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Marginalized Perspectives in Body Horror Comics and Manga

Introduction

While body horror is steadily growing into one of the most popular sub-genres of horror in the contemporary comics and manga community, it has yet to be examined through the lens of feminist and gender studies pedagogy. Utilizing the pictorial vocabulary technique originated by Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, the five essays in this paper examine how body horror represents and manifests as struggles experienced by marginalized groups, namely women and individuals identifying as queer. Body horror is a subgenre of horror that focuses on the physical and visceral aspects of fear, often involving grotesque and disturbing transformations of the human body. Body horror is universally terrifying because it threatens every viewer: all humans are potential victims of bodily mutilation in the body horror universe, creating an equal playing field for destruction. Examining this “sub-genre of a sub-genre,” marginalized perspectives in body horror sharpens this focus by emphasizing how body horror can be a physical representation of oppression. Beyond the surface of shocks and scares, body horror is a lens to examine complex social issues, specifically those

pertaining to queer identity and feminism. Examination of body horror throughout a wide range of visual narratives will be limited to body horror used to meaningfully portray life experiences of people who are continually mistreated by society, not egregious blood and gore for the purpose of shock or done in poor taste. This also excludes film narratives that are under the body horror umbrella, though techniques utilized in the film studies tradition for analysis remain useful in dissecting panels.

The first essay analyzes Junji Ito's manga *Tomie* as a deconstruction of beauty ideals through the revelation of Tomie's true form as a grotesque monster, confronting male gaze and dismantling the idealized image of Japanese women. Additionally, the writer explores photography as a metaphor for perception of one's identity and how others might also perceive it differently. The following essay investigates the manga *Inside Mari* by Shūzō Oshimi, which illustrates body horror as a manifestation of gender dysphoria and the horrific experience of dysphoric puberty. Examining the seinen manga as an explicit representation of a dysphoric queer teenager, further analysis uncovers how menstrual blood is used to illustrate the horror of living in the body of the wrong gender and experiencing a dysphoric puberty. The following essay pivots to the American comics tradition, analyzing the short comic "Detained" from the series *False Positive*. In this comic, the relationships between women and patriarchal society as well as between each other are explored through interactions between a scientist and a goddess. Through varying degrees of hyperrealism and references to magical female archetypes, "Detained" examines what it means to be both a woman and a monster. The penultimate essay explores another webcomic called "Some Other Animal's Meat," where the writer analyzes the body horror in this comic as seen through the lens of a middle-aged woman's relationship with her body and sense of self, and how this is affected by both the advertisement and application of

beauty products. Additionally, the essay dissects the ways societal expectations influence and corrode the sense of self as seen in the visual overlap between the main character and the apparition she hallucinates. Finally, the last essay returns to the Japanese manga tradition through *The Summer Hikaru Died* by Mokumokuren. Visual analysis investigates the use of body horror as a means of examining how the othering of queer identities creates isolation and alienation that can be so strong they feel dehumanizing. The essay examines the combination of the familiar (humanity, its emotions and appearances) and the unknown (supernatural entities that defy definition) to make body horror more than just visually unsettling but also psychologically distressing — particularly as a metaphor for queer experiences.

Notably, all of the selected works center marginalized perspectives; some are about womanhood and beauty standards, while others are about queer and transgender identity. Every visual narrative is about the body and physical form, as well as how that intersects with society at large and often leads to violence, disgust, and repulsion. Several of the selected works overlap with a focus on beauty standards and aging, though “Some Other Animal’s Meat” narrows in on the beauty product angle, particularly how advertising can alter a person’s view of themselves. Instead of blurring the line between beauty and horror as *Tomie* does, this comic blurs the line between the self and other, the hyperreal and the abstract, reality and hallucination. Both *Inside Mari* and *The Summer Hikaru Died* center queer experiences, but the former wrestles with body horror as gender dysphoria, while the latter investigates body horror through the lens of ostracisation and homophobia. Through a thorough investigation of the multifaceted implications of body horror, this paper will uncover how body horror narratives challenge normative conceptions of gender and sexuality, destabilizing the boundaries that confine female and queer identities within rigid societal frameworks. Visual analysis will demonstrate how body horror

interrogates the patriarchal structures which control queer people and the objectification of women's bodies, portraying bodies as sites of monstrous transformation and resistance.

Perceptions of Beauty Standards and Empowerment in relation with Body Horror within *Tomie* by Junji Ito (Kylie Chang)

The central areas of discussion of this passage will concentrate on Junji Ito's manga collection of *Tomie*, specifically *Vol.1 Chapter 2: Photograph (1989)*. Generally, the story revolves around a female character, Tomie, a young woman who has the supernatural ability to regenerate, which gives her an otherworldly allure, blurring the lines between beauty and horror. The narrative often portrays Tomie as an object of desire, with characters becoming infatuated with her despite the grotesque nature of her transformations. This juxtaposition of repulsion and attraction serves as a commentary on the societal fixation on physical appearance and the superficial aspects of beauty. The manga explores themes of beauty, obsession, and the consequences of societal expectations. We will be analyzing the impact under the lens of McCloud's Triangle and how the art illustrations may alternate when witnessing profound transformations on individuals' perspectives of beauty and self-worth through this text.

Fueled by the myth of beauty, an unrealistic societal standard imposes the idea of eternal physical attractiveness, placing immense pressure on women to conform to inherently unattainable ideals. Within this construct, women's desirability is often tethered to their perceived value in the eyes of men. Young and beautiful women ascend, reaping the rewards of their youth, beauty, and perceived utility. In the specific context of Japan's phallogocentric economy of desire, the archetype of the ideal Japanese woman emerges, youthful, slender, light-skinned, with a small face and a high-bridged nose. Tomie, characterized as a mysterious beauty in Junji Ito's manga, encapsulates these traits, captivating every male character in the narrative.

Moreover, Tomie's extraordinary ability to regenerate and her perpetual youth challenge the traditional aging process, a globally recognized element in beauty standards. Japan's enduring appreciation for youthful features intensifies the societal pressure to maintain a youthful appearance. Tomie's immortality further amplifies the cultural emphasis on eternal youth, reflecting societal expectations for women to embody a consistent and idealized image throughout their lives. This dynamic aligns with broader discussions on gender roles and societal expectations, illuminating the pressures imposed on women within Japanese society regarding their physical appearance.

However, Ito shatters this idea of the ideal Japanese woman revealing an unrecognizable Tomie (Figure 4), the photograph shows a grotesque monster-like figure, which signifies Tomie's true form. By destroying Tomie's facade as a beautiful woman, Ito confronts the male gaze by returning it. As a monster, she cannot be further objectified by the male gaze nor be presented as the 'perfect woman' anymore. In doing so, Tomie dismantles the notion of beauty by deglamorizing the phallogocentric fantasies of the ideal Japanese woman. This portrayal of women in manga is a stepping stone to breaking down Japan's patriarchal idea of women.

In my analysis, I've opted to utilize Scott McCloud's Triangle, as outlined in his book *Understanding Comics*. I'm delving into the artistic decisions and level of realism evident in character design within the manga, and exploring how these choices contribute to the perception of beauty and empowerment. According to McCloud, the more abstract the depiction is, the greater the cognitive effort required from the reader to engage with the narrative. McCloud asserts that words represent the most abstract form of communication within this spectrum, relying solely on the reader's imagination to interpret meaning. In contrast, the more highly detailed illustrations demand less interpretive effort from the audience, putting them at the

opposite end. This method sheds light on the ways in which visual representation influences societal norms and individual agency, ultimately contributing to discussions surrounding beauty ideals and notions of empowerment in contemporary manga culture.

Tomie - Vol.1 Chapter 2: Photograph centers on the transformation of Tomie's appearance through the medium of photography. The use of visual representation, particularly in a medium like photography, adds layers of complexity to the exploration of beauty standards. Junji Ito is also known for incorporating symbolism and metaphor into his work. This chapter uses the concept of photography as a metaphor for societal expectations, with the captured images representing the static and often unrealistic standards of beauty. The narrative explores how these visual representations influence Tomie's perception of herself and how others perceive her.

In Figure 1, Tsukiko, a student of the photography club, had been tasked to take photos of Tomie for them. Here, you can see that Tsukiko approaches Tomie to take photos. At the outset, Tomie appears empowered by actively participating in a photo shoot, expressing a genuine desire to be seen as beautiful. This initial willingness to showcase herself suggests a level of agency and control over her own image, aligning with the theme of empowerment. The act of willingly subjecting herself to a photographic session reflects a confidence in her appearance and a proactive stance in defining her own beauty. On the other hand, Tsukiko's hidden agenda of capturing unflattering images adds a layer of deception to the narrative. While Tomie believes she is participating in a photo shoot that aligns with societal norms of beauty, Tsukiko's ulterior motive challenges the authenticity of Tomie's empowerment. This introduces a tension between Tomie's self-perception and the external forces at play.

In Figure 1, Tomie is presented in a way that highlights her best features during a photoshoot with Tsukiko. This portrayal not only emphasizes her preferred side but also mirrors the contemporary societal emphasis on appearance and public image, particularly concerning women and girls. Applying McCloud's Triangle to the top three boxes of Figure 1, Tomie's facial features would be positioned at the bottom and a little to the left of McCloud's Triangle. This placement reflects the incorporation of realistic human facial aspects while maintaining significance within the fictional world. Her hair is fully colored black with simple highlighting. Moreover, the bottom two boxes, rendered more abstract, would be situated towards the middle of McCloud's Triangle but slightly to the right. Stripping down Tomie's detailed image amplifies the notion of empowerment, transcending the limitations of more realistic art. In contrast to the intricate detail found in other elements of the manga, Tomie's face is depicted with simple dots and lines for eyes and mouth, lacking in elaborate features. Additionally, her hair in the film adaptation is no longer shaded in black, and her clothing appears to be of an opposing color to that seen in previous panels. This alteration could be attributed to the color grading of the film or it may symbolize an alternative perspective, possibly reflecting Tsukiko's negative critique of Tomie within the panel. Furthermore, these panels may be more abstract since the author has established Tomie's appearance, and as the reader, you may be more inclined to see yourself in the protagonist's shoes, hence later use in more abstract art style can focus on other aspects of the scene and the feeling of confidence within Tomie.

However, the narrative then takes a dramatic turn during the photo development process. In Figure 2, Tsukiko is depicted developing the photos, while the employee at the photo developing store is presented with less shading compared to Tsukiko. The character wears a collared shirt that lacks full coloration, and his facial features are simplified without shading.

This portrayal suggests that although the character plays a role within the story, particularly in the background, they are not deeply intertwined with the overarching themes being explored.

Furthermore, when Tsukiko finishes processing the photographs and discovers unsettling images of Tomie (Figure 3). This development serves as a metaphor for societal expectations, implying that Tomie may not conform to perceived notions of adequacy and beauty. Noticeably, there's slightly more shadowing in Tomie's facial features and the back of her hair, where another face is subtly depicted. Tsuki also exhibits a touch more shading in the last panel, conveying her horror and visceral reaction towards Tomie. The storyline intricately explores the complexities of societal standards and their profound impact, particularly on women who grapple with the pressure to conform to unattainable ideals. From another perspective, this could be interpreted as a representation of monstrous femininity, challenging traditional ideals and norms. Tomie's beauty transforms into a source of horror, defying conventional standards. This imagery may symbolize societal fears and anxieties surrounding powerful and unconventional women.

In addition, this unexpected transformation challenges Tomie's agency over her own image, revealing the deceptive nature of appearances and underscoring the potential vulnerability individuals face in the pursuit of societal beauty norms. The impact on Tomie's self-esteem is profound. The drastic contrast between her perceived beauty and the distorted images can lead to significant self-doubt, reinforcing the societal link between self-worth and physical appearance. This experience highlights the detrimental effects of unrealistic beauty standards, showcasing how easily external forces can manipulate and distort one's self-perception.

Figure 4, Tomie's final photo deliberately accentuates shadows and hair highlights, skillfully utilizing shadow colorism. This stylistic choice positions near the left but a little below the middle horizontal threshold in McCloud's Triangle. One plausible reason behind Ito adopting

this approach could be the intent to present Tomie in a more villainous light. Ito's choice to enhance shadow effects and hair highlights adds depth to Tomie's visual representation, contributing to a more nuanced and textured depiction that might evoke a sense of eeriness or unease. By incorporating a heightened level of realism into the character's depiction, Ito strategically engages the reader, even if it's anticipated that they may not readily identify or align themselves with Tomie.

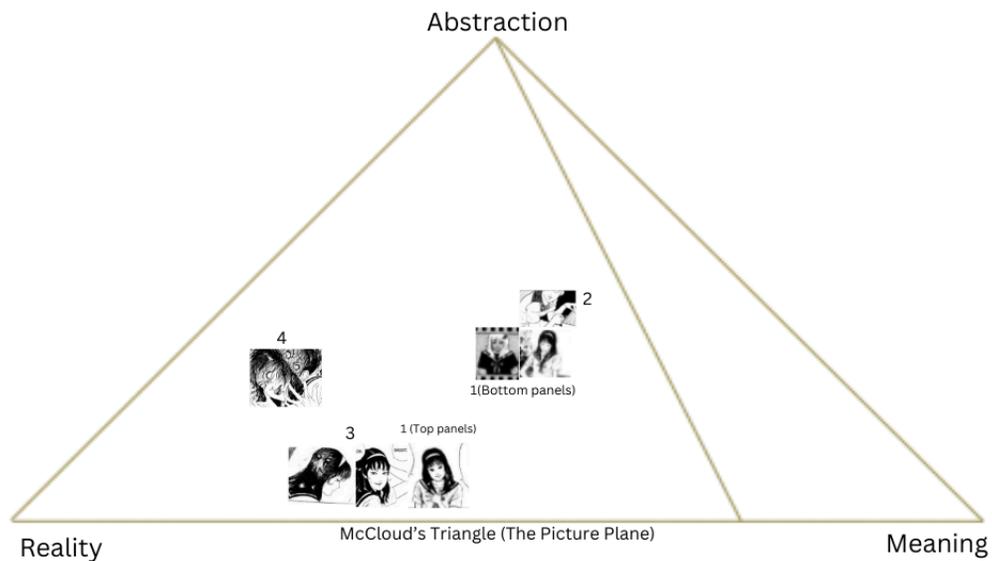


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Dysphoric Body Horror: Manifestations of Gender Dysphoria in *Inside Mari* by Shūzō Oshimi (Lily Habas)

In the manga *Inside Mari*, body horror is used to portray the horrors of female anatomy as seen from the perspective of a character experiencing gender dysphoria. The manga was originally published in 2012 and was written and illustrated by Shūzō Oshimi. The story was serialized in *Manga Action* until it finished in 2016, leaving a large base of readers with a shocking twist ending after keeping them hooked for several years. While the manga in itself is not classified specifically under “body horror,” the countless instances of visceral physical body horror throughout the surreal manga allow it to be studied as part of the genre. Though the story initially appears to continue in the popular tradition of body-swap manga, *Inside Mari* breaks out of the traditional mold by representing visual manifestations of the horrors of gender dysphoria and the puberty-induced body horror that comes with it.

Beginning in Volume I, the manga tells the story of a college dropout lowlife named Isao Komori who wakes up one day in the body of a beautiful high school student named Mari Yoshizaki. It is soon revealed that Isao had been following Mari home after they both went to the same convenience store at the same time every evening. Besides the insidiousness of an adult man stalking and fantasizing about a teenage girl, it is an utter mystery how Isao Komori ended up in the body of his secret juvenile crush. Even more surprising and mind-bending than the supernatural switch-up is the final reveal and plot twist at the end of the manga’s nine volumes. After telling the mysterious story of Isao Komori’s life living in the body of the angelic and coveted Mari Yoshizaki, the author lays out his final card: Isao Komori never actually existed. Well, he technically did. Isao is a real person who lives nearby in Mari’s Tokyo neighborhood. However, Isao Komori’s *soul* never inhabited the body of teenage Mari. There was never a

fantastical “body swap.” The mind and voice inside of Mari’s head always belonged to Mari Yoshizaki, a biologically female teenager. The reader finally discovers that Mari had been privately watching the real Isao Komori every day, fantasizing about his mundane life as a loser college dropout. She yearned for the simplicity of his life as she perceived it, as well as his masculinity and complete lack of femininity. Mari did not want to be herself (female) so she invented an alternate identity (male) disassociated from her reality. The shocking twist reveals the hidden truth to the reader: the main character had been biologically female all along, secretly desiring to become Isao Komori so much that she disassociated from her real self. Such a blindsiding ending reveals that the body-swap story was not a fantastical “what-if” foray for the male author into switching gender identities. Rather, it is an explicit psychological analysis of gender dysphoria and the horrors of feeling like your inner self does not “fit” with how you present externally. Many transgender and queer individuals who have experienced gender dysphoria explain the issue as a feeling of being completely at odds with the inner self and the self that is presented outwardly to other people. In Oshimi’s manga, this concept is dealt with viscerally, forcing people who may not otherwise experience gender dysphoria and the horrors of dysphoric puberty to grapple with it visually and narratively.

When Mari gets her first period in Volume II, Chapter 18, the panels roll out cinematically, slowly building up tension in a style similar to a horror-slasher flick. The frame darts from Mari’s wide eyes to her petite frame crumpled on the ground in a dark street. The following panel reveals drops of blood pooling beneath the skirt of Mari’s school uniform. All around the teenager, her racing thoughts crowd the edges of the panels, notably marked by jagged black lines. “Blood. It’s bleeding. *I am bleeding.*” “Period? Is it a period? Am I having my period?” “For real!? It’s not a wound or a disease, is it?!” The black and white panels seem to

be suffocating Mari as the reality of her grotesque female anatomy sets in for the first time. Sweat clings to Mari's body as it rains down her face, blood continuing to seep out of her onto the street. Suddenly, a pedestrian walks by, politely asking whether she is alright or if she is in trouble. Mari quickly brushes him away, continuing to awkwardly crumple in the middle of the street to avoid the stranger getting a view of the blood coming from inside her body. Mari eventually stumbles away as blood runs down her legs like a river. Clutching her uterus, she groans and limps in pain from the cramping. She fumbles for her handkerchief, apologizing to the "real" Mari before wiping her vagina with the cloth. She gazes at the handkerchief, sweating bullets at the sight of her violent red smear. Mari makes her way into the convenience store, stumbling around as she tries to purchase a menstrual pad. When confronted with the options before her, she is bewildered and unknowledgeable about which product to choose. Shortly afterward, a drop of blood falls again, which startles and embarrasses Mari once more. Mari quickly shuffles to the register, where the male clerk blushes bashfully at the beautiful high school girl. She nervously asks if she can use the restroom, and hurries inside to put on the menstrual pad. In the bathroom, the stark framing depicts a lonely Mari shaking in pain while text bubbles of her groans fill the air around her. This will not only be a monthly occurrence for Mari's foreseeable future, but *Mari doesn't even feel like a girl*. Whether the scene is analyzed from the earlier perspective of Isao Komori in Mari's body, or later when Mari is experiencing dysphoria in her own body, both perspectives are horrified by experiencing the puberty of the wrong sex.

In Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics*, the author utilizes a visual triangle to display where visual assets fall on the scale of the picture plane – a wide scale representing "reality," "languages," and "the picture plane." McCloud argues that this triangular diagram,

“...represents the total pictorial vocabulary of comics or of any of the visual arts” (McCloud 51). Therefore, utilizing various visual assets from Volume II, Chapter 18 of *Inside Mari* as pictorial vocabulary (below) is useful to support the idea that the manga explicitly represents gender dysphoria through manifestations of body horror, particularly as menstruation.

The first important pictorial vocabulary in *ch.* 18 comes from the tense panel (*fig. 1*) depicting Mari’s attempt to crumple up in the street and hide her menstrual blood as it drips onto the pavement. The drops of blood are illustrated with austere black within the neutral color palette, emphasizing the visual and mental power the menstrual blood holds over Mari. Beyond the sheer fear she feels from the unfamiliar blood flowing out of the opening inside her body, Mari is experiencing intense physical pain and confusion. Waves of period cramps are rolling through her like the sea, all while she is enveloped with the shame of freely bleeding in public. Though it is framed as an undoubtedly dysphoric experience, the feelings Mari portrays in the panel are universal for anyone who menstruates and has a vagina. Period blood is seen as taboo and horrific in the eyes of patriarchal society, menstruation is body horror in itself. When framed in the context of a dysphoric individual experiencing menstruation as the *wrong puberty*, the horror is doubly intensified and socially relevant. The body horror of menstruation illustrated in *Inside Mari* is not a divergence from the genre of body horror, but rather an evolution to create space for queer experiences within the existing tradition.

The panel focusing on the appearance of Mari’s menstrual blood is followed by a frame displaying her face and fearful expression (*fig. 2*). Mari’s wide eyes and gaze of utter shock and terror, coupled with trickling beads of sweat and groans of pain, encapsulate some of the terror of dysphoria and puberty she didn’t sign up for. From the perspective of Isao Komori inside Mari’s body, the young man is living through his first traumatic and painful menstrual cycle he didn’t

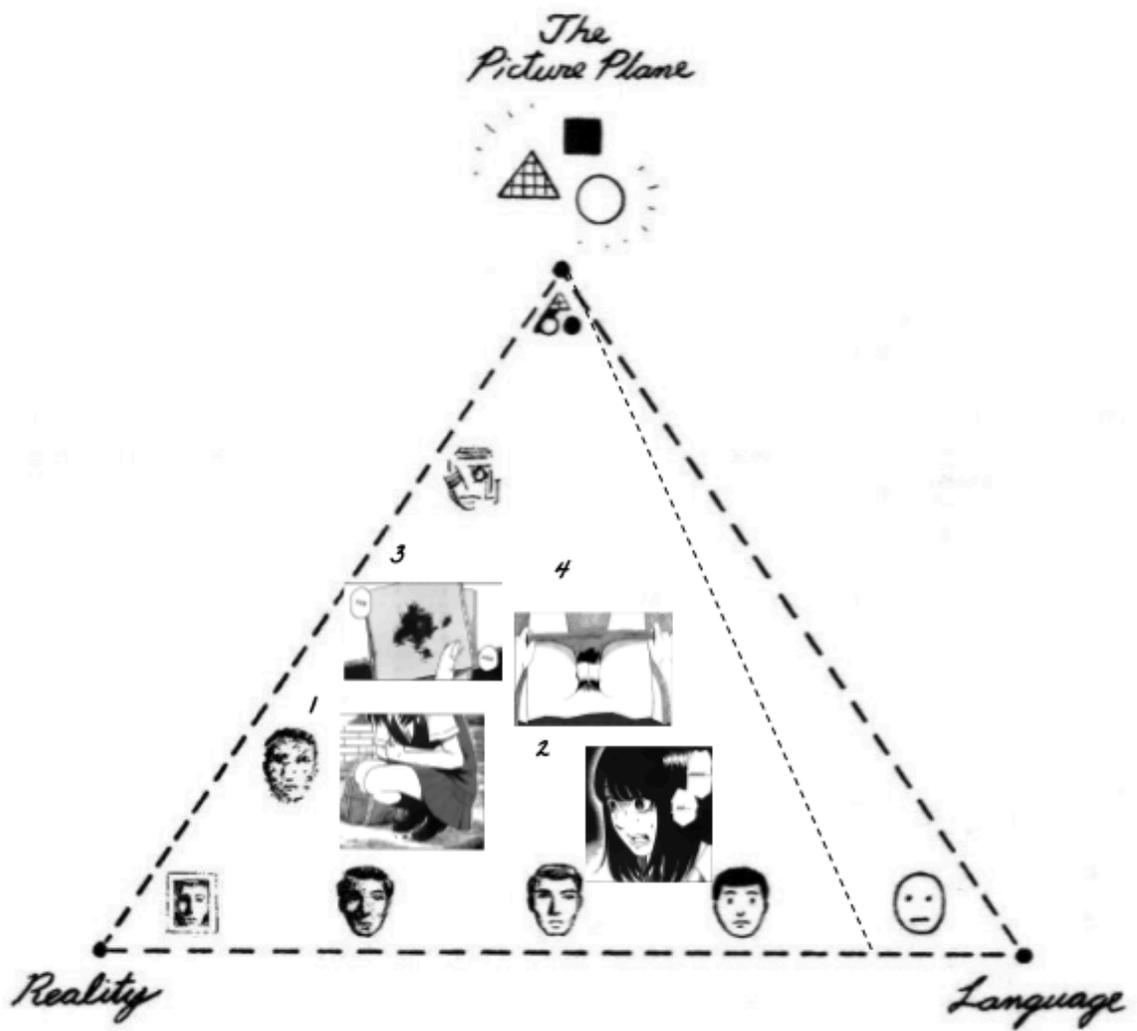
choose to have. For Mari experiencing gender dysphoria in her own body, going through a menstrual cycle when she doesn't even *feel* like a woman is nothing short of torturous. The blood and pain of having a vagina is a physical reminder and manifestation that the sex she presents to the rest of the world is that of a woman and one who receives constant attention and objectification at that.

The following panel of note (*fig. 3*) depicts Mari's handkerchief after she attempts to wipe up the blood from her vagina. The frame shows little else besides the solemn handkerchief in hand covered in dark menstrual blood, with Mari's pained groans of "Haa..." "Haa..." floating around her delicate fingers. Once again, even the physical manifestations outside of Mari's body and organs are constantly reminding her of the sex and gender that has been assigned to her without her choice or consent. Her handkerchief, meant to clean and protect her, is just another slap in the face with her own menstrual blood. It will follow her everywhere, no matter how much she tries to clean it off and get rid of it. In this manifestation, menstrual blood becomes a symbol of Mari's dysphoria, clinging to her at every turn, and sometimes even causing her public humiliation when it drips everywhere and creates a mess.

Finally, the panel that instills the most explicit discomfort and fear is perhaps Oshimi's most straightforward. The wide-frame panel (*fig. 4*) depicts Mari seated on the public restroom toilet, gazing at her blood-soaked underwear and her genitalia below. The image is uncomfortable beyond just this, even showing stains of blood on the sides of Mari's thighs, and a thick string of menstrual blood stuck in the center of the page. The illustration is striking and unpleasant, far from the idyllic powder-scented tampon commercials that have visually demanded the wider media for decades. In her essay *Monster Pains: Masochism, Menstruation, and Identification in the Horror Film*, film scholar Aviva Briefel describes how menstruation is

the classic “feminine” companion to the masculine tradition of body horror, despite how little it has been explored. “The female counterpart to the act of self-mutilation is menstruation, a narrative event that positions the audience in an uncomfortably close relationship to the female monster” (Aviva 16). This analysis within the film studies tradition supports the idea that Mari’s menstruation is not only a physical manifestation of body horror, but that the feminist lens of analyzing puberty as body horror and the lens of queer analysis go hand-in-hand.

Inside Mari is a revolutionary visual narrative in the body horror genre. Shūzō Oshimi’s seinen manga is outwardly unassuming, beginning with a tried and true body-swap trope that causes awkward scenarios for the opposite-gender character in the “wrong” body. The mind-bending end twist reveals a female protagonist who has been suffering from intense gender dysphoria all along, throwing the reader’s perception of the story entirely into question. Visualizing and naming instances of horrifying dysphoric puberty, like the pain of menstruation, cements *Inside Mari* as a vital text in the body horror manga genre. Beyond this, it creates space for telling explicitly queer stories in the body horror genre, rather than just implicit ones. Oshimi’s manga does not create an entirely new genre of its own, but rather pushes and breaks the constraints of body horror that have long been enforced by archaic social norms. The story challenges readers to see beyond binary gender and even question their own notions of biological sex. Oshimi asks the horror community as a whole to consider how body horror can evolve beyond shock value and screams into a meaningful metaphor for real pain. By illustrating and acknowledging the horrific experience of gender dysphoria and the ways contemporary society aggravates this pain, Shūzō Oshimi’s manga expands the genre of body horror in comics and manga to include and highlight experiences of explicit dysphoria and queerness.



Pictorial pyramid for visual analysis of Inside Mari

Creatures and Goddesses: Magical and Monstrous Women in Michael Walton's "Detained"

(Julia Hansen)

In the short comic "Detained" from Michael Walton's digital story collection *False Positive*, a woman transforming into a monstrous creature symbolizes the plight of women who do not conform to society's expectations for how women ought to look and behave. Specifically, the main character's identification as a goddess subverts the trope of goddesses being beautiful and pure beings. Additionally, the female scientist who gives up her life and family to gain the goddess's power represents women who are forced to choose between motherhood and self-determination. *False Positive* is an anthology of short horror webcomics, especially well known for their hyper-realistic art style and visceral imagery and subject matter. "Detained" is the fourth story in the series, and was published on July 30, 2012. "Detained," much like *False Positive* as a whole, is interesting because of its artistic style, as the character design and artistic choices make it memorable and interesting to analyze through the lens of Scott McCloud's vocabulary of comics. However, "Detained" is particularly worthy of further exploration because of its focus on female characters and their interactions with one another, which is not as commonly found within the horror genre. "Detained" also combines a multitude of women-centric themes and ideas, such as mythical creatures, beauty standards and femininity, motherhood, and womens' relationships to each other. This is especially impressive as the comic is only seventeen pages long, making addressing all of these issues in a nuanced, subtle way an impressive feat.

For my analysis, I have chosen to use Scott McCloud's abstraction diagram of pictorial vocabulary from his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Specifically, I am analyzing

the artistic choices and degree of realism across the representational edge in the design of the characters, and how this relates to the comic's commentary. According to McCloud, the vocabulary of comics is interrelated with the level of abstraction of the comic, meaning how closely it resembles reality. The more abstract and less realistic an aspect is, the more perception is required from the reader to understand the work. McCloud says that words are on the most abstract end of the representational edge, as they rely purely on the reader's imagination to convey a message; the more detailed the description, the more abstract it is. Conversely, the more detailed a drawing is, the more received it is, putting it on the opposite end of the representational edge (McCloud 56). This idea manifests itself in a triangular diagram with three vertices; reality, meaning, and the picture plane. I will apply this method of analysis to "Detained" by documenting the degrees of abstraction and realism of the characters throughout the story's progression, and how this relates to what is happening in the story and the message being conveyed. I am interested in using this method because *False Positive* is well known for its specific, hyper-realistic art style, and this approach is the most direct way to discuss this artistic choice. This approach is also ideal for discussing works that are a part of the body horror genre because of the reliance on visceral imagery and visual representations of the limits of the human body. McCloud's diagram also helps to understand the intersection between Walton's artistic choices for the story's characters and the story's commentary on the experiences of women in society through the grotesqueness and detail of the goddess's monstrous form.

In the first few pages of "Detained," the two women are depicted against a simple, abstract background made up of basic shapes and colors. The women themselves are both drawn as leaning more towards the "reality" side of the representational edge, more closely mimicking what humans look like in real life. However, the scientist is more abstract looking than the

goddess, as her face does not include as many fine details. Her clothes are less shaded, and the outline of the circular shapes of her cheekbones are more prominent to the reader's eye. The goddess, on the other hand, is placed further on the reality side, with her face and clothing including more complex shading and highlighting techniques, and features like her hair and eyelashes being more pronounced and detailed (Figure 1). This difference in the abstraction of both women indicates to the reader that the goddess is the main character of the story, and is who we should be paying attention to. The abstract, minimalist background serves to highlight how bare and sterile the environment is, and the cell's wall being made of glass means that it lacks strong details and contrasts. The goddess asks if the scientist thinks that she is a witch, and the two women are very clearly juxtaposed against one another. This visual comparison makes the difference in abstraction and realism between the two women jarring (Figure 2). Witches are a mainstay of literature and culture, playing roles in works such as *Macbeth*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, and *The Crucible*. In all of these works, witches are characterized as wicked, hideous, reclusive women who wreak moral havoc on civilized society. The scientist replies that she believes the woman is an ancient goddess, and the two women's faces are mirrored against each other once again, with the goddess appearing angular and hyperrealistic, and the scientist appearing softer and less finely detailed (Figure 3). Goddesses, unlike witches, are frequently portrayed as the most beautiful women possible, defining beauty standards in the form of deities such as Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena. The fact that the story makes clear that the goddess is not a witch implies that the goddess is not to be perceived as following in traditional patriarchal expectations of how a woman should look and behave, since the audience expects witches to be outwardly ugly. Instead, her identification as a goddess subverts the idea that goddesses are inherently beautiful and attractive looking, indicating that she is not a woman who

fits into societal norms. The aesthetic differences between the two women emphasize this point further, as whenever the concepts of witches and goddesses are mentioned, the two women are visually compared and the differences in their levels of detail are highlighted. This creates a binary between the normal, human scientist who follows societal expectations, and the othered, frightening goddess who does not align with societal expectations of her.

The goddess's departure from feminine ideals is further emphasized by her transformation into her true form. After being angered by the scientist's demand for her to give up her powers, the goddess flies into a rage, transforming into a giant, hideous monster covered in eyes and teeth (Figure 4). The monstrous goddess fills up the entire square, and she is drawn in a grotesque, hyper realistic manner that would be placed all the way on the most realistic end of McCloud's diagram, most closely resembling what the monster would look like if it existed in person. This is intended to shock and surprise the reader, both because of the graphic image and because the goddess did not undergo the transformation that was expected. The goddess's transformation into a hideous beast further emphasizes the point that the goddess does not fit into the traditional archetype of what a goddess is "supposed" to look like, as the transformation according to tradition should involve the goddess becoming extremely beautiful. Although the goddess does not match expectations for how she should look, she still holds extreme power, which the scientist covets. In fact, the scientist is so obsessed with gaining the goddess's infinite knowledge that she agrees to sacrifice all of her family, including her young daughter, to join the goddess. This is a reference to how women who are parents are often forced to conform to expectations about how a mother should be, being forced to leave behind their independence and autonomy and lose their identities in the pursuit of being deemed a "good mother" by society. By taking the extreme measure of sacrificing her child, the scientist rejects this expectation and

chooses to become a monstrous goddess, which is a representation of becoming something that society is afraid of and confused by; a woman who does not conform to patriarchal rules. Once she makes this choice, both the scientist and the goddess are removed from their physical forms, with their true forms being orange and blue, respectively (Figure 5). This is one of the only times that color is used in this story, as the majority is in shades of beige. This is an application of McCloud's diagram in a different way, as the colors add realism in a way that diverts from the traditional uses of shadowing and detail. By adding color during this moment, Walton communicates that this is the penultimate scene of the story; the scientist has left traditional femininity and motherhood behind in favor of self determination and deviation from society.



Figure 1



Figure 2



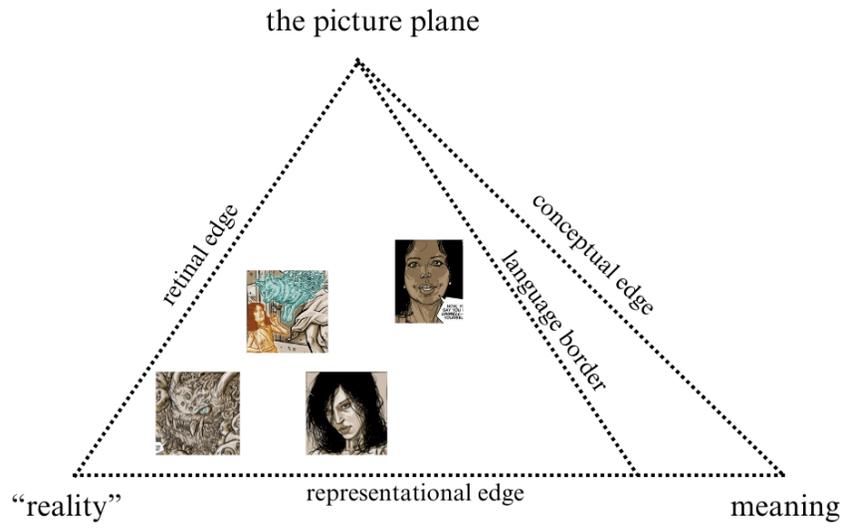
Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Your Skin, but Better: Beauty Products, Body Horror, and the Abject in “Some Other Animal’s Meat” (Kelly Malone)

Emily Carroll’s 2016 webcomic “Some Other Animal’s Meat” is a short horror story about Stacey, a woman who sells beauty products, her relationship to her body, and her increasing departures from reality in brief ambiguous hallucinations. Largely, the plot of this story is meandering, and each “page” varies; One section will detail a conversation between Stacey and an acquaintance, then another will be a depiction of Stacey examining herself in the bathroom mirror, and still another will depict one of Stacey’s “parties” where she demonstrates the various beauty products she sells and its horrific spiral into the uncanny and grotesque. Throughout, Stacey’s hallucinations take the form of an amorphous apparition that is implied to be a strange amalgamation of her beauty products, skin, and even the form of those around her or herself. These departures from reality (like many aspects of this story, and indeed, Carroll’s writing in general) are ambiguous; the reader is never truly sure what is actually happening, if these are real, imagined, or some combination of the two.

This webcomic is of interest due to this ambiguity and the unanswered questions that arise from this. Another element of interest is that while this comic and its themes of loneliness, mental illness, and physical appearances are broadly applicable, I was more interested in analyzing how Stacey’s experience as a middle-aged woman plays into these themes, and into the broader category of body horror. Her obsession with her physical appearance and hallucinatory episodes do not exist in a vacuum — they are the result of societal pressures, other women around her, and even herself in an awful cycle of self-perpetuating disgust. Indeed, the whole concept of a “skin-care routine” and the application of beauty products is an intensely gendered one when considering who these products are marketed to, who uses them, and why. In

a group that is centered around the concept of body horror in relation to marginalized perspectives, this story came to mind due to the aforementioned gendered elements, but also because of the ambiguous nature of the body horror elements themselves; in this strange apparition that appears to her, transforms those around her, and gradually corrodes Stacey's sense of self over the course of the story.

In approaching how to analyze "Some Other Animal's Meat," I will be focusing on three bathroom scenes that are dispersed throughout the story, the instances where this apparition and the resulting body horror occurs, and the moments where these two aspects of the story intersect. Because body horror is an intensely visual concept, I will be using Scott McCloud's visual language of comics pyramid to analyze not only the apparition, but how Stacey and her surroundings are visually depicted. McCloud writes of the power that cartoons have in amplifying "reader-identification," and alternatively how realism does the opposite, as "other characters [are] drawn more realistically to objectify them, emphasizing their "otherness" from the reader" (44). Thus, there is interest in how the sliding scale of abstraction is used in body horror and what effect both a departure from and hyper-examination of reality has on both the narrative and viewer.

In using McCloud's visual language pyramid to map various art styles throughout "Some Other Animal's Meat," a wide range of placements along all axes is seen within the triangle. During the first encounter with this strange apparition in page three, Stacey is awoken in the middle of the night by a noise, and goes downstairs to check on it (as seen in "F" and "G" in the diagram). She is confronted by a strange vision in the kitchen — from her spilled beauty products, a strange creature has formed. At first, it appears ghost-like, perhaps even like a bird perching on the kitchen counter ("O"). It then turns to look at her and in doing so, seems to

mirror Stacey's general body shape and form ("N"). Stacey's eyes widen in horror ("E") as this apparition continues to evolve, becoming an even more amorphous suggestion of lotion, skin, and other bodily associations ("L"), and finally stretching to a strange angel-like shape in the corner of the ceiling ("M"). Within the triangle, Stacey's visual appearance lies pretty firmly near the representational edge, and only varies slightly from looking more realistic, to more simplified depending on the significance of Stacey's character within the panels in question (e.g., her silhouette ("I") is very simple, as the focus in that panel is on the apparition). This makes sense, as Stacey is ostensibly the character that we, the audience, are supposed to project the most onto.

In contrast, the visual appearance of the apparition exists more towards "the picture plane;" That is, it is vastly more abstract than any other visual element in the story as a whole. Even verbal descriptions are hazy and shift — is this an apparition, a creature, a hallucination? Is it an amalgamation of lotion, an angel, a shadow of Stacey? It is almost impossible to nail a description, both verbally and visually, and this is reflected in its placement within the visual triangle. Some depictions are easier to place — "N" can be read as a person looking towards Stacey, as we see the general curve of a breast and the suggestion of a head, even though the "skin" of the apparition is strange and liquid. Alternatively, "L" is harder to categorize — one could call it a tentacle, or a more clearly "lotion"-looking part of the apparition, but it has lost any discernible human qualities as it shifts to its final, strange alien form. This placement closer to the picture plane is seen in the second and third encounters with the apparition in pages six and eight respectively. The second encounter is the most "gory" depiction, as during the aforementioned party Stacey demonstrates these beauty products, and the women who are there slowly morph and change into the shape of the apparition as they apply these products. Flesh melts and becomes malleable; occasionally distinguishing features such as eyes or blood can be

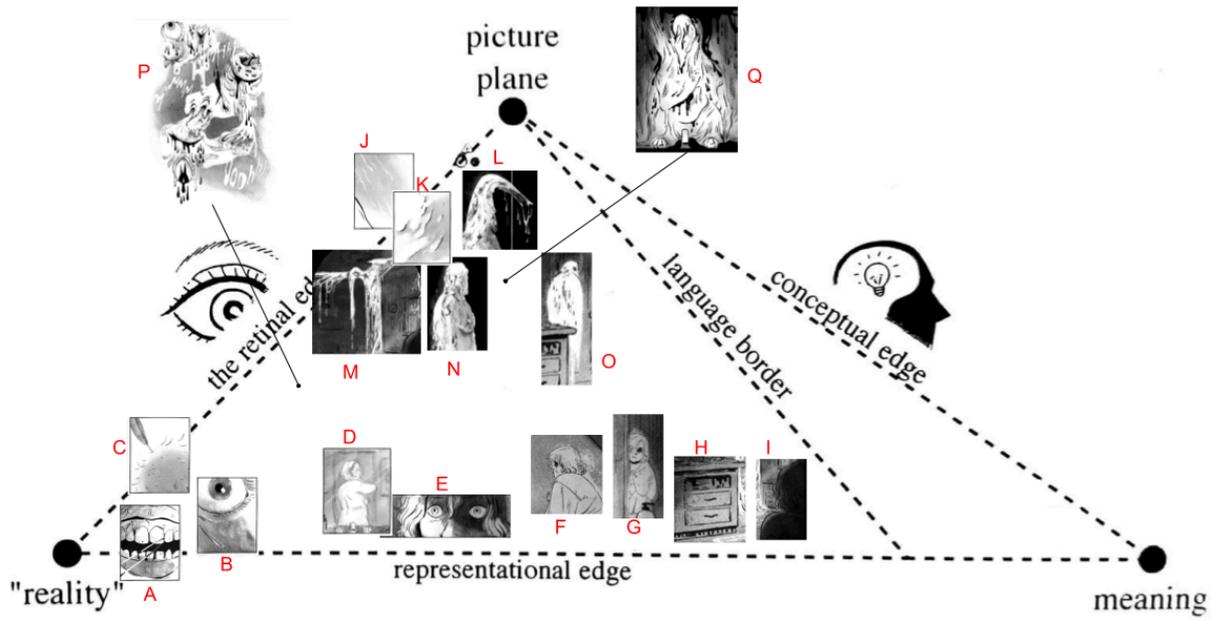
placed, but largely the resulting visual is a confusing blend of the suggestion of skin, body, and lotion (as seen in “P”).

An interesting section of the visual pyramid of “Some Other Animal’s Meat” is the section of the comic where the style appears the most realistic in images “A,” “B,” and “C” as well as “J” and “K,” contradictorily enough. Throughout the story, there are three scenes where Stacey examines herself in the bathroom in pages two, five, and eight. The first bathroom scene is relatively normal; Stacey removes her bathrobe and wordlessly examines her naked body, before leaving the frame (“D”). Thus, her visual appearance is “normal” and lies more on the representational edge, slightly more towards “reality.” However, in the next bathroom scene, all of the panels show an extreme close up of various parts of her body, such as her teeth as she flosses or her nipple as she plucks hair with tweezers. This sudden shift to hyperrealism is sudden and jarring; the effect it has on the viewer is one of confusion or even disgust as these mundane body parts become grotesque and strange in their depiction. Even more intriguing is the placement of the image of her cellulite and stretch marks (“K” and “J” respectively) within the triangle. Because these are simultaneously depicted realistically, and are closely cropped, the content becomes hard to place. At first glance, they appear simply as squiggly lines, and it is only within the larger context of the page that they can be deciphered. Both of these “disturbing elements” (the depictions of the apparition and Stacey’s cropped body parts) are examples of extremes; they are the furthest away from “meaning” on the diagram, which makes them the furthest away from easily projectable cartoons. They become alien, other — separate from the reader, just as they are separate from Stacey. Finally, the last bathroom scene depicts a slow, gradual emergence of the apparition from the bathroom walls, in the place where Stacey has stood in previous scenes. In this scene, which is both the final bathroom scene and final

encounter with the apparition, the visual appearance of the creature is similar to previous encounters, lying firmly near the picture plane on the triangle diagram (“Q”). However, the form the apparition takes is more similar to how it first appeared to Stacey; in the vague mirror of her body shape. It is interesting that in the final scene of “self-examination,” the “self” that appears is not Stacey as the audience has been used to seeing her as, but rather, this strange amalgamation that is both separate from, and intertwined with Stacey.

In using McCloud’s visual language pyramid and the resulting analysis of both the bathroom scenes and encounters with the apparition that appears to Stacey, we discover that not only do the lines between the self and other become blurred, but also the self and societal expectations of beauty and aging as experienced through the lens of a middle-aged woman. The apparition can be understood to be a visual manifestation of many things: Stacey’s obsession with appearance in the form of her skin and beauty products, outside influences on her view of the self in the form of advertisements, the women she surrounds herself with, and the broader weight of societal expectations of how women look as they age. The creature falls under the realm of the uncanny and the abject — the shape is human-like, and yet not, a reflection of Stacey, and yet not. It defies definition, description, and category. Oxford Reference defines the abject as “That which disturbs the self, by provoking either disgust, fear, loathing or repulsion” and that “As such, it is simultaneously outside or beyond the subject and inside and of the subject. Our own bodily fluids are for the most part loathsome to us, but the intensity of that loathing owes precisely to the fact that they come from us.” The abject is a central part of the subgenre of body horror, as many examples of body horror depict what falls under the umbrella of the abject; guts, blood, excrement, and the corpse especially. However, in “Some Other Animal’s Meat,” the apparition is, in some ways, not a “typical” example of body horror — it

feels alien, unreal, even supernatural, and yet it is still inextricably linked to the human form and other bodily associations. It does, however, fall under the realm of the abject. In her seminal essay "Powers of Horror" Julia Kristeva coins the theory of the abject, and writes that it is "On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (2). This contradictory notion is seen in how the apparition operates throughout the story, as Stacey (and the viewer) lose touch with what is real and what is not, what is the self and what is other. Not only does the apparition deal in the realm of the abject, but also in the aforementioned hyperreal depictions of Stacey's body. In her obsessive self-examination, these normal aspects of a woman's body become grotesque. What does it mean that depictions of cellulite and stretch marks are in the same visual category as this horrific alien apparition? That they invoke similar feelings in the reader of disgust, unease, and even fear? Women are taught from a young age to fear the process of aging, to be repulsed by this natural phenomena, and to disseminate this self-hatred amongst themselves. Stacey is the one who *sells* these beauty products, who markets them to the women around her as they lather themselves in that which they are told will make them more beautiful, more young-looking, and more of a person. And yet, this societal promise does not come true; instead, Stacey becomes riddled with hallucinations of the monster that simultaneously appears to her, takes the form of others around her, and in the end, ultimately merges with her sense of self, annihilating Stacey in the process.



Body Horror as a Vessel for the Queer Experience in *The Summer Hikaru Died* by Mokumokuren (Sophia Pardo)

The work that I will be analyzing is *The Summer Hikaru Died* by Mokumokuren, a short, queer horror manga first published in 2021. This story revolves around two teenage boys, Yoshiki and Hikaru, who share an incredibly close friendship. One day, Hikaru goes missing while hiking in the mountains, only to return seemingly unharmed several days later and resume life as usual. However, Yoshiki quickly realizes that whatever has returned to their small town is not really his best friend –and as it turns out, Hikaru has been consumed by an unknown, eldritch creature that has taken over his body, memories, and personality, essentially becoming him in the process. The story revolves around the strange relationship that develops between these two as Yoshiki struggles with the grief of losing his dearest friend –along with his now permanently unresolved romantic feelings for him– and “Hikaru” becomes more and more obsessed with Yoshiki. This work takes a highly distinctive spin on both horror (specifically body horror) and romance, combining them to create a story that pushes the boundaries of either genre. Mokumokuren leaves behind the blood and guts that is typical of body horror and instead relies on horror that is deeply psychological and physical, while at the same time weaving a love story that is everything but a love story.

The method that I will be using to interpret this work is McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* “visual universe” triangle diagram. The triangle diagram is a fantastic way of analyzing body horror in general because the genre is so heavily dependent on visual characteristics, but it is especially relevant for the unique style of body horror that Mokumokuren employs in her work. She incorporates both highly abstract and highly realistic elements (that lie on completely opposite ends of the diagram) when drawing the true form of the creature. The art largely

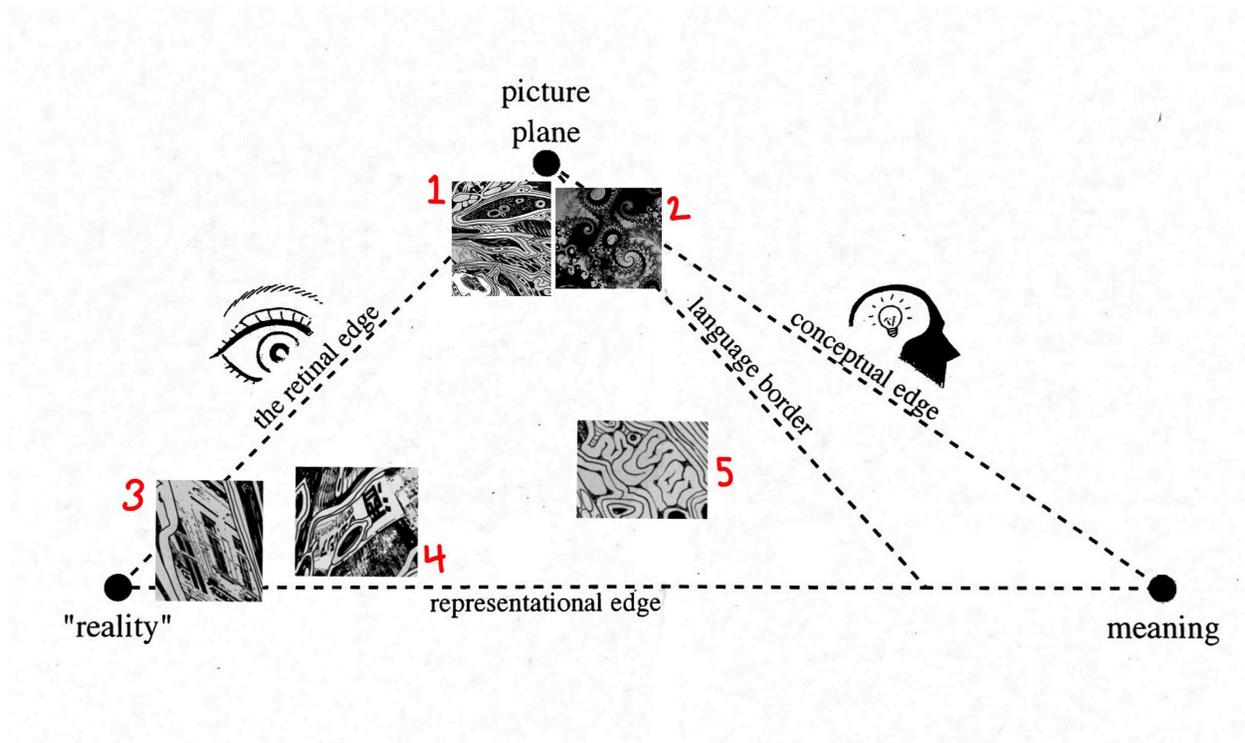
consists of abstract shapes that escape description, which creates body horror of something that is completely unrecognizable as a body. This very effectively emphasizes the demonic, alien nature of the creature by making it visually incomparable to any “monster” commonly seen in cultural lore or popular media. The unknowable nature of this fake Hikaru lends well to the power of the horror because it shows that both Yoshiki and we, the readers, have absolutely no clue what this creature actually is –it is not defined as a demon, monster, spirit, or anything specific. It is simply an unknown supernatural entity, accordingly drawn using ambiguous patterns. However, within the unusual shapes that make up the creature’s “body,” there are also spaces that include hyper realistic images of everyday things, such as buildings and street signs. These images are most likely meant to represent Hikaru’s memories, and thus the traces of his personality, that the creature has retained within itself.

The creature is a strange amalgamation of nonhuman and human traits, which is reflected in the variation of visual abstraction in depictions of it. Its appearance is largely what isolates it from human society, and it is only able to interact with people in a non-violent way by stealing a human body and wearing its face as a mask. At the same time, it is emotional in a way that is unsettlingly human; it expresses joy, anger, affection, sadness, and jealousy in a manner that, while certainly exaggerated, is very familiar and even relatable. It is overjoyed to have a body that can taste food and make friends; it cries when it believes it has hurt Yoshiki’s feelings; it playfully teases its classmates at school. However, the creature is obviously incredibly dangerous and volatile, repeatedly implying that it will “have to” kill Yoshiki if he tells anyone about it. The jarring contrasts in the creature’s demeanor align with the way it is drawn. The artist very effectively combines the unknown –amorphous, amoeboid shapes that can be most accurately placed toward the very top of McCloud’s triangle– with the familiar –photorealistic images that,

despite being partially hidden and distorted, are easily recognizable and thus reside in the triangle's lower left-hand corner— just as the creature combines its unknown nature and intentions with very familiar displays of human emotion. There are also elements of the art that fall into a category somewhere between completely abstract and completely realistic, such as repeated convoluted shapes that resemble the outer surface of a human brain in a stylized form. To analyze the body horror, specifically from the panel in which the creature's true form is fully revealed in all its glory, we can place different aspects of the creature's body in very different areas of McCloud's diagram. The most nebulous shapes are at the very top, on the edge of the picture plane (labeled "1" in the diagram at the end of this section). There is an area in the corner of the panel that shows an image of a building's outer wall that can be placed in the very bottom left-hand corner because of its photorealistic nature ("3"), as well as a sign that is realistic and recognizable because it contains language, but because it is more distorted than the building, it is slightly further away from the corner of absolute photorealism ("4"). The brain-like motifs are best placed in the middle of the triangle, slightly closer to the "language" edge because they are highly stylized and lack detail, but are still recognizable as the gyri and sulci of a convoluted cerebrum ("5").

The Summer Hikaru Died uses its unique brand of body horror to craft an equally unique analysis of the queer experience. In a small, rural village in Japan —where gay marriage is still illegal— Yoshiki's queerness alienates him from his peers, even if they are not aware of it. On the other hand, Hikaru becomes outright nonhuman and is thus alienated from human society altogether. The creature laments this fact, expressing joy at being able to finally have human experiences and professing its loneliness as part of the reason why it is so dangerously attached to Yoshiki. These two highly othered beings find a strange kinship and comfort in one another's

presence because of their shared peripheral status in society. Ironically, their bond alienates them both even further, as Yoshiki becomes withdrawn and antisocial as he spirals into depression, and “Hikaru” becomes so overcome with its love for Yoshiki that it loses control over its human form. Additionally, body horror is used as a metaphor for sexual experimentation throughout the story. There are several scenes depicting very intimate, almost erotic moments where Yoshiki interacts with and explores Hikaru’s new, supernatural body in different ways, such as placing his arm into an empty cavity that splits open the creature’s chest and face. McCloud’s diagram comes into play again here, because the moment Yoshiki touches “Hikaru,” he vividly hallucinates a series of abstract, spiral shapes that are representative of the creature’s insides (image “2”). However, in this particular depiction, there are no recognizable, realistic shapes or images; there is only the unknown (the abstract at the very top of McCloud’s triangle), with no element of comfort that comes from the familiar (realism). Yoshiki is startled at first, but ultimately enjoys the experience, and it brings the two beings closer together. This is perhaps representative of embarking on the slightly terrifying, yet thrilling, journey into the unknown realm of experiencing queer sexuality for the first time. These experiences, while not universal, are depicted in a way that is strangely understandable to the reader despite the unnerving supernatural spin on the situation, creating all the more effective, unforgettable horror.



Conclusion

By creating and exploring a genre that focuses specifically on marginalized perspectives in body horror comics and manga, this paper and the essays within are able to uncover the power that body horror holds in challenging societal expectations of gender and sexuality. All of the essays included in this paper analyze their respective works through Scott McCloud's visual language of comics triangle diagram, and in doing so, examine the variety of ways body horror visually interacts with these systems of power and objectification, and the characters who either resist or fall to these expectations. By including the manga *Tomie* in this genre, it is revealed that the body horror genre is not limited to mere scares, but can also encompass a wide range of themes including beauty and power dynamics. These examples demonstrate how horror narratives can serve as a platform for exploring complex social issues, breaking through the superficial aspects of the genre, and offering deeper insights into human nature and societal fears. In another vein, the manga *Inside Mari* asserts body horror as an apt tool for portraying and manifesting painful experiences under the queer umbrella. Far from just pointless gore, body horror as a genre can be leveraged to create powerful emotions and empathy in readers, who can see firsthand how society punishes and hurts those who struggle within the constraints of strict gender norms. "Detained" from *False Positive* exhibits the ways in which body horror and McCloud's triangle diagram can be used to communicate diversion from the status quo and what society considers "normal," and how these diversions can make people feel outcast and rejected by society. This is reflected in the way body horror, and "Detained" specifically, examines the ways in which monsters and beasts, especially female monsters and beasts, are treated and perceived in storytelling. In the webcomic "Some Other Animal's Meat," body horror is revealed as a way to visualize how societal expectations influence and corrode the sense of self, through

the lens of Stacey and her experience as a middle aged woman who sells beauty products. It is a creative example of body horror, as the apparition that haunts Stacey defies boundaries and description — is at once human-like and alien, reminiscent of both lotion and skin. Similar to this concept, by including the manga *The Summer Hikaru Died*, it is discovered that horror as a genre is highly flexible, and the definition of body horror can extend to include visual entities that break the boundaries of what constitutes a “body,” as despite being mostly visual, body horror is ultimately psychological in nature.

By including these various examples under the umbrella of marginalized perspectives in body horror comics and manga, we are able to not only understand the genre in new ways, but in the examples themselves. In *Tomie*, the work itself already focuses on themes of the male gaze, cycles of violence, beauty and obsession, eternal youth. But with the application of McCloud’s Triangle, we can delve deeper into how stylistic elements play a factor in accentuating this through its visuals which can provide a more intensified experience for the audience. On the surface, *Inside Mari* can appear as a simple psychological body-swap seinen with close up illustrations of a teenage girl’s nude body. The shocking twist-ending, however, coupled with the author’s own testimonies of experiencing gender dysphoria, requires the reader to consider a closer analysis. Regardless, the representation of gender dysphoria from the perspective of a young man and woman in a science-fiction manga series is groundbreaking in its own right, and exists within a long tradition of feminist and queer body horror. Body horror can also interact with different archetypes of magical women in the literary canon to create an interesting and new perspective on how these types of characters are viewed and what they represent. This can be seen in “Detained,” for example, with our expectations of the archetype of the goddess being subverted in the form of a transformation from human woman to terrifying monster. In this way,

body horror is employed to challenge societal notions about how women are expected to look and behave. Without viewing “Some Other Animal’s Meat” through the lens of how Stacey’s gendered experience affects her obsessions and self-image, the work is still compelling, as these themes of loneliness, mental illness, and body image are universal. However, if this lens is applied, the work becomes deeper, and the ambiguity of the hallucinations start to have a potential, intriguing answer. *The Summer Hikaru Died* explores topics such as love, grief, and unhealthy relationships. Hikaru and Yoshiki’s relationship can be analyzed from a perspective that focuses on the toxicity of codependent partnerships, using the creature as a metaphor for losing one’s identity when succumbing to obsession with another. However, if one looks at the story for its portrayal of marginalized perspectives, this allows the reader to take a step back and consider the wider-scale implications of the adverse treatment of othered groups, considering that this negative treatment might be the root cause of the unhealthy nature of some such relationships.

After exploring and compiling these examples of marginalized perspectives in body horror, there is still room to expand upon and grow within this genre. While the examples listed in this paper deal with some marginalized perspectives, they are by no means a comprehensive or total look at the ways in which body horror intersects with sexual and gender identity. In addition to this, there is room within this fabricated genre to explore the ways in which racial identity affects body horror, as a concept that is inextricably linked to violence, identity, and the body. *Tomie* touches on this idea, but other examples could potentially expand upon the effects of intersectionality in being a woman of color and how racial discrimination creates a different experience of womanhood (especially in men’s treatment and view of women). We can also expand by looking into body horror comics from different countries, cultures, and languages and

comparing and contrasting them to American and Japanese visual narratives. Body horror can also interact with different archetypes of magical women in the literary canon to create an interesting and new perspective on how these types of characters are viewed and what they represent. By looking through the lens of both McCloud's vocabulary of comics and the body horror genre, we can understand why the authors and illustrators make the artistic choices they do, and how those choices correlate with the message they send about conformity and non-conformity to patriarchal expectations. Body horror allows us to examine the experiences of marginalized groups in a way that captures the raw emotion and vulnerability of expressing and navigating one's identity in this world in a way that is vivid, visceral, and at times uncomfortable. In continuing to explore and challenge preconceived notions of body horror as a tool that is only used for shock or gross-out value, we hope to bring to light the power behind body horror as a lens through which we can better understand societal structures of power and oppression, as well as perspectives that might not be explored otherwise. Body horror is a popular sub-genre of horror for a reason — it is visceral, uncomfortable, and yet it is hard to look away from. What more will be found if we continue to look, and to analyze the power in that which simultaneously disgusts and entrances us?

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