

# SOMETHING TERRIBLE

Or, how graphic style shifts are used to depict  
the horrific in contemporary horror comics

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# Abstract

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Analytical approaches to motivated use of graphic style in comics remain rare, especially for genre works. Likewise, as the majority of horror studies focus on novels or films, the horror-making techniques of graphic artists are largely unexamined. After a literature review that collates concepts from both the fields of horror and graphic style in comics, this investigation sets out to bridge these conversations by examining how graphic style shifts are used to depict the horrific in contemporary horror comics.

The methodology used to examine horrific graphic style shifts was two-fold. The approach combined practice-based experiments with a hermeneutic image function analysis of six horror comics published between 2010-2020. The practical graphic style experiments were used to exemplify the affective and interpretative differences that dynamic use of graphic style can produce in a single comic sequence. Additionally, the analysis of horror comics described and interpreted graphic style shifts that have recently been used to depict the horrific.

The investigation showed how dynamic variation of graphic style is used in contemporary horror comics to evoke and support the titular affective sensation. Horrific graphic variation may create fluctuations between different horror aesthetics, alter the perception and interpretation of diegetic reality, or create a special portrayal of either the horrific or the horrified. Furthermore, the graphic style strategies may be interpreted on a spectrum that includes objectifying and abstracting the horrific at either end.

In general, the disruptive nature of graphic style shifts makes them suitable for supporting aesthetic interpretations that favour horror. This suggests that graphic style shifts in particular may offer some medium-specific affordances for horror-making in graphic narratives.

Keywords: GRAPHIC STYLE, GRAPHIC STYLE SHIFT, GRAPHIC VARIATION, HORROR, COMICS, VISUAL NARRATIVE

# Abstrakti

AALTO YLIOPISTO  
Taiteen maisterin  
opinnäytteen tiivistelmä

Tekijä

TIIA REIJONEN

Työn nimi

JOTAIN KAUHEAA; eli kuinka graafisen tyylin variaatioilla luodaan kauhua nykykauhusarjakuvassa

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Graafisen tyylin motivoitunutta käyttöä etenkin genre-sarjakuvassa on tutkittu suhteellisen vähän. Kauhututkimuksen keskittyessä enimmäkseen kauhuromaaneihin ja -elokuviin, graafisten taiteilijoiden kauhun tuottamisen tekniikat nousevat samoin harvoin paalupaikalle. Koottuaan teoreettisen kehyksen sekä kauhu- että sarjakuvatutkimuksesta, tämä työ pyrkii tuomaan nämä keskustelut yhteen tarkastelemalla kuinka graafisen tyylin variointia käytetään kuvaamaan kauhua nykypäiväisessä kauhusarjakuvassa.

Tutkimus lähestyi kauhistuttavia graafisia repeämiä kaksinaisella metodologialla. Lähestymistapa yhdisti käytännöllisiä graafisia kokeiluja sekä kuuden 2010-2020 julkaistun kauhusarjakuvan hermeneuttisen kuva-analyysin. Käytännön kokeiluja käytettiin empiirisen esimerkin tapaan kuvaamaan kuinka yksittäisen, itsetuotetun sarjakuvasekvenssin tunnelataus ja tulkinta muuttuvat graafisen tyylin muutosten mukaan. Sen lisäksi kauhusarjakuvien analyysillä kuvailtiin ja tulkittiin niitä graafisen tyylin liikkeitä, joita nykykauhusarjakuva käyttää kuvatakseen kauhunsa.

Tutkimus näytti kuinka tämänpäiväinen kauhusarjakuva käyttää graafisen tyylin variointia herättääkseen kyseisen tunnekokemuksen. Kauhistuttavat graafisen tyylin muutokset saattavat luoda liikehdintää erilaisten kauhun esteettisten kokemusten välillä, muuttaa diegeettisen todellisuuden tulkintaa, sekä luoda erityisen kuvauksen joko kauhun aiheuttajalle tai sen kokiijalle. Graafisen tyylin strategiat kauhunkuvaamiseksi voidaan nähdä liikkeenä esineellistämisen ja abstraktion välillä.

Yleisesti, graafisten variaatioiden häiritsevä luonne itsessään voidaan nähdä saattavan niiden esteettisen tulkinnan kohti kauhun piiriä. Tämä ehdottaa, että graafisen tyylin muutokset suovat erityisiä mahdollisuuksia kauhun kuvaamiselle visuaalisessa tarinankerronnassa.

Avainsanat: GRAAFINEN TYYLI, GRAAFISEN TYYLIN MUUTOS, GRAAFINEN VARIAATIO, KAUHU, SARJAKUVA, VISUAALINEN TARINANKERRONTA

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I am eternally grateful for my advisor Zach Dodson.  
I am sorry I could not include glitter to a PDF.

I would also like to expressly not thank any of my friends and family who teased me endlessly when I was coming up with new ways to procrastinate. I will have you know that taking a month-long break to make a miniature camping set for knitted frogs is part of the process.



## 1 The beginning

Reading the title of this thesis might lead some to think that it is about horror comics. It is not. The interest of this investigation is primarily graphic style; the way things are graphically depicted and how this contributes to the reading and tone of visual narratives. Horror comics themselves serve as the doubly convenient arena to examine graphic style, firstly based on the observation that illustrated horror media tends to frequently utilize motivated stylistic variations, and secondly as the comic form is more accessible for solo-experimentation than, for example, animation or video games. Moreover, comics studies provide a focused context and framework for the study of graphic style. As inquiries into the specifics of how horror comics use graphic style to create a special depiction of the horrific are limited (if not altogether absent), this investigation set out add to these efforts.

Graphic style in general and graphic style shifts in particular remain a both developing and fertile grounds for research, as both critical and analytical approaches towards it remain rare. On the narrative side of comics studies, Kai Mikkonen has noted that the narrative functions of the wider phenomena of 'graphic showing' do not draw much theoretical attention (Mikkonen 2017c, 74), and that the study of stylistic variations within single works could prove especially illuminating for the study of graphic style (115). As another example, comics researcher Pascal Lefèvre has expressed that studies of a comic 'group styles' could aid in examining the relationship that individual styles have within specific historical groups of comics (Lefèvre 2016, 137).

While the study of graphic style remains fertile, it is not without traversal. The specific use of graphic style shifts has previously been examined, for example, by Randy Duncan (2015), Kai Mikkonen (2017), Pascal Lefèvre (2011, 2016, n.d.). Some instances of the phenomena have also been remarked upon by Scott McCloud (1994) in his seminal, practitioner-based work on comics. Furthermore, the topic generally appears to garner more attention in the European Francophone scholarship.<sup>1</sup> The notion of style in horror comics or horror illustrations has also been examined by some candidate and master level theses (Marcus Jernberger (2020), Bridget Monro (2015), and Maximilian Quay (2016) to mention a few), and graphic style shifts in horror comics have previously been noted by what we might call 'fan media analysts' (for example, John Walsh, better known as 'Super Eyepatch Wolf', has pointed out the fixating quality of graphic style shifts in Junji Ito's comics in his 2016 video essay *How Media Scares Us: The Works of Junji Ito*).

Horror comics themselves have received limited amounts of analytical interest aside from historical inquiries and case studies of individually exceptional comics, and even there the topic of graphic style is seldom touched upon. A notable exception is Julia Round's examination of the intersection between Gothic and comics; Round suggests a Gothic model of comics analysis that touches upon the excessive style of comics in general (*Gothic in Comics and Graphic Novels, A Critical Approach*, 2014). As Round's model fully associates the comic form with the Gothic mode of writing, her approach spills far beyond the scope of this particular investigation, and is perhaps best utilized by those who possess a working knowledge of post-structuralism and new literary criticism.<sup>2</sup>

While discussion of horror itself is an ancient, sprawling beast of a thing, this investigation relies on source literature that foregrounds the relevance of formal style in horror. This means collating concepts from various disciplines, ranging from videoludic studies to art education and

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1 Mikkonen points out Philippe Marion's doctoral thesis *Traces en cases* (1993). Mark Venter (n.d.) refers to Thierry Groensteen, *Bande Dessinée et Narration* (2011) as well as Thierry Smolderen, *Naissances de la Bande Dessinée* (2009) in his master's thesis. These works are not referred to in this investigation as per the language deficiency of the author.

2 Which, to be unnecessarily frank here, does not include the investigator.

film studies. What is not included is an account of the ‘pleasures’ or ‘paradoxes’ of horror, or, any systematic attempts to answer the question of ‘why do people enjoy horror (*if*) horror makes them feel bad’. Much ink has been spilled in this endeavour, and the general stance in this investigation is that it is often incredibly reductive to speculate why audiences enjoy horror when they can enjoy it for great many reasons and in great many ways. These apparently ever elusive pleasures of horror will not be much dissected here, but if interested, Matt Hills (2005) offers an illuminative, although slightly dated, discursive analysis of the topic.

## 2.1 Objectives

This thesis examines how graphic style shifts are utilized in contemporary horror comics to depict the horrific. Additionally, it looks into how graphic variation affects the evoked sensation of horror. The investigation uses both a qualitative analysis of a sampling of contemporary comics and a practice-based experiment on a single comic sequence to conduct this examination. The hypothesis is that such shifts aid in depicting a subject as horrific. These shifts may also contribute to creating a specific affective atmosphere, beyond one that is nebulously ‘scary’.

A literature review including both theories of horror and graphic style in comics will be undertaken. The theories and methods established will be applied to the investigator’s own horror comic sequence through a series of experiments partaken from an explicitly practitioner-focused standpoint. The purpose of these experiments is to examine whether different graphic style shifts change the sensation of horror, and if they do, describe how.

The extrapolated theories and methods will also be used in a qualitative analysis of a sample of contemporary horror comic sequences that include graphic style shifts as one of their horror-making strategies. The analysis will look at how graphic variation is used to depict the horrific in the selected sample. The expectation is that by better understanding the use and potential of graphic style shifts in horror comics, we can deepen our understanding of visual storytelling both as makers and scholars.

## 2.2

## Outline

As the reader may have already noticed, this investigation begins with an introduction. **THE CURRENT CHAPTER** describes the reasons, objectives, and motivations behind the thesis, outlines the following chapters and provides definitions for key terminology.

This second stop takes us to the library and looks at established literature on the subject. **CHAPTER 2** outlines how different affective definitions of horror highlight different formal aspects of the genre. It then examines the use and possibilities of graphic style shifts in comics, and finally brings these two topics together to sketch out some possible entrances to deciphering horrific graphic styles.

**CHAPTER 3** takes place in the armory, where we go through our plans and sum up the research methods and procedures of the investigation. This section details some relevant features of qualitative research in the context of comics research, and establishes the two-pronged research methodology of practical experimentation and image content analysis that is applied in the investigation. In addition, the selection criteria for the sampled horror comics and the sequence of original work is explained. The works in questions are also briefly introduced.

In **CHAPTER 4**, the investigation dives into the basement to conduct a series of clandestine experiments. Here the observations of the literature review were considered through practice, as different graphic style treatments were applied to the investigator’s own comic sequence to see if they truly make a difference.

After finishing the experiments in the basement, we run up to the observatory. The second portion of the investigation is accounted for in **CHAPTER 5**, where an adapted version of Randy Duncan’s model for hermeneutic image content analysis was utilized. This model was used to examine how graphic style shifts in the moments of horror in a selection of six contemporary horror comics. Observations from the analysis were further categorized to propose a number of common horrific graphic style devices.

Finally, **CHAPTER 6** and **CHAPTER 7** respectively present the discussion and conclusion of the investigation, going through the findings, limitations, possible applications, and future avenues of the investigation.



## 2.3 Terminology

### / **Horror + comics**

Following Kai Mikkonen's institutional definition of comics (2017a, 15), both 'horror' and further 'horror comics' are understood in this investigation as cultural artefacts that are made and marketed as horror (comics), interacted with as horror (comics), and are thus commonly understood as horror (comics). As Mikkonen notes, a definition like this circumvents to an extent the issues that arise from focusing on a singular feature or a set of features as the decisive factors of the form (15). In comics studies, this means going around the picture/word discourse, that is, whether the defining value of comics lie in the special use of images, words, their juxtapositioning, sequality, or something else entirely (Mikkonen 2007a, 12-15). No matter what is framed as the determining formal elements of the medium, something will inevitably be left out—which in the case of comics often includes wordless, imageless, or single panel comics (ibid.). An institutional definition, while not perhaps as satisfactory as other definitions, sustains and appreciates diversity of the form (15). The term 'comics' is used instead of 'graphic novels' or 'graphic narratives' or 'sequential art' for its brevity and intelligibility in common use, as well as for the delightful compound term of 'horror comic'.

An institutional definition becomes doubly valuable as examination moves onto the horror genre which, by the blessed virtue of being a genre, is a horribly contested and historically weighty concept. As Mark Jancovich notes in the introduction to *Horror, The Film Reader*, 'while most people use generic categories. . . the precise meaning of these terms are not always clear' (Jancovich 2002, 1). If a definition of horror seems elusive, it is because no fixed meaning exists; works that once were considered pivotal fall out of the generic spotlight, and works that did not claim genre honorifics on arrival are put on pedestal in later periods (1-2). In this manner, genre can be seen as more of a discursive process than a stable group of artefacts (ibid.). In addition—or because of this—akin to the comic form, the horror form is monstrously diverse. There is no one set of trope characters, plots, or style that encompasses the total hoard of horror, and as Brigid Cherry notes, a horror story may just as well include monsters, serial killers, or aliens;

be seen in the past, present, or future; be horribly explicit or uncomfortably implicit—the genre is, overall, 'marked by a sheer diversity of conventions' (Cherry 2009, 12). And this is only to talk of the horror film. Adding to the mix the total number of mediums involved in contemporary horror culture, from literature and video games, to cartoons and memes, to music and high art, to TV and philosophical theories, as you look closer, the boundaries of the genre start slithering and fading into the shadows.

This is not to say that attempts to 'solve' the diversity of the genre do not exist. They do, and they do so in droves. While the typical (and indeed persuasive) solution to horror is to appoint a common evocative goal for the genre, this is not a strategy without issues, as is further examined in CHAPTER 2. Meanwhile, the decision to lean on an institutional definition is an explicit attempt to keep the diversity of horror unsolved.

### / **Graphic style + shifts**

While a more thorough description of graphic style and graphic style shifts is provided in CHAPTER 2, it is perhaps pertinent to summarize what is meant by these concepts—especially as the term 'graphic style shift' might be wholly unfamiliar to some, or an unfamiliar name for a familiar phenomenon to others. To begin with, 'style' across multiple disciplines can be understood as a pattern of choices. Narratologist Kai Mikkonen refers to literary stylistics as 'patterns of linguistic choice and preference that can be attributed to a particular author's personal style, a period style, a generic style, or a given work of literature' (2017c, 110). This is repeated as Pascal Lefèvre refers to music scholar Leonard Meyer (quoted in Lefèvre 2016, 127), stating that a style is:

A replication of patterning, whether in human behaviour or in the artefacts produced by human behaviour, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints.

Graphic style then refers to a number of decisions made in the 'graphic design' of a work, especially as they pertain to the graphic traces such as linework and coloring (Mikkonen 2017c, 83). A narrow definition of graphic style in comics studies excludes choices of image and layout composition altogether, and puts the analytical focus squarely on the qualities of the graphic trace (111-112).

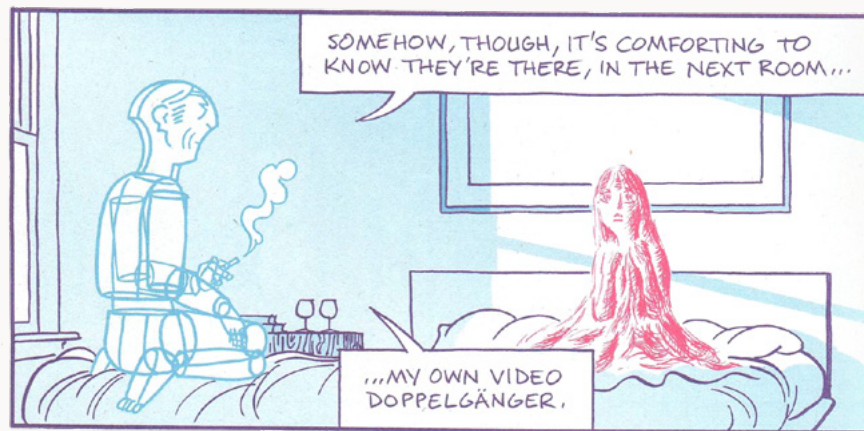


FIGURE 1. Asterios and Hana. Asterios Polyp.

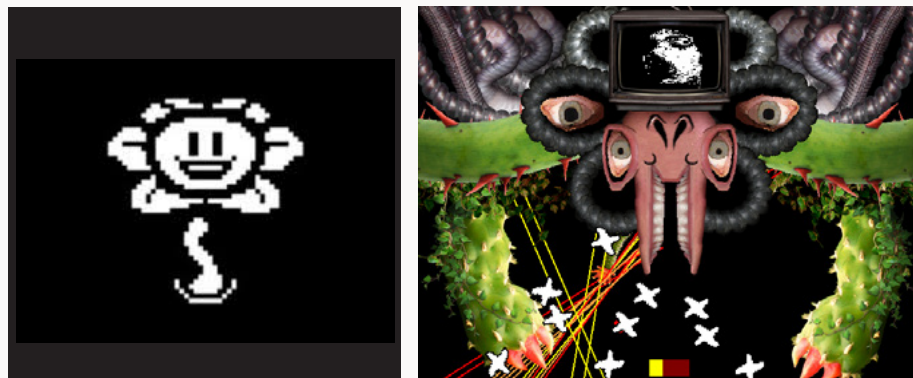


FIGURE 2. Two looks of Flowey the Flower. Undertale.



FIGURE 3. Oktavia von Seckendorff and Madoka. Puella Magi Madoka Magica.

Graphic style shifts, alternatively, refer to the instances where the repeated pattern of choices is somehow intentionally ruptured or disturbed, or when multiple simultaneous systems are introduced within a one work (Mikkonen 2017c, 115). An oft-quoted contemporary comic example of this is David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp* (see fig. 1). In addition to highly 'visible' cases of graphic variation, some more conventional examples include the common tendency of utilizing different graphic styles for characters and backgrounds, and the super-deformation of figures used in manga for comedic flourishes. More examples of this phenomena are listed in a community curated list on the website *TVTropes* under the category of 'Art Shift', which points out this device is often utilized for the purposes of 'homage and parody', and—perhaps a more salient clue in this context—that 'particularly abrupt shifts can be rather scary' (TVTropes).<sup>3</sup> Some more horrific examples of style shifts outside of the comic medium include the shifted presentation of Flowey the Flower in the video game *Undertale* (2015, fig. 2) and the look of the witches and the witch dimension in the magical girl horror anime *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (2011, fig. 3).

#### 2.4 Motivations and disclosures

It further bears mentioning that although I talk about comics in this thesis, and use a comic sequence as the practical part of the investigation, I am by no stretch of the word a 'comic artist' nor an author. Neither do I professionally identify as an illustrator or as a graphic designer. What perhaps comes the closest is the title of 'production artist' or 'concept artist'. If forced to elaborate, I would say that my practical expertise lies in designing and executing 'the look' for other people's projects. I have worked along these lines (to an altering degree) in animation, advertisement, and educational illustration for the last seven years. For me, the point of differentiating production design as my practice over others, lies in the concept

<sup>3</sup> If the TVTropes examples prove too common for some to take seriously, Mark Venter lists some more literary comics examples in the appendix of his master's thesis, *The Use of Graphic Style as a Narrative Function in Comics* (n.d.).



collaborative effort: the production designer is, by definition, always part of a larger team. This is a roundabout way of saying that—while I do feel a degree of ownership over many of the projects I have been part of—to this day I have not produced any extensive original work.

The project used for the practical component of this investigation, *Kummitusjuttu*, is one that I started seriously developing for my bachelor's thesis and one that I opted to continue in this masters programme during 2016-2017. The Bachelor's thesis in question<sup>4</sup> examined how character design could be used as a method for story development. The adjacent character line-up represents the refined character designs developed therein.

The practical portion of this thesis was likewise an attempt to continue developing the story—this time by finding the 'correct' sensation of horror for a single sequence of the comic, and perhaps, by extension, for the project as a whole. Seeing how a dynamic use of style is a major contributor to my enjoyment of horror, I naturally wished to include such horrible wonders in my project as well. This, as we will discover as we go forward, might not have gone according to plan.

Another point of disclosure is one a discerning reader might have already gathered from my selection of examples. My personal preference for art, media, and entertainment lean rather heavily on the low-brow side things. Although I am determined to keep the can of worms known as 'value' steadfastly sealed and buried for the duration of this investigation, my attitude on the issue might, from time to time, bleed through. For this reason I want to explicitly state that this investigation is not one that seeks validation for horror, for comics, for the utilization of graphic style shifts, or for the utilization of graphic style shifts in horror comics (even for non-narrative purposes). In the end, different media, art, and entertainment artifacts can have many different audiences, and provide for them many different things. These artifacts do not need to provide value for oneself—nor is it required of one to understand their value—for them to be valuable for someone else. This not-understanding, I understand, can cause a slight sensation of horror. If ever faced with this possibly uncomfortable sensation, going forward, the reader is encouraged to try and savour it.



Character line-up. *Kummitusjuttu*.

<sup>4</sup> Tiia Reijonen, *Möykyn mysteeri eli kuvitetun tarinan kehitys ja tutkiva hahmosuunnittelu* (2016).

## Between the haunted stacks

This literature review sets out to sketch a hypothesis about the possible horror functions of graphic style in comics. To do so, it first examines alternative accounts of the evocative goals of horror media in general. It then takes a look at some recognized functions of graphic style in comics. Finally, it reflects how these functions may relate to some common affective devices used in works of horror. The highlighted literature was selected based on its apparent relevance to the topic of horror and functions of graphic style—as through supporting or de-emphasizing a connection between the two, or as it offered practical tools for analysis and production of horror. As the scope of the review remains narrow, it is by no means meant to be taken as a full account of either horror or graphic style in comics.

### 2.1 On horror, horror, horror

Horror appears as both exceedingly obvious and obnoxiously elusive. In common conversation, it is apparent whether a work belongs to the horror genre or not (Carroll 1990, 13; Kilpeläinen 2015, 35). In this vein, generic sample cases for works of horror and non-horror can be identified following ordinary use of language: Stephen King is a notable horror author, James Joyce falls short; *Hellraiser* (1987) is a work of horror, *The Princess Bride* (1987) is not; the *Silent Hill* games aim to horrify, the *Super Mario* games not so much. In this recognition process, it bears further emphasis that works of horror do not spawn from the abyss. In addition to audiences negotiating

the placement of horror works, the familial belonging to the genre is also signaled by the makers and dealers of horror; be it with dark and ominous marketing materials, library placement, or genre tags on streaming services.

While the elusive essentialists definitions of horror are then not necessary for identifying a work of horror, they can highlight what is seen as the most salient property of horror. Notably, typical efforts to define generic horror in this manner begin by stating that works of horror are first and foremost grouped together by their intent to evoke a certain type of feeling in audiences (Schneider 2004, 140). Whereas some more formal genres, like Westerns, are grouped through typical settings or characters, works of horror are seen to be set apart by their designs to horrify us (Carroll 1990, 14-15). After all, sensation is inscribed on the label, as the roots of the word ‘horror’ lead—across various European languages—to tremors, and shakes, and hair standing on its end (Kilpeläinen 2015, 16-17). Determining the exact nature and functions of this sensational quality is where the many aesthetically driven horror theories tend to divert. The following examines some select theories from this pool to demonstrate how defining the sensation of horror highlights different aspects of the structure and construction of horror.

As good a place to start as any, is the seminal work by Noël Carroll. In his cognitivist theory of horror art, Carroll localizes the felt quality of horror to ‘threatening and impure monsters’ and dubs it ‘art-horror’ (Carroll 1990, 27). This distinction separates the emotion one feels engaging with works of horror from ‘natural horror’, the emotion felt when faced with real-life horrors (12). According to Carroll, art-horror is the physically felt emotional response triggered by the thought, and not the actual existence, of simultaneously fearsome and disgusting monsters (27). Following Mary Douglas (*Purity and Danger*, 1966), Carroll states that these monsters are disgusting as the result of ‘categorical transgressions’; they are somehow interstitial, conflicting, or incomplete by nature, that is, they may be both living and dead, wolf and human, alive but without a will (Carroll 1990, 32). Based on this definition, Carroll also sketches out a dual theory of what draws audiences to art-horror; on a universal level horror fascinates because it piques our curiosity by examining the impossible and anomalous nature of monsters, and on a general level this ‘play of fascination’ is further heightened by placing the monster into a suspenseful narrative structure (190).



While Carroll's theory offers some significant insights when it comes to the construction of a type of horror works and their monsters, it is by no means comprehensive and ultimately overlooks critical aspects of the genre. First, as Carroll's many critics have pointed out, by localizing art-horror into the concept of monsters, the theory does not examine the works recognized as horror where situations, events, or humans are the source of horror.<sup>5</sup> Neither does it properly attend to the works operating without a fictional backdrop, a narrative, or a distinct representational form, such as 'shockumentaries', stand-alone images, or music (Sauchelli 2014, 41). Because of this, Carroll's theory does not describe whatever it may be that connects these types of works to each other and to those included under his umbrella of art-horror.

Moreover, as Kilpeläinen points out, pinpointing the source of art-horror purely to the thought of a monster does not meaningfully recognize the impact depiction bears for horror (Kilpeläinen 2015, 63). If it was the thought alone that counted, that is, a monster is art-horrifying because the thought of it is threatening and violates cultural categories, it would make little difference what was used to depict a monster, or even how well this depiction was executed (ibid.). The limits of this approach can be brought into focus by, for example, contrasting three different depictions of the same monster: a literary excerpt describing Count Dracula from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a segment from *Sesame Street* (1969-present) featuring the puppet Count von Count, and the final confrontation with Dracula in the video game *Castlevania* (1986). All of them depict a 'Dracula' who, according to Carroll, is impure by his vampiric concept; a categorically transgressional living dead. But by distinction of depiction, these are very different ways of portraying Dracula, and arguably make him horrific (or not horrific) for different audiences (see figures 4-6).<sup>6</sup> Not addressing the effects depiction has

5 These, as they do not fit his theory, Carroll chooses to separate from horror and re-classifies them as either 'tales of terror' (Carroll 1990, 15) or 'tales of dread' (42). For further arguments, see for example: Berys Gaut (1993, 334), Susan L. Feagin (1992), and Andrea Sauchelli (2014, 41).

6 Alternatively this highlights Matt Hills's observation that stock monsters such as Dracula are exactly what 'we expect to encounter within the cultural category of horror genre' (2005, 16), and I would add, have become well categorized in popular culture at large.

Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal.

FIGURE 4. Count Dracula. *Dracula*.



FIGURE 5. Count von Count. *Sesame Street*.



FIGURE 6. Dracula. *Castlevania*.

for these works, and works of horror in general, discounts key affective methods of shaping the horrific. While Carroll does account that the audiences of course first engage with the portrayal of the monster (Carroll 1990, 84), by focusing on the metaphysics of some formal objects of horror he ends up overlooking evocative and expressive qualities of the genre.

In contrast to Carroll, Andrea Sauchelli (2014) proposes that horror is more of a style than genre and brings the depiction of horror to the spotlight. He suggests that the familial relation between works of horror is based on ‘a shared set of rhetorical devices designed to elicit a specific mood’ (Sauchelli 2014, 40). Compared to art-horror—where the emotion is triggered by the monster and ‘not the fiction as a whole’ (Carroll 1990, 84)—the horror mood, or ‘H-mood’, is not affixed to a single element in a work but rather saturates the entirety of the work (Sauchelli 2014, 42). For example, in a film H-mood may be cued by an initial scary sequence that creates an anticipatory state for the scares to come (ibid.). Instead of monsters, Sauchelli notes that works evoking H-mood generally examine ‘aspects of death, murder and evil’ (43). Notably, Sauchelli also considers the distinct ways different mediums have at their disposal to turn a subject horrific and so foregrounds the point that a painting can create an atmosphere of horror by utilizing different means than a film (ibid.). Altogether, he concludes that a work of horror captures the audience’s interest by combining fitting stylistic features to unsavory topics, creating a sustained H-mood, where the pleasures of horror can vary from appreciating this formal composition to adopting horror as a coping mechanism (46-47).

Although Sauchelli’s account of horror as a mood better accommodates the diversity of the genre and its means of depiction, it does not offer a clear analytical approach. Firstly, as the theory is mostly descriptive, it does not elaborate what it is about these stylistic features that might evoke the H-mood, beyond that they do and that this is their shared function. Moreover, Sauchelli stresses that H-mood is meant to ease the recognition of the shared qualities between horror works and thus offer criteria for evaluation of their success as works of horror (46). This, I would argue, continues to enforce a type of assumed sameness on horror. H-mood implies, to use some of Sauchelli’s own examples, that works such as the *A Serbian Film* (2010) and an Akira Yamaoka track were

designed to create the same atmosphere. To illuminate how H-mood is a challenging way to approach evaluating horror, we can look at how Sauchelli describes these two horror works. As a counterexample to Carroll’s monster-driven art-horror, Sauchelli describes *A Serbian Film* as ‘one of the most disturbing films produced in recent years’ and highlights the film’s simultaneous portrayal of explicit sex acts and gore as its source of horror (Sauchelli 2014, 41). Later, when decentering the role of disgust in horror, he then describes the atmosphere of an Akira Yamaoka track as ‘evocative and mysterious’ (47). Comparing the two works even as they are described by Sauchelli, not to mention analysing or evaluating them as if their creators shared an evocative goal, seems peculiar. If *A Serbian Film* and an Akira Yamaoka track use similar stylistic elements, they use them to achieve different enough effects that an evaluation of their success should take this into account. This makes evident that while it might seem at first that all horror works are designed to ‘horrify’, as Steven Jay Schneider remarks, they are meant to evoke a legion of different sensations to begin with (2004, 139). A common evocative goal is sensible only if ‘horrifying’ is seen as a sweeping description to cover, in addition to horror, an amalgamation of intended affective states like shock, anxiety, dread, fear, and terror (Schneider 2004, 140).

This variety of ways horror feels and is made to feel is acknowledged by affective theories of horror. For example, Matt Hills states horror does not necessarily involve a occurent emotion towards a horrific object but can also manifest in a state of immersive, objectless anxiety (Hills 2005, 25). Inspired by Hills, Susanne Ylönen further describes how the horror affect might have similarities with the emotions typically associated with horror (such as fear, disgust and anxiety) but it is not explicitly any of them (Ylönen 2016, 20). Moreover, she notes that the horror affect may trigger varying, non-fixed emotional responses; in this way, we can alternatively be amused or disgusted or bored by horror fiction, while still recognizing the felt quality of it as horror (21). To better understand this affect, Ylönen maps out an ‘aesthetic topography of horror’. Compiled from a variety of theories, the topography of horror distinguishes between three modes of horror portrayal—sublimating, aestheticizing, and sublating—where the felt quality of horror gains different ‘flavors’ depending on the ‘distance’ the



audiences are allowed to have from the horrific and how it is presented to them (Ylönen 2016, 21). In a way not unlike Sauchelli, Ylönen regards horror more as a series of distinct style choices than as a genre (20). Further, Ylönen points out that neither the felt quality nor the aesthetics of horror are exclusive to works of horror; the relationship between works of horror and the works of non-horror with horror flavors can be referential (20-21). Following Ylönen in this matter, whether it is sensible to discuss a work as a horror work only depends on the purpose of initiating such a discussion.

If we choose to pursue some formal or affective definition of horror, it should be done with some caution—especially so when considering horror-making. Observing works of horror from an angle that highlight their messy diversity would allow us to learn from those cases where a recognized sensation of horror pervades both narrative and non-narrative works, within the genre as well as out of it. In addition, since the topic at hand is that of construction, metaphorically keeping the doors open allows examination of the myriad of compelling ways a sensation of horror can be brought forth in different mediums.

Furthermore, it bears acknowledging that the divide between ‘art-horror’ and ‘natural-horror’ is not so steep that they do not matter in conversations of the other—it is not even clear if there is a difference to begin with (for accounts of this nature, see Schneider 2004, 138; Hills 2005, 159-160). Recognizing what in daily lives disturbs, unnerves, and shocks can direct attention to what it is in these moments that arrests us, be it thoughts, the moods, or some material qualities. By approaching the works of horror—and the sensations of horror—as they are recognized rather than enforcing a ‘rationally reconstructed latent criteria’ (Carroll 1990, 13), these otherwise overlooked aspects of construction can be properly examined.

In this investigation horror is defined by its use, both as a concept and a genre. Conceptually horror is understood as a fluctuating ‘series of rhetorical devices’ (following Sauchelli) or ‘affective (style) choices’ (following Ylönen), that are at this point in time used to evoke some sensation that shares familial qualities with the emotions, moods, and affects of horror, fear, anxiety, dread, and so on. This sensation may not always manifest as fear or horror, and can just as easily become amusement, boredom, or

derision. When the words ‘horror’ or ‘horrify’ appear in this investigation to describe evoked sensation, they refer to this concoction of sensation and not only the specific emotion of horror. Similarly to other rhetoric devices, we can recognize these devices while not being convinced by them.

Although we can speculate that works of horror tend to utilize these affective devices more frequently or more explicitly than works of non-horror, the primary recognition and identification of works of horror here approaches as done institutionally by the makers, dealers, and audiences of horror. Experiencing a felt quality of horror is subjective, but not illusory. By contrasting our experiences with others and the cumulated works already in the genre, we can reasonably talk about horror and inspect what might make a work of horror fascinating in the terms of its construction.

## 2.2 Graphic style functions in comics

In the most broad and simplistic terms, ‘style’ can be seen as some pattern of interconnected choices. In comics, style is broadly defined as the whole pattern of choices made in production, from the selection of topic to the arrangement of image compositions and page layout all the way to type choices (Mikkonen 2017c, 111). These choices are inevitably connected, for example, to the preferences of the artist, the moment in time, and the conventions of the chosen genre (ibid.). In addition to personal choices, as Pascal Lefèvre points out, ‘the comic’s formal options’ are also often limited or directed by the realities of production and the social context (Lefèvre 2011, 31). For example, a comic’s style might be influenced by studio production systems dictating certain choices (Mikkonen 2017c, 109; Lefèvre 2016, 135), or it can be a collaborative effort as the creative production tasks of the work are divided between artists (Mikkonen 2017c, 109).

Following narratologist Kai Mikkonen, graphic style is used here to narrowly refer only to the drawn aspects of style (2017c, 112), or the signs of other graphic techniques used to produce the imagery.<sup>7</sup> This ex-

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<sup>7</sup> Although both Mikkonen (2017c, 74) and Lefèvre (2011, 15; 16) seek to exclude or separate

cludes choices of image selection and composition, as well as other organizational choices on the level of both single images and page layouts, which Mikkonen notes makes graphic style overall a more focused analytical concept (111). While graphic style is a separate concept from the tools of production, it is to some extent governed by the allowances afforded by them (Lefèvre 2016, 126); the amount and type of available formal choices are different depending on whether the imagery is produced, for example, via a pen, a brush, a camera, or a drawing software.

Although the specific elements of graphic style vary from work to work, recurring aspects can be used to determine general features of graphic style in comics. This can be done by observing the repeated use of particular production methods and devices (Mikkonen 2017c, 112), and then comparing this pattern within the images of one work, across multiple works, or within specific genres (Mikkonen 2017c, 115). In this way, comics and other visual narratives highlight their graphic style more apparently than single illustrations, as stylistic choices are repeated from panel to panel, image to image (Lefèvre 2016, 127). Traditionally, line drawing is a staple of the graphic style of comics (Mikkonen 2017c, 113; Lefèvre 2016, 119) which is often used in conjunction with color or tone (Mikkonen 2017c, 113; Lefèvre n.d.). In addition to line work and coloring, graphic style is seen to include choices of proportion and deformation, a stylization scale from ‘cartoony’ to ‘realistic’ (Mikkonen 2017c, 114; Lefèvre 2016, 128). In his well-known pyramid of ‘pictorial language’, cartoonist Scott McCloud describes a similar scale going from realism to the representative, ‘iconic’ abstraction of cartoon, but also adds to it a purely non-representative plane (McCloud 1994, 51; see fig. 7).

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either photographs and photorealism from graphic style, I question whether a division like this is warranted. Producing a comic through even ‘basic’ photographic images is a subjective act that requires a degree of artifice and technique that is—if you know how to look—visible in the end result. Similarly, convincing photorealism (for example, via drawing, painting, or CGI) is not an automatic act as it takes considerable effort to produce and render. Both of these constitute meaningful stylistic choices that relate to the graphic surface of the imagery and not, for example, to the organization of the page.

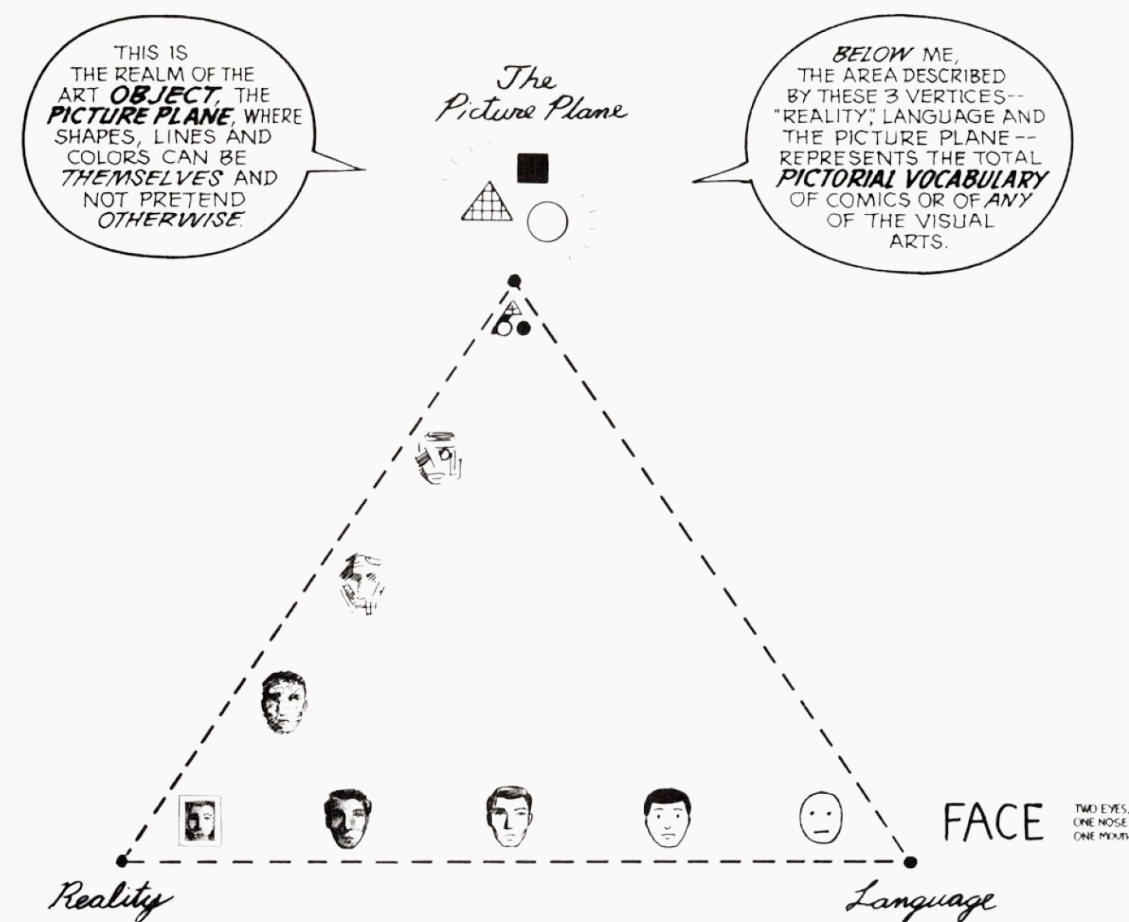


FIGURE 7. McCloud's pyramid (McCloud 1994, 51).  
Understanding Comics.

Following image production techniques, Lefèvre (2016, 130-132) proposes the following list for the possible features of graphic style:

- (the amount of) detail
- deformation (stylization of figures and environment)
- (the quality of) line
- distribution (of lines or marks)
- depth (projection system)
- light (tonal modeling and volume)
- color

Elsewhere, Lefèvre (n.d.) notes that the most relevant aspects of graphic style in comics could be further narrowed down or aggregated to:



- the way of drawing (detail, deformation, line, distribution)
- the type of coloring (color, light)
- the projection system (depth, perspective)

While Lefèvre is mostly referring to drawing techniques, the list provided here is broad enough to encompass some general features of image production at large—including painting and photography. At the most basic level, a repetition of these formal choices gives a comic both a sense of continuity and coherence (Mikkonen 2017c, 106).

While graphic style is a just creative choice among others, both critical and motivated approaches towards it are rare.<sup>8</sup> Often, the graphic style chosen for a comic is automatically seen as the ‘correct’ choice for the work (Lefèvre 2016, 123). While this might partially be explained by the fact that audiences are not being well-trained enough to separate the expression of a scene from what it represents, or to imagine alternative options (ibid.), another explanation for this phenomena is that, traditionally, graphic style is regarded as ‘a kind of signature, the image bearing the signs of its making’ (Mikkonen 2017c, 109). Graphic style choices are perceived to be more belonging to artists than, for example, choices in level of image composition or structural organization. Yet, personal expression is only one aspect of graphic style, as it can also serve a variety of other purposes.

To begin with, Lefèvre notes that graphic style—whether consciously employed or not—establishes both a visual interpretation of the storyworld (Lefèvre 2016, 122) and sets expectations for its operation (Lefèvre 2011, 17). For example, a classic cartoon-style in the vein of *Tom and Jerry* both sets allowances for cartoon-logic (where hammers may materialize from thin air and disappear without a trace) and aids in turning the portrayed violence into something ‘bearable and acceptable’ (ibid.). A world rendered in a more realistic style in turn is assumed to

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<sup>8</sup> Although note that motivated approaches to graphic style appear to be more common in productions that require collaboration, for example in larger animation production (see Bacher 2013, 44-45; 127). Perhaps when the scale of production already requires a creation of an ‘apersonal’ group style, the deciding factors for the creation of that style become more apparent.

function more like our own (Lefèvre 2015, 12).

McCloud, on the other hand, suggests that the simplified form of the cartoon allows it to distill meaning (McCloud 1994, 30). He calls this ‘amplification by simplification’—instead of viewing the cartooning mode of drawing as erasure of detail, he points out that it rather focuses our attention to the ideas being communicated (30). Additionally, McCloud speculates that the simplicity of the cartoon gives it universal appeal, stating that the limited description allows us to see ourselves in the image (36).

When discussing the narrative functions of graphic style, Mikkonen in turn refers to film scholar David Bordwell’s list of stylistic functions in film (Mikkonen 2017c, 110). He states that similar functions can be seen to apply to the graphic style in comics, and follows Bordwell’s model to suggest that style can be used to convey story information, relay thematic meaning, highlight expressive qualities, or serve a decorative function (ibid.). Narrative functions of graphic style contribute to the reader’s understanding of the characters and the storyworld as far as it relates to the understanding of what is happening in the story (Mikkonen 2017c, 112). Going back to Bordwell, these narrative functions include both instances where style is used to convey story information, as well as when it relays thematic meaning.

Examining Bordwell’s other functions of style, we can see that he connects expressive functions to highlighting the ‘feelingful’ quality of characters or action (Bordwell 2012, 377). This is also what McCloud describes when talking about line quality of comics; the type, shape, and character of the line can change its evocative qualities (McCloud 1994, 125). The expressive functions of graphic style can then be seen as the descriptive functions that make the characters and world seem animate and distinct. For the decorative functions of style, Bordwell describes those instances where the stylistic, artistically ‘arresting’ features of the work are seen to surpass the conventional necessities of narration and expression (Bordwell 2012, 377-379). As there is a current tendency to focus on narrative qualities of images in fiction, it bears mentioning that the other functions are no less important; as Mikkonen points out, ‘visual imagination’ is a significant part of the appeal of comics (2017c, 74), not to mention other visual narratives.

The potential of graphic style is further brought into focus when multiple ways of representing the ontology of the storyworld are juxtaposed.



FIGURE 8. Graphic style as an objectifier (McCloud 1994, 44). Understanding Comics.

posed. Mikkonen refers to this type of 'dynamic stylistic phenomena' as alternatively stylistic heterogeneity, shifts, ruptures, and variation (2017c, 115). Broadly, this refers to the use of two or more graphic style systems within a single work, that is, when the graphic style shifts. While this may sound like an easily discernible phenomenon, a number of graphic style shifts are already conventionalized—and subsequently, made less apparent—within the medium, formal drawing techniques, and some subgenres. For example, the different graphic treatment of characters and backgrounds is a widely-acknowledged graphic phenomenon,<sup>9</sup> same as having a decreasing amount of detail in perspective is an almost 'invisible' technique of image production, where the objects closer to the 'eyes' or 'camera' of the scene are depicted with greater amount of detail than those further away. In addition, McCloud's (1994, 44) observation of the shifting level of realism in manga could be seen to belong to this more invisible category of graphic style shifts (see fig. 8). In this sequence, McCloud points out how realistic or more detailed graphic style is used for 'objectifying' both characters and objects, while the simplified, animative forms otherwise preserved for positive characters are extended to objects when they become part of the character's action or identity (ibid.).

On the other end of the spectrum, prominently 'visible' graphic variations can bring graphic style to the forefront of the reading experience, drawing attention to themselves as well as to the relation between graphic style and the meaning of the work (Mikkonen 2017c, 119). Mikkonen states that these types of graphic shifts often foreground narrative decisions made by the author (83). In this manner, graphic style shifts can, for example, indicate a shift in narrative focus, situation, time, or level of narration ('stylistic variation', Mikkonen 2017c, 115). For instance, Mikkonen points out that graphic style shift can indicate a shift between alternative storyworlds (116-119), suggest an altered state of mind, for example by using blurriness to depict dreams or fantasies (110), or be used to vary narrative duration by manipulating the amount of detail depicted in an image (Mikkonen 2017b, 54). Alternatively, graphic style shifts can mirror or 'dramatize' a character's perspective and emotions ('mind style', Mikkonen 2017c, 118-119). This in-

9 See for instance Kai Mikkonen (2017c, 115), Pascal Lefèvre (n.d.), Scott McCloud (1994, 42).



cludes examples such as David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp* (2009) which uses graphic style shifts to relay changing character perspectives and relationship developments.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, graphic style is a potent visual device in graphic narratives. It can be used to establish the rules of storyworld operation, to serve narrative or expressive functions in a work, or to further bolster a distinct, striking artistic point of view. The study of graphic style, however, has a number of challenges. Even only in relation to narration, Mikkonen remarks that determining whether or not a fictional world has been coloured by the character's perception can be nigh impossible (Mikkonen 2017c, 122). He continues that equally difficult can be to arbitrate the 'source of narration', that is, whether the subjectivity displayed in the graphic style should be attributed to a specific character or the artist (124). Beyond issues of narrativity, making distinctions between the different functions of graphic style is a challenge of its own. Especially considering the 'excessive', or decorative functions of graphic style, we are inevitably faced with the question of 'excessive according to whom'?

Finally, as Lefèvre (2011) notes, a systematic study of graphic style is challenged by availability of comparable samples (17). Examples of different graphic treatments of the same story content are rare, not to even mention samples where all other variables except graphic style stay constant (ibid.). It could be said, that while most comics scholars are fully capable of doing 'structure manipulation' studies by deleting, moving or substituting elements of comic<sup>11</sup>, manipulating a graphic style of a comic can be seen to take a degree of technical drawing training that is not included in the traditional education of a literary scholar, a narratologist, or a linguist. Unlike the issues of interpretation and analysis, the challenge of scarce samples appears to have some readily available solutions.

First of all, graphic style manipulation is not necessary as technically difficult as it might first appear to 'non-drawers', especially con-

sidering the breadth of graphic styles used in comics. Graphic style could be studied by re-styling a comic in stick figures or abstract cut-out shapes or collaged photographs and ephemera<sup>12</sup>, just as well as it can be through formal drawing. Secondly, even formal or technical drawing is a skill that can be learned, just as writing formal academic text is—it is a skill within the reach of scholars to acquire. Another low-threshold entry to graphic style manipulation could be by using developing convolutional neural networks, such as deepart.io, that map and transfer the graphic style of one image over the content of another.<sup>13</sup> Finally, graphic style can prove a fruitful field for collaboration with—or for studies by—practitioners, as they not only capable of manipulating and producing the graphic material themselves, but can also offer expert understanding of their practice.

## 2.3 Towards horror functions of graphic style

Whereas the previous topics have been more grounded in established scholarship, here we take a turn towards monstrous hybridization, where the rhetorics of horror and functions of graphic style may conjoin. These exploratory horror functions of graphic style have been divided into three categories: mode of depiction, depiction of perception, and depiction of the horrific. They do not make explicit divisions between the different functions of graphic style (narrative, thematic, expressive, and decorative), but are rather simply referred to as 'horror functions'.

'Mode of depiction' refers to Susanne Ylönen's (2016) topography of horror, and the name is changed to highlight connection with the other categories of this investigation. The devices listed under depiction of perception and depiction of horrific have been primarily collected from Bernand Perron's list of videoludic 'scare tactics' (2018, 120-122) and the

<sup>10</sup> For illustration, see for example Randy Duncan, *Image Content Functions: The Use of Shape and Color as Hermeneutic Images in Asterios Polyp* (2012).

<sup>11</sup> See Neil Cohn (2014, 64-66).

<sup>12</sup> These are all suggestions Kuttner, Sousanis and Weaver-Hightower make for the 'not-drawing' scholars looking to produce comics-based research in a broader context beyond comic scholarship itself (2017, 415-417).

<sup>13</sup> See Gatys, Ecker & Bethge (2016) and visit deepart.io.

narratological accounts of horror by Yvonne Leffler (2000) and Roger B. Salomon (2002). These have been supplemented with some reflections from Noël Carroll (1990), Brigid Cherry (2009), and Matt Hills (2005). Out of these, Perron, Leffler, and Salomon are favoured as they are the most concerned with the practicalities of depicting the horrific.

Some notes on the limitations of this listing are in order. The horror functions presented here have been selected based on their ostensible compatibility with the previously identified functions of graphic style in comics. Accordingly, it is by no means comprehensive review of horror-making techniques, and notably excludes, for instance, common plot structures and features<sup>14</sup>, ‘true story’ stylistics<sup>15</sup>, and typical set pieces or characters<sup>16</sup>. Additionally, this listing is fairly limited to representative forms of horror, and thus, does not necessarily provide tools for the analysis or production of more abstract horror media (such as music or sound design). Although the list also mostly describes features of sequential or temporal horror narratives, I do believe it could be broad enough to consider at least some forms of non-narrative or non-sequential horror as well. As a final piece of caution, I would like to note that these categories overlap both by decision, as mode of depiction can be seen to operate ‘above’ the other two categories, and by inevitability, as in some cases it is difficult to arbitrate whether a (graphic) style choice has been made to imply a subjective vision of a character, or to create a special depiction of the horrific, or whether these are in play simultaneously. They are divided, so that when they do diverge and entangle in some notable manner, they can be examined.

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14 If interested in the matter, the reader can look up Carroll’s account of typical horror plot structures covered in ‘Chapter 3: Plotting Horror’ of *Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), and then perhaps contrast it with Roger B. Salomon’s assertion that horror narratives eschew—to their credit—typically satisfactory plots altogether (2002, 96-101).

15 See for example Susan Steward (34-37, 1982). These were not included as all of the examined horror sequences make no claims of being really ‘real’.

16 This, as first of all, these are matters of ontology rather than depiction, and secondly—as previously noted—the horror genre is so infernally diverse that a full account of even stock play pieces could fill the pages of a phonebook.

## / Mode of depiction

The topography of horror drawn out by Susanne Ylönen (2016) helps negotiate the diversity of horror. Considering different modes of portraying the horrific aids in keeping some depth in the treatment of horror, without collapsing it into one generalization. Moreover, Ylönen’s categories of ‘sublimating’ (*ylevöittäminen*), ‘aestheticizing’ (*estetisointi*), ‘sublating’ (*härmistäminen*) are intricately active, and foreground the agency in horror production—something is not so much sublime by default, it is *made* sublime (Ylönen 2016, 50). This is an important addendum since the interest of this investigation is not only in horror-analysis, but in horror-making as well.

As mentioned in a previous section, topography of horror illustrates the metaphorical distance audiences are allowed to have from the horrific (Ylönen 2016, 21). The three modes of depiction—sublimating, aestheticizing, and sublating—are akin to sign-posts of specific distances. Overall, these different modes of depiction can allow for a more nuanced inspection of horror artefacts beyond their intent to simply scare.

To begin with, the sublimating mode creates distance between the viewer and the horrific and makes the horrific seem awe-inspiring and all-encompassing (49). Ylönen connects the sublimating mode of horror to a number of interdisciplinary theories; from Edmund Burke’s sublime as some momentary loss of self (53-58) to Sigmund Freud’s sublime as an overwhelming, ‘oceanic’ experience (58-61); from the symbolism of the romantic period (61-62) to the postmodern loss of faith in the pursuit of ‘perfect’ knowledge (62-64). Overall, Ylönen describes that the sublimating mode makes horror feel threateningly shapeless, unnervingly abstract, intellectually intriguing but painfully incomprehensible (64). Sublimating approaches to horror bring forward the limits of human knowledge and perception, and question whether the world we know is actually as we think it is (*ibid.*). Moreover, the sublimating mode has a tendency to make the horrific appear more reputable and valuable (*ibid.*).

Similarly to sublimating, aestheticizing mode provides distance, but in a way that offers comfort and makes the horrific manageable (Ylönen 2016, 49). According to Ylönen, aestheticizing is apparent in, for



example, violent movies and war reportage to make them more acceptable (71-74)<sup>17</sup> as well as in the comforting and conforming functions of ‘beauty’ (67-70; 74-77). Aestheticizing also has a ‘fictionalizing’ quality on the depicted which creates symbols out of subjects (78-79). In this manner, the aestheticizing mode of horror may make the horrific appear shallow or comforting by removing uncomfortable meaning or by instilling it into the uncomfortably meaningless (79). Overall, aestheticizing can take away the bite of the horrific, whether for better or for worse.

Finally, the sublating mode brings the horrific uncomfortably close, ‘under the skin’, reveling in the base, the gross, and the grotesque (49). Ylönen builds sublating mode on Carolyn Korsmeyer’s concept of the sublate; as a suggested counterpart to intellectual and abstract sublime, sublating returns to the body and the material (81). Key is that this sensation of the gross can turn into something valuable, like the simultaneous disgust and delight of savoring unusual (or usually gross) delicacies (83). Ylönen also draws lines between sublating mode of horror and Julia Kristeva’s abject—the liminal substance between an object and subject, something that once was a part of us or something where ‘we’ have been vacated (86-88)—and Roland Barthes’s punctum, based on its invasive qualities (88-89). Lastly, the sublating mode can have a dimension of dark or mocking humour, like a corpse laughing at our discomfort in the face of death (89-91).

### **Depiction of perception**

Narratologist Yvonne Leffler claims that horror stories can be seen as a sub-category within mystery stories, insofar as they are built around question-answer structures (Leffler 2000, 106). She continues to say that unlike mystery stories, horror stories are ultimately not interested in solving their mysteries—the function of questions is to remain unsolved, to leave audiences in a state of uncertainty (107). Instead of providing neat answers to neat riddles, horror stories often focus on depicting the unknown, or humanity’s inability to escape its limited perception and understanding of reality (111). To achieve this, horror texts utilize a number of ‘mystification’ devices that

<sup>17</sup> The reader may also recall a previous example of the acceptable cartoon violence in Tom and Jerry.

complicate understanding of the story (108). Depiction of perception here refers to these stylistic devices of horror that highlight the subjective perception of a character and/or obscure and complicate the perception of the reader.

First and foremost, this type of horror devices can highlight the subjectivity of the work. This is often achieved by blurring the boundary between objective recounting of events and subjective experiences which complicates the process of piecing together an uncontested ‘true’ account of what is happening in the story (Leffler 2000, 121). Some narrative devices reigned for this purpose include building stories within stories and utilizing multiple first-person narrator-focalizers (124). Roger B. Salomon also notes that horror stories tend to juxtapose devices that affirm the sound-mindedness of the focal character with some heightened artifice that continuously brings it under question, creating hesitation about the ‘reality’ of the depicted events (Salomon 2002, 76). On the other hand, Matt Hills describes how a work can appropriate conventionally realist devices to ‘portray subjective states of mind . . . as if they were objective’ and then in a flash reveal the falsity of this assumption—forgoing hesitation in favor of shock (Hills 2005, 40-41).

Connected to the heightened subjectivity is another trait of the horror story; the inability to see clearly (Leffler 2000, 130). As Leffler notes:

The horror story constantly takes up the problem of seeing, either seeing too little and therefore not knowing, or seeing too much, or so much that it leads to trauma and madness. (2000, 125.)

In practice, both internal and external, as well as diegetic and non-diegetic devices are used to limit or obfuscate the vision of characters and audiences alike. The effects of witnessing or experiencing horror is depicted in the vision of the characters, for instance, as Bernard Perron notes, by ‘blurring’ images to express ‘hallucinations, panic attacks, or vertigo’ (Perron 2018, 289-290). In a like manner, external ‘visual interference’ or devices of limited vision are used to create uncertainty towards what is being shown (Carroll 1990, 154). Diegetic environmental factors like fog and darkness can be used to hinder the visibility of the horrific, as can non-diegetic structural elements such as claustrophobic framing or composition (Perron 2018, 120-

122). The function of these obscuring tactics is often manifold: they both limit what is literally being seen and create uncertainty towards what is not being shown, as well as whether what is seen is real or not.

### / **Depiction of the horrific**

Depiction of the horrific refers to the graphic treatment of that which is not being shown—or perhaps put on explicit display. In this investigation horrific things include the subcategories of horrific environments, horrific events, and horrific entities. In general, descriptions of the horrific (whether they are of places, monsters, or people) are littered with notions of ‘inbetweenness’, of the liminal, of this <sup>but also</sup> that.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, graphic devices that highlight some perceived or felt duality could be utilized in all depictions of the horrific. Similarly, the use of extra-diegetic or non-naturalistic lighting or coloring (as mentioned by Cherry 2009, 88-93; and Carroll 1990, 155) can affect everything or any thing in an image, and as such unusual coloring devices can affect a number of horrific details.

// **Horrific environments** can be established by emphasizing the duality of spaces or by imbuing them with a sense of malevolent, opaque agency. The depiction of the horrific environment may lean on the aforementioned horrific dualities, and sketch a vision of opposing environments (Salomon 2002, 9). The horrific milieu often inverts something known, or ‘idyllic’, in a ‘negative replication’ (Salomon 2002, 104). In this manner, as Perron notes, the setting of horror can offer an iconic ‘unfamiliar’ depiction of a familiar place to establish an anticipatory, anxious mood—for instance, by highlighting signs of abandonment and decay in usually populated spaces (2018, 347). On the other hand, Salomon notes that the alternative worlds of horror can be ‘miasmatic’ (2002, 22), ‘malignant growths’, that trespass the normalcy of the known world (10)—perhaps in a way which goes beyond the known unknown of the mood-setting iconic locale. In

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18 This has already manifested in this investigation with mentions to ‘categorical transgressions’ and the abject, but likewise often summoned is Freud’s ‘*unheimlich*’—the uncanny, the familiar made unfamiliar—as is noted by Hills (2002, 47-54). For some other reiterations of this see Perron 2018, 347; Steward 1982, 41-42; Salomon 2002, 13.

this manner, a structure can be made unfamiliar by depicting it as wholly ‘inhuman’, or in other words, by highlighting it as something not built for humans or human functions in mind (Salomon 2002, 102).

In addition to—or as another example of—devices of the unfamiliar, environments may gain horrific qualities through ‘faulty’ animation. A house can be given a life, an agency and a body of its own; chairs may move, windows and doors may bang and breathe, walls and floors may bleed and moan, rooms and corridors may ‘twine and shift’ (Perron 350-351). The animate environment in itself can ‘express monstrosity’ (Salomon 2002, 107). It is important to note here the ‘faultiness’ of the horrific animation; the environment is given lively qualities but not for the purpose of presenting as ‘truly’ alive. One only needs to consider examples from the Western animation tradition, from the whimsical ‘Be Our Guest’—musical sequence from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), to the numerous commercials that choose to animate the inanimate product they are selling, to see how animation of the inanimate is deployed for non-horrific purposes. The difference here might be that while conventional cartoon animation is very much concerned with transparently communicating character personality and motivation (with movement, but also by design), the animated horror environment may purposefully fall short. Following the distinction Perron draws between villains and monsters, where a monster is a being with an ‘incomprehensible agency’ (Perron 2018, 376-377), we can note that this applies to the agent environment as well. The writhing and squirming teacups, napkins, and pitchers of ‘Be Our Guest’ are shown doing so for a clear reason: they are entertaining Belle and inviting her to be entertained by them. The cartoon form and the musical presentation further domesticate the potentially uncanny scene. Meanwhile the ‘animated’ haunted house may be given a body or bodily functions and motion, but what it is doing and why is obscured—and so, assumed malignant by context.

// **Horrific events** refer here to those instances where the horrific is present. To begin with, we may follow Carroll’s logic of using the reactions of the positive characters as a guide to noticing the salient horror moments in a narrative (Carroll 1990, 18-19). The focus of horrific events is to portray the



horrific in some manner, while possibly also presenting an ideal reaction to it through the positive characters. These moments can include instances where characters talk or think about the horrific, but might be most explicit during direct confrontations between the characters and the horrific, or between the audience and the horrific. Some horrific devices that are used in these confrontations include, for example, the startle event and the frozen moment.

Startle or shock events (or simply put ‘jumpscare’), utilize ‘quick intrusions of disturbing figures’ as well as sensory events happening at the peripherals of attention (Perron 2018, 372). The ‘shock cut’ (following film studies) is therefore used to create a violent disruption of the narrative in a ‘single savage moment’ of force and velocity (Cherry 2009, 100). The shock cut differs from a regular jump cut by its disturbing contents (ibid.). To further push the effectiveness of the shock event, it is typical to utilize a preceding uneventful ‘long take’ or other anticipatory tactics to create a sense of expectation for something to happen (102).

While shock events are perhaps more at home in audiovisual and temporal works of horror (as these forms provide more affordances for depicting abrupt, forceful movement), still horror forms such as painting and photography may utilize ‘the fixation of the pregnant moment of the reaction’ (Perron 2018, 73), or what I’m calling here frozen moments of horror. These moments invite the audience to fully fixate on the image (Perron 2018, 73). While Perron does not make this connection himself, he later notes that horror games typically use high-fidelity, high detail cutscenes to introduce their monsters (2018, 379), which I would mark as a frozen moment as the players are invited to simply marvel at horrific before being pushed back to play. Similarly, Cherry refers to these drawn-out moments of fixation by negation when talking of shock-cuts: ‘these acts of violence [that the horror film refuses to cut away from] *do not necessarily have to be long drawn-out shots*’ (2009, 101, emphasis and clarification added). The duration of horrific events could then be forcefully fleeting, or arrestingly prolonged.

// **Finally, horrific entities** and monsters do populate the genre in its many forms. As previously stated, horrific entities are perhaps foremost beings that are presented with incomprehensible or obscured agency (Perron

2018, 376-377). Following the qualities of horrific spaces, the horrific entity can as well be an exaggeration of a liminal union between some perceived dual opposites (Leffler 2000, 145; Perron 2018, 386; ‘fusion technique’ in Carroll 1990, 43), or a ‘negative double’ of a positive character (Leffler 2000, 146; Salomon 2002, 33; see also ‘fission technique’ in Carroll 1990, 46-47), that should embody for both the characters and the audiences the unknown and strange (Leffler 2000, 139).

If defamiliarizing the environment can be seen as a process of faulty animation, then defamiliarizing an entity might be seen as process of faulty inanimation: something is made to appear less alive or agent, while maintaining some discernible aspects of their previous form. As Perron notes, the anatomy of the horrific often mirrors that of a human while being ‘not quite right’ (Perron 2018, 384). According to Perron, this can be achieved for example by prescribing strange, erratic movements for horrific entities, as well as by distorting their facial features (386-388). Perron remarks that distorting the face disrupts its function as the ‘privileged place’ of communication and expression (2018, 388). Likewise, the entirety of the typical human figure can be stretched and distorted; its features exaggerated or multiplied to create unfamiliar silhouettes (392-395).

Another method of depicting the human as ‘not quite right’ is to underline the ‘blunt physicality’ of the grotesque (Salomon 2002, 55), and to foreground the material aspects of the body (Perron 2018, 390). This type of ‘body horror’ often relies on realistic depiction of the figure, highlighting the details of decaying, bulging, and merging flesh (ibid.).

Overall, it is clearly evident horrorification devices of figures lean heavily on the conceptions of normalcy and ideal forms. It is consequently important to note how apparent ethics are, or perhaps should be, in horror production—as Perron notes of horror video games, the abnormalcy of horrific forms frequently refers to sexual (female gendered) imagery, neuroatypicality, and racialization (Perron 2009, 448-449). This note is reflected in the amount of critical writing that horror, in its many forms, garners. While I, like Perron, do not concentrate on being critical of the genre in this investigation, it would be remiss to not acknowledge the responsibilities of horror production, especially as it comes to depiction of abnormality, as well as that which is made abnormal to begin with.

## Just the right bullets

The methods used in this investigation are a combination of practice-based experimentation and hermeneutic image content analysis. Considering that this thesis is concerned with describing and interpreting the intersection of graphic style shifts and horror devices in horror comics, the overall approach used is qualitative in nature. As Muratovski (2016) describes, qualitative research is the recommended approach when focusing on describing, interpreting, verifying, or evaluating something (2016, 48).

As far as comics research goes, this investigation follows the guidelines set out in Neil Cohn's critique of 'comics theory' (2014). In his critique Cohn notes that the field of comics research is pervaded with both theoretical and methodological inadequacies and confusion on what kind of knowledge can be extrapolated from what type of research (57; 71). He points out that much of this confusion might stem from the lack of transparency on whether one is studying comics from a cognitive or an aesthetic perspective (70).

The approach this thesis takes to investigate the aesthetics of horror comics is two-fold. First, it conducts a series of graphic experiments on a sequence of original work. Cohn calls this type of method 'structure manipulation', since it inspects the workings of the comic by changing its structure (Cohn 2014, 69). Secondly, the investigation analyses the image content functions of horrific graphic style shifts to determine how they work to create a sensation of horror within the sampled comic sequences. This is inspired by Cohn's proposed cataloguing method for comics research where the workings of a phenomena in a comic or across multiple

comics are listed and described (ibid.). Instead of inspecting cognitive explanations for how comics function, these methods were used to offer aesthetic interpretations of these functions.

A more detailed description of analysis, sample collection, and experimentation methods will soon follow, but before going deeper it is crucial to be aware of the dangers lurking in the shadows. Especially in the context of practice-based research, where part of the research material is produced by the researcher, it is deceptively easy to incidentally make the practice reflect a suggested, possibly incomplete or false theory, which can lead to circular interpretations, where 'because my theory of how this works is X, it should be drawn in the way Y, and because it is drawn like Y it can be proven to work like X'. While objectivity in research that involves interpretation is a futile (as well as a contradictory) goal, it remains imperative to be critical and self-reflective; seek solutions to disprove hypotheses and observations as well as to prove them. Afterall, it is a well-known horror trope that stubbornly holding on to your existing beliefs usually gets you slaughtered by the third act.

### 3.1 Hermeneutic image content analysis

As there is no set model for comparative analysis of graphic style shifts, the analysis method applied in this investigation is, to an extent, exploratory as well. It is inspired by American comic researcher Randy Duncan's suggested method for hermeneutic image content analysis. Duncan notes that hermeneutic image content analysis approaches comics as 'rhetorical acts by one or more agents' (2012, 46), and while he directs the method more towards the analysis of 'complex narratives with a degree of ambiguity' (ibid.), the adapted model used in the analysis of this thesis was pointed towards the rhetoric acts of horror-making. The goal was to assess what graphic style devices were used to serve horrific functions, and to describe how they were used to do so.

Duncan's model was chosen as the basis for analysis, as it is meant for observing and analysing specifically meaningful images in comics (2012, 43-44). The method focuses on inspecting non-diegetic 'hermeneutic' images in comics, or more specifically, the images that 'explicitly' attempt to influ-

ence the reader's interpretation of the storyworld (44-45). Duncan describes that these images represent something more or other than just the physical or mental reality of the fictional world (45). This appeared a fitting match for inspecting horrific graphic style shifts, as they explicitly can be seen to guide the reader to interpret facets of the storyworld as horrific in ways that do not necessarily fold under interpretations of diegetic reality.

As an example, Duncan uses his method to analyse the hermeneutic image functions as they relate to the relationship of Hana and Asterios in David Mazzuchelli's *Asterios Polyp*. While Duncan notes that visual metaphors also count as hermeneutic images (ibid.), he focuses his analysis of *Asterios Polyp* on the graphic style aspects of color and shape (48). The analyses in this investigation followed this emphasis on graphic style.

Duncan's method is as follows:

- 1 Name artists and their roles
- 2 Read work as is, without trying to overly analyze it
- 3 Identify hermeneutic images using frequency and presence at pivotal moments as hints of analytical saliency
- 4 Determine how they function to contribute to the reading of the story or a specific aspect of the story (46-47.)

After being modified to inspect the relation between graphic style shifts and horror, the method used in this investigation looked like this:

- 1 Name artists and their roles
- 2 Read work as is, without trying to overly analyze it
- 3 Identify non-diegetic graphic style shifts occurring during horror events
- 4 Observe and describe what aspects of the graphic style shift and determine how they function to contribute to the affective understanding of horror

Considering the breadth of the sample, the analytic focus was put strictly on moments where the graphic style shifts occur during horror events. This means that interpretations of the overall meaning and the specifics of individual comics were not deeply investigated, but were brought up when more context was needed for describing and interpreting the horror. While, as Ylönen suggests (2016, 21-22), examining horror might always have an aspect of just tasting out the story and savoring horror, it is possible to use a mangled interpretation of Noël Carroll's definition of art-horror to help navigate these moments. In narrative works of horror, a horror event might then be underway when 1) a manifestation of horror is present (physically, mentally, verbally) and 2) the focal characters react to this presence in a way that implies they are scared, disgusted, or otherwise distressed.<sup>19</sup>

As further defined before, graphic style shifts were approached through Lefèvre's factoring features of graphic style: 1) detail, 2) deformation, 3) line, 4) distribution, 5) depth, 6) light, and 7) color. As to limit the scope of investigation, graphic treatment of typography, speech and thought bubbles, as well as panel borders were exempt from the analysis. After identifying graphic style shifts deployed at horror events, their horrific functions were interpreted using the speculated horror devices as guidelines. The analysis sought to limit its arguments to what was observable in the works and what could be interpreted by comparing the works to each other, or comparing different moments within the same work. It was also important to keep in mind that identifying both graphic style shifts and horror events is always reliant on also identifying what the 'baseline' of the comic is—how a comic normally graphically looks like and what it feels like when not depicting a horror event.

### 3.2 Navigating contemporary horror comics

The selection of research material aimed to arrive at a manageable, non-repetitive, fruitful sample that presents how graphic style shifts are used to portray

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19 If one, however, is interested in better savouring horror, the following is suggested: 1) read alone, 2) read late at night, 3) dim the lights, 4) maybe light a candle, and 5) listen to some spooky tunes or white noise with headphones on.



horror in contemporary horror comics. As Muratovski (2016) points out, the sampling process for visual research may vary highly in its rigorousness but can benefit from being guided by some central principle (160). The guiding principles of this particular selection were the use of graphic variations and date of publication. Although somewhat systematically acquired, this selection was not meant to represent an average or to be taken as a generalization, but rather to serve as a fruitful and diverse basis for analysis.

The focus of visual analysis was directed at how graphic style shifts are used in a broader sense and not necessarily on how a specific artist uses them. A broader look at six comics then provided material for analysis that might go beyond the quirks of one artist. A sample like this also gave the possibility of comparing and contrasting the chosen works with each other in an attempt to identify patterns as well as discrepancies. This seeking of patterns and similarities should not be seen as an attempt to reduce the sample into generalizations, but rather as clues that the works and their artists share social and cultural contexts which affect their work.

The initial sampling was done to limit ‘all horror comic books’ down to ‘some horror comic books’ using *Best of* -lists from various sources. While the focus was not what makes ‘best horror’, this approach gives a collection of titles that are seen as prevalent in contemporary generic discourse. The *Best of* -lists were all from the first page of search results for *Best horror comics* and *Best horror graphic novels*. Two of the selected lists were user-curated and evaluated (Ranker, Goodreads), one list was composed by two male editors working in the field of comics (Paste Magazine), and one list was composed by a female editor mostly working in the field of women’s studies (BookRiot). The purpose was to keep the sample diverse, while still narrowing down the amount of individual comics. To keep the focus on the current state of the field, comics published before 2010 were eliminated from the list.<sup>20</sup>

The final downsizing to the selected titles was done at the investigator’s own discretion to include titles that used graphic style shifts to depict horror in a way that would be meaningful to the investigation at hand. Finally, to avoid oversaturation and keep the analysis of this sample within a reasonable scope, only the first volume of serial comics was included in

20 See ‘Appendix’ for the initial sampling of horror comic titles.

the analysis. In the case of anthologies and collections, a work per title was again selected based on how relevant they appeared in the context of this research. The following offers a brief introduction of the selected comics. This introduction includes naming the creative agents of the works, a short plot description taken from the publisher’s websites (and if not available, written by the investigator), and an example of their baseline style.



”Site 17” (in *Bones of the Coast*. Cloudscape Comics, 2016)

Artist	CHRISTIAN HARUKI LETT
Writer	ADAM TUCK

A pair of siblings are faced with the unease of the unknown as they share an otherwise empty camping site with a mysterious neighbor. As the neighbor invades the siblings’ tent at night, they flee. When the siblings return to collect their belongings, they find the campsite ransacked, and their tent still occupied. Who or what resides at camp site 17 is never shown, but all their fears may result in nothing more than a hungry bear.

The figures of the baseline style are stylized and cartoony. The coloring is more realistic and, for example, changes to indicate different times of day.



**Gideon Falls, Volume 1: The Black Barn (Image Comics, 2018)**

Writer	JEFF LEMIRE
Artist	ANDREA SORRENTINO
Colorist	DAVE STEWARD
Letterer and designer	STEVE WANDS
Editor	WILL DENNIS

'The lives of a reclusive young man obsessed with a conspiracy in the city's trash, and a washed-up Catholic priest arriving in a small town full of dark secrets, become intertwined around the mysterious legend of The Black Barn, an otherworldly building that is alleged to have appeared in both the city and the small town, throughout history, bringing death and madness in its wake.'(Image Comics, 2021a: Gideon Falls.)

The baseline style of the comic follows realistic proportions and coloring. The line is sketchy, and the blacks of the baseline style are further textured with vertical line work.



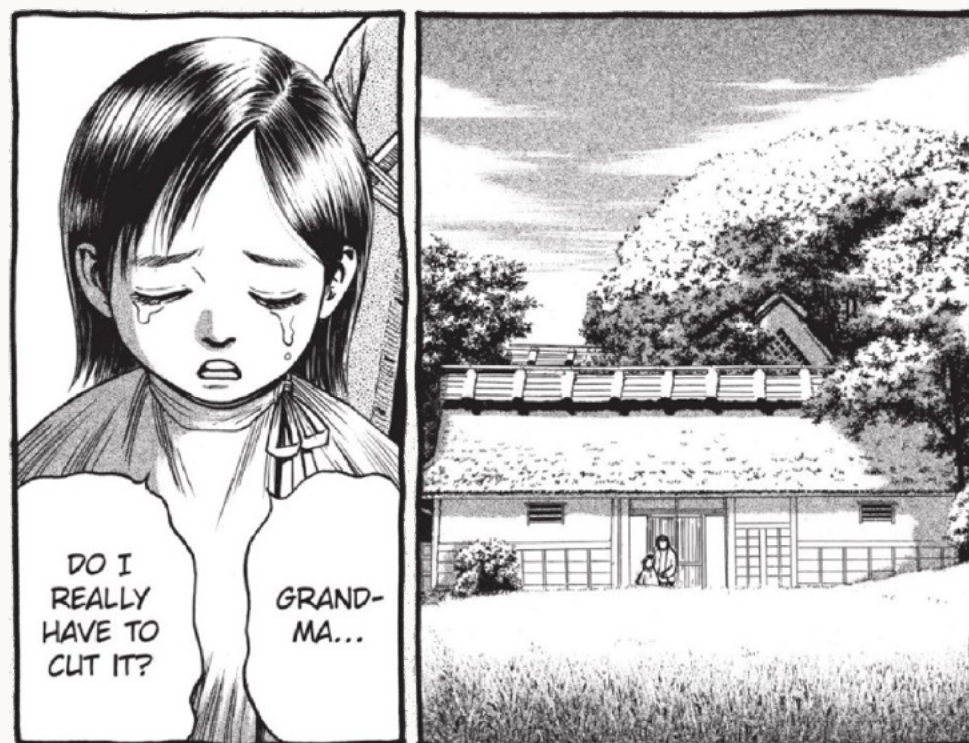
**Infidel (Image Comics, 2018)**

Writer	PORNSAK PICHETSHOTE
Artist	AARON CAMPBELL
Colorist and editor	JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA
Letterer and designer	JEFF POWELL

'A haunted house story for the 21st century, Infidel follows an American Muslim woman and her multiracial neighbors who move into a building haunted by entities that feed off xenophobia.' (Image Comics, 2021b: Infidel.)

The baseline style favours realistically proportionate figures and backgrounds. Coloring is realistic, but mostly muted. The line is loose and sketchy. More definition is put on figures, while the backgrounds are more indicative.





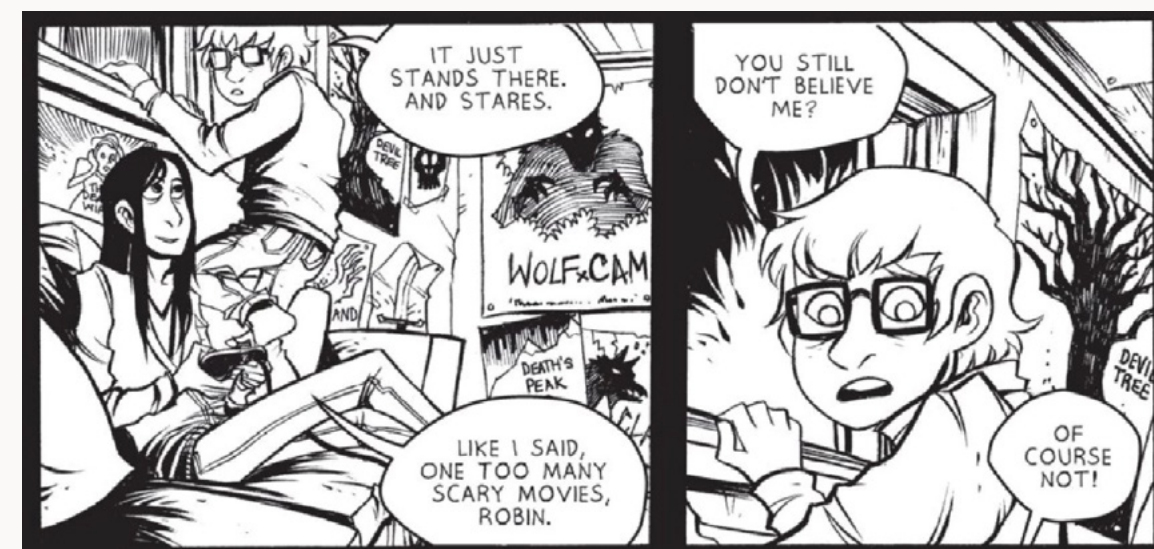
**PTSD Radio, Volume 1. (Kodansha, 2017)**

MASAAKI NAKAYAMA

'...ha...ir.....hand hand hand... han..d.....fire.....be...hin...d.....blood.....U.....sh... shadow.....ahh.....ow.....ow...w.....co.....bo...box.....chil...dren.....straw.....shears....s... sss.....sever...GR0ooOHH.....rah.....O...gu...shi...sa.....This is AERN-BBC, PTSD Radio. No tuning...necessary.' (Kodansha, 2021.)

A series of loosely connected horror sequences are used to describe the slow awakening of an ancient god. The comic's baseline style mostly respects realistic proportions but employs stylized facial features. Backgrounds are drawn with a higher level of detail. The coloring is black and white, and both horizontal line hatching and rasters are used for shading.

**Note:** Examples read right-to-left.



**"It Comes Back" (in *The Sleep of Reason*. Iron Circus Comics, 2014)**

BRITT SABO

Friends Robin and James go out to investigate a strange creature that Robin swears lives in the field surrounding his house. The encounter with the creature leads to James dying and becoming a creature of the field as well.

The baseline style is black and white, and the proportions and features of characters are stylized. Backgrounds are more realistic, but portrayed with approximately the same amount of detail as characters. Hatched shading is used sparingly to depict diegetic lighting effects.





**"A Lady's Hands Are Cold" (in *Through the Woods*. Margaret K. McElderberry Books, 2014)**

EMILY CARROLL

Soon after her wedding, a girl discovers the remains of her husband's last wife hidden in the walls and floors of his manor. After the girl re-assembles the 'lady's' corpse with a ribbon, the corpse comes back to life and threatens to take back what was once hers. The girl flees, leaving her new husband to the mercy of the vengeful lady.

The baseline style of the comic uses stylized figures and backgrounds. The color-palette is non-diegetic and limited to black, white, red, yellow, and blue. The projection system is likewise non-realistic, depicting the storyworld in highly stylized, often flattened perspective. Both the writing and the art of the comic are fairytale-like.

### 3.3 Practice-based experiments

Generally, in practice-based research, a creative work is central to the contribution to knowledge (Candy 2006, 1), and to fully present this creation process as research, it needs to be contextualized with written analysis and critical reflection (Candy 2006, 2). In this thesis the creation of work was contextualised as a set of experiments to explore the established hypotheses. The experiments were carried out by applying different graphic style devices to depict the horrific, while maintaining every other aspect of the sequence. The goal of this was to examine how the graphic depiction of the horrific can alter the sensation and interpretation of the horrific, and to further understand the aesthetic phenomena at hand by inspecting it from the point of view of a practitioner in addition to that of an analyst. Original work was chosen as the starting point to have a better understanding of what the intended aesthetic experience is supposed to be and to reserve the possibility of feeling out if something strays off course.

The experiment was informed by Cohn's structure manipulation methodology, where an aspect of comic is examined by manipulating said aspects for example by deleting them, moving them or substituting them (Cohn 2014, 64-66). While Cohn's methodology is directed towards research in the cognitive understanding of comics, it is possible to appropriate these ideas for inspecting aesthetic phenomena as well: what are the ways to manipulate the visual expression of a specific idea while keeping this expression aesthetically coherent?

The experiment set-up was as follows: heightened moments of horror within the story were identified and a moment which appeared most fruitful for the experiment was selected (full criteria for selection will follow anon). Then, a baseline sequence was drawn, striving to only portray what is required to understand the diegesis of the story. Based on the hypotheses developed from the literature review, a series of experiments were designed to guide the shifting of the graphic style in the baseline sequence. Finally, the results of these experiments were analysed using the same methods as the image function analysis.

While tools have a significant part in the makings of a graphic style, testing different tools was ruled out of the scope of this thesis and

the focus was on the different effects that can be achieved using a singular toolset. Therefore, all experiments were drawn in Photoshop 2020 using a Wacom Cintiq Pro 24 with a stylus (and as the investigator has a very specific preference, let it be known a felt tip nib was used in the stylus).

### 3.4 Overview of the original project

The experiment sequence was selected from an unfinished original work, a folkloresque horror comic titled *Kummitusjuttu* (eng. 'A Ghost Story'). The comic follows a pair of siblings as they are brought into a malicious mansion, wrecked by a mysterious disease that turns people into wooden figures. The events are set in the ambiguous past of a fictional Finland. The sequence selected for the experiment depicts the younger sibling Kuura being led by her ominous double into a hidden basement where a number of the wooden figures are kept before they are burned. The sequence was selected because it includes these two different horrific entities that lean towards different modes of depiction (the sublime double and the sublate wooden 'corpse'), a progression through environments with varying degrees of reality, as well as holding the possibility of depicting the events as a dream or otherwise perceptually compromised. Additionally, the baseline sequence on its own was not especially horrific, making it easier to feel when the sensation of horror was intensified. This baseline sequence is included on the following pages.

While the baseline sequence attempted to portray events with minimal amount of stylistic variation, it includes some natural fluctuation. This includes color shifts based on location, and the amount and type of diegetic lighting. The second floor bedroom where the sequence begins is moonlit through a dirty window, the second floor landing is darker as there are no windows, the foyer is lighter due there being multiple windows, the cellar stairway is the darkest as it is underground, and the boiler room is lit by fire in the boilers. The amount of detail shifts based on how close or far an object is from the 'camera'; elements in the background have less detail while elements in the foreground have more detail. Amount of detail also shifts based on what is the most important thing in individual panels.



Horrific entities of 'Kummitusjuttu';  
initial sketches of the wooden figures (left)  
and of the doubles on fire (right).

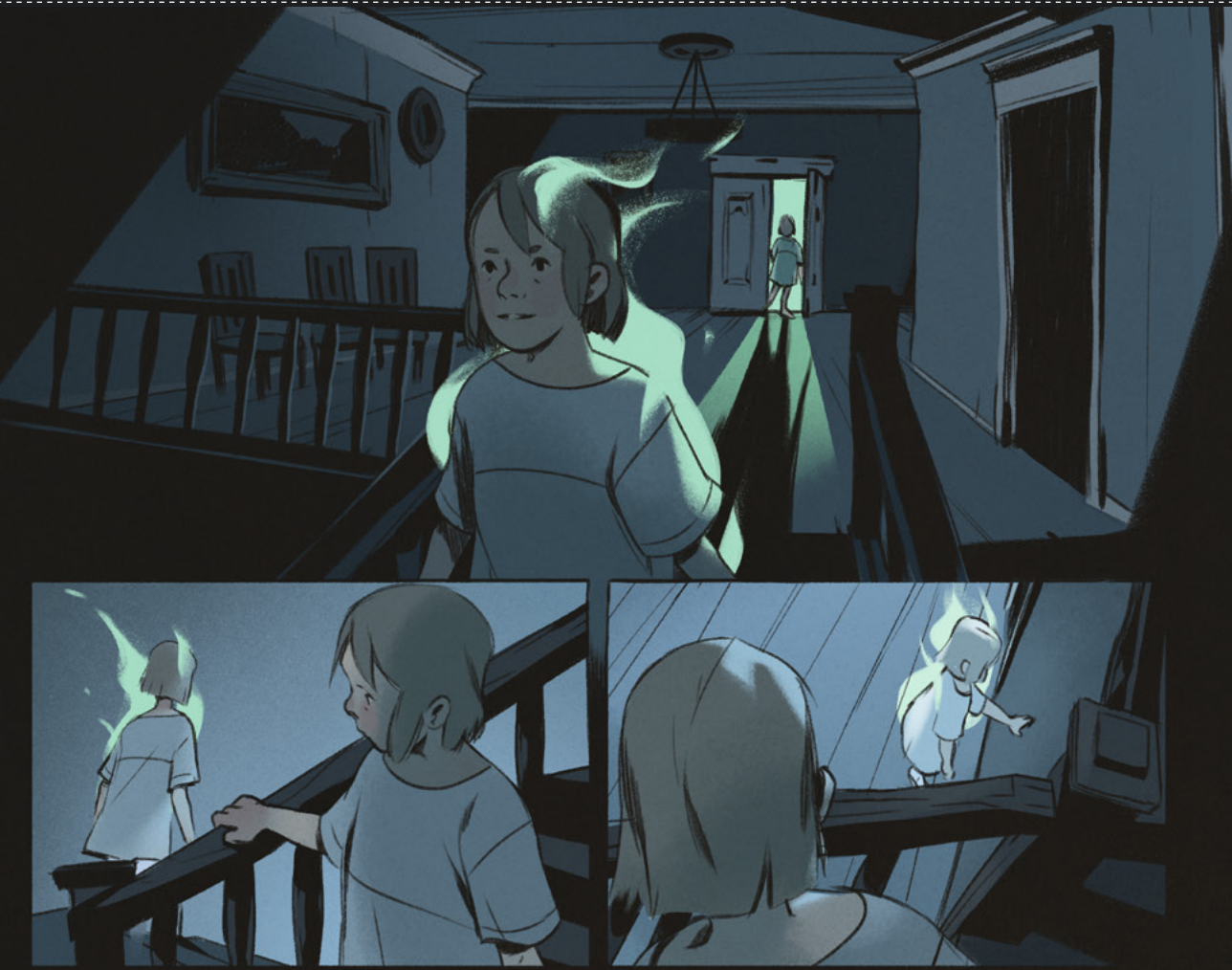
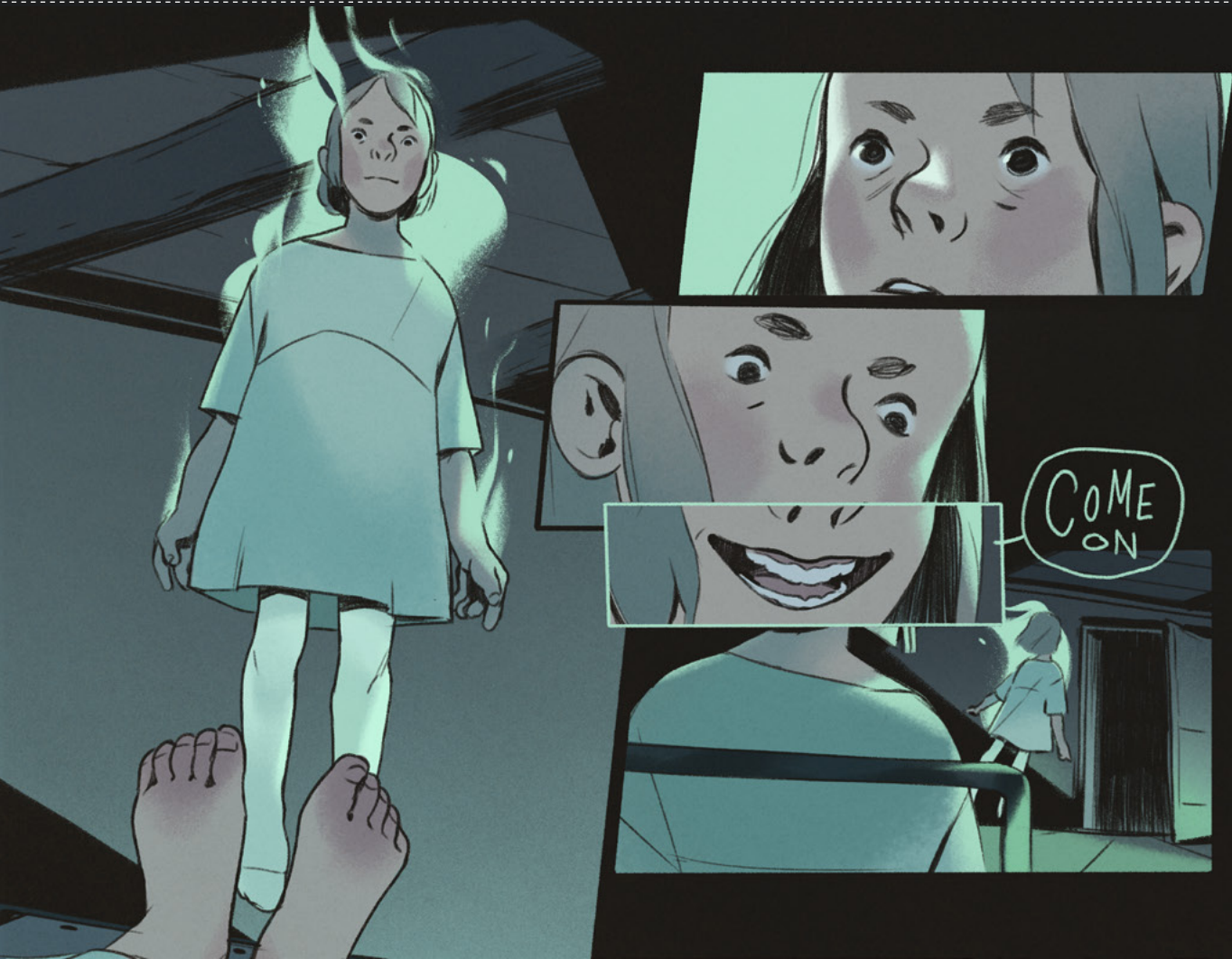
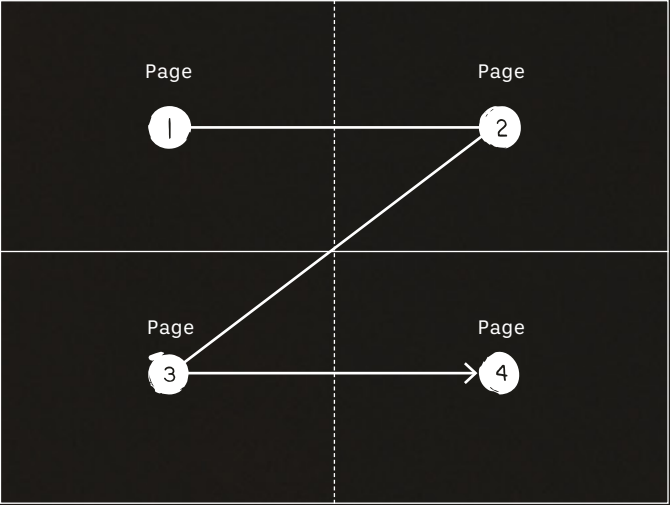


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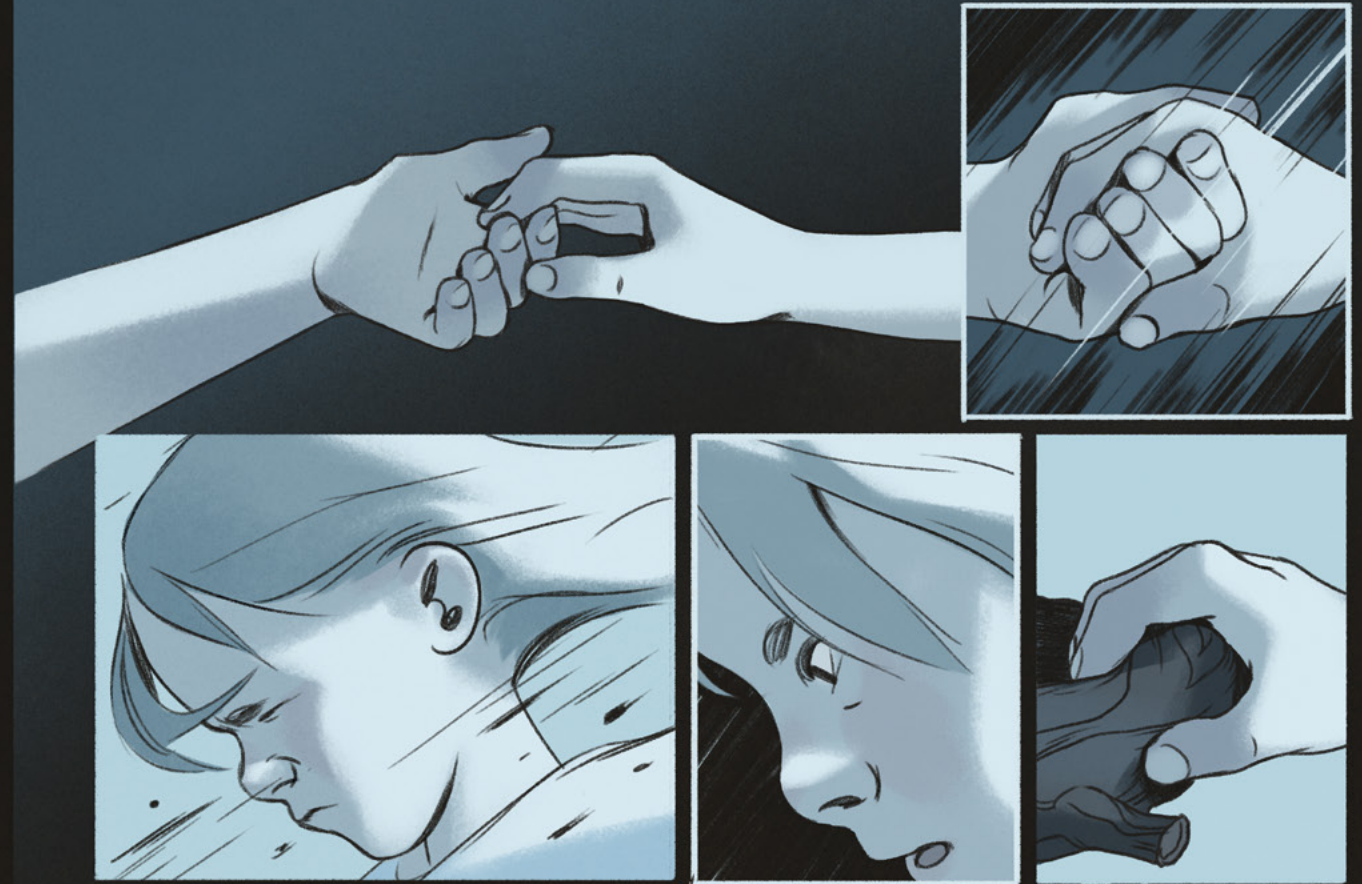
BASELINE SEQUENCE

/ No non-diegetic graphic variation

Each page here features two spreads of the comic. For maximum coherency, the recommended reading order of pages is as follows:



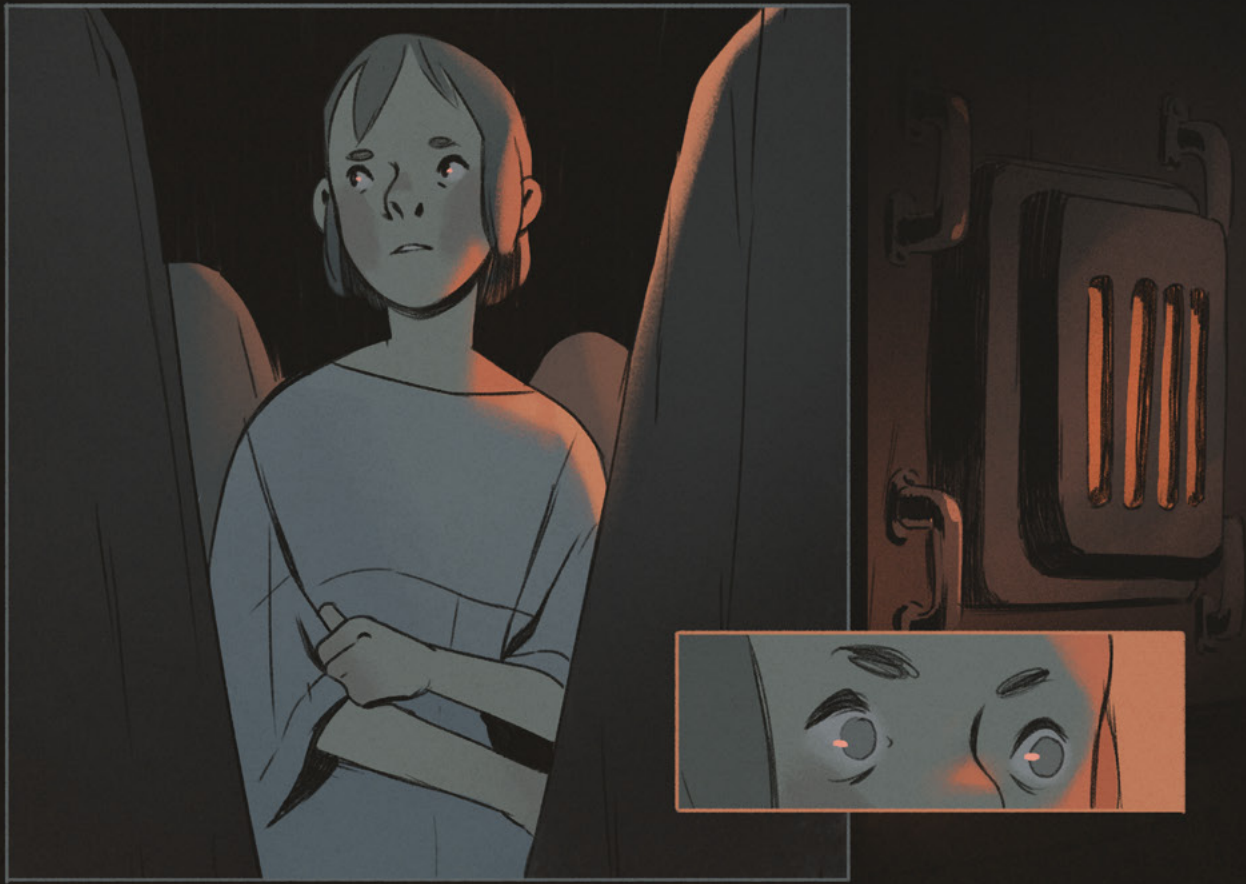














## Down to the basement

The following practical experiments examined the possibilities of horrific graphic style shifts as applied to practice. The previously discussed analytical concepts were turned on their head to consider them through horror-making. Horrific elements of the selected sequence were approached through the horror functions previously extrapolated from the literature review; the mode of depiction, the depiction of the horrific (including entities, events, and environments), and the depiction of perception. Since varying the mode of depiction is reliant on having something to depict, it will be discussed in relation to shaping either the horrific or the perception of the horrific.

### 4.1 Depiction of entities

The first graphic experiments were carried out on the depiction of entities, the girl's double on fire and the wooden figure in the basement. These studies inspected how changing the mode of graphic depiction affected the overall sensation of horror as well as the interpretation of the entities themselves—which became an especially prominent factor when said interpretation clashed with the constraints of the story. The experiments also examined some different graphic devices that could be used for depicting these specific entities as horrific. The studies made in the depiction of entities largely set the stage for later experiments as the horrific entities continue to be prominently featured in the sequence.



FIGURE 9. A pauper man statue (fin. 'vaivaisukko').  
The National Museum of Finland.

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### The wooden figure

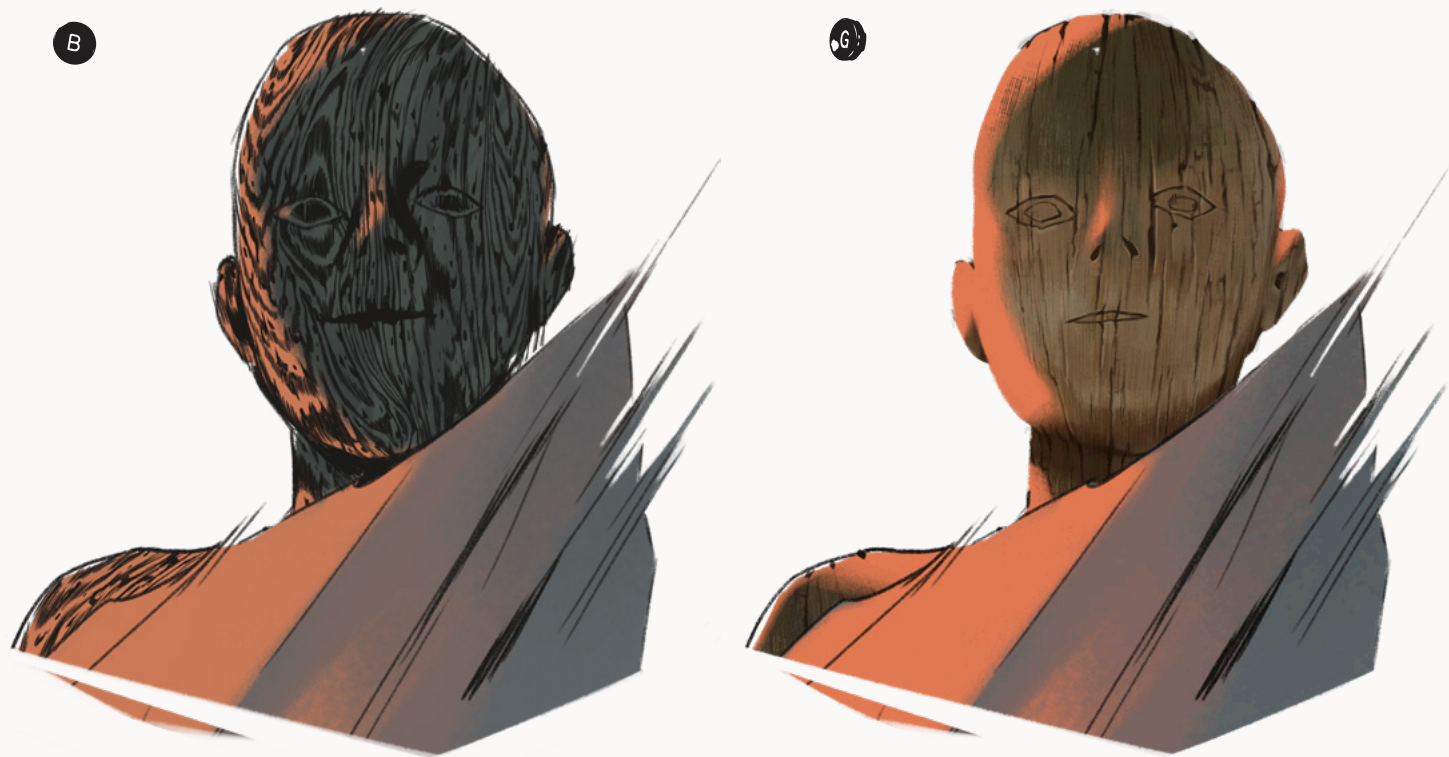
The experimentation began with the wooden figure. Within the story, the figure represents an 'empty' but still 'alive' body, devoid of its animating force. Initially, the figures in the story reference the wooden 'pauper man' statues which used to reside outside of Swedish and Finnish churches as means of collecting donations for the poor. It should be noted here that the referenced figure itself—placed outside of the original context and bearing signs of abandonment—gains some horrific qualities. Especially as it depicts a human figure, the worn and discolored wood texture easily becomes a stand-in for a decaying corpse. This connection was examined by the first graphic experiments.

Although the sublate mode of horror is repeatedly connected to the materiality of human flesh, it appeared an interesting venue of investigation whether a sublate sensation of horror can be brought forth through highlighting the physicality of other materials. As Perron notes of horror, and McCloud of comics, depiction of materiality tends towards detail-focused 'realism'. Accordingly the adjacent studies examined the connection between the level of detail and the sublate sensation of horror. Figure A is the baseline illustration style, while figure B is the exact same illustration but with added level of detail and a more realistic wood pattern. While the added level of detail refers here to wood and not flesh, the added level of detail on the human form nonetheless creates more room to interpret the figure as a corpse.

Figures C-F depict the wooden figure with a different stylization of facial features as well as an increasing amount of detail. Here, the sublated figure is combined with a clear distortion of the face, a technique that Perron identified for creating a 'not right' portrayal of figures. The usual site of an 'eye' in the knot of wood is used as a stand-in for the eye of the figure. As detail is added to the figure in studies E and F, the overall impression turns more grotesque. Compared to the figures A and B however, the distortion and stylization of the face appears to retain some more sublime qualities.



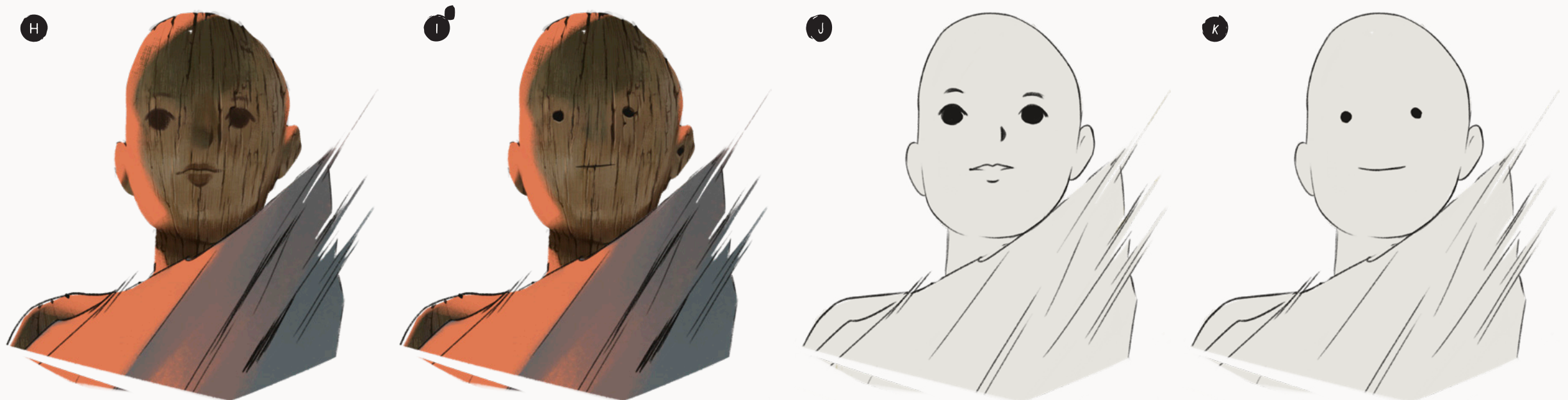




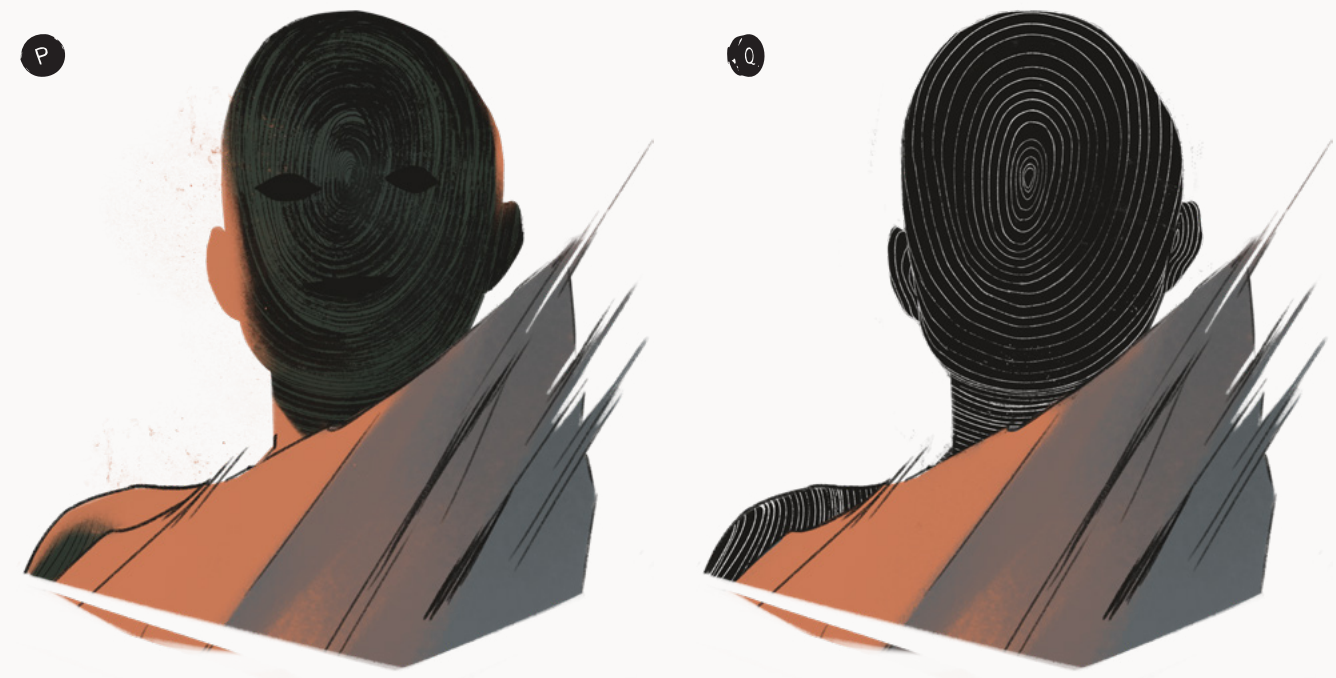
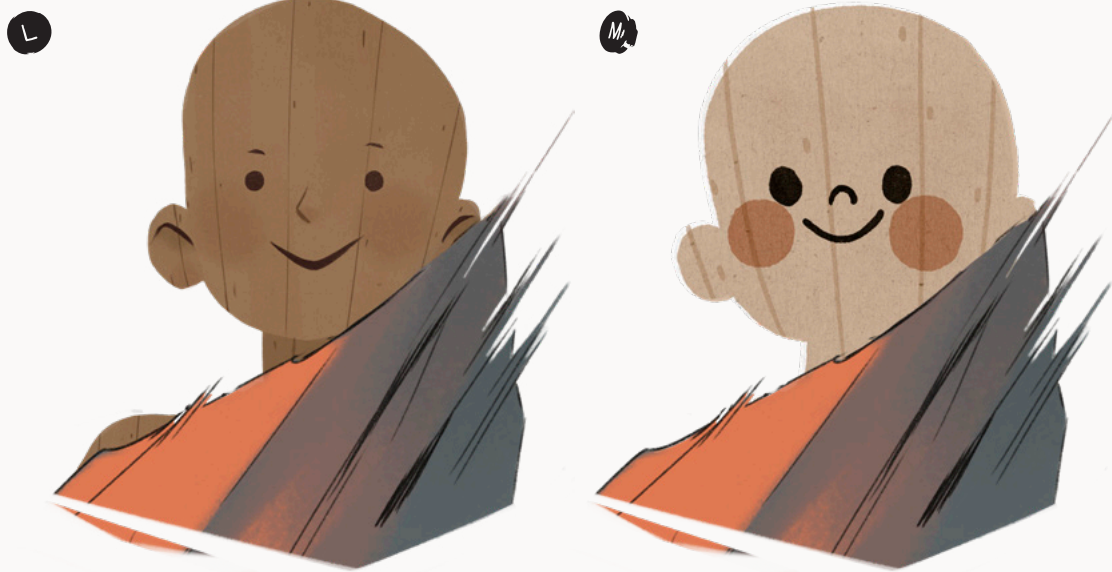
A material reference to a corpse becomes harder to make when the wooden qualities are further reinforced with graphic depiction. This is visible in figure G, where in addition to an added focus on depicting detail, the rendering style also moves towards naturalism. While figure B remains stylized enough for open-ended or polysemous interpretations, G closes some of those doors.

Heightened depiction of materiality overwrites the stylization of the facial features, shifting their interpretation from non-diegetic to diegetic. This is evident in both sets B-F and G-I, especially when contrasted with the minimal set J-K. While the features of the more material figures are, as it is, carved in wood, the minimal features of J-K are more open to interpretation.

It also appears that although the interpretation of set G-I as a corpse is perhaps less evident than it is in the previous studies, the heightened amount of material detail itself functions as a horrific device to some extent; while H and I could on their own be argued to be somewhat horrific, asserting that a figure such as J or K was horrific would require some more convincing, be it of the narrative kind or something else.





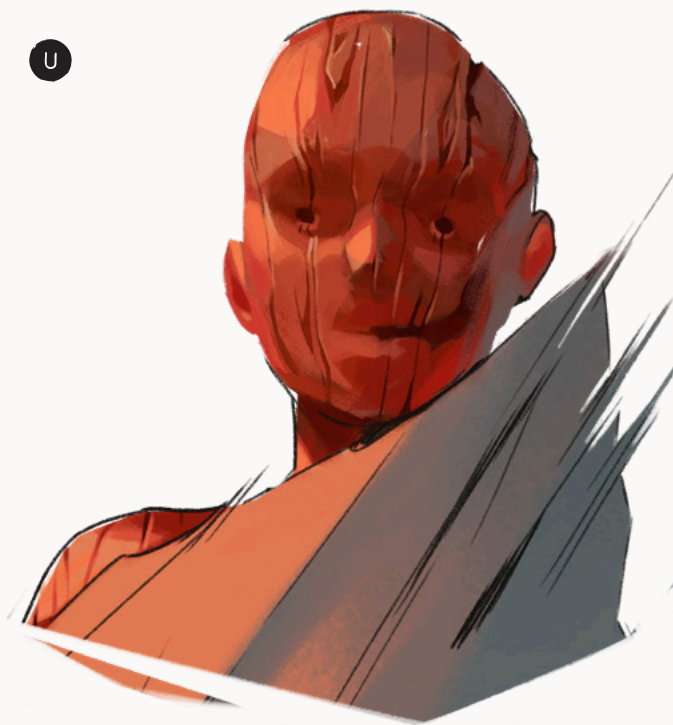


A similar observation can be made of the study set L-M, which examined the use of aestheticization as an explicit horror move. Although the images themselves are far from what is considered scary, used in this context (as a graphic style shift in a comic) they seemingly fold under depiction of perception; as the revealed horrific figure is on purpose not-at-all horrific, they appear almost like a coping mechanism of the protagonist witnessing the horror. This connection is strengthened as the protagonist of this story is in fact a child, and as the aestheticization tactic applied in the images references storybook illustrations. It should also be noted that this drastic of a change in style also comes across as quite comedic and successfully incorporating it into a work of horror would require some more work. A further exploration of the idea of 'aestheticization as coping' will follow when discussing the horrific depiction of perception.

Studies N-Q examine the possibilities of using a sublime approach while maintaining the material qualities of the figure. This was attempted both by completely erasing the facial features (Q) and by making them significantly less distinct (N-P). The wooden-ness of the figures was referenced with bark-like texture and year rings of trees. N and O, in addition, retain to some extent the reference to corpses, as their appearance brushes against that of the mummy.



The notion of realism being a primarily device of body horror presented another intriguing venue for graphic exploration. Studies R-V examined the possibility of depicting the figures as ‘abstract flesh’, while attempting to maintain some visual references to wood. This proved challenging, and to some extent, contradictory to the requirements of the story—the wooden materiality of the figures is not inconsequential, as they should look and feel like you could both burn them and build regular-looking structures out of them. These qualities were continuously lost in the ‘flesh’ experiments. In this context, a workable flesh reference was able to be constructed only through color and lighting (U), although the depiction still notably relies on realism. The result is akin to a body peeled of skin, where the fleshiness is highlighted, for example, by having light shine through the left ear of the figure as it would through flesh. These separate qualities of the figures could also be further divided between panels so that the introduction of the wooden figure as an object (V) and as a ‘liminal being’ (U) are separated.





BASELINE  
A



### / The double on fire

The double on fire is an interpretation of a Finnish folk entity ‘etiäinen’; a sometimes-ominous doppelganger that can be seen to perform actions which its original will inevitably repeat. As the experimentation moved onto the depiction of this figure, the friction between story restraints and style experiments increased. The restrictions of depiction became evident, as the figure needed to be presented as incorporeal enough to be hidden or obscured in several previous scenes, as well as to somehow enter a wooden figure in a later sequence. Similarly, the requirement for the figure to be on ‘fire’ (as the counterpoint the wooden bodies) further limited the amount of seemingly appropriate solutions. The figure also needed to be identifiable as a double or shadow of the positive character, Kuura. This meant retaining some recognizable form, which in these experiments translated to maintaining the silhouette of the figure. Although limiting the formal options for the experiments, this can also

B



be seen as a type of horror move, as presenting a ‘negative double’ of a character, as described by Leffler and Salomon, requires the double to be identified as such.

Graphic style study B continued the initially sketched approach as seen on page XX. To portray the figure as ‘other’ from the positive character (a feature of horrific entities described by Leffler), the form and facial features of the figure were obstructed with flat black and repetitive line work. Instead of depicting the figure in full detail, the specifics of form were hidden. To continue the trend of distorting the face, the facial features were minimized to the burning eyes and a slit of a smile. Overall, the appearance of the figure sought to evoke a sense of a fire on the very last embers. To support this, the shape of the head and the glow of the eyes also reflect the motion of the flame. The color of the fire was throughout non-realistic to portray the figure as fantastical.





Variations of figure B showcase the difficulties in trying to vary the stylization of the double on fire. Notwithstanding some minor textural differences, and the stylization of the head on fire, these studies offer little motivated differences.



c



b



Figure C attempted to further abstract the figure, while still maintaining the story-required attributes. This worked to some extent, although the interpretation of the figure on fire became exceedingly tenuous. While the textured line of figure B could be seen as soot or charcoal, the light color used here appears more like chalk—which is a somewhat fitting choice, as the story repeatedly utilizes a chalkboard as a source of horror and tension. However, as the chalkboard is not necessarily central to the story, this type of material reference gives it some undue weight.

Study D took minimization of features a step further by presenting a minimal amount of texture and simplifying the face into simple

dot-like eyes. The sensation and movement of fire was maintained by applying spark-like texture on the diagonal line of the image. Although the figure nears depicting a black silhouette, the edges are slightly blurred and softened to bring about a sense of unreal.

Comparing the faces of figures B-C to that of D, the minimal stylization and depiction of facial features make D appear notably calmer, as well as arguably also more open to interpretation. While figures B-C appear visibly malicious and erratic, the agency and motivations of the figure D are made less obvious.

#### Variable sequence #1

The first variation of the baseline sequence (presented in the following pages) examined a horrific graphic style shift where only the horrific entities of the sequence are portrayed through graphic variation. The graphic variation for both entities was selected individually, meaning that there was no attempt at creating a matching system for both.

The selected stylization for the wooden figure was a combination of the style studies U-V, divided between two panels as described earlier. While some of the more sublate studies (such as C-F) felt ‘scarier’, they did not necessarily evoke the correct horror sensation for the story; although the wooden figures are a threat, they are overall more tragic than grotesque. For similar reasons, the more abstract and sublime versions of N-Q felt like they did not fit; the abstraction went too far to feel like they would garner much sympathy. As for the double on fire, study D was selected, as it depicted the double as ominous but not necessarily as unambiguously malicious.



1

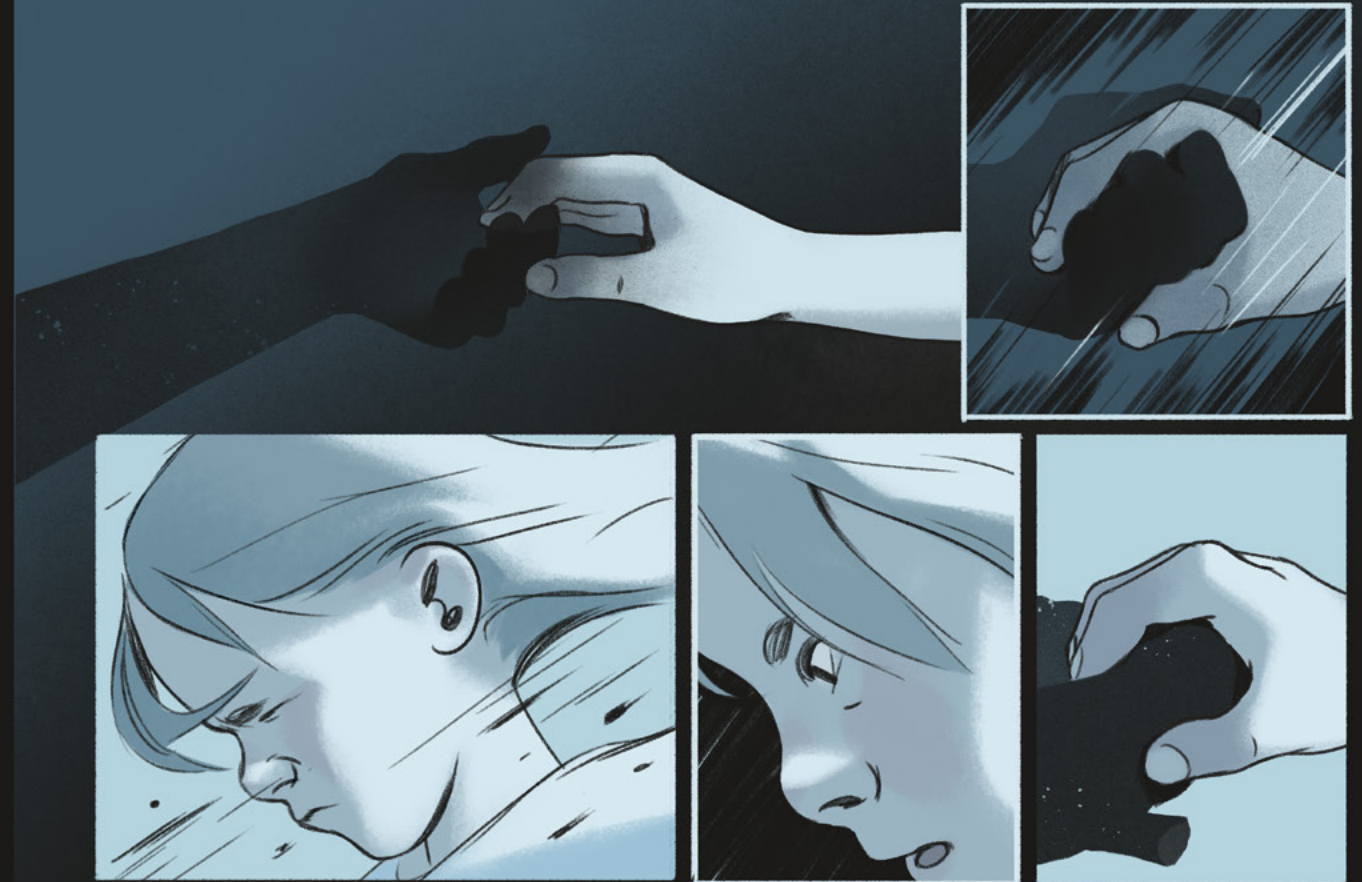
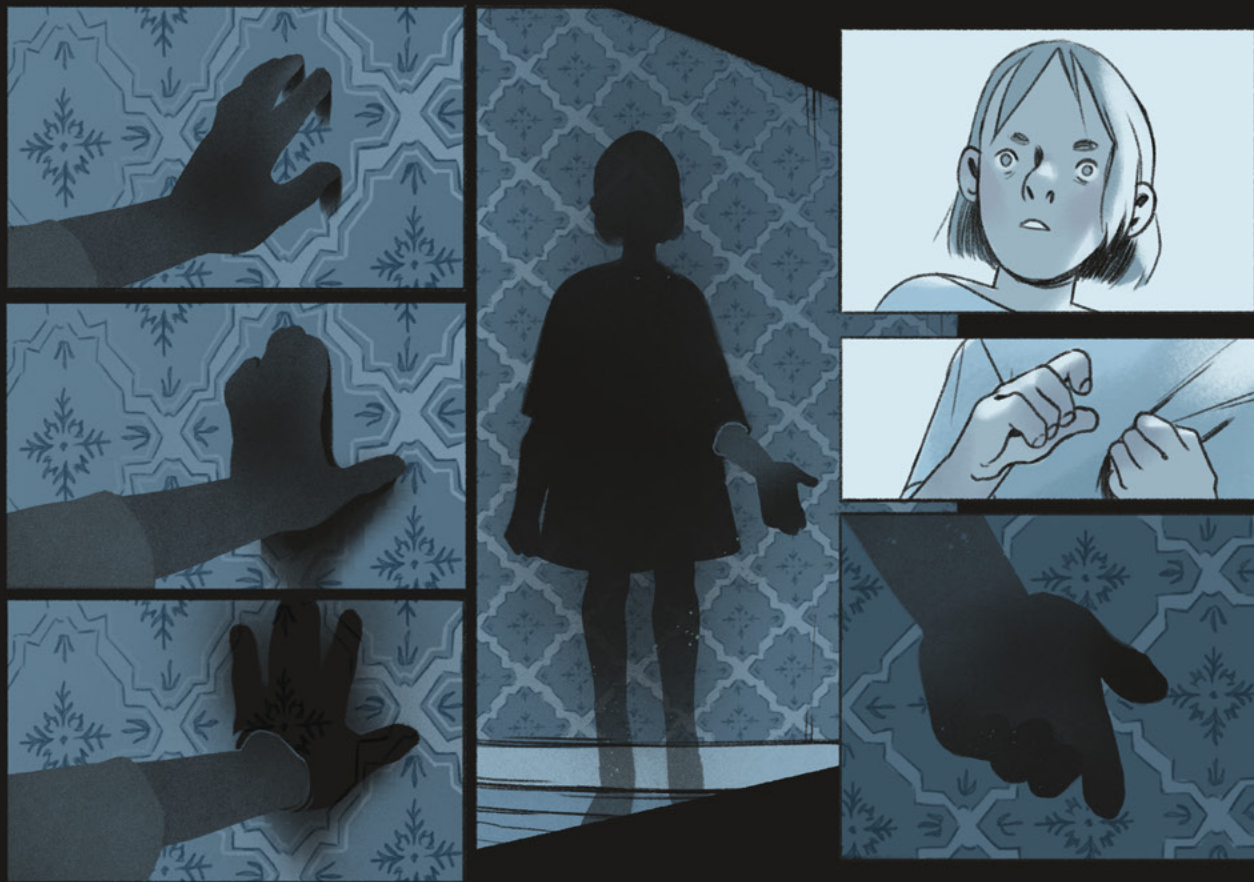
# ENTITY-BASED SEQUENCE

/ Depiction of entities shifts

/ Entities have completely separate shifts



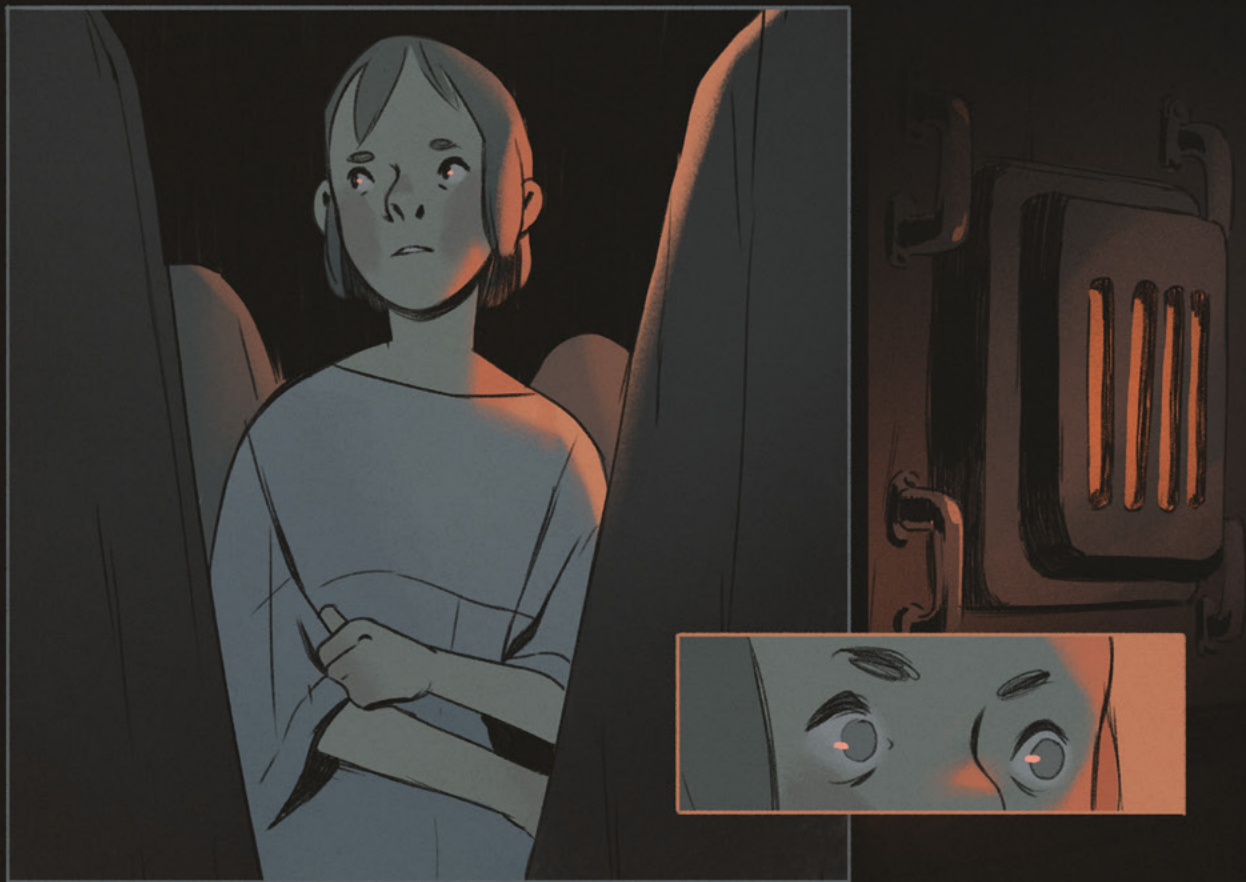














#### 4.3 Depiction of environment and events

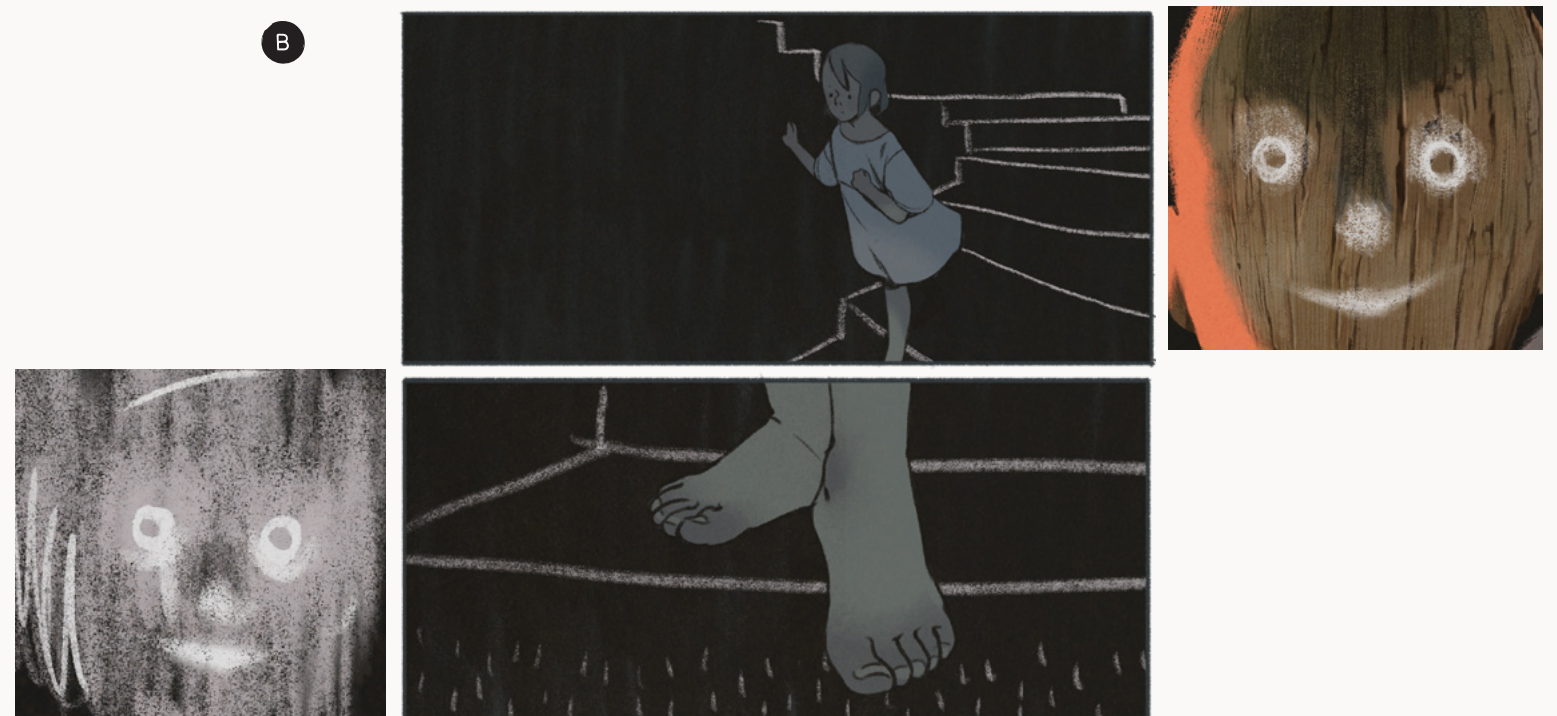
Graphic depiction of environments and events was examined in two more sequence variants. As the selected sequence did indeed continue to feature horrific entities, these experiments were more focused on creating an overarching depiction for the horrific, this time considering the totality of the sequence. Environments and events are here grouped together as it proved quite arbitrary to dictate whether the overarching depiction of the horrific was highlighting the overall sensation of the event or ‘only’ the entities and environments in it. The entirety of the sequence depicts ‘a horrific event’ but how this could be reflected in the graphic style was not obvious—especially if the said ‘event’ was to be highlighted in a non-subordinate role. Nonetheless, an attempt was made, as variable sequence #2 focused more on bridging the gap between the entities and the environment, while variable sequence #3 further examined the possibilities of graphically highlighting the more temporal properties of a horrific event.



#### / Variable sequence #2

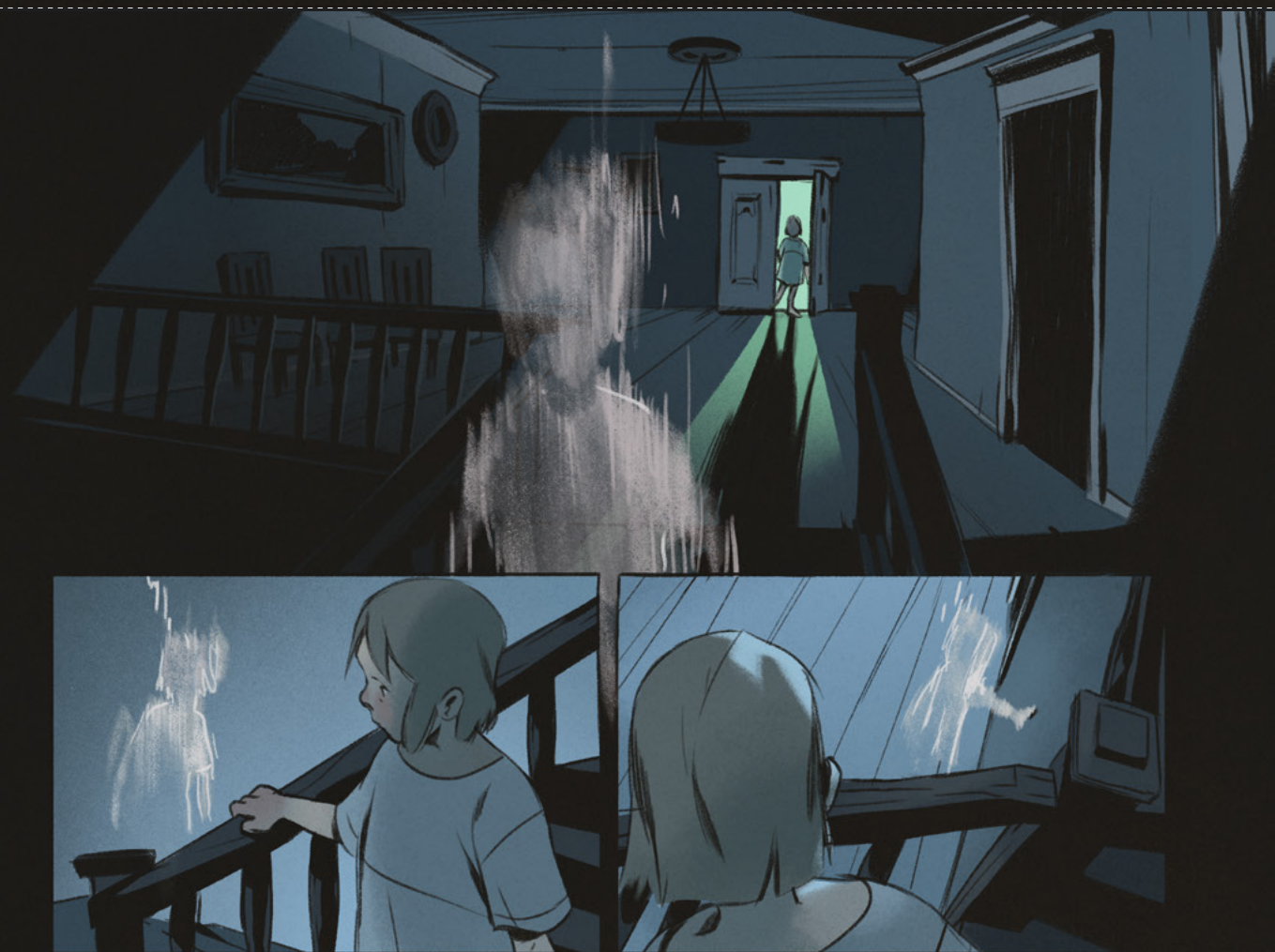
Variable sequence #2 (presented on the following pages) examined the possibility of a developing graphic shift where the graphic depiction of the double bleeds into the environment and is referred to again as the wooden figure is revealed (B). In this sequence, the goal was to somehow translate the agency and ‘faulty animation’ of the double to the environment. The loose line of the double is transferred to the environment and used to portray the basement staircase as though ‘boiling’ or shifting. While the overall graphic depiction of the wooden figure relies on material realism, its facial features and their graphic treatment mirror that of the double, as though the spirit of the line was bringing it to life as well.

The sequence also takes Salomon’s notes on ‘horrific inversion’ literally, as the color of the animating line is inverted from white to black and back to white.

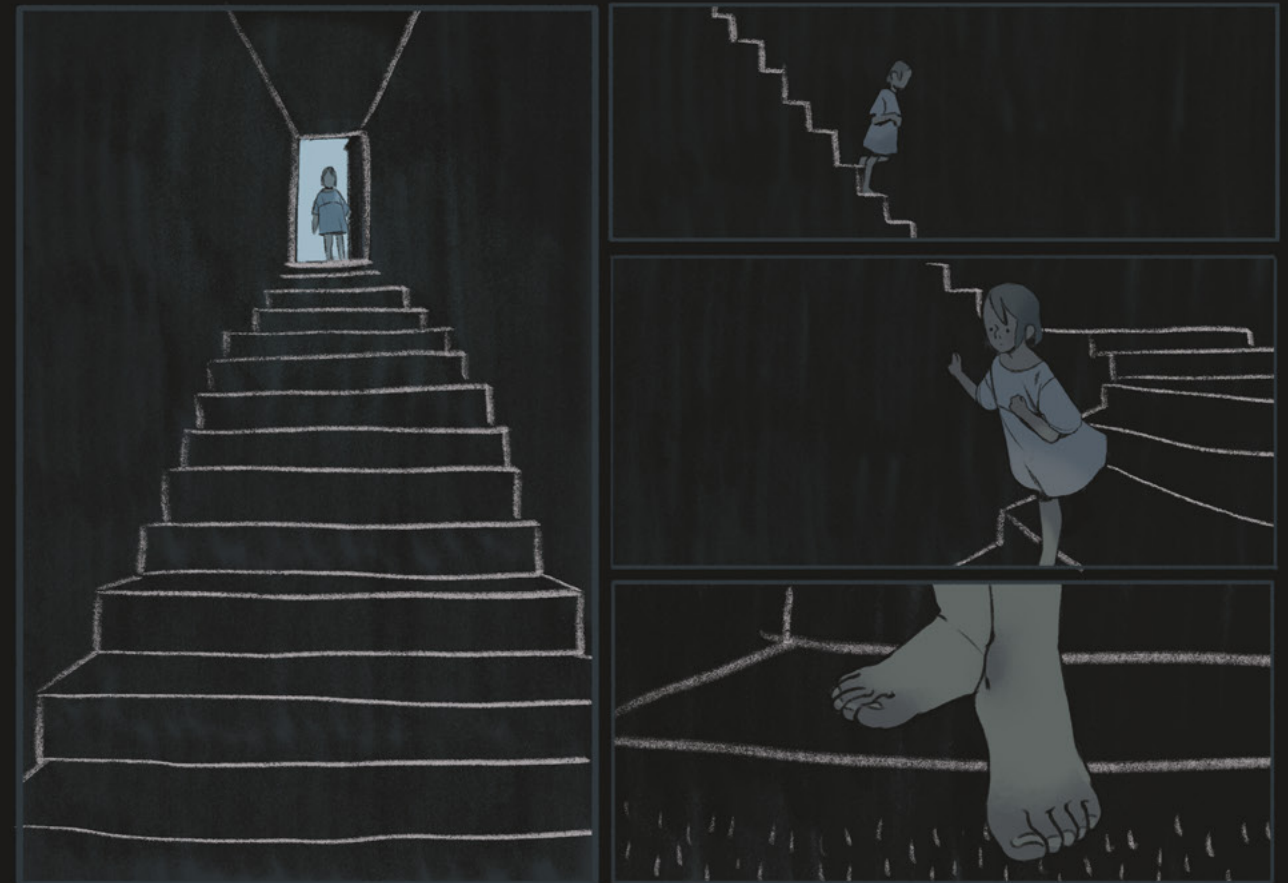
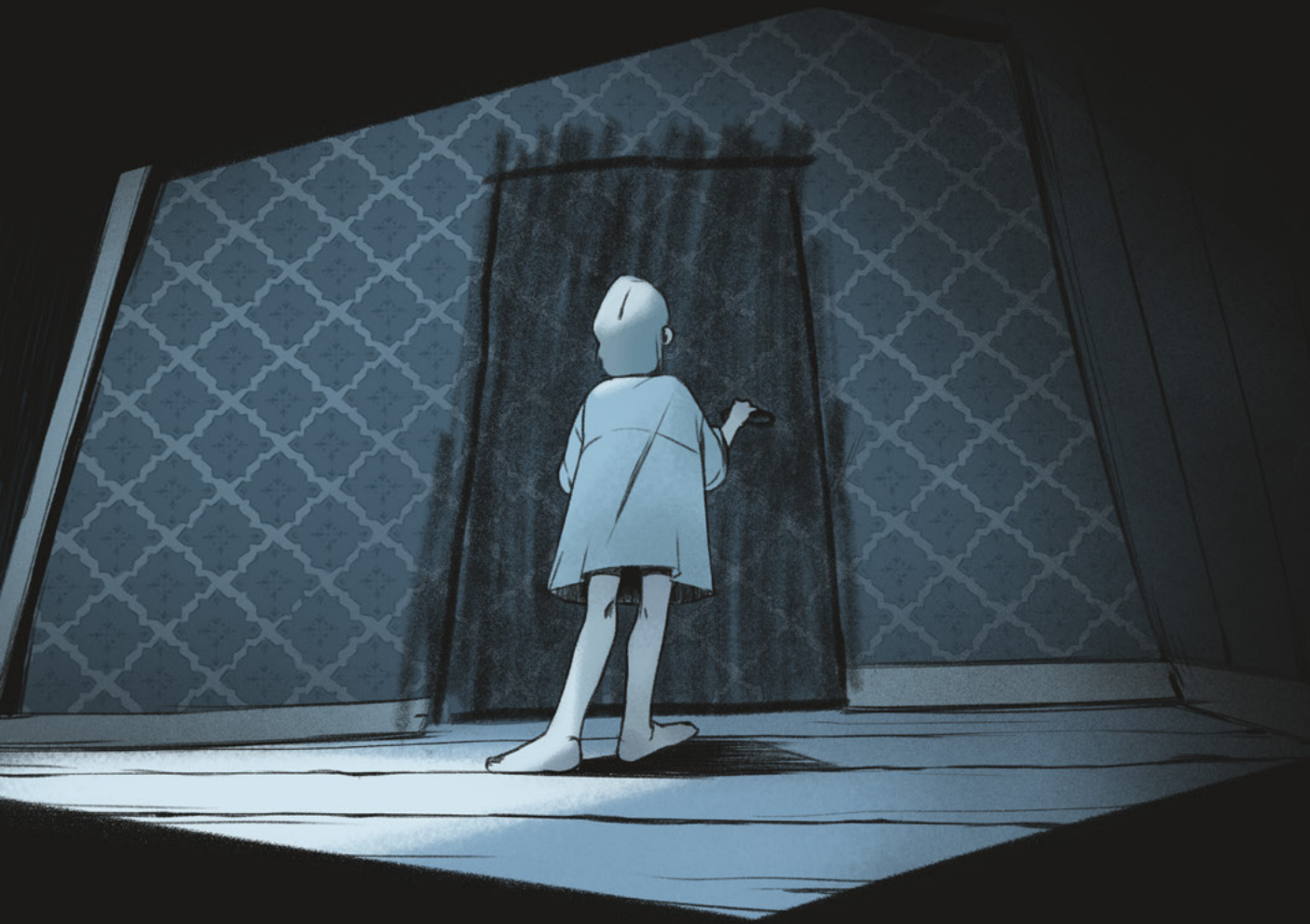
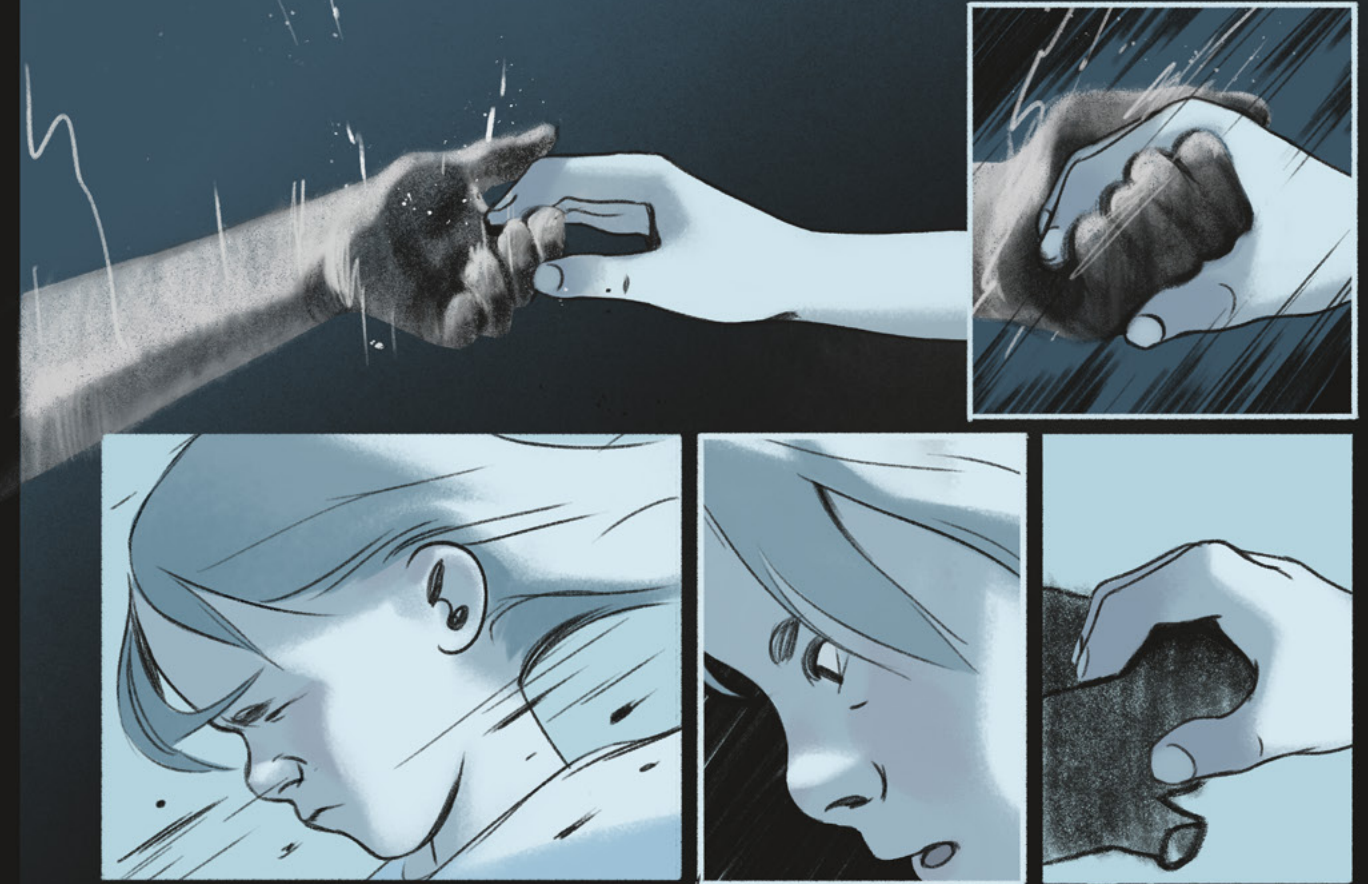
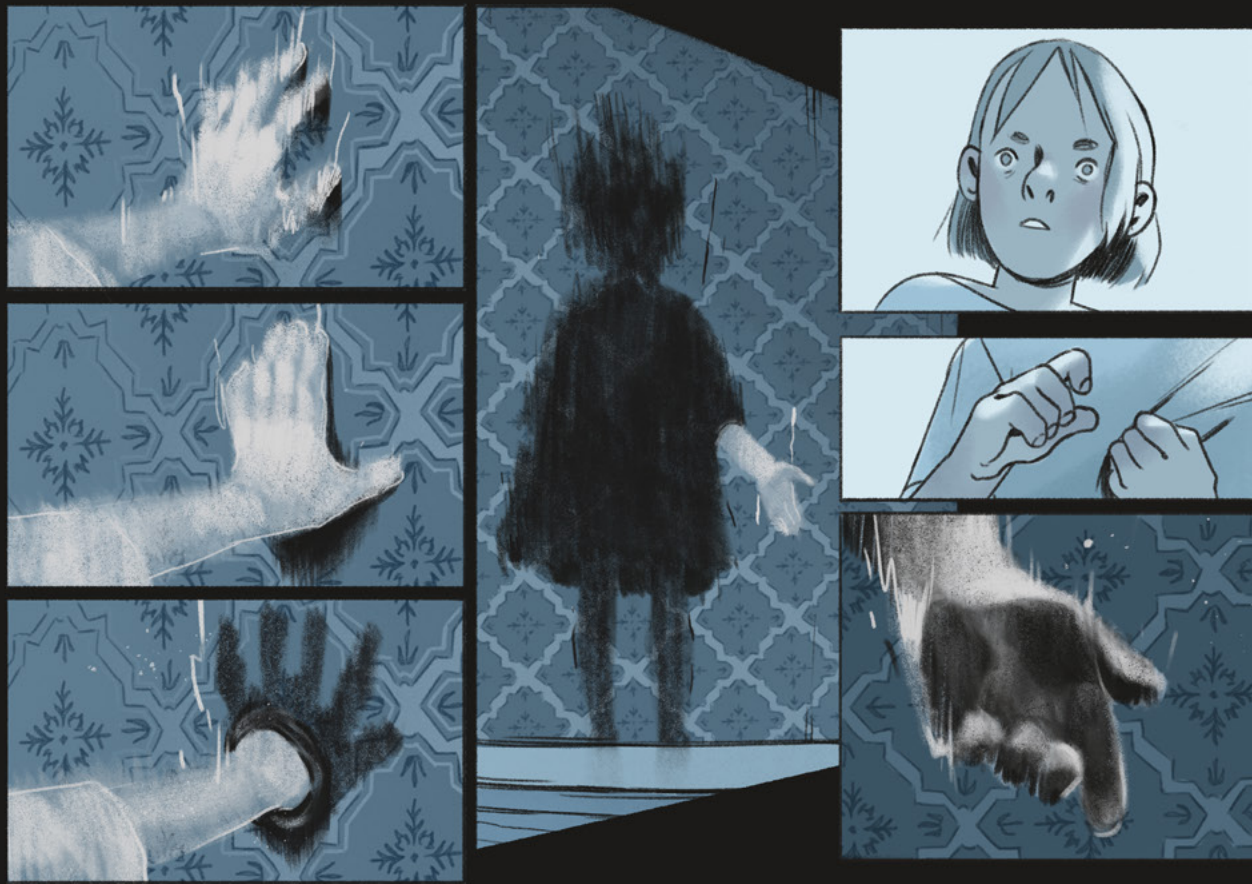




/ Depiction of entities shifts  
/ Depiction of environment shifts  
/ Horrifics have different but  
related graphic shifts







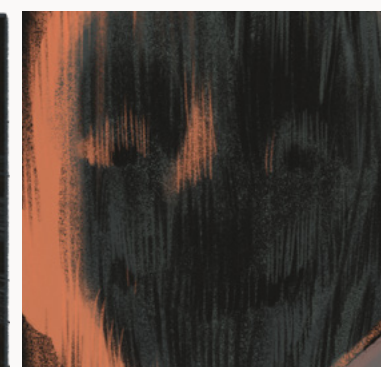












### Variable sequence #3

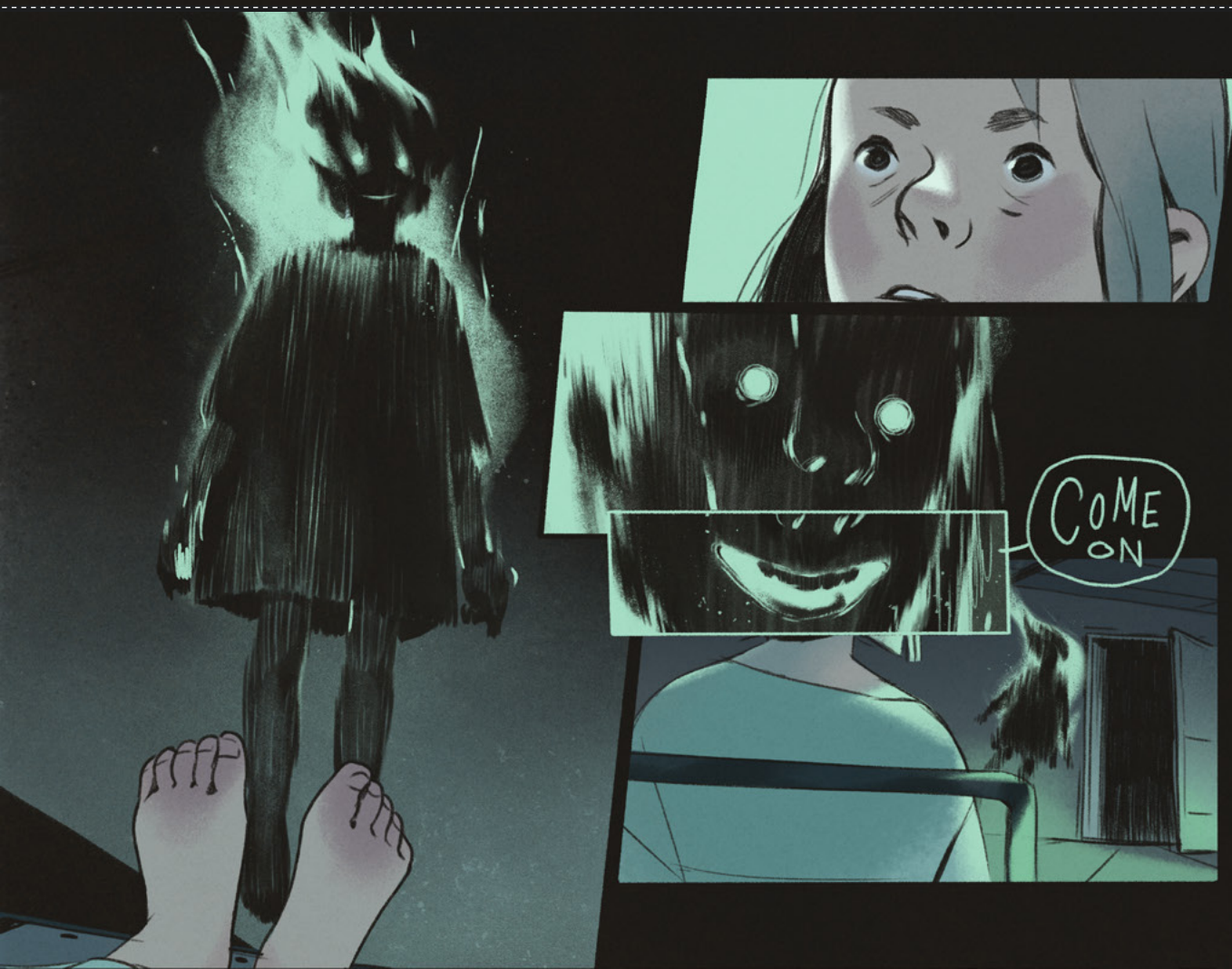
Variable sequence #3 (presented anon) proceeded to examine a graphic style shift that would continue to gradually spread and escalate throughout the sequence. This reflected both on Salomon's notes on the 'miasmatic' qualities of the horrific environment, as well as on the possibilities of using deviating graphic style to depict the entirety of a horrific event.

Overall, the graphic style was shifted to mimic the depiction of the double on fire with a heavy use of line and non-diegetic shadows. The size of the line work infecting the baseline style starts off small and is contained within the figures. As the style shift continues to spread, it grows in both size and density, finally spilling over the defined edges of the figures, making the depiction of the event into a singular blur of some foreboding sensation (C).

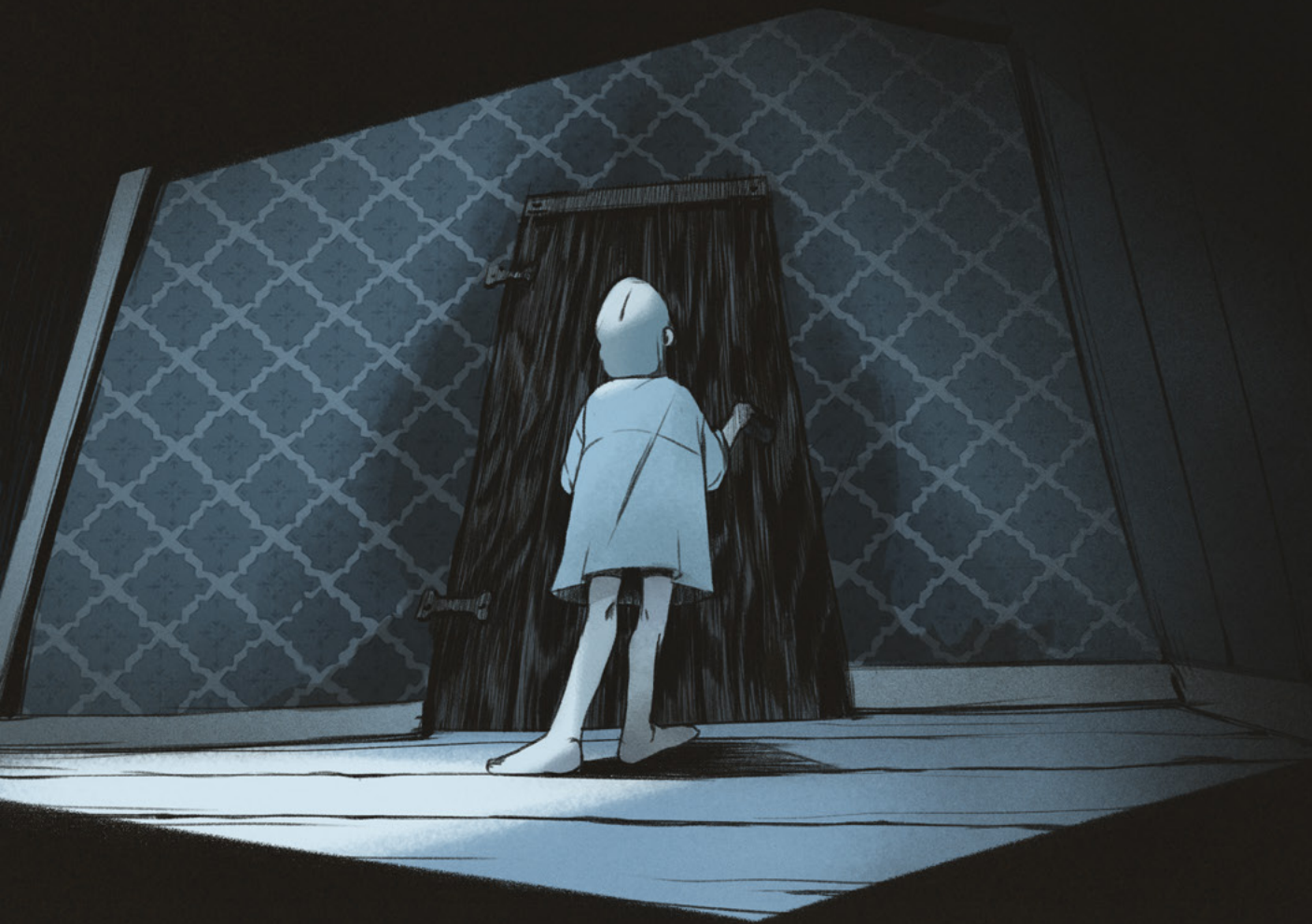
In addition to supporting the depiction of the horrific as a singular event, the first signs of the graphic style shift in the environment (as seen on the hidden door and the basement stairway) can initially be interpreted as a heightened graphic portrayal of abandonment and decay, doubling to create an anticipatory atmosphere as described by Perron. This initial shift is subtle enough to be missed, and well enough within the boundaries of 'natural' stylistic fluctuation between characters and backgrounds to create an opportunity for the reader to initially misinterpret the shift as diegetic or non-important. As the intensity of the then ramps up, this initial interpretation may be re-evaluated—possibly bringing in the factor of faulty perception as well.



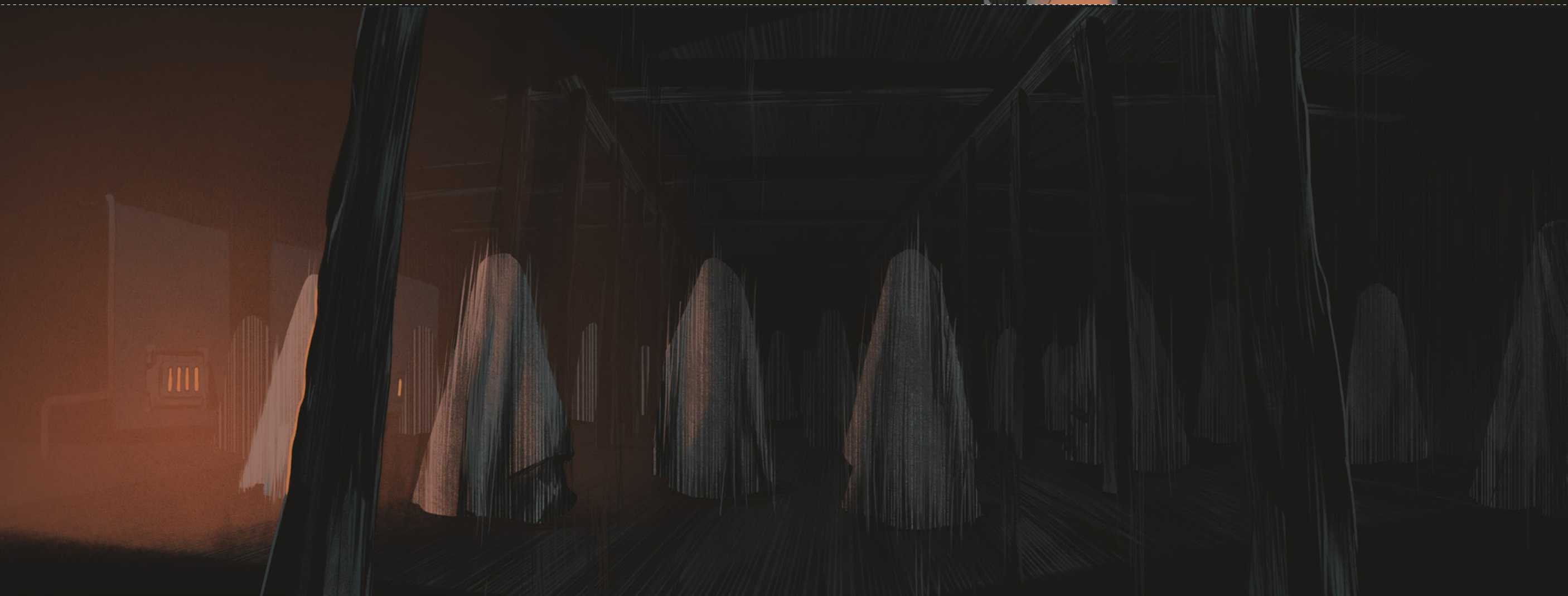
- / Depiction of entities shifts
- / Depiction of environment shifts
- / Gradual progression of one type of graphic shift



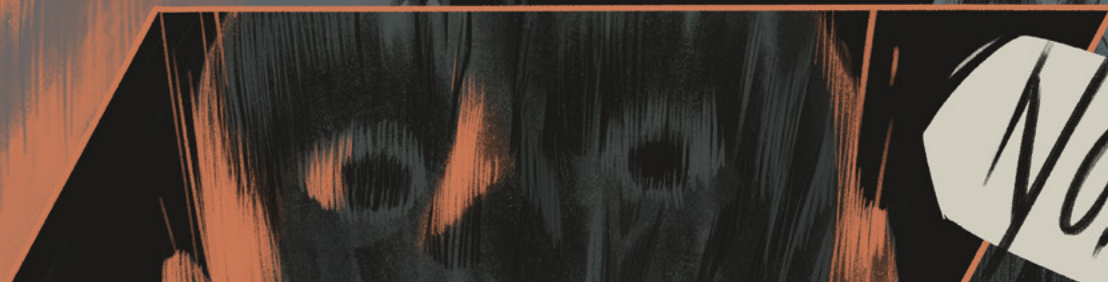
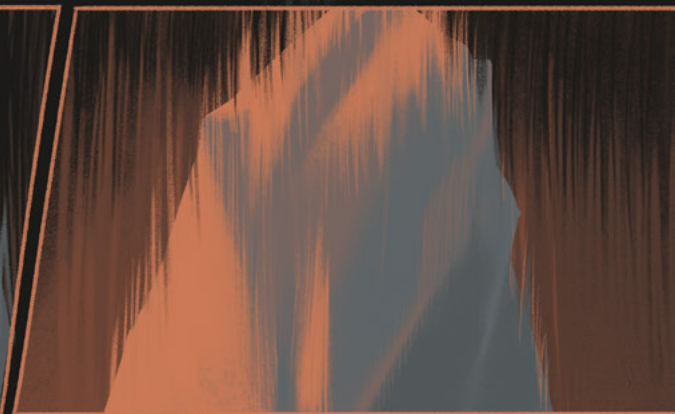
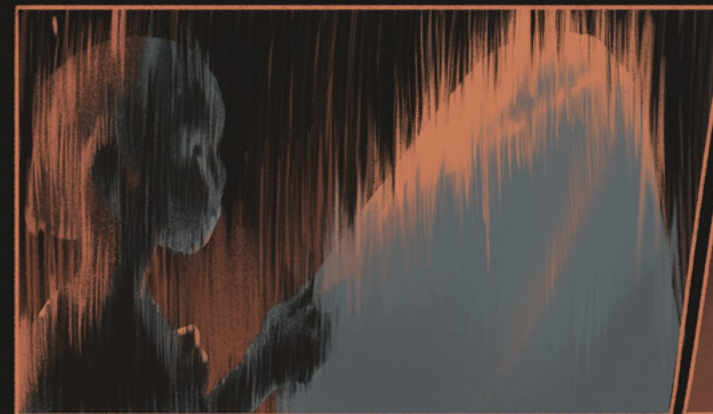
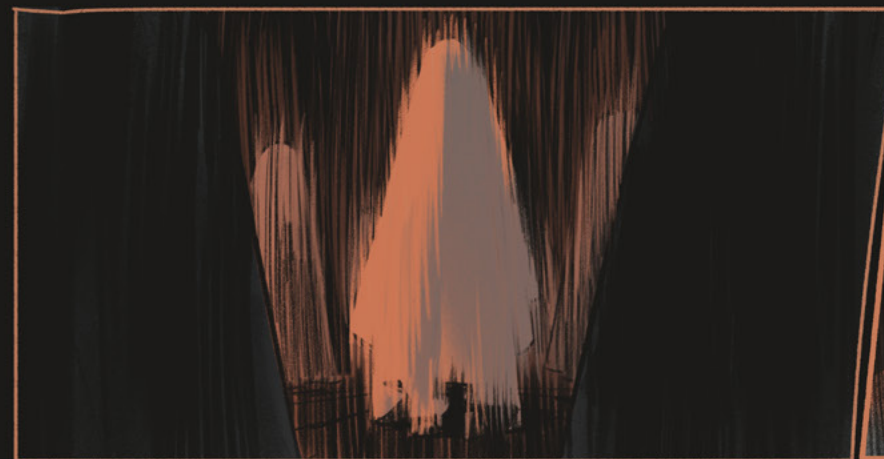
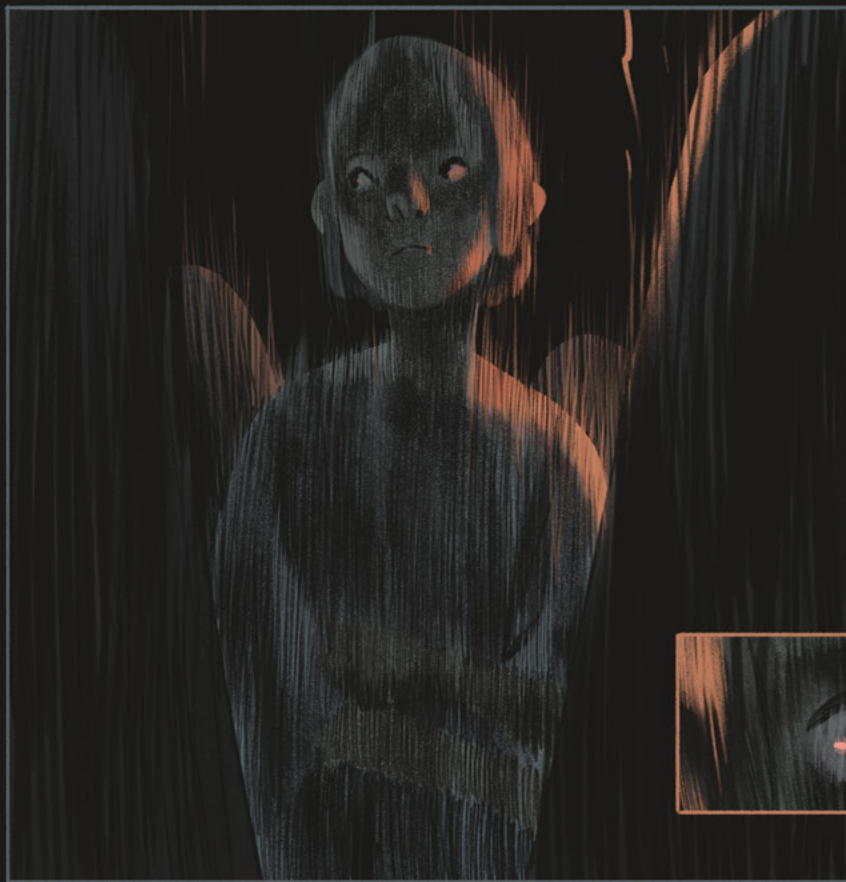












No!



DON'T  
LOOK  
AT IT!







#### 4.4 Depiction of perception

The final graphic experiment conducted for this investigation examined the use of horrific graphic style shifts to depict the subjective perception of the positive character. Here, graphic style was used to portray a clearly subjective account of the events, which was then revealed to have been ‘truly’ treacherous by an abrupt return to the baseline style. In addition, it examined a portrayal of ‘not-seeing’—or perhaps seeing too much—as described by Leffler, through the depiction of the double.

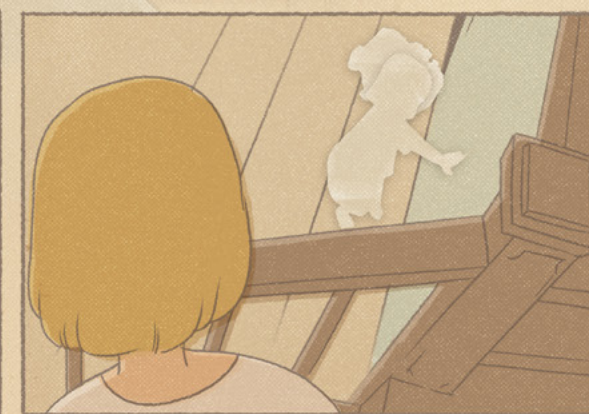
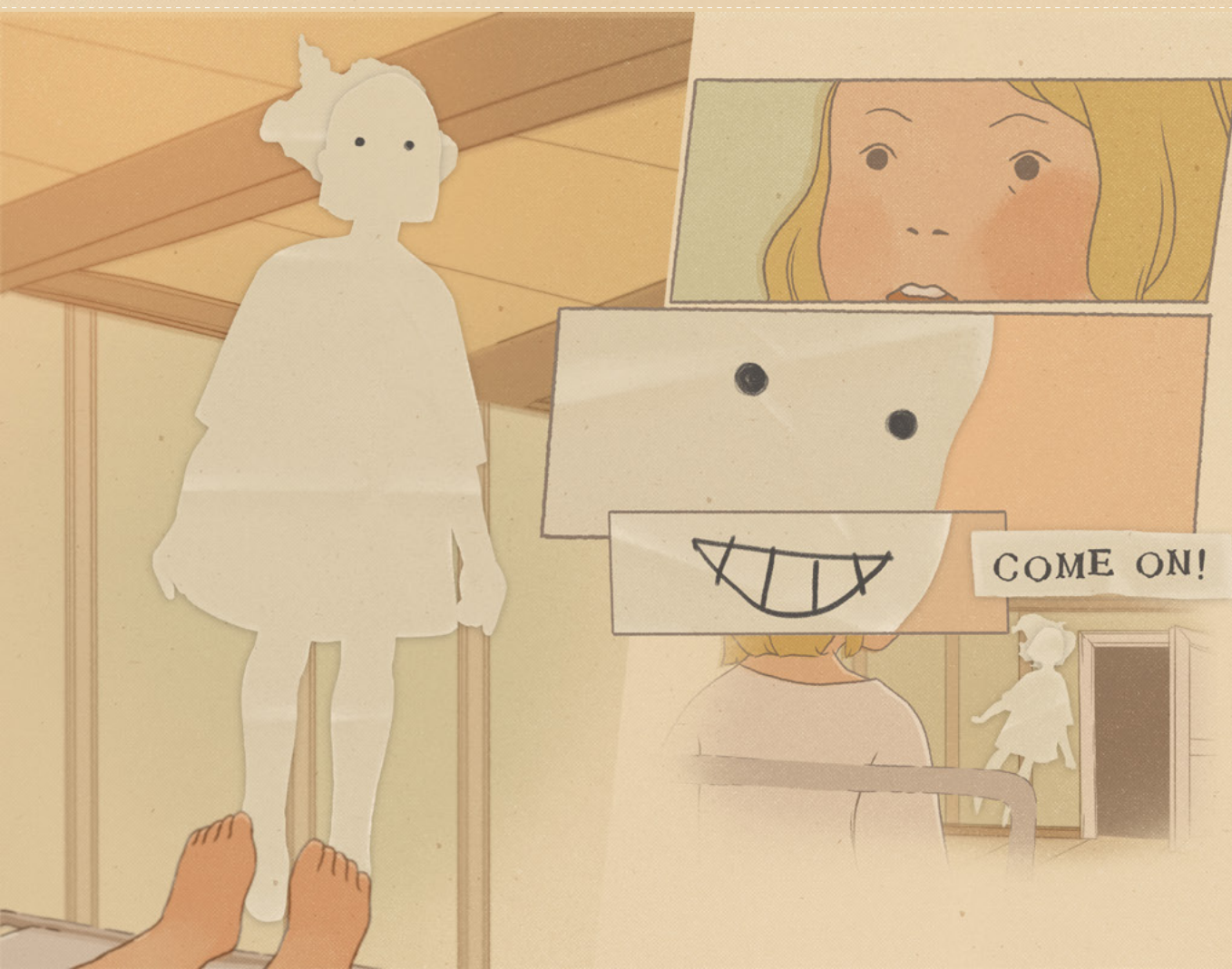
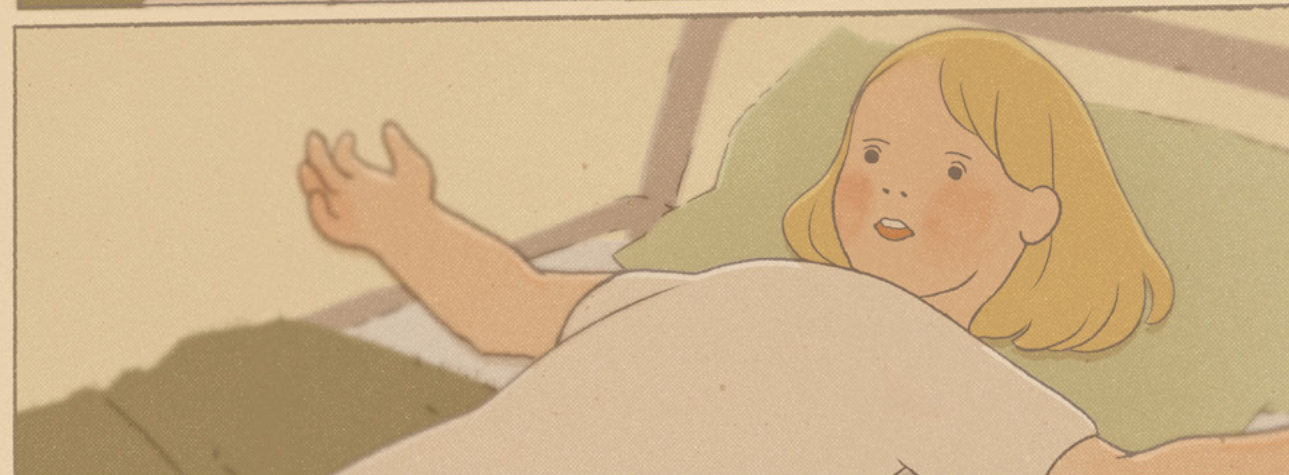
##### / Variable sequence #4

This sequence drew inspiration from the ‘aestheticized’ studies of the wooden figure but flipped the shifted properties around; the graphic style of everything except the wooden figure is depicted in the variant style. In contrast to the preceding experiments, the shifted style was intended to be as bland as possible. The overall color scheme was shifted to muted, light neutrals. Furthermore, blurring was used around the edges of the images to further indicate a subjective, dream-like state. Blurring was noted by Mikkonen as a graphic device of comics and by Perron as device of horror. This brings the perception of events further under question—if the sequence is initially presented as though it was a dream or hallucination, the reader is left unsure (or sure of their lack of interpretation) on whether what is happening is threatening or not. To further enhance this, the overall shift in stylization pursued an ambiguously ‘vintage’ appearance, alluding to the possibility that the main character Kuura may be perceiving the events through a storybook lens, or as otherwise fictional—in some way aestheticized.

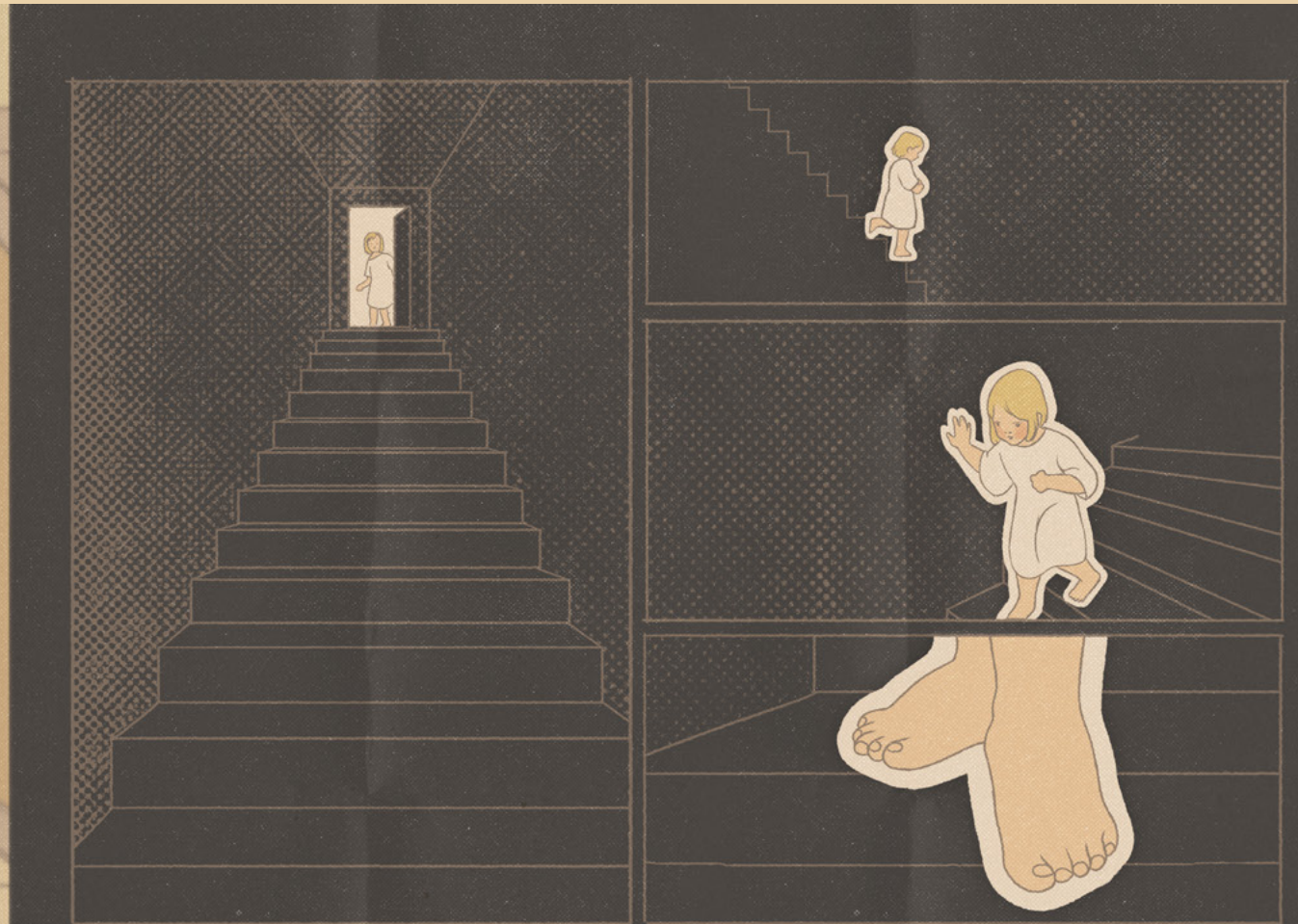
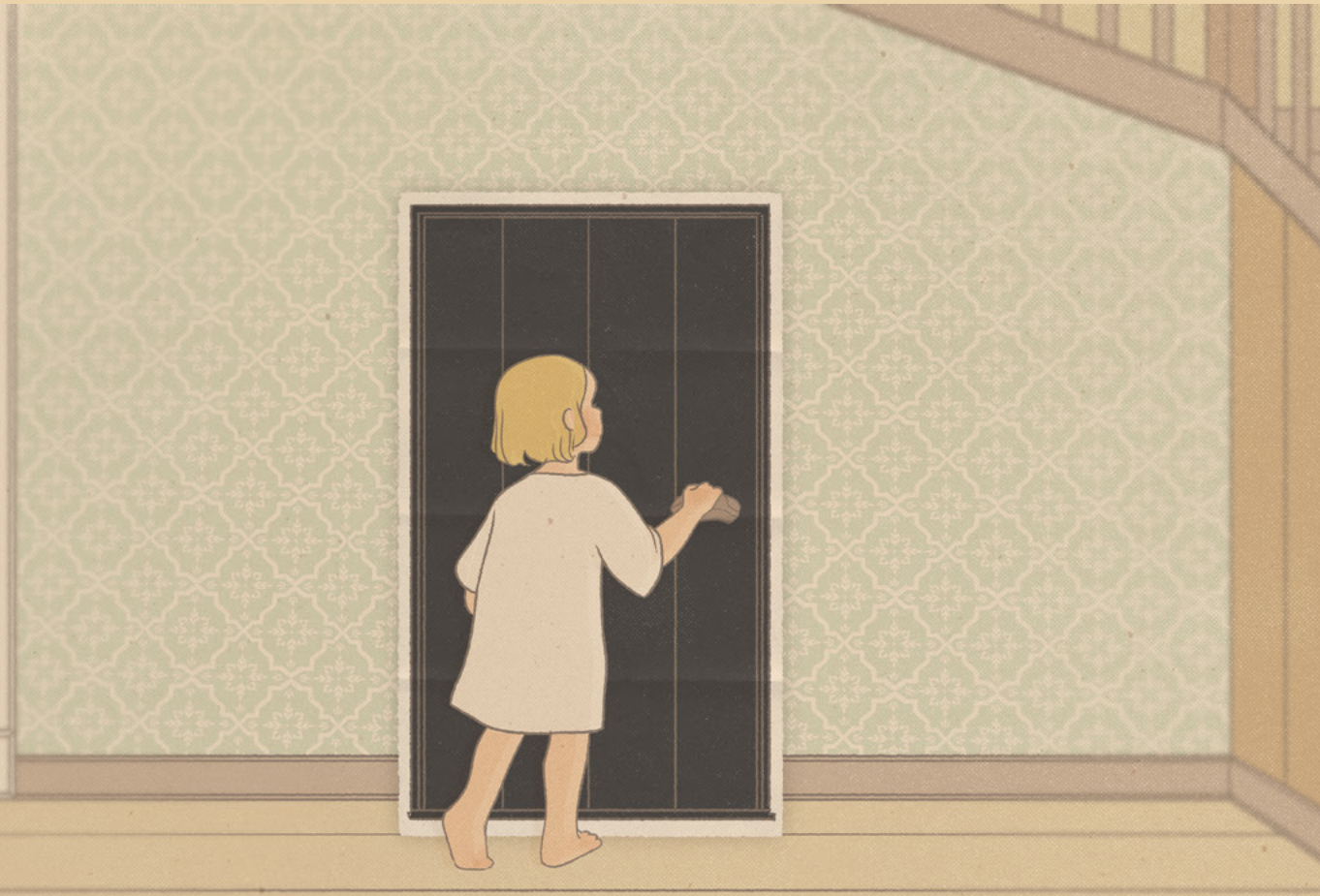
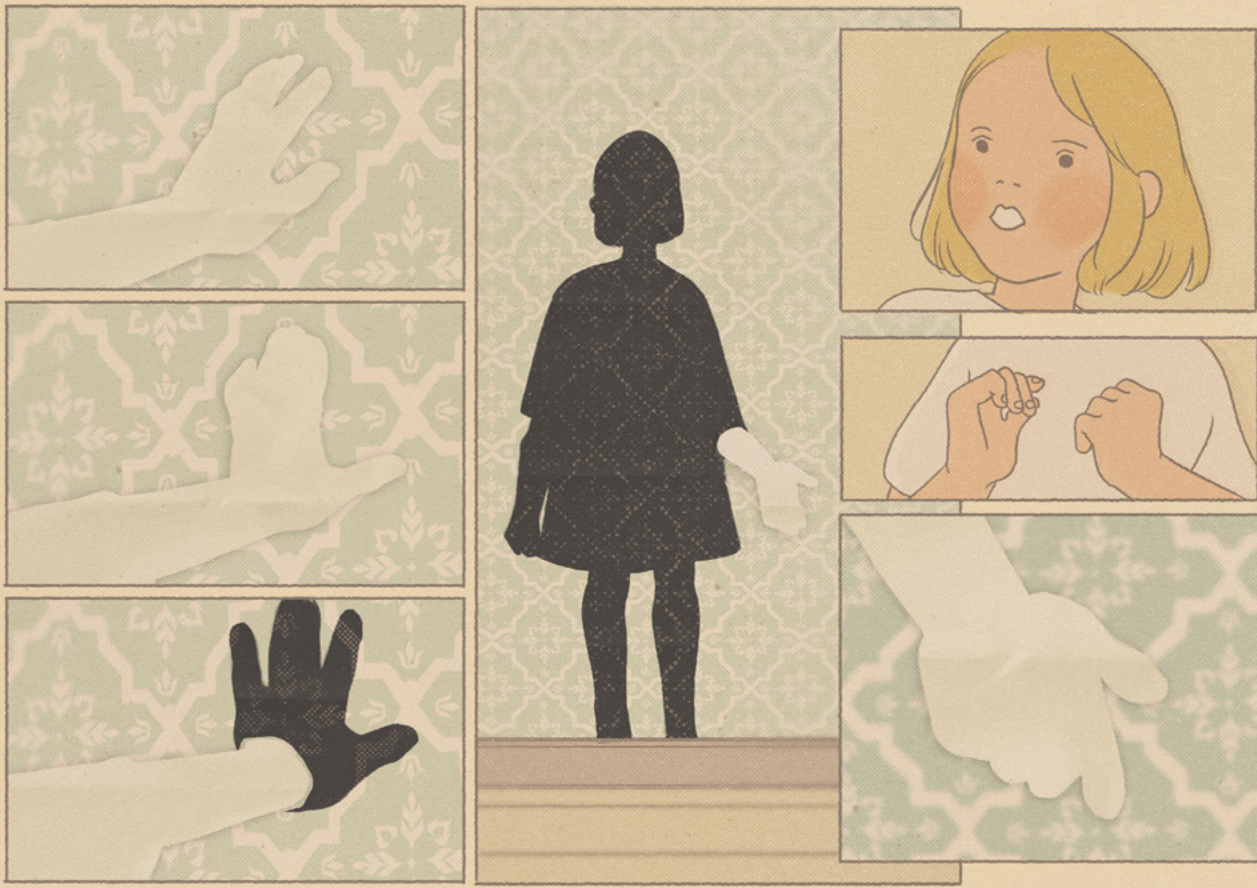
Meanwhile, the horrific double is depicted as a featureless paper cut-out, hinting to the fact that even in this more comforting perception of reality, the main character is to some extent incapable of fully perceiving or understanding the horrific. As the sequence progresses, the horrors continue to deviate from the subjective perception of reality, and finally the reveal of the wooden figure drags the graphic style back to the horrific normalcy.



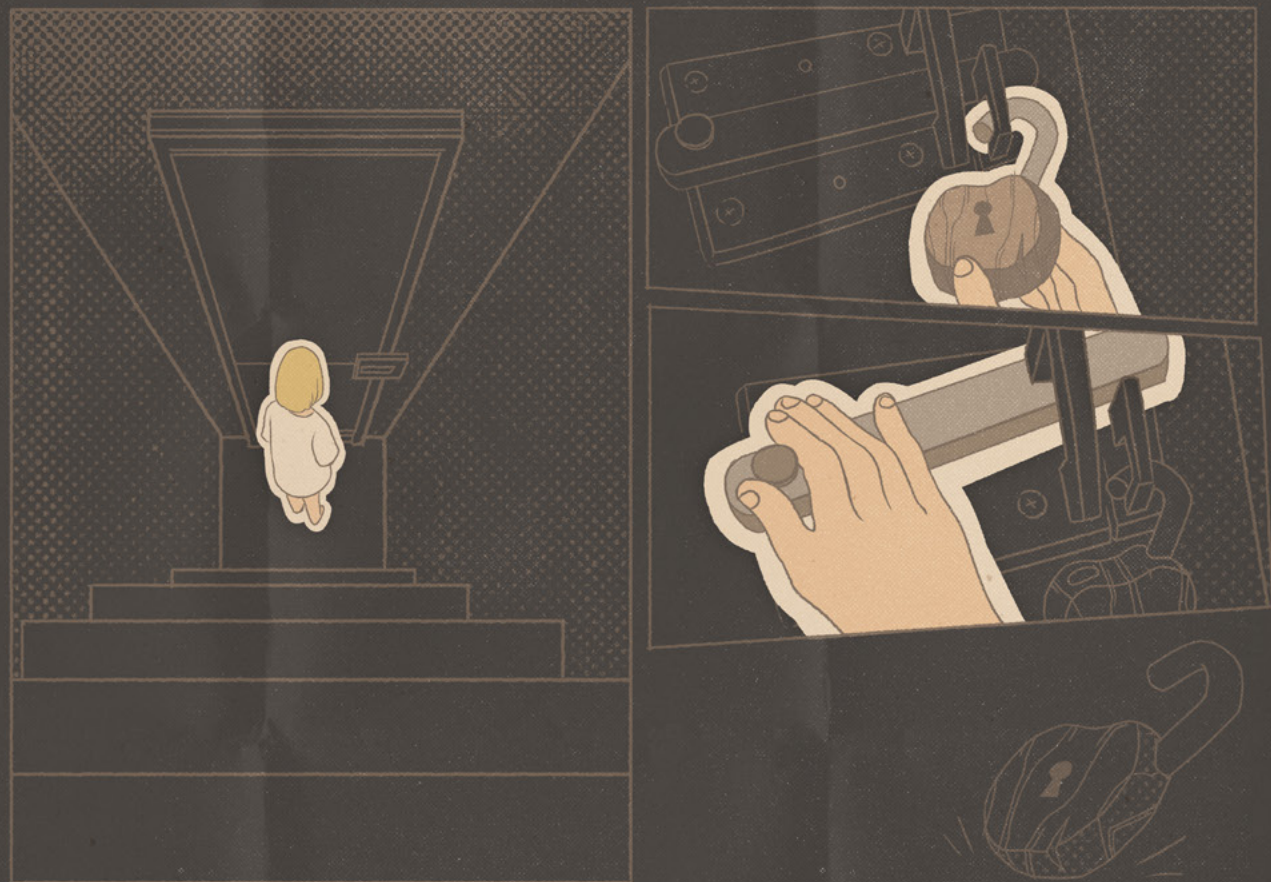
/ Depiction of the storyworld shifts  
/ Depiction of entities shifts

















#### 4.5 Report from the basement

The experiments on the horrific entities show how graphic style can affect the sensation of horror and, to an extent, direct the interpretation of whether the depicted is horrific or not in the first place. Additionally, the degree of stylization affected the degree of expectation for a faithful depiction of diegetic reality; the facial features of the more materially rendered entities appear less up to interpretation than those with a more simplified style.

Story constraints—as well as preconceived thoughts for the visualizations for the entities—became increasingly apparent in the experiments. The depiction of the horrific entities could not stray too far from the narrative and metaphorical functions they serve in the story. Both of the entities also involved elements that necessitate a level of formal description to be read correctly (that is, wood and fire) which further limited the scope of the experimentation. This meant experiments exaggerating the overall shape or silhouette of the horrific, as proposed by Perron, were not appropriate for this sequence.

In the end, the conducted experiments did not manage to fully capture a fitting sensation of horror for the selected sequence. Sequence variant #1 separately considered the most suitable graphic style shifts for the horrific entities. This approach resulted in a somewhat disjointed end result. While the individual depictions of the entities felt most fitting, the lack of connective tissue between them made them feel incongruous—and not in the desirable, horrific way. Even if different graphic treatment is extended to different figures, there is an expectation for them to have some meaningful correlation. This correlation was not achieved here.

Sequence #2 attempted to bridge this gap between the depiction of the different entities and introduced a graphic style shift in the depiction of the environment. While this sequence did not necessarily aim to depict subjective perception, it nonetheless reads so; as the depiction of the environment shifts back to baseline on arrival to the basement boiler room door, the stylized staircase sequence appears a less reliable account of events—the door and stairs leading to the base-

ment are less real than the basement itself. However, the abrupt return to normalcy at the boiler room door also breaks the build of tension through graphic style in the middle of the sequence.

The approach used in sequence #3 appeared the most cohesive and intentional. The unified look of the stylistic shift was not unintentionally disturbing, and the gradual progression of the shift brought in the sensation of some horrifically unidentifiable progression. As the graphic style shift affected the positive character, the feeling that the unfolding events were not in her favor intensified. The shift also covered multiple horror functions with a relatively simple graphic device. Overall, this sequence proved the most workable out of the ones produced for this thesis. However, as the stylization of the horrific entities continued to favor a mocking, caustic depiction it did not, in the end, capture the specific sensation of horror that the investigation of this specific sequence was after.

Sequence #4 presents an interesting example of the possible use of aestheticization to explicitly horrify. It should, however, be noted that aestheticization from the perspective of the character does not translate into aestheticization for the reader—the use of this type of graphic variation on its own is still a conspicuous enough device to not fulfill the comforting functions of aestheticization. However, although perhaps interesting in other ways, variable sequence #4 does not necessarily fit the selected sequence, nor achieve the ever elusive ‘correct’ sensation of horror. Additionally, the integration of the two styles remains somewhat at odds. While they are in this instance very different on purpose, if pursued, the final reveal of the wooden figure would require some further work.

To find the correct style, further experimentation is required. This could mean further developing the sequence #3 by, for example, using a more sublimating and subdued approach to the stylization of the entities’ facial features. It may also be that the baseline style itself calls for adjustments. Likewise, part of the issue with the sequence ‘not feeling right’ might be structural and the answer could involve re-structuring the mise-en-page.



Leaving the musty confines of the basement, this investigation now moves to the image content analysis of the previously introduced contemporary horror comic sequences. This analysis has been structured by categorizing the different graphic style strategies that were used to fulfill the previously established horrific functions. The purpose is to further describe the graphic horror-making tactics in contemporary horror comics.

However, categorizing the types of graphic style variations used in the sample proved difficult. As was the case in the speculative horror functions, finding completely non-overlapping categories for horror-making moves was challenging if not all together impossible; the functions of graphic devices seem to overlap and intermingle as many things can be accomplished with a singular stylistic decision. Similarly, the features of graphic style are intervoven to a degree where dissecting them soon becomes onerous—a change in the amount of depicted detail will increase the amount and density of line work, and the increased amount line of work can simultaneously work towards enhancing a sense tonal depth and lighting and so on.

Nevertheless, the following pages present further notes and analysis on some recurring graphic strategies used for horrific purposes in the sample. These include instances of highlighted materiality or objectification, abstraction, non-diegetic use of color and lighting, and movement. Furthermore, a fourth graphic function emerged from the sample and concerns graphic style shifts in the depiction of the horrified.



## 5.1 Objectification and materiality

Graphic objectification of the horrific forms was present in multiple titles of the sample. By ‘objectification’, I here refer to the use of ‘realistic’ graphic style variations as they are described by McCloud (1994, 44). This ‘realism’ is perhaps better understood as an increased effort to depict the materiality of the horrific—it is not only related to stylization or deformation of figures (a shift in stylization was actually not present in the sample), but is also build up with the amount of detail depicted, as well as shifts to more naturalistic lighting, coloring, and perspective. As McCloud notes, this both emphasizes the ‘otherness’ of the depicted horrific and highlights their ‘physical complexity’ (ibid.).

For example, in *Infidel* Campbell portrays a number of the xenophobia-fueled entities with more volume and detail than the baseline style. In the very first sequence of the comic, the entity formerly known as Mitchell Fisher is depicted with great focus on its detailed cracked nails, twisted body, and wetly gleaming eyes (fig. 10). Meanwhile, the overlaid narration of the protagonist Aisha details the stench of rotting meat and legion of ants and cockroaches gorging on it. The material qualities of the horrific are heavily highlighted. However, although this introduction to the horrific relies on the material, the subjectivity of the event is swiftly brought into question, as Aisha wakes and questions whether the entity was real or not. This hesitation is also supported with the graphic style, as while the entity is depicted with an added level of material detail and volume, the shifted style also has a soft and hazy quality to it, and often utilizes an extradiegetic color palette. As nothing else in the storyworld is drawn the same way, the suspension of whether the entities are real or not remains.

This play of the heightened materiality and possibility of the unreal is further highlighted as Aisha encounters a second entity, a softly detailed older male figure. As the entity corners her, it begins to morph and melt, finally dropping an veiny eyeball on Aisha’s face before disappearing (fig. 11). The graphic style is shifted to provide a heightened sense of the sublate grossness of the human figure and used to argue for the objective reality of the events, while simultaneously using it to question their subjectivity. When the story escalates, so does this dual depiction of



FIGURE 10. Aisha and a horrific entity. *Infidel*.

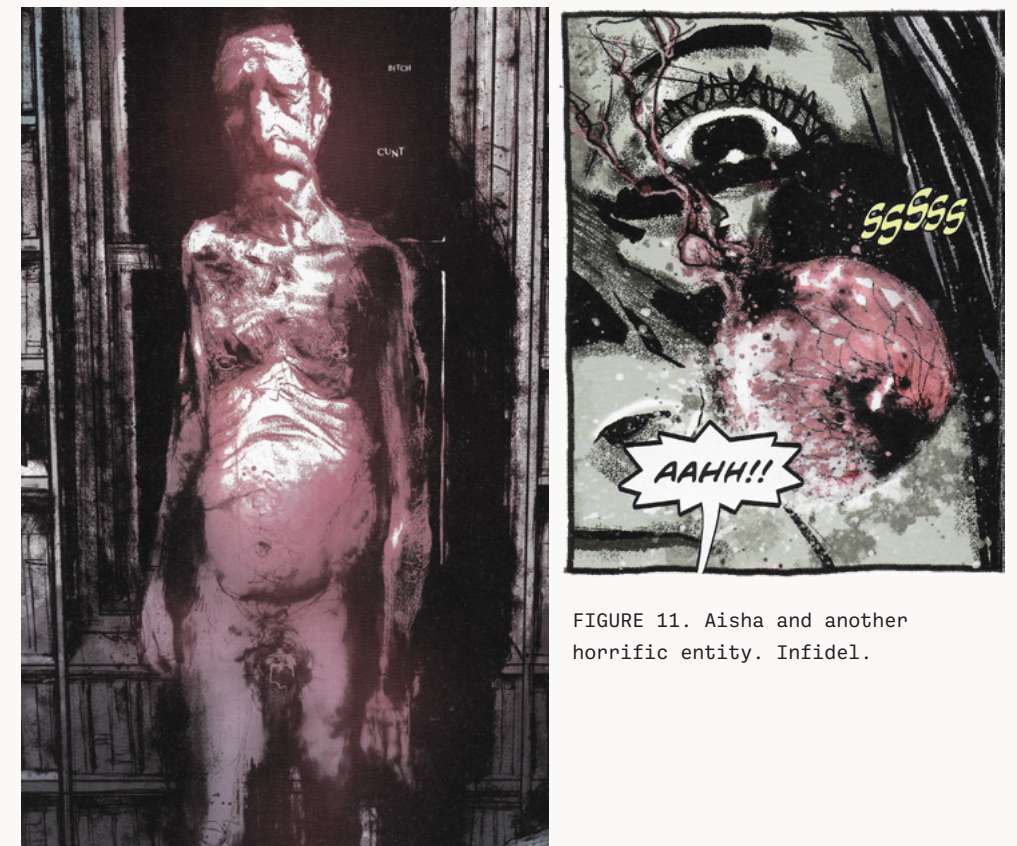


FIGURE 11. Aisha and another horrific entity. *Infidel*.



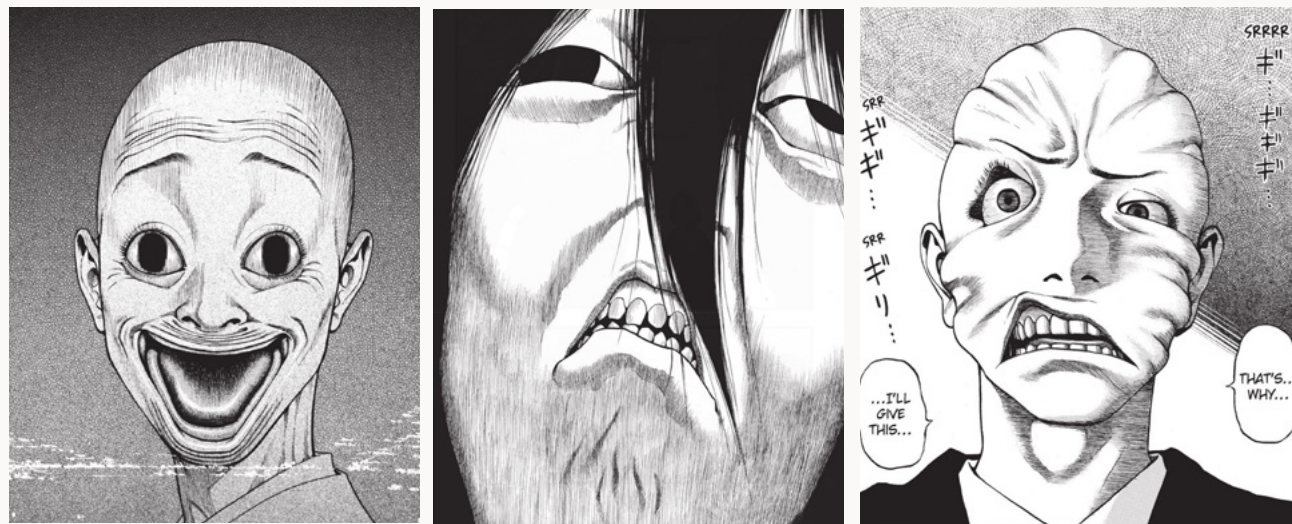


FIGURE 12. Added level of detail and line in contorting faces. PTSD Radio.

the entities—while suspension is eventually thrown aside, the objectified figures are continued to be used to disturb through their visceral physicality combined with increasingly fantastic forms.

In like manner, Nayakama regularly shifts the depiction of the horrific to highlight the uncanny materiality of the horrific in *PTSD Radio*. This is especially apparent in the several contorting faces that haunt the multiple protagonists; more detail and line work is used to render the pulling, and twisting features of cursed humans, ominous reflections, and the slowly revealed figure haunting the comic itself (fig. 12). Compared to *Infidel*, which also uses objectification of figures to hesitate between what is real and what is not, *PTSD Radio* wholly embraces the grotesque imagery, as everything that is happening is presented without complications.

A move towards realism is also present in *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*. In the comic, Carroll depicts the lady's corpse with an increased amount of detail, as seen especially around the mouth, nose, and eyes of the corpse (fig. 13). After the discovery of the lady's body, Carroll also adds otherwise absent tonal shading, and the use of color changes from the highly stylized, extradiegetic reds, blues, and yellows to a more grounded gray palette, with a clear diegetic light source. As the lady's corpse comes back to life, even the projection system changes from flat and eclectic storybook perspective to more natural point of view shot of the lady (fig. 14). Whereas in *Infidel* and



FIGURE 13. The girl (left) in comparison to the lady's head (right). *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*.

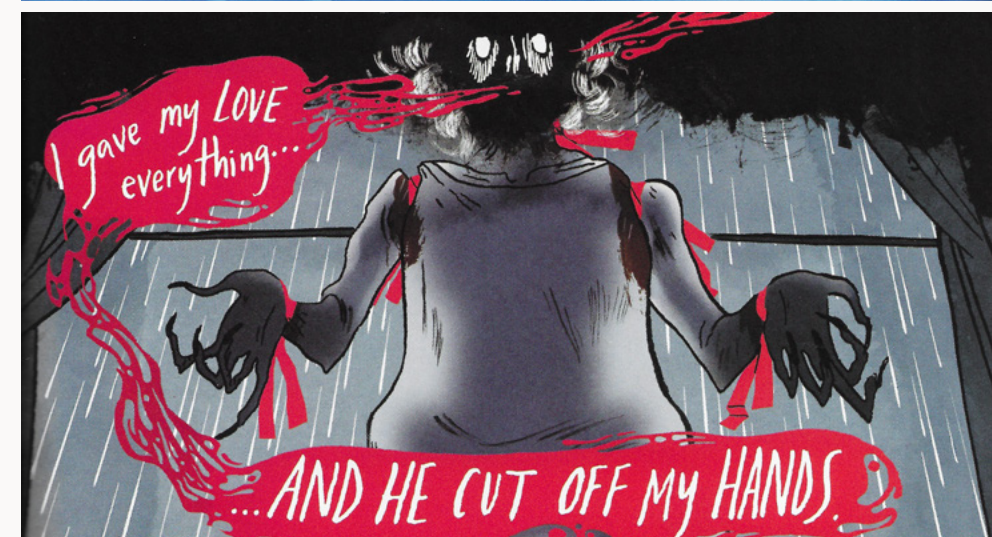


FIGURE 14. The flat baseline perspective (top), and the point of view shot of the lady (bottom). *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*.



*PTSD Radio* only the graphic treatment of the entities is shifted, the shift here affects everything in the storyworld. Compared to the fairytale-like narration and the stylized look of the baseline style, the objectifying graphic style shift in *A Lady's Hands Are Cold* brings in a claim of the real; this is truly happening, and it is truly terrifying.

While there is reasonable appeal to claim that objectifying figures lends itself especially to sublated depictions of horror, *Site 17* offers an example of heightened materiality as a sublimating device. In *Site 17*, Lett adds a level of added detail and dimension to repeatedly point out a tent in a camping site. Later, we find out that the occupant of the tent is not human. In the end, the siblings flee their own tent as their unknown neighbour begins to enter it. When they return, it is now their tent depicted with extra detail (fig. 15). Although it is hinted that their unknown campmate is a bear, it is never explicitly shown. The heightened objectification of the tent is not so much done to highlight the grossness of tents, but rather to graphically point out the importance of the tent, portray it as something strange and not-belonging, and to create an anticipatory atmosphere; something more than is shown must be happening. The same tactic of objectification is also used to depict a shrouded figure that appears in a nightmare of one of the siblings, further showcasing this as a way to create a special depiction for something that is hidden.

## 5.2 Abstraction and obscuring

Another widely utilized horror device was the graphic abstraction or obscuring of the horrific and its features. This included graphic style shifts that deformed figures away from naturalistic proportions, lowered the amount of depicted detail, and in some cases rendered them completely featureless.

In *Gideon Falls*, Sorrentino uses dense, scribbled line work to depict the interdimensional Black Barn, obscuring finer details and drawing attention to the non-fixed, conceptual nature of the barn (fig. 16, on the following page). This is a heightened mode of the heavy use of scribbled black surfaces as shading in the baseline style. The coloring of the Black Barn is simplified from the baseline, with a limited palette of black, red,



FIGURE 15. The siblings' tent when there is no bear in it (top) in contrast to when there is a bear in it (bottom). Site 17.





FIGURE 16. The depiction of a regular building (left) in contrast to the depiction of the Black Barn (right). Gideon Falls.

and later, white. The only details that stand out are the simple rectangles of the window and the door; the entrances to the barn. As Reddy and Father Wilfred are shown entering the barn towards the end of the first volume, the barn has lost its edges and dimension almost completely, a flat scribbled rectangle blending into the environment with the door and window staying distinct and gaping open (fig. 17). The details of the physical form of the barn are graphically portrayed to be insignificant compared to its existence, making the barn feel more sublime. The barn is also visually referred to through crude, child-like drawings (both diegetic and non-diegetic) that once fully collapse into a simple iconic house shape, presenting an even more simplified, conceptual form (fig. 18).

Other examples of abstraction are in *It Comes Back*, *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*, and *Infidel*. In *It Comes Back*, Sabo draws the black hounds of the field almost completely without features. The flat, all black silhouette-like depiction of the hounds is similar to how shadows are depicted in the work, but as it does not change when the main characters shine a flashlight towards it, it is fair interpretation that this is not a diegetic choice (fig. 19). The only continuously highlighted feature of the hounds is their glowing, dot-like eyes.

Likewise, in *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*, as the lady's corpse shifts from being horrifying as a corpse as physical object to being horrifying as a corpse that is coming back to life and threatening the main character, its face is completely obscured by shadows, with only crude and shaky features re-



FIGURE 17. The Black Barn when Reddy and Father Wilfred enter it. Gideon Falls.



FIGURE 18. The Black Barn, scribbled (left) and the Black Barn, iconic (right). Gideon Falls.

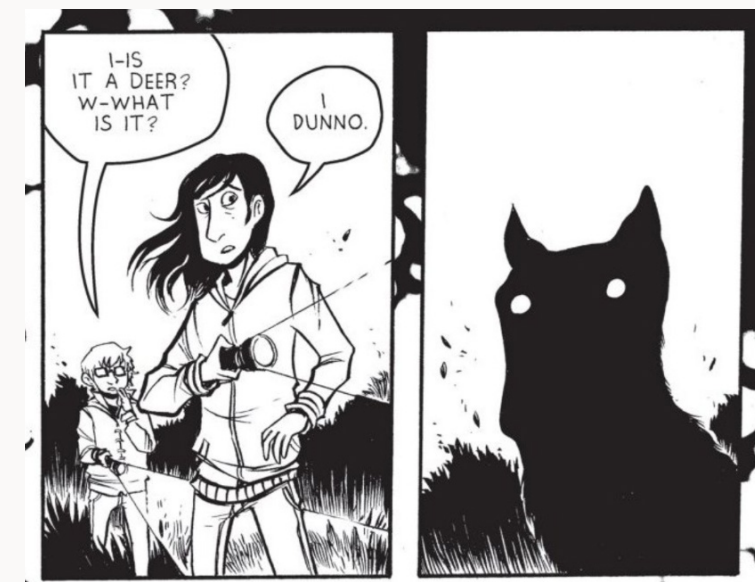


FIGURE 19. The simplified form of the hound. *It Comes Back*.



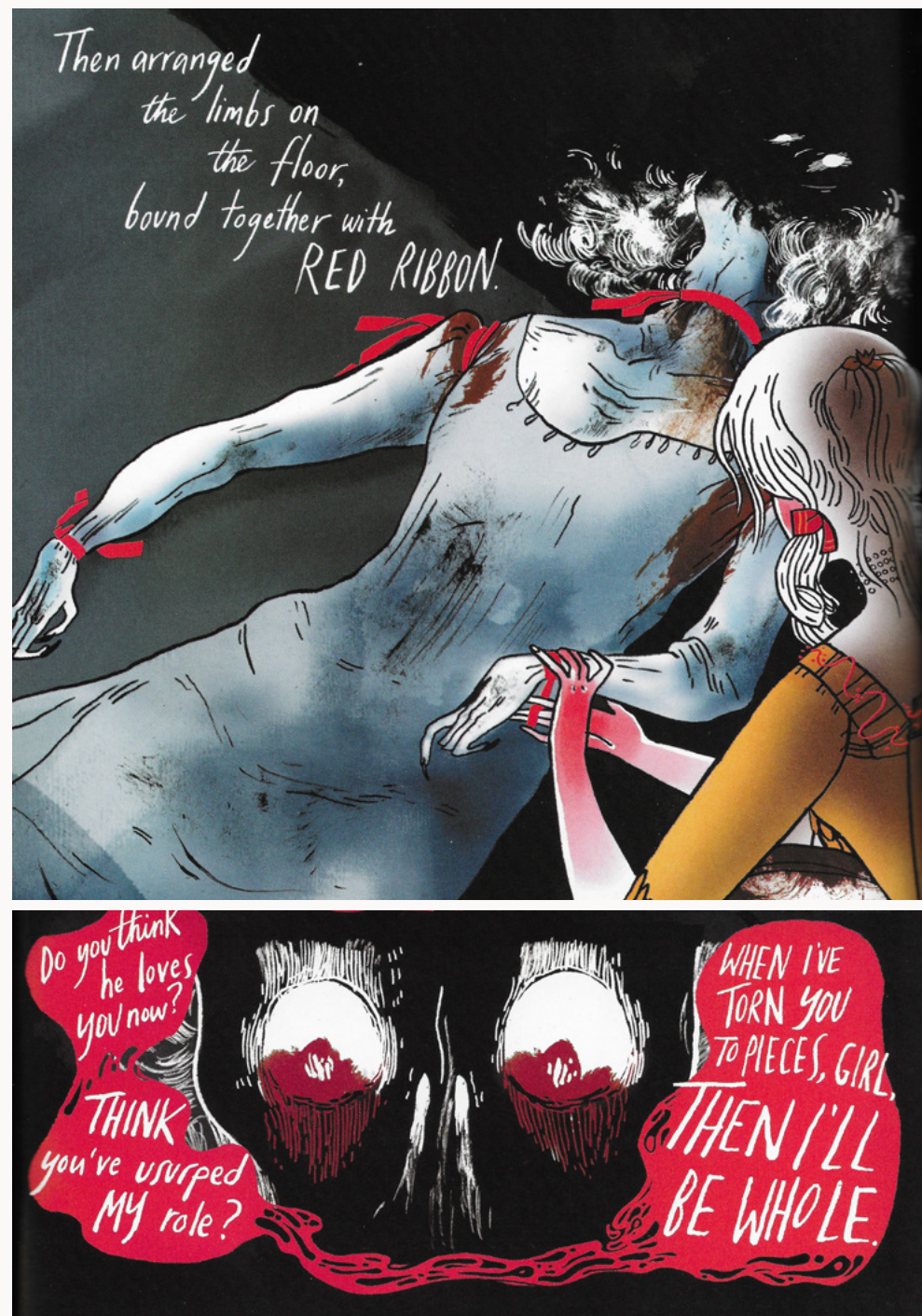


FIGURE 20. The lady's material body and obscured face (top), and the lady's horrible stare (bottom).  
A Lady's Hands Are Cold.

maining. This happens simultaneously as the lady's body is objectified—the body is made material while the face is being obscured (fig. 20). All the while, the lady narrates her motivations for wanting to tear the girl to pieces; the girl has taken the lady's role after her husband chopped her to pieces and hid her body around his mansion, and as the lady says: 'When I've torn you to pieces, girl, then I'll be whole'. The obscured stylization of the face is a component of maintaining the horrorification of the lady—while we are explicitly told of her tragic fate, her motivations and plans, her face morphs further and further away from the material reality, bleeding into shadows.

Another instance of this is at the very end of *Infidel*, as a shadowy face is shown looming over the construction workers coming to restore the apartment building, hinting that the horror may not be over (fig. 21). As this figure is notably less graphically material than the other entities so far, the hesitation whether things will work out after all is maintained. *Infidel* also utilizes a number of more simplified styles and obscuring graphic treatments for its horrific entities. In addition to the softness of even the more objectifying shifts, digital blurring is used multiple times to indicate blurred character perception as well as to further soften the horrific. A notable example of a shift in the deformation of figures can be seen in the exaggerated features of the sharp-nosed entity which attacks Aisha's friend Ethan towards the end of the comic.



FIGURE 21. Shadowy figure looming over the happy ending. *Infidel*.



### 5.3 Non-diegetic color and lighting

Throughout the sample, lighting is used to cast the horrific in shadow by ominous backlighting. While in some cases, like in *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*, this is also used to obscure the figure, there are instances of backlighting being used without obscuring the features of the depicted. For example, Nayakama repeatedly portrays characters in unstable mind states or in peril with a non-diegetic backlighting. This is again used to both point out the otherness of these characters, as well to highlight the material reality of the situation.

Colorwise, the use of red stands out in the sample. In *Infidel* red is used to convey we are experiencing something from the point of view of the monsters and highlight the moments of intense, toxic emotion that in the story lead to the manifestation of entities. Red is also used to



FIGURE 22. Mitchell Fischer embracing his hatred. *Infidel*.

convey one of the entities embracing those toxic emotions and discarding the sympathy he might have had for his victims (fig. 22). Moreover, while the rest of the comic goes for a realistic—if muted—color palette, the supernatural monsters are often portrayed in reds, purples, greens and pale blues, incongruous with their environment. Whether this is diegetic or non-diegetic is hard to say as per the nature of the fantastic (who knows if the monsters are ‘really’ purple or not), but it does again provide a motivated contrast between the depiction of the natural and the supernatural—reality is muted and grounded while the supernatural is accompanied with vivid and full of colors one would not expect in a drab apartment building.

In *Gideon Falls* vivid red is most strongly associated with the Black Barn; every time the barn appears, the graphic style shifts to an almost duotone of red and black. Red also consistently appears as a highlight color for panel frames, sound effects, and to point out details (fig. 23). This



FIGURE 23. Examples of the pervasive uses of red in *Gideon Falls*. Red is also used to depict the perception of Norton, as he notes the special trash around the city. *Gideon Falls*.



can be interpreted as whenever red makes an appearance, whatever is happening is referring to the Black Barn or happening under its influence. The continuous use of color creates a pervasive presence for the barn in the comic; even when we are not shown the barn, its presence lingers. This presence is then re-situated as right before Father Wilfred enters the barn, the world surrounding the barn turns black and white and the red shifts inside the barn; the threat of the barn shifts from its presence to what is inside of it. Once we move inside, the red remains but is also joined by yellows and greens absent in the concurrent depiction of diegetic reality. Inside the barn a color shift is used to create a feeling of a different plane of reality; first through the sickly contrasting combination of vivid red and muted greens, then moving to purples and blue to evoke the feeling of the 'space' as Father Wilfred meets a dismissive Jesus, and finally to reds and oranges of hell fire when he is condemned by his adversary. The rapidly shifting color inside the barn works with how reality is depicted to fracture through other means in the sequence.

Similarly *A Lady's Hands Are Cold* uses plenty of color to tell its story, but as noted previously, at the moment of horror Carroll shifts the color use from non-diegetic to diegetic. In the baseline style three key colors are used to depict objects, attributes, and presences associated with each of the significant characters: the girl is yellow, the man is blue, and the lady is red. In the context of the overall comic this association means that the girl gains attributes of decoration, the man attributes of coldness, and the lady attributes of violence (committed against her and then perpetuated by her corpse). While this coloring is perhaps not explicitly chosen to horrify, there are some moments where abrupt changes between colors contribute to the horror that can be appreciated even without fully understanding the thematic values of the coloring. When the girl takes a hatchet to the manor walls, and the color shifts from blue to red for three panels, we get a foreboding feeling that something bad is about to happen (fig. 24). Likewise, when we see that the girl's hands and face have changed from red to blue at the end of the comic, we know that it is not a good thing. A shift in color plays into creating an unnerving atmosphere no matter your level of interpretation.



FIGURE 24. An abrupt shift in color.  
A Lady's Hands Are Cold.



There are a number shifts in line direction and distribution when depicting the horrific. This notably includes shifts towards concentrated, vertical line work as well as towards increased line work more explicitly emphasizing the direction of movement. Although the dense vertical line work this could be seen solely as another method of obscuring or othering the depicted, it could also be noted that this type of linework bears a similarity to how movement is typically presented in comics.<sup>21</sup> Considering the context where these types of shifts in line direction happen, an interpretation of it could be a depiction of the metaphorical pull of emotional gravity, the trapped, static movement of a ghost unable to move on, or another way of highlighting the materiality of the subject.

For example, in *PTSD Radio* Nayakama uses this type of line work to depict a ghost-like figure in parallel with a character noting that the figure's 'time stopped' (fig. 25). In addition to the dense line work obscuring the features of the ghost, it also creates a sense of contained, perpetual movement, unable to be resolved or released. In previously mentioned moments of non-diegetic backlighting, Nayakama also often incorporates some vertical line. This is clearly contrasted as otherwise the shading in *PTSD Radio* is done with horizontal lines or rasters. As these shifts occur when characters are either in distress or have malicious intentions, the shift to vertical line work could be seen as some momentary sense of heaviness, an emotional gravity.

A similar shift was present in *Gideon Falls* as Sorrentino uses a notably oppressive vertical line hatching throughout the comic; the 'real' worlds of the story are portrayed with a heavy, dense vertical line, which then shifts to a flowing horizontal line when depicting repressed memories or the impossible space inside the black barn (fig. 26). Reality is concrete, pulled by gravity, while the more conceptual space inside the barn is in flux, continuously being swept away, or swaying in some unperceived heat.

Movement was also used as yet another materiality tactic. The shape of the horrific is depicted through line work that highlights the direction of

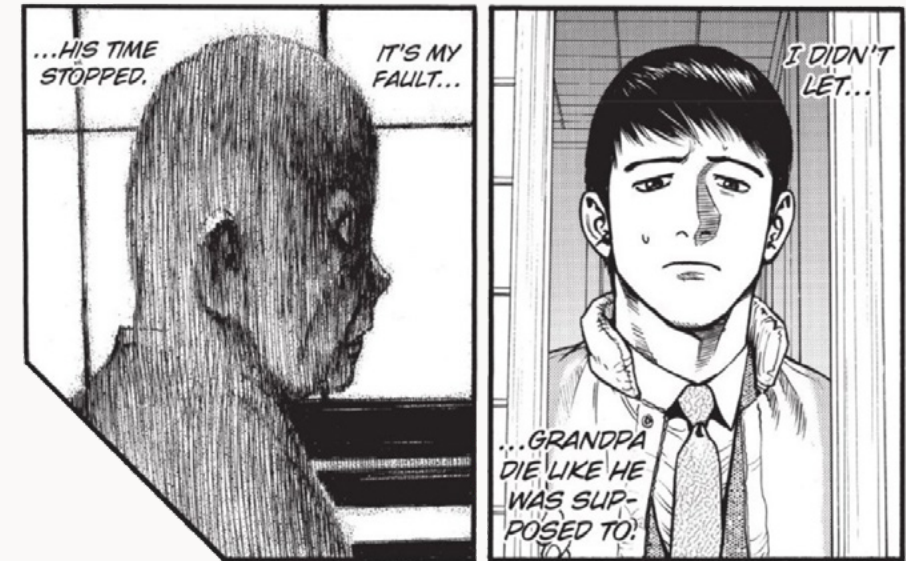


FIGURE 25. A man laments the state of his grandfather. PTSD Radio.



FIGURE 26. Dominant line direction outside the barn (left) and line direction inside the barn (right). Gideon Falls.

<sup>21</sup> See for example McCloud (1994, 109-114).



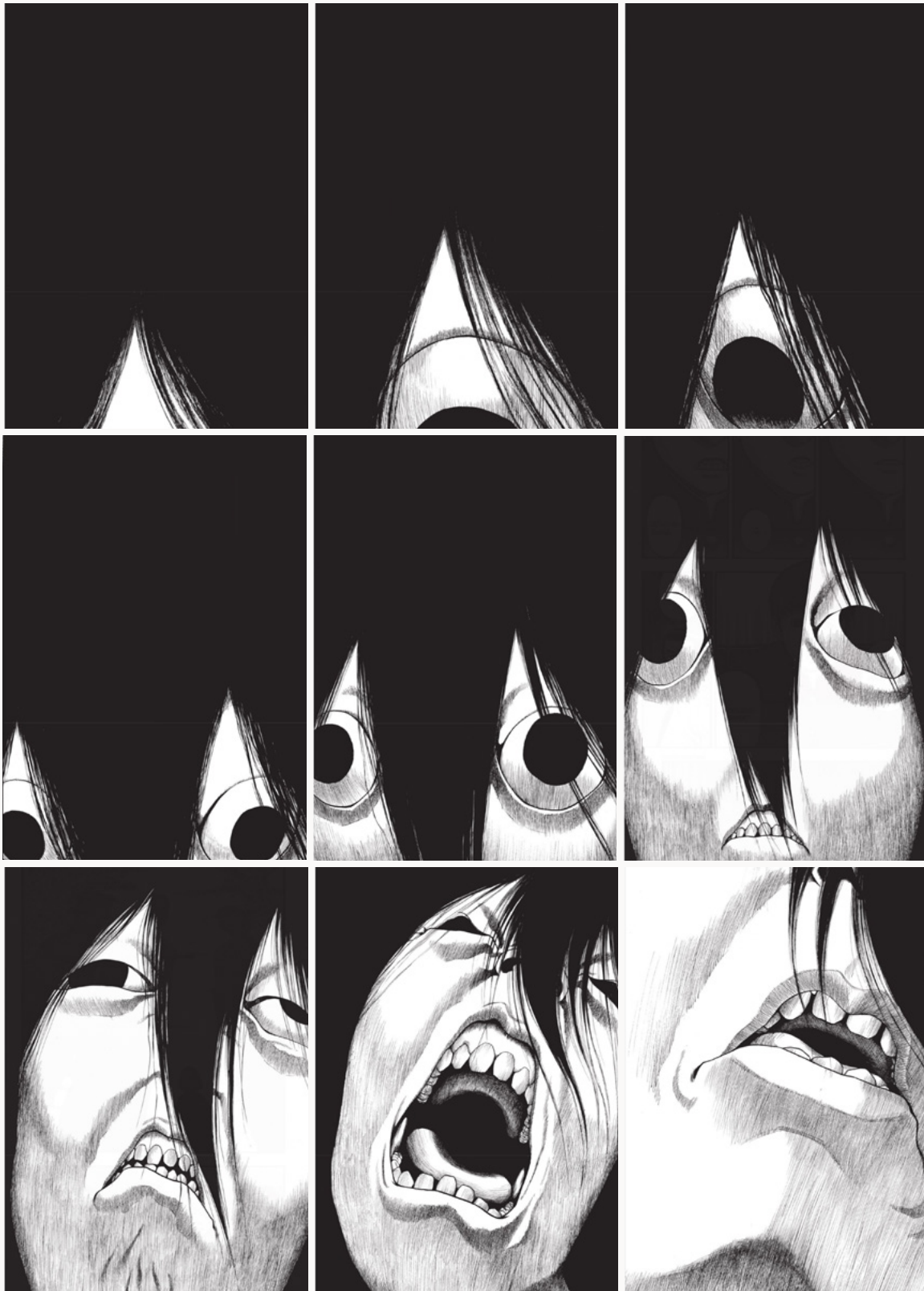


FIGURE 27. A portion of the movement sequence spread across the first volume of *PTSD Radio*. Note how the line direction follows the motion of the head. *PTSD Radio*.

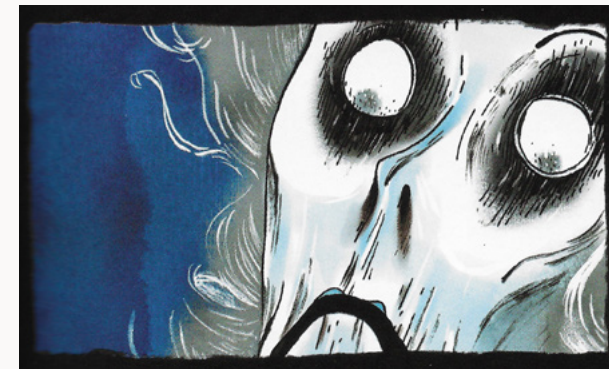


FIGURE 28. The lady's face stretched in stare. *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*.



FIGURE 29. Father Winfred squeezed through space. *Gideon Falls*.

movement. This is present again in *PTSD Radio*, but also in *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*. Nayakama uses this repeatedly, both when depicting the horrific as well as the horrified. Considering the depiction of the horrific, this is especially noted in the slowly approaching figure shown between chapters; as the figure rises from below the frame and slowly stretches its mouth open, the line work further emphasizes this movement (fig. 27). In like manner, Carroll reinforces the lady's wide open stare with directional line work that also doubles as added details to the corpse (fig 28.). Lastly, in *Gideon Falls* movement was made visible through deformation of the figure. As Father Winfred descends further down the Black Barn, his figure becomes disturbingly elongated and distorted (fig. 29).

## 5.5 Depiction of the horrified

Although depiction of the horrified was not included in the initial speculation of graphic horror functions, it was present in both *PTSD Radio* and *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*. In both instances, the horrified were depicted with graphic variations similar to those used for the horrific. As the girl finds the lady's corpse in *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*, Carroll begins to draw dark



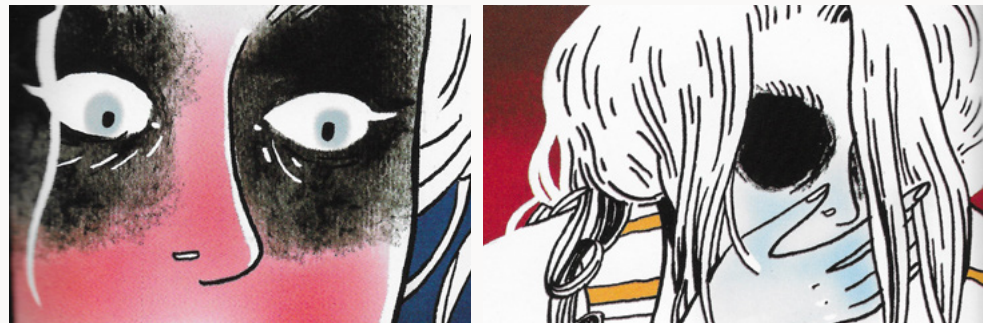


FIGURE 30. The lady (top) and the girl, horrified (bottom). *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*.

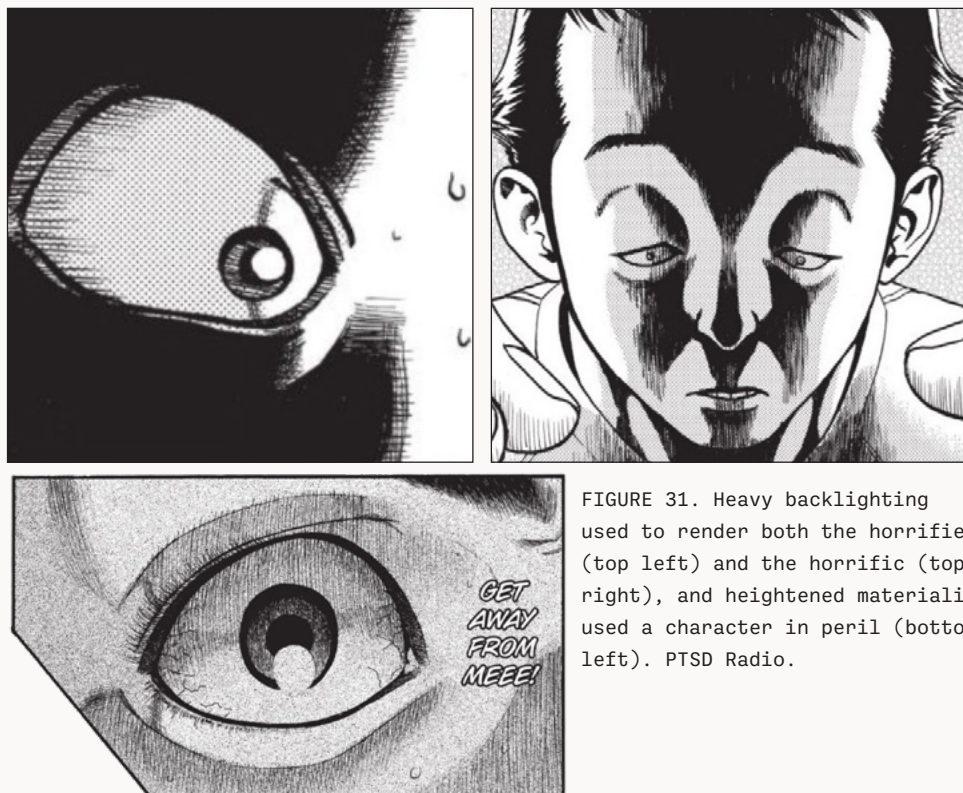


FIGURE 31. Heavy backlighting used to render both the horrified (top left) and the horrific (top right), and heightened materiality used a character in peril (bottom left). *PTSD Radio*.

black circles around her eyes, mirroring the concave holes surrounding the eyes of the corpse. At the very end of the comic, the girl's eyes are gaping black holes, and the coloring of her face and hands has also shifted to that of the corpses, a pale plue replacing the blush red (fig. 30).

In a similar fashion, the horrified are often portrayed exactly as the horrific in *PTSD Radio*. The materiality of characters in peril is increased through added detail and tonal modelling and their features are obscured through ominous backlighting (fig. 31).

## 5.6 Report from the observatory

At moments of horror, the graphic style of the comics shifted in a variety of ways, spanning the entire catalogue of Lefèvre's features of graphic style. Similarly, all of the graphic devices identified above were used for multiple horrific functions. This ranged from creating a distinct sensation of horror, to providing a heightened sense of an event as either subjective or objective, as well as creating non-congruent depictions of the horrific.

Determining whether stylistic variations were done to reinforce a specific character's perception or to depict the horrific itself was challenging, but some more explicit cases could be noted. This includes instances of point of view blurring in *Infidel*, and some color shifts in *Gideon Falls*. Easier to pinpoint were cases where graphic obscuring was used to limit the perception of the reader—for this function, dense line work and non-diegetic lighting were especially utilized.

Graphic style shifts were used to depict both horrific environments as well as entities. Considering that this was the selection criteria for the sample, unsurprisingly all of the sampled comics used graphic style shifts to portray horrific events. Overall, graphic shifts were more so used to highlight horrific entities, and less so horrific environments. The notable exception here was *Gideon Falls* and its miasmatic barn of horror. Following Salomon's remarks on malignant environments (2002, 10), these repeated graphic ruptures can be seen as the horrific slowly encroaching on the normalcy of the comics' sto-



ryworlds. To an extent, the stark depiction of the Black Barn can also be seen as an graphic inversion of the idyllic pastoral countryside, as likewise described by Salomon (2002, 104). Of note is also *Site 17*, as it is debatable whether the graphic style shifts were used to point out entities or environments at all, or if they were solely used to highlight the horrific-ness of the event.

In general, graphic devices of objectification were used for detail-oriented depiction of physicality, and thus leant themselves for more sublate approaches. Objectification of the horrific included an increased amount of depicted detail and dimension. When depicting human figures, this was especially utilized to highlight physicality or the distortion of facial features. In addition to presenting the sublate grossness of the body, objectification was also used to argue for the ‘reality’ of the depicted events. This was done to either present a conflicted account of the diegetic events or to depict supernatural events as ‘truly’ happening. In one case, objectification was utilized to simply highlight the otherness of the depicted, illustrating a sensation of unvoiced unease. An increased amount of detail and density of line work was also used to arrest the gaze and slow down narrative time, as the reader was invited to stop and witness the horrific forms in all their glorious detail.

Graphic abstraction and obscuring of the depicted brought into question the reality and understandability of the depicted. This provided affordances for sublimating the horrific through different graphic ways of obscuring, abstracting, and limiting the reader’s information of what is being shown. The features of entities were cast in shadow and depicted with minimal detail, or obscured with dense line hatching. The descriptive functions of horrific graphic style become more apparent, as to an extent these graphic devices can be seen as refusals to fully describe the horrific, or to center the ‘description’ only on specific details; be it the horrible stare or the wide open maw of a door. Abstraction was used when the mere thought of something was meant to be the primary source of horror. *A Lady’s Hands Are Cold* showcased that abstraction can also be deployed to disrupt or complicate empathetic understanding of the horrific.

In many cases non-diegetic color and lighting could be seen as

further examples of both highlighted materiality and abstraction; divergent lighting was used to both obscure and abstract figures, as well as to highlight their material form; the simplified color use in *Infidel* and *A Lady’s Hands Are Cold* are instances of heightened stylization, while the lighting *PTSD Radio* emphasized the form of the figure. Nevertheless, as color and lighting can be used to undermine or contradict other methods of physicality and abstraction (as was done in *Infidel*), it can be beneficial to keep them as a separate analytical concept.

Although movement is not perhaps the most synonymous with still artforms, it is often utilized in horror media; from the generic shambling zombies and the infamous head shake in *Jacob’s Ladder* (1990), to the many twisting, teleporting, and crawling video game monsters, uncanny movement is not foreign to horror. In the sample, graphic variation could be interpreted to depict both metaphorical and physical movement of figures, to portray a sense of emotional gravity or heaviness as well as to emphasize the materiality of movement. Although this interpretation should be approached with caution, it was present enough in the sample to be mentioned. Out of the analysis, especially the trapped static motion of the ghost in *PTSD Radio* unable to move on felt like horrific motion—vibrating in place, liminal, and unresolved. Similarly, the strangeness of the stretched and deformed figure of Father Winfred in *Gideon Falls* stands out as a case for strange, horrific movement depicted with the graphic style, in a way combining movement with a flavour of body horror.

Finally, the depiction of the horrified emerged from the sample as another function of horrific graphic style shifts. In two of the samples, the horrified subjects were not safe from the graphic properties of their horrors. The sensation of horror was then not only projected onto the horrific through graphic style shifts, but repeated in the depiction of the witnessing characters as well.



## 6 We have the right to know

The practical experiments and the qualitative comic analysis illuminated how graphic style shifts are used to depict the horrific in contemporary horror comics. The following sections will discuss the findings of the investigation and reflect on the literature review. The limitations, oversights, and challenges that may have affected these findings will also be addressed.

### 6.1 Horror functions of graphic style

The investigation identified four functions that graphic style shifts perform in contemporary horror comics. These functions are as follows:

- altering the mode of depiction
- altering the depiction of perception
- creating a special depiction of the horrific
- creating a special depiction of the horrified

The initially hypothesized horrific purposes of graphic style shifts were mostly fitting. They were beneficial for both describing and analysing the aesthetic effects of graphic style shifts. There were, however, some unexpected revelations that influenced the analysis and practical experiments. The research had not anticipated the depiction of the horrified, and the subcategory of horrific events was a more complex issue than initially expected. This discussion will address the other horrific functions of graphic style first and return to these oversights anon.

### / Mode of depiction

Shifts in graphic style often—if not always—altered the mode of depiction. In the sampled comic sequences, this meant either moves towards either the sublate or the sublime. The modes of horror were also often intermingled together. As Ylönen notes of horror in her analysis of picture books, while some modes of horror might dominate the overall sensation produced by the work, they are often at play simultaneously (Ylönen 2016, 24). This overlapping and intertwining was also present in the selected comics; *Infidel* created suspense by alternating between sublating body horror and incongruously soft rendering and uncanny coloring, *A Lady's Hands Are Cold* grounded a supernatural moment of a fairytale with a sublate treatment of a corpse while simultaneously sublimating the situation by obscuring the face, identity, and agency of the corpse.

Overall, the concepts of sublating and sublimating highlighted the multiplicity of horror during the analysis. Moreover, they called attention to instances of the same graphic device being used for different purposes, such as the more sublime objectification of the tent in *Site 17*. In the practical experiments the mode of depiction was used to brainstorm different ways of portraying the horrific—and subsequently to exemplify how different graphic approaches can alter the interpretation and sensation evoked by the depicted. Although aestheticization was not present in sampled comics (and it is debatable whether graphic style shifts could, as it stands, be used to depict aestheticized horror), the concept provided an interesting venue for graphic experimentation.

### / Depiction of perception

Graphic style shifts were widely used as a device to question and complicate the reality of events. Some of the comics, like *Infidel* and *Gideon Falls*, used graphic variation to conflate subjective and objective interpretations. Others, like *PTSD Radio* and *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*, also used graphic variation to affirm the 'realness' of the horrific.

In general, it could be said that highly visible artifice in graphic variations lends itself well to narrative horror-making. As Mikkonen notes, graphic style shifts in and of themselves bring into question the subjectivity of narration (Mikkonen 2017, 83). This was apparent in the experiments



as well; even when the primary intent of a shift was not to portray a subjective account of events, the interpretation of diegetic reality leaned this direction. This was especially apparent with variable sequence #2. In short, highlighting the subjective experiences of characters is both an affordance of graphic style shifts (Mikkonen 2017, 118-119), and a recurring attribute of the horror narrative (Leffler 2000, 121), which makes graphic variation an especially salient device for narrative horror. Likewise, graphic style offers plenty of options for altering the ‘visibility’ of the depicted, covering the full spectrum of both showing too much and not enough.

### **Depiction of the horrific**

Graphic variation was also used to create disruptive depictions of the horrific. Here too, the very application of stylistic ruptures worked to create a sense of unfamiliarity or strangeness for the horrific—most viscerally felt on the initial instances of variation. These first encounters with the horrific are visibly, graphically ‘other’ than what has preceded them. Although McCloud only remarks upon the ‘othering’ power of realism (1994, 41), I would argue that the introduction of any graphic variation into a dominant baseline style brings with it a sense of otherness—especially when the depicted is framed as horrific. This was present in multiple examples in the sample that used abstraction and simplified forms to depict the horrific (*Gideon Falls*, *A Lady’s Hands Are Cold*, *It Comes Back*). Similar effects can be observed in the practical experiments, both in the simplified depictions of the double on fire, as well as in the basement stairs of variable sequence #2.

Overall, McCloud frames his account of the ‘universalizing’ and ‘animating’ powers of the cartoon form as unambiguously optimistic devices for reader-identification (see, for example, McCloud 1994, 36: 42). A horrific survey of simplified forms reveals a flipside: a simple ‘cartoon’ could indeed be anyone including oneself, but at the same time, it could also be *anyone* including *oneself*. Especially in the explicit context of horror-making, a simplified and deformed image can leave room for an unsettlingly open-ended interpretation. It is an outright refusal to fully or ‘faithfully’ describe the depicted. In this manner, noticeably simplifying, deforming, or stylizing the form evokes the sensation of something being hidden or obscured. While

McCloud emphasizes the simple cartoon-form as an act of focusing on salient details of the form (McCloud 1994, 30), the horror of simplicity might then lie in those instances when the eliminated detail gains an equal or greater meaning in the interpretation of the image. Although the discussion of the possible explanations is beyond the scope of this research, I think this offers an interesting continuation of the previously discussed concept of ‘faulty’ animation. The ‘faultiness’ of animation may certainly be reliant on the narrative framing of the horrific as something with oblique agency, but how much and what type of a role graphic depiction plays is a fertile course of further study.

One of the limitations with the theoretical framework used in this study is that it proposed a rather narrow definition of horrific events. Although the aforementioned ‘shock event’ and ‘frozen moment’ are qualities of horrific events, they describe only some temporal aspects of the phenomena. This proved challenging to work with in a few different ways. To begin with, the analysis model of graphic style did not focus on pacing, and ignored all aspects of page composition. While abrupt changes in the style may shock to an extent, a great part of this shock can be attributed to page composition. In the selected sample, a number of the graphic ruptures were full-page illustrations that followed a page turn. As Jeff Lemire, the writer of *Gideon Falls*, points out in the afterword to *Infidel*, the page turn is a significant contributor to the comics equivalent of a ‘jump factor’, the shock event. In comparison, the ‘frozen moment’ of horror fits the examined purview of graphic style better. As Mikkonen notes, changes in the amount of detail do affect narrative time, and the added detail in depicting the horrific invites prolonged fixation on the image in the manner that was described by Perron. What neither the ‘shock event’ nor the ‘frozen moment’ capture, is any duration or pacing of events that falls between ‘abrupt’ and ‘not-moving’. For example, in the sequence #3 the sensation of horror could be seen to steadily intensify throughout the sequence. An analysis of graphic style that also considered other formal aspects of the narrative could better understand the temporal mechanics of graphic horror-making.

Horrific events were defined in this investigation as different types of confrontations between the positive characters and the horrific.



However, this definition failed to fully account for those instances when it was events themselves that were made horrific—an example of which was presented in *Site 17*. This type of horrific event has been recognized. For example, Matt Hills has offered an event-based definition of horror, where the depiction of events is given primacy over the horrific entities (Hills 2003, 142). Hills notes that an horrific event is a logical requirement for an encounter with the horrific (ibid.). He then goes on to say that these events do not necessitate an encounter of any kind to be depicted as horrific (143-144). Hills describes instances where the diegetic existence of the entity is never fully disclosed—like, for example, in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999)—or when the horrific agency transcends the ‘limits of embodiment, spatiality, temporality, or . . . “theological” explanation’ (146). If the analysis of the comics were approached through Hill’s description of horrific events, *Site 17* could be viewed as a case of a non-disclosed horror event, while *Gideon Falls* could be seen as an example of a transcendent horror event instead of a miasmatic environment. Similarly, the approach taken to the graphic experiments could have had different results if the primacy of events had been addressed explicitly.

To some extent, the analysis conducted does address the key concerns behind Hills’ event-focused definition of horror. Hills frames event-based horror explicitly to consider a) the specific aesthetics of horror as they move between ‘graspable objects’ and ‘cosmic space’ and b) the formal aspects of horror (film) that do not contribute to a narrative reading nor emphasize the presence of some definite entity, but rather evoke a sense of unease (Hills 2003, 147). The analysis of horror provided in this thesis does take into account both of these concerns. The former was explicitly separated into the mode of depiction. The latter concern, about the role of atmospheric description, was included in the description of horrific environments. However, it is difficult to say if the analysis of the graphic style devices themselves would differ if the comic sequences were approached primarily as events—or what those differences would tell about horror-making. As it stands, the boundaries between the different horrors appear artificial and blurry. Whether, for example, a haunted house is portrayed as an entity, an imperfectly animate object, or a haunting (or if it includes aspects of all of the above) is not always clearly apparent, nor

is it necessarily always possible—or desirable—to make such a distinction.

Overall, it might be beneficial to approach instances of horror primarily as simply manifestations of the ‘horrific’ and make distinctions between the horrors only as needed or when beneficial. The practical experiment in this investigation may provide an anecdotal, but illuminative example; when the entirety of the comic sequence was approached as a singular horror event rather than separate elements, it led to the most cohesive and workable sequence of the four. Meanwhile, in further comparative analyses of graphic horror-making it would be interesting to investigate if there are significant differences between horror strategies as they are applied to events, environments, and entities.

### / Depiction of the horrified

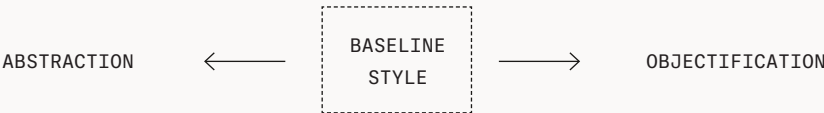
Finally, graphic style was used to create a special depiction of the horrified. This function of horror rhetorics was initially missed in the literature review. I say missed, as Yvonne Leffler does identify this as a feature of the horror story. Leffler describes how facing the horrific often leads to the disruption of the main character’s identity and blurs the boundaries between the self and the horrific (Leffler 2000, 153-154). Although this function did emerge in the analysis of the comics, it was not explicitly examined in practice since its discovery came quite late in the investigation. Some instances of it are present in the experiments nonetheless; as variable sequence #3 considered the ‘spread’ of the graphic style as miasmatic and infectious, it did ‘naturally’ infect the characters as well (as seen in the vertical lines appearing over the girl’s face and form). Considering this sequence in retrospect, the integration between the horrific and the horrified goes beyond showing that the ‘unfolding events were not in her favor’—it portrays the positive character as especially vulnerable to the powers of horror as the (formal) boundaries between the figures and environment disintegrate. This might be another reason why this sequence feels like it ‘works better’ than the others.

Overall, both the analysed examples and sequence #3 exemplify that graphic style variation provides distinct affordances for graphically depicting this type of blurring between the positive characters and the horrific.



6.2 **Horrific graphic style shifts**

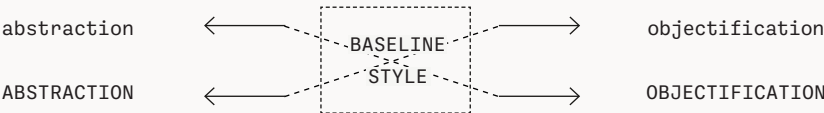
The visual analysis of the comic sequences proposed preliminary types of horrific graphic style strategies. Although these were initially divided into four, the primary approaches to depicting the horrific were movements towards realism-oriented objectification and simplified abstraction. This broadly follows the ‘reality—iconic abstraction’ scale of McCloud’s pyramid of pictorial language, but with an explicit focus on horror. In addition it accounts for both the deformation (realist—abstracted) and graphic treatment (detailed—obscured) of images in the same space.



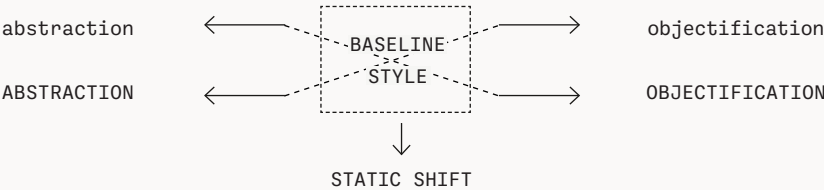
As previously discussed, both objectification and abstraction were used for all of the identified horror functions. In general, objectification provided more affordances for sublate depiction of horror, while abstraction veered towards the sublime. However, as *Site 17* showcased, it is possible for objectification to be used to simply create an uncanny atmosphere. Although creating a sublate sensation of horror through abstraction did not succeed in the practical experiments, I would consider those results inconclusive. Objectification and abstraction can be seen to favour a one mode of depiction over the other, but exceptions may exist.

Non-diegetic color and lighting was used to both support and contradict the primary devices. While in many cases this could be seen as further movements towards objectification or abstraction, it was at times used to counter the ‘arguments’ made by the primary device. This was apparent, for example, in *Infidel* where the detailed, realistic depictions of the horrific entities were basked in non-diegetic light and color to create doubt in the interpretation of reality. Although coloring and lighting were graphic strategies used for contradictory purposes in the analysed sample, the takeaway from this observation should simply be that contradictory devices are possible. Any aspect of the graphic style might go against the primary movement of a graphic style shift. For example, the deformation

of figures can move towards simplified form, while the ‘rendering’ of the image can move towards realism. While non-diegetic color and lighting may provide simple and effective means of contradicting the primary movement of a graphic style shift, it should be noted that any element of the graphic style shifts could be used for contradictory ‘minor’ movements.



Additionally, a horrific graphic style shift might not shift towards objectification or abstraction at all (or, at least not in any meaningful way). If we consider the graphic style shift in sequence variable #4, it did not significantly shift towards either direction. While many aspects of the graphic style do shift, the overall approach (explicitly barring the depiction of the double on fire) remains close to the baseline style. Regardless of this, I would argue that the overall change in style does contribute to creating an uneasy atmosphere. Hence, the movement of horrific graphic style shifts may include a ‘static’ shift, which simply introduces a competing depiction of the diegetic reality without necessarily moving towards objectification or abstraction.



While given special mention in the analysis, the evidence for graphic depiction of movement being used as an explicit horrification strategy is tenuous. Many of the examples mentioned could simply be further instances of objectification or abstraction, and the sensation of horrific movement interpreted from them could be subjective. There may be a case for graphic style portraying horrific movement, but it would take further study that explicitly considers how motion is depicted in non-temporal media. In the end, based on this investigation, I would not reject the possibility of graphically depicted horrific motion functioning similarly to the others identified here.



### 6.3 Limitations, challenges, and analytical difficulties

This investigation was exploratory in nature. The number of both analysed comics and conducted experiments was low, and the analysis was interpretative in nature. The analysed comics were also mostly North American, and as such present only a very select slice of comics. Any broad generalizations based on these observations are not proposed. Rather, the results and discussion provided are offered to further illuminate and exemplify the use of graphic style shifts in general, and graphic horror-making in particular.

The investigation also had a number of challenges involving the chosen methodology. Duncan's method for analysing hermeneutic image functions initially looked like a fitting choice as a starting point. This was because it explicitly addressed aesthetic interpretations of graphic style. However, it did not have a comparative aspect that could have made analysis easier. Additionally, since Duncan's original method did not call for quantitative proof of the saliency of the hermeneutic images, the adapted model did not either. It may have benefitted from such inclusion. It is not within the reach of this investigation to give numeric data to prove its observations. This includes, for example, data about which types of graphic devices were used most often, what the most common horror functions were, or if one mode of depiction was favoured over the others, and so on.

The loose definition of a 'moment of horror' (or 'horror event') should be revisited if this approach is adopted for a quantitative study. While the positive characters' negative reactions to the horrific were a fruitful way of determining heightened moments of horror, some metric is needed to judge the duration of a singular moment. In this sample, climactic scenes contained prolonged sequences of the graphically divergent horrific that also included repeated encounters and new horror reactions from the characters. While this did not hinder the interpretative analysis, a more rigorous approach should consider what counts as a new instance of a horror moment.

The categorization of both horrific graphic functions and devices was challenging and the boundaries between them remain fuzzy. The same devices include shiftings of various features of graphic style, have multiple, disparate functions, which in turn meld into each other. While perhaps reflective of the messy reality of things, this did not make

describing the phenomena under study any easier. There are many adjustments that further studies could do to mitigate these difficulties. The examination of horrific style shifts could explicitly focus on individual elements of graphic style. One way would be to follow Lefèvre's aggregate list of the way of drawing, coloring strategy, and projection system. Alternatively, the issues of deformation and stylization of figures could be approached separately from the surface rendering of images. The scope could likewise be limited and clarified by focusing on a single function of graphic style. Following Bordwell, this could mean inspecting narrative, thematic, expressive, or decorative functions of graphic style in general, or horrific graphic style in particular. An analysis could also choose to closely examine one of the horror functions of graphic style identified in this investigation, or focus on the different strategies objectification and abstraction afford for horror-making.

The graphic experimentation could have been both better planned and integrated into the research set-up. As it stands, the experiments were carried before the final analysis of the comics, and as such, were not used to explicitly examine the graphic devices identified therein. It is possible that another round of experiments after the analysis could have provided more nuance for the discussion of the graphic devices. In retrospect, the experiments could have included a sequence where only the graphic depiction of the environment shifted. Even if the sequence itself included entities, it does not mean they need to be graphically deviant. This could have been an interesting avenue for inspecting the relation between horrific entities and environments. In addition, if another round of experiments had been conducted after the final analysis, a shift in the depiction of the horrified could have examined explicitly as well.

The other missing sequence from the experiments is 'the final' one, since the experiments failed to capture the right sensation of horror for the selected sequence. While personally disappointing, this failure itself was beneficial to the overall investigation. In a sense, it further suggests that there are different sensations of horror, and that graphic depiction of the horrific has some effect on this sensation. The practical experiments did contribute to the investigation in two ways. Firstly, they provided further examples and counterexamples of the investigated phenomenon



that, I would argue, make the final discussion more rounded. Secondly, the practical experiments allowed the suitability of observed concepts to be tested for practice as well as analysis. While these experiments were far from flawless, they did meaningfully contribute to the discussion.

#### 6.4 Future research

While the exploratory nature of this investigation limits the general applicability of the findings, those findings do provide ground for future studies. To begin with, the use of graphic style shifts could simply be examined in a broader sample of horror comics—or even non-horror comics. The broader examination could utilize quantitative cataloguing in addition to the purely interpretative analysis provided here, and consider the aforementioned challenges that were faced in this investigation. The effects of graphic style shifts could be examined by directly manipulating the graphic style of the analysed comics themselves. Practice-based experiments could also be framed in a more exploratory role, entirely without a limiting narrative framework, or by using a completely self-contained sequence.

Another avenue for future research could be to explore where the line between ‘faulty’ and properly functioning graphic animation lies; when and how does a simplified image succumb to the dark side, become an ‘object’ instead of a subject or an object? This could also require examination of some cognitive or cultural explanations of how we relate to graphic traces in images. Likewise, any explanation-based investigation could be used to better understand the phenomena under study.

The relation between graphic style shifts and horror specifically could also be inspected further. As the findings of this study suggest, there could be some medium-specific affordances for graphic style shifts to evoke a sensation of horror. Whether the evocation of horror ‘invites’ more use of graphic style shifts could be examined, for example, by conducting a comparative study that would look at how often graphic style shifts are used in horror comics (or in other horror media) as compared to some non-horror equivalents. Moving beyond the scope of comics studies, the use of graphic style and graphic style shifts could also be studied in other horror media.



## The end

I set out to find how graphic style shifts affect horror comic sequences, and how this influence creates salient distinctions in the interpretation of the material. In the literature review, I sought connections between horror-making strategies in horror media at large, and the motivated use of graphic style in comics. The practical experiments exemplified how varying the graphic treatment of a sequence changes the interpretation and affective atmosphere of a sequence. The analysis of horror comic sequences further described strategies currently used for graphic horror-making.

At the close, I have proposed that horrific graphic style shifts can be seen as a fluctuating, and sometimes contradictory, movement between graphically objectifying and abstracting the depicted—including the possibility of a ‘static’ shift. Both in the experiments and analysed comics, this shifting of the graphic style served to fulfill the horror functions that were identified in the literature review, either by altering the mode of depiction, the depiction of perception, the depiction of the horrific, or the depiction of the horrified. The investigation also noted some specific instances where graphic style shifts themselves may provide fitting affordances for evoking the sensation of horror.

By exemplifying the multiplicity of graphic horror-making in particular, I hope to have contributed a demonstration of how graphic style can influence visual narratives in general—regardless of whether it explicitly influences the narrative, whether it serves to evoke some distinctly lively (or undead-ly) sensation, or whether it appears excessive. I believe this is the broader relevance of my investigation.

I would also like to stress that although this investigation focused on generalizations and the shared moves of horror, these similarities are here offered as signs of belonging, not as a basis for careless value judgement. The inspected horror sequences are distinctly different from each other. They tell different stories, about different horrors, in different contexts. What is more, they feel different. Even if they can be seen to move in the same directions, the quality of movement itself differs, expressing different attitudes and evoking a different sense of character and mood.

However, to appreciate and savour the differences in movement, you have to notice something is moving in the first place. For these shifts to be understood or appreciated, they need to be first recognized and examined with similar rigour as is given to other aspects of graphic narratives (not to mention, other non-graphic narratives). I believe that by recognizing these moves in various contexts, used for various objectives—regardless of genre or critical acclaim—we can learn something different about their use and even their possible value.

There is much to horror-making that thrives in the periphery. The fact that graphic style and graphic style shifts are yet unremarked upon provides these horror sequences with additional, temporary occult potential. From the details that change subtly when we are not paying attention to them, to the abrupt and unexplained bursts of disruptive imagery, this is the realm of horrors. It might appear counterintuitive to call attention to them. However, I think that the beauty (and the horror) is that as we turn to look where we thought we saw movement, the periphery inevitably moves as well. Acknowledging the existence of graphic style shifts will not make them any less potent. It may only contribute to a slow shift in perception.

As for us in the business of making things, I do not think we ‘need’ more motivated approaches to graphic style—all of us already have one, even if it is not tailor-made for each project. However, just as critics and scholars see graphic style as a ‘mark of the maker’, we too feel that the way we produce imagery is somehow a part of our identity as graphic-makers—and as people. My hope is that this serves as another reminder that both of these things are flexible. And that



sometimes when you can't find the right feeling, the correct door in the dark, what you might need is a change in direction, or in the way you are walking—or who you are walking as. Sometimes an integration between yourself and the horrific might be necessary. But who am I to preach anything?

The graphic experiments I conducted served the research-bound purpose I set for them. They demonstrate that using different approaches to the depiction of the horrific influences an individual horror sequence. However, I did not find what I was personally looking for. I do not believe that my experiments yielded the right approach to finding the 'correct' sensation for the sequence of my own project. The experiments set out to exemplify the identified horror strategies. In practice, this meant that I had to force myself—on multiple occasions—to examine graphic style avenues that I felt from the onset would not work out for my project. After all, how could I demonstrate their effects, if not by executing them regardless? Did these experiments not capture the right feeling because I did not expect them to? It is a stark possibility. Did my mindset affect the outcome in some way? Most certainly.

I can also say with confidence that forcibly examining possibilities that you expect to fail, that then proceed to fail, over and over again, is an incredibly demoralizing experience. I suspect if I had not chosen to tie the experimentation to an already existing project, it would have felt more natural to freely experiment with the visuals. Likewise, had I felt free to pursue whatever felt right in the experiments—without trying to examine any extraneous points—the results may have been completely different. I have come to know, now, how much selecting the right framing for your practice in research matters.

As for me? I am still here. The reader may rest assured that the hunt for ghosts on the basement steps will resume. As is the case with ghost-hunting, the results will likely be up to interpretation. For now, I yearn for the sleep of reason.



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Page numbers for *A Lady's Hands Are Cold*, *Infidel*, and *Gideon Falls* were counted by hand starting from the first panel of the comic. Page numbers correspond to images reading left-to-right and top-to-bottom in rows.



Appendix: Initial sampling of horror comics

P

100 OF THE BEST HORROR COMICS OF ALL TIME / PASTE MAGAZINE

Edited by Steve Foxe and Sean M. Edgar.

<https://www.pastemagazine.com/books/horror-comics/best-horror-comics-of-all-time/>

R

THE MOST TERRIFYING HORROR COMIC BOOKS TO READ AT NIGHT / RANKER

User curated.

<https://www.ranker.com/list/best-horror-comic-books-graphic-novels/ranker-comics>

B

12 OF THE BEST HORROR COMICS THAT ARE TERRIFYING READERS TODAY / BOOK RIOT

Edited by Steph Auteri.

<https://bookriot.com/best-horror-comics/>

G

BEST HORROR COMICS/GRAPHIC NOVELS! / GOODREADS

User curated (cut off at 100 titles).

[https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/3033.Best\\_Horror\\_Comics\\_Graphic\\_Novels\\_](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/3033.Best_Horror_Comics_Graphic_Novels_)

**BOLD TITLE** Comic was either published or begun publishing during 2010-2020

**P R G** 30 Days of Night. Steve Niles, Ben Templesmith. IDW Publishing, 2002.

**B** **Abbott.** Saladin Ahmed, Sami Kivelä, Jason Wordie, Taj Tenfold. BOOM! Studios, 2018.

**P R G** **Afterlife With Archie.** Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, Francesco Francavilla, Jack Morelli. Archie Comics, 2013 – present.

**P R** **Aliens: Dead Orbit.** James Stokoe. Dark Horse Comics, 2018.

**P** **Aliens: Salvation.** Dave Gibbons, Mike Mignola, Kevin Nowlan, Matt Holligsworth, Clem Robins, Anina Bennett, Ryder Windham. Dark Horse Comics, 2015.

**P G** **American Vampire.** Scott Snyder, Rafael Albuquerque, Sean Murphy, & Various Artists. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 2010 – 2016.

**P R G** Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth. Grant Morrison, Dave McKean. DC Comic,s 1989.

**P** **A Walk Through Hell.** Garth Ennis, Goran Sudžuka, Ive Scorcina, Rob Steen. AfterShock, 2018-2019.

**P R** B.P.R.D. Mike Mignola, Christopher Golden, Tom Sniegowski, Ryan Sook, Curtis Arnolg, Dave Stewart, & Various Artists. Dark Horse Comics, 2002-2019.

**P** **Babyteeth.** Donny Cates, Garry Brown. AfterShock, 2017 – present.

**G** Batman & Dracula: Red Rain. Doug Moench, Kelley Jones, Malcolm Jones III, John Beatty, Les Dorscheid, Todd Klein. DC Comics, 1991 – 1998.

**P** Batman: Haunted Knight. Jeph Loeb, Tim Sale. DC Comics, 1996.

**P G** Beasts of Burden. Evan Dorkin, Jill Thompson, Benjamin Dewey. Dark Horse Comics 2003 – present.

**P G** Beautiful Darkness. Fabien Vehlmann, Kerascoët. Drawn & Quarterly, 2009

**P** **The Beauty.** Jeremy Haun & Jason A. Hurley Image Comics, 2016 – 2019.

**G** Blackgas. Warren Ellis, Max Fiumara, Ryan Waterhouse. Avatar Press, 2006 – 2007.

**P G** Black Hole. Charles Burns. Kitchen Sink Press / Fantagraphics, 1995 – 2005.

**P R** **The Black Monday Murders.** Jonathan Hickman, Tomm Coker. Image Comics, 2016 – present.

**P** **Bones of the Coast.** Shannon Campbell, Jeff Ellis, Kathleen Jacques & Various Artists. Cloudscape Comics, 2016.

**P** Cat Eyed Boy. Kazuo Umezu. Originally published in Japan by Shonen Gahosha, 1967-1978; English publication by VIZ Media, 2008.

**P R G** **Chilling Adventures of Sabrina.** Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, Robert Hack, Jack Morelli. Archie Comics, 2016 – present.

**G** Cinema Panopticum. Thomas Ott. Fantagraphics, 2005.

**P R B** **Clean Room.** Gail Simone, Jon Davis-Hunt. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 2015 – 2017.

**R G** **Clive Barker’s Hellraiser Vol. 1.** Clive Barker, Christopher Monfette, Leonardo Manco. BOOM! Studios, 2011.

**P R G** **Colder.** Paul Tobin, Juan Ferreyra. Dark Horse Comics, 2013 – 2016.

**R** **Come Into Me.** Lonnie Nadler, Zac Thompson, Piotr Kowalski, Niko Guardia. Black Mask Comics, 2019.

**P R G** Crossed. Garth Ennis, Jacen Burrows, Alan Moore, David Lapham, Si Spurrier, Kieron Gillen, & Other artists. Avatar Press, 2008 – 2010.

**G** The Crow. James O’Barr. Caliber Comics, 1989.

**P R** **The Dark & Bloody.** Shawn Aldridge, Scott Godlewski, Patricia Mulvihill. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 2016.

**P** **Delphine.** Richard Sala. Fantagraphics, 2013.

**R** The Demon. Jack Kirby. DC Comics, 1972.

**P R** Doctor Voodoo: Avenger of the Supernatural. Rick Remender, Jefte Palo, Gabriel Hardman, Jean-Francois Beaulieu, Dave Lanphear, & Other Artists. Marvel Comics, 2009 – 2010

**G** Dragon Head, Volume 1. Minetaro Mochizuki. Originally published in Japan by Kodansha, 1995 – 2000; English publication by Kodansha USA, 2006.

**P** **The Dregs.** Zac Thompson & Lonnie Nadler, Eric Zawadzki, Dee Cunniffe. Black Mask Comics, 2017.

**P G** The Drifting Classroom. Kazuo Umezu. Originally published in Japan by Shogakukan, 1972 – 1974; English publication by VIZ Media, 2006.

**P G** EC Comics Archives (The Vault of Horror, Tales from the Crypt.) Various artists. EC Comics, 1950 – 1955.

**P R** **Edgar Allan Poe’s Spirits of the Dead.** Richard Corben. Dark Horse Comics, 2014.

**B** **The Empty Man.** Cullen Bunn, Vanesa R. Del Rey, Michael Garland. BOOM! Studios 2014 – present.

**G** “The Enigma of Amigara Fault”. Junji Ito. In *Gyo*. Originally published in Japan by Shogakukan 2001 – 2002. English publication by VIZ Media, 2015.

**G** Essential Tomb of Dracula, Vol. 1. Marv Wolfman, Roger McKenzie, Gene Colan, Frank Robbins. Marvel Comics, 2004.

**P** The Eyes of the Cat. Alejandro Jodorowsky, Moebius. Humanoids, 2012. First published in 1978.

**P** Face. Peter Milligan, Duncan Fegredo. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 1995.

**P R** **Fatale.** Ed Brubaker, Sean Phillips. Image Comics 2012 - 2014.

**P R** Flinch. Various Artists. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 1999 - 2001.

**G** **Fragments of Horror.** Junji Ito. Originally published in Japan by The Asahi Shimbun Company 2013 - 2014. English publication by VIZ Media, 2015.

**P** Freaks of the Heartland. Steve Niles, Greg Ruth. Dark Horse, 1995.

**P R G** From Hell. Alan Moore, Eddie Campbell. Top Shelf, 1999.

**P** **Ghosts and Ruins.** Ben Catmull. Fantagraphics, 2013.

**P R B** **Gideon Falls.** Jeff Lemire, Andrea Sorrentino, Dave Steward, Steve Wands, and Will Dennis. Image Comics, 2018 - present.

**P** **Girl from the Other Side: Siúil, A Rún. Nagabe.** Seven Seas, 2015 - present.

**P** The Goon. Eric Powell. Avatar Press / Dark Horse Comics, 1999 - present.

**P** **Gotham By Midnight.** Ray Fawkes, Ben Templesmith, Juan Ferreyra. DC Comics, 2015 - 2016.

**P G** Gyo. Junji Ito. Originally published in Japan by Shogakukan 2001 - 2002. English publication by VIZ Media, 2015.

**P** **H.P. Lovecraft's The Hounds and Other Stories.** H.P. Lovecraft, Gou Tanabe. Dark Horse Comics, 2015

**G** Hack/Slash Omnibus, Volume 1. Tim Seeley, Dave Crosland, Stefano Caselli, Andy Khun, Joe Largent, Mike O'Sullivan, Matt Merhoff, Federica Manfredi and others. Devil's Due Publishing, 2008.

**P R G** **Harrow County.** Cullen Bunn, Tyler Crook. Dark Horse Comics, 2015 - 2018.

**G** Hell Baby. Hideshi Hino. Blast Books, 1995.

**P G** Hellblazer. Jamie Delano, John Ridgway, Various Artists. Vertigo / DC Comics, 1988 - 2013.

**G** Hellblazer: All His Engines. Mike Carey, Leonardo Manco. Vertigo / DC Comics, 2005.

**P G** Hellboy. Mike Mignola, Duncan Fegredo, Richard Corben, Dave Stewart. Dark Horse Comics, 1994 - 2019.

**G** Hellboy: Weird Tales, Vol. 1. Scott Allie, John Cassaday. Dark Horse Comics, 2003.

**G** Hellsing, Volume 1. Kohta Hirano. Originally published in Japan by Shonen Gahosha 1998. English publication by Dark Horse Comics, 2003.

**P** **Hillbilly.** Eric Powell. Albatross Funnybooks, 2017 - present.

**P** **The House.** Phillip Sevy, Ian Bertram, Drew Zucker. Sucker Productions, 2018.

**P R** **House of Penance.** Peter Tomasi, Ian Bertram. Dark Horse Comics, 2016.

**P R G** I Am a Hero. Kengo Hanazawa. Originally published in Japan by Shogakukan 1998. English publication by Dark Horse Comics, 2016.

**P R B** **Ice Cream Man.** W. Maxwell Prince, Martin Morazzo. Image Comics, 2018 - present.

**G** Ichi the Killer, Volume 1. Hideo Yamamoto. Originally published in Japan by Shogakukan 1998. English publication by Tonkam, 2011.

**P** **Idle Days.** Thomas Desaulniers-Brousseau, Simon Leclerc. First Second, 2018.

**P** I Feel Sick. Jhonen Vasquez. Slave Labor Graphics, 1999 - 2000.

**R** **The Immortal Hulk.** Al Ewing, Joe Bennett. Marvel Comics, 2018 - present.

**P R B** **Infidel.** Pornshak Pichetshote, Aaron Campbell, José Villarrubia,

and Jeff Powell. Image Comics, 2018.

**G** **in Sanity, AZ.** James Ninness, Michael Fountain, Joe Pezzula, Chris Burkheart, Courtney Cmacho, Chris Collins, Various Artists. Quad Shot, 2013.

**P** **InSExts.** Marguerite Bennett, Ariela Kristantina. AfterShock Comics, 2016.

**P** **In The Dark: A Horror Anthology.** Rachel Deering, Various Artists. IDW Publishing, 2014.

**B** **Joe Hill: The Graphic Novel Collection.** Joe Hill, Various Artists. IDW Publishing, 2017.

**P R G** Johnny the Homicidal Maniac. Jhonen Vasquez. Slave Labor Graphics, 1995 - 1997.

**P** **Kill the Minotaur.** Chris Pasetto, Christian Cantamessa, Lukas Ketner, Jean-Francois Beaulieu. Image Comics, 2017.

**P** **The King in Yellow.** I. N. J. Culbard, Robert Chambers. SelfMadeHero, 2015.

**G** The Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service, Volume 1. Eiji Otsuka. Originally published in Japan by Kadokawa Shoten, 2002. English publication by Dark Horse Manga, 2006.

**G** The Laughing Vampire. Suehiro Maruo. Young Champion, 1998-1999

**P R G** Locke & Key. Joe Hill, Gabriel Rodriguez. IDW Publishing. 2008 - 2013.

**P** **The Lottery: The Authorized Graphic Adaptation.** Shirley Jackson, Miles Hyman. Hill and Wang, 2016.

**G** Marvel Zombies. Robert Kirkman, Sean Phillips. Marvel Comics, 2005 - 2006.

**P R** **Moonshine.** Brian Azzarello, Eduardo Risso. Image Comics, 2018 - 2020.

**G** MPD Psycho, Vol. 1. Eiji Otsuka. Originally published in Japan by Seirindo, 1997 - 2016. English publication by Dark Horse Manga, 2007 - 2009.

**P G** Mr. Arashi's Amazing Freak Show. Suehiro Maruo. Originally published in Japan by Seirindo, 1984. English publication by Blast Books, 1993.

**P** **Mr. Higgins Comes Home.** Mike Mignola, Warwick Johnson-Cadwell. Dark Horse Comics, 2017.

**G** Museum of Terror. Junji Ito. Dark Horse Manga, 2006.

**P R G** **Nailbiter.** Joshua Williamson, Mike Henderson. Image Comics, 2014 - 2017.

**P** **Nameless.** Grant Morrison, Chris Burnham. Image Comics, 2016.

**P R G** **Neonomicon.** Alan Moore, Jacen Burrows. Avatar Press, 2010 - 2011.

**G** **The Nightmare Factory, Volume 1.** Thomas Ligotti, Stuart Moore, Joe Harris, Colleen Doran, Ben Templesmith, Ted McKeever, Michael Gaydos. Harper Paperbacks, 2007.

**P G** Nijigahara Holograph. Inio Asano. Originally published in Japan by Ohta Publishing, 2003 - 2005. English publication by Fantagraphics, 2006.

**B** **Nimona.** Noelle Stevenson. Webcomic / HarperCollins, 2015.

**P** Nocturnals. Dan Brereton. Dark Horse Comics / Image Comics / Oni Press, 1995 - present.

**P** **Not Drunk Enough.** Tess Stone. Webcomic / Oni Press, 2017.

**P** **The Other Side: An Anthology of Queer Paranormal Romance.** Melanie Gillman & Kori Michele. Other Side Press, 2016.

**P R** **Outcast.** Robert Kirkman, Paul Azaceta. Skybound / Image Comics 2014 - present.

**G** Panorama of Hell. Hideshi Hino. Originally published in Japan by Hobari Shobo, 1984. English publication by Blast Books, 1993.

**P** **Panther.** Brecht Evens. Drawn & Quarterly, 2014.

**P R** Pixu: The Mark of Evil. Gabriel Bá, Becky Cloonan, Vasilis Lolos, Fábio



- Moon. Dark Horse Comics, 2005.
- G** Preacher, Volume 1: Gone to Texas. Garth Ennis, Steve Dillon. DC Comics / Vertigo 1995.
- P** **Providence.** Alan Moore, Jacen Burrows. Avatar Press, 2015 – 2017.
- P** **PTSD Radio.** Masaaki Nakayama. Kodansha Comics, 2017 – present.
- P** **Rachel Rising.** Terry Moore. Abstract Studio, 2011 – 2016.
- P** **Rat God.** Richard Corben. Dark Horse Comics, 2015.
- P R** **Redlands.** Jordie Bellaire & Vanesa R. Del Rey. Image Comics, 2017 – 2019.
- P** **Redneck.** Donny Cates, Lisandro Estherren. Skybound/ Image Comics, 2017 – 2019.
- B** **Regression.** Cullen Bunn, Danny Luckert, Marie Enger. Image Comics, 2017 – 2019.
- P R** **Revival.** Tim Seeley, Mike Norton. Image Comics, 2012 – 2017.
- G** Roots of the Swamp Thing. Len Wein, Bernie Wrightson, Néstor Redondo. DC Comics, 2009.
- P** **Safari Honeymoon.** Jesse Jacobs. Koyama Press, 2017.
- R G** Saga of the Swamp Thing. Stephen R. Bissette, Alan Moore. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 1983.
- P G** The Sandman. Neil Gaiman, Sam Kieth, Mike Dringenberg, Others. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 1989 – present.
- P G** **Severed.** Scott Snyder & Scott Tuft, Attila Futaki. Image Comics, 2012.
- P** **Shadows on the Grave.** Richard Corben. Dark Horse Comics, 2018.
- G** Showcase Presents: The House of Mystery, Vol. 1. Len Wein, Robert Kanigher, Gerry Conway, Bernie Wrightson, Neal Adams, Gil Kane, Alex Toth. DC Comics, 2006.
- G** Showcase Presents: The House of Secrets, Vol. 1. Mike Friedrich, Gerry Conway, Marv Wolfman, Jerry Grandenetti, Bill Draut, Werner Roth, Dick Giordano. DC Comics, 2008.
- P** **The Sleep of Reason.** C. Spike Trotman. Iron Circus Comics, 2014.
- P** **Southern Cross.** Becky Cloonan, Andy Belanger. Image Comics, 2015 – 2018.
- R** **Spread.** Justin Jordan, Felipe Sobreiro, Kyle Strahm. Image Comics, 2015 – 2018.
- P** The Squirrel Machine. Hans Rickheit. Fantagraphics, 2009.
- R** Strange Embrace. David Hine, Rob Steen, Comicraft. Image Comics, 2007 – 2008.
- P** The Suicide Forest. El Torres, Gabriel Hernandez Walta. Europe Comics/ IDW Publishing, 2011.
- P** **Survivors’ Club.** Lauren Beukes & Dale Halvorsen, Ryan Kelly & Inaki Miranda. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 2018.
- P** Swamp Thing. Alan Moore, John Tottleben, Stephen Bissette, Rick Veitch, Others. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 1972 – 2016.
- P G** Through the Woods. Emily Carroll. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2014.
- G** Tomie. Junji Ito. Originally published in Japan by Asahi Sonorama, 1987 – 2000. English publication by VIZ Media, 2016.
- P** **Trick ‘r Treat: Days of the Dead.** Michael Dougherty, Todd Casey, Zach Shields, Marc Andreyko, Fiona Staples, Stephen Byrne, Stuart Sayger, Zid. Legendary, 2015.
- P** “The Trumpets They Play!”. Al Columbia. In *BLAB!* #10. Fantagraphics, 1998
- G** Ultra-Gash Inferno. Suehiro Maruo. Creation Books, 2001.
- P** **Underwinter.** Ray Fawkes. Image Comics, 2017.
- P R G** Uzumaki. Junji Ito. Originally published in Japan by Shogakukan, 1998 – 1999. English publication by VIZ Media, 2016.
- B** **Victor Lavalley’s Destroyer Vol. 1.** Victor Lavalley, Dietrich Smith, Joana Lafuente, Jim Campbell, Micaela Dawn. BOOM! Studios, 2018.
- P R** **The Wake.** Scott Snyder, Sean Gordon Murphy. Vertigo/ DC Comics, 2014.
- P R G** The Walking Dead. Robert Kirkman, Charlie Adlard, Tony Moore. Skybound/ Image Comics, 2003 – 2019.
- P G** Warren Comics Archives: Creepy & Eerie. Various. Warren, 1964 – 1983 / 1966 – 1983.
- G** Welcome to Hoxford. Ben Templesmith. IDW Publishing, 2008.
- R** **The Wilds.** Vita Ayala, Emily Pearson. Black Mask Comics, 2018.
- P B** **Winnebago Graveyard.** Steve Niles, Alison Sampson. Image Comics, 2017.
- P R** **Witch Doctor.** Brandon Seifert, Lukas Ketner. Skybound/ Image Comics, 2011 – 2013.
- P R B G** **Wytches.** Scott Snyder, Jock. Image Comics, 2014 – 2015.
- G** **X’ed Out.** Charles Burns. Pantheon, 2010.
- G** Y: The Last Man. Brian K. Vaughan, Pia Guerra, Goran Sudžuka, José Marzán Jr. DC Comics / Vertigo, 2003