

Reviews: Disorientations.com is Travis Jeppesen – Katharina Klewinghaus

As someone who was addicted to slasher films as a child in the 1980s, and who went on to read a ton of feminist and queer theory at university in the 1990s, I've long been fascinated with the contradictory ways that women and sex are portrayed in the horror genre. It is a subject that has fascinated academics throughout the last decade, as well, and one that's been in dire need of a documentary treatment for some time. Now, thanks to Katharina Klewinghaus, star of Bruce LaBruce's new film *Otto; or, Up with Dead People!*, that documentary has arrived: *Science of Horror*, which was screened this weekend at the Porn Film Festival.

Klewinghaus had the savvy to bring together some of the more well known directors of the horror genre, as well as a range of writers and academics who have illuminated the subject through their work. While you might not agree with all of the arguments being put forth, Klewinghaus never appears to take sides and none of the points ever seem belabored – a sign of great filmmaking. Considering that this is Klewinghaus's first feature, this is quite an impressive feat.

Women were largely relegated to one of two roles in the strictly codified proceedings of the horror film – the studious virgin/hero or the party-harty whore/victim. If I have one minor criticism of the film, it is that the (largely male) filmmakers interviewed failed to address the topic of gender. While they were eager to speak about the function of sex in the films – drawing comparisons to the language of pornography – it would have been interesting to hear their thoughts on the function of gender. Were they conscious of what they were doing in relegating the role of women in their filmic universes, or were their values so engrained in the cultural climate of America in the 1980s, wherein the moral majority was forcing its “family values” propaganda on the population, that they felt it necessary to reinforce these values through their art?

That aside, *Science of Horror* is one of the most intriguing documentaries I've seen this year.

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