

# Liquid Surfaces: Minor Architectures of the Fille Fatale

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring the interactions between liquid surfaces and their relationship to the figure of the fille fatale in dark genres of film and television, this paper suggests that the liquid surface not only disrupts our understanding of architecture as a static structural envelope, but also acts to destabilise the image of the innocent girl in science fiction and horror films and television. The discussion focuses on three relatively recent depictions of young girls who confront (or are forced to confront) the liquid surface: Mitsuko's submersion in the water vessels of an apartment building in *Dark Water* (2002), Ofelia and the muddy interior of the tree in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and the watery floor of Eleven's psychic state in *Stranger Things* (2016). Working with Jill Stoner's understanding of minor architectures and their ability to deterritorialise both physical structures and structures of power, the paper asks to what extent the liquid surface encounters of Ofelia, Mitsuko and Eleven exist as reflections of each character's experiences, or as currents of agency through which the fille fatale reshapes her world. In doing so the research considers the ways in which fictional liquid surfaces operate as a visual minor architecture that elicits a questioning of social and physical norms.

## INTRODUCTION

The fille fatale is the child version of the archetypal femme fatale character. Discussing the emergence of the 'fille fatale' in post-war cinema, critic and film scholar Barbara Creed framed the disturbing potential of this character in terms of boundaries and vulnerability. As Creed observed, 'What is specifically horrific about the monstrous little girl is that the potential for their body and mind to be corrupted is seemingly without borders or limits.'<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging her vulnerability, this paper nevertheless sets out to move beyond the corruption of the evil little girl's body and mind, towards an exploration of her relationship to dark or corrupted space. More specifically, filmic depictions of the liquid

surface are considered here as architectural representations or reflections intrinsic to the dangerously disruptive figure of the fille fatale. At stake in this relationship, we argue, is the status of architectural form as a set of limits— not only between spaces and those who experience them, but also between interiors and their exteriors, creator and the created. In short, on film, the fille fatale and the liquid surface make visible a set of architectural relationships and experiences that exceed the static conventions of borders or limits.

Drawing on poststructuralist and feminist theoretical frameworks to explain these dematerialisations and transgressions, the following discussion contends that the dark space of the liquid

surface constructs a minor architecture that both forms and is informed by the agency of the fille fatale. In *Towards a Minor Architecture* (2012), architect and theorist Jill Stoner describes minor architectures as activities and structures that lie outside the discipline's cannon and the aesthetics of building design. They are initially defined through their antagonistic relationship to traditional forms of architecture.<sup>2</sup> Here, Stoner's primarily literary conceptualisation of minor architectures is extended in film.<sup>3</sup> The fictional liquid surfaces in film are treated as significant visual examples of the disruption and deterritorialisation of spatial conditions—ones that at the same time reject the 'burdens of linearity' associated with conventional architectural form and representation.<sup>4</sup>

Following a brief introduction to minor architecture and points of intersection with the language of liquid states, and an explanation of the fille fatale as an agent of minor architecture, the paper introduces three recent filmic depictions of fille fatales and their fraught interactions with liquid surfaces: Ofelia in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), Eleven from *Stranger Things* (2016), and Mitsuko in *Dark Water* (2002). These examples are used to illustrate and discuss the broader themes of transgression, mediation and autonomy embedded within the liquid surfaces' modes of deterritorialisation in connection with the fille fatale. Just as the moving images of film have the potential to summon the liquid surface as a spatial setting, they also provide the figure of the fille fatale with the capacity to render visible the liberating and unsettling qualities of these environments and worlds

There has been growing interest in the critical potential of minor architectures following architectural theorist Jennifer Bloomer's pivotal *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (1993), but their significance beyond literary examples has yet to be fully explored. Acknowledging minor architecture's indeterminacy, Stoner finds examples of minor architectures in extreme and diverse settings, including the Jewish Residential Quarters in Warsaw in 1940, where 400 000 people were confined within a sealed ghetto during early German occupation. In response to this imprisonment, a complex network of underground tunnels, spaces carved into walls were created to conceal people and

their personal possessions.<sup>5</sup> Consistent with Stoner's understanding of the minor in architecture, these spaces represent powerful instances of resistance, overcoming the enforced separation of interiors. Spaces generated by those denied political power. Although minor architectures also have the potential to intersect with feminist perceptions of space and experience in a number of significant ways—or at least to disrupt more conventional politics of space—there is still much to be written about these conditions in detail. The following discussion takes steps towards this through an exploration of a thoroughly under-represented architectural agent, the young girl, in her most paradoxical and challenging form.

The fille fatale characters introduced here represent a necessarily limited selection of some recent depictions of the dangerous little woman on film and television. Ofelia and Eleven move between very different multiple and parallel worlds, while Mitsuko haunts the apartment block in which she met her premature death; yet each character constructs a deliberate and meaningful relationship with the dark space of the liquid surface.

## MINOR ARCHITECTURES AND LIQUID LANGUAGE

In *Towards a Minor Architecture* (2012), Stoner describes architectures that evade and undermine the discipline's connection to the commercially-driven design of buildings and structures. According to Stoner, while 'the major language of architecture is yet one more product of a culture increasingly dominated by symbolic capital,' minor architectures literally and figuratively 'alter and dematerialize the constructed world.'<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the built outcomes associated with conventional architectural production, minor architectures are 'necessarily ephemeral' conditions that 'slip through cracks of Euclidean convention, and pay no heed to the idea of the formal.'<sup>7</sup>

Despite this, minor architectures are not, strictly speaking, simply the inverse of major architecture. Like the minor literature it emerged from, the minor in architecture develops from within the structure and language of the major. In Stoner's treatment of

minor architectures, they register as 'knowingly impoverished'—as forms of multiplicity and repetition that at the same time 'perpetuate conditions of lack.'<sup>8</sup> It is these very qualities that often resist representation beyond textual descriptions. The lines and edges of conventional architectural drawings and models, in their ambition to fix conditions, struggle to describe the conditions of variance and absence.

While Stoner's minor architecture derives its name from the minor literature of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*,<sup>9</sup> her thinking also builds quite directly on Jennifer Bloomer's use of the same term within *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (1993).<sup>10</sup> Minor literature pertains to forms of writing and textual production that actively subvert the conventions of established canons of (major) literature through structure, syntax, dialect and so on. The result is prose that resists a singular interpretation. As such, the definition of minor in architecture in this context has its philosophical roots in two key terms often associated with post-structuralist theory: deterritorialisation and deconstruction. While Stoner refers to Deleuze and Guattari's 'deterritorialisation' throughout *Towards a Minor Architecture*, Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction and language provides a less explicit but nevertheless important theoretical framework via Bloomer's text. More specifically, Derrida's notion of deconstruction sets up the terms for Bloomer's movements between text and architecture.<sup>11</sup>

The spatial and temporal implications of the kinds of deterritorialisation achieved through minor architectures are fundamentally connected to the breakdown of traditional interior-exterior relationships, overcoming the segmented and hierarchical structures that these help to create.<sup>12</sup> Stoner further connects the minor's capacity to act on the major to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of smooth and striated space—as a set of contradicting, but nevertheless non-binary terms. As she explains,

Striated and smooth form a dialectical pair; one would not exist without the other. And yet the distinction between the two is not like night and day. The space between them is immeasurable; they are a mixture with blurring, slippage, and overlap. Power triumphs by constructing striations. A desire to subvert the power of these constructions is a smoothing force. Minor architectures operate in that mercurial, indeterminate state that is the passage from striated to smooth, from closed to open space.<sup>13</sup>

Acknowledging the minor's preoccupation with the major and its situation within this process of 'smoothing,' Stoner (picking up on Bloomer's earlier reading of Derrida) makes clear minor architecture's desire to 'de(con)struct.' According to Bloomer, while Derrida's position in *Of Grammatology* (originally published as *De la grammatologie*, 1967) 'exposes both the logical problems of and the motivation behind privileging speech over writing in Western culture,' it cannot be understood as an argument for the superiority of writing.<sup>14</sup> Rather, Bloomer suggests, Derrida's rejection of binary categories in relation to these actions ultimately argues for a kind of flow between different states.

[S]imply to reverse the privileging flow, to privilege the previously inferior term over the previously superior term, is to remain within the same system of privileging. Writing, then, can reveal this, but come with its own pitfalls of logocentric construction. And this revelation upon revelation, emerging from reflexive critique—the thing at hand always throwing itself into question—constitutes the lesson of Derrida. Privileging, an ultimately static operation, gives way to oscillating (or shuttling), an operation that itself shuttles between stasis and flow.<sup>15</sup>

Not unlike Bloomer's description of Derrida's 'privileging flow,' Stoner's descriptions of minor architecture make use of a liquid-focused language of fluidity. Connections between such liquid states and the dematerialization of conventions are extended here to the articulation of architectural space.

Architectural space need not only be bound to enclosure—finite, measurable, and palpable. It may also transcend material boundaries, flow maddeningly like mercury, soft-hard and fluid. Such space is found within texts both written and built. We find it in literature and in architecture; it flows teasingly among words and within walls, between interiors.<sup>16</sup>

In this sense, the liquid surface can be thought of as a visual expression of minor architecture's tendency to destabilise and disrupt solid (striated or static) conditions and structures. Further, the association of minor architecture with a form of liberation or freedom through its fluidity is consistent with Stoner's description of spaces determined by traditional, top-down power structures as 'frozen' in terms of both their spatial and temporal qualities. The solid nature of this hierarchical state, its ability to divide and control, is contrasted with the dynamic, free-flowing and ephemeral aspects of minor architectures. Alongside this freedom, however, the open-ended condition of the architectural liquid minor has potentially terrifying consequences.

## THE MINOR ARCHITECTURES OF THE FILLE FATALE

Some of the most vivid portrayals of the fille fatale in film include Regan, a twelve-year-old evil, possessed girl, in *The Exorcist* (1973), or *Carrie*, a young woman in her early teens who uses telekinesis to inflict revengeful violent destruction on her home town (1976).<sup>18</sup> These exaggerated depictions of demonic girls are accentuated by their upheaval of the traditional image of a female child. In her recent study of the figure of the fatale within neo-noir film, Samantha Lindop has argued that the fille fatale presents a layered threat to established character traits. For Lindop, 'childishness also bears structural similarities to the psychosexual formation of femininity as masquerade and just as cultural codes of femaleness are assumed to ally and deflect patriarchal reproach, signs of immaturity are used in a similar manner.'<sup>19</sup>

'Fille' has numerous applications in the French language—for instance, it may refer to a girl, daughter or a spinster—but its deployment in relation to a fille fatale specifically describes a girl or femi-

nine youth. 'Fatale' has many varied applications as well: it may mean fatal, deadly, lethal, disastrous; but also fate, the inevitable, inexorable and irresistible. As such, the fille fatale can be thought of not only as wicked or devilish, but also as a character who enacts murder, seduction, deceit, entrapment or behaves in any number of dangerous ways.

There have been a number of important accounts of a range of fille fatales within recent feminist and cinematic theory.<sup>20</sup> Among these varied incarnations of dangerous little girls identified through this term, we might include the demonic (*The Exorcist* and *Poltergeist*), the murderous (*Carrie* and *The House That Dripped Blood*), and those who seduce (*Lolita* and, more recently, *Hard Candy*).<sup>21</sup> The architecturally-informed analysis of the fille fatales in this paper posits that they can also be defined more broadly by their capacity to subvert patriarchal structures and disrupt their environments. Further, in this context, the greatest threat that these characters pose may be this very subversion. As Lindop observes, 'the combination of youth, femininity, and intelligence are a potent mix for the generation of patriarchal paranoia.'<sup>22</sup>

Creed suggests that the fille fatale emerged in cinema in the postwar era, although she traces the emergence of this figure back to the surrealists, who were enamoured with childishness and the 'femme enfant' in their early manifestoes of the 1920s.<sup>23</sup> The femme enfant for the Surrealists refers to the child bride, and is often used to describe the character Lolita. Lindop cites Simone de Beauvoir, who proposed that little girls with treacherous yearnings had been on the rise in popular culture since the 1940s, as women become more present in male dominated spheres, and therefore less mysterious.<sup>24</sup> Lindop goes on to explicate the role of the fille fatale in mainstream post feminism, describing her as 'savvy, self-inventive, and extremely formidable,' further noting that the 'shift towards an increasing centrality of fille fatales is indicative of postfeminist popular culture as a whole, where girls have become central to the notion of female empowerment.'<sup>25</sup> The fille fatale is indeed dangerous, but not necessarily through her capacity for violence or demonic behaviour; but through her empowerment and ability to assert control over a given space, most often the dark space, that she inhabits.

The post-feminist shift from femme to fille fatale described by Lindop is exemplified in Guillermo Del Toro's dark fantasy film *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). The film is set in Spain in 1944, in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. Ten-year-old Ofelia and her mother, Carmen, are sent to the country to join Captain Vidal, Ofelia's stepfather and high-ranking Falange officer. Their relocation is due to the imminent arrival of Ofelia's half-brother, which she is excited about, but it is clear that she has no desire to connect with her stepfather. Ofelia signals this through her rebellious, although not malicious, behaviour, while her mother continues to be obedient to her new husband despite her own discomfort. Here, the femme is obedient while the fille is defiant. Carmen is confined to a wheelchair and therefore constrained within the home at her husband's request, placing her unborn child's well-being over the mother's. In response to this, Ofelia continually escapes into a dark fantasy, where her rebellious actions often involve creating portals to a space (possibly imagined) beyond the limits of the house.

These portals are created through physical props or devices such as keys or holes in the floor that acts as gateways to Ofelia's Underworld. Interestingly, Vidal's housekeeper, Mercedes, another significant female character in this film (who is secretly working with republican resistance), also uses these same props to hide food and correspondence with the rebels from the Captain.<sup>26</sup> Mercedes presents an alternative to Carmen's passiveness, but her subversive actions are anchored by her duties and responsibilities, while Ofelia is liberated by her status as a child and her capacity to escape to the Underworld. Ofelia is dangerous primarily through her capacity to create and control her environment; the first of these spaces takes the form of the dark, viscous interior of the tree, and this is what ultimately empowers her to disregard Captain Vidal's authority.

Ofelia's first task in the Underworld involves her retrieving a key from the oversized, engorged toad that lives inside the tree (see Figure 1). The interior of the tree is liquid in terms of its viscous, mud-coated surfaces, and also through the illusion of its volume. The cavernous depth of the tree's interior does not correspond with its external appearance. Rather, it is a fluid space, and the indefinable boundaries of the space create a sense of tension as Ofelia moves through this dark space. Both the darkness and the 'bottomlessness' of the liquid surface of the muddy floor fill this scene with suspense. Ofelia's capacity to overcome her apprehensions of this space and her success in retrieving the key from the toad set her on the path to completing all of the tasks she is assigned. As a result, she transgresses the Captain's authority in both the Underworld and earthly existence.



Above  
Figure 1: Ofelia confronts the toad inside the tree in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006)

The transformative liquid space and its mediation between multiple worlds or realities at the hands of a *fille fatale* also feature in the 2016 television series *Stranger Things*. A science fiction series written, directed and produced by the Duffer Brothers, the first season of *Stranger Things* is initially focused on the search for a young child who has disappeared from the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana. The series follows the friends and family of the missing child, Will Byers, as they attempt to locate and then rescue him from a dark parallel dimension. At the same time, these events intersect with the escape of a monster and a young girl, Eleven, who possesses psychokinetic abilities, from a laboratory at the edge of town. Eleven has been raised in the laboratory, and her name is her number as a test subject. Where Ofelia's reality and its dark spaces consist of 1940s Spain and the Underworld, Eleven's realities span between the American Midwest of the 1980s and its "Upside Down" dimension, accessible to her through her ability to inhabit a spatially and temporally fluid psychic state.

In a flashback to her experience in the Laboratory prior to escape, Eleven is shown in the cell-like interiors of the facility, as two attendants force her into a small, windowless room. Although it is clear that she is extremely powerful, within this first episode of *Stranger Things*, Eleven is primarily depicted as vulnerable and threatened. Nevertheless, as the story unfolds, the full extent of her psychic abilities becomes more apparent (including psychokinesis and telepathy, as well as extra-sensory perception of the Upside Down). We begin to see that Eleven is capable of violent acts; another flashback to her life within the laboratory as a test subject shows her killing two guards as they attempt to lock her in solitary confinement.

After being discovered by a small group of Will's friends in the woods around Hawkins, Eleven begins to reveal her powers to them and make contact with Will in the Upside Down. Through this process, the young boys also witness her capacity to inflict pain on and manipulate those who seek to harm her or those who she considers friends. Eleven also poses a threat to those around her through her value to the Hawkins National Laboratory and their desire to keep her existence and abilities a secret at all costs. In order to remain undetected in the community while the Laboratory searches for her, Eleven disguises her status as a weapon, using a wig and dress, thus hiding her shaved head, and taking on a more stereotypical (and less threatening) feminine appearance.

In episodes five and six of *Stranger Things*, the Duffer Brothers introduce a spatial understanding of Eleven's psychic state, allowing the audience to inhabit a dark, seemingly limitless void with her as she makes contact with other people and beings. As Eleven moves around this psychic space, she appears to stand upon a liquid surface (see Figure 2). The surface reacts to Eleven's movements, rippling and moving as she walks and runs through the space. The void-like qualities of Eleven's psychic state represent both her ability to transcend space and time, but also the kind of sensory deprivation she must be subjected to in order to access this state (see Figure 3). This sensory deprivation is achieved through Eleven's suspension in liquid, in the laboratory via full immersion within a purpose-built tank, and later in the series through flotation in a makeshift pool of salt water.



Both Eleven and Ofelia share an experience with a dark 'other' space—the Upside Down for Eleven and the Underworld for Ophelia. They engage with these spaces via a liquid surface. This liquid surface, undefinable and unbounded, connects them to thoroughly alternative spaces and states. The third and last film to be presented as a case study in this paper is *Dark Water* (*Honogurai Mizu no Soko kara*, 2002). Marking a slight departure from the depiction of *fille fatales* in *Stranger Things* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, the film broadens the analysis beyond a western lens.<sup>27</sup> It also presents a *fille fatale* in the genre of horror.

*Dark Water* was adapted from Koji Suzuki's short story *Floating Water*, published in 1996. Throughout *Dark Water*, the Mother character, Yoshimi, is forced to defend her sanity in a dispute with her estranged ex-husband over custody for her daughter Ikuko. Yoshimi and Ikuko move into a new apartment together and this is where they begin their interactions with liquid surfaces. At first this appears as pools of water on the floor and a water damaged ceiling that drips into their apartment. As the film progresses the audience is made aware that the appearance of the water signals the ghost of a girl named Mitsuko. Ikuko becomes friends with the ghost of Mitsuko, and this affects Ikuko's behaviour at school.

**Above top**

Figure 2: Eleven walking on the watery surface in a psychic state.  
Stranger Things (2016)

**Above bottom**

Figure 3: Eleven in the sensory deprivation tank prior to entering a psychic state.  
Stranger Things (2016)

There are posters pleading for information about Mitsuko as a missing girl, and Yoshimi pauses to read one early in the film. There is also the missing girl's bag, which mysteriously comes into Ikuko's possession. When Yoshimi discovers that Mitsuko lived in the apartment above theirs, and the leaking ceiling becomes too much to tolerate, she goes upstairs to investigate. In this scene, Yoshimi becomes drenched, as every surface—walls, floor and ceiling—is saturated with water in Mitsuko's apartment. Yoshimi discovers that Mitsuko drowned in the cooling tower on the roof of the building. The film ends with Yoshimi being abducted by Mitsuko from the world of the living.

Koji Suzuki also wrote *The Ring (Ringu)* (1991) the basis for the now infamous Ring trilogy films (1998-2000). Central to his films are the 'dead wet girl' characters. Chris Pruett discusses the critical commentary in Suzuki's portrayal of single mothers, young girls and women protagonists in his stories:

The works of Koji Suzuki, including *Ring* and *Honogurai Mizu no Sokokara* ("Dark Water"), focus on single mothers, single fathers, and other deviations from the traditional nuclear family. Kalat suggests that this reflects anxiety about dramatic changes in Japanese society over the last fifty years, especially in regard to the rights of women. He contends that while women's rights have come a long way in the last half-decade, the resulting culture is necessarily much more complex. This is perhaps why the antagonists of modern Japanese horror are so often female: in death they wield power that they were denied in life.<sup>28</sup>

Valerie Wee, in her analysis of *The Ring*, writes that *Ringu's* gender politics borrows from the tradition of the Japanese female ghost story, adapting its conventions to express a growing masculine anxiety within contemporary Japan, where modernity and social change are steadily undermining previously entrenched gender roles.<sup>29</sup> In Suzuki's stories, the ghost girl characters (Mitsuko in *Dark Water* and Sadako from *Ringu*) are avenging their death—a death that has resulted from neglect or murder by those who are supposed to act as guardians. The female ghost originated in the

Tokugawa/Edo period (1603–1868), and Wee comments that, 'these popular narratives articulate the Japanese attitude towards gender roles and behaviors in general.'<sup>30</sup>

Suzuki's 'dead wet girls' are a particular theme in Japanese horror stories, offering a useful example for this research. They explicitly address the changing role of women in society and their capacity to assert agency over their own situation. As Pruett writes, 'these are contemporary tales about women exercising their onnen to wreak vengeance on the world.'<sup>31</sup> The dark, liquid spaces that these girls inhabit are an environment wherein they can exert influence within traditional authoritarian structures.

The liquid surfaces and spaces of the *fille fatale* offer an opportunity to work through some of Stoner's observations, particularly through this process of deterritorialisation. The liquids that mediate Ofelia's, Eleven's and Mitsuko's experiences are more than just a visual strategy for representing a moment of transition or connection between different realities; they are a clear expression of the duality of the *fille fatale*, and possibly the only kind of spatial experience that could react to and reflect her existence. Major architecture represented in the fictional but real settings of 1940s Spain, 1980s Hawkins or late twentieth century Japan overlooks (or even erases) the *fille fatales* examined in this discussion. Ofelia moves into the house belonging to Captain Vidal, but is able to slip in and out while her mother remains imprisoned; Eleven grows up within the cell-like interiors of the Hawkins National Laboratory, and her existence has been kept secret; the ghost of Mitsuko is confined to the apartment building that she lived in before she died. The structures and spaces recognised as architecture in these worlds are often the limiting conditions or barriers imposed on the *fille fatale*, not spaces that belong to her, or in which she belongs.

## DETERRITORIALISED LIQUID SPACE AND TRANSGRESSION

Importantly, the deterritorialising actions of the liquid surface are marked not only by the literal melting liquidity of the surface and its accessible zones, but also, as Stoner notes, by a 'fluid time' that

'surrounds and overwhelms the management of lived time.'<sup>32</sup> In this respect, minor architecture, and the fluid conditions of the *fille fatale's* dark liquid space, might be seen not only in terms of their ability to deconstruct physical structures, but also as existing structures of power, through the disruption of time as a linear condition.

In *Dark Water*, Mitsuko's capacity to bend architectures across the present and the past, and the spaces of the living and the dead, is a trope of the fictional ghost character. This is unlike the spatial transgressions between the real and supernatural enacted by Ofelia and Eleven. Mitsuko can only exist within the watery spaces that she creates; she cannot be present in any 'real' physical space. For Mitsuko, the liquid surface—pools of water on the ceiling and the floor—are her only method for connecting with the living in the real world. For Ofelia and Eleven, the liquid surface is what transports them to the supernatural. For all three characters, however, the liquid surface operates with a method for (and visual representation of) deterritorialisation across the environments in which they appear to find themselves confined.

The liquid surface, then, is also a form of evasion—in Stoner's words, as 'lines of escape that pass through seemingly solidified boundaries, provoking architecture to bend towards its own (minor) immanence.'<sup>33</sup> For both Ofelia and Eleven in particular, the liquid surface and the other realities to which it provides access involve acts of transgression. Whether these transgressions relate to the laws of space and time, or the social conventions of their immediate context, these *fille fatales* repeatedly break the rules and overstep their limits.

Throughout *Pan's Labyrinth*, Ofelia escapes what appears to be a desperately hopeless situation via the creation of portals—transforming what are seemingly solid walls and boundaries into openings to another space. As such, the rooms' restrictions that comprise Vidal's residence continue to give way to the dialectically opposed fluid and organic spatial logic of the liquid surface. From the moment that Ofelia (not by chance resembling Alice before her journey through the looking glass) approaches the

tree and begins to muddy her perfectly polished shoes, she immediately realises that the liquid space violates the conventions of Vidal's domestic interior. By proceeding through the mud to seek out the toad, Ofelia can be seen to consciously, rather than inadvertently, reject the latter.

The metanarrative of *Pan's Labyrinth* is a critique of the Spanish Fascist regime. The characters of Captain Vidal and, to some extent the Faun who sets the tasks for Ofelia to complete in the Underworld, represent Spain's totalitarian government. Ofelia's disobedience of their orders mirrors the position of the anti-fascist rebels. The didacticism of this parable in the film's narrative is brought to the fore when Ofelia refuses to offer her baby brother to the Faun for the purposes of extracting a small amount of blood. Ofelia's rebellion against the Faun's orders is ultimately rewarded with her rightful return as a Princess in the Underworld. The moral of this fairytale, then, is to not follow blindly, and to question authority. Each of these small, visual devices—most notably for this study, the muddy interior of the tree—act to relay a much larger narrative about authoritarian politics. Through the fluid boundaries created by the liquid surface, the *fille fatale* can register her existence within the structural confines of patriarchal space. In doing so, she is destabilising spaces that are not created by her, or for her.

Eleven's imprisonment in the Hawkins National Laboratory appears equally as hopeless as Ofelia's house arrest. The 'solidified boundaries' of the cell-like spaces of the Laboratory offer little hope of escape for Eleven until her abilities generate a much deadlier portal within the facility. Immersed within her psychic state, Eleven encounters a terrifying monster (referred to as the 'Demogoron'). Upon touching the monster, Eleven creates a rupture the wall of the laboratory cell, allowing both her and the murderous creature to escape into Hawkins. When a distressed Eleven later refers to herself as 'a monster', she underlines this parallel narrative and its significance.

Within the world of *Stranger Things*, the only creatures we know that can be conscious of the psychic state and its liquid surface are Eleven and the Demogorgon. This is the space of mon-

sters who do not conform to the rules of existence in Hawkins. Not unlike the mud that begins to coat Ofelia's shoe, the liquid that Eleven experiences swirling at her feet within her psychic state signals a spatial logic incompatible with the hierarchical and highly controlled rooms of the Laboratory. Even more so than Ofelia's portals, though, Eleven's psychic state rejects any kind of discernible scale—there is no possibility of cartesian or polar reference points in space or time. The apparently intuitive process of navigation that Eleven employs in her psychic state thus deterritorialises and deconstructs her experience of highly-structured institutional space. Nevertheless, the apparently limitless void-like psychic state remains highly disturbing in its perpetual darkness.

As much as they are young girls, the fille fatale figures of Ofelia, Eleven and Mitsuko are, in their ability to access and navigate the logic of their unnatural liquid states, monstrous creatures alongside the Faun, the Demogorgon and the undead. These monsters sit in direct contrast to the predominant representations of domesticity and suburbia in which these films are set. They are not merely visual cues for terror, but signifiers for a social critique of the domestic. The horror is embedded in their ability to signify the return of the repressed, a reckoning. Feminist film scholar Shelly Stamp Linsey explicates this in her analysis of the film *Carrie*, highlighting that:

Such films open up an alterior space in which social criticism becomes possible... the sexual repression demanded by patriarchal culture in order to generate neutered, nuclear families returns in horror films 'as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror' - the repressed familiar returns as unfamiliar and monstrous.<sup>34</sup>

The monstrous space penetrated by the fille fatale through the liquid state functions as a minor to the normative representations of the domestic and suburban life. The occupation of these monstrous spaces by the fille fatale stresses the patriarchal orders associated with a repressed domesticity. The monstrous and the domestic exist in parallel.

## DETTERRITORIALISED LIQUID SPACE AS MEDIATING DEVICE

The fille fatales' experiences of their alternative fields of existence are not independent or somehow separate from structuralist environments. The liquid states they encounter appear to act as mediating devices between these spaces, rather than as counter or 'anti' spaces. As such, the real and imaginary realms that the fille fatales inhabit are not contained by separate, solid boundaries. Instead, all three characters inhabit these spaces simultaneously. Echoing once again the qualities of minor architectures, the instability of the fille fatale's dark liquid surfaces can be read as a form of mediation, allowing for a kind of productive slippage between states. This is again consistent with Stoner's observation that 'minor architectures may emerge either in the movement from one segment to another or as lines of forces within the zones between segments. These forces are purposeful but unstable. They obliterate conventional geometries to bend and join with time.'<sup>35</sup> And yet, in each case, the films discussed here remain consistent with the lived experience of space as a multiplicity of times (past, present and future), can be experienced simultaneously.

As noted, for Eleven, the liquid surface acts primarily as mediating space between the fictional town of Hawkins and other places. It is particularly important to note that the psychic state isn't 'upside down' and, in turn, the Upside Down isn't literally an inverse of 'real' Hawkins. As Mike's (and ultimately also Eleven's) friend, Dustin, explains, they exist in parallel. Comparing the Upside Down to the fictional space within a game that the group of boys play, called the 'Vale of Shadows,' he remarks that, 'It [the upside down] is right next to you and you don't even see it.' While Eleven uses the underside of the board game, the boys play in Mike's den to explain the Upside Down; by flipping the board over she also clearly illustrates this point. The reverse side of the board is not the mirror of what the children usually see, as it lacks the lines, shapes and text that mark out spaces on the front of the board. In fact, the reverse side of the board, its 'upside down' is black, dark, undefined.

As Ofelia tentatively squelches her way into the expansive internal space of the tree in *Pan's Labyrinth*, she finds herself briefly

lost in its vast interior. Not only is the inside of the tree impossibly large in relation to its external form, the viscous surface of this space means that its boundaries are soft to the touch, boundless and indefinable. It does not offer a sense of safety or enclosure or protection. It is threatening and terrifying. The space is not offering refuge or some form of alternative from her bleak situation, but nevertheless acts to provide her with a method of coping with circumstances she must face. In *Dark Water* this is particularly explicit, with Mitsuko's crossing from the past to the present. When she finally captures Yoshimi in the apartment, time stops. Upon her return to the apartment, the adolescent Ikuko experiences this frozen temporal state, where Yoshimi and Mitsuko have remained unaffected by the passing time. Time loops back and is lost in the apartment, but marches forward in the world beyond.

Ofelia and Eleven both activate liquid surfaces that act more literally as portals between other states of reality. While they function as 'under' or 'upside down' worlds respectively, their apparent movements through liquid states and between dimensions again resist clear binary oppositions, especially in terms of structures of power. Bloomer's and Stoner's Derridan rejection of 'a privileging flow' between states and structures is legible in these situations in the difficulties both Ofelia and Eleven face across both major and minor architectural states. Moving through the liquid and underworld realities does not simply liberate Ofelia from forms of power. In Francoist Spain, Ofelia is expected to obey Vidal, while beyond that reality, she must receive orders from the Faun and finds herself hunted by The Pale Man. That is to say that the underworld and the liquid surface are not spaces that Ofelia can control, but instead extend structures of power beyond 'their framed and familiar territories.'<sup>36</sup>

Mitsuko's existence within the water that services the apartment building where she died points to an almost parasitic relationship between the liquid surfaces of her paranormal existence and the architecture of her everyday while she was alive. Clear tensions across space and time exist within this relationship. The flowing and ephemeral conditions of the liquid Mitsuko channels between floors and walls bring the corruption of building-as-

shelter, as the liquid state wreaks havoc on its interior. Such conditions also call into question the apparent permanence of the apartment block—the liquid physically damages the structure as it breaches the boundaries, while also registering as other to a conventional understanding of architecture through its rapidly changing fluid forms.

Keeping these relationships in mind, it is also possible to view the deterritorialisation of each of these filmic spaces at least partially as a product or reflection of female hysteria. In all three narratives the audience is inevitably left to question the sanity of the fille fatales and also quite often their mothers. In *Dark Water* this is central to the character of Yoshimi. From the very beginning of the film, her capacity to care for Ikuko is questioned, and she ultimately loses her daughter completely when she is captured by Mitsuko. But while the inexplicable continual presence of the leaking water encountered by the building's manager and the janitor confirms that something unusual is occurring in the apartment, the existence of Mitsuko is for the most part understood as Yoshimi's hallucination. This might also be the case for Ofelia. Her encounters with the Underworld are the result of an overactive imagination, although there are hints that some of her experiences directly correlate with events occurring in the 'real.' Questions are also raised about the sanity of Eleven's character throughout *Stranger Things*, most notably when the character Dustin proclaims, 'She's our friend and she's crazy.' When Eleven's biological mother is located, she is revealed as being confined to her home and in the care of her sister after a mental breakdown—one caused by circumstances surrounding the apparent loss of her child.<sup>37</sup>

Through their association with apparently fragile (female) psychological states, the fille fatales discussed here each produce what appear to be unstable or untrustworthy realities. Other characters and the audience are given cause to doubt the existence of liquid spaces and other states by the way they seem to seep and bleed into the 'real'. In other words, in its mediating function and parallel relationship to what is presented as reality, the familiar moments and figures that seem to appear across these multiple worlds also suggest a dream-like or hallucinatory state.

Consider, for example, an early femme fatale, Dorothy Gale—without pausing to discuss the significance of her own interaction with liquids and the process of melting—and her return to Kansas in the closing scenes of the 1939 film adaptation of L Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. We, along with Dorothy's friends and family in Kansas, are to believe that she has experienced nothing more than a feverish dream, primarily due to the resemblance between a number of beings from Oz and the people who exist in her 'real' life on the farm. But as Dorothy protested:

No, Aunt Em, this was a real, truly live place. And I remember that some of it wasn't very nice... but most of it was beautiful. But just the same... all I kept saying to everybody was, "I want to go home!" And they sent me home. Doesn't anybody believe me? <sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Oscillating between real and imagined, domestic and monstrous, major and minor spaces, this study has explored the potential spatial and architectural agency of the fille fatale through her interactions with the dark space of the liquid surface. There is undoubtedly much more to be said about dangerous women, their interactions with liquid surfaces and even how they might figure within an account of filmic minor architecture. Nevertheless, as this paper has demonstrated, an exploration of the liquid surfaces of the fille fatale through a concept of minor architecture can serve as a valuable entry point into this larger discussion.

In line with Barbara Creed's account of the fille fatale, Ofelia, Eleven and Mitsuko may well be 'baby bitches from hell'—they are dangerous, perhaps monstrous, certainly unnatural in their non-conformity—but they are also creatures in search of a space where they belong. If it is possible to decipher the apparently empty or unbounded dark liquid states of the fille fatale using the theoretical framework of minor architecture, then the liquid surface becomes more than a kind of no-place or vague zone between realities. Instead, we might understand it as a much more purposeful and multi-layered architectural representation of the fille fatale's agency, as much as a reflection of her identity as

other to familiar power structures and their architectural forms. The fille fatale's status as an outsider to existing social, political and architectural hierarchies is intrinsic to her ability to generate, influence and occupy the dark space of the liquid surface. Her capacity to transgress conventional space and time through this surface and its attendant space constructs a state that is boundless and seemingly limitless, disrupting the spaces of control embedded in her everyday life.

To date, the primarily textual explorations of the minor within architecture have necessarily put to one side the question of minor architecture's image or appearance. As noted earlier, the minor is most readily defined through its de-forming, unrecognizable qualities—a sense of absence or 'lack' in relation to the major. In order to seek out an image of architecture in its minor form then, this paper has turned away from traditional forms of representation in architecture, towards the fictional environments made possible through film.

As powerful visualisations of architectures capable of expressing their formlessness and rejection of 'Euclidean convention,' the liquid surfaces and fille fatales described here contribute to a deeper understanding of minor architectural space and its agents. At the same time, however, we are left with a series of related questions about such a slippery set of conditions and the forces that shape them: Where else might the disruptive and deterritorialising symptoms of minor architectures make their appearance, and to whom are such spaces visible and accessible?

## NOTES

1. Barbara Creed, "Baby Bitches from Hell: Monstrous Little Women in Film," In J. Crew & R. Leonard (eds.), *Mixed-up childhood* (Auckland: Art Gallery Toi o Tmaki, 2005), 36.
2. Jill Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).
3. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*
4. Catherine Ingraham, "Animals 2: The Problem of Distinction," *Assemblage*, No. 14 (1991), 24.
5. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 54-55.
6. Jill Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 2.
7. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 2.
8. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 4.

9. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure*, Collection Critique (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: toward a minor literature*, Theory and history of literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
10. Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The Scripts of Joyce and Piranesi*, Theoretical perspectives in architectural history and criticism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
11. Stoner acknowledges Janet McCaw's earlier work on Bloomer's minor architecture, but it is also important to note here the way McCaw's paper underlines the significance of Bloomer's reading of Derrida (as distinct from Peter Eisenman's reading of his work). Janet McCaw, "Architectural (S)cripts: In Search of a Minor Architecture," *Architectural Theory Review* 4, no. 1 (1999).
12. It should be noted that minor architectures generate quite specific forms of deterritorialisation—ones that should be distinguished from the act of destabilising or distorting more conventional modes of architectural practice more broadly. Within *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (2000), for example, Anthony Vidler examines the increased awareness of the subjectivity of space and the destabilisation of its relationship to the body under modernism. As an action, 'warping', for Vidler, sets up some connections with the language of liquid-like distortion across disciplines, but these are constructed largely through the 'major architecture' of public urban space and the modernist projects of the early to mid-twentieth century. See Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).
13. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 7.
14. Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, 8.
15. Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, 8-9.
16. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 21.
17. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 18, 51.
18. Creed, "Baby Bitches from Hell."
19. Samantha Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
20. Alongside Creed, "Baby Bitches From Hell" and Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*, see also Valerie Wee, "Patriarchy and the Horror of the Monstrous Feminine," *Feminist Media Studies*, 11:2, (2011). 151-165, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2010.521624
21. Creed, "Baby Bitches from Hell."
22. Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*.
23. Creed, "Baby Bitches from Hell."
24. Lindop *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*.
25. Lindop, *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*, 99.
26. The key that Ofelia retrieves from the Toad for the Faun, and Mercedes' key, is to the Captain's store room; she gives the key to the captain and Mercedes uses these holes in the ground to store items to support the rebels, and Ofelia uses these holes as portals to spaces in the Underworld.
27. Although a Western version of *Dark Water* was made in 2005, but this is not the focus in this paper.
28. Chris Pruett, "The Anthropology of Fear: Learning About Japan Through Horror Games," in *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and*

- Values 10 (2010): 9. <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/article.php?id=741>
29. Wee, "Patriarchy and the Horror of the Monstrous Feminine."
30. Wee, "Patriarchy and the Horror of the Monstrous Feminine" 153.
31. "This idea, called onnen is that some emotions are so strong that they can reach from beyond the grave and manipulate the human world. Onnen is a central concept in Japanese horror literature." Pruett, "The Anthropology of Fear," 9.
32. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 5.
33. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 19.
34. Shelley Stamp Linsey, "Horror, femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty," *Journal of Film and Video* (1991): 33. Within this passage Stamp Linsey is quoting Robin Wood's introduction to the 1979 edited volume, *American nightmare: essays on the horror film*.
35. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 10.
36. Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*, 22.
37. It is interesting to note that all three of the young girls studied here also experience, on quite different terms, the loss of their mother. While a more detailed discussion of this aspect of the fille fatale lies beyond the scope of this paper, it is intriguing to consider the absence of the mother figure in relation to their crucial relationships to domestic structures as spaces of the traditional heteronormative family unit. See, for example, the literal connections between a mother and her house in Jane Blocker, "Woman-House: Architecture, Gender and Hybridity in What's Eating Gilbert Grape?," *Camera Obscura* 13, 3 no. 39 (1996): 126-150.
38. *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by Victor Fleming (1939, Culver City, CA: Warner Home Video, 2009): DVD.

## BIOGRAPHIES

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