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## Whedon's Great Glass Elevator: Space, Liminality, and Intertext in *The Cabin in the Woods*

[1] Joss Whedon has described *The Cabin in the Woods*, somewhat conversely, as being both "a loving hate letter to horror" and "a sonnet to the genre's best examples, a serious critique of what we love and what we don't about horror movies" (Utichi). Furthering this, the movie has been consciously positioned by its authors as a critical evaluation with a distinct purpose: more than passive commentary or criticism, Whedon in particular maintains that it is an attempt to "revitalize the horror movie genre" which has suffered a "devolution . . . into torture porn and into a long series of sadistic comeuppances"<sup>1</sup> (Utichi). To what extent Whedon and Goddard are successful in their game-changing remit has been, and no doubt will continue to be, a source of much contestation. For example, in terms of academic study the movie has thus far been positioned as a deeply cynical act of genre snobbery (Woofter), whilst it has also emphasized that the response from the online Whedon fan community has been almost universally (and unusually) positive thus far in comparison to Whedon's other works (Kociemba).

[2] Regardless of whether it is interpreted as a "sonnet" to or a "critique" of the horror genre, such meditations that the movie performs are exercised principally via Whedon's "signature intertextuality" (Lavery and Burkhead xi); Whedon is of course known for his blending or internal conceptual transformation of genres as well as for his meticulous "quoting," either explicitly or implicitly, of myriad other texts (Bussolini 18). Congruent to this, *The Cabin in the Woods* not only provides points of reference for a myriad of supernaturally based horror movies—though admittedly the film's catalogue of monsters mostly overtly cites the Slasher-genre's most popular and notorious examples—but in the process attempts an evisceration (in both diegetic and metaphorical terms) of said cinematic universes. The title itself is of course a reference to the archetypes it simultaneously celebrates and dissects; indeed, the poster promoting the cinematic release visually presents the titular Cabin in the form of a Rubik's Cube-esque puzzle, complete with the tagline "You think you know the story," both overt allusions to the movie's reflexive qualities. Accordingly, critic Roger Ebert concludes that the movie poses more questions than it answers: "The Cabin in the Woods has been constructed almost as a puzzle for horror fans to solve. Which conventions are being toyed with? Which authors and movies are being referred to? Is the movie itself an act of criticism?" (Ebert). The notion that the overt horror references within the movie constitute both a puzzle and an act of criticism forms the basis of the

reading that this essay performs: utilizing a variety of critical perspectives, this essay conceptualizes the film via poststructural approaches pertaining to intertextuality and space, as espoused by Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva. Ultimately, via conceptualizing the processes that inform Whedon and Goddard's critique, such a reading informs as to whether *The Cabin in the Woods* succeeds in its stated ambitions: namely, the reinvention and reinvigoration of the horror genre.

[3] Most significant to such conceptualizations is the manner in which *The Cabin in the Woods* specifically invokes and utilizes a multitude of creatures from the pantheon of horror, beyond and outside of the particular horror subgenre that the movie (at least initially) takes as its referent; in these terms, Conaton cites *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Cabin Fever* (2002) and *Dead Snow* (2009) as archetypal examples of the well-known "Cabin" horror trope (441). Early on in the narrative, many of these monsters are explicitly foregrounded on the whiteboard on which the various facility staff wager on the outcome of the scenario, and subsequent to this, a plethora appear far more fleetingly in the "elevator" and "system purge" sequences in the latter third of the movie. There are specific monsters whose origins in other movies are readily identifiable (though they take the form of allusions, as opposed to direct "guest appearances"): for example, the "Hell Lord" from *Hellraiser* (1987), an "Angry Molesting Tree" from *The Evil Dead*, "The Twins" from *The Shining* (1980) and a Clown from *It* (1990). Also present are more general stock-horror supernatural archetypes such as zombies, vampires, and demons, as well as creatures from mythology and folklore<sup>2</sup> (the subversion of the latter having been a trend in recent horror film, such as *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013), *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013) and *Gingerdead Man* (2005).

[4] Obviously it cannot be claimed that such references are unique, both in context of the intertextual nature of much of Whedon's oeuvre, and in wider terms, the trend evidenced in recent horror film to "display intertextual subcultural capital"<sup>3</sup> (Hills 182). However, what is interesting in regards to the use of intertextuality in *The Cabin in the Woods* is that the effectiveness of the references themselves appears specifically to correlate to their physical form as monsters. But it is not their status as a form of visual "quoting" of the films they allude to that is significant, rather their bodily approximation and evocation of said monsters. In this manner, in their very viscosity, they function as a form of corporeal embodied intertextuality.

[5] In regards to physical representation, said intertexts can be conceptualised in spatial terms; various theorists (to be discussed shortly) have posited that multiplicity and space are essentially symbiotic by their very nature: "Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of plurality . . . of the existence of more-than-one . . . without space, no multiplicity, without multiplicity, no space," as stated by Doreen Massey

(Massey 9). In terms of *The Cabin in the Woods*, a key sequence demonstrates how the aforementioned multitude of intertextual references presented by the movie can be conceptualised via spatial representation: the “elevator sequence” in the latter third of the movie. In this sequence, the characters of Marty and Dana are the last survivors of the Cabin scenario, having resisted their positioning as stock horror-genre character archetypes that are required by horror movie convention. Marty’s continued existence hence threatens the Ritual, as only “the Virgin” can remain alive in order for it to be successful.<sup>4</sup>

[6] In their escape attempt, Marty and Dana discover an elevator from the Cabin scenario locale down into the lower levels of the facility; taking the elevator down, they travel through a vast open space, and in the process encounter (as described in the shooting script) “an endless array of elevators, moving around like a 3-D puzzle . . . like Charlie’s Great Glass Elevator, like *Cube*. Monsters (many of them like the ones we’ve seen) in every single one . . . It’s the Costco of death” (Whedon and Goddard “The Cabin . . . Script”). It is significant that Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is cited here; in Roald Dahl’s story, *Willy Wonka* describes his “Great Glass Elevator” in the following terms: “This lift . . . can visit any single room in the whole factory, no matter where it is! You simply press the button, and zing! You’re off!” (Dahl 149-150). If read as an act of criticism, Whedon and Goddard’s elevator sequence fulfils an identical function; the lifts do indeed visit “any room in the factory” in order to ferry the chosen monsters to the cabin scenario; this also applies extra-diegetically in terms of the portrayal of the horror film as a factory-assembly commercial product, with pre-packaged elements of the genre being selected as required. This can be seen in the manner in which the film frames its monsters as commodities, essentially toys in boxes waiting to be bought and played with.<sup>5</sup>

[7] However, in regards to the reading this essay provides, the importance of the elevator in this sequence is that, as a space between places, and a space of transition, it can be conceptualized as a liminal space. This concept was first coined as an anthropological term by Arnold Van Gennep in *Rites de Passage* (1908), which maintains that such between-spaces are integral to human processes of ritual and transformation, an often painful passage between alternative states, involving “the removal of previously taken-for-granted forms and limits” (Szokolczai “Liminality” 148). The concept of liminality can of course be applied to the horror genre in a wider context; for example, Abbott notes that “horror operates in a [liminal] space in which the rules of society and the natural world are overturned” (Abbott 6). Correspondingly, the teenage victims ubiquitous to the genre occupy a liminal space with the horror narrative itself serving as a re-evaluation of the validity and purpose of tradition rules and order (Bunnell 83-84). This ultimately results in horror typically depicting “a rite of passage from ignorance to

wisdom, from unawareness to self-awareness" (85). Though such readings are clearly relevant to *The Cabin in the Woods*, the emphasis in this essay lies in the specific conceptualisation of the elevator itself in terms of liminality; for Marty and Dana, it indeed functions as a transformative space between states as they travel from the diegetic space of the Cabin scenario (the horror movie itself), to the managers' facility, thus revealing the creative processes behind the scenario construction.

[8] Subsequent to Van Gennep, the concept of liminality has been appropriated in various ways by a diverse range of theorists; Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process* (1969) maintains that in such liminal spaces, one's sense of identity dissolves, bringing about disorientation, but also the possibility of new perspectives (156). Indeed, the very presence of boundaries and borders themselves creates the possibility of resistance and change for those who are able to exploit the space and move between two worlds (157). Again, Marty and Dana personify these processes; Marty has come to the realization that "we are not who we are," in that the identities of his companions have been subject to external manipulation, rewritten into the horror archetypes necessary for the ritual.<sup>6</sup> As liminality can lead to the dissolution of all stable frameworks, Szokolczai warns that "temporary suspension of stable structures open up the forces of darkness" (*Reflexive* 210); in the case of *The Cabin in the Woods*, this can be seen to function in literal terms: for Marty and Dana, all assumed prior notions of stable identity (not to mention the assumed non-existence of supernatural monsters!) have been disrupted, and the elevator ride (as well as the Buckners' previous emergence via elevator into the cabin scenario) confronts them with their worst nightmares.

[9] However, despite the disorientation of the elevator ride, their experience in the liminal space does begin to offer new perspectives, allowing them comprehension of their situation; "they made us choose", states Dana, when she is confronted by the Hell-Lord and his puzzle-box, realizing that the items previously found in the cabin basement determine which monsters will be released. It is significant to such spatial conceptions that liminality reveals both understanding and choice here, as according to Turner, it is in these interstices of structure that those occupying a liminal space are most aware of themselves, resulting in a "free recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird" (*Turner Dramas* 255). Hence it is in just such a space that Dana comes to understand the machinations of her and Marty's situation, in the process also explicating (or at least reiterating) to the audience the rationale behind the use of the horror genre-conventions to which the movie slavishly adheres.

[10] This conceptualization of liminality within the film, and its significance to the creative processes both internal and external to the movie narrative, can be further explicated via that manner in which theorists have equated Turner's conception of liminal space to that of Michel Foucault's notion of Heterotopia.<sup>7</sup> In his 1967 essay "Of Other

Spaces," Foucault uses this term to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions; that is to say, spaces of otherness, subject to ritual, which are neither here nor there.<sup>8</sup> Foucault states that "heterotopic sites possess an aura of mystery, danger or transgression, possessing multiple meanings; like laboratories in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out" (Hetherington 12-13). These elements of mystery, transgression and danger are self-evident within the movie, and a laboratory is a fitting analogy;<sup>9</sup> not only are the scenario subjects trialed and tested upon in order to achieve the results desired for the ritual, but the film itself subjects the horror genre at large to analysis and experimentation (though the depth of said experimentation is contested, by Woofter for example). In these terms, the manner in which it exposes processes both internal and external to the cinematic narrative, *The Cabin in the Woods* functions as what Foucault calls a "heterotopia of illusion," which has the potential to "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space" ("Of Other" 30). This functions in literal terms for the characters of Marty and Dana; as they descend into the bowels of the underground facility via the elevator, the very machinery "beneath" the horror movie in which they are unwitting participants is exposed to them. In a wider sense Hadley and Sitterson (the controllers of the scenario) can be conceptualized in terms of this experimental manipulation of their ritual subjects (revealing the constructed nature of the Cabin scenario), but also in the wider terms of the movie itself (being an experiment on the horror genre). Of course, these are by no means mutually exclusive, as the characters of Hadley and Sitterson also function as ciphers for Whedon and Goddard, as well as the cinema audience (the latter made explicit when Hadley is shown eating popcorn whilst watching events in the scenario unfold on monitor screens), and hence are a commentary upon the creative moviemaking process itself, and its subsequent public consumption.

[11] Foucault states that heterotopic spaces "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable . . . the heterotopic site is not freely accessible . . . the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (29). This system of "opening and closing" can of course be related specifically to the nature of the elevator, which is not freely accessible until Marty hacks the control panel. However, in a more general sense, the film demonstrates that adherence to ritual (albeit unwittingly) is a prerequisite of obtaining entrance to the scenario itself, the encounter with *The Harbinger* at the gas station being a prime example (this is a trope common to *Deliverance* [1972], *The Hills Have Eyes* [1977] and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* [1974], amongst many others.) This encounter can also be related to Turner's emphasis upon spaces of ritual and choice, as Sitterson explicates: "Creepy old fuck, practically wears a sign, 'you will die.' They have to choose to ignore him, just like they have to

choose what's in the cellar."<sup>10</sup> Via this exercising of choice, the archetypes are subject to the "rites and purifications" that Foucault describes, expressed verbatim by The Harbinger in his telephone call to Hadley and Sitterson: "The lambs have passed through the gate, they are come to the killing floor . . . Cleanse them. Cleanse the world of their ignorance and sin."<sup>11</sup> After this "system of opening," the force-field and tunnel cave-in close the space of the scenario, keeping the subjects contained, as demonstrated when Curt's attempt to jump the chasm by motorcycle leads to his death

[12] In *The Order of Things* (1966) Foucault further describes a heterotopic space as "an impossible space which has layers of meaning or relationships to a large number of fragmentary possible worlds . . . that are juxtaposed or superimposed upon each other (and contains undesirable bodies)" (Genocchio 1995). Specifically in regards to the elevator sequence, such conceptions can be applied; the multitude of coexisting monsters within the elevator sequence, each an intertextual reference to a horror archetype in the form of an "undesirable body," can be read as representations of said fragmentary worlds, all of which are occupying the same space, superimposed upon one another; all are also subject to Hadley and Sitterson's (and by extension, Whedon and Goddard's) processes of experimentation. Hence, in heterotopic terms, *The Cabin in the Woods'* horror movie representations function as a synthesis of multiple heterogeneous realms which are not hierarchically ordered, but are parallel to one another other. Significantly, Foucault cites cinema itself as a fitting example of such spatial and temporal overlays: "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible . . . thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space" (Foucault "Of Other" 28). Of course, *The Cabin in the Woods* is a work of fiction, and hence is not a "real" space to which Foucault claims the figure of heterotopia at least partially refers (as opposed to utopian spaces, for example, which are purely fictional.) However, it can also be maintained that fictional filmic heterotopias are in fact inherently tied to reality (via cinema in the "real" world), therefore increasing the number of overlapping worlds and hence further questioning the status of reality of any of those worlds; this further supports Foucault's claim that heterotopias "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space" (30).

[13] We can further negotiate between conceptions of space as both liminal and intertextual via Julia Kristeva, whose abjection theory (drawn from the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas) is of course tailor-made for the examination of horror and (via Barbara Creed) the horror movie. Abjection is an inherently traumatic experience, a reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other, "representing taboo elements of

the self barely separated off in a liminal space" (Childers and Hentzi 308). Situated outside the symbolic order, the place of the abject is where meaning collapses. Correspondingly, Marty and Dana are inextricably drawn away from the symbolic order, into the liminal space of the elevator where signification collapses: "Do we want to go down?" she asks in trepidation, to which he can only respond "Where else are we gonna go?"

[14] According to Kristeva, since the abject is situated outside the symbolic order, being forced to face it is an inherently traumatic experience, as with the repulsion presented by confrontation with filth, waste, or a corpse; notably, Marty and Dana's route into the liminal space of the elevator is via an open grave, a literal representation of leaving the symbolic order and crossing Kristeva's boundary into the realm of the abject. This is further compounded by the presence of the dismembered body of Judah Buckner, as just such a corpse exemplifies the Kristevan abject, literalizing the breakdown of the distinction between subject and object: "corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death" (Kristeva Powers 3). The fact that this particular corpse is a dissected but still twitching zombie ("I had to dismember that guy with a trowel," declares Marty) only compounds their revulsion; the zombie is arguably a powerful embodiment of the abject, as not only is it a referent of mortality, but it also threatens to bring mortality to an end. [15] Barbara Creed

expands on Kristeva's concept, claiming that the horror movie functions by its portrayal of an abundance of images of abjection, and that the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross said border is abject (Creed 71). Again, this threatening of borders can be tied into liminal space, which houses the vast abundance of images of abjection; the creatures seen in the many other elevators are penetrated (The "Hell-Lord"), turned inside out ("The Blob") or lacking any clear internal/external borders at all (The "Wraith"). It is also worth noting that the "Ballerina-Dentata" monster encountered in the elevator (seen by Marty but not Dana) is reminiscent of the castrating Vagina-Dentata, a concept at the heart of Creed's monstrous-feminine: "Both the mother and death signify a monstrous obliteration of the self and both are linked to the demonic" (Creed 30). This notion of the maternal as abject can be further linked to the apparent anxieties and contradictions towards authorship evident in the film, in that its existence is ironically dependent upon the very horror tropes that Whedon and Goddard claim to be critiquing and rejecting. This attempt to cast off said horror clichés and create something new can be viewed as abject, as we must reject the maternal, the object which has created us, in order to construct an individual identity. However, much like Kristeva's example of "mother's milk,"—described as "a medium that is common to mother and child, a food that does

not separate, but binds . . . a flow that mingles two identities" (Kristeva Powers 105)—however repugnant such expelled and rejected objects may be, they remain necessary to bodily existence and are thus inescapable. Hence, in these terms, Whedon and Goddard are inherently bound to the very things that they wish to reject. Hadley and Sitterson's attitude towards the monsters on which they rely is emblematic of this tension, being in turns mocking and reverent: "The Buckners. They may be zombified pain-worshipping backwoods idiots . . . But they're our zombified pain-worshipping backwoods idiots." Conversely, the dangers of attachment to the abject are exemplified via Hadley's yearning desire to encounter a specific monster ("I am never going to see a Merman. Ever" he laments, when said creature is not selected for the Ritual), and his subsequent gruesome demise at the hands of one, the irony of which is evidently not lost to him (his last words being "Oh, come on!").

[16] Further to the monsters' status as abject, Kristeva's theoretical approach also allows a reading as to how the elevator sequence visually demonstrates not just the horror of the monsters, but also their significance as intertexts in relation to spatial conceptions. Drawing from the work of Saussure and Bakhtin, Kristeva's conception of intertextuality (as defined in *Desire in Language* [1980]) charts a three-dimensional textual space consisting of intersecting planes which have vertical and horizontal axes, the former connecting the text to other texts, and the latter connecting the author and reader of a text. In this manner, the production of meaning in a text takes place on both these horizontal and vertical axes. The elevator sequence visually represents and maps these axes via the clearly defined vertical and horizontal movements of the elevator itself, as it moves first vertically and then horizontally through the vast three-dimensional space. In initially descending in the elevator upon a vertical axis, Marty and Dana move into the intertextual space, exposing themselves to the host of other elevators, each containing a specific intertextual reference in the form of a monster. However, as Kristeva's conceptualisation of intertextuality is dependent upon the interaction between both vertical and horizontal axis, it is only when they subsequently move horizontally that Marty and Dana are able to infer meaning upon the intertexts that they encounter, as the communication between author and reader is always paired with an intertextual relation in a past text. Kristeva refers to this as "direct discourse representation" ("Word" 73) in which parts of other texts are incorporated into a text and explicitly marked as such, hence consisting of references made in order to clarify a certain point or to continue, build up, or develop new ideas. In keeping with this, it is therefore when the elevator moves horizontally and comes abreast to another elevator containing the "Hell-Lord" and his puzzle-box<sup>12</sup> that Dana (within the film's diegesis, and by extension, the cinema audience outside of it) fully comprehend this intertextual reference, thereby coming to comprehend the "puzzle" of the movie.

[17] It is vital to acknowledge the dynamic nature of intertextuality, since elements of a text may be designed to be interpreted in different ways by different receivers; in other words, understanding is depended upon, and informed by, other texts with which the reader is familiar, which are dependent upon cultural context. The cultural specificity of the horror film is acknowledged in *The Cabin in the Woods* via the depiction of the different rituals performed by various branches of "the Organization," all of which invoke their own culturally specific archetypes. For example, whereas the American ritual invokes Western clichés, the "Floaty Girl" present in the Japanese scenario alludes to the "Onry" figure prevalent in Japanese horror, probably best recognized by Western audiences via *Ringu* (1998) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002), both of which have been subject to American remakes.<sup>13</sup> In *The Cabin in the Woods* DVD audio commentary, Whedon and Goddard engage in a debate as to whether or not American audiences would comprehend the Japanese horror subplot, concluding that whilst an understanding of the prescribed conventions is not required to comprehend this sequence, those viewers who are familiar with the conventions of Japanese horror will obviously be "that much more inside on the joke" (Goddard and Whedon).

[18] Kristeva's conception of intertextuality is further made evident in the elevator sequence in that she posits that a text is constructed as a "mosaic of citations" ("Word" 36), as the intertextual elements absorb and transform themselves and other texts. Having navigated the vertical and horizontal intertextual axes, the elevator sequence culminates with a dramatic camera pan-out, revealing a vast multitude of elevator compartments, each complete with monstrous occupant. As these many elevators are moving in and around one another in intricate formation, visually this sequence functions as a striking depiction of the Kristevan intertextual mosaic. Interestingly, not only does the shooting script describe this sequence in these terms almost verbatim ("... an endless array of elevators, moving around like a 3-D puzzle") but in keeping with depiction of a space comprised of pure intertextual citation, also describes this via explicit reference to comparable elements of other works ("like Charlie's Great Glass Elevator, like Cube").

[19] Ultimately *The Cabin in the Woods* unifies these complex spatial and intertextual issues visually via the "system purge sequence." Subsequent to the elevator arriving at its destination at the facility, Marty and Dana chance upon a literal "big red button," no doubt Whedon and Goddard's commentary upon similarly convenient deus ex-machina devices prevalent in the horror genre, although (as previously discussed in relation to Kristeva's "mother's milk") it is notable that whilst they wish to ridicule this contrivance, they simultaneously rely upon it as a narrative device. The button is pressed, and all the monsters are released from their prior confinement, triggering carnage on an epic scale. As previously explored, up until this juncture all the monsters

(hence intertexts) have principally been regulated and contained; however, as Turner maintains, such order cannot be sustained, positing that the dissolution of order during liminality can lead to the dissolution of all stable frameworks, resulting in the “release of potentiality through a resultant emotional or affective intensity” (Turner 128).

[20] Indeed, it can be argued that such chaos is the inevitable result of such a surplus of intertextual referents, on which the intrinsic premise of *The Cabin in the Woods* is dependent. As Kristeva poetically states in *Desire in Language*, “when texts are examined in terms of intertextuality and we are witness to their capacity to inform, absorb, and transform each other, they themselves become monstrous hybrids that resist containment . . . intertextuality makes a text a ‘living hell on Earth’” (Kristeva *Desire* 66). This is depicted literally, as the “monstrous hybrids” indeed “resist containment” when freed by Marty and Dana (who, by subverting their prescribed roles as “fool” and “virgin” have in their own way resisted the containment of their own archetypes). In a rapid series of scenes, the “purge sequence” depicts an innumerable number of monsters eviscerating both their captors and each other; the sheer rapidity and gore-soaked brutality of this sequence<sup>14</sup> results in the monsters (and hence their specific cinematic origins) becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between. While their bodies approximate certain films known to the viewer, their sheer number, along with the randomness and chaos of their “deployment,” serves to homogenize their potential meanings, implying that these monsters are essentially empty bodies, all indexing the same idea of horror films having devolved into that of slick product; the film’s framing of the generic process as ritual suggests this also. Hence, this sequence uniquely and powerfully demonstrates Kristeva’s statement as to the ultimate consequence of an intertextual reading: “In the space of a given text, utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (*Desire* 36).

[21] The dissolution of all stable frameworks leads not only to this audacious bloodbath but, as Kristeva describes, to a literal “living hell on Earth”: the failure of the ritual results in the rise of the Ancient Gods at the final climax of the film. However, despite the destruction, dissolution and homogenization depicted (these processes functioning as an act of criticism), the question remains as to whether Whedon and Goddard’s experimentation with the horror genre can be further conceptualized in this manner, and deemed as success.

[22] In the terms that have been discussed, this act of ultimate textual destruction can ultimately be read constructively. *The Cabin in the Woods* takes as its intrinsic premise the recontextualization of the horror genre, performed via the medium of spatial conceptions of intertextual citations. As this spatial reading demonstrates, the inherent connection between the film’s use of intertext and abject results in Whedon and Goddard being (as exemplified via Kristeva’s “mother’s milk”) inherently bound to the

very things that they are attempting to reject. However, in characterising the intertextuality of the film in the context of the liminal, we can contextualise this in terms of potentiality, as explicitly verbalized at the film's dénouement. When informed by the Director that he must die to save the world (this being both the world of the film, and the extradiegetic world of the horror film itself), Marty asserts that "maybe it's time for a change."<sup>15</sup> The film ends as the "Ancient Ones," who function as ciphers for the horror audience, rise up and destroy the world; this is Whedon and Goddard's overt challenge to the horror genre to wipe the slate clean, find uncharted territory and reinvent itself anew. In keeping with this, as demonstrated via the reading that this paper has performed, conceptualizing *The Cabin in the Woods* via heterotopic and liminal spaces makes possible new ways of ordering (Hetherington 22), and hence the potential for change; ultimately, via this interpretation, the conditions for the potential production of a new order, a new discourse, are created. Although the horror genre has a "remarkable capacity to transform itself" (Phillips 197), it is yet to be seen if *The Cabin in the Woods* is to have any such transformative effect upon the horror pantheon to come. But in this regard the film occupies its own liminal space, on the cusp of a new possibility for genesis, as such borders or thresholds signify the "ultimate marking of an inevitable change" (Deleuze and Guattari 438).

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## Notes

1. Of course, such claims as to the stagnancy of the genre are not a given. For example, *The Cabin in the Woods*' response to a "genre-in-crisis" arguably eschews notions of both cultural variation and inter-genre hybridity (Woofter). It is not the purpose of this essay to debate Whedon and Goddard's assertion; rather, to conceptualize the processes performed within the film based upon such said assertions. For a discussion of the "rhetoric of crisis" in which artists like Whedon and Goddard are operating with respect to horror-genre, see Steffen Hantke's "American Film Criticism, The Rhetoric of Crisis and the Current State of Horror Cinema" (2007).

2. The brief nature of the appearance of many of these references has resulted with internet fan-groups engaging in "monster spotting," i.e. studying the movie in considerable detail in order to identify said monsters and their source material. An example of a website collating these examples can be found here:

<http://thecabininthewoods.wikia.com/wiki/Monsters>.

3. To this end, Hills gives as examples horror films from the 1990s and 2000s such as: *Bride of Chucky* (1998), *The Faculty* (1998), *Cherry Falls* (2000), *Scream* (1996), *Urban Legend* (1998) and *Cut* (2000).

4. The required format for the sacrificial ritual (in terms of order of deaths) is referenced obliquely throughout the movie, and explicitly at the end by The Director: "The whore; she is corrupted, she dies first . . . the athlete, the scholar, the fool. All suffer and die at the hands of the horror they have raised, leaving the last to live or die as fate decides." The casting of Sigourney Weaver as the Director is of course intertextually informed by her role as Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1979), a character considered to be archetypal of Carol Clover's Final Girl. Dana adheres to several characteristics required of the final girl, in that she avoids the vices of the other victims, has a unisex name, and (in stabbing Sitterson) is subject to "phallic appropriation" (Clover 49). However, her sexual unavailability is subverted ("A Virgin? Me?"). Though Marty's role as the fool is also archetypal in the horror genre, its subversion (in that against type, he survives and assumes a heroic role) can be viewed in terms external to the horror diegesis. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "The Carnavalesque," a literary mode in which assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere are subverted through humor and chaos, is well suited here, as he states that the fool "becomes wise" by possessing "the right to be other" (Bakhtin 159).

5. However, in positioning the monsters as pre-packaged commodities, Whedon and Goddard arguably also contradict their own argument, as this process strips the monsters of their power as evocations of cultural anxieties.

6. Connections between Marty and liminal space can be further conceptualised via Jungian psychoanalysis, often used to read horror. In these terms, the Bakhtinian fool can be positioned as Jung's "trickster" archetype, which, fittingly, is a symbol of the liminal state itself (Pelton qtd. in Russo 244).
7. Foucault's term is derived from the Greek meaning "other-place" (opposed to Utopia's "no-place")
8. In conceptualising such spaces, Foucault specifically cites a mirror (as well as theatre and cinema) as heterotopia: "in the mirror, I see myself there where I'm not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface" ("Of Other" 29). Although not explored in this paper, it is worthy of note that mirrors are featured prominently in *The Cabin in the Woods* (such as the sequence featuring Holden spying on Dana), as well as *Whedonverse* at large. Interestingly, in *Buffy*, it is a mirror that disguises the entrance to the elevator leading to "The Initiative," an institution which bears considerable similitude to "the Organization," both ideologically and visually. In particular, the episode "The Initiative" (4.7) features a number of *Buffyverse*-specific demons held captive in glass cages, arguably a simplified precursor to in *The Cabin in the Woods*' elevator sequence, in that both "The Initiative" and "The Organisation" create hybrid monsters bent on destruction.
9. Season 4 of *Buffy* uses The Initiative's laboratory in similar terms: as a metaphor for a university functioning as a ritualized space between adolescence and adulthood.
10. The convention of a sacrificial victim coming of their free will is common in the horror genre, perhaps most notably demonstrated in *The Wicker Man* (1973), in which Sergeant Howie unwittingly embodies all the characteristics that make him a suitable sacrifice to the Gods: "A man who would come here of his own free will . . . A man who would come here as a virgin . . . A man who has come here as a fool."
11. The Harbinger's portentous proclamations are of course immediately subverted for comedy: "Bathe them in the crimson of . . . am I on speakerphone?"
12. This is a reference to "Lemarchand's box" in the *Hellraiser* franchise, specifically the "Lament Configuration" puzzle box, used to summon the Cenobytes from its Hell-dimension. The many other "Monster Items" in the cellar of *The Cabin* each have a different method of summoning its corresponding monster, each a horror movie reference in their own right. For example, the Buckners are summoned by reading aloud from a book, an allusion to the "Book of the Dead" from *The Evil Dead* franchise.
13. *The Grudge*, the 2004 American remake of *Ju-on: The Grudge*, starred Sarah Michelle Gellar in one of her first post-*Buffy* film roles, hence instilling the Japanese horror sequence in the film with *Whedonverse*-specific intertexts.
14. The cascades of blood from the elevators in this sequence are an intertextual citation of *The Shining* (along with the previously mention "twins," who appear on the

whiteboard and in the elevator and purge sequences), or perhaps more specifically its infamous cinematic trailer, which consists entirely of one continuous shot of blood pouring out of an elevator.

15. Similarly, having been mortally wounded by a Werewolf , Dana's statement that she is "going away" and that "it's time to give someone else a chance" can be read in reference to the necessary demise and required reinvention of the overused and clichéd final girl trope.