

Horror Movies and the Cognitive Ecology of Primary Metaphors

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Horror movies consistently reflect metaphorical associations between verticality and affect, as well as between brightness and affect. For example, bad events happen when movie characters are going downwards, or when lights go off. Monsters and villains emerge from below and from the darkness. And protagonists get lost and stuck in dark underground caves, dungeons, tunnels, mines, bunkers or sewers. Even movies that are primarily set above ground or in bright light have the most suspenseful scenes happening beneath the ground and in the dark. An analysis of several horror movies highlights the striking consistency with which the two metaphors “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” are used within this genre. I will argue that these metaphors help in creating fear. Moreover, I will outline how cinematic manifestations of metaphor elaborate and extend metaphorical concepts and ultimately may have a formative role in keeping metaphors alive within a culture.

“Horror” is a cultural practice that revolves around inducing fear. This practice goes back a long way and is widespread across different cultures (Bosco, 2003; Felton, 1999). “Horror has been an important genre for millennia” (Kawin, 2012, p. 3), and modern-day horror *movies* are one reflection of this practice in popular culture. They translate the ancient activity of telling creepy fairytales into visual narrative form. In doing so, they provide “a way to conceptualize, give shape to and deal with the evil and frightening” (Kawin, 2012, p. 3).

As genre, horror movies may be classified with respect to certain recurring themes (e.g., monsters, death, the supernatural). But the genre is probably most clearly defined by its goal “to frighten and revolt the audience” (Kawin, 2012, p. 4). In other words, “we are meant to be frightened” by horror movies (Clarens, 1967/1997, p. xviii). The present article looks at how metaphors help in creating fear.

I will investigate horror movies from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2002, 2005; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theory surmises that the metaphors encountered in everyday language are reflections of underlying metaphorical conceptualization. Metaphorical linguistic expressions are understood as being motivated by underlying *conceptual* metaphors. Thus, metaphor reaches beyond language, for example, by being expressed in different forms of media (e.g., Forceville, 2008; Forceville & Renckens, 2013; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Ortiz, 2011).

A great deal of work has looked at how metaphors can be expressed multi-modally (Forceville, 2006, 2008), for example, via dialogue, via images, via text, or via sound and music. Some of these multi-modal representations may be novel and innovative metaphors. Others may be culturally entrenched, that is, they exist also within the cultural system of metaphors writ large (Forceville, 2008). Such “embedded” metaphors correspond to metaphors found in language (Forceville, 2008, pp. 474–476). In this article, I look at multi-modal metaphorical representations of two such embedded metaphors: “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*.” The article will analyze mappings between the source domains of “*VERTICALITY*” (low vs. high) and “*DARKNESS*” (bright vs. dark) with the target domain of negative affect.

The target domain is intentionally left somewhat vague: For example, there are numerous vertical metaphors (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, Ch. 4; Kövecses, 2002, pp. 35–36), including “*HAPPY IS UP/SAD IS DOWN*,” “*HEALTHY IS UP/SICK IS DOWN*,” “*POWER IS UP/SUBMISSION IS DOWN*,” and “*VIRTUE IS UP/LACK OF VIRTUE IS DOWN*.” What’s shared between these different metaphors is that upward orientation goes together with positive evaluation; downward orientation with negative evaluation (Kövecses, 2002, p. 36). In the context of horror movies, it will suffice to call the metaphors “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*,” bearing in mind that these metaphors are intended to also encompass such phenomena as “*FEAR*” and “*DEATH*.”

Both “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” are so-called “primary metaphors” (Grady, 1997), that is, basic metaphors that arise through experiencing environmental correlations, or through experiencing particular emotions in certain contexts. For example, with respect to negative associations with darkness, many children experience fear of darkness (King, Ollendick, & Tonge, 1997; Muris, Merckelbach, Meesters, & Van Lier, 1997), a fear that is perhaps innate (Mineka & Öhman, 2002) because it protects us from dangers that may lie within the darkness. Darkness is indeed dangerous for humans—this applies to cities, where street lighting is inversely associated with crime prevalence (Pease, 1999), as well as to the natural world, where most man-eating predators attack at night (Packer, Swanson, Ikanda & Kushnir, 2011). In general, we are more vulnerable to attacks when it is dark, and we are also more likely to stumble, trip, or hurt ourselves (cf. discussion in Forceville & Renckens, 2013, p. 163). Thus, darkness is, in fact, correlated with negative matters such as danger and fear. This is what ultimately motivates the conceptual metaphor and linguistic expressions such as “These are *dark* times” and “She has a *dark* personality,” or conversely, “*Brighten* up!” and “Her face was *bright* with happiness” (Kövecses, 2002, p. 85).

Negative associations with low vertical position are thought to stem from a different set of environmental correlations. When feeling sad or “down,” people may physically assume a lower position, such as lowering their head. And when somebody is small, looking “up” to others, then one is (generally) also in a physically inferior position: Tall people who, by virtue of their height, look down on others, tend to be more in control. We may also experience how powerful people tend to be physically located above us (e.g., CEOs frequently have their offices at the top of company buildings). These correlations and experiences are thought to motivate such expressions as “I’m feeling *down* today” or “That was a *low-down* thing to do” (Kövecses, 2002, p. 36).

Psychological studies reveal the underlying conceptual nature of both of these metaphors: For example, Adams and Osgood (1973) showed that participants from over 20 countries consistently associated dark colors with negative feelings and bright colors with positive feelings. Sherman and Clore (2009) asked participants to name words presented in different font colors;

participants were quicker to name a font color to be “black,” if the concomitant word denoted a relatively immoral concept (e.g., the word *greed*), and they were quicker to name a font color to be “white,” if the concomitant word was relatively more moral (e.g., *honesty*). More generally, negative words are more quickly recognized when printed in black font as opposed to white font (Meier, Robinson, & Clore, 2004). Finally, Meier, Robinson, Crawford, and Ahlvers (2007) showed that positively valenced words were perceived as *physically* brighter than negatively valenced words.

Mental associations between negative affect and low vertical positions have similar support from experimental research. Being depressed selectively draws visual attention downwards (Meier & Robinson, 2006), and positive words are more quickly recognized when presented in a high position on a computer screen (Meier & Robinson, 2004). Moreover, when participants were asked to indicate the location of previously seen words, they tend to *misremember* them to be positioned higher if the word was positive, and lower if the word was negative (Crawford, Margolies, Drake, & Murphy, 2006). With respect to the related metaphor “POWER IS UP,” Schubert (2005) showed that words for relatively powerless groups, such as employees, are recognized more quickly when presented in a low position on a screen as opposed to powerful groups, such as employers or bosses (see also Giessner & Schubert, 2007). Finally, “DIVINITY” is also “UP”: Meier, Hauser, Robinson, Friesen, and Schjeldahl (2007) showed that god-related words are understood more quickly in a high position, and devil-related words in a low position. Together, this work shows that we negatively valence “DARKNESS” and “DOWN-NESS.” The experimental literature suggests that these associations are part of people’s cognitive makeup and can become activated automatically. The analysis below will show that these associations are also expressed in horror movies.

I will first focus on “EVIL IS DOWN,” looking specifically at the movies *The Cabin in the Woods*, *Aftershock*, *The Gate*, and the three cave movies *The Descent*, *The Cave*, and *The Cavern*. I will then show that “EVIL IS DOWN” is also expressed across a larger set of horror movies. Next, I will briefly show that “EVIL IS DARK” is similarly expressed across many different horror movies. A list of all movies considered is given in Appendix A. Then, I will discuss *why* these two metaphors feature so prominently in horror movies. Finally, I will show how the present analysis supports a view that “takes metaphor out of the head and into the cultural world” (Gibbs, 1999).

“EVIL IS DOWN”

The Cabin in the Woods

In *The Cabin in the Woods*, a group of five young men and women spend a weekend in a remote cabin. The movie progresses along a vertical axis (Figure 1). First, the group discovers an eerie basement below the cabin, full of ancient items, including old toys and books. One of the characters reads from a book they find, which unleashes an evil force. Thus, the evil is triggered *beneath* ground level. After a lot of action set above ground, the group discovers that there is a laboratory complex *below* the cabin. The friends soon find themselves trapped and they can only try to escape via entering the underground laboratory. Down there, more monsters are unleashed as the story progresses towards its climax. Finally, the group discovers that *further down below*

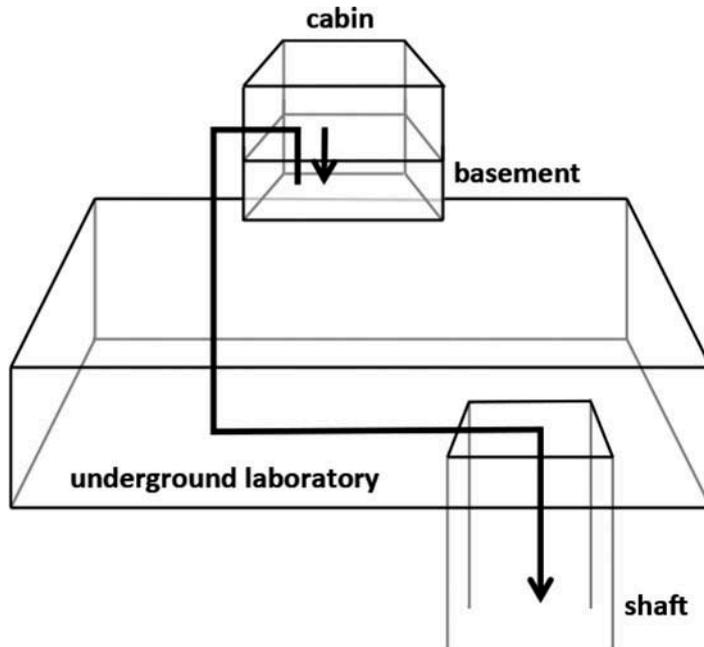


FIGURE 1 A schematic view of the spatial layout of *The Cabin in the Woods*. The story progresses downward: First the basement, then the underground laboratory, finally the shaft to the underworld.

the underground laboratory, there is a deep vertical shaft that leads to some kind of underworld, where an ancient evil force lies dormant.

We can thus see that *The Cabin in the Woods* has an overarching vertical structure. Progressively more evil beings are at progressively lower depths. As mentioned by Kövecses (2002, p. 57), “films may be structured in their entirety in terms of conceptual metaphors.” Here, verticality is a spatial scheme that unfolds across an entire feature film.

Aftershock

The movie *Aftershock* revolves around the theme of the breakdown of human civilization. The narrative follows a group of tourists in Chile. The group is first shown above ground and during daytime, going to an open-air rave and visiting a vineyard. At nighttime, the group parties in a club located in a basement (see Figure 2). While they are there, an earthquake hits the city. Parts of the ceilings crash down and furniture falls over, killing many people in the club. Panic spreads and the group escapes *upward*, out of the basement club. Once outside, the group learns that a tsunami is expected to follow the earthquake. So they need to move higher. Moreover, because one of the protagonists was injured in the basement, the group has to find a hospital—and this is located at the top of a hill. The hospital up the hill signifies hope, the target to be reached.

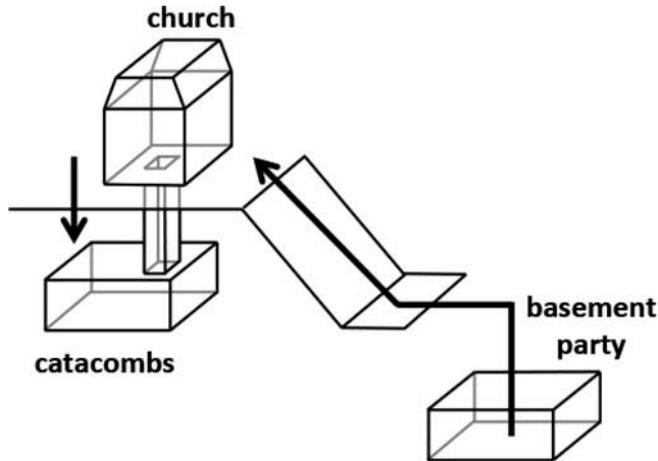


FIGURE 2 A schematic view of the spatial layout of *Aftershock*. The earthquake hits when the group is partying underground. The group wants to reach the top of the hill. The final scenes of the movie take place in the catacombs below a church.

The group never reaches the hospital. Instead, they are chased by criminals who managed to escape prison because of the earthquake. On the top of the hill, the remaining survivors seek refuge in a church. When they enter the church, they move down a small set of stairs, and just as they are doing so, an aftershock of the earthquake hits the city. The group has no choice but to escape via tunnels located *below* the church. While the group is climbing down a long shaft that leads to these tunnels, another aftershock hits, and a character falls down and dies.

The final scenes take place in the tunnels below the church. By this time, the movie has already shown, violently, many of the wicked things that humans can do to each other when civilization breaks down. However, the movie adds another layer of violence and suspense: Down there, a character who seemed to be helping the group is revealed as a murderous lunatic who tries to rape and kill everybody left alive. The main protagonist's sister gets killed. And the group discovers an evil secret about the church: The nuns of the town, when they got pregnant, would kill their babies and bury them in catacombs beneath the church. Thus, some of the most psychologically horrifying aspects of the movie happen towards the end of the movie, just after the steepest decline.

At first sight, the group's largely upward path seems to contradict the idea that "*EVIL IS DOWN*." But, in fact, everything in the movie is consistent with the vertical scheme suggested by the metaphor: The characters *want* up, either to escape from the collapsing basement club, to flee from the tsunami, or to try to reach the hospital. In a way, the only hope the group has is to move upwards; otherwise they will be killed. Thus, "*GOOD IS UP*." The group, however, is *forced* to go down into the catacombs beneath the church. As the discussion below will highlight, *wanting up* but *being forced down* is something that characterizes many horror movies. It is a schema we have already encountered in *The Cabin in the Woods*, where, the characters definitely did not want to go down into the underground laboratory, but were left with no alternative.

The Gate

While the preceding two movies are relatively new and were directed with an adult audience in mind, *The Gate* is a children's horror movie from 1987. The story revolves around a hole that has opened up in the backyard of a family home. While the parents are gone for the weekend, the kids are haunted by demons emerging from the hole. The central theme of the movie is already vertical in a metaphor-consistent way, with evil coming from below the ground via a steep hole. But the movie does not stop there. *The Gate* furthermore provides excellent examples for how "individual images in a movie may be based on one or several conceptual metaphors" (Kövecses, 2002, p. 57).

The house that *The Gate* is set in has two floors and a basement. In one of the movie's most eerie scenes, the kids are forced to go down into the basement because the electricity has failed. The group is shown from below the staircase that leads down to the basement. The upwards tilted camera angle reinforces perceptions of verticality, as it gives a stronger impression of steepness. Beyond this, verticality is suggested by dialogue: Before the group enters the basement, one character mentions how afraid she is of going down there. This suggests that the characters, too, associate "DOWN" with fear.

It is well known that camera angles may express metaphorical concepts (cf. Ortiz, 2011; Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2012). In *The Gate*, vertical camera angles are used repeatedly throughout the movie. For example, Figure 3a shows a camera shot where the boy is looking from above into the dark hole in the backyard, followed by a shot from below (Figure 3b). Figures 3c and 3d show the first death scene; the family's pet dog has died. Again, this scene is shown both from above and from below, reinforcing difference in vertical positions. In Figure 3c, the main character holds

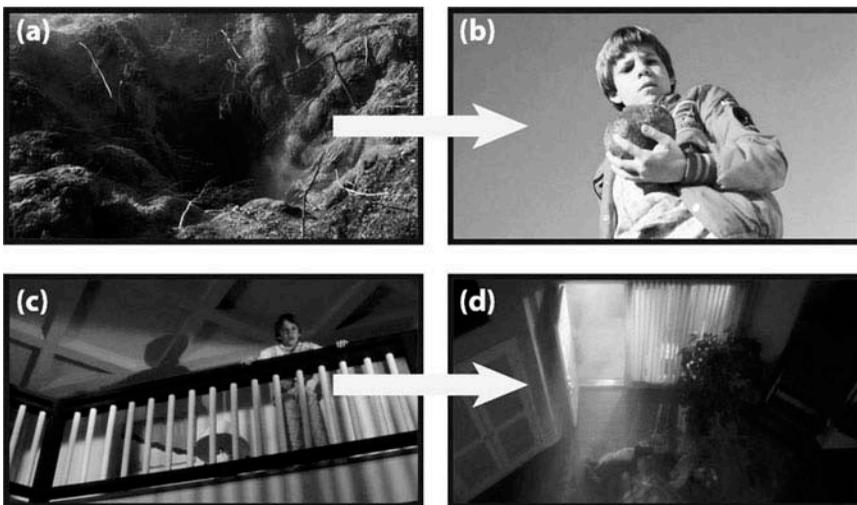


FIGURE 3 Consistent use of vertical camera angles. (a) Looking down into the dark hole in the backyard. (b) The main character from below. (c) Shot from the entrance hall below up to the second floor. (d) Character viewpoint shot from above onto scene in the entrance hall.

onto the second-floor railing, looking down at his friend in the entrance hall next to the dead dog. Then, we have a character viewpoint shot from the second floor, where we see his friend, mourning the death of his dog (Figure 3d). In both sequences, the relatively lower positions (the hole and the entrance hall floor) are negatively valenced, either because that is where evil beings come from (the hole), or where the first death of the movie happens (the entrance hall floor).

Another use of vertical camera angles is shown in Figure 4. Towards the end of the movie, a large demon breaks through the entrance hall floor. It is a huge figure; its sheer size is terrifying. It is far taller and more powerful than the kids—and this power differential is reinforced by the vertical orientation of the camera (“POWER IS UP”). First, the boy is shown on the ground of the second floor, leaning towards the wall (Figure 4a). The demon is looking down onto the boy. A second shot (Figure 4b) shows this scene with the camera located behind the boy. The steeply vertical camera angle leads to reverse foreshortening, where the demon’s size appears larger, making it appear even more intimidating.

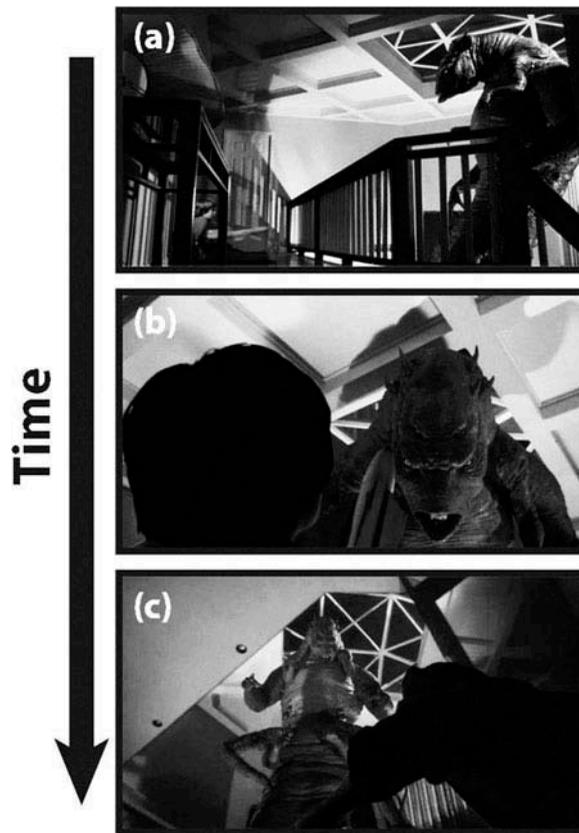


FIGURE 4 Progression of vertical shots visually reinforcing the power and size differential between the boy and the demon.

Then, after a brief skirmish, in one of the last interactions with the demon, the boy finds himself in an even lower position on the ground floor, with the demon being elevated all the way up to the second floor. So, for the climax, the vertical distance between the pair of them is now even larger, and reverse foreshortening creates an even more extreme impression of size. It is noteworthy that the camera angle and spatial setup become more vertical as the story moves towards its climax.

The sequence depicted in [Figure 4](#), however, is also problematic for the “EVIL IS DOWN” notion discussed so far. While the example may well show an instance of “POWER IS UP,” the demon in fact is shown as being above the child. Hence, it might appear that “EVIL IS UP” rather than “DOWN.” There are two things that can be responded to this alternative interpretation: First, even though the demon is shown in a high vertical position on the screen, it still originates from the deep shaft that presumably leads to the underworld. In fact, the demon’s body structure reinforces continuity to the underworld, as it has an elongated snake-like trunk that is fully connected to the pit where the demon comes from. This means that the power differential is displayed while at the same time keeping consistency with “EVIL IS DOWN.” Additionally, the sequence shown in [Figure 4](#) is also consistent with a more general mapping of negative affect to verticality (see discussion above and Kövecses, 2002, p. 36). The vertical camera angle highlights the inferiority of the children (for use of this device in other movies, see, Ortiz, 2011, pp. 1572–1573). Thus, physical inferiority—a negatively valenced state—is mapped onto a low position. Similar to what we have discussed with the movies *Aftershock* and *The Cabin in the Woods* above, the children do not *want* to be in that position, since it is not a good state to be in.

In fact, power differentials expressed through vertical angles are a recurring theme of *The Gate*: In many scenes, large ghouls look down onto the kids. And, many times, the camera angles show such scenes both from above and from below. In all of these instances, the use of vertical angles highlights the inferiority of the children. This cinematic device is especially effective precisely because all the characters of the movie are very young and hence very small anyway. Because of this, vertical subjective shots from the kids’ perspectives make enemies appear even larger.

After the demon is defeated, the camera reverts back to horizontal position, with no indication of verticality. This is in striking contrast to the vertical angles in the suspenseful scenes of the movie. The final shot shows the house and then pans upwards to the sky, thus ending the movie on a positive note (“HAPPY IS UP”).

Throughout the movie, there is a progression of verticality, just as in *The Cabin in the Woods* and in *Aftershock*: Towards the end of *The Gate*, the kids fall down into the hole in the backyard. Thus, closer towards the end of the movie, the protagonists are closer to where the evil lives. And, in the very final scene, there is an even steeper hole (the one that is broken into the entrance hall floor by the large demon). Thus, again, verticality is an overarching element of the narrative, and suggestions of verticality become stronger towards the end of the movie.

The Cave, The Descent, and The Cavern

In 2005, three horror movies were released that were all set in caves: *The Cave*, *The Descent*, and *The Cavern*. Despite being released in the same year and having a similar theme, the movies were supposedly produced independently of one other. And, surprisingly, they have striking similarities with respect to “EVIL IS DOWN”: All of the depicted caves go down deep. Talking about

The Descent, Kawin (2012, p. 90) characterizes the cave as “a dark, precipitous, claustrophobic underworld” that cannot be escaped. He calls the cave a “hell.” This description equally well applies to the other two movies.

Again, verticality is a crucial element of the overall spatial structure of these movies. The spatial setup of *The Cave* is schematized in Figure 5. Again, we see a vertical progression throughout the narrative. And again, the group is *forced* to go down at some point—they want to get up, out of the cave, but they have to confront the monster in the final scenes of the movie in the lowest cavern of the cave network.

In all three movies, the characters furthermore explicitly *comment* on the steepness of the vertical decline. Take, for example, the following exchange between two characters in *The Cave* that occurs after the movie’s monster has been revealed:

- A: Where to?
 B: Down.
 A: Sure?
 B: Yeah, down.

During this exchange, there are eerie sounds in the background. The question asker’s hesitation shows that the character—just like the viewer—is not expecting good to happen when they move further down. Moreover, the character who said “down” in the exchange above has previously been suggested to have evil ulterior motives (he is infected by the monster). Hence, evil is leading the group downwards, and this is expressed through dialogue.

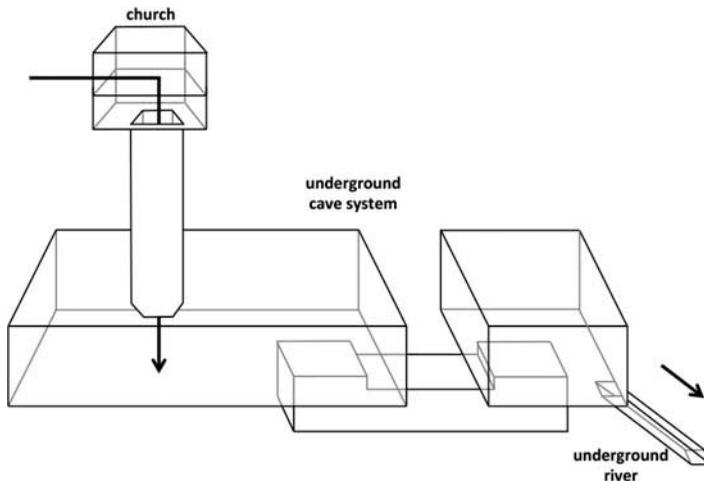


FIGURE 5 A schematic view of the spatial layout of *The Cave*. The church, itself located beneath a pile of debris, leads via a long shaft into an underground cave system. The protagonists delve deeper into the system, finally finding themselves sliding down an underground river into an even bigger cave.

Other Movies

So far, we have only discussed a handful of movies. While the consistency with which “*EVIL IS DOWN*” is expressed throughout these movies is compelling, of course, counter-examples easily come to mind. For example, some movies have monsters coming from *above* rather than below (e.g., *The Birds*, *Birdemic: Shock and Terror*), or they have an upwards-oriented trajectory, with the evil hiding at a high position (e.g., *[Rec]*, *[Rec] 2*).

However, a striking number of horror movies take place in underground settings, such as underground laboratories (e.g., *Resident Evil*, *The Devil’s Tomb*, *Doom*, *Eden Log*), underground bunkers (e.g., *The Bunker*, *Outpost*, *The Hole*), subway systems (e.g., *Mimic*, *Kontroll*, *Creep*, *Midnight Meat Train*) or mine shafts (e.g., *The Boogens*, *My Bloody Valentine 1981*, *My Bloody Valentine 2009*, *Sorority Row*).¹ Sewers, too, are a frequently used setting for horror movies: In *Alligator*, a baby alligator is flushed down a toilet in Chicago and grows to a gigantic size by eating escaped lab rats injected with growth hormones. In *C.H.U.D.* (short for Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dweller) homeless people mutate to zombie-like cannibals in the sewers. Finally, even ice-based settings—themselves not inherently vertical—get used to express “*EVIL IS DOWN*.” In *The Thing 1982* and *The Thing 2011*, two movies that play largely above ground, the alien actually was dug up from beneath the ice, which is similar for the movies *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* and *Nazis at the Center of the Earth*. Hence, the movies discussed in more detail above are only a subset of the many horror movies that play underground.²

Another example for this theme comes from the sub-genre “shark horror.” All shark horror movies have an element of “*EVIL IS DOWN*”: Sharks come from the water, from below; people are above them, on boats or on the ground. At some point, some character falls into the water. They do not want to be there (down with the shark), but they want to be out of the water, up on solid ground (“*GOOD IS UP*”).

So far, we have seen that many movies express “*EVIL IS DOWN*” in some way or another. More compellingly, exceptions prove the rule: Movies that largely play above ground, and that appear to have enemies that act above ground, may have the final confrontation happening underground (e.g., *Species*). The movie *Grave Encounters*, for example, plays in an abandoned asylum with most scenes being on ground level or upper floors; the final scenes happen in the tunnels below the mad house. *The Orphanage*, too, plays mostly above ground, except for the final (and most suspenseful) scenes in a dark underground basement. In *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*, the evil monsters come, as the title suggests, indeed from outer space and hence, from above. Yet, the final confrontation with the clowns happens deep down at the bottom of the clowns’ circus-shaped space ship that is buried into the soil.³ *Thanksgiving* plays almost exclusively above ground, but the evil turkey (the villain of the movie) is shown as emerging from the soil. Similarly, *Cockneys vs. Zombies* plays mostly above ground, but the zombies are shown to come

¹Note that for some of these movies, the narrative is upwards-oriented. However, consistent with “*EVIL IS DOWN*,” the characters generally *want* to go up (e.g., in *Eden Log*), and they usually don’t want to go down.

²Some other movies with underground themes include: *The Crypt*, *Graveyard Shift*, *Alligator II: The Mutation*, *Mimic 2*, *The Burrowers*, *Death Tunnel*, *Rats—Notte di terrore*.

³There is an additional element of verticality when the group is standing on an elevated position with alien clowns swarming from all directions. This is another trope consistent with “*EVIL IS DOWN*” that is seen in other movies as well (e.g., *La horde*).

from a lowered graveyard. Finally, even though *Sharknado* is all about a tornado that picked up a school of sharks that then fall out of the sky (hence from above), the sharks attack from below in most of the movie's scenes.

In brief, horror movies frequently exploit space beneath the surface, either as the place from which evil emerges, or as the place to which protagonists have to go to confront evil. Underground laboratories, bunkers, sewers, mine shafts, caves and other underground settings all reflect the mapping "EVIL IS DOWN." The sheer number of downwards-oriented horror movie settings is striking and suggests that the horror movie genre indeed reflects "EVIL IS DOWN" in metaphor-consistent ways.

Moreover, Eggertsson and Forceville (2009, p. 430) and Forceville and Renckens (2013) emphasize that many cinematic metaphors are repeatedly reflected throughout a film, something that in the context of literature has been dubbed "megametaphor" (Kimmel, 2009). We have seen this throughout all of the detailed discussions above. Such recurring and metaphor-consistent use of a source domain is important: It shows that within a given movie, the association of verticality and negativity is not merely coincidental but, in fact, systematic.

"EVIL IS DARK"

It almost goes without mentioning that horror movies tend to be set in dark places. Darkness pervades all the movies that we have discussed above: In *The Cabin in the Woods* and *The Gate* the evil monsters first attack at night. In *Aftershock*, the earthquake hits at night. And, *The Cave*, *The Cavern* and *The Descent* are all set in underground caves that are not only deep but also dark.

In many horror movies, the evil emerges only when it becomes dark (e.g., the zombies in *28 Days Later*). Or, the evil can only move toward where there is darkness (like in most vampire movies). Often, in the final scenes, light sources die out, and characters frequently comment on the absence of light. The mysterious and scary nature of darkness is frequently reinforced through dialogue, such as when a character from *The Cavern* says: "When you're down there, you're in darkness—an eternal never ending world of night (. . .)" In more classic movies, too, "EVIL IS DARK" is exploited, for example via the use of shadows (Ortiz, 2011, pp. 1571–1572; see also Forceville & Renckens, 2013).

And, just as with "EVIL IS DOWN," exceptions prove the rule: For example, the movie *The Mist* plays—at first—during daytime, when a small town is being filled with a mysterious mist that makes people disappear. While the mist itself is already eerie and mysterious, the first monster attack happens in a dark warehouse. And, the first big attack of many monsters happens at night. Another good "counter-example" is *Children of the Corn*, a horror movie that plays largely at daytime. Yet, suspense is generated when characters move inside where there is less light, and the climax happens at night. Thus, many horror movies are dark or reserve darkness for final confrontations with evil beings.

WHAT EXPLAINS THE FREQUENCY OF "EVIL IS DOWN" AND "EVIL IS DARK"?

The preceding discussion showed that the two metaphors "EVIL IS DOWN" and "EVIL IS DARK" are prominent aspects of many horror movies. Given this, we need to ask the question:

Why do these two metaphors occur so often? Here, I want to propose that at least two factors play a role. First, the effectiveness of such metaphors in creating an atmosphere of fear. Second, at a more trivial level, practical movie-making issues.

As said above, horror movies center on fear. As Dietle (2011) notes, “Horror isn’t complicated. You find out what makes your audience uncomfortable and present it to them in the most unsettling way possible.” Hence, anything that creates fear is welcome when a horror movie is being made. We already know from the psychological research mentioned above that people automatically associate “*DOWN-NESS*” and “*DARKNESS*” with negative feelings. Moreover, research has shown that darkness may reinforce startle reflexes (Grillon, Pellowski, Merikangas, & Davis, 1997).

Besides the (perhaps biologically conditioned) association between darkness and fear, as well as between darkness and startle reflexes, “*DOWN-NESS*” and “*DARKNESS*” have a common denominator: Things that are below oneself (e.g., in the water, or in the ground) generally cannot be seen easily. The same applies to things obscured by the dark. As people are generally afraid of the unknown, horror movies may be tapping into mental associations between knowing and seeing, or, in other words, the metaphor “*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 48). This metaphor, too, is culturally very entrenched and highly motivated, and it has been shown to be frequently expressed in movies as well (Ortiz, 2011, p. 1576). By virtue of being consistent with “*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*,” the way in which “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” are used in horror movies may be even more efficient in creating fear. Specifically with respect to water-related horror movies (such as shark horror), this connection has been made explicit by Kawin (2012, p. 79):

There is room in the water for things to grow to great size or great numbers without being detected; their stories begin when they become threats to humanity, whether the people are on boats or in coastal cities. The water is a natural cover, a hiding place and a source for the monster. Though it may have a placid surface, the water radiates danger and concealed horror.

The crucial aspect here is that being beneath the water surface *conceals* the monster. The same applies to being below ground or being wrapped in darkness. A similar connection between “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*” occurs in the many horror movies where something evil is hidden in the basement by a family or an individual, such as in *Frontier(s)*, *Martyrs*, *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*, *The Loved Ones* or *Fresh Meat*. An average home, for example, is not suitable for *hiding* a victim. But a basement is. Hence, the aspect of low vertical position and the aspect of *concealing* go hand in hand.

We may surmise that if moviemakers use cinematic devices that are consistent within the general cultural context, the efficiency of those devices is enhanced. In the case of, “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*,” the audience already comes with the culturally formed *expectations* that bad events are going to happen when the characters are going down or into the dark. If it is not obvious enough from the visuals alone, sometimes the characters are verbally expressing these expectations, as discussed above for the movies *The Cave*, *The Gate* and *The Cavern*, where characters talk about darkness or the steepness of a decline.

The expectations created by “*DARKNESS*” and “*DOWN-NESS*” alone may create fear. We know, for example, that anticipating bad things can lead to increased sensitivity to shock (Jovanovic et al., 2005). Kawin (2012, p. 9) notes that showing something explicitly “can horrify, but so can an *idea*, an atmosphere or an implication.” Similarly, Forceville (2006) points out that

metaphors do not always have to show us both target and source domain. A knowing audience is able to fill in the missing pieces.

This discussion highlights that in addition to culturally formed expectations, genre knowledge plays a role. When people watch a horror movie, they are usually aware of watching a horror movie. “*DOWN*” and “*DARK*” would perhaps not be as bad if they watched something else. In a romantic movie, for example, a dimly lit room could equally well be signaling intimacy in a love scene. The same lighting conditions would prepare us for something bad to happen in a horror movie. Kawin (2012, p. 4) emphasizes the “determining effect of genre” on expectations in relation to the fear of water:

Imagine a scene in which two young lovers decide to go swimming in a remote lake. They don't see anyone around, and they feel safe. But this is not a horror movie, so they *are* safe.

In a similar vein, Forceville and Renckens (2013, p. 172) discuss that the effect of metaphor depends to some extent on “cooperation of the film viewer.” That is, metaphor is only effective relative to a viewer's understanding of the movie and the genre.

Besides the effectiveness in creating fear, another factor that likely explains the frequency of “*EVIL IS DARK*” and “*EVIL IS DOWN*” is the fact that these two metaphors can also be expressed cheaply. Cameras can easily be tilted upwards or downwards, and lights can easily be dimmed or switched off. Hence, darkness and verticality come with low production costs. Davis (2004, p. 195) mentions that “darkness comes cheap, and a director can afford as much as they want.” Darkness can furthermore offset low production values. For example, bad or cheap monster and make-up effects can be concealed by the dark. Caves, bunkers, sewers and other underground settings are furthermore doubly effective because in them, “*DOWN-NESS*” and “*DARKNESS*” are naturally correlated. Movie makers that decide to have a movie play underground may thus tap into the negative effects of two metaphors for the price of one.

To conclude this section, we have to recognize that a conglomerate of innate biological reflexes, cultural pre-conceptions and expectations, as well as connections to “*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*” may explain the effectiveness of “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” in creating fear in horror movies. In this sense, a metaphor in a movie is a means to an end, as a way of creating a specific reaction in the viewer. In the film world, however, any means to an end needs to be also evaluated with respect to its costs. Hence, darkness and verticality are especially useful as fear-creating devices, because not only are they effective, but also cheap.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

The preceding sections have shown that “primary metaphors can be and are expressed visually” (Ortiz, 2011, p. 1579). This shows yet again that “metaphors are just as much cultural as they are cognitive entities and processes” (Kövecses, 2005, p. 11). In other words, horror movies provide converging evidence for the underlying *conceptual* (and not merely linguistic) nature of metaphors, in line with work that has been conducted for other genres and other media (Forceville, 2006; Ortiz, 2011).

Gibbs (1999) emphasizes how metaphors are often considered as something internal. Instead, he suggests that we should take “metaphor out of the head and into the cultural world.” The

present study can be viewed as an example of this approach. In this section, I outline possible effects of cultural metaphorical representations. I want to propose that in general, cultural manifestations of metaphor may have at least three different but related effects:

1. *Elaborating*: Cultural representations may elaborate on existing metaphors, enriching them with specific examples.
2. *Reinforcing and maintaining*: Cultural representations may strengthen metaphors in the minds of the people who witness these representations, which helps to keep metaphors alive.
3. *Creating and re-creating*: Cultural representations may create new metaphors or re-create old metaphors in the minds of new generations (see the following discussion).

The elaborating function of cultural representations has frequently been noted. With any medium, there are medium-determined ways of cueing metaphors (Forceville, 2008, p. 463). Because cultural representations are necessarily different from verbal language as a medium of metaphorical expression, these other representations create a diversity of metaphorical encoding. It is one thing, for example, to hear the phrase “he is *down* today”—which provides a specific linguistic instance of the metaphor “*SAD IS DOWN*.” It is an entirely different thing to *see* metaphors expressed in camera angles, or to experience them expressed over the course of an entire feature film. In the case of horror movies, we can say that different horror movies *elaborate* on the primary metaphors that we considered. In doing so, they provide specific memorable examples of those metaphors. These different representations may also “naturalize” the metaphors they reflect (Forceville, 2008, p. 473): The cinematic medium can physically instantiate “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” in real space and time, making them more tangible and perhaps more memorable. Expressions of metaphors in verbal language are not as concrete.

Elaboration may also *reinforce* those metaphors. *Seeing* a movie that expresses “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” reminds the viewer of these associations. The effect of this cannot easily be quantified, but it should not be underestimated. Take, for example the mainstream superhero movies *The Dark Knight Rises* and *The Amazing Spider-Man*, both of which screened in 2012. The movies had millions of viewers worldwide (this is reflected, e.g., in international box office sales: *The Dark Knight Rises*: \$1,084.4M; *The Amazing Spider-Man*: \$752.2M⁴). Both movies feature evil coming from underground: Batman’s nemesis, Bane, emerges from a pit and attacks the city from the sewer. And when Dr. Curt Connors becomes lizard man (Spiderman’s nemesis), he moves underground into the sewers from where he subsequently operates. Because millions of people have seen these movies across the globe, millions of people have also been reminded that—at least in our cultural conceptions—evil lives underground. This means that the mental association between verticality and fear/evil has been strengthened in the minds of millions of people just through these two movies alone. Horror movies that reflect “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” may have a similar effect on many other viewers.

Something else to consider about the reinforcing and maintaining aspect of cultural representations is that they may be more emotionally involving than purely linguistic ones (cf. Forceville, 2008, p. 463). This emotional involvement is apparent in the case of horror movies, where we

⁴<http://www.boxofficemojo.com> (retrieved March 3, 2014).

are being reminded of “EVIL IS DOWN” and “EVIL IS DARK” in a particularly intense fashion, namely, via fear and shock.

Metaphorical concepts are furthermore *stabilized* through external representations. A cultural representation can provide a “material anchor” (Hutchins, 2005), or, in the case of horror movies, a concrete visual representation that serves as an easily accessible version of a mental construct. Hutchins (2005) makes a similar proposal for conceptual blending theory, where he discusses how material structures can anchor and hence stabilize blends. Here, we might say that horror movies may play a role in anchoring and stabilizing “EVIL IS DOWN” and “EVIL IS DARK.” A second mechanism through which external representations stabilize metaphors is via storage and transmission. A movie can be stored and viewed by later generations, it can be reproduced and propagated. As such, even though an individual movie experience is ephemeral in nature, it is perhaps less ephemeral than a linguistic token. Both of these aspects—tangibility, as well as storage and reproducibility—may make the metaphors involved more stable, and may thus help in maintaining them within our culture.

If cultural representations, such as horror movies, can reinforce and maintain metaphors, can they maybe also create them? As discussed above, metaphor theorists generally think of primary metaphors as arising through embodied interactions with the world, such as experiencing environmental correlations (Grady, 1997; Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff, 1987). However, if a conceptual metaphor has come into existence through this process, the fact that it subsequently becomes expressed in culture, such as in the case of horror movies, means that culture provides a new set of “environmental” correlations for the next generation. After all, we grow up in an environment that is shaped not only by nature, but also by culture. If the conceptual systems of a generation forge cultural representations consistent with those systems, then similar conceptual systems will be re-created in the following generations that grow up with these representations.

Primary metaphors may participate in a cultural feedback loop, depicted in Figure 6. The figure is organized according to Kövecses’ (2002, Ch. 2) “three levels” of metaphor; he distinguishes

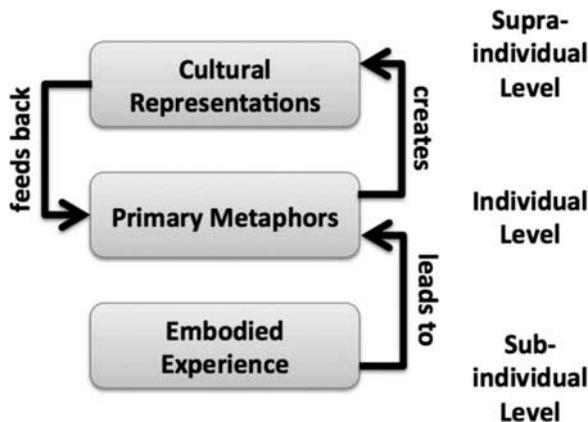


FIGURE 6 The three levels of metaphors discussed by Kövecses (2002) interact in creating and re-creating primary metaphors.

between the sub-individual level (the level of embodied experience and environmental correlations), the individual level (the level of individual conceptual representations), and the supra-individual level (the level of cultural representations and conventions, including language). The two primary metaphors “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” are presumably created through embodied experience in the individual, perhaps reinforced through innate fears. Children’s nighttime fears, for example, are evidence for an early development of negative emotional associations with darkness. In Kövecses’ terms, these associations come from the sub-individual. However, the fact that *previous generations* have already undergone the process of building up the mental associations at the individual level becomes important when these previous generations create metaphorical representations. These cultural manifestations of metaphors are located at the supra-individual level, but they may “feed back” into the conceptual systems of new generations that are exposed to such manifestations.

Such a perspective is consistent with those offered by Hutchins (2005, 2010), Gibbs (1999) and others. Hutchins (2010), for example, speaks of “cognitive ecology,” which he defines as “the study of cognitive phenomena in context.” Here, we have looked at metaphor in a cultural context. Metaphors are not just seen as stemming from embodied correlations (which is the most frequently held view), but also from witnessing and interacting with cultural representations of those primary metaphors. Going further, we may view metaphor not just as being a purely cognitive phenomenon, but instead, as a phenomenon that is spread across Kövecses’ sub-individual, individual and supra-individual levels. In other words: Metaphors are not in any one place, such as in the mind, in language, or in cultural representations, but they are, instead, spread across the “three levels” of metaphor. Like many other cognitive phenomena that are not solely located within the head, but that instead arise through environment-organism interactions (Hutchins, 1995), metaphor is essentially *distributed* in nature.

Horror movies are just one example of this general process. They are ideal in exemplifying how the two primary metaphors “*EVIL IS DOWN*” and “*EVIL IS DARK*” are culturally reflected in a specific medium. In reflecting these metaphors, horror movies also partake in elaborating, reinforcing and re-creating the underlying metaphorical associations. Thus, together with other cultural representations, horror movies participate in the cultural feedback loop.

CONCLUSIONS

Metaphors exist not just in language, not just in individual conceptual systems, but also in cultural representations. Horror movies provide a large set of specific examples where the two primary metaphors “*EVIL IS DARK*” and “*EVIL IS DOWN*” are seen in action. I have argued that this is important because viewing horror movies that express metaphor affects the conceptual metaphors in the viewer’s mind. Ultimately, this article presented evidence for the distributed nature of metaphor, where metaphor is manifested across different levels. Thus, in conjunction with many other cultural representations, horror movies play a role in maintaining and potentiating metaphor within the larger cultural system. Looking at horror movies thus provides one key example of how culture embellishes and reinforces metaphor.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1
List of Movies Discussed

<i>Movie Title</i>	<i>Release Year</i>	<i>Director</i>
<i>[Rec]</i>	2007	Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza
<i>[Rec] 2</i>	2009	Jaume Balagueró, Paco Plaza
<i>28 Days Later</i>	2002	Danny Boyle
<i>Aftershock</i>	2012	Nicolás López
<i>Alligator</i>	1980	Lewis Teague
<i>Alligator II: The Mutation</i>	1991	Jon Hess
<i>AVP: Alien vs. Predator</i>	2004	Paul W. S. Anderson
<i>Birdemic: Shock and Terror</i>	2010	James Nguyen
<i>Children of the Corn</i>	1984	Fritz Kiersch
<i>C.H.U.D.</i>	1984	Douglas Cheek
<i>Cockneys vs. Zombies</i>	2012	Matthias Hoene
<i>Creep</i>	2004	Christopher Smith
<i>Death Tunnel</i>	2005	Philip Adrian Booth
<i>Doom</i>	2005	Andrzej Bartkowiak
<i>Eden Log</i>	2007	Franck Vestiel
<i>Evil Dead</i>	1981	Sam Raimi
<i>Fresh Meat</i>	2012	Danny Mulheron
<i>Frontier(s)</i>	2007	Xavier Gens
<i>Grave Encounters</i>	2011	The Vicious Brothers
<i>Graveyard Shift</i>	1990	Ralph S. Singleton
<i>Gremlins</i>	1984	Joe Dante
<i>Jaws</i>	1975	Steven Spielberg
<i>Killer Klowns from Outer Space</i>	1988	Stephen Chiodo
<i>Kontroll</i>	2003	Nimród Antal
<i>La Horde</i>	2009	Yannick Dahan, Benjamin Rocher
<i>Martyrs</i>	2008	Pascal Laugier
<i>Midnight Meat Train</i>	2008	Ryûhei Kitamura
<i>Mimic</i>	1997	Guillermo del Toro
<i>Mimic 2</i>	2001	Jean de Segonzac
<i>My Bloody Valentine</i>	1981	George Mihalka
<i>My Bloody Valentine</i>	2009	Patrick Lussier
<i>Nazis at the Center of the Earth</i>	2012	Joseph J. Lawson
<i>Outpost</i>	2007	Steve Barker
<i>Rats - Notte di terrore</i>	1984	Bruno Mattei
<i>Resident Evil</i>	2002	Paul W.S. Anderson
<i>Severance</i>	2006	Christopher Smith
<i>Sharknado</i>	2013	Anthony C. Ferrante
<i>Sorority Row</i>	2009	Stewart Hendler
<i>Species</i>	1995	Roger Donaldson
<i>Thanksgiving</i>	2009	Jordan Downey
<i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i>	2012	Marc Webb
<i>The Birds</i>	1963	Alfred Hitchcock
<i>The Boogens</i>	1981	James L. Conway
<i>The Bunker</i>	2011	Rob Green
<i>The Burrowers</i>	2008	J. T. Petty

(Continued)

TABLE A1
(Continued)

<i>Movie Title</i>	<i>Release Year</i>	<i>Director</i>
<i>The Cabin in the Woods</i>	2012	Drew Goddard
<i>The Cave</i>	2005	Bruce Hunt
<i>The Cavern</i>	2005	Olatunde Osunsanmi
<i>The Crypt</i>	2009	Craig McMahon
<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i>	2012	Christopher Nolan
<i>The Descent</i>	2005	Neill Marshall
<i>The Devil's Tomb</i>	2009	Jason Connery
<i>The Gate</i>	1987	Tibor Takács
<i>The Hole</i>	2009	Joe Dante
<i>The Human Centipede (First Sequence)</i>	2009	Tom Six
<i>The Loved Ones</i>	2009	Sean Byrne
<i>The Mist</i>	2007	Frank Darabont
<i>The Orphanage</i>	2007	J. A. Bayona
<i>The Thing</i>	1982	John Carpenter
<i>The Thing</i>	2011	Matthijs van Heijningen
<i>Vanishing on 7th Street</i>	2010	Brad Anderson

Note. Director names appear as in credits.