

A (mush)room of one's own: feminism, posthumanism, and race in Sofia Coppola's *The Beguiled*

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If white american feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of colour? (Lorde 2017, 19)

can whiteness critique itself in the realm of cinema? (Zuo 2019)

In 2017, three period films appeared that each had at their core the use of mushrooms by women to poison men: *Lady Macbeth* (Oldroyd 2016), *Phantom Thread* (Anderson 2017) and *The Beguiled* (Coppola 2017). These were the latest in a slew of films that have featured mushrooms and other fungi throughout cinema's history – from the mushrooms on the moon in Georges Méliès' *Voyage dans la lune* (1902) through to the post-nuclear killer mushroom people of Ishirō Honda's *Matango* (1963), and the more recent considerations of fungi in *Shrooms* (Breathnach 2007), *Splinter* (Wilkins 2008), *A Field in England* (Wheatley 2013), *IJspaar* (Gamaker 2014), *The Girl With All the Gifts* (McCarthy 2016), *Dao khanong/By The Time It Gets Dark* (Suwichakornpong 2016), and *Midsommar* (Aster 2019). As those familiar with these films might infer, mushrooms and fungi are more often than not associated with horror, or at the very least with the advent of other worlds – even as they are in various of these films associated equally with investigations into, and representations of, the past (for an introductory consideration of fungi horror, see Gardenour Walter 2017).

Given their association with new worlds and the end of humanity, perhaps it comes as no surprise that mushrooms have been taken up in posthumanist discourse, or what we might call critical considerations of the Anthropocene. Indeed, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has famously argued for mushrooms as “what manages to live

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despite capitalism” (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2015, viii). While mushrooms and fungi might be or become associated with a world beyond the human, they are in recent popular culture also associated with women and the poisoning of men – as per the three 2017 releases named above. If mushrooms suggest a world beyond the human and yet also are associated with women, then this is because woman has historically been excluded from definitions of the human, which thus comes to stand monolithically for a masculine and patriarchal world, defined by capital and exploitation. Indeed, as Claire Colebrook argues, “[t]he supposedly universal ‘human’ was always white, Western, modern, able-bodied and heterosexual man; the ‘subject’ who is nothing other than a capacity for self-differentiation and self-constitution is the self of market capitalism” (Colebrook 2016, 91).

Given this history of the human being defined by masculinity, we can see how it follows that much discourse regarding the Anthropocene suggests that it is a period of planetary reconfiguration also driven primarily by (capitalist) men. Forasmuch as the term “Anthropocene” tries to highlight the masculinity of this process for the purposes of critique, it also places man once again at the centre of our collective worldview; the only force in existence capable of taming nature and shaping it according to his whims – be that for better or for worse. Colebrook continues: “To return to ‘anthropos’ now, after all these years of difference seems to erase all the work done in postcolonialism that had declared enlightenment ‘man’ to be a fiction that allowed all the world to be ‘white like me’” (Colebrook 2016, 91). It is for this reason that thinkers like Donna Haraway (2015) propose alternative titles to this period, including the capitalocene, the plantationocene, and the chthulucene, which are terms to which I shall return, while Joanna Zylińska equally proposes a “feminist counterapocalypse” (which also makes reference to the Colebrook passages quoted above; see Zylińska 2018, 34). In this way, posthuman feminism might constitute what Rosi Braidotti refers to as a “collective feminist exit from Anthropos” (Braidotti 2017, 28) – but one that is not just future-oriented (expressed cinematically in science fiction cinema), but one that also explores and perhaps even rewrites the history of these exclusions – hence the turn to period filmmaking in *Lady Macbeth*, *Phantom Thread*, and *The Beguiled*, as well as a consideration of how to explore Thai history in *By the Time It Gets Dark* (for more on this film, see Park-Primiano 2018).

Although terms like capitalocene, plantationocene and chthulucene all seek to clarify how the Anthropocene might well have capitalist man as its chief protagonist, while at the same time trying to decentre that man from the historical narrative, for a scholar like Kathryn Yusoff, these “alter-cenes” do not quite get to the root of the issue. While considering what is referred to as “the Golden Spike,” or the debated moment at which the Anthropocene is thought to have come into existence (with different versions suggesting that it started with agriculture, the discovery of the Americas, industrialisation in the mid-1800s, or the nuclear era), Yusoff suggests that in all instances these constitute a specifically white history (see Yusoff

2018, 23-64). For this reason, Yusoff insists upon a Black Anthropocene “or none” – in the sense that we must recognise how race is central to the “production of humanity in the Anthropocene” (Yusoff 2018, 61), with humanity’s ability to dominate geology, rather than for geology to exist at its own rhythms, being built upon an “extractive colonialism” that had at its core the subjugation and the relegation underground (especially into mines) of black bodies, particularly after 1492 and the subsequent instantiation of the global slave trade. Put differently, it is not simply that “the figure ‘man’ is... synonymous with ‘the human,’” but also that “man” is “a technology of slavery and colonialism that imposes its authority over ‘the universal’ through a racialized deployment of force” (Jackson 2013, 670).

Given that poor women of colour regularly continue to have menial jobs that involve caring for and cleaning the white world (see Vergès 2019), it is of great importance that a feminist theory of cinema does not overlook the role that race plays (together with sexuality and able-bodiedness) in constructing the human and the Anthropocene – hence the invocation of Audre Lorde in the quotation that opens this essay. Given that Sofia Coppola’s mushroom-themed *Beguiled* is set three years into the American Civil War, which in popular perception had as its core ideology the liberation of slaves from the American south, it exists self-consciously in a space where gender, race, and the posthuman all intersect. While a wider consideration of mushrooms, gender, and race will have to wait for another occasion (including the way in which a film like *The Girl with All the Gifts* portrays a future black woman-fungus symbiogenetic existence), I shall in this essay focus on *The Beguiled*, which I shall ultimately read under what Denise Ferreira da Silva (2018) might term the “blacklight” of the black Anthropocene, even though there is an absence of race within the film, in that it features only white actors playing white characters. That is, while the film harnesses mushrooms as a force to bring down the patriarchy, its white feminism nonetheless helps us to identify the limits of Anthropocene discourse, especially if it refuses intersectionality and the inclusion of black (as well as queer and disabled) others. It is *The Beguiled* in particular (and not, say, *Phantom Thread*) that allows us to do this through its use both of Colin Farrell as an Irish star and, in particular, of the Madewood Plantation House as its primary location. For the Madewood was also the location of earlier music videos for black musicians J. Cole and Beyoncé, including the latter’s famous *Lemonade* (with Kahlil Joseph, Melina Matsoukas, Dikayl Rimmasch, Mark Romanek, Todd Tourso and Jonas Åkerlund, USA, 2016). As we shall see, *The Beguiled* might, *chapeau à* Virginia Woolf, constitute a new (mush)room of one’s own, as well as an instance of a feminist “counter-cinema,” but it also points to the historically racialised limits of cinema and its potential demise (and rebirth?) in the face of alternative media forms.

Remaking *The Beguiled*

The Beguiled tells the story of Miss Martha Farnsworth's Seminary for Young Ladies, a southern all-girls' boarding school that during the Civil War has been reduced to only seven people as a result of its close proximity to the front, from which we hear sounds of combat and explosions throughout the first half of the film. The inhabitants of the school include the eponymous head mistress (Nicole Kidman), fellow teacher Edwina Morrow (Kirsten Dunst), and five pupils: Alicia (Elle Fanning), Amy (Oona Laurence), Jane (Angourie Rice), Emily (Emma Howard), and Marie (Addison Riecke). The film opens with Amy picking mushrooms when she discovers Corporal John McBurney (Colin Farrell). McBurney is a Yankee soldier with a badly wounded leg, and so the women take him in and help him to recuperate – even though he is a “blue belly” (i.e. fighting for the Union Army). While Jane in particular dislikes him for fighting for the north, McBurney attempts to ingratiate himself with all of the women, who in turn seem to vie for McBurney's attention and affection. While convalescing, McBurney begins to tend to the grounds of the school and seems not to want to return to war. However, he is injured again after being pushed down the stairs of the main school building by Edwina, with whom he had promised to run away, but who finds him in bed with Alicia on the very night that he had promised to visit Edwina in her room. Martha, who herself had at least momentarily been tempted by McBurney's charms, amputates his leg, prompting the latter to fly into a rage that sees him take a gun and threaten the women. Edwina chases McBurney to his room where they have sex, while Martha and the girls plot McBurney's death – by feeding him poisonous mushrooms. McBurney dies at the dinner table, somewhat to Edwina's surprise, before all of the women sew him into a cloth body bag and leave his corpse outside the school gate.

In the latest of several analyses of Sofia Coppola's work, Anna Backman Rogers describes Kirsten Dunst's star performance as Edwina in *The Beguiled* as a “highly complex image of (white) femininity” (Backman Rogers 2019a, 118). The use of parentheses is telling, in that they do the job of suggesting, via Richard Dyer, that “ideally white is absence: to be really, absolutely white is to be nothing” (Dyer quoted in Backman Rogers 2019a, 121; see also Handyside 2017, 90). That is, the parentheses occult whiteness just as they reveal it (why not simply suggest that Dunst offers a highly complex image of white femininity – without the parentheses?). And yet, Coppola's adaptation-cum-remake of *The Beguiled* is, as we shall see, purposefully and problematically white, such that the film is not about (white) femininity, but more precisely white femininity. More than this, it is about white femininity as built upon black absence. That is, the whiteness of *The Beguiled* allows us paradoxically to see a darkness, including, perhaps especially, the black skin of African

American slaves whose liberty was supposedly the stake of the American Civil War.²

Though I suggest that blackness is a structuring absence in *The Beguiled*, Sofia Coppola was nonetheless accused upon its release of “whitewashing” the story of *The Beguiled*, which in Don Siegel’s 1971 US “original” prominently featured Mae Mercer as Hallie, an African American slave who tends to the space of Miss Martha Farnsworth’s Seminary for Young Ladies, while also generally being relegated to the outhouse of the boarding school in which the film is set. Hallie is herself an adapted version of Matilda Farnsworth, or Mattie, the slave who takes her name from the Farnsworth family that owns her, and who narrates three sections of Thomas P. Cullinan’s 1966 source novel, *A Painted Devil*, in which the story is serially recounted from the perspective of different characters. Although Backman Rogers recognises how it is “highly problematic... that Coppola would seemingly silence the voice of a black woman,” not least in the contemporaneous context of Black Lives Matter (Backman Rogers 2019b, 47), she nonetheless fails to distinguish between Hallie and Mattie. Furthermore, if Coppola supposedly “refuses to perpetuate a style of narrative and dialogue that has, to her own way of thinking, reduced black voices to the point of offensive cliché and redundancy throughout cinematic history” (Backman Rogers 2019b, 47), to reduce Mattie/Hallie to inexistence can hardly be any better – especially when we consider that it is Mattie who cooks the mushrooms that will be used to poison McBurney in Cullinan’s source novel. That is, the subversive agency of Mattie is not only extinguished, but even appropriated in Coppola’s film, even if Cullinan might stand accused of “ventriloquising” in his pointedly black vernacular language during the sections narrated by Mattie.

Coppola notably calls her film *The Beguiled* as opposed to *A Painted Devil*, which suggests that we should consider the 2017 version as more of a remake of the 1971 film than as an adaptation of Cullinan’s novel. But since Mattie appears as Hallie in the Siegel film, the absence of the black woman in Coppola’s remake can only be read as a conscious and conscientious choice. That is, through its very status as a remake, *The Beguiled* draws attention to the race of its cast, making visible the whiteness that otherwise might remain invisible.

² Backman Rogers titles her essay “And That I See a Darkness” (Backman Rogers 2019a). However, rather than being a reference to race, this seems to be an otherwise unexplained reference to an album and song by white musician Will Oldham, better known as Bonnie “Prince” Billy. The song, which was covered by Johnny Cash before his death, perhaps speaks of Backman Rogers’ relationship with Dunst and/or Coppola, in that it bespeaks the way in which friends (and film stars?) can help people through difficult times. Although Coppola is well known for the perceived “quality” of her soundtracks, Oldham’s song has not been used in her work. That said, in 2007 Oldham did guest edit an issue of *Zoetrope: All-Story*, a magazine produced by Sofia’s father, Francis Ford Coppola. Notably, Oldham in his introduction describes the issue as “a cocktail party at which all of the contributors, word and image, are present... add a bowl of keys and some mushroom cookies and I am there” (see Anonymous 2007). Perhaps Oldham inadvertently planted the seeds (or better, the spores) for Coppola’s later mushroom movie.

In other words, Coppola deliberately constructs a white movie – something that perhaps is also suggested by the opening moments of the film, in which Amy wanders down a path and through a wooded area in search of mushrooms. The moment is characterised by lens flare, which, as Fiona Handyside notes, is one of Coppola's signature techniques (Handyside 2017, 90); its use functions as a means of making visible the otherwise invisible light/whiteness that characterises not just the cast of her films, but perhaps the form/medium of cinema as a whole.

Backman Rogers does not cut Siegel's version of *The Beguiled* much shrift, classifying it as a "clichéd priapic narrative" (Backman Rogers 2019b, 3), even though the film features various stylistic choices that make it redolent of the New Hollywood period from which it emerges, as opposed to the "classical" style that she attributes to it (Backman Rogers 2019a, 133). Indeed, the earlier film features voices over from various of the female characters, giving us access to their innermost thoughts, while also critiquing the way in which that film's McBurney (Clint Eastwood) is a liar, showing us images of him mercilessly slaughtering Confederates as he tells a story of his fear of combat. Perhaps the film lacks ambiguity, but it certainly aims to undercut the authority of the male figure, even as it repeats McBurney's desiring gaze.³ Nonetheless, Coppola's film differs significantly from Siegel's, dispensing as it does with voices over, and giving us little insight into McBurney, except that here he is a recently immigrated Irishman who joined the Union for money as opposed to for ideological reasons – a point to which we shall return. Backman Rogers suggests that the film aligns viewers with a feminine, if not a feminist, perspective, not least because the women do not (visibly) throw themselves at McBurney, as happens in Siegel's film, but rather "refuse to participate in their own subjugation as a sex class any longer" (Backman Rogers 2019b, 56).

This is not to say that the women are without desire. Coppola carefully deploys a sensual gaze on aspects of McBurney's body as Martha washes his torso and groin region after his arrival at the school, while Alicia seems at some point to have solicited McBurney to join her in his room, an invitation that we do not see in Coppola's film even as we see it in Siegel's. Indeed, what Siegel's *Beguiled* perhaps most clearly retains of "classical" cinema is the "omniscient" position in which viewers are placed. This is not so with Coppola, who

³ For all that it is "priapic," the film does still end with McBurney being killed by the women, as per Cullinan's novel. If the film does not at least attempt to critique a certain vision of masculinity, then I am not sure what Backman Rogers would make of, say, Fernando Trueba's similarly-themed *Belle Époque* (Spain/Portugal/ France, 1992), in which a deserter from the Spanish Civil War (Jorge Sanz) also hides on a farm, and where he ends up sleeping in succession with four sisters, played by Maribel Verdú, Ariadna Gil, Miriam Díaz-Aroca, and Penélope Cruz. Even as the film features sex-positive and empowered young women who offer a sensual break from the meaninglessness of war, *Belle Époque* still functions as a fantasy of masculine sexual conquest. Notably, Cruz's character is called Luz, which is Spanish for light – making her a cinematic antipode perhaps to Kirsten Dunst's Lux in Coppola's *Virgin Suicides* (USA, 1999).

instead uses ellipses, a technique adopted in other of her films, to deliberately render the story more opaque. For example, in Coppola's film it is also likely Alicia who gives McBurney the key that allows him to escape his room, which in turn leads him to take Martha's gun and then to appear in the kitchen to threaten the women after the amputation of his leg ("what are you lovely southern ladies learning today, the art of castration?"). However, we cannot be certain of this – except perhaps by using Siegel's film to fill in the gaps of Coppola's film.

Rather than considering the Siegel film to be the "complete" text of which Coppola's film is only a part (as if it were a film that was "lacking"), Coppola specifically "rethink[s] the masculinist premises of the American national cinema" (Tay 2009, 5), using not only a film about the Civil War (which elsewhere in film history has been treated as the event that led to the "birth of a nation"; see Barrett 2009), but also a film from the period of cinema with which Coppola's father is most famously associated, in order to rewrite a "herstory" of cinema. That "herstory" does not consider ellipses to be a sign of incompleteness as per the classical narrative of mainstream Hollywood productions. Rather, they are an acknowledgement of incompleteness as the very condition of human life – at the same time as those ellipses, marked as they are by brief fades to black, suggest the raced dimension of the patriarchal quest for completion and conquest, the very quest that occults blackness in a bid for "pure whiteness."

Even as New Hollywood was oppositional to classical Hollywood, and even as it gave expression to the violent times in which it emerged, namely the era of the Vietnam war, Sharon Lin Tay nonetheless (several years before the production of *The Beguiled*) identifies Coppola's films as contrasting deliberately with the 1970s cinema that was perhaps the apogee of her father's career:

If the 1970s American cinema of loneliness that [Robert] Kolker unearthed is a cinema of inertia characterised by an inability to change and the failure of action, the American cinema that Coppola's *oeuvre* represents is one that strives towards its own sustainability. Such a cinema exhibits no sign of defeat in the face of a powerful ideology, but rather acknowledges the complexity of the landscape that it traverses. Coppola's cinema assumes a femininity that it neither glorifies nor rejects, but wears as the necessary condition of its gendered existence as it interacts with social and political possibilities that are new and challenging. (Tay 2009, 146-147)

Tay's reference to sustainability implicitly refers to ecological concerns, to which we shall return later. Nonetheless, her suggestion regarding Coppola's "acknowledgement of complexity" can also be challenged by the removal of Hallie/Mattie from her film, in that her film does not engage with femininity as it intersects with race (and other issues), which in turn might signify a(n indirect) glorification of white femininity, even as that white femininity is itself arguably "complex."

Sue Thornham describes the “palimpsestuous” adaptation as a key and “doubled” space of women’s cinema, in that the female-authored adaptation (and even more so the adaptation-cum-remake?) contradicts dominant narrative and its organisation of space, namely the need in narrative cinema for everything to make sense and to be seen/shown, including the amputation, which is gruesomely present in Siegel’s film but absent from Coppola’s (see Thornham 2019, 163). In this “palimpsestuous” undoing of narrative, then, Coppola creates the kind of “counter-cinema” that Claire Johnston famously demanded back in 1973 (see Johnston 1999), and which indeed stretches beyond just Coppola’s films and into her other work as a maker of music videos, a fashion designer, and more (for more on the inclusion of a wider range of material in relation to female cinematic authorship, see Grant 2001). Nonetheless, this “counter-cinema” is still deeply “cinematic,” not least in its “prettiness,” which we shall analyse shortly, rather than being “counter-” cinema, in the sense of “against cinema.” Or, put differently, the whiteness of her cinema suggests that the medium is/remains the preserve of whiteness, while blackness is relegated to the off-screen, or the outside of the medium, so (much more) “counter-” is it to cinema. The film’s occultation of race, then, can be read as an example of what Eugenie Brinkema would call *mise-n’en-scène*: “in addition to reading for what is put into the scene, one must read for all of its permutations: what is *not* put into the scene, what is put into the *non-scene*; and what is *not enough* put into the scene” (Brinkema 2014, 46). The absence of race in *The Beguiled* can thus paradoxically function as a means through which to discuss race in relation to cinema.

An evolution in style and the beauty of ugly feelings

It should go without saying that Coppola merits critical attention, and that she thus qualifies as what has been termed an *auteuse* (see Atakav and Williams 2017) – even as accusations of frivolity persist in some quarters. As the earlier reference to her persistent use of ellipses suggests, Coppola has a style and set of concerns that remain relatively consistent across her works, including her repeated use of Kirsten Dunst as an actress, as well as her insistent emphasis on white women, especially white women going through “rites of passage” as they proceed through girlhood and potentially into adulthood (see Backman Rogers 2015). With its story of a group of women inside a single location, *The Beguiled* cannot but in some senses recall *The Virgin Suicides*, while repeated shots of the school’s exterior, especially with women looking out from its balcony with a telescope, demonstrate not only women who see, but also a sense of routine and standardised behaviour – tropes that feature in other of her films (see Handyside 2017, 103-112).

What is more, like Coppola’s other films *The Beguiled* uses *prettiness* and decoration, perhaps especially via clothes, not to placate a male gaze but to subvert the time of narrative and achieve a “quality of discomfort with a style of heightened aesthetics that is too

decorative, too sensorily pleasurable to be high art, and yet too composed and ‘arty’ to be efficient entertainment. To some degree, this awkwardness is the condition of the art film... there is a strong affiliation between prettiness and art cinema” (Galt 2011, 12).⁴ With its sumptuous images of southern landscapes, pretty garments (here designed by Stacey Battat), blonde movie stars, and a gorgeous house (about which, more later), *The Beguiled* would through its prettiness seem to do artistic work-as-usual for Coppola, including via a characteristic pink title card.⁵ More than this, it would seek to do that work not by destroying visual pleasure, as per Laura Mulvey’s original exhortation for feminist cinema (Mulvey 1975), but rather by *intensifying* visual pleasure.

However, while we can find various “typical” aspects of Coppola’s authorship in *The Beguiled*, the film does in some respects also mark a departure for the filmmaker, who after *The Bling Ring* (2013) “knew... I wanted to do something beautiful... That movie was in such a tacky, ugly world, and I wanted to cleanse myself” (Sollosi 2017). For example, where *Marie Antoinette* (2006) involves a deliberately anachronistic and punk soundtrack, *The Beguiled* is much more restrained, with no anachronisms and a minimalist score. Notably, one recurring piece of music is the Civil War folk song “Lorena,” the lyrics of which were written in 1856 by Henry D.L. Webster. Reflecting on the end of a relationship, the song occurs several times in *The Beguiled*, but it is of importance not just because it tells the story of a woman who eludes the love (read: control) of a man, but also because it has been used in such films as *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming 1939), which tells the story of a spoiled southern white girl trying to become a woman during the Civil War, as well as in *The Searchers* (Ford 1956), which tells the story of a racist white man trying to rescue his niece from Native Americans. That is, the song is associated in film with the Civil War and with race, thereby providing another hint at Coppola’s *mise-n’en-scène*.

If Fiona Handyside reports how some critics feel that Coppola’s cinema would be more easily identifiable as “‘hardcore’ feminist... if only she would finish her films with an outbreak of brutal violence” (Handyside 2017, 107), then *The Beguiled* also marks an evolution in Coppola’s style, since the murder of McBurney means in some senses that the film does precisely that – even if the latter’s death does not feature buckets of blood. Indeed, as *The Virgin Suicides* is a film that plays upon the tropes of horror cinema (see Backman

⁴ Patricia White notes that Coppola has “enough cultural capital to be admitted to the *cinéma d’auteurs*” (White 2015, 22). While Claire Johnston suggested that women’s cinema should be “counter-cinema,” White updates this argument to propose “women’s cinema as art cinema” (White 2015, 68). Coppola would seem to be just such an artist.

⁵ In relation to film stars, Kate Ince suggests, after Catherine Constable, that “the trope of female stardom can disrupt and force the reorganisation of elements of patriarchal narrative and representation” (Ince 2017, 40). The star’s “disruption” of the narrative might take the form of increased screen time, and thus the shift of a character from what might have been a marginal position in the film to a more central one, thereby leading to modifications/disruptions in the narrative.

Rogers 2019b: 37), then so too does *The Beguiled*, with its “nightmare” tale of male incarceration and castration.

What is more, if Coppola’s cinema is regularly pretty, and yet if with *The Beguiled* she wanted to do something beautiful, then this turn to beauty also marks a meaningful evolution in Coppola’s style. In particular, we might recall how beauty is for Elaine Scarry linked to the good, in the sense that beauty is, after Iris Murdoch, “an occasion for ‘unselfing’” (Scarry 2011, 113). That is, “[g]oodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness” (Murdoch 2001: 91). Put simply, beauty inspires in us a consciousness of otherness, the recognition of which demands the treatment of that other as if they were ourselves. I shall return shortly to the theme of southern hospitality, but for the time being I wish to say that if Coppola’s film does aspire to beauty (in addition to prettiness), then the otherness of which it wishes us to become conscious is limited to white women in a patriarchal society, and not the absent other, the African American slave woman, who has consciously been excised from her film. These white women are not uniquely virtuous heroines in that they are not “action babes” who in effect replace the phallic male as agential drivers of the narrative (as ersatz *anthropoi* shaping the world – cousins, perhaps, of what Angela McRobbie refers to as “phallic girls”; see McRobbie 2007). Indeed, Martha, Edwina, and Alicia may be pretty, and *The Beguiled* may be beautiful, but this is a world that is also capable of what Sianne Ngai would characterise as *ugly feelings*. Or, more precisely, Coppola’s *Beguiled* deconstructs the way in which the ugliness of ugly feelings is an ugliness constructed by men and applied to women.

In her analysis of envy, Ngai refers to Sigmund Freud, who suggests that “the identifications on which group formations depend are only secondarily established through a reversal of envy. Thus, envy oddly emerges as primary in the production of ‘group feeling’” (Ngai 2005: 164). Furthermore, “if in order to make the thesis of envy’s primary role in the production of ‘social feeling’ *truly convincing*, Freud needs to introduce the image of a female throng or multitude, the quasi-militaristic ‘troops of women and girls’” (Ngai 2005, 165). Siegel’s *Beguiled* makes clear the process that Ngai describes, as the women at Martha’s school, including Martha herself, become envious of each other in their competition for McBurney; envy is what unites the women as a group, who in turn are affirmed in their male-constructed femininity through envy.

In Coppola’s film, however, the women demonstrate little if any visible or understood envy towards each other. When Edwina pushes McBurney down the stairs, it is out of anger at him, and at no point is she antagonistic towards Alicia – even if she finds her somewhat childish, offering her a withering look, for example, when the latter continues to defend McBurney after he has shown his true, manipulative, and lecherous colours. Similarly, Martha chides neither Edwina nor Alicia for falling for McBurney. Indeed, in his rant in the kitchen, McBurney tries to arouse envy in the women by pointing out

how Martha only cut off his leg because he did not accept her advances. And yet, the women collectively know that Martha undertook this operation only to save McBurney (indeed, had Martha really wanted “revenge,” she could have left him to die, gone to find some Confederate soldiers, or any of a number of things). And so, McBurney tries to plant envy amongst the women, but he singularly fails – and in this sense the consummation of his relationship with Edwina can indeed be read as Edwina sacrificing herself for the rest of the women, rather than claiming McBurney as her own (see Backman Rogers 2019a: 127-134). For this reason Edwina returns to the women at the end, even as she said that she wanted to leave the school upon first meeting McBurney, and even as she is visibly surprised when McBurney initially keels over at the dinner table from eating the mushrooms. After McBurney reveals himself as manipulative and unreliable, Edwina would realise that Martha and her fellow white women are truly the people whom she can trust, and a community is thus forged through said trust, rather than being simultaneously constituted and torn apart through envy. Coppola thus achieves beauty and goodness by exposing in some senses the patriarchal construction of ugliness (including the patriarchal myth that some women are ugly, with ugliness regularly elided with badness). In short, there is a beauty to this exposé of how ugly feelings are constructed for the purposes of patriarchy, since envy leads to “selfing,” while solidarity and generosity lead in Coppola’s film to “unselfing.”

The southern hospitality of Medusa

If goodness and beauty involve “unselfing,” then hospitality is arguably an act of goodness, with Alicia herself stating, ahead of the first dinner that McBurney attends (and where he arranges his tryst with Edwina), how “[w]e should show him some real Southern hospitality.” Even though McBurney is a “blue belly,” the women of Miss Martha Farnsworth’s Seminary for Young Ladies have already shown hospitality by taking McBurney in. Indeed, as Mila Zuo reminds us, after Jacques Derrida, hospitality “contains an implicit hostility (‘hospitality, hostility, hostpality’), revealed in the Latin for ‘foreigner’ (*hostis*), which means ‘welcomes as guest or as enemy’” (Zuo Forthcoming). In other words, hospitality is perhaps most true when it involves the reception of an enemy, here not just a Union soldier, but also a man (Martha invites Confederate soldiers in for a drink at one point, a far more generous offer than the one offered by Geraldine Page’s Martha in Siegel’s version of the story; there Martha refuses entry to Confederate soldiers, who seem unambiguously set on raping the women should they get the chance).

Significantly, in her study of transnational Chinese stardom Zuo offers up a synthesis of hospitality and Ngai’s ugly feelings. Considering Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1965), Zuo suggests that Ono’s “hospitality” towards “potentially irritating, antagonistic and pungent guests,” as they approach her and even remove her clothes in that

performance piece, reveals “the minoritarian processes that embed racialised, gendered sociality” (Zuo Forthcoming). That is, with reference to Ngai’s take on the “ugly feeling” of irritation, Yoko Ono’s performance “produces an oscillation between insides and outsides” (Ngai 2005, 201), in the sense that irritation-in-(spite-of-) hospitality points to how Ono-as-Asian-woman is rendered outside of mainstream western patriarchal society – because Asian and perhaps also because woman. As envy is constructed as ugly for the purposes of subverting women’s solidarity, so too is irritation constructed to remind the Asian woman that she is an outsider – a process that Ono attempts to subvert in her performance of extreme submissiveness, a performance that like Coppola’s prettiness aims to subvert the cliché not by denying it, but by intensifying it. Zuo goes on to link these processes to the sense modalities of smell and taste, as made clear by her use of the term “pungent” above. The whole capitalist sensorium is in this way revealed as being constructed through equally constructed boundaries of gender and race, with those boundaries reinforcing sensory hierarchies and vice versa, such that different genders and races not only taste and smell differently, but, as far as mainstream society is concerned, they taste and smell *disgustingly* (or a variation thereof, including pungently). Given that McBurney will die from eating poisonous mushrooms that he cannot taste as poisonous (“[t]hey look mighty tasty... and I am hungry!”), *The Beguiled* explicitly reveals the way in which taste is constructed for social purposes as much as it is constructed for biological purposes. In other words, our taste buds would alert us to poison if that was what our taste buds had really been trained to do. Instead, our senses of smell and taste are in fact constructed to find disgusting different genders and races, which in turn reaffirms hierarchies of race that place whiteness at the top, being colourless, odourless and tasteless.

We shall return to the mushrooms shortly, but first let us continue with the possible “ugly feelings” with which *The Beguiled* toys. For, while they might show “hospitality” to McBurney, Martha and her students nonetheless commit homicide – and on a man who as he sits down for dinner apologises for his earlier “outburst” and, in a post-coital glow, professes to wish to make good his relationship with his hosts. Furthermore, as McBurney dies, Martha in particular watches in a cool, detached fashion. Her steel does not necessarily connote evil so much as pragmatism (as she herself remarks, “[a]ll bravery is, is doing what is needed at the time”). Nonetheless, there is a sense in which, collectively, the women at the school constitute neo-*femmes fatales* (see Lindop 2015), or “nasty women.” In relation to the latter, Agnieszka Piotrowska emphasises those nasty women who deploy their nastiness “in order to fight patriarchy” (Piotrowska 2019, xi), referencing shortly afterwards the way in which Donald J. Trump also characterised Hillary Clinton as precisely a “nasty woman” in order to win the 2017 US presidential election (Piotrowska 2019, 2). Not only does the latter confirm “nastiness” as a construction for controlling women who otherwise might disrupt the patriarchal consolidation of power (even as Clinton was perhaps

rejected in some quarters for being too “phallic”). But Piotrowska also links the “nasty woman” to the mythical figure of Medusa, a beautiful woman who in Greek mythology was rendered ugly by Athena for getting raped in her temple by Poseidon (see Piotrowska 2019, 6-10).⁶ Not only does the myth signal an early example of how rape is constructed in patriarchal society as being the woman’s fault, but it also makes woman responsible for one of the chief axioms of said patriarchy, namely petrification.

As Medusa supposedly turns those who gaze into her eyes to stone, so does she in fact make good on the process of petrification that patriarchy wishes to put in place. For, petrification involves the cessation of time or change, and the making-permanent of form – something that stands in stark contrast to Medusa, who not only has become a monster having been a beautiful woman, but whose hair is also famously constructed of slithering, shifting snakes. In other words, Medusa becomes, while patriarchy seeks to make itself permanent and no more to become. If patriarchy is phallic, it is also monolithic, or made of stone (from the Greek *lithos*, meaning stone). In other words, Medusa gets punished for helping men to fulfil their desires, just as the rape victim gets punished for being attractive, with Medusa’s punishment (being made “ugly”), thus rendering her fit only for more punishment.

Mycorrhizomal thought

In having his leg amputated, an act that he considers a castration, clearly McBurney’s phallic prowess is undermined, even as staying at the school as a gardener might be an appealing hypothetical future for him. In a bid to ingratiate himself with Amy, McBurney professes at one point to love “anything wild... wild and free.” However, this sentiment is revealed to be persiflage as McBurney as a gardener wishes to prune roses and to trim bushes; that is, he wishes to stop the growth of, and to control, that which is wild and free, or what Thornham might describe as “unruly plants” (Thornham 2019, 107). This search for control matches McBurney’s underlying desire for petrification and the control of women and the control of time (never to become, always to remain the same). And yet, it is perhaps in his relationship with mushrooms that McBurney’s monolithic thinking is most clearly revealed.

For, in its earliest phases – after being spat out by the sun and having cooled – the Earth is thought simply to have been a lifeless rock. Fungi, especially in their symbiotic relationship with algae or cyanobacteria (the result of which symbiosis is lichen), were able to live without air, surviving on that rock by breaking it down and using

⁶ Thornham also points to the role played by Medusa in contemporary women’s cinema (Thornham 2019, 79), linking it, via Hélène Cixous (1976), to Kathleen Rowe’s conception (1995) of the unruly woman who laughs. For a classic consideration of Medusa in relation to the “monstrous feminine,” see also Creed (1993).

its minerals for survival, and in the process turning that rock into mud. That mud, when combined with the oxygen produced by bacteria and the water that arrived in vast quantities from outer space via comets, produced the conditions for life on this planet (for the briefest of summaries, see Lowenhaupt Tsing 2015, 22; for more on the arrival on Earth of water from space, see Randall 2015, 226-227). What is more, mycorrhizal fungi are more or less ubiquitous in soil, creating the conditions within mud for nearly all plants on Earth to live – such that Tsing, in an earlier text, defines mushrooms as an “unruly companion species” (see Tsing 2012). In other words, fungi turn that which is petrified into mud, thereby helping to create the conditions that will allow new life to grow. Or, if you will, fungi operate as a mush-room, a space in which the petrified thought of patriarchy turns to mush. The process is deadly to petrification/the petrified, as McBurney discovers in his consumption of the mushrooms. But ultimately this fungal process of mushroom consumption also engenders becoming.

Backman Rogers points to the meaning of “beguilement,” suggesting that it relates to notions of deception and trickery (Backman Rogers 2019b, 162). I might add that the term is thought to relate to the Old Frisian *wigila*, meaning “sorcery, witchcraft.” Meanwhile, Rosalind Galt traces the word “pretty” back to the Old English term *prætt*, meaning “a trick, a wile or a craft” (Galt 2011, 7). Finally, the term “gift” might also relate to the German *Gift* and the Dutch *gif*, meaning “poison.” Not only might *The Beguiled*, especially via its prettiness, thus involve something like a coven of witches, but in their hospitality and generosity, in their gift to McBurney, they also poison him. That is, gifts are not necessarily poisonous – except inasmuch as a gift runs counter to the capitalist logic of exploitation and exchange, thus becoming poisonous to that which already is toxic (here, McBurney’s masculinity). As psilocybin-eaters can use mushrooms to mush their brains and become with the world by seeing it afresh (as they use the drug to break down the petrification of thought and instead to make their brains malleable, or what Catherine Malabou describes as “plastic”; see Malabou 2008), so too can “poison” in fact be “good” for us, provided we do not like McBurney greedily wolf down the stuff in large quantities. If we do guzzle mushrooms like McBurney, i.e. if we lead a selfish life of greed, then the gift of mushrooms becomes a poison that kills us.

What is more, *The Beguiled* would seem to suggest that mushrooms can put us in touch with an otherwise invisible time that is pre-capitalist, pre-plantation, and even pre-human and pre-plant, suggesting that the human is symbiotically entangled with the world, part of processes that far outdate those of capital.⁷ If Rosi Braidotti

⁷ For more on entanglement as a concept taken from physics, see Barad (2007). And for more on the term in relation to cinema, including the baroque cinema of Sofia Coppola, see Walton (2016, especially 144-157). Notably, Walton also acknowledges the baroque as a form of entanglement, in that it “proliferates like a form of vegetable monstrosity” (Walton 2016, 108). Perhaps “fungal monstrosity” might constitute a new baroque form of entanglement, too.

argues “strongly for a rhizomatic embrace of conceptual diversity in scholarship” in order to allow humans to enter new modes of thinking (Braidotti 2017, 31), then perhaps it is mycorrhizomatic thought that will more properly enable this. Indeed, if for Braidotti *zoe* might be considered the “ruling principle” of the universe, in that *zoe* suggests “life in its nonhuman aspects” (Braidotti 2017, 32), then perhaps Coppola’s American Zoetrope also evokes a cinema that moves beyond its human aspects, especially as the human has historically been defined as white, male, straight, able-bodied, and so on (the “human” as patriarchal). In this way, creating a (mush)room of one’s own, or perhaps more simply a mushroom of one’s own (maybe we do not need the parentheses), opens us up to new dimensions of reality that elude patriarchal capital.

Dismantling the master’s house?

As Joanna Zylińska says, man disavows “his kinship with women and those of nonbinary gender, with animals, microbes, and fungi,” preferring instead to separate from “‘nature’ to emerge standing, proudly erect, yet already threatened with contamination, shrinkage, and evanescence” (Zylińska 2018, 12). Having contrasted such phallic/monolithic/petrified thought with the posthumanist idea of a (mush)room of one’s own, we can now relate this back to the Anthropocene and final considerations of race (and other issues, including sexuality and disability).

The Beguiled was notably shot at the Madewood Plantation House in Louisiana, the historical home of Colonel Thomas Pugh and the centre for a 10,000-acre sugar plantation. As mentioned, Donna Haraway proposes the plantationocene as a possible alternative name to the Anthropocene – with plantationocene being a term that directly invokes a history of slavery. Meanwhile, Kathryn Yusoff draws upon Sylvia Wynter to propose that the development of plantations in fact involved the *replantation* of peoples and existing ecologies to new sites, with 1452 being the year when “African slaves are put to work on the first plantations on the Portuguese island of Madeira, initiating the ‘sugar–slave’ complex” (Yusoff 2019; see also Wynter 2003). In other words, Madewood is, as a sugar plantation, front and centre in a global slave trade.

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that the house is painted white – as if it represented in its petrified/solid form the very whiteness of the plantationocene and the capitalocene, with the White House of course also being the name of America’s primary seat of power (the birth of a nation involves the birth of a white house). In the figure of the house, we meet some tension in *The Beguiled*, for while the women may via mushrooms connect with different times, they remain constrained within the house, much as Handyside sees many of Coppola’s films tempered in their politics; that is, there is a desire for freedom that is never quite realised. Or, if that freedom is realised, in that McBurney is killed, the white women remain constrained within their white house, confined thus to a world of whiteness (for

houses as spaces of confinement in women's cinema, see Thornham 2019, 94). And yet, such confinement does not necessarily involve the creation of a safe space, since houses can also be interrupted and/or invaded, perhaps especially by aspects of the past, including ghosts (see also Vidal 2012, 65-109; Mayer 2016, 152-169). And while Coppola might evoke a long, non-human history through her use of mushrooms, the white house of Madewood is nonetheless a space haunted by a past of slavery, which is made palpably present by the use of Madewood in other, recent (and notably non-cinematic) audiovisual media products.⁸

Madewood was used in 2014 as a location for J. Cole's video for *G.O.M.D.*, directed by Lawrence Lamont, and in which the rapper plays a house slave who leads an uprising against the white owners (while also rapping in some stereotypical fashion about "bitches" and using other derogatory terms, with G.O.M.D. itself standing for "Get Off My Dick"). Meanwhile, Beyoncé also used Madewood in 2016 as a location for parts of *Lemonade*, the 65-minute concept album video that she co-directed with various luminaries of the artist's and music video worlds. The film, which takes in various themes including the American south, slavery, Beyoncé's family history, and the Black Lives Matter movement, clearly connects the space of Madewood to an American history of racial exploitation and discrimination.

Given that both *G.O.M.D.* and *Lemonade* pre-date *The Beguiled*, there is some likelihood that Coppola knew of the location's renewed meaning as a result of these interventions at the location. That is, the Madewood of *The Beguiled* carries the memory of, or is haunted by, these alternative depictions of its history. Together with the use of the black screen during her ellipses and her deliberate removal of Hallie/Mattie from the story, these music videos further suggest race as a structuring absence in Coppola's film.

But more than this, these music videos reveal the way in which her white feminist vision is built upon an occluded blackness, just as the white houses both at Madewood and in Washington D.C. were built by slaves. Indeed, the very prettiness and beauty of Coppola's cinema are revealed as signs of white privilege when we consider Madewood as a sugar plantation. For, if prettiness is often elided with sweetness, as Galt acknowledges (Galt 2011, 9), then the taste for sweetness in the white western palate is, as Kyla Wazana Tompkins makes clear, "inextricable from slavery's moral 'stain'" (Tompkins 2012, 97). That is, Coppola's cinema might subvert white tastes by intensifying its prettiness/sweetness, but this prettiness and sweetness are themselves built upon the historically black labour of the sugar and cotton trades, including directly that of the Madewood plantation. Whatever "unselfing" takes place, then, does not extend to including black bodies, while hospitality can welcome a white enemy, but not a black one. Finally, while white women can subvert patriarchy by not being envious of each other, they nonetheless

⁸ *The Virgin Suicides* also involves much natural imagery, as Handyside explains (without relating this imagery to the Anthropocene; see Handyside 2017, 119).

appropriate the cooking know-how and skills of the black woman, before removing her from the narrative altogether. How subversive is the overthrow of patriarchy if it is only in the name of whiteness and not in the name of a broader, intersectional (post)humanity?

Colin Farrell's inclusion within the film here becomes telling, not least because he, unlike Eastwood in Siegel's version, plays an Irishman who joined the Union Army for citizenship rather than for ideological purposes. As has been widely acknowledged, the Irish have often been elided with blackness in American history, meaning not only that the north's victory in the Civil War is built upon an ongoing and exploitative migration of peoples across the Atlantic, but also that the assassination of McBurney is in some senses the assassination by white women of the black other.⁹ More than this, if blackness and Irishness are both associated with queerness, as both Tompkins and Mel Y. Chen have suggested through the historical use of the term *quare*, which was used to define the otherness of both (see Chen 2012, 59; Tompkins 2017, 61), then Coppola's vision of an empowered white femininity is arguably built upon an exclusion of the queer as well as the black other. When we consider that McBurney is killed after having already been reduced to crutches, then empowered white femininity would also seem to be the remit solely of the able-bodied. Furthermore, if in talking to (privileged? white?) women students at Cambridge's Newnham and Girton Colleges, Virginia Woolf suggested pragmatically that money lies at the core of having a room of one's own, then perhaps it is fitting that it is at an all-girls' private school that the class limits of white feminism can also be revealed. Indeed, while there are various references to queerness, disability, race, and sugar in Woolf's classic, with food also being of especial interest to the Bloomsbury author, there is one reference that seems particularly striking. In suggesting that (upper middle class?) British white women do not feel the need to possess all that they see (unlike white men), Woolf proposes that "one of the great advantages of being a [white] woman [is] that one can pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her" (Woolf 2019, 40). Coppola would seem to feel something similar, namely no compulsion to make a black woman cinematic by including her in her film. In other words, and to return to Lorde, there seems to be a clear failure of human intersectionality in Coppola's film, even as it appeals to the mycorrhizome.

And yet, even in this posthuman realm, Coppola's work encounters a contradiction. For, as Tsing points out, fungi prohibit the development of sugar from cane, since fungi begin to ferment sugar, turning it into alcohol (hence fungi being particularly useful for the rum trade; see Tsing 2012, 149). That is, fungi turn sugar into poison. And so, while the women of *The Beguiled* may use mushrooms to poison McBurney, those same mushrooms also threaten the sugar plantation that lies at the root of their privileged whiteness. Or, put

⁹ My thanks to Anita Biressi for initially making this observation about Farrell's Irishness.

differently, having a room, a house, and a cinema of one's own is key to the construction of whiteness – and even if it is a room or a cinema cleared of men, it is still a room built upon the labour of occulted others, including racial others and perhaps also those fungal others that allowed that clearing and the creation of space to happen in the first place.

Through the general if not complete absence of other races from her films, Coppola betrays how cinema is, like the house, like ugly feelings, and like the Anthropocene, historically a construct by and for whiteness. If Adrienne Rich says that neither a woman nor a bumblebee's work can be “fulfilled inside this house” (Rich 1986, 211), then Lorde, with whom we started, famously declares that “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” (Lorde 2017, 16). Cinema similarly cannot undo cinema. As per Zuo's words also cited at the outset of this essay, cinema cannot truly critique whiteness, with Zuo reminding us, once again after Richard Dyer, that the medium itself “was built around the normality of white people” (Zuo 2019). And so Coppola, like cinema as a whole, relegates racial others to the outside of her film – and it is to the outside of cinema that we must look to find alternatives.

Even as cinema in the digital era becomes seemingly more, and with some luck irreversibly, diverse, with directors like Ava DuVernay emerging to critique how the Civil War only led to the mass incarceration of African Americans, or what we might also describe as slavery by other means (see DuVernay's *13th*, 2016), it is via digital media like the music video, as per *G.O.M.D.* and *Lemonade* (with *13th* itself being a Netflix film, i.e. one distributed primarily via the internet), that the limitations of cinema are exposed and a “minoritarian” form that can include people of colour emerges.

Notably, Carol Vernallis has described the music video as an “unruly” medium, with Beyoncé perhaps inevitably appearing on the cover of her *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video and the New Digital Cinema* (see Vernallis 2013). As we have seen over the course of this essay, unruliness might thus be understood as a characteristic shared by women, mushrooms, plants, and (non-white) media alike. But this shared “unruliness” is most powerful only when there is kinship, understanding, and organisation between these forms. In other words, as Susan Leigh Foster argues that racial protests in the form of sit-ins in the 1950s were not unruly at all, but rather organised and “proper,” so might all of these “unruly” others be understood as “unruly” only from the perspective of patriarchy. Understood on their own terms and when working together, they are in fact systematically dismantling patriarchy in an unstoppable fashion – just as fungi will eventually rot the walls of the white house, creating a mush/mud from which new lifeforms will emerge.

If “dominant postfeminism is a patriarchally grounded, media inspired concept that promotes the individualistic, consumer driven rhetoric of neoliberalism, while shying away from political engagement” (Lindop 2015, 11), if it involves a “*mise-en-scène* of

luxury” (Schreiber 2014, 15) – or prettiness and sweetness, and if it is about *having it all*, then “dominant postfeminism” is, like dominant feminism, primarily white. Nonetheless, as Trump affirms the whiteness of the house, as Hillary Clinton is cast aside as “nasty,” and as Black Lives Matter rages against a repressive and racist state machinery, intersectional posthumanist/mycorrhizomatic thought can, following but also in spite of Coppola, emerge to help us to connect with times and spaces outside of capital, thus engendering the possibility for alternatives to patriarchy, or the creation of a (mush)room of one’s own. Such “posthumanist” thought can only work, though, if it engages not just with gender, but also with the racial limitations of patriarchy, limitations we should try not to forget as we remind ourselves continually and in ongoing fashion that “[white] feelings are not *the* centre of feminism” (Rich 1986, 231). This white-centrism remains Coppola’s mistake, engaging as she does with the posthuman (mushrooms), but not with the human (racial others). That is, posthumanist thought might lead to a more inclusive, if contradictory, humanity – defined not by exclusion but by kinship. However, this has to be not just across species but also across sexes, races, spaces, times and perhaps even across the perceived divide between life and death (fungi lived on and brought to life an otherwise dead planet).

Nevertheless, Coppola’s *The Beguiled* can still be an instructive text. But it cannot do this alone through its pretty critique of patriarchy via an elliptical narrative and its vision of an empowered white femininity. Rather, its potential can only finally be unlocked by a consideration of its *mise-n’en-scène*, or by being seen under what Denise Ferreira da Silva would term a “blacklight.” For, blacklight can reveal to us important and previously unseen aspects of an artwork, such that it creates “*the possibility of considering thinking in some other way*” (Ferreira da Silva 2018). When seen not in the typical light of cinema but in the blacklight of an ultraviolet radiation lamp, we see what otherwise is absent in *The Beguiled*, as well as in Coppola’s work more generally, namely blackness. Indeed, as blacklight is used specifically to help us to see fungi and bacteria, so might blacklight, when applied to Coppola’s *Beguiled*, help us to see that the wood of the Madewood Plantation House is not so strong or white as it seems, but already riddled with rot and the other lifeforms that will turn it to mush and thereby produce mud to help regenerate our planet. That is, white women may have a room or even a house of their own, but the mushroom will mush not just the Irish man, but all rooms and all houses – and what arises will not involve a replantation that repeats the errors of the plantationocene (be that with a different or with the same cast). Rather, this will be the definitive dismantling of the master’s white house via unstoppable processes that precede even the possibility of the human, which are thus vastly different from the master’s tools, and which processes will exceed the white human as the latter disappears from the planet. Put differently, and to evoke another recent Netflix documentary, it is time perhaps not simply to

dismantle, but wholly to *Knock Down the House* (Rachel Lears, 2019).¹⁰

Gaining access to this (mush)room and learning to become with it (becoming by learning with it, learning by becoming with it, working in concert, making kin – across both races and species), rather than seeking petrification and an eternal and unchanging present, might well be the key to an ecstatic and truly “unselfed” future, involving a decentred, fecund, multi-coloured, and intersectional feminism. In such a world, rather than humanity being limited to whiteness and a few mycorrhizomatic allies, the human in its full entanglement will finally come into conscious and conscientious being.¹¹

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¹⁰ *Knock Down the House* documents the progress of various female politicians, including women of colour, as they proceed to run for the US Congress in the 2018 midterm elections.

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