just as the step by step transformation is unsettling and suspenseful in *The Fly*, it has the same effect in *Pinocchio*.

Additionally, if in *The Fly* "the moment of crisis comes from the unexpected results of the transformation,"[55] the same can be said for *Pinocchio*. While the unexpected consequences of Seth's transformation are more about his humanity and what he can or

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[53] Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses," 163.
[54] Reyes, *Body Gothic*, 60.
[55] Ibid., 62.

cannot do as a hybrid creature, the consequences of the Pleasure Island transformation are known to the audience and not to Lampwick or Pinocchio. Because we see, with Jiminy Cricket, the corral of donkeys being yelled at and hit and sold into unknown slavery before Lampwick's transformation actually happens, the audience watches it with hesitant knowledge that after the transformation comes even more unjust treatment. The mutation itself is body horror, but the knowledge of what follows amplifies the eeriness and discomfort of the scene. It is rooted in the fear of transformation, but also the fear of the unknown consequences.

Both of these fears are even further intensified by the fact that they are happening to child bodies. As was previously mentioned, there is an unspoken rule in horror movies that child deaths – or in this case, mutation – are handled very delicately. The child's body is respected, even in film. In the most popular examples of body horror, the bodies affected are very rarely – if ever – children. *The Fly* and *The Thing* solely deal with the mutation of adult male bodies. Even in horror comedies, the child body is respected – in 2019's *Ready or Not*, an entire family explodes, on screen, as part of a ritualistic curse. The two children of the family, however, are taken off screen before they are killed. If a child body *is* mutilated, we at least never see it explicitly.

Because we as film audiences are so accustomed to *not* seeing child bodies in the context of body horror, it is deeply unsettling to not only see this type of gruesome transformation happen to a child, but to see it happen in a movie made specifically *for* children. Children experience the same identification that is so vital to film studies; if they watch a child, one no older than they are who has done nothing inexplicably *wrong*, unwillingly undergo a physical transformation that ends in child slavery, they will

inevitably have a visceral reaction. I, a nearly fully-grown adult, have a visceral reaction, and so do most people I talk about this scene with! So it is not surprising that so many children who grew up watching *Pinocchio* have a deep aversion to this scene, and consequently the movie as a whole.

Pinocchio, like many fairy tales, was written as a cautionary tale. The Pleasure Island scene is a part of this – it extends a form of discipline to the children who, in the eyes of the island, misbehave or live life as "jackasses." But as much as the experience may be a disciplinary tale, the consequences do not match the offenses – it echoes back to the body horror employed by Dr. Heinrich Hoffman in *Struwwelpeter*. Yes the "abject child" is punished, but in a way that is more terrifying than educational.[56] But while Hoffman was criticized and sparked controversy for his use of body horror in a disciplinary sense, *Pinocchio* has not necessarily received the same backlash. The film is still a Disney classic, in spite of, or just by simply ignoring, the deeply unsettling body horror it houses.

I still love *Pinocchio* – but I only fully appreciated it once I was able to watch it without cowering. It fills an important slot in the history of Disney animation as the second feature film, and it *shouldn't* be hidden away or forgotten just because it's scary. It is simply important to recognize the power that animation held, even in 1940, to manipulate the body and incite visceral reactions – even before animated films were a regular occurrence at the theater. And, if it accomplished anything, it made generations of kids hesitate before smoking cigars.

[56] McCort, *Reading in the Dark*, 40.

V. *Coraline*, *Chicken Run*, and Stop-Motion Reanimation

In trying to pick just one stop-motion animated movie for this chapter, I found myself stuck: in the discussions I had with friends about this thesis, *Coraline* was mentioned multiple times, but *Chicken Run*, to this day, is a movie that personally freaks *me* out. *Coraline* and *Chicken Run*, though both stop-motion animated, cover very different bases. They represent different forms of stop-motion – *Chicken Run* using the sculptable figures of Claymation and *Coraline* utilizing more puppets and latex – as well as different sides of the encoding and decoding discussion – *Coraline* was created, purposefully, to be spooky and eerie, whereas *Chicken Run*'s creepiness was not necessarily intended. But what they share is the inherent movement, texture, and ambient details that accompany the medium of stop-motion animation – an inherent aesthetic that, I believe, both makes it the animation style of choice for any animated film that aims to be creepy, and makes it incredibly prone to body horror.

Coraline is not the only one in this category of purposefully creepy stop-motion films; *Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Corpse Bride,* and *Frankenweenie* (all produced and/or directed by Tim Burton) are all stop-motion and, as is common with Tim Burton's style, have an intentionally "creepy" aesthetic. *ParaNorman* and *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Wererabbit* both utilize horror genre tropes, themes, and references in their plots. And, even if *Chicken Run* is not as aesthetically eerie as Tim Burton films, I would argue that the plot is unsettling – a farm of chickens forging an escape when their owner plans to slaughter them to make pies – and the stop-motion adds to it.

Stop-motion as an animation style is defined mostly by technique, not materials – a model or character is moved, each miniscule movement at a time, and photographed before repositioning, eventually simulating movement. The materials can vary – clay figures, puppets, wood, latex – but the process, for the most part, is dependent on crafting every single frame by hand.[57] Henry Selick, director of *Coraline*, works primarily with stop-motion – he also directed *Nightmare Before Christmas*. Originally a novel by Neil Gaiman, *Coraline* follows a young girl living a gloomy life who finds a parallel world where her Other Parents have glassy buttons for eyes. The movie gets dark, sinister, and "chilly," in Selick's words, and this is all amplified by the inherent blemishes of stop-motion:

> Selick says he works to leave in imperfections. "Stop-motion is sort of twitchy; you can feel the life in it," he says. "If we were to remove that completely, there'd be no point in it." After all, he points out, the beauty and mystery of stop motion are in those traces of the animators hand.[58]

Each frame of a stop-motion film is created in the moment – yes it can be planned, and extensive planning is needed, but there is no eraser or paintbrush to fix a frame if the artist later sees that it's off.

Walter Benjamin wrote in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Reproduction*, that even "the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be"[59] – that is, most reproduced art is lacking the *aura* of the artist, of its creation. With the presence of an aura comes an acknowledgement of the creative process, an authenticity that cannot be reproduced. When Henry Selick notes that stop-motion has "traces of the

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[57] Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 161.
[58] Neda Ulaby, "Henry Selick, Keeping Stop-Motion Moving Ahead," NPR, last modified February 9, 2009.
[59] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 3.

animator's hand," he is acknowledging that stop-motion has an aura not seen in other styles of animation. In stop-motion films, especially those primarily made with clay like *Chicken Run*, there are fingerprints, indents, and scratches all on screen for the viewer to see. The creation of the film is visible in the final product – there is an aura unique only to this style of animation. This, according to Benjamin, adds a layer of closeness that makes the animation more visceral to the audience. The typical reproduced work of art, one which lacks this certain aura, has a "unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be."[60] No matter how familiar the art may be to the viewer, the absence of this aura places a certain amount of distance between the art and the audience. In stop-motion, however, this separation is not as clear. What is on screen feels *closer* to us, making any aspects of the uncanny or body mutation feel much more real to us as audience members.

And, like Selick mentions, stop-motion is twitchy. There is a jerkiness, and yet there is also an uncanny fluidity. Natural movement is nearly impossible to capture in frame-by-frame. In *Coraline*, for example, Coraline's arms move very smoothly, almost as if they're floating on air sometimes; in *Chicken Run,* however, which was made nearly ten years prior, each movement feels disjointed and twitchy. No matter what motion is occurring, "it is difficult to recreate an absolutely realistic sense of movement when working frame by frame…[it] lacks the "motion blur" that occurs naturally" with a real-life model in front of a camera.[61] Even when working frame by single frame and crafting every single movement the character makes, the human hand cannot recreate the nuances of human movement.

[60] Benjamin, *The Work*, 21.
[61] Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 161.


Figures 11 and 12 – animators work on *Coraline*

Additionally, even if the body movements are relatively fluid, a stop-motion character's face will almost *always* lack this fluidity and nuance. For movies like *Coraline*, each character has hundreds of interchangeable faces swapped in and out for each shot. In *Nightmare Before Christmas*, the character of Sally alone had ten "types" of faces, each one with a series of eleven variances of expression.[62] Selick calls this technique "replacement animation" – and thousands of heads and faces would be made for each film (see **Figure 11**).[63] But no matter how many faces were made, there will inevitably be pieces missing and the end result will be disjointed or choppy. It is impossible to account for every small facial detail represented in every single emotion. The "in-betweens" will be missed – the tiny transitions or details that make our facial expressions move smoothly.

[62] Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 164.
[63] Ulaby, "Henry Selick," NPR.


Figures 13 and 14 – an animator switches out faces in *Wallace and Gromit*

And so while Henry Selick may see stop-motion's inherent twitchiness and uncertainty as an artistic blessing in the medium, it also accounts for some of the unsettling feelings associated with the style. There is an inherent fragmentation, an unsettling unfinishedness that accompanies the movements in stop-motion. You can see the artist's touch, as Selick says – you are almost constantly aware of the process of the animation that created the movie as you watch it. This also connects to the *tactility* of stop-motion. In 2D or CGI animation, everything is comprised of pixels – even textures that *look* real as animation technology improves are created by a computer and lack fully authentic tactility. Stop-motion, however, is rooted in real, physical objects, and has that very prominent aura; this adds another level to the eeriness of the animation.

Again, this connects to an inevitable imperfection – "like backgrounds, the characters of stop-motion are affected by the materials used to create them…all stop-motion figures have inherent surface texture and are subject to the laws of gravity."[64] Whether the characters are made of clay, latex, or wood, they are comprised of recognizable textures and surfaces that the audience connect to real life and tactile touch.

[64] Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 159.


Figures 15 and 16 – the chickens of *Chicken Run*

In re-watching *Chicken Run*, this is one of the aspects I noticed most often. The characters were made of clay, and in each movement, the squash and squish of the clay was traceable. For lack of a better description, it *looks* malleable; the audience knows clay, and knows that clay feels like, and so with each tiny motion of the clay, the audience has an instinctive knowledge of what it *feels* like. The eyes of the characters, however, are made of glass – with the lighting of a film set, even a stop-motion one, they are constantly shining and reflecting light to a noticeable degree. They have thick clay teeth and fingered hands; they are chicken-human hybrid creatures crafted out of clay and wearing woolen clothes. There are scenes where characters get wet or they cry, and the combination of water with the texture of the clay gave me a visceral *ick* feeling – just like imagining the texture of cornstarch or the sound of nails on a chalkboard, certain sensory images will create that sort of bodily reaction in an audience, even if it is simply wet clay.

Disgust, too, is a large part of body horror, and just because this disgust is not directly caused by blood and gore does not mean that the qualities of *Chicken Run* or other Claymation films are free from this association. There is an uncanniness in the combination of textures we do not realistically, regularly see together. It both feels so real and so unrealistic – we can imagine what that combination of wet clay, glass eyes, and fabric

clothes feels like, but we do not associate those textures as realistically existing together. In this way, these characters exist on that precipice of real and unreal that terrifies audiences so viscerally.

Figure 17 – *Chicken Run*'s protagonist Ginger

But textures aside – textures can be disliked, sure, but rarely are they scary – can these stop-motion animated movies be considered body horror? In both their movements and their tactility: yes. Movement, according to Masahiro Mori, strongly influences audience perception of characters and can contribute, even if the character doesn't border on overly realistic, to feelings of the uncanny valley. Movement "decreases the familiarity even further for human-like images that were rated as unlikeable when still"[65] – so for characters that are not known to the audience, the button-eyed parents in *Coraline* or the chickens with four-digit hands in *Chicken Run*, the jerky and fragmented motion makes them increasingly unfamiliar and fall into the dreaded uncanny valley. Motion, when it is not done by something we know and accept to move, is viscerally disconcerting.

[65] de Borst and de Gelder, "Is It the Real," 7.

To completely see this stop-motion movement as a form of body horror, we must understand why we are afraid of zombies. As mentioned before, zombies inherently exist on an uncomfortable border: the border between life and death. In the illustrated model of the uncanny valley (refer back to **Figure 1**), Mori positioned zombies right at the lowest trough of the valley; on the y-axis of familiarity, zombies were put at the absolute lowest point possible. They are the ultimate boundary-pushing entity – when Noël Carroll defined fusion as one of the primary aspects of horrific entities, he listed zombies as one of the primary examples of something that is both living and dead.[66]

The "typical" zombie, as portrayed in Hollywood, has a similar twitchy, fragmented movement to these stop-motion characters. When we watch a zombie movie, the body horror is less about feeling the pain that the characters on screen feel – it is more fearing that our bodies would suffer the same fate. The "uncoordinated, jerky movements of the typical cinema zombie are indicative of severe damage to the cerebellum," and it scares us with a distrust of our own bodies.[67] There is a terror in the lack of control that zombies have, the loss of humanity and the inability to act rationally in their own bodies. So when we see stop-motion characters move in the same way, we have the same visceral reaction; the human body should not move like that, so movements like those must be indicative of something *wrong*.

While stop-motion animated characters may move like zombies, the comparison does not end there. Maureen Furniss argues that stop-motion, in a much different way from

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[66] Carroll, *The Philosophy*, 43.
[67] Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses," 167.

motion-capture, can fall into the uncanny valley thanks to the constant sense of reanimation:

> It seems as though stop-motion animation is apt to provoke that [uncanny] experience to a greater extent…The reason is that stop-motion objects – clay, wooden, latex, or pixilated human – already have a "real life" status, even before they are set in motion.[68]

And for what we know about why the uncanny valley makes us so uncomfortable, it makes sense. The uncanny is that which borders too closely on reality, but is not quite real – stop-motion characters *are* real, and they are tied to real life in some way, but they are not "real" in a "human" way.

Stop-motion echoes stories of reanimation; like Frankenstein creating his monster or Dr. Herbert West bringing back the dead in horror series *Re-Animator* (1985), stop-motion takes motionless, inanimate characters and injects them with life. This unnerves audiences in the same way that the concept of the undead does – as they teeter on the border between life and death, conscious and unconscious, zombies are "the ultimate in abjection, even from a biological perspective."[69] They walk and move, but without making their own decisions; they are "soulless creatures," walking when they should not be able to.[70] Stop-motion characters are similarly alive and yet not alive. And with this soullessness, like with the uncanny characters of *The Polar Express*, comes an unfamiliarity towards the characters, which leads to an eeriness and distrust.

Unlike 2D animation and motion-capture, where the techniques can easily *allow* for body horror and uncanny valley, stop-motion has them ingrained in its medium. This is

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[68] Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 165.
[69] Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses," 166.
[70] Ibid.

likely why it seems to be chosen, more often than not, for animated movies with a creepy or spooky tone or aesthetic – or why so many stop-motion movies are so often noted as being unsettling to children. Tim Burton described stop-motion animation as giving a "crude elegance" to a film, that it allowed for deeper representation of emotions and "could bring something purely imagined to vivid life in a way 2D animation couldn't."[71] Again, this is the irreproducible *aura* of stop-motion. Stop-motion is able to bring things to life in a way 2D animation can't because stop-motion *is* real life. Stop-motion is connected to the real world in a way that no other animation style is because it is not housed in a computer or on tracing papers – it exists as real, tangible objects and sets that one can touch, move, and control. Tim Burton saying that stop-motion brings something to "vivid life" reflects how there is an inherent liveliness to the medium; a scene created in stop-motion will automatically feel more "real" than the same scene, 2D animated because it objectively *is* real.

Stop-motion is, in a way, a real life example of the horror genre where inanimate dolls come to life; just as the animate doll in horror movie *Annabelle* is meant to provoke fear, the puppets used to bring *Coraline* to life do the same. First, it is clearly unsettling that anything inanimate could possibly get up and start walking around. Something inanimate suddenly having animated qualities, like walking, talking, or moving without being touched, is unsettling on its own. But dolls are also creepy because of their proximity to us as humans; they are physical representations of humans, but are not human. They have the facial features of humans, but not the life or spirit. Just like the emptiness and emotionless faces of the *Polar Express* characters cause distrust in the audience, dolls tend to have the

[71] Jenny He, "Crude Elegance: Stop-motion Animation and Tim Burton," MoMA, last modified April 7, 2010.

same effect – our brain sees a face, but it is not a human face with a mind or soul. There is a cognitive dissonance, like the one David Livingstone Smith cites as the core of creepiness, that leads to dolls, dummies, and masks being mainstays of the horror genre[72] – and the *Coraline* dolls and puppets have the same effect.

So even if *Chicken Run* is not as intentionally creepy as *Coraline*, these unsettling aspects of stop-motion put them on the same level of childhood discomfort. Regardless of plot, stop-motion has an inherent uncanniness ingrained in its construction. The frame-by-frame nature of the medium creates a fragmented body rooted a little too deep in reality, a zombified doll meant to represent a human body. The proportions lean more cartoony, but the characters themselves are real – they are unrealistic and realistic at the exact same time. But an appreciation for the time and effort that goes into making a stop-motion animated film is needed – it is painstaking and tedious, to say the least, to craft, sculpt, and shoot every single frame of a ninety-minute movie. It just also happens, whether intentional for the story or not, to make our skin crawl.

[72] Smith, "A Theory."

VI. Conclusion – Why Are We Afraid of Fear?

Re-watching *Chicken Run* made me start joking about whether watching it as a child inevitably made me transition into a vegetarian as an adult – I refused to watch it for years, but remembered that the simple plot revolved around a group of chickens avoiding slaughter. It didn't – as far as I know – but as someone very comfortable with scary movies now, it is a fun joke to make and a fun conversation piece surrounding this strange little movie that a lot of my friends seemed to also be creeped out by.

These long-term emotional effects, though, are what parents fear when exposing their children to scary movies. Horror as a genre is generally steered away from children because of the psychological and emotional impacts it may have – sleeplessness, nightmares, or even the threat that horrific imagery might stunt the child's emotional growth. To many parents, desire to watch and be entertained by horror is associated with lowered empathy.[73] The fear that exposure to horror at a young age will turn a child into a future psychopath or unempathetic is not an uncommon one, even though most research focuses on the consequences of *violent* TV and films instead of just *scary* ones.[74] Anything deemed "scary" is kept from children both because of the fear (yes, the fear of fear) of both the short-term effects, like nightmares or not sleeping, and the long-term effects that have yet to be fully studied – but as the previous case studies have shown, not everything that scares kids is outright "scary" to the adults making the decisions.

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[73] G. Neil Martin, "(Why) Do You Like Scary Movies? A Review of the Empirical Research on Psychological Responses to Horror Films," *Frontiers in Psychology*, October 18, 2019, 17.
[74] Laura J. Pearce and Andy P. Field, "The Impact of 'Scary' TV and Film on Children's Internalizing Emotions: A Meta-Analysis," *Human Communication Research* 42, no. 1 (January 2016): 99.

Studies of children's reactions to horror movies found that 65% of older children (ages 11-12 versus 7-8) actually *liked* scary movies, and that the ones who didn't were simply told to avoid them.[75] This is a common theme in parenting websites, studies, and honestly anything related to exposure of scary media to children – it all depends on the child, so just avoid what your child seems to be scared of, or avoid scary media in general. But as we saw with *The Polar Express* or *Pinocchio* or even *Chicken Run*, avoidance can only go so far. So many of the films that scared me or my peers as children were not seen by adults as "scary" movies. Animation is, too, a medium inevitably tied to body horror – with each subcategory of the medium, there is chance for bodily manipulation or contortion that will lead to feelings of unease and fear. And, since "the most common content causing fear" in eight-year-olds "was the supernatural (imaginary/fictional monsters) with someone being hurt the next most common,"[76] these animated movies where bodies are unrecognizable or in some way "hurt" are just as likely to cause the effects parents fear.

So, in a way, children being scared by movies is practically unavoidable; even if all movies generally classified as horror or scary, as well as all "scary" movies made *for* children like *Coraline* or *Frankenweenie*, were avoided, there will still be movies that cause fear. Fear is not limited to movies that have blood and gore and masked killers – sometimes it can come from a Christmas movie starring Tom Hanks or a Disney animation from the 1940s.

What is the point, then, in putting so much energy into keeping children unafraid? Parent blogs agree that avoidance is not the answer, instead offering advice to discuss with

[75] Martin, "(Why) Do You Like," 13.
[76] Ibid.

children *why* they are feeling afraid – "children need to talk about their fears to decrease them," says clinical social worker Trudy Ruminer.[77] But more important than avoiding fear itself might be avoiding ingraining certain fears in children with what we present to them as scary. Children's movies are "teaching machines" – they teach children their morals and fears as much as parents do, no matter how much parents may try to avoid it.[78] So what filmmakers and animators and producers use to scare kids will, intentionally or not, teach them to fear that in daily life.

None of the body horror specified in *The Polar Express*, *Pinocchio*, or *Coraline* necessarily has the real-world counterparts like that of the Grand Witch from *The Witches* and her *Ectrodactyly* or Ursula's fatness; instead, they act to show that the body presented in children's media, even if animated, has fear-creating consequences. Film's created for children are not exempt from the visceral reactions of horror, especially when connected to the body. So, just as *Pinocchio* can teach children to fear being turned into a donkey, other "scary" characters – like Ursula, for example – can teach children to fear *that* body, even if it is a body that they see in the real world.

Body horror is always colloquially associated with slasher films or torture porn, but it clearly has an common thread through so many children's and animated movies. When an artist animates a body, there is such possibility for mutation or abnormality. The medium of animation thrives off of being *not* real – it is able to tell a story that cannot physically happen in our reality. But this also means that most animated bodies will exist on that fragile boundary between real and not real; it's taking something we as an audience knows

[77] "Ask the Experts: Kids and Scary Movies," MetroFamily, https://www.metrofamilymagazine.com/ask-the-experts-kids-and-scary-movies/.
[78] Giroux and Pollock, *The Mouse*, 91.

to be real, the human body, and putting it in an inherently unreal animated setting. There is no reason to treat the discomfort we feel from seeing the children transform in *Pinocchio* any differently than the visceral reaction we get while watching body mutilation in *Saw*. They speak to the same cognition and reaction in our brains, but there is clearly a genre divide in how we treat each of them.

If we start to see body horror as a concept that can exist in more than just horror movies, we can better understand how it affects our ability as audience members to see bodies in real life. If we are shepherding children away from "classic" body horror in horror movies, they will just see it again in a different format in their "accepted" children's media. There is obviously a difference in gore, violence, etc. when it comes to the body horror exhibited in these two genres, and it's not that children should be shown the *Saw* movies from the moment they start watching screens. It does, however, show that pointing at horror movies as something that rots children's brains, turning them into sociopaths and making them unfit members of society, might be a false equivalence. Clearly, the cognitive responses audiences have in response to body horror happen in horror and nonhorror movies alike. Furthermore, the bodies children are taught to fear through children's media can have just as much of a real-world effect, as seen through the vilification of disabled, fat, or otherwise othered bodies. Horror movies are still maligned by parent groups and a majority of society alike – but in reality, the fear they incite is not *that* different from the fear from childhood films. It's just that one fear is seen as more acceptable, because it is more covert and less apparent in its existence.

So much of our society is built around fear – many laws and societal constructs are structured out of fear, acknowledging that what we fear is valid and that we can face it in

preventative and proactive ways. But when it comes to fear specifically from media, there is avoidance. We accept fear from all other aspects of our lives, but take specific action to avoid fear from the media we consume. What the previous analysis has shown, though, is that fear is an inevitable factor of life. Even animated children's movies themselves understand this; 2015's *Inside Out* characterized Fear as one of the five primary emotions guiding human existence. Yes, it is a simplified version of the human mind for the plot of a Pixar movie, but the *Inside Out* team consulted cognitive scientists to whittle down the complexity of the human brain into the most basic emotions.[79] Fear is an accepted, and important, part of life – it should also be an accepted aspect of media and the films we consume.

This is not a plea for horror to be a more mainstream genre or shown to children – instead, it is simply an observation of duplicity. We as a society shield children so heavily from things that are "scary." Even critics of *Coraline* said it was too scary for children; Roger Ebert described it as "nightmare fodder for children, however brave, under a certain age."[80] As many people as I have spoken to, though, had just as regular nightmares about *Pinocchio* or *Chicken Run*. This, however, is not used as a critique for the movie itself like it is for *Coraline*. Horror as a genre is so maligned by critics, awards shows, parents – but in truth, the emotions that constitute horror in the first place are everywhere. In movies made for children, and in simple animated scenes, there is the fear and emotional reaction that is the simplest definition of horror.

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[79] Bryn Alexander, "Exclusive: Missing 'Inside Out' Emotions Revealed," *USA Today*, November 1, 2015.
[80] Roger Ebert, "A beautiful film about several nasty people," RogerEbert.com, last modified February 4, 2009.

Fear is a long-lasting emotion; I saw this in every immediate response I got when I asked "What movie scared you the most as a kid?" Fear leaves a visceral memory, especially when that memory is formed in childhood. But as the previous analysis has shown, it is nearly impossible to avoid fear in its entirety. Animation as a medium is prone to these visceral effects of body horror, but animation is also so deeply ingrained in, and associated with, children's media. Even the movies parents deem as "safe" can be scary; the movies encoded – by adults – with positive messages and bright colors can be decoded by children as terrifying. There can be an added awareness of preventing animation from veering towards the uncanny valley, leaning more towards "cartoony" and farther from realism, but there is an inevitability in the discomfort toward some animated bodies.

If fear is unavoidable, then, with so many "unscary" movies still leaving lingering fear into adulthood, the focus should then be on monitoring *what* is doing the scaring. Teaching children to fear disabled bodies or fat bodies will have much more tangible consequences than the short-term effects of watching a scary movie. The body has so much potential to cause fear – when we watch a movie, we immediately put our body in the screen, identifying with the bodies on screen and feeling what they feel. That is the power of filmic identification, but also a power we must be aware of. It's a power that can lead to fearing, and thus vilifying, certain bodies. We should not be afraid of fear; fear is inevitable. Fear is powerful, and we should be aware of what we associate with "scary."

And no, I will not be watching *Chicken Run* again any time soon. The fear from my six-year-old self, while conquered in a way, is not gone forever. It still gives me the creeps.

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