

## Everything Stares at Me

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1500-word statement: The statement must relate your project to course material and explain its significance

NOTE: If there is any trouble loading the .m4v file, I have uploaded the video on YouTube (unlisted) [here](#)

I wanted this short film to not only be a statement about my feelings about societal confines and being trapped within a system, but I wanted it to be a piece that could be relatable to university students and anyone else who may be feeling the same way the protagonist feels. Growing older, I feel as though I can more clearly understand that the society we have created confines our individuality and represses our true nature. The film follows a female, university student who works at home, simply trying to get through each day. Intertwining elements of horror (more specifically attributes of cosmic horror - more on this later) to heighten the emotion of what our protagonist is feeling.

The decision to frame *Everything Stares at Me* as a horror film amplifies its thematic resonance and emotional impact. As discussed throughout the course, Horror as a genre has the distinct ability to explore societal anxieties and existential dread in a visceral and captivating manner. Mannerhoods such as this can be seen in great films such as *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) and *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, 2014). *Get Out's* thematic elements touch on the issues of race, identity and social inequality. This was a great film to take inspiration from as its use of horror elements very masterfully explores the insidious nature of some of the societal anxieties such as racism and cultural appropriation.

Infusing elements of cosmic horror into the narrative, I feel as though I was able to tap into the protagonist's internal struggles whilst also externalising them in a way that transcends the mundane, reminiscent of the supernatural dread found in *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell, 2014).

The presence of the otherworldly entity serves as a metaphor for the incomprehensible forces (more on this later) that shape our reality and perpetuate societal confinement, akin to the sinister presence in *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015). In embracing the horror genre, the film confronts audiences with the unsettling truth that the true monsters may not be external or otherworldly beings, but rather the oppressive systems and norms that govern our lives.

The use of horror tropes such as confinement, psychological terror, and existential uncertainty heightens the sense of unease and underscores the urgency of the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery and liberation, mirroring the atmospheric storytelling and meticulous attention to thematic detail found in *The Babadook* and *The Witch*. Through its exploration of fear and the unknown, *Everything Stares at Me* emerges as a potent critique of contemporary society, inviting viewers to confront their fears and question the systems that constrain us all.

The feeling of confinement and restriction from society creates feelings that are otherworldly and unnatural. For this reason, I introduced a truly otherworldly entity to guide the protagonist on how the world she lives in is also not a natural one, but more a synthetically fabricated system. For this reason, I think having this short film as a cosmic-horror-inspired piece with an alien-like entity present, in addition to the constant pressures surrounding her from work, school and life in general greatly assists in magnifying the internal and external pressures we all face today. In a way, from a certain point of view, I would want it to feel as though the protagonist herself is taking these pressures of society and manifesting the entity within herself so that her mind can process some form of a tangible terror. Our minds are an incredible machination that depends on understanding and processing. To process such a "synthetically fabricated system" that is our world today is a large task for our brains.

I have decided to tackle this specific situation in my short film because, as discussed during this course, horror films oftentimes are created during a time of political/societal discourse and unrest or other stances that should be publically stated. Another reason is to bring forth the horrors of our world and the way it works, what it does to people and how it affects us. To me, the issue of being confined within our homes, studies, work and minds is a societal issue that is so deeply rooted in our history that it all seems so normal. As we learned, while reactionary horror often reinforces traditional power dynamics and conservative values, progressive horror seeks to challenge and subvert these norms. By opting for a progressive approach, the film confronts societal injustices head-on, interrogating how capitalism, colonialism, and heteronormativity intersect to imprison individuals within oppressive structures. The short film is also progressive in the thought that the entity ('monster') is not 'defeated' or overcome in any way. Seemingly, our protagonist accepts its communications and ends up accepting its visions as truth before ultimately escaping societal norms and confinement. One last thing I would like to add to this point is we can ask ourselves who or what the monster truly is. Is the entity the 'monster' or is it the world we live in today?

What I should name this short film had evaded me for some time but I am currently happy with *Everything Stares at Me*. I feel as though it helps encapsulate the pervasive sense of scrutiny and oppression that permeates not only the protagonist's reality but all of our realities. Our worlds are collectively governed by expectations and norms to the point in which we feel (and are) constantly surveilled and judged. In the film, I try to get a sense that the protagonist feels this way. I wanted to exaggerate this feeling to the point where every object and entity around her bears witness to her struggles. First starting with her ceiling, then the pills that sit on her nightstand, to the bottles of beer that litter her apartment. There is a sense that all of these objects are silently judging her.

Again, given all of the external pressures of our society, I wanted to highlight how many people suffer from anxieties (that are oftentimes shielded internally). These anxieties are caused by a seemingly omnipresent gaze from our society. A gaze that confines and controls who we are. The anxieties that the protagonist has are manifested in various forms, from the relentless voices in her head to the commercialised imagery that inundates her surroundings (more on this later). To me, this truly reinforces the suffocating feeling of society and its expectations. Ultimately, the title *Everything Stares at Me* serves as a stark reminder of the protagonist's battle for autonomy and self-actualization within a world that seeks to reduce her to a passive object of scrutiny and consumption.

I wanted to choose a female protagonist for this film as women are often much more scrutinised, and oppressed and possess many more expectations than men. This is a slight touch on how on top of an already judgmental society, there is a deeply rooted patriarchal system and how this system possesses inexcusable inequalities. There is an intersectionality to our protagonist's struggles, and to me, the theme and meaning of the film are greatly enhanced through this lens.

In the opening scenes of *Everything Stares at Me* the theme of confinement is blatant and brought to the forefront. Confinement represented both physically and mentally. The voices she hears serve as a manifestation of the internalised expectations and external influences that dictate her thoughts and actions, driving her towards conformity and complacency (for example, the pills/medicine she possesses next to her bed). Her bed and room physically restrict her from leaving whilst she is perceptibly monitored by the ceiling of her bedroom.

To add a few side notes of the film's thematic elements of capitalism, the commercial that plays on her television further emphasises the insidious influence and nature of our

society. Reaching the point where companies offer false promises of fulfilment through consumerism, profiting off of those who are already greatly struggling. The commercial promises happiness and serenity through a solution that they are selling. I wanted this commercial to play in the background as a way to expose the illusion of choice within a system designed to perpetuate inequality and exploitation. The thought of 'selling happiness' because our society is so burdened with the weight of expectations seems, to me, a much scarier idea than an otherworldly entity appearing before me.

In addition to this, the protagonist's interaction with her computer highlights the pervasive nature of capitalism. I wanted to loosely touch on how one's worth is measured by productivity and economic success. The voices she hears intensify as she confronts the stark reality of her entrapment within a system that prioritises profit over human well-being. Amidst the clamour of societal dictates, she finds solace in memories of freedom by remembering past adventures she has had with friends and family. A time when she was living the life she wanted to live, unrestricted by the world. This reminds her of the possibility of liberation beyond the confines of societal norms.

With these memories and the arrival of the entity, there is a catalysation of the protagonist's awakening, challenging her to reimagine her reality outside the confines of heteronormative expectations. Through this encounter, she begins to envision a life unrestrained and embracing the boundless possibilities of self-expression and fulfilment. Through the numerous shots that are seen, intersected by cuts of space and time, we see what can be interpreted as memories of our protagonist. Possible journeys they have taken, including both the good and bad memories of them. Before reawakening in her bed once more similar to the beginning of the film, there are shots of a graveyard, to symbolise how death waits for us all quickly followed by a flower blooming. This flower blooming represents our protagonist's true awakening after experiencing what we can interpret as the entity's way of communication and understanding.

When I first started writing this piece, this climax was exactly what I started with. I pictured an entity thrusting the protagonist on a life-changing experience. Though I am not religious or spiritual in any way, I got this idea through the concept of apotheosis. It is not a very well-known concept or idea, and there is not much to read and research online. In its simplest terms, the journey of apotheosis can be paralleled with a journey to godhood, our true reason for life. The idea is that we, as humans, are all one entity, living each life (without necessarily any chronological order) that exists in our world. Once this entity has lived every life there is to live, it achieves apotheosis, granting it a higher level of understanding and being. To me, the entity that we see in the film is one

of these entities who have already gained this higher plane of existence and wishes to support this entity's journey. This is another reason why I chose to have a cosmic horror-inspired film.

Ultimately, the film ends with the protagonist's emancipation (or so we can only assume), as she rejects the chains of conformity and embraces her true self. In doing so, she transcends the limitations (possibly achieving apotheosis) imposed by society, reclaiming agency over her narrative and forging a path towards liberation.

The final shot as our protagonist leaves the confinement of her bedroom lingers on the room and cuts back and forth between the entity. A final reminder of the pervasive scrutiny we face in our world, emphasizing that our actions are constantly under observation and evaluation.

I took a lot of inspiration from 2001: A Space Odyssey. Going as far as using the sounds from the time/space gate warp scene in addition to using a few frames to signify when the entity takes our protagonist away from and returns them to their reality.

In conclusion, the short film navigates the complexities of identity, agency, and societal oppression using the genre of horror. *Everything Stares at Me* offers an exploration of the transformative power of resistance and self-discovery. Through its progressive approach, it challenges audiences to confront the systemic injustices that pervade our world and imagine alternative futures built on principles of equity, autonomy, and empowerment.

End Note: I wanted to thank you Lianne for hosting such a wonderful course this semester. As I am a Computer Science major, I do not oftentimes get the chance to have 'fun' courses where I get to challenge my creativity and go beyond the realm of 'thinking logically'. I am very happy I chose to enroll in this course.