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Alanna Thain in conversation with *Horror Development Lab* team members and participants

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Volume 5, Number 2, December 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1096044ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1096044ar>

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Publisher(s)

Montréal Monstrum Society

ISSN

2561-5629 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Thain, A. (2022). Beyond Type A: The *Horror Development Lab* at the *Blood in the Snow Film Festival* Remakes the Scene: Alanna Thain in conversation with *Horror Development Lab* team members and participants. *Monstrum*, 5(2), 116–132. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1096044ar>

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**Beyond Type A: The *Horror Development Lab*
at the *Blood in the Snow Film Festival*
Remakes the Scene**

**Alanna Thain in conversation with
Horror Development Lab team members and participants**

Since its founding in 2012 by critic, filmmaker and programmer Kelly Michael Stewart, the Toronto-based [Blood in the Snow Film Festival](http://www.bloodinthesnow.ca) (*BITS*) has championed contemporary Canadian horror and genre cinema and media, aiming to “challenge social boundaries, explore artistic taboos and support and exhibit independent Canadian genre media artists” (www.bloodinthesnow.ca). Taking a holistic and activist view of the cycle of production, distribution and consumption of Canadian horror media, *BITS* has worked to support media that better reflects a horror fandom and creative community much more diverse than is usually assumed. In 2018, they revamped the festival’s industry market as *Deadly Exposure*, with panels, roundtables and networking events, but felt that there was more they could do to build a sustainable pipeline to production for minoritarian makers. In 2021, the first edition of the *Horror Development Lab* (*HDL*), directed by *BITS*’s Carolyn Mauricette and Stewart, was launched in an online edition.

BITS HDL is a “development program focused on facilitating business and production opportunities for genre (horror, sci-fi, action, thriller) scripted projects and short films by traditionally underrepresented BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+ Canadian filmmakers and content creators” (www.bloodinthesnow.ca). The *HDL* offers targeted support for moving selected short-form films or web series pilots into feature films or fleshed out web series. Twelve to fifteen projects are selected by a jury, and the makers take part in a two-stage program. In stage one, selected artists work with feedback from the *BITS HDL* team to perfect their pitch, and then participate both in *HDL*-specific activities, including two days of workshops, and in the wider events of the *Deadly Exposure Industry Market* which runs in parallel to *BITS*. The focus is on pragmatic tools for business development. After the festival, participants work with assigned Industry Leads for hands-on follow-up sessions to take their work to the next level.

HDL is the brainchild of Carolyn Mauricette, *BITS* development coordinator and programmer. I spoke at length with Mauricette, who in addition to her work with *BITS* is a critic who writes for such venues as *Graveyard Shift Sisters*, *Cinema Axis*, *Rue Morgue Magazine* and *Grim Magazine*, and is also director of Canadian Programming for *Fantasia International Film Festival*. I also spoke with two other members of the *HDL* team: Kelly Michael Stewart, *BITS* founder and a strong advocate for diversifying the genre and supporting Canadian talent, and Alison Lang, *BITS* development advisor, writer and author of *Women with Guts: Horror Heroines in Film, TV and Print* (Rue Morgue Library, 2017). Finally, members of the *HDL* jury and maker/participants offered their takes on why *BITS* is needed, what makes a great short film and why horror is so attractive for minoritarian makers. Speaking for the jury are [Victor Stiff](#) (Film Critic, *Rendezvous With Madness* Programmer) and Alex Hall (MA student, Cinema Studies Institute at the University of Toronto, and runs the Instagram account [Lezzie Borden](#), examining depictions of queer women in horror). And finally, filmmakers to watch out for and *HDL* participants [Adrian Bobb](#) (Writer/Visual Artist and Director, including 2022's *The Foremen*), Javier Badillo and Nat Marshik (who together wrote, directed and produced the sci-fi comedy feature *Lupe Q and the Galactic Earworms*) and Shelagh Rowan-Legg get into how their work was supported by this program. These interviews have been condensed and edited for content.

Alanna Thain: We begin with *BITS HDL* team members Mauricette, Stewart and Lang discussing horror histories and how they got involved with *Blood in the Snow*.

Kelly Michael Stewart (Founder and Festival Director): I was always into Gothic horror. I have strong bonds with the classic Universal Horror films of the 1930s, as well as the films of Mario Bava and the Hammer, AIP atmospheric films of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Then that led to the more modern horror that we are all fans of today.... Between 2010 and 2012, I was writing for a few websites and occasionally contributing to *Fangoria* magazine. That opened a few doors including hosting my own movie night called “Fright Nights at the Projection Booth” which was an old grindhouse cinema in Toronto at the time. By late 2012, I had become aware of the growing genre scene in Canada and had the opportunity to play a number of premieres of new horror films. So instead of rolling them out monthly for four or five months, I took five features and premiered them over one weekend, which became the *Blood in the Snow Film Festival*.

Carolyn Mauricette (Development Coordinator and Programmer): I was raised in horror. Sounds crazy, but my mom loved that soap, *Dark Shadows*, and she liked the name Carolyn, so I was named after Carolyn Stoddard. My family is from the West Indies, so horror and folk tales are a part of growing up. They would tell you the Jumbie would come and get you at night, which is like a boogeyman, or the Soucouyant. They would gossip about someone's girlfriend and say, "Oh, she's a Soucouyant," using these folkloric anecdotes in conversation, and you absorb it. Also, my family was tragically Catholic, very religious: as if it was a discipline tool. I remember being on a podcast talking about *The Exorcist*, and I felt like that could have happened to me. I was raised in a "there's something else out there" type of environment I always watched films like *Godzilla* as a kid, *Doctor Who*, anything sci-fi, fantasy, or horror. My favorite things to read as a kid were the Grimms' fairy tales. Anything about fairies, fantasy worlds, and things that didn't relate to the real world. I started writing about film just as a hobby, and then it just expanded from there. I started covering film festivals, one of which was *Blood in the Snow*. How I came to work for *BITS* is that I went to the festival, and I saw a film I didn't like. I felt that they were really not thinking about who the viewer is, and Kelly (founder of *BITS*) took that to heart. He called me and said, 'I'd like to talk to you'. I thought I pissed somebody off or something, but he asked me if I wanted to be a programmer. I just thought that was so amazing because he's the real deal. I joined and it all just kind of worked.

Alison Lang: I grew up reading horror, watching horror, just generally obsessed with horror. Moving to Toronto, there's been a pretty good horror community here.... I love that there were so many women involved in particular and in various roles. I was approached a couple of years ago by Carolyn and Kelly to be on the board. I had been to *BITS* a few times, and really enjoyed the idea of a Canadian film festival that highlights short films and independent creators. And I love how it has a really strong, tight-knit community that surrounds it that's very friendly and welcoming. It's different from any other type of festival I've ever been to, in that sense.

AT: The *Horror Development Lab* was launched in 2021. What prompted its creation? Why this was the right moment for that project? Was it something that you always had in mind working with *BITS*, and how did it come to be?

Stewart: Mauricette, as a programmer, came to me a few years ago about her frustration at the lack of diversity and representation she was seeing in our submissions at the time. I tend to be problem solver rather than accept the status quo, so I suggested we do something about it. That led to discussions of having some sort of lab that could help foster better representation in front and behind the camera which led to the *Horror Development Lab* we have now.

Mauricette: I had been a programmer since 2015 and we started talking about it in 2018. I was seeing the same, predominantly white, filmmakers all the time. As a programmer, you're often watching screeners on your own. When I saw like a person of colour, I'd be like: "Oh my God!" In a horror film specifically, that's not typical. These days, it's getting better, but it wasn't typical. And so, I would champion these films. Of course, they would have to be technically good, well-written and have all the moving parts, but I would always champion a film with people of color. I'm sick of seeing the same old thing and then getting excited when I see a person of color in horror film. So, Kelly said, well, let's do something about it—what do you want to do? We discussed it, and we came up with the *Horror Development Lab*. The problem is, filmmakers who are underrepresented might only have a weekend to make a short film, and they might have the funds to do that, but after the fifth or sixth short film, they need to get that boost to go to a feature length, if that's what their goal is. What the lab does is facilitate that filmmaker to meet with an industry leader, to meet with funders, to meet with people and get business advice and feedback on their pitches and projects, so that they have the tools to move forward to create a feature film.

Lang: Basically, me and another board member, Mariam Bastani, were brought on to feed into the Development Lab. There was a core nucleus of about four of us—Kelly, Carolyn, me and Mariam. And we just discussed the lab and Carolyn's ideas. I just love the idea that there's a small film festival that is not just doing callouts to marginalized creators for submissions, but actually addressing the lack of visibility in genre film festivals head-on by providing opportunities for folks who fall in one of our category groups in the lab, and giving them an opportunity to work and develop their work so they can submit it. And I think that's a really key component that has been missing, especially from genre horror film festivals for a long time: an element of nurturing talent so they can submit and feel empowered to submit.... It's such a great concept. I'm very proud to be involved with an organization that has something like this

in place. I think it's already done well; it has a lot of interest, and it can only grow as the years go on.

AT: How long was the lab in development before you were able to launch in 2021?

Mauricette: About two or three years, we were just hashing out what we wanted. I feel like it's still it's early days, too, so each year we adjust to what's happening.... Last year was online, and this year is in person. Because this is Canada-wide, we have people coming in from other provinces; it's a lot, and we're figuring out how to make it the easiest for the lab participants and make it streamlined for us planning it.

AT: What needs were you already seeing in the horror film community as programmers, for example, but also as critics, makers and fans, that this program is responding to?

Stewart: In our research for creating the lab, underrepresented filmmakers told us they felt they were being kept in mentorship programs, and not being presented with real opportunities. So, Carolyn and I right from the beginning framed the lab as a place for filmmakers to pitch their projects directly to funders, distributors and broadcasters, with the intention they would be going to camera soon on these feature film projects.

Mauricette: Speaking from the artistic side: you have a filmmaker. They've got all these ideas without necessarily thinking about those little cogs. They don't think about where they're going to get the money and support (because a lot of this is financial). I went to the *Women in Film and Television* Toronto International Film Festival reception this year in Toronto, and I saw one of our lab participants from last year. She said she was looking at a website for funding and didn't understand any of it, like it's written in legalese! This is a component in the lab, where we actually have funders coming to guide them and tell them what they need to do. Even me, as a writer, I was looking to see if I could get funding to write a book. I looked at the website and the requirements were so contradictory; I just gave up. And that's what they want, right? They want the hardcore people to push through it, but some of us who are not business-minded aren't going to think about it. And that's why we want to have that component in the lab. [Artists] need to ground themselves so that they are prepared, and not just showing up at a production company saying "I've got

this great story about XYZ, let's make it!" and not know that they have to rent lights, get insurance, and perhaps things like an intimacy coordinator. All of that costs money, all of that you have to budget for.

AT: Why did you want to be involved with the *BITS Horror Development Lab*? What does *BITS* contribute to the Canadian horror media scene?

Victor Stiff (HDL jury): As a film critic, festival programmer, and unabashed cinephile, I watch an ungodly number of movies. I began noticing a lot of young filmmakers running into similar problems. *BITS* allows me to share my insights with up-and-coming writers/directors/producers so that they can avoid some of the common bumps in the road. The Canadian entertainment industry often takes a backseat to our neighbours to the south. *BITS* champions homegrown talent that deserves time to shine.

Alex Hall (HDL jury): I've always found *Blood in the Snow's* approach to Canadian genre films to be a vital platform for horror makers. The festival has consistently carved out a space for voices that don't necessarily get centred in similar environments, and the programming has always pushed boundaries in ways that make it such a generative setting for horror fans and devotees, too. So, having been a fan of the festival for years, when I was approached with the opportunity to become involved, I was all-in.... I deeply admired (and continue to laud) the work being done by the entire team behind the *BITS* Development Lab as well as my fellow jurors. Knowing the stats are still astoundingly high regarding minoritized filmmakers being overlooked and undervalued, it's a project I truly wanted to advocate for and support in any way I could. [The festival is] an innovative outlet for more localized, transgressive and diverse genre work beyond the typical Can-con [Canadian content] one often associates with a national cinema. Going beyond the pale and providing an outlet for work that pushes boundaries, the festival is a necessary platform for facilitating BIPOC presence in genre film, as well as forging a vital space for horror fans, too.

Javier Bardilo and Nat Marshik (HDL participants 2021): *Blood in the Snow* is exactly what is needed in Canada for genre filmmakers to get ahead. I knew it would be incredibly competitive and oversubscribed, like most film development programs in Canada and elsewhere, and would require travel and accommodation investment on my part, but there's no other program quite like it in the whole country. As a POC member of the Canadian film

community, and a resident of Vancouver, BC, it is very difficult to get your projects developed and funded. A cohort of talented creatives and film business executives working on similar projects is not only greatly inspiring, but also key to establishing the connections one needs to get their projects done. And this is exactly what BITS does for underrepresented Canadian filmmakers.

Shelagh Rowan-Legg (HDL participant 2022): As a Canadian filmmaker, *BITS* is a great opportunity to connect with local and regional producers, financiers, and others working in the film industry, the people and companies with whom I would work on my project. It provides a place and atmosphere to make good business connections. To help filmmakers make connections, to foster development of Canadian genre film..., I think it's necessary to have a genre lab that is dedicated specifically to Canadian productions, as often local talent is lost in international labs.

Adrian Bobb (HDL participant 2021): It's no secret that genre filmmaking is overwhelmingly white and cis-male. But that's not in and of itself evidence that that's the only group interested in making genre-films. I feel that especially in recent years *BITS* has broadened its net to search for stories that touch on fears, hopes, dreams, and futures of people often silenced or spoken over and it's done nothing but showcase the potential of genre film as a revelation of true human experience. It's necessary because while I'm crazy enough to remain a genre-filmmaker (in a genre known for being expensive and time-consuming) there are many in marginalized communities that simply assume it's not an option or not a realistic point of entry into the industry. If you can see it, you can imagine it, and *BITS* is one of the few Canadian genre houses that are taking a practical step in broadcasting that vision.

AT: *BITS HDL* has an open and free call for submissions. What is the process like for selecting participants? Who applies to the *Horror Development Lab*? Do you have a set of criteria that's explicit?

Mauricette: We have submissions, and then we have a separate jury. This jury is made up of members from underrepresented groups (BIPOC, LGBTQ, disabled), and they are all filmmakers, film critics, and academics. They'll go through the submissions and look at things like budget, storyline We also have a requirement that, if you're from the LGBTQ community but not from the BIPOC community, for example, you have to show that you have

representation behind the camera and in front of the camera. They also look at whether that story can be developed into a feature. There's a whole separate section that decides on that project, which is anywhere from 12 to 15 selections. We have 13 this year (2022). Last year selections were made by a scoring process. This year, we used Filmfreeway, which is a submission website that has its own integrated scoring system.... Kelly and I stay out of it, so it's not biased, because we know a lot of the filmmakers and we encourage people to apply. [*HDL* participants] have a choice, if they want to submit to the film festival as well.... Usually we have that component because if you don't get into the lab and your film is submitted to the festival, it still has a chance to be shown somewhere, or we'll support you in some way. The programming team deals with that ..., and we all discuss it.

AT: How you do outreach?

Mauricette: We did a different brand of outreach this year (2022). The first year, we just opened it up. We reached out to colleges, film schools, different organizations like film groups online, we reached out to film commissions to see if they would post information about the lab. And then within our own filmmaking community here in Toronto. Basically, the first year was reaching out to whoever; we cast a wide net to figure out where we can do this. This year, Kelly and I did a ton of networking at *Fantasia Film Festival* where I'm a programmer, and *TIFF*. We let a ton of Canadian filmmakers know that the lab exists. We also did a lot of outreach I was reaching out to women-run production companies and thinking outside of the box. So, we did a different approach this year, and I think we'll probably actually hone it even more. Because once people are aware of it, and see what it actually is, I think there'll be a lot of interest There are so many notes I'm making on what we need to do for upcoming labs, so I would like to actually have a bigger outreach. We also went to every province, to whoever was able to take a meeting with us. We did have outreach across Canada, it's just whether people are willing to submit or feel like they have the wherewithal to submit at that time. We will be persistent We just want to make it as representative as possible.

AT: As jury members, what is it like working on *BITS*?

Stiff: I always look forward to my time with the *BITS* team. Most people in my life don't appreciate horror movies, so I love our *Horror Lab* discussions. I'm eager to hear everyone's perspective, even when we disagree.

Hall: The process has allowed me, and my fellow jury members, to oversee applications from filmmakers across Canada identifying as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, women and from other minoritized communities. Mauricette encouraged our analysis and insight into each applicant's project, fostering an engagement with genre film that felt uniquely community oriented. Furthermore, it provided me insight into a potential future of national cinema and genre work that redirects a focus to vital underrepresented voices, and the further possibilities surrounding Queer women in horror. Two years on, this has been one of the most gratifying experiences I have had so far in my work within minoritized horror.

AT: From the participants' side, what was the experience like?

Bardillo and Marshik: Absolutely wonderful. Exactly what I expected. Informative and entertaining. Made new friends and valuable professional connections that will grow with time and last me a lifetime. It opened up a door into a new filmmaking community that thrives in adversity, larger and more interconnected from the one I've been part of on the west coast.

Rowan-Legg: It was a very positive experience. While I have a long history as a programmer and critic, and have made several short films, this was my first experience from this side, as a filmmaker with a feature project. I came into the lab quite nervous but left feeling confident and assured of the support I would receive should my project move forward.

Bob: I've had a great relationship with *BITS* ever since my third short film *EXT* played at the festival in 2019. After multiple chats with ... Mauricette about the Black experience in relation to genre filmmaking (a real blind spot especially in Canada) I was immediately interested when I heard about the construction of a Horror Lab that boosted marginalized voices. As someone who has had a long career in the VFX, animation, and videogame industries as a digital artist and eventually as a writer/director, I've found my progression in the industry consistently ignored as the kind of projects I like to make rarely structure themselves around racial trauma, but instead simply place POC protagonists in sci-fi positions as scientists, soldiers, and future peoples. The lab was a fantastic way to not only support genre filmmaking among marginalized people but to normalize it too.

AT: *BITS* positions the Development Lab to be less about mentoring emerging filmmakers. As Mauricette noted, once you get to that fifth short film, there's a kind of plateau that so many marginalized communities encounter when they're trying to get to that next level. Was that a conscious choice from the beginning to focus on that level, rather than on first-time filmmakers, for example?

Mauricette: Yes, because often the first time filmmaker ... sometimes they're great right out of the gate. But especially when you're making short films, you need to gain a bit more experience of how the industry works, because a lot of people will come in with, for instance, a really high budget. And Kelly always says, "this is Canada, so that's not going to happen," because there's a whole different system here of how films are funded, as opposed to the US Whereas if they learn the business, you can get all kinds of funding, you can get equipment at different rates, you can get consulting; there's a bunch of things that you have to get under your belt first. Of course, there are those success stories that happen right away, but oftentimes, you really do have to kind of take a couple of knocks, sadly.

AT: *BITS HDL* invites submissions that showcase short-form horror as proof-of-concept, with the idea that makers want to develop it either into a feature or a web series. What tells you that what works in a short film could translate into a feature? Would you say that there's the same or different set of considerations for web series?

Stewart: The short films [they submit] don't actually have to be the same project as the one they are pitching. The main point of showing us a short film is to ensure that the person/team submitting is at a professional level, that we feel they are ready to make a feature film. Mainly we are seeing if they have the production values and strong story skills to translate something into a feature film. Many times, we have seen filmmakers make a few weak short films but then make a feature film before they are ready.

Mauricette: If you have just me thinking personally as a programmer and watching tons of films, you have compelling characters that you want to know more about, right? And then there's the story. For instance, we had a short film play last year called [DUPPY](#) by Andrew Hamilton It was about a little boy ... his grandmother was telling him about their Jamaican heritage, and she's telling him about this kind of boogeyman called the Duppy. And so it started with him as a little boy, and then when he grows up and encounters this creature

as an adult, the storytelling was so compelling and I really wanted to see that expanded Now, having said that, I've seen a few viral horror shorts become long form or a mainstream feature film. They didn't quite work. But I think that might be because one of those movie production houses that crank out horrors got a hold of it. Something that's pure going through the machine to make it saleable, that's a whole other story. But compelling storytelling, good writing, and just leaving the audience member to ask what happens next? I think that works for feature film.

Web series have that bit of luxury because they can extend the story...At the festival, we have a web series component [*Bits and Bytes*] and it's so exciting to see what people are making out there. Sometimes we get maybe one or two episodes, and sometimes we'll get a whole season. I love it because you get to see that story progress in little bites.

AT: What makes a great horror short? What do you see as the place of short form horror in today's industry? Are short films always just a calling card, or ends in themselves?

Rowan-Legg: Short films present their own challenges: you have to tell a story more quickly, getting to the “point” of the film, or creating a mood, and thus you have to put aside much of your ego in order to accomplish this goal. It also allows a sharper focus. A great horror short is one that gets you into the mood quickly, gives us a new perspective on a horror trope, and makes us remember it long after viewing.

Bardillo and Marshik: Horror is incredibly versatile and can take many different masks—it can be disguised under science fiction, under documentaries, and even under comedies. A great horror film can hide the genre behind its premise and tone, making it subversively accessible to many.

Stiff: A great horror short tells a complete story. That can happen in two minutes or twenty. Most filmmakers can create a creepy five-minute scene, but few can tell a thoughtful and engaging story in that same window. If the whole point of a short is to create a jumpscare, that's not a story, and you can't build on that. A successful web series or feature spinoff builds on the short's hook/germ of an idea while examining its themes through compelling characters who grow and change over time.

Bob: The success of a good horror film, in my opinion is in its ability to haunt you long after you've seen it. It follows you home and might even reveal a dark truth you've rarely touched upon. It is why short-form horror is so difficult and also so dependent on concept and delivery. You have to get in and get out and scar the viewer with a thought or image that has staying power and it requires a thorough understanding of the techniques of filmmaking as well as story craft in general. The jump from short form to long form is the concept. Sometimes the concept isn't grand enough to expand into a feature, just as a concept might be too grand to fit into a short The more novel or rare a concept is, the more opportunity there is to address it in a long form film or web series.

Hall: I think more than anything, it's so vital for short-form filmmakers (both writers/directors) to hone a particular vision that is not only clear and concise but is visually devoted to the process. For example, being able to articulate, onscreen, a vision and craft that is indicative of a singular (or, in some cases, collaborative) sensibility. The restraint of the format allows for a malleability of storytelling and narrative forms of onscreen expression, in that a certain level of inventiveness and resourcefulness is required in establishing, especially for viewers being introduced to a filmmaker, a vision that will translate across a body of work, including from short format to feature projects.

Mauricette: I love a good short film. I remember there was a time during the lockdown where attention spans were a blip. If I had the gumption to go to my partner's place, we would just sit and watch a bunch of horror shorts; they're just nice bite-sized chunks of horror. It's like reading short stories, where sometimes you just want to read a little capsule of horror. They really do serve a need. Sometimes, we don't want to sit through a whole film. I don't know if there's a director that, unless it is experimental, does specific short form unless they enjoy doing anthologies.

Stewart: I love anthology films and I actually produced and co-wrote my own anthology film [*Late Night Double Feature*](#) in 2016. Short films can be both a calling card and an end in itself, but talking to most of our alumni, the end goal is almost always to make a feature film. Equitable representation is much fairer for short films than features simply because of the smaller costs and resources needed to make a short. Parlaying that short into a feature is where the

institutionalized obstacles arise. This is why the *Horror Development Lab* is so important to help encourage these changes.

AT: Is short form filmmaking more accessible to a more diverse range of makers? Are there limits that come with working in the short form?

Hall: I think short-form projects present a terrific opportunity for filmmakers just starting to hone their craft to utilize the form as a means of exploring and experimenting with specific themes, narrative structures and aesthetics: aspects that may present as more transgressive or experimental and that wouldn't necessarily serve longer or feature-length projects. It can be utilized as such a generative space for outlier filmmaking practices, being such an indispensable medium unto itself. Succinct cinema can weird a sort of otherworldly, spellbinding spectatorial experience that I've always felt deeply drawn to. Of course, this feels especially true for works operating within genre, horror and sci-fi modes.

Stiff: Short form filmmaking is more accessible than ever. If Steven Soderbergh is willing to shoot movies on smartphones, what's stopping you? What's most important is that information about how to make and distribute movies is at your fingertips, too. Studying cinema isn't as sexy as going out and shooting something with your friends, but developing your skillset is just as important. Aspiring filmmakers can go to YouTube film school and master their craft. The new struggle is getting a film in front of the right audience.

Bob: There are certainly creative limits that come with working in the short form but in comparison to features or series, short form filmmaking is absolutely more accessible. A big part is money and equipment, which in long form can be extremely difficult to get, especially in the genre space. Minorities have a higher hill to climb especially due to the fact that our stories are "othered," rare, and generally unlike those that have been given multiple opportunities to refine and normalize themselves in the public consciousness.

AT: What would make working in short form more sustainable for you? Aside from money, what is the biggest challenge for makers going from short to long form?

Rowan-Legg: The limits are really just about the time—often you can't tell the story you want in a short time, so you have to cut a lot that you would

not otherwise. Funding can also be difficult, as it's harder to find financiers for smaller projects. More access to equipment would help—perhaps a government program would help for films under a certain budget.

Bardillo and Marshik: Filmmaking in general has become democratized, affordable, and accessible to all cultural and economic layers of society. You can make a film anytime, anywhere, with or without training. But it's a hobby, and it won't pay your bills. But it will develop your skills and build you a network of professionals who all grow and collaborate together The problem with short-film filmmaking is that there is no existing economy to sustain a viable career. The short film distributors worldwide that purchase films are so few and far between that their selection threshold keeps the vast majority of filmmakers out. And self-distribution models are not sophisticated enough to engage enough paying audiences. Unfortunately, there isn't an easily accessible career guidance program for short form filmmakers. Other than commercial films (i.e. branded content promotion "short stories" for large companies), art-drive indie film fare is unmonetizable.

Mauricette: From our survey from last year, a lot of [*HDL* participants] said they were really glad they were able to speak to [industry] people. Because before they didn't have a chance to get in the door; they would maybe just send an email. It's understandable, if you're working for a production company and you get an email from somebody, sometimes it just gets lost in the ether, right? ... Kelly will tell you at the festival proper, there have been people meeting up and then ending up doing films together years later. It's those actual in-person meetings that are really beneficial for them. They don't get that normally, unless they push themselves, go to festivals, and show up to things. It's really hard to push yourself to get out there and network! So that's one of the number one barriers for these filmmakers—that they don't get the chance to speak to people face to face.

Rowan-Legg: It can be more accessible, simply because it costs less money, and one can make a short film with just a smartphone, if you have the skills. I think horror appeals to a wide range of filmmakers, though it can have appeal to those from marginalized groups, as many of the themes and tropes of horror can be used to represent the stories of those groups.

AT: What would *BITS* need, not just from the wider horror community, but also in Canada where provincial and federal forms of funding for production are so important, to make that happen?

Mauricette: Absolutely more funding and more response from sponsors to see how important it is that underrepresented groups are represented in this genre. Because it's an important genre—there are academic papers on horror, there's a niche of people of color writing and talking and making horror. I just think it's really important to give a space to everything.

AT: Does horror have any special affordances that make it more interesting, or full of potential for more diverse, more equitable representation, with a broader palette when it comes to thinking about what we see on our screens?

Bob: That's a great and difficult question. It's special in that horror is such a real and ancient part of what it means to be a living thing. It's revealing, and it's something all of us can tap into. In relation to minoritarian filmmakers, it's novel. Fear is universal as a concept but it's incredibly diverse and specific to every group of people on this planet. Personally, I believe the horror we've seen on screen since the earliest days of the medium have been tied to the horrors of those privileged enough to have access to the technology and financial backing necessary to share it. Which is why I'm so excited to see where the future takes us. Being human can be terrifying and there are 8 billion of us on the planet. Film, TV, and Videogames are strangely the few mediums that can showcase that horror, but in a way that we willingly embrace it. As a minority filmmaker I find that space so honest and spectacular because it's personal and reflective. And at this point in history, it's untreated territory.

Stiff: Horror has always had a special appeal to minoritarian makers because it's the perfect medium to deliver scathing social commentaries. Horror is at its best when it uses metaphorical monsters to terrorize viewers. Horror movies feed audiences life's bitter truths with a spoonful of sugar so the message goes down easy.

Hall: The fact that so much of horror film is still considered to be part of an outlier genre definitely speaks to the experience of those systematically “outcast”, forgotten and marginalized. Narratives within horror have always

forged deeper paths into the loneliness, isolation and terror felt by the oppressed for so long.

Mauricette: Absolutely. Look at the late Jeff Barnaby I'd never seen *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013). When I finally watched it, though, I realized it's like a horror and fantasy film. The way he posits his film *Blood Quantum*: that's a horror film that comes from a specific background and set of beliefs, which is very important for that representation. And you would think, with so many cultures in Canada, so much folklore, and so many beliefs that it would be so easy to just pick out of this big well of subjects, but the problem is, and this is my personal belief—horror is not respected in the way that it should be. So, you've got your *Exorcist*, you've got your Ari Asters, *Hereditary*: I did a panel at TIFF recently ... and someone asked a question about “elevated” horror. Everybody thinks there's a certain hierarchy in horror, but I think it's really unfair, because then you're leaving out these folkloric horrors and things that represent cultures that are not within mainstream white culture. There's so much room for that. But the problem is people of color will get funding for a documentary, no problem. Because I feel like, not that these stories don't matter, but [mainstream audiences] like to see a documentary about a person of color going through strife, and then you walk away, and you feel like you've done something. But really, it's just kind of perpetuating a level you can't get past. There are stories about people who are happy, or people who want to do a horror movie who are from the Caribbean or Morocco for example, and there's a particular thing that they remember from childhood. Maybe they want to make a horror movie about it, and it doesn't have to be a trauma-based film. So, I think that's the struggle—horror is not respected. And when I show up to things, I say, yeah, I program horror, and they're like, huh? And I still find that really weird. It's just so discriminatory against the genre itself. And then you get that the lack of representation. It's like a double layer.

AT: That's a really good point, about what counts as “worthy” representation: where the funding goes, but also where the interest goes too. And the idea that with so many works produced by marginalized communities there's often such a demand to be representative in a very limited way. You miss that whole sense of all the possibilities of how representation starts to crack open. We sometimes don't see that with genre film because genre films are always supposed to be the same thing, but perhaps they are a site for experimentation because people feel like they can own the material a little bit. Everybody understands what they want, because usually they start as a fan.

Mauricette: I did a Q&A for a Mexican film at *Fantasia* this year, called *Huesera* (Michelle Garza Cervera, 2022) It was about a woman who is haunted by this ghost, and the pressures of societal norms for women. It represented culture, women, a niche, punk, anarchist section, and it was so well done. That film is a niche film, but it was universal. At the Q&A, there was another filmmaker, who was in the audience. She was in tears by the end of it because she said, the film represented her being a mother and going through postpartum depression. The character in the film was driven to become a mother, but she wasn't ready for it To have that reaction from one audience member and to know that it affected somebody in that way, that's what I want to see with the representation of the [*Horror Development*] Lab. Basically, my hope for the lab is that it reaches people who don't see themselves.

Alanna Thain is professor of cultural studies, world cinemas and gender, sexuality and feminist studies at McGill University. She directs the Moving Image Research Lab, which explores the body in moving image media broadly conceived, and is former director of the Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies. She leads the FRQSC funded research team CORÉRISC (Epistemologies of Embodied Risk), focused in its first iteration on queer, feminist and minoritarian horror in media, art and performance. Her book, *Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema*, looks at how unusual or aberrant experiences of time resensitizes us to our own corporeal volatility around the body's primary capacity: change over time or "anotherness." She co-directs the NFRF funded project The Sociability of Sleep, and through that project is writing a book on 21st century feminist sleep horror. She is also finishing a book on post-digital screendance as a score for survival, entitled "Anarchival Outbursts."

- 2022 -

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