

Artist Statement:

My name is Alishba Rahim, I am an illustration major and international student at the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA). My project is called, 'Digital Girl World', an almost 8-minute-long teaser and trial episode in an antagonist, a hyperfeminine young girl named Naami, as she guides the viewer after the viewer has been transported into a liminal, retro-horrific version of PNCA. The genre of the series is a psychological horror with visual novel elements.

I created the film digitally. For the background images, I took photos of the 6th and 5th floors of PNCA and edited them in Photoshop. I animated the characters, 'Naami' and 'Monster Door' on Spine, and edited the composition layers in After Effects and the sound in Premiere Pro. The reason I wanted to make this story is because, during my 3rd year in PNCA, I was interested in the rising popularity of retro-horror games and analog horror media on the internet and the connection of hyper-femininity in the horror genre. I wanted to explore and experiment with the retro-horror and vapor-wave aesthetic to combine them with hyper-feminine characters, like Naami, to establish a space where she holds control and autonomy in a genre and environment where her trope would typically die or be devalued.

Throughout the process of creating my teaser episode, I realized I needed to spend more time on the Naami's character study, to ensure I could incorporate her hyperfemininity in a visual language so that the intent of my thesis is clear. Moving forward, I will be more intentional about Naami's character acting about her environment and story. The iconography of the aesthetic mentioned above does need to be stronger so that they are juxtaposed more clearly.

ANTAGAUTO**NAMI**

Hyper-feminine expression deserves to hold autonomy, and I will do so by visually expressing the relationship between contrasting aesthetics of hyper-femininity and retro horror. My story 'AntagAutoNami' will be formatted in 13 animated TikTok shorts (about 8 to 10 seconds). The content will center around a mythic, antagonistic, hyper-feminine young girl named Nami who manipulates the viewer throughout the story, leading to the viewer's demise. The viewer is transported through a bizarre, liminal space version of PNCA, with only an unassuming Nami as an ally. The viewer must solve a puzzle from each floor of PNCA, starting from the 6th floor, where they spawned, to progress down to the lobby, where the exit is. The genre is a psychological horror with visual novel elements, animated as a point-and-click adventure game.

The core of my thesis is merging a retro horror-game aesthetic with hyper-femininity to reclaim women's sense of autonomy in animation by recontextualizing traditional feminine traits. Most media depict the 'girly girl' as vain, unintelligent, and basic. Someone who has not earned their agency. This correlates with how the interests of young girls are seen through similar lenses of lesser value. Instead, misogyny encourages both men and women to invest their time with traditional masculine, interests/fields/appearance, which are more respected and important in society. This is especially relevant in horror movies, where the hyper-femme girl who is neither the 'succubus', 'femme fatale', or 'final girl' is treated to be insignificant and weak—the victim.

Alishba Rahim
Thesis Proposal
SP24

As a fem-presenting woman, I want to create a narrative that celebrates hyper-fem and unapologetic desire for power in horror. I aim to reclaim control over situations like horror stories without altering Nami's aesthetic presentation.

Throughout my research, I have discovered that the retro-horror aesthetic is intimidating because it is from a time when VHS and low-poly models and backgrounds are nostalgic. On a theoretical approach, subverting nostalgia into fear effectively contrasts unassuming hyper-femininity. My intention is for the docile-ness associated with femininity to be subverted just like the nostalgia of VHS and low poly. I plan to incorporate analog horror elements in my illustrations, but will maintain Nami to be cute and feminine with her bright pink outfit and heart details. This retro horror aesthetic will make the audience question Nami's existence and suspicion of her casual demeanor.

Alongside the retro-horror game aesthetic and Hyper-femininity, I will also incorporate other styles and concepts within my project. Aesthetics such as Vapor-wave/ internet core and the concepts such as 'Viral Body Horror', 'Evil Demon Horror', 'The Venus Fly Trap Method', and the existence of 'Other'. In writing Nami's character and exploring her body language and actions, I will turn to references such as TikTok content creator Molly Moon and the Netflix show, *Girl from Nowhere (2018)*

Alishba Rahim
Thesis Proposal
SP24

My first-semester thesis is dedicated to pre-production work before I begin finalizing storyboards, filming, animating, and editing. Things I will begin over the summer and into my second-semester thesis. My second semester is dedicated to advertising my defense and fine-tuning work already completed.

This is a list of what I need to get done for this semester:

- Flesh out details for all 13 episodes (Puzzle Research, Dialogue)
- Film each floor according to the writing
- Edit images to look like the Res-Horror game, experiment, and refine them more
- Test Animations of Nami
- Editing Nami with the Environment

The art I have created in PNCA are illustrations and animations that take the appearance of a cartoon/ lead art style. I work with a lot of bright, saturated colors, as well as textures and patterns. This project is a challenge for me, as it forces me to work with a limited color pallet for the retro horror background, and strategically edit where vaporwave iconography can fit alongside it. Throughout my experimentation with these styles, I am pleased to find myself capable of recreating the two aesthetics, while still seeing my pre-established styles of highly saturated colors, textures, and patterns.

The project is a great addition to my portfolio, as it exemplifies how versatile my art style is in different genres. Moreover, the solid storyline, alongside the unique visuals I have innovated will show art directors that I can produce, write, animate, and edit a short series in a very marketable video format. In seeing my potential, it is easier to work with a company to sponsor my work visa to continue living and working in this country.

In conclusion, looking at different aesthetics and how they are connected (vaporwave/retro horror) and combining them with the core contrasting aesthetic of hyper-femininity creates an unsettling disconnect for the viewer. The reason for this stems from a plethora of conceptual theories, such as hyperreality, viral body horror, and the 'other'. The main effect I want to construe is for Nami to be in control of the narrative and the contrasting aesthetics solidify her status as the authoritative figure through subversion, deeming it a successful reclamation of traditional feminine autonomy.

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Abstract.

Digital Girl World is a teaser and trial episode showcasing the viewer's attempt at survival after being transported into a horrific version of PNCA. Your only ally, a young, hyperfeminine girl named Nami helping you find a way out of this liminal space PNCA. Can you trust this girl? She looks sweet, but something about her feels...off. Through a merging and contrast of hyperfeminine and retro horror game aesthetics, internet-core and analog elements. I will create a narrative that reclaims hyperfeminine women's sense of autonomy in the horror genre. The genre is a psychological horror, animated as a visual novel.

In the plot of the teaser, after the viewer is transported into the liminal space PNCA, they are immediately chased by shadow people. There the viewer meets Naami, who helps you out by solving a puzzle, which unlocks the elevator, allowing both Naami and the viewer to the next floor. Naami then introduces herself and informs you that the school creates puzzles depending on what the shadow people and the environment want. The two process to explore the floor, and stumble upon a Monster door that wants something to eat. Naami guides you along with a puzzle, unlocking a locker that reveals a still-beating heart. Naami fills the heart with blood and feeds it to the Monster Door. After the door is satisfied, the elevator door opens, indicating the puzzle is solved and the two are free to go. The viewer feels relieved that someone as reliable and totally not suspicious as Naami is there by your side.

The core of my thesis is merging a retro horror-game aesthetic with hyper-femininity to reclaim women's sense of autonomy in animation by recontextualizing traditional feminine traits. Most media depict the 'girly girl' as vain, unintelligent, and basic. Someone who has not earned their agency. This correlates with how the interests of young girls are seen through similar lenses of lesser value. Instead, misogyny encourages both men and women to invest their me with traditional masculine, interests/fields/appearance, which are more respected and important in

society. This is especially relevant in horror movies, where the hyper-femme girl who is neither the 'succubus', 'femme fatale', or 'final girl' is treated to be insignificant and weak—the victim.

This is all exemplified through Digital Girl World's main character Naami. A smiley and sweet feminine girl, with an 'off-side'. The goal for the future is to create more episodes where Naami's true nature gets revealed before it is too late for the viewer to do anything about it. Therefore, crowning the girly Naami as undefeated, forever more. In the plot of the teaser, after the viewer

Thesis Speech

- **Introduce yourself**

Hi, my name is Alishba Rahim. I am an illustration major and an international student. And I'm going to talk about the film you just watched: Digital Girl World,

- **Project summary (what it is)**

The Digital Girl World that was shown today is a teaser and trial episode to see how the visuals, animation, and story could come together. The teaser centers around a mythic, antagonistic, hyperfeminine young girl, named Naami. In the film, you see Naami be deceptively sweet with an edge of unease like she is secretly mocking you. Throughout the rest of the story, she manipulates the viewer, leading to the viewer's demise.

This all starts because the viewer is transported through a bizarre, liminal space version of PNCA, with only an unassuming Nami as an ally. The viewer must solve a puzzle from each floor of PNCA, starting from the 6th floor, where they spawned, to progress down to the lobby, where the exit is.

The genre is a psychological horror with visual novel elements, originally, I had intended for it to be animated as a point-and-click adventure game. However, due to time constraints and sudden life events that I will mention later in the presentation, I made a lot of creative decisions.

-**What your goals were**

When I proposed in the Spring, my thesis was **Merging RETRO HORROR GAME aesthetic with HYPER-FEMININITY in order to reclaim women's sense of autonomy in animation by recontextualizing traditional feminine traits.**

Most media depict the 'girly hyperfeminine girl' as vain, unintelligent, and basic. Someone who has not earned their agency.

This correlates with how the interests of young girls are seen through similar lenses of lesser value. Instead, misogyny encourages both men and women to invest their time with traditional masculine, interests/fields/appearance, which are more respected and important in society. This is especially relevant in horror movies, where the hyper-femme girl who is neither the 'succubus', 'femme fatale', or 'final girl' is treated to be insignificant and weak. The victim.

My goal for this film was to push Naami's agency in her cute cruelty. While creating my film, I've come to realize that I cannot actualize the narrative and visual intended effect of my thesis at this moment. I still have to push the retro horror visuals and flesh out the intricacies of Naami's character. Moreover, the animation needs to be tightened to heighten the effect of Naami's words and actions. My film today was a good first pass at the potential of the aesthetic effects I am trying to create.

Moreover, my previous goals were to create 12 short TikTok-length episodes but as I began writing the script, I realized I was not proficient enough to compact a story with complexity in small shots and little sentences. It was an enlightening learning experience that animating just one episode would highlight the actual length of production and outcome.

- **Personal**

These themes of the hyper-fem and reclamation of autonomy are important to me because as a fem-presenting woman who has felt powerless her whole life, I wanted to create a narrative that celebrates the camp of the hyper-fem alongside the unapologetic desire for power that only a horror narrative can give.

In the horror genre, the narrative has typical tropes that usually lead to the demise or trauma of its characters. For me, I want to reclaim control over a situation (like a horror story) in a way where I can't lose nor do I have to change my aesthetic presentation to come out on top.

Ironically, my final semester here at PNCA really challenged my mental strength.

My status as an international student is precarious at best and unjust at worst. I am constantly advocating for my right to live in this country, to feed myself, and to solely fund tuition and housing while being limited in what I can legally do as well as my limited resources because I am labeled an alien. I have had to work twice as hard to be exceptional enough that legally I become more than an alien with a visa. That all proved to be difficult when personal circumstances that posed a safety to me came in the way of achieving what I wanted out of my thesis.

I wouldn't say I flippantly took control over my life like Naami would have but I always end up rising to the occasion, which is what being fueled by my survivalism does to a person.

- **Process**

The process of putting together my short film began with creating an outline for all the previously intended 12 episodes. I know the beats of the story. The core narrative points that allow Naami to attain power from her next victim. I began scoping out every floor of PNCA to brainstorm where a good shot of Naami and the viewer would be and what puzzles I could create referencing the material on every floor. I began this research in the summer. However as mentioned earlier, I was and am tormented by a life-threatening problem and that made me lose my productivity in the summer. I was at least able to take satisfactory photos of the 5th floor.

Here is the before and after of a background photo example. I created a preset in Photoshop of adjustment layers. I wanted to push the contrast and low-res effect that the pasteurization effect gave. I chose contrasting colors of orange and blue to create separation and visual interest. The lighter colors are also meant to note that Naami and the viewer are out of danger (for now).

Furthermore, I upped the contrast and pushed the values of the images on the 6th floor. I wanted to lean on ghoulish colors like green and purple for the audience to immediately connote a sense

of creepiness and danger. Since I had taught myself how to create a custom preset filter in Photoshop editing 70 images became a less daunting task. Next in the process was editing all the photos together, so that they could be sped up or slowed down. The timing aspect of editing was very time-consuming.

After editing all the images and doing the initial timing, my mentor advised me to do a storyboard of the many shots Naami will appear. The process really helped me break down the dialogue into what exact pose. Breaking the dialogue down to smaller and smaller sentences helped in the long run when animating. It would be far more intimidating to lip-sync a large voice file than a smaller one.

One of my biggest challenges was having to animate on Spine when I had been rusty in its mechanics for about longer than 6 months. I created art for Naami's Puppet in the Spring semester, during my 'Animating for Games' class. I learned the basics of attaching bones to the puppets and how to break down artwork so it makes sense when animating. While challenging, I had chosen to have Naami be a rigged puppet, to give off that eerie 'doll' feeling but also I believe it would save more time. And it did. I would have been able to animate all 21 shots of both Naami and the Monster door in a much shorter time frame if I had animated on hand. Spine is also forgiving in the sense that I can fix my animation mistakes because the illustrated character is rigged and keyframed to my convenience.

My mentor Rob worked hard on setting up Naami's puppet to have the perspective bone, IK constraints, and any other ambitious needs for a 2D puppet to move in a 3D way. His willingness to let me be uncertain and to ask continuous questions helped me be more confident and intuitive with the program when it proved to be less intimidating with trial and error. As I began my 21-shot animation marathon, I found myself just getting more confident in my understanding of the principles of animation. As mentioned before, I am an illustration major and have only taken 4 animation classes in my entirety here at PNCA.

So, I am satisfied with how expressive and decent the animations came out, despite them needing some polish.

Editing the timing and different layered animation of the art assets/ text box and text animation proved to be tedious and difficult as After Effects could not handle that many animation layers and would slow down and lag enough when using the larger Mac computers in the editing station. Ultimately, the lag in editing is the reason some shots may go too quick or too slow.

I did my final compositing in Premiere Pro so I could focus on including sound without having to worry about lag from After Effects. I wanted to include some transition effects between Nami's sprites from Premiere Pro but nothing seemed to work, I'd had to look more into visual novel animation to get a better idea of the techniques for possible future episodes.

I Illustrated the art assets in Clip Studio Paint and Photo Shop. I find that drawing freestyle is best within Clip Studio and Editing my art is preferred in Photoshop, the constant back and forth of passing art between both programs in this process has made me more proficient with them. I have web or vaporwave frames to border Naami and the movie to call back to my conceptual

research of merging reality and virtuality to create a sense of dissonance as that is the core of Naami's character. I also attempted to make organs look pixelated/ low res but still kept that grotesque detailed quality to them, moving forward, I believe I would want the background to look more like organ art for possible future episodes.

- **Creative influences**

Onto my feminine creative influences, Molly Moon, a TikTok influencer and adult content creator, pays homage to the point-and-click adventure game, Harvester (1996), by utilizing a low-res visual style.

Moon appears as a hyper-feminine strange entity, inserting pre-established choices for the viewer to click on and moving the mouse to point and click.

Her acting in the video is immersive, displaying herself as naive and deceptively sweet while maintaining a creepy grin. Her feminine appearance contains all the horror of being 'cute' and 'unharming,' leading the viewer to follow her throughout the narrative. The way Moon carries herself with gleefulness and sweetness was the inspiration for Naami's character acting.

Danganronpa: When I began putting all the elements of a visual style game together, I was picturing the editing to be how the games do it. The text box is personalized to each character and there are speedy and quirky transitions animations between characters that allow the still sprites of the character to be timed and emotive despite the lack of animation. Going forward, I will reference closely to the editing style of the games. I also believe that it may be easier to tell the point-and-click/ visual style game as a story if I could start it off as an actual game. Like figuring out the game mechanics in the RPG maker program.

- **Research and Theory**

Throughout my research, I have discovered that the retro-horror aesthetic is intimidating because it is from a time when VHS and low-poly models and backgrounds are nostalgic.

On a theoretical approach, subverting nostalgia into fear effectively contrasts unassuming hyper-femininity. My intention is for the docileness associated with femininity to be subverted just like the nostalgia of VHS and low poly. While I did touch on low-res and VHS aesthetics, I would like to push it more in future episodes.

The vaporwave aesthetic utilizes distorted old internet designs to create a dream-like state that blurs the lines between reality and virtuality. The world of Digital Girl World is a space between reality and the digital space of the internet, as when the viewer is transported into the limited space version of PNCA, there are glitches and motifs of early 2000s internet iconography. Such as window bars, a mouse arrowhead, error messages, and loading screens. Through the 'Venus Flytrap method, Nami's expression of femininity is promoted without conforming to the typical horror trope. The bizarre and nostalgic imagery of the vaporwave aesthetic encourages this expression.

- **Future**

In my proposal, I would like to see this existing as a web series, it fits the aesthetic and medium. Especially because short animated horror videos are on trend right now. I only hope that my work can break the mold of dozens of the same ideas out there. That is why I hope to perfect the aesthetic effect of my thesis statement, to ensure that my visual language is strong, relevant, and innovative.

In my Advanced Illustration 2 class, we were tasked to create pieces for our thesis. I made two promotional works. A poster and postcard, this process and the class's assignments helped solidify my artist and portfolio branding. I made logos after the vaporwave/ glitch iconography from Digital Girl World. This is good for me because my ideal creative space would be to work for an indie horror game studio.

While Digital Girl World does solely exist on the internet, I would like to create gallery spaces like this one that merge the digital effects of hyper-reality, surrealism, uncanniness, and horror into the real world. After all, that is Naami's goal to escape her Digital Girl World and make friends with all of you instead.

Thank you.

FINAL RESEARCH DOSSIER

ALISHBA RAHIM

MAY 10, 2023

RESEARCH FOR A CREATIVE PRACTICE

Kate McCallum

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THESIS IDEAS

more specific lens
horror game - Pixel, low res,
"puppet combo"
"RRG Horror"

Early 2000's
aesthetic
weirdcore. (gore?)
internetcore

Femininity

"Jennifer's body" feminine rage. Uber femininity

Contrasting visuals of cute and scary + horror



RESEARCH FOR THESIS

- History → Examples from past works analyze the ~~re~~ how its done
- Theory → The psychological themes on why its cool
- Method → The technical aspects and how it works together
- Effect → The psychological/emotional effect
- Visuals → Low pixel, static, bright colors, contrast
- Narrative → Femininity, empowerment? malice?
- Sound → To enhance visuals. Sound are ^{imp} TikTok
- Simplicity → Focusing on the imp stuff
- Audience → Major audience opinion.
- Success → How mainstream it is
- Political narrative → Connect it to feminism
- Case studies → Articles, blogs about ^{this} topic
- Multimedia → analog, videogame, animation,
- Fashion → aesthetic, personal identity
- Autobiographical → about ~~meeee~~.

TERMS TO FIND INFO

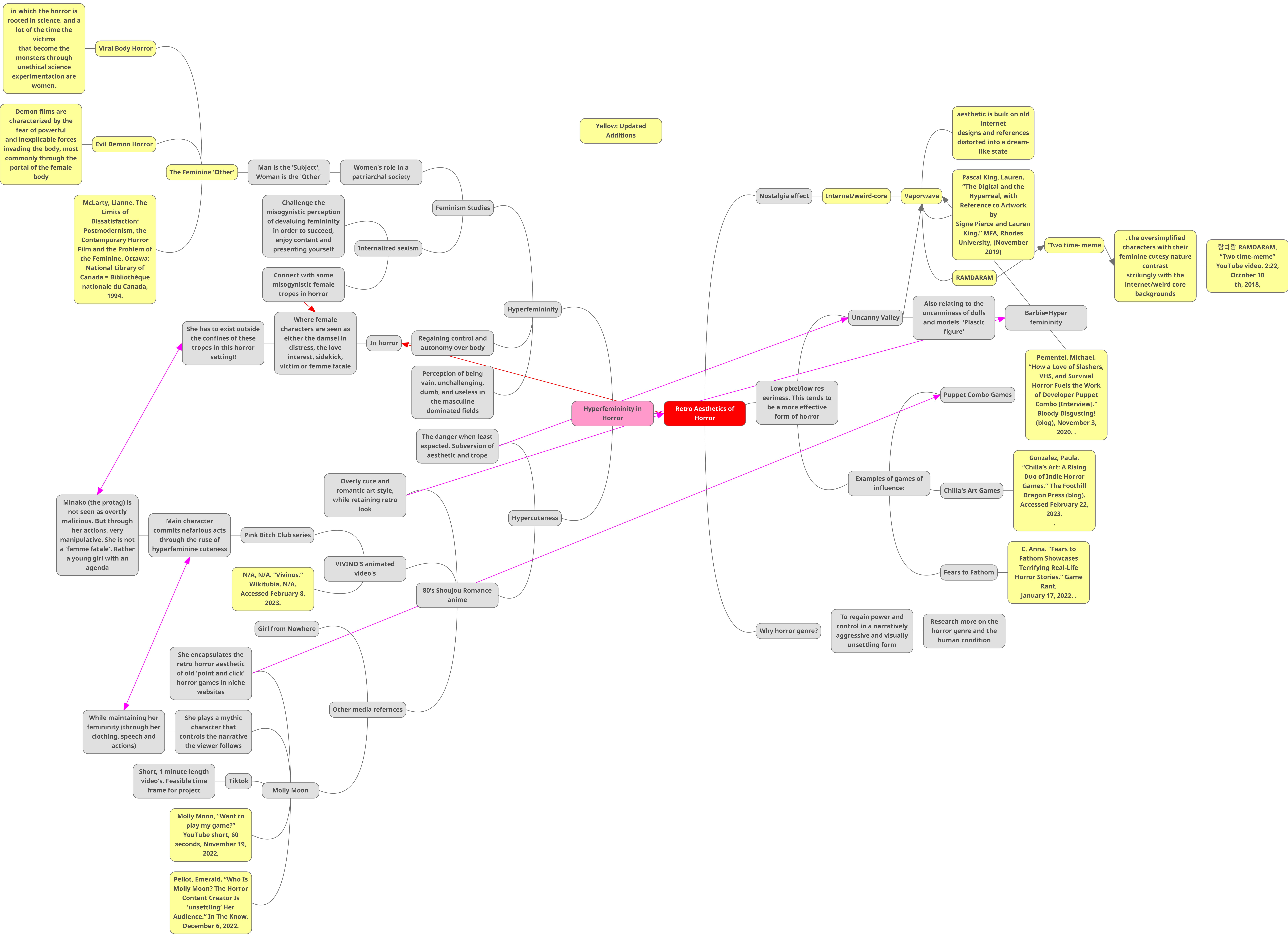
- Point and Click adventure game
- Pixel horror game. ~~RPG~~ RPG
- Puppet Combo (horror game company)

Indie horror

Feminine horror → "Gone Girl"
"Jennifer's body"

Research question

What are the effects of merging horror, retro game aesthetic with ultra femininity. An insight about traditional femininity and feminism as a whole



Updated Bibliography

Hyper femininity

- Francis, Becky, Louise Archer, Julie Moote, Jen De Witt, and Lucy Yeomans. "Femininity, Science, and the Denigration of the Girly Girl." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38, no. 8 (November 17, 2017): 1097–1110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2016.1253455>.

The article explores how and why the 'girly girl' is recurrently unable to practice and engage in 'masculine' subjects, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The study shows that 41% of girls and 57% of boys agreed that girly women are not interested in the field, it was noted that that mindset is primarily the cause of social perception and stereotyping, rather than physical or mental capabilities. A small percentage of boys claimed that the 'girly girl' is focused on their aesthetic and glamour, meaning they would not be willing to get their hands dirty in such labor demanding field.

The discernment of feminine characteristic traits is seen as vain, unchallenging, and most importantly useless when considered with the perception of the very masculine science fields, shifting the writer's focus to explore the complexity of gender deconstruction and heteroglossia. This study is relevant to my thesis to recontextualize the image that hyper-feminine women are intelligent/capable and laborious while still maintaining their girliness.

Retro Horror Aesthetic

- **C, Anna. "Fears to Fathom Showcases Terrifying Real-Life Horror Stories." *Game Rant*, January 17, 2022. <https://gamerant.com/fears-to-fathom-real-life-horror-stories-video-game-adaptation/>.**

This article summarizes and highlights the contemporary indie horror game: *Fears to Fathom*. This video game uses the low-poly retro horror that is trending nowadays in the indie horror sphere and is a relevant aesthetic to my thesis when combining it with hyper-femininity. Interestingly, these stories from the game are based on real-life events. I am interested in this fact as I have been contemplating using true crime as a narrative slate for my thesis.

- **Gonzalez, Paula. "Chilla's Art: A Rising Duo of Indie Horror Games." *The Foothill Dragon Press* (blog). Accessed February 22, 2023. <https://foothilldragonpress.org/277753/a-latest/chillas-art-a-rising-duo-of-indie-horror-games/>.**

Chilla's Arts games is another low-res, low-poly indie horror game. Its development team is based in Japan, which is significant as many of my creative influences are from the Eastern region. *Chilla's Art* games are especially effective in creating a slow burn and subtle narrative, another theme that is like my other creative influences (RDR's works)

- **Kurland, Daniel. "In the '90s, 'Harvester' Explored and Condemned the 'Dangers' of Video Game Violence." *Bloody Disgusting!* (blog), May 17, 2018.**

<https://bloody-disgusting.com/editorials/3498905/90s-harvester-explored-condemned-dangers-video-game-violence/>.

The visuals of the game 'Harvester' really take advantage of the low graphic texture to create something grotesque and uncanny. Its point-and-click game style is a design choice replicated in Molly Moon's TikTok videos (an important artistic influence)

- **LVL3. "Ville Kallio," August 19, 2021.** <https://lvl3official.com/ville-kallio/>.

This is a one-on-one interview with multi-media artist, Ville Kallio. He exaggerates the primitive, proto-3-D environments, to establish a visual peculiarity that is unique in the horror genre. The immediate juxtaposition of eye-straining visuals and the horror genre leaves the viewer confused but intrigued by the new and strange development. Not only that, Kallio tends to emphasize the grotesqueness in flesh and skin within his character or background design for these horror games, stating that ideas of overgrowing and disgusting mutation conflict with people's innate priority to stay 'clean' and 'healthy' as derailing from those characteristics would deem one immoral or 'other.'

- **Pementel, Michael. "How a Love of Slashers, VHS, and Survival Horror Fuels the Work of Developer Puppet Combo [Interview]." *Bloody Disgusting!* (blog), November 3, 2020.** <https://bloody-disgusting.com/interviews/3639670/interview-love-slashers-vhs-survival-horror-fuels-work-developer-puppet-combo/>.

The Puppet Combo games emphasize its retro age by having the narrative be set in the 90s. It makes use of the VHS tape filter and brings attention to the

technological significance of retro aesthetics and contemporary aesthetics (Vaporwave). This game also makes use of its low poly design but has a more cheesy-slasher story than a slow build, psychological one. It is still relevant to have all these choices in the horror genre when I am so unsure about the content of my narrative.

Creative Influences

- **Molly Moon, “Want to play my game?” YouTube short, 60 seconds, November 19, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qR3Qgmk9Tho>**

Molly Moon plays her role as the hyper-feminine strange entity that influences the player's story by inserting pre-established choices to click at and since it's a video, the action of moving the mouse to point and click is already animated beforehand. Her feminine appearance contains all this horror to be 'cute' and 'unharming', causing the viewer to follow her throughout the story, and eventually their doom. This content creative is important for my research as the character archetype Moon plays, and the retro visuals she infers are my main source of inspiration for how I want to construct the narrative of my thesis.

- **Netflix Philippines, “Cute but Deadly! Nanno and Her Sweet Revenge. Rewind: Girl From Nowhere. Netflix” YouTube video, 13:42, January 14th, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeDdVRd5KIs>**

Each episode of the show premieres Nanno in a different private school with a new game of manipulation to force her victims to face their wrongdoings. Nanno

is depicted as desirable, beautiful, young, and cute which offsets all the heinous crimes she has committed. Her elusiveness and lack of humanity absolve her of the guilt, only caring about the calculated outcome she has premeditated in every episode.

She subverts the trope of Viral Body Horror by not having her body become associated with sex, illness, and death. Even though she has been in all those scenarios, there is a disassociation because she is not a victim of the Viral Body Horror. Which is something I want to achieve through my character for my thesis. I feel as though the strengths of Nanno's character come from her expressions, body language, mannerisms, and dialogue. It helps break down the characteristics of what makes her so successful into a checklist of what I need to do to build my character.

The Concept of the 'Other'

- **McLarty, Lianne. The Limits of Dissatisfaction: Postmodernism, the Contemporary Horror Film and the Problem of the Feminine. Ottawa: National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1994.**

This article explores the concept of the 'Viral Body Horror' (where the source of threat is in science) and 'Evil Demon Horror' (where the source of threat is in the supernatural) in old horror films. Especially in how it exploits the female characters in these stories, when both these concepts rely on the female body to be vulnerable to invasion and destruction. Their possession or mutation disrupts the equilibrium of the heteronormative household, where the female character represents the 'home'. When the possessed female character can no longer serve

her function as the homemaker, she is not 'normal' anymore, she has become the 'other' (which is anything outside white, abled cis heteronormativity).

This is imperative to my thesis, as I wish to subvert the notion that a woman becoming an 'other' figure is a negative thing. I want to reclaim the narrative where once women were the main force of the story (by being possessed) but they do not get defeated in the end. As to not allow the heteronormative equilibrium to restart.

Vaporwave (Internet/weird core)

- Pascal King, Lauren. "The Digital and the Hyperreal, with Reference to Artwork by Signe Pierce and Lauren King." MFA, Rhodes University, (November 2019) <https://commons.ru.ac.za/vital/access/services/Download/vital:38688/SOURCE1>.

This research is relevant to my thesis, as it highlights the effect of combining vaporwave and femininity through the 'Venus Fly trap' method that forces the viewer to engage with the blatant personalized expression of femininity that fit no standard other than for its existence. The idea of 'Venus Fly trapping' may seem devious to those who feel threatened by outward displays of sexualized femininity, but in a world where women are invariably demonized regardless of how they choose to express their femininity, reclaiming femininity and employing it within the artistic practice as a means of subversion, is a justified response to patriarchy.

While searching for academic articles about weird/ internet core, I discovered that the aesthetic is called 'Vapourwave' in more academic settings, and in many

ways was the father of what weird/ internet core is today. The use of the vaporwave aesthetic promotes that expression with its bizarre and nostalgic imagery. Technology is associated with intelligence and importance, and when hyper-femininity is combined with those connotations within the vaporwave aesthetic, it creates a bizarre disconnect.

Those who are uncomfortable with change and new ideas would be greatly unnerved by the combination of hyper-femininity and vaporwave/retro horror game aesthetic.

- 램다람 RAMDARAM, “Two time-meme” YouTube video, 2:22, October 10th, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= LLCz1FCWrY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLCz1FCWrY)

The content of the video consists of the protagonist Daram being illustrated in various scenarios: alone, at school, in different outfits, while other characters acquainted with her flitter through within in their own illustration between Daram’s ones. The internet browser window framing the character briefly dissociates the viewer from the video, as it highlights the fact that the characters in the video are from the internet and maybe they are aware of their 2-D presence when the (Vapourwave) internet core is so overtly present. The use of the internet core and its freedom to break the 4th wall speaks volumes about character agency and control, which are significant themes to my narrative regarding hyper-femininity.

History Of Hyper femininity in Japan

- Azzi, Amanda. “Little Girl: The Weaponization of Infantilized and Robotized (Hyper)Femininity in Postwar Japanese Popular Culture,” 2021. <http://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/42748>.

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The article delves into how in the wake of Japan's defeat in World War II, the country turned to animanga as a way to express its trauma and rebuild its psyche. Kawaii culture is used as an escape from the violence and harsh realities of the world, kawaii is a sensibility that encompasses global Japanese girl culture and has become an important figure in the realm of animanga. The misogyny perpetuated by popular anime reveals Japan's still apparent underlying shame of becoming 'emasculated' by the U.S, transferring that abuse onto the marginalized group of people. Once again, I want to reclaim that sexist writing to something more productive and effective in reframing victimhood, without sexualizing and infantilizing hyper femininity.

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Research Question

The original:

What are the effects of merging horror, retro game aesthetics with ultra-femininity? An insight about traditional femininity and feminism as a whole

Rewritten:

Can merging horror, retro game aesthetic with hyper femininity reclaim women's sense of autonomy in the media? An insight of recontextualizing traditional feminine traits that were devalued in a narrative that causes an unnerving fear.

The focus of my thesis is to investigate why young girls and the interests of young girls hold no cultural capital in our patriarchal society. Especially, since in modern society, a universal experience for adolescent girls is to steer towards masculine interests to not be ridiculed or seen as 'basic'. As those adolescent girls were fed into the misogynistic narrative that feminine interests such as clothing, cosmetics, etc. are seen as unchallenging, boring, vain, and non-intelligent. There is a level of disregard and disrespect for traditionally feminine women, I presume this could be explained by the functionalist theory. Everyone in society has a role they must perform to keep civilization functioning properly. A culture that is heavily cis-gendered and straight claims that husbands are the breadwinner, wives are the homemaker and children go to school. Feminist theory dictates that women who are homemakers are seen as subhuman, an extension of their husbands. This is especially relevant in American culture

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around the 1920s-1930s, where advertisements would promote for women to look physically appealing while dealing with household chores, errands, and raising the children, as a prize for the husband to return home too. Not for the women themselves. Sometime after that, the narrative changed since traditional femininity is for men, therefore we must not participate in it, to not perpetuate the belief that women can only 'sit still and look pretty'. Thus, inferring young women with internalized misogyny look elsewhere for approval and a sense of self. It is also relevant to note that the power structure between men and women has always been in favor of men, this sense of superiority can arise in ugliness and abuse that shames and ridicules traditional wives who are feminine. In the past (and to this day) there are no active consequences of invoking physical, emotional, or psychological abuse on women. As they are depicted as 'weak' or 'unintelligent' because they don't physically present themselves with masculine attributes or attitudes. Values that have always held cultural capital to this day.

What I want to achieve with my art is to create a series of animated illustrations (or GIFS) that center around an adolescent girl as a mythic antagonist or antihero in retro, low-res horror visuals. I want the young girl to be dressed traditionally femininely, with a cutesy aesthetic. Mix in some 'weird core' and 'internet core' to invoke a sense of nostalgia by merging visuals of the past with more contemporary aesthetics. Most importantly, the young girl must have an air of mischief, malice, and deception to establish her agency against the viewer. To subvert expectations on her role in a horror narrative, where instead of being the love interest, damsel in distress, or femme fatale, she is a catalyst of destruction and holds no consequence for the damage she creates. Neither villain nor hero, more of a wild card. Where only the young girl herself can establish her role and in doing so holds power over the viewer in establishing predetermined gendered roles onto her. I will research more on the low res, low-poly, pixel art in horror games, and how and why they are so effective. Primarily analyze how these mediums are so successful in doing so much with so little. I wish for my animated gifs to be something akin to a point-

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and-click adventure, where the only direction and narrative are controlled by the young mythic girl who centers the viewer into her orbit and has them spinning in fearful circles.

In conclusion, I will research more on the theoretical effects of low-res horror visuals combined with a cutesy and bright aesthetic that invokes a delightful contrast. As well as find out more contextual history on internalized misogyny and women's role in society and the positives and negatives of how it is changing. I feel by having more information about that, can add more meat to my very vague narrative. I also hypothesize that it may be useful to investigate character tropes to create a checklist on how to successfully subvert expectations. Finally, the medium for my thesis may extend to a full animation or a series of moving illustrations, which will all depend on once the visual and narrative outlines have been decided.

Evolving position paper 2

Research Question:

Can merging a retro horror-game aesthetic with hyper-femininity reclaim women's sense of autonomy in visual media by recontextualizing traditional feminine traits?

Doing some more in-depth research on how hyper-femininity is viewed in sectors outside of media highlights the negative depiction of characteristics associated with hyper-femininity. Such as a lack of competency, weak-mindedness, unintelligence, and vanity, all traits that are seen as 'inferior'. It is especially relevant when superior traits tend to be associated with intelligence and strength, attributes that would only be available when not performing hyper-femininity. This is seen through the qualitative study conducted to discern students' opinions of the lack of hyperfeminine women in STEM fields (Francis et al, 2016). The article delves into the societal gender construction of identifying men as the 'Subject' and women as the 'Other'. Not only does this reinforce women's omnipresent subservience to men in social dynamics and gendered definitions, but it also isolates the woman from the same level of humanity as the man. Further reinforcing the lack of respect and agency a woman has for her existence and identity.

From a character trope point of view, the term 'other' refers to something abnormal/inhuman, and at times, because of its anomaly, the 'other' is antagonized. Usually the 'other' is referred to as some sort of monster, or an uncanny evil. This goes perfectly with how I want to portray the leading character in my visual media. Truly isolating women's stereotyped association with men through hyperbolizing the role of the 'inferior other' into something more sinister, allows

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hyper femininity to be reclaimed through the sheer chaos, rage, and malice from the cloak of being an 'uncanny evil'. To advance this aura of horrific otherness, I have magnified the design techniques in retro, low-resolution horror games. Multimedia artist and game designer Ville Kallio exaggerates the primitive, proto-3-D environments, to establish a visual peculiarity that is unique in the horror genre. Usually, the norm would be a rendered, darkened creepy area for the player to feel uneasy towards. However, Kallio subverts that expectation by prioritizing the use of bright neon primary colors within a horror narrative. The immediate juxtaposition of eye-straining visuals and the horror genre leaves the viewer confused but intrigued by the new and strange development. Not only that, Kallio tends to emphasize the grotesqueness in flesh and skin within his character or background design for these horror games, stating that ideas of overgrowing and disgusting mutation conflict with people's innate priority to stay 'clean' and 'healthy' as derailing from those characteristics would deem one immoral or 'other'.

Nowadays, indie horror games that tend to use low-resolution 3-D modeling are the most influential and inspiring. Such as Chilla's Art, Fears to Fathom, and Puppet Combo games. All different narratives and themes in horror take advantage of the viewers' familiarity with horror graphics to capitalize on their expectations, uneasiness, and nostalgia. Molly Moon (adult content creator and TikTok influencer) uses this low-res visual style, by paying homage to the point-and-click adventure game, 'Harvester'. The visual story shares Kallio's design of excessive gore contrasting with pixelated, semi-realistic render. Moon plays her role as the hyper-feminine strange entity that influences the player's (viewer) story by inserting pre-established choices to click at and since it's a video, the action of moving the mouse to point and click is already animated beforehand. The immersive aspect is Moon's acting in the video, she displays herself as naïve and deceptively sweet, however it very, very distinctively obvious that it is a ruse through how her voice is staticky high pitched, her squelching bug-eyed blink and malicious and creepy grin. However, her feminine appearance contains all this horror to be 'cute' and 'unharming' concluding the viewer to follow her throughout the narrative.

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Reading through the artist's explanations of grotesque visualization of flesh and fluid reminds me of my research on abject horror in SP22. I learned a lot of interesting analyses on the appeal and effectiveness of disgusting art. I will review my research from then and expand upon it in my thesis. The visual aesthetics of my thesis becomes more and more clear when I can include contextual information about how low-res game designs work so well with hyper-femininity. To progress further, I shall lay out a narrative, to be able to pick and choose what visuals I want to highlight in which section and why.

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Evolving Position Paper 3

Research Question:

Can merging a retro horror-game aesthetic with hyper-femininity reclaim women's sense of autonomy in visual media by recontextualizing traditional feminine traits?

Throughout my research, I have discovered that since visual media is a huge component of how I will incorporate my thesis into an artistic platform, it would make sense that I have gathered a handful of different aesthetics. Such as Hyper femininity, shojo manga, vaporwave, and retro horror game. Most importantly, gathering resources has revealed that my thesis of wanting to reclaim women's autonomy through merging hyper-feminine and low poly horror is a sentiment that I have recognized through many articles and studies. It is very satisfying to find out that the ideas in my head can be academically supported, thus making me confident of the goal of my thesis.

To elaborate, in *The Limits of Dissatisfaction: Postmodernism, the Contemporary Horror Film and the Problem of the Feminine* (Lianne McLarty, 1994), the concept of viral body horror comes up. A notion in which the horror is rooted in science, and a lot of the time the victims that become the monsters through unethical science experimentation are women.

Comparatively, in *The Digital and the Hyperreal, with Reference to Artwork by Signe Pierce and Lauren King* (Lauren Pascal King, 2019), the vaporwave aesthetic is built on old internet designs and references distorted into a dream-like state. Which furthermore disassociates reality and virtuality by exploiting the viewers' sense of nostalgia towards vaporwave and making it uncanny through its distorted weirdness. This is what Pascal King calls Hyperreality, and she combines hyper femininity through the mediums of installations and zines. Moreover, both vaporwave and viral body horror has roots in technology and science.

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And as I have learned from my first resource *Femininity, Sciences, and the Denigration of the Girly Girl*. (Francis Becky et al, 2017), there was a small percentage of young boys claiming that the 'girly girl' would not be willing to get her hands dirty in a labor and rational-intensive field.

Altogether, it is illuminating when the fear of 'viral body horror' and the uncanniness of 'vaporwave' combined with some aspect of femininity can become uncomfortable and off-putting in its unfamiliarity. It ties back to my initial thoughts of how young girls and the interest of young girls hold no cultural capital, in terms of the content they consume or the feminine interests they have. As there was always this devaluation of hyper-femininity and a value in traditional masculinity that is very much rooted in misogyny. The reason for this sexist ideation could be to ensure women won't hold autonomy in interests that were once catered to men for themselves.

As seen through McLarty's writing, the 'evil demon' horror movies typically involve the bodily invasion of the female victim. And a large percentage of the time, she is either the mother, the wife, the love interest, etc. The reason there is this devastating horror attached to these possessions is because the women represent the home, and when taken away so does the comfort and security that the male protagonist (and viewer) initially had. Additionally, it reduces a woman's role in the story to her maternity and reproduction. Moving forward, I have expressed to research more on my Asian creative influences because a lot of them share the vision of my thesis. I predict I will learn more about character tropes in that resource summary, as there seem to be more diverse feminine tropes in Eastern media in comparison to the West. Though, it would be intuitive to contrast media from a geographic point of view.

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Evolving Position Paper 4

Can merging a retro horror-game aesthetic with hyper-femininity reclaim women's sense of autonomy in visual media by recontextualizing traditional feminine traits?

The focus of my thesis is to investigate the relationship between contrasting aesthetics of hyper-femininity and retro horror. The medium I will choose to do this is the visual format, whether it be moving illustrations or an animated short with limited movement. The content will center around a mythic, antagonistic, hyperfeminine young girl that in some way manipulates the viewer throughout the story, perhaps to the viewer's demise. The purpose of this is to reclaim hyper-femininity through low-res and low-poly aesthetics, as this combination creates an uncanny effect through an irregular combination of aesthetics. As well as the retro low-rendered background and foreground visuals of the juxtaposed alarmingly with saturated and bright colors, associated with femininity. The horror genre is an effective contrast, as it supports my thesis's purpose of reclamation. The subversion of typical horror tropes for women in media invokes a sense of power from a genre that is built upon exploiting the audience's fears.

Throughout my research from my resource summaries, I have discovered many theoretical concepts that I have identified within my creative influences, such as 'Hyperreality' and the 'Venus Fly Trap' method, both related to the use of the vaporwave aesthetic. According to *The Digital and the Hyperreal, with Reference to Artwork by Signe Pierce and Lauren King* (Lauren Pascal King, 2019), the vaporwave aesthetic is built on old internet designs and references distorted into a dream-like state. This furthermore disassociates reality and virtuality by exploiting the viewers' sense of nostalgia towards vaporwave and making it uncanny through its distorted weirdness. This is what Pascal King calls hyper-reality, and she discerns that merging that with hyper-femininity will reclaim feminine interests and characteristics. She does this by using the 'Venus Flytrap' method, which forces the viewer to engage with the blatant personalized expression of femininity that fit no standard other

than for its existence. And the hyper-reality from the vaporwave aesthetic promotes that expression with its bizarre and nostalgic imagery.

Technology is associated with intelligence and importance, and when hyper-femininity is now combined with those connotations within the vaporwave aesthetic, it creates a bizarre disconnect. According to the article, *Femininity, Sciences, and the Denigration of the Girly Girl* (Francs Becky et al, 2017), stereotypically the 'girly girl' is 'not fit for technological and laborious inducive subjects like STEM. As hyper-femininity is viewed in areas outside of media tends to be associated with characteristics such as incompetence, weakmindedness, vanity, and unintelligence. All traits are seen as 'inferior'. It is especially relevant when masculinity combined with technology has stereotypical connotations of strength, confidence, and authority. This is seen through the qualitative study conducted to discern students' opinions of the lack of hyperfeminine women in STEM fields (Francis et al, 2016).

The article also reinforces the societal gender construction of identifying men as the 'Subject' and women as the 'Other'. Not only does this reinforce women's omnipresent subservience to men in social dynamics and gendered definitions, but it also isolates the woman from the same level of humanity as the man. Further reiterating the lack of respect and agency a woman has for her existence and identity. Though, it is relevant to note that for my thesis I want to subvert the 'othering' of the female identity, not erase it. It would be more impactful for femininity to have control over its 'otherness' and really take advantage of the 'inhuman' or 'hyper-real' characteristic associated with the othering horror, to thrive from its dissociation from the norm.

To achieve this, the concept of the 'other' also works as a horror archetype and would be effective to merge with the vaporwave and retro horror aesthetic. Comparatively, the nostalgia factor of the vaporwave aesthetic revels in the same effect that the retro horror game aesthetic does. It lures the viewer into a false sense of security by challenging the familiarity of things from the past. Those who are uncomfortable with change and new ideas

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would be greatly unnerved by the combination of hyper-femininity and vaporwave/retro horror game aesthetic.

The article, *The Limits of Dissatisfaction: Postmodernism, the Contemporary Horror Film and the Problem of the Feminine* (Lianne McLarty, 1994) explore the concept of the 'Viral Body Horror' (where the source of the threat is in science) and 'Evil Demon Horror' (where the source of threat is in the supernatural) in old horror films. Especially in how it exploits the female characters in these stories, when both these concepts rely on the female body to be vulnerable to invasion and destruction. Their possession or mutation disrupts the equilibrium of the heteronormative household, where the female character represents the 'home'. When the possessed female character can no longer serve her function as the homemaker, she is not 'normal' anymore, she has become the 'other' (which is anything outside white, abled cis heteronormativity). This is imperative to my thesis, as I wish to subvert the notion that a woman becoming an 'other' figure is a negative thing. I want to reclaim the narrative where once women were the main force of the story (by being possessed) but they do not get defeated in the end. As to not allow the heteronormative equilibrium to restart.

To advance this aura of horrific otherness, I have magnified the design techniques in retro, low-resolution horror games. Multimedia artist and game designer Ville Kallio (2021) exaggerates the primitive, proto-3-D environments, to establish a visual peculiarity that is unique in the horror genre. Usually, the norm would be a rendered, darkened creepy area for the player to feel uneasy towards. However, Kallio destabilizes that expectation by prioritizing the use of bright neon primary colors within his tactical first-person shooter game called, *Cruelty Squad* (2021). The immediate juxtaposition of eye-straining visuals and the horror genre leaves the viewer confused but intrigued by the new and strange development. Not only that, as stated in *LVL3* (2021), Kallio tends to emphasize the grotesqueness in flesh and skin within his character or background design for these horror games that ideas of overgrowing and disgusting mutation conflict with people's innate

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priority to stay 'clean' and 'healthy' as derailing from those characteristics would deem one immoral or 'other'.

Nowadays, indie horror games that tend to use low-resolution 3-D modeling are the most influential and inspiring. *Puppet Combo* (2012 onward) is a game development studio that specializes in retro-style graphics and intense, often disturbing, gameplay. The effectiveness of Puppet Combo games can be evaluated in several ways. Firstly, the indie game company has gained a significant following among horror game enthusiasts. Many players appreciate the unique style and atmosphere of Puppet Combo games, which often feature gruesome violence and disturbing imagery. They also focus on creating a sense of fear and tension in players when the studio prioritizes the visual storytelling through retro graphics and low-fi sound effects creating an immersive experience that can be genuinely frightening. Players are forced to rely on their instincts and wits to survive in these games, rewarding their initial fear and dread by acknowledging the player's intuition to lead the protagonist to a good ending. This could prove to be significant in my project from a narrative perspective, it would be productive to not invest as much time and energy on a 'lore' or 'mystery' of the story, as that would confuse the viewer on what they are supposed to acknowledge as intriguing.

Furthermore, Molly Moon (adult content creator and TikTok influencer) uses this low-res visual style, by paying homage to the point-and-click adventure game, *Harvester* (1996). The visual story shares Kallio's design of excessive gore contrasting with pixelated, semi-realistic render. Moon plays her role as the hyper-feminine strange entity that influences the player's (viewer) story by inserting pre-established choices to click at and since it's a video, the action of moving the mouse to point and click is already animated beforehand. The immersive aspect is Moon's acting in the video, she displays herself as naïve and deceptively sweet, however it very, very distinctively obvious that it is a ruse through how her voice is staticky high pitched, her squelching bug-eyed blink and malicious and creepy grin. However, her feminine appearance contains all this horror to be 'cute' and 'unharming' concluding the viewer to follow her throughout the narrative.

Like Molly Moon, the Netflix series, *Girl from Nowhere* (2018) is a solid reference in how to construct a powerful mythic character. While the setting of the series is not associated with retro horror, it does overturn typical horror tropes connected with female characters. Moreover, each episode of the show premieres Nanno in a different private school with a new game of manipulation to force her victims to face their wrongdoings. Nanno is depicted as desirable, beautiful, young, and cute which offsets all the heinous crimes she has committed. Her elusiveness and lack of humanity absolve her of the guilt, only caring about the calculated outcome she has premeditated in every episode. She subverts the trope of Viral Body Horror by not having her body become associated with sex, illness, and death. Even though she has been in all those scenarios, there is a disassociation because she is not a victim of the Viral Body Horror. Which is something I want to achieve through my character for my thesis. I feel as though the strengths of Nanno's character come from her expressions, body language, mannerisms, and dialogue. It helps break down the characteristics of what makes her so successful into a checklist of what I need to do to build my character.

In conclusion, looking at different aesthetics and how they are connected (vaporwave/retro horror) and combining them with the core contrasting aesthetic of hyper femininity creates an unsettling disconnect for the viewer. The reason for this stems from a plethora of conceptual theories, such as hyperreality, viral body horror, and the 'other'. The main effect I want to construe is for my hyper-feminine character of mine to be in control of the narrative and the contrasting aesthetics solidify her status as the authoritative figure through subversion, deeming it a successful reclamation of traditional feminine autonomy.

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Creative Influence Summary I

An artist I look at for a lot of visual narrative inspiration is the animator by the name of 'VIVINOS'. She is a South Korean animator on YouTube, and many of her popular videos are short animations of the horror genre. Her works take inspiration from the anime style of the 80s, as well as the shoujo aesthetic. Her videos are short and don't rely on extreme animation to convey their story, focusing on the illustration, editing, and soundtrack. VIVINOS is very successful in doing so much, with so little. And I presume a lot of it has to do with the pacing within her stories. Her most popular video, titled, 'Suki Suki Daisuki♡,' focuses on building tension, through the way characters react and interact with one another, implicitly and indirectly. Making the viewer and the protagonist feel like voyeurs as if they were not supposed to be there. Invoking that sense of uneasiness, that slowly builds till the release. Which primarily happens towards the end, as a big reveal. Usually, these big, shocking moments are quick and pass by in the blink of an eye, as a way of concealing the true nature of the video and story.

The cutesy, romantic art style also conceals the nefarious nature of the video. There is such an interesting relationship between combining the contrasting elements of the overly cute with the overly horrifying. Especially in a way that doesn't negate either theme, but instead works together to a unified effect of horror and unease. This is exactly what I want to portray through my thesis, in terms of combining hyper femininity with horror. While VIVINOS doesn't play with the retro horror aesthetic, (opting to work with the internet or web core aesthetic) I found other sources that are in the same realm of hyperfeminine horror. Molly Moon is a content creator on TikTok that efficiently combines the style and mechanics of retro point-and-click adventure games through a mythic character she plays. The character in question is presented with deceptive innocence, influencing the protagonist (viewer) to be guided through her disturbing and creepy story, to help her. When Molly Moon's character is usually the catalyst of whatever insane hijinks occur and that the protagonist is the victim of. I hypothesize that I can combine elements from both pieces of media to create something new and terrifying, I also want to focus on making my work short. Something like promotional work, a snippet, or a sneak peek, to spark interest for a full story that is not developed. This is effective in the way our society consumes media, through small, condensed videos that spam information in interesting and creative ways that leave an impact on the viewer for days to come. Further emphasizing the effect of doing a lot with so little.

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Since these artists are independent, new and niche, there isn't much research I can do on them, their inspiration and influence. I will focus on the aesthetics, styles and themes that they have presented within their video's. As I still want to combine it with the changing roles of women and their interests in society, finding a way to create metaphors of the topic I want to establish. There must be articles that go into the method and theory of shoujo and horror anime, as that is an artform I can find historical context for. Additionally, it would be effective to research old graphics horror game design, especially obscure games only found on the web.

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Creative Summary 2

Multimedia artist and game designer Ville Kallio exaggerates the primitive, proto-3-D environments, to establish a visual peculiarity that is unique in the horror genre. Usually, the norm would be a rendered, darkened creepy area for the player to feel uneasy towards. However, Kallio subverts that expectation by prioritizing the use of bright neon primary colors within his tactical first person shooter game called, 'Cruelty Squad' (2021). The immediate juxtaposition of eye-straining visuals and the horror genre leaves the viewer confused but intrigued by the new and strange development. Not only that, Kallio tends to emphasize the grotesqueness in flesh and skin within his character or background design for these horror games, stating that ideas of overgrowing and disgusting mutation conflict with people's innate priority to stay 'clean' and 'healthy' as derailing from those characteristics would deem one immoral or 'other'.

Nowadays, indie horror games that tend to use low-resolution 3-D modeling are the most influential and inspiring. Puppet Combo games (2012 onward) is a game development studio that specializes in retro-style graphics and intense, often disturbing, gameplay. The effectiveness of Puppet Combo games can be evaluated in several ways. Firstly, Puppet Combo games have gained a significant following among horror game enthusiasts. Many players appreciate the unique style and atmosphere of Puppet Combo games, which often feature gruesome violence and disturbing imagery. They also focus on creating a sense of fear and tension in players when the studio prioritizes the visual storytelling through the retro graphics and low-fi sound effects creates an immersive experience that can be genuinely frightening. Players are forced to rely on their instincts and wits to survive in these games, rewarding their initial fear and dread by acknowledging the player's intuition to lead the protagonist to a good ending. Which could prove to be significant in my project from a narrative perspective, it would be productive to not invest as much time and energy on a

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'lore' or 'mystery' of the story, as that would confuse the viewer on what they are supposed to acknowledge as intriguing. Instead a simple plot that the audience can already figure out from the get-go, so that they can stick around and award their sleuthing skills seeing how the rest of my project plays out.

All different narratives and themes in horror take advantage of the viewers' familiarity with horror graphics to capitalize on their expectations, uneasiness, and nostalgia. Molly Moon (adult content creator and TikTok influencer) uses this low-res visual style, by paying homage to the point-and-click adventure game, 'Harvester'. The visual story shares Kallio's design of excessive gore contrasting with pixelated, semi-realistic render. Moon plays her role as the hyper-feminine strange entity that influences the player's (viewer) story by inserting pre-established choices to click at and since it's a video, the action of moving the mouse to point and click is already animated beforehand. The immersive aspect is Moon's acting in the video, she displays herself as naïve and deceptively sweet, however it is very, very distinctively obvious that it is a ruse through how her voice is staticky high pitched, her squelching bug-eyed blink and malicious and creepy grin. However, her feminine appearance contains all this horror to be 'cute' and 'unharming', causing the viewer to follow her throughout the narrative.

Reading through Kallio's explanations of grotesque visualization of flesh and fluid reminds me of my research on abject horror in my Spring semester last year, here in PNCA. I learned a lot of interesting analyses on the appeal and effectiveness of disgusting art. I will review my research from then and expand upon it in my thesis. The visual aesthetics of my thesis becomes more and more clear when I can include contextual information about how lowres game designs work so well with hyperfemininity. To progress further, I have identified that it would be more significant to not focus on a fleshed out plot or lore surrounding my female character in her horror story. But rather the visuals and the aesthetics and through that let the viewer create their own presumptions and theories while being led through-out the narrative by my untrustworthy character.

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Creative Influence Summary 3

For this creative influence summary, I have decided to reference another independent South Korean YouTube animator by the handle of, 램다람 RAMDARAM, or RDR. Her style of animation is like one of VIVINO'S, another artist I look at for inspiration. RDR excels at selling a story through limited movement of her animation, she prioritizes editing and illustrating over fully-fledged animation, therefore making her music video's the most successful content on her channel. Her second most viewed music video is titled, *'Two time- meme'* (2018) has approximately 23 million views. A solid hypothesis for this success is the way RDR displays the subtle narrative within her video. A lot of the imagery and limited animation stay on screen for about five seconds then move on to the next imagery/minor animation until we reach the chorus of the song, where the main segment of animation repeats itself.

The content of the video consists of the protagonist Daram being illustrated in various scenarios: alone, at school, in different outfits, while other characters acquainted with her flitter through within in their own illustration between Daram's ones. At first glance you wouldn't immediately recognize that there is an intriguing narrative underneath the catchy song and colorful pictures, however through low and slow instrumental moments of the song, RDR allows herself to reveal something darker, as there are motions of Daram inflicting pain on another character, but the impact of the blow is off the frame, only displaying blood after each hit. The subtlety only slightly vexes the viewer, leaving them curious, rather than scared, but the audio doesn't allow the viewer to ponder on what they witnessed as they are once again affronted with the chorus for the third time. Repetition in music and video promotes the visual media to stick in the audience's head for long periods of time, making the video more memorable and familiar. And RDR's technique of essentially throwing a bunch of visual information at the viewer between 5-second intervals generate the audience to still be stimulated by the new content between the chorus repetition.

The art style is a more simplified version of the shoujo manga art style, the characters are small and cutesy but don't inherit the sparkling anime eyes or rendering you would see in

traditional Japanese anime, instead, there is a mix of Western influence within the style. Other than the fact that this is RDR's personal style, it also works from a marketing perspective. The lack of details on the characters and the background design, permit the character's individuality to shine through simplified iconography of their hair, clothes, facial features, etc. It also helps that every character shares the same build, their default body type allows fans to replicate it and embed their own character within the art style. Moreover, the oversimplified characters with their feminine cutesy nature contrast strikingly with the internet/weird core backgrounds. The internet browser window framing the character briefly dissociates the viewer from the video, as it highlights the fact that the characters in the video are from the internet and maybe they are aware of their 2-D presence when the internet core is so overtly present. It sort of breaks the 4th wall in a sense.

This is critical to my thesis because the editing and limited animation allow me to focus on all the aesthetics I have stacked up (hyper femininity, low-res retro horror, weird core, internet core) without worrying about constructing a fully articulated plot and character arc. Moreover, the use of the internet core and its freedom to break the 4th wall speaks volumes about character agency and control, which are significant themes to my narrative regarding hyper-femininity. For future resource studies, it would be helpful to find academic articles on why weird/ internet core is associated with cuteness and femininity. Does it recognize the power of combining horror with girliness? Will I come across the concept of the 'other' again? It is also interesting that Internet core visuals mostly consist of old Microsoft/ Internet Explorer tabs and window styles, which to many is nostalgic. I also wonder if I will find any relation between Internet core and low-res retro horror, solely on the idea that they both rely on nostalgia.

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Creative Influence Summary 4

Content Warning for SA

My final creative influence summary will focus on the character study of the mythic adolescent hyper-feminine girl that my narrative centers around. And through my research, I have found that the main antagonist/protagonist Nanno (played by Chicha/Kitty Amatayakul) from the Netflix series, *Girl From Nowhere* (2018) is the best reference source for this character study. The video I have cited is a compilation of all of Nanno's best and climactic moments that truly showcase how powerful and horrific she is. For context, *Girl from Nowhere* (2018) is set in Thailand and follows an enigmatic young girl named Nanno, she transfers to different private schools to expose the student's and faculty's lies, secrets, and hypocrisy.

Each episode of the show premieres Nanno in a different private school with a new game of manipulation to force her victims to face their wrongdoings. Nanno does this not as some karmic God (even though she is very much immortal, given how she dies and respawns multiple times in the show), but more so for her amusement. She finds that forcing morally black or grey deceitful people to come to self-actualization of their misdeeds being too late to repent is a

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hilarious and thrilling game. She is cunning and malicious but still carries herself through an air of cuteness and innocence that makes it so easy for her to blend into the many, hierarchal, status quo-oriented cliques of every school she attends, even as a sudden transfer student.

In the video, I will only reference a total of three scenes I feel are the most significant to dissecting Nanno's mystifying character. To reiterate, these scenes are the climax of the slow build plot of each episode. The first clip is Nanno tormenting the pedophilic teacher that blackmails students for sex, she projects a live feed of the teacher's 13-year-old daughter with an older boy about to copulate (it's more dubious than consensual). The composition of this scene places Nanno higher up, she is gracefully relaxed on top of an open window, looking down on the teacher who demands to know where his daughter is. Nanno taunts the man, claiming she will consider telling him if he gets down on his knees and begs. As he is about to get into position, Nanno from above, on top of her stoop cackles out a maniacal, malicious, and megalomaniacal laughter that echoes throughout the gymnasium. What makes this scene frightful, is that through Nanno's calm and calculated speech in contrast to the teacher's loud and desperate demands, Nanno's insane laughter is so unexpectedly high volume and callous that it cuts the tension with an even more unnerving tension. A constant, thrilling buildup of unpredictability that Nanno brings combined with her elegant and feminine posture, portrays an aura of power and self-assuredness that leaves her victims and the viewers following her every word and action.

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The second scene is surprisingly a bit more hectic than the first. The premise of that episode is that Nanno is a pretty and popular transfer student at the new school. A group of boys asks their female friends to get Nanno to attend their party so that they can get her inebriated and sexually assault her. The girls who are jealous of the attention Nanno gets, (as well as the fact that Nanno insults them) agree. Nanno is drugged and dragged upstairs to the house to be taken advantage of. The story escalates, during the mid-assault, Nanno reveals she is sober and causes the boy to panic. She begins to exclaim, taunt, and invite all the boys to rape her, bringing attention to their crime, and subverting the submissive, Asian girl stereotype.

The boy, stressed, confused, and ashamed of what is happening bludgeons Nanno to her death. Then, through mass panic and blackmail from the boy, he gets his friends to bury the body. Dark at night, they lay Nanno in her grave in an abandoned area, however, they find Nanno still alive as she continues to taunt them from her open grave. The assaulter not being able to take the madness anymore, bludgeons Nanno again with a shovel, only to cut to the next shot of Nanno standing a few feet ahead of him alive and well. The boy, negating all rationale of his actions, as the situation follows no logic goes to attack Nanno again, and this time his friends join in panicked tears, just wanting the insanity to end.

Once again, Nanno teleports behind them, monologuing about how she's had so much fun getting to know all of them, until one of the boys in confusion shouts out, "What the fuck is she?!", to which Nanno responds, "Nanno is Nanno. I told you before, but you wouldn't listen". The squad begins to book it and Nanno stands there exclaiming pleasantries about wanting to

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be better friends with a deceptively innocent tone that contrasts with the anxious, fear-ridden students. This is the first scene of the show that highlights Nanno's supernatural capabilities and her omnipresence, but even with these grand abilities all she uses to cause destruction is her silver tongue and feminine wiles.

Finally, the third segment opens with a teacher surrounded by a myriad of corpses. All students. The teacher is holding a gun, panting, and aiming it right at Nanno. The only survivor. Nanno bored and indifferent, grabs the barrel of the gun and pulls it towards her chest, challenging the teacher to shoot her. The teacher unnerved by Nanno's bold indifference hesitates and tries to rationale her decision to mass shoot the student body. Kind of like explaining yourself to a disappointed adult. Nanno asks for her reasoning to which the teacher with her unhinged mindset responds that all the students were destroying the educational system and their eradication will ensure the system's reformation. Nanno, who is not threatened by being held at gunpoint, moves and circles around the teacher, like a shark intimidating its prey. The teacher who is hyperventilating can only listen to Nanno as she manipulates her with a few cleverly chosen words. The enigmatic girl steps closer grabs the murderer's chin, and mutters that her arrogant belief that she committed genocide to protect the future is a lie she deluded herself into, and for that, she is truly the most pathetic.

The teacher screeches out, commanding Nanno to shut up. Ignoring the teacher's hysteria Nanno begins to leave the room, moving towards the screen. In the foreground, over her

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shoulder, you can witness the teacher muttering to herself, in denial of what she has done, and through that mental break, positions the gun to her chin and takes her own life. Nanno walks away, with a satisfied smirk on her face while she does her signature move of twirling her hair in a cunningly, coquettish way of another job well done. This climax of this clip truly encapsulates Nanno's ability to manipulate at any given moment, it is important to note that Nanno has technically never gotten her hands dirty, she is only the trigger.

Intriguingly, Nanno is depicted as desirable, beautiful, young, and cute which offsets all the heinous crimes she has committed. Her elusiveness and lack of humanity absolve her of the guilt, only caring about the calculated outcome she has premeditated in every episode. Just because she can. Just because she finds it fun. Moreover, the fact that she isn't directly responsible for the deaths distances any aspect of vulnerability. She subverts the trope of Viral Body Horror by not having her body become associated with sex, illness, and death. Even though she has been in all those scenarios, there is a disassociation because she is not a victim of the Viral Body Horror. If we are truly talking about karmic justice, it is irrelevant, as Nanno is unaffected by any of her misdeeds, and even through her obvious evilness, viewers do not see it that way.

Which is something I want to achieve through my character for my thesis. I feel as though the strengths of Nanno's character come from her expressions, body language, mannerisms, and dialogue. It helps break down the characteristics of what makes her so successful into a

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checklist of what I need to do to build my character. Additionally, a lot of the episode plots were based on actual cases in Thailand, while that is horrific, it opens the possibility of how I would construct my narrative. I am hoping that through my next resource summary, I can gain more information about female gender roles in Asian communities, reference back to Nanno's subversion, and to recontextualize hyper femininity at a geographical scale.

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Resource Summary 1

Francis, Becky, Louise Archer, Julie Moote, Jen De Witt, and Lucy Yeomans. "Femininity, Science, and the Denigration of the Girly Girl." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 38, no. 8 (November 17, 2017): 1097–1110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2016.1253455>.

The article begins by stating the topic of hyper-femininity and the 'girly girl' is not as commonly discussed or investigated in the topic of feminism (in comparison to other subtopics). It then states hyper femininity to be stereotypically defined as a heterosexualized performance of femininity for the male gaze. Women who are depicted as the 'girly girl' are seen as non-intelligent, shallow, and weak-willed, which goes hand in hand with how hyper-femininity is on an inferior power level with hyper-masculinity. Inferring that it is subservient to that intense (or any) performance of masculinity. Although, Hey et al.'s work discusses instances where women exert their power over men, mostly through their sexuality and seduction, in an attempt to challenge the subservience mindset in common heterosexuality.

Furthermore, the article segues into exploring how and why the 'girly girl' is recurrently unable to practice and engage in 'masculine' subjects, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The authors are focused on where this stigma derives from and inquire if the women who are in STEM must perform a certain form of masculinity or lesser femininity to succeed in their field. Their previous research references how young girls who are not encouraged by their peers, teachers, and parents are not confident to pursue the subject. There have also been anecdotal stories of women experiencing hostility in the field, stemming from the notion that science careers are labeled to be 'for boys', making young girls steer away from it (Archer et al, 2012a, 2012b). With this technical context of a women's role in the STEM field, the authors proceeded with their investigation of the unfiltered thoughts and opinions young students have for this dilemma.

The writing exemplifies a qualitative study of covert interviews conducted with students (aged 15-16) and their parents. The interview lasted about 30 to 60 minutes, most of the questions pertained to science, then the final query asked, "Some people suggest that girls who are particularly 'girly' and super

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feminine are less likely to want to pursue Physics. Do you think that could be the case?" A large portion of interviewees were indignant and headstrong in their belief that 'anyone can do anything', however, their narrative wasn't as accurate as their responses. There was a lack of resolution to explain the reasons why there is objectivity that hyperfeminine women are not as prominent in the STEM field. As 41% of girls and 57% of boys agreed that girly women are not interested in the field, it was noted that that mindset is primarily the cause of social perception and stereotyping, rather than physical or mental capabilities. A small percentage of boys claimed that the 'girly girl' is focused on their aesthetic and glamour, meaning they would not be willing to get their hands dirty in such labor demanding field. The article reiterates that misogyny is still apparent at the core of heteronormative practices and constructions of gender. The discernment of feminine characteristic traits is seen as vain, unchallenging, and most importantly useless when considered with the perception of the very masculine science fields, shifting the writer's focus to explore the complexity of gender deconstruction and heteroglossia.

I found this article to be insightful about hyperfeminine women's associations with science. And how that demeaning perception is based on decades of stereotyping of that archetype of woman. I am now focused on researching more data on boys' association with stereotypical feminine subjects and interests. Is it possible that there is less stigma of boys enjoying female-oriented interests, just because they are male? It would be interesting to explore the always-present power imbalance between men and women. A section that stood out to me in the text was, 'The monoglossic account of gender as binarized, with its hierarchal animation of male as Subject and the female as Other, clearly maintains hegemony'.

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Resource Summary 2

McLarty, Lianne. *The Limits of Dissatisfaction: Postmodernism, the Contemporary Horror Film and the Problem of the Feminine*. Ottawa: National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1994.

I have dissected chapter four of the article titled, 'Contemporary Horror and the Question of Opposition or the "Problem" of the Feminine Other?', which dives into how 'Evil Demon' films such as *The Brood* (1980), *Psycho* (1960), *Exorcist* (1973), *Death Becomes Her* (1992), *Basic Instinct* (1992), etc are horror films that focus on an abstract threat, generated by absolute evil. These films often displace social anxieties onto pure evil and project that demonic paranoia onto the audience. Demon films are characterized by the fear of powerful and inexplicable forces invading the body, most commonly through the portal of the body. This fear is displaced onto female characters in 'Evil Demon' movies, who are often portrayed as helpless against these forces, and when focused on the female body, the threat posed by the demon is often depicted as less abstract than it initially appears. Moreover, the reading discerns that women are pre-determined to be the portal through which demons find an entry as they are the ones who transform the male victims into zombies, to serve their purpose of 'reproducing' the evil presence. Furthermore, reinforces the misogynistic mindset over a woman's bodily autonomy, automatically reducing her to her biological function of reproduction.

Continuously, these horror movies typically portray women as victims and monsters, they use horror to explore how the female body is vulnerable to invasion and destruction. David Cronenberg's films explore the horror of the contemporary social world and the ruination of the subject using horrific constructions of the feminine. His films exploit a postmodern nihilism that warns of invasive and monster-generating technologies. This sub-concept of horror narrative is called, 'Viral Body Horror', meaning where the source of threat is in science. Usually, the threat is generated by an individual scientist, rather than by widespread practices, which dissociates unethical and evil science practices from

mainstream practices and diverts critical attention away from the norm. Instead, the focus of the narrative becomes the monstrous body. Such as in Cronenberg's, *The Brood* (1980), the character Dr. Hal Raglan's psychoplasmic therapy induces transformations in the bodies of his patients which range from welts to cancerous tumors, to the monstrous children of the title. The horror is tied less to Raglan's evilness and more so to some aspect of the feminine. The mothers in this film are responsible for the horror, as their abuse transfers to their daughters, reiterating that the horror in these films is dependent on the monstrous transformation of the female body which is often associated with sexuality, illness, and death. Viral Body Horror films focus on the body as a site of horror, and the consequences of technology-driven transformations.

These films have critical potential, but they rely on anxieties about the feminine. Therefore, in Cronenberg *Videodrome* (1983), technology is associated with a horrific, feminine seductiveness that leads to the character Max's suicide. This seductive power is most poignantly expressed in a scene in which Max's television broadcasts Nikky's lips, in extreme close-up, and hyperreal, pulsating, three-dimensionality. In *Videodrome* and *The Fly* (1986), what makes technology threatening is the association of the feminine with scientific rationality. This association makes technology monstrous, and the consequences of this are ventured through the initial invasion and subsequent transformation of the bodies of the protagonists.

Furthermore, this reading is relevant to my thesis, as the invasion of the female body in 'Viral Body Horror' correlates with the predisposition that a woman's body is an automatic vessel for evil. Even when the cause for possession or mutation (the demon/scientist) that would antagonize the female character is not depicted as the villain of the film. Instead, directors exploit women's traditional feminine attributes (their sexuality and motherhood) and control the narrative to invoke anxiety in the audience by depicting the mothers, the wives, girlfriends, 'the homemakers', as the 'home destroyers'. Threatening the equilibrium of domestic safety from a traditional family home, by vilifying the female characters, once again reducing their character to serve the patriarchs of the household and reinforcing that stereotype to the viewer.

Through exploring the concept of the feminine 'other' in horror, I now have the context of traditional femininity in the horror genre. Which even more invigorates the importance of recontextualizing femininity through an abundance of femininity (hyper femininity). To make it glaringly apparent that there is no masculine presence, and more importantly, to reframe the antagonistic 'other' concept through a more agency-prioritized narrative. The question I do have is whether I should parody the scenes of this retro horror film in my contemporary and forward narrative, to display my vision. But I would include more modern aesthetics (weird-core/ internet-core), maybe a call-back to the technological significance of Cronenberg's films. Additionally, it could be significant to research if retro Japanese horror films were similar in their depiction of the feminine 'other' in contrast to Western horror. It would be critical, as one of the aesthetics I am looking into regarding the hyperfeminine, is the 80's 'shoujo manga' article (a romanticized, cutesy anime art style). I also wonder about the difference in analysis in retro horror games rather than movies, as that is the aesthetics that I am majorly focused on.

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Resource Summary 3

Pascal King, Lauren. "The Digital and the Hyperreal, with Reference to Artwork by Signe Pierce and Lauren King." MFA, Rhodes University, (November 2019)
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My third resource summary extracts from an MFA student's peer-reviewed thesis work. Lauren Pascal King, a Fine Arts student at Rhodes University begins her thesis with a list of illustrations that merge the hyperfeminine and the vaporwave aesthetic. Her thesis articulates how gender politics operate in this digitized space, focusing on representations, manipulations, and exploitations of feminine figures in cyberspace. Which centers around her body of work, as she states, 'My final body of work for the professional art practice component of this MFA is realized in the form of an immersive installation that straddles the virtual and the real. Influenced by digital and hyperreal aesthetics (such as Vapourwave), this installation also explores various expressions of femininity that an individual can express both online and in real life.' (Pascal King, 2019)

Her zine series presents digital content compiled through means of selfies, game screenshots, photographic and installation concept shoots, all of which deal with ideas of the tension between the virtual and the real, as well as the various representations, exploitations, and manipulations of feminine figures in virtual realms such as cyberspace, selfie cameras, and game-worlds. This zine also features screenshots from various girl game series, including Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, Barbie, and Sims, as well as her selfies and a photoshoot exploring feminine and digital aesthetics. While the installation showcases milk cartons that reference ideas of commodity fetishism and a Vapourwave-inspired dollhouse.

Along her process, she references the photography of artist, Signe Pierce, who generates a plethora of digital portraits of the subject scantily clad, with some aspect of technology bordering her. Interestingly, Pascal King investigates Signe Pierce's 'Venus Flytrap

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methodology. Which is a means of using the inherent divine feminine energy of sexuality, beauty, and prowess to communicate ideas to those who would typically steer clear of any discussion involving feminism. The idea of 'Venus Fly trapping' may seem devious to those who feel threatened by outward displays of sexualized femininity, but in a world where women are invariably demonized regardless of how they choose to express their femininity, reclaiming femininity and employing it within the artistic practice as a means of subversion, is a justified response to patriarchy.

While searching for academic articles about weird/ internet core, I discovered that the aesthetic is called 'Vapourwave' in more academic settings, and many ways was the father of what weird/ internet core is today. Vapourwave is defined as a nostalgic and distorted take on the aesthetics of the '80s and '90s. As well as, incorporating old images & web design from the early days of the internet, music videos, or other elements of pop culture of decades past and mixing it with surreal and distorted elements. Furthermore, throughout Pascal King's completion of her MFA, she has learned that 'cyberspace is a turbulent sea that represents uncharted virtual territories, a space in which it is possible to assume alternate forms and occupy digital identities'. This essentially means that cyberspace is not entirely utopian as real-world socio-political issues transcend into the realm of the virtual. Which is what she calls, 'Hyperreality' (something that is real and virtual simultaneously).

Lastly, this research is relevant to my thesis, as it highlights the effect of combining vaporwave and femininity through the 'Venus Fly trap' method that forces the viewer to engage with the blatant personalized expression of femininity that fit no standard other than for its existence. And the use of the vaporwave aesthetic promotes that expression with its bizarre and nostalgic imagery. Technology is associated with intelligence and importance, and when hyper-femininity is now combined with those connotations within the vaporwave aesthetic, it creates a bizarre disconnect. As stereotypically the 'girly girl' is 'not fit for academic and labor/mess inducive subjects like STEM. To add on, the nostalgia factor of the vaporwave aesthetic revels in the same effect that the retro horror game aesthetic does, it lures the viewer into a false sense of security by subverting and

challenging the familiarity of things from the past. Those who are uncomfortable with change and new ideas would be greatly unnerved by the combination of hyper-femininity and vaporwave/retro horror game aesthetic.

Now that I have identified and explored my initial ideas of the internet/weird core, I feel I can progress onto the Eastern cultural influence of Japan, South Korea, etc within this aesthetics. As a lot of my creative influences are from those regions, it would be imperative to know why a lot of the aesthetics I am researching lead back to Asia. I wonder if I will find references and history from South Asia, besides East Asia. As a South Asian, hyper-feminine woman it greatly interests me to connect something of my ethnicity to a topic that seems so modernized in comparison to the traditional values of my culture and community. Will I find other visual ways of how hyper-femininity is displayed in other cultures? In different mediums other than digital, maybe?

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Resource Summary 4

Azzi, Amanda. "Little Girl: The Weaponization of Infantilized and Robotized (Hyper)Femininity in Postwar Japanese Popular Culture," 2021.
<http://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/42748>.

Amanda Azzi's research paper dissects how post-war Japan weaponizes kawaii culture or infantilized femininity as 'soft power' in artistic subcultures to restore a favorable reputation on a global scale and make up for its failure. Azzi's thesis is inspired by Takashi Murakami and others' contributions to the exhibition collection *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (2005). Murakami claims that after Japan was defeated and forced demilitarization, it became an emasculated and castrated little boy. Furthermore, Azzi's research starts from the mention of the bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively, which represented the American revenge over the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. From these two air raids, along with the politics of the subsequent occupation of Japan, reflect Western hegemony and American hypermasculinity resulting in a 'castrating' effect in Japan following the latter's ultimate defeat.

Azzi's research paper aims to highlight how Japan was dismantled and forced into a system that does not produce 'adults'. Post-war Japan struggled to redefine and reclaim its national and cultural identity after the physical and mental trauma of its defeat in World War II. Therefore, Japanese creators have responded by embracing feminine attributes in their work to compensate for hegemonic masculinity. This femininity has been seen as a positive image on an international scale, benefiting Japan in the long run. The collapse of the bubble economy was the predetermined outcome of a poker game that only America could win. The article states it best by reiterating that, 'Father America is beginning to withdraw, and its child, Japan, is beginning to develop on its own'.

One of the most significant hyperfeminine media sources Azzi mentions is the anime, *Sailor Moon* (1992). The manga and anime series have been popular in Japan and the United States, the series is known for its strong female characters and its ability to empower girls worldwide. However, it also perpetuates misogyny by relying on male figures to save the main character, Sailor Moon, and by sexualizing her early in her development as a character. The article also states how *Sailor Moon* (1992) and *Violet Evergarden* (2015) are two popular manga and anime series that depict Japan's use of popular culture to redefine themselves in the post-war world. *Sailor Moon* is more infantilized, while *Violet Evergarden* reflects Japan's post-war efforts to become a strong country.

The protagonist, Tsukino Usagi (Sailor Moon) is an important figure in the development of hyperfeminine characters in Japanese popular culture. In addition to her role as a superheroine, *Sailor Moon* embodies many of the qualities that are commonly associated with Japanese women, such as being obedient and dutiful, while embracing *kawaii* culture. Firstly, *kawaii* culture is defined as a culture of cuteness which refers to items, humans, and nonhumans that are charming, vulnerable, shy, and childlike. Secondly, Usagi and the younger sailor Chibiusa are vital in identifying how the Japanese viewed the relationship between Japan and the U.S. The character Chibiusa can only seek help from her elder Usagi to help with the Kingdom's challenges since they are left with zero resources to improve their current state.

Violet Evergarden (2015) is a manga that uses post-traumatic growth (PTG) to explore the empowerment of women in male-dominated spaces. Violet's characterization is a manifestation of the Japanese. As she lost both her arms in war, Violet represents the Japanese people in their struggle to overcome their trauma and find a new beginning. She is an imaginative and obsessive individual who is driven to create technology to improve the nation. Her prosthetic limbs signify her progress toward a new post-humanity, and her work as an Auto Memory Doll helps people connect with those they love. While Violet and other female characters force us to acknowledge women to still be respected in these spaces

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through their bodies, the contrasting overt abuse of their bodies is inherently misogynistic. Her sense of agency is limited through her association with the patriarchal symbol of the army.

Lastly, Azzi's inclusion of referencing Murakami et al book, *Little Boy* (2005) is imperative to post-war Japan's struggle to find its agency. The work contributes to an understanding of Japanese culture, the atomic bomb, and consumerism. Japan was able to gradually reinstate itself as a powerful nation—at least through **soft power**—to influence and counteract the unwavering influence of Western hegemony, **American** hypermasculinity, and its effects in Japan. The article provides three components of hypermasculinity: physical prowess, going to war, and inferiority towards those who are different- that play a vital role in Japan's adoption of the cute, infantilized feminine culture (Kawaii culture)

To elaborate more, **Kawaii** culture is used as an escape from the violence and harsh realities of the world, **kawaii** is a sensibility that encompasses global Japanese girl culture and has become an important figure in the realm of animanga. Anime and manga have a long and significant history in Japan and have been widely popular in North America throughout the 1990s. The popularity of *Sailor Moon* (1992) and *Violet Evergarden* (2015) helped to promote 'Girl Power'. By infantilized and hyperfeminized figures, animanga provides a political and social commentary on Japanese national and international relations. In the wake of Japan's defeat in **World War II**, the country turned to animanga as a way to express its trauma and rebuild its psyche. This growth becomes a form of reconstruction in the face of crisis and ironically leads to the progression of the Japanese psyche that has infantilized itself to address said trauma. As mentioned before, in *Violet Evergarden* (2015) the use of suits and prostheses for muscular strength is paralleled with the rehabilitation of the Japanese body and mind after WWI and **WWII**.

It is interesting to note that the anime mentioned in the article (*Sailor Moon/Violet Evergarden*) are great pillars of the reclamation of identity through hyper-femininity.

However, the reclamation only progressed on a commercial level. It helped increase animanga industry revenue, which was quite rewarding for Japan's economy, though it did not do much to heal the trauma of the atomic bombings. I speculate that the misogyny perpetuated by these popular anime reveals Japan's still apparent underlying shame of becoming 'emasculated' by the U.S., transferring that abuse onto the next marginalized group of people (women). And it is unlikely the cycle of abuse will ease out due to sexist 'fanservice' content being favorable in the market.

Some questions arose: Is there comparative research on more modern/niche animanga that do succeed in reclaiming autonomy for Japanese identity? And is one of the creative influences one of them? The concept of Hypermasculinity is interesting, perhaps there is a connection with that concept with the retro horror aesthetic. Maybe that's why its contrast with hyper-femininity is so striking. It is combining two opposing concepts (hyper-fem/hyper-masc).

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Fieldwork Report

For my fieldwork report, I had scheduled an interview with Sloane McNulty (PhD American Studies – Rutgers) who teaches Liberal Arts and Critical Studies at the Pacific Northwest College of Art. However, they could not make it at the last second, so I ended up interviewing an artistic acquaintance of mine, John Hastings, Campus Safety Supervisor, and former student here at PNCA. I had been interested in getting his takeaways as well, as the themes and concepts of my thesis counter everything that encapsulates what he represents: white, cis heteronormativity. Moreover, since he is an artist himself, he would all right be familiar with how the thesis process works.

I had set up a Zoom interview for convenience's sake, my aims were to get a fresh new perspective on the ideas from my thesis as well as get advice from a seasoned artist on how to progress further. Furthermore, since my thesis covers a lot of topics and tends to get convoluted, I had suggested at the beginning of the interview that I will start off with a pitch of my thesis, by stating my thesis and my intentions about the content and what medium I will be using. The interview lasted for about an hour, and to my surprise, he was relatively unaware of what hyper-femininity or retro horror game's aesthetic was. Rather, he was aware of how it looked but could not connect the terminology to the visuals, which is why I ended up showing him two of my shorter creative influences so that he got a better idea of the vibe that I'm working with.

At this point, he was interviewing me, asking about the ins and outs of my research, just so that he could get acquainted with the content before giving his two cents. One of the main things that stuck out was when he mentioned *Jennifer's Body* (2009) as an example of merging femininity and horror to which I responded that I wouldn't want to center my narrative around men, even for revenge. That I was trying to steer away from the sexualized figure of the femme fatale. He agreed with me and mentioned there is an easy temptation for the media to jump to the conclusion that feminine

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agency is all about usurping the patriarchy. It centers on womanhood being about defeating men when it should decentralize them.

Moreover, a lot of his questions to me were to expand more on how I would employ a horror narrative with the aesthetic I have chosen (Hyper femininity, retro horror game, vaporwave, etc). He majorly wanted a game plan for how my ideas will come across in the narrative of the mediums I have chosen. John suggested that I start to thumbnail some conceptual work and create a mood board for every single aesthetic I have gathered. Because when he asked if I had any of my own work that displayed any of the visuals I was talking about, I told him I had not started on that. I do agree with him it would be productive to test out my technical capabilities of bringing all these aesthetics together and implementing them with my newly gained knowledge of all the sub-topics I have researched from this class.

Lastly, he suggested I reference my own culture within my thesis since I mentioned that as a South Asian girl, I wanted to subvert the submissive Asian girl stereotype. John mainly suggested this as a lot of my creative influences were from Japan, Korea, or Thailand. I couldn't tell him at the time, but I do disagree with the need to commodify my culture for content. Or at least force a storyline that was not initially thought of, but I had also thought about the pros of including new traditional Pakistani and Islamic art onto aesthetics and concepts that are not associated with my culture. I am brainstorming a non-commercialized way of incorporating my culture within my thesis that feels authentic and interesting.

Overall, it was a refreshing experience having to verbally summarise my work and see a new perspective and ideas on how to progress further toward my thesis' success. I will definitely implement the advice in the beginning thumbnail and mood board, to bring to generate my ideas into reality.

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