Space Inversion: Haunting Gentrification in DaCosta's *Candyman*

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Introduction

With the release of Nia DaCosta's 2021 *Candyman* film, numerous reviews and online comparisons to the 1992 Bernard Rose movie have appeared. In what follows, I hope to add to that conversation by demonstrating the ways in which DaCosta inverts key aspects of the original film and the scholarly tradition preceding the new movie, particularly in the areas of race, gender, class, and place. I argue that these inversions are most powerfully represented by the idea of gentrification, since the legend of Candyman is firmly linked to a specific location. By inverting the neighborhood in this way, DaCosta engages with the same ideas as the first movie while highlighting the importance of place in the Candyman universe. The place in this instance is the former Chicago housing project called Cabrini-Green. I argue that the way in which Candyman's legend circulates, gains strength, and sustains his being necessitates the degradation of the space in which he dwells. This ghostly monster thrives only if his urban locale suffers, but DaCosta uses the trope of inversion to offer hope that Candyman can be turned against those who originate and perpetuate the cycle of violence in Cabrini-Green.

Bernard Rose's 1992 *Candyman*, starring Virginia Madsen and Tony Todd, adapts Clive Barker's 1985 short story, 'The Forbidden.'[1] In the film, Madsen's Helen Lyle is a white female graduate student studying the semiotics of graffiti in the context of folklore and mythography. In exploring the real-life Chicago housing project Cabrini-Green, she encounters the legend of Candyman (Tony Todd), a hook-handed thrasher summoned by saying his name five times while looking into a mirror. Helen becomes entangled in Candyman's machinations and eventually perishes in a bonfire while saving a baby who had been abducted by him.

In Nia DaCosta's 2021 sequel of the same name, we encounter a contemporary Cabrini-Green that has been gentrified into an upscale living and shopping area. Remnants of the old housing project are boarded up and seemingly abandoned by all but the most marginalized. Yahya Abdul-Mateen II portrays Anthony, an artist living with his girlfriend, Bri (Teyonah

Parris), a rising star in the world of art gallery management. Anthony becomes obsessed by the events portrayed in the first film and summons Candyman in the mirror. He subsequently discovers that he was the baby saved by Helen Lyle and is manipulated by a long-time resident of Cabrini-Green, Billy (Coman Domingo), into becoming the latest sacrifice that will replenish the legend. Anthony and Bri escape Billy only to encounter the police, who shoot Anthony to death and attempt to pressure Bri into corroborating their story that he had been the aggressor. Bri defiantly summons Candyman in the police car's rearview mirror, and Anthony appears in Candyman guise and kills the officers. In a brief encounter before he disappears, Anthony morphs into Tony Todd's version of Candyman from the first film and advises Bri to 'tell everyone' (1:26:04).

A Focus on Race

As Adam Ochonicky (2020), Christopher Robinson (2021), and others observe, scholarship on both 'The Forbidden' and Bernard Rose's 1992 film adaptation has tended to focus on the topics of race, class, and gender. The Candyman stories consciously and intentionally focus their energies on exploring the social and urban realities related to these three vectors of scholarly criticism. Several key works relevant to these conversations will be held in abeyance for more thorough analysis in the following section. Touchstone publications by Judith Halberstam (1995), Aviva Briefel and Sianne Ngai (1996), Elspeth Kydd (1996), Antonis Balasopoulos (1997), Isabel Cristina Pinedo (1997), Laura Wyrick (1998), Diane Long Hoeveler (2007), Lucy Fife Donaldson (2011), Jessica Baker Kee (2015), Michael J. Blouin (2016), and Brigid Cherry (2016) make clear that the scholarship on *Candyman* has remained focused on issues of race, gender, and class across the three decades since the release of Rose's film.

Along those lines, concerns about race and gender are coded in DaCosta's film to match language used by cultural movements in the United States. Advertising for the film included the 1999 hit single "Say My Name" by Destiny's Child. An obvious reference to how Candyman can be summoned (speaking his name while looking in a mirror), variations of this phrase became rallying cries against racialized police violence. In 2014, the African American Policy Forum

(AAPF) created the hashtag #sayhername to highlight the intersectional nature of police violence against Black women. In 2020, this hashtag was adapted to #sayhisname in the wake of George Floyd's murder by police officer Derek Chauvin. Therefore, when Anthony's art show in the film is titled "Say My Name," the audience is presented with a multilayered reference to Anthony's own search for artistic fame, the practice of summoning Candyman, the current cultural movements against racialized and gendered police violence, and the longer history of racialized violence in the US.

One cultural zone in which this history of race and violence can be mapped is film. Robin R. Means Coleman (2011) traces the depiction of Black people in horror movies from the 1890s to the first decade of the 21st century. A primary distinction that animates Means Coleman's work on this topic separates "Blacks in horror" films from "Black horror" films. The former makes exploitative use of Blackness by portraying Black characters as bumbling fools, savage purveyors of violence, and fodder for the killer, monster, and so on. The latter, however, 'have an added narrative focus that calls attention to racial identity, in this case Blackness—Black culture, history, ideologies, experiences, politics, language, humor, aesthetics, style, music, and the like' (Means Coleman 2011: 7). This distinction underlies the remaining chapters in her book and provides a useful framework for clarifying my argument about the inversions that take place in DaCosta's film.

Although *Candyman* (2021) shares some salient features in common with the films discussed in Means Coleman's chapter on the 1970s horror films released 'during the rise of the Black Power movement' (2011: 11), the present argument more closely shares the focus on urbanism in her chapter on the 'Black horror' films of the 1990s. That chapter contains a discussion of the 1992 *Candyman* as an example of the 'Blacks in horror' films that flatten Blackness and participate in well-worn stereotypes. I argue that DaCosta's *Candyman* reverses this legacy by empowering the film's Black community. The final inversion in her film consists of Bri—a young Black woman—wielding the ghost that previously terrorized the Black community against the corrupt white police officers who killed Anthony. In this act, it becomes clear that the 2021 film is a nuanced take on Black identity and the attendant swirl of cultural issues that attend being Black in the United States. It therefore moves beyond the tokenism and

stereotypes used in 'Blacks in horror' films (including the first *Candyman*) and into the realm of 'Black horror' films.

More recently, Seán Travers continues the scholarly focus on these topics through a novel lens. Travers defines her new concept as follows:

> Polynarration features diverse groups of characters acquiring interconnectivity abilities that enable to supernaturally share traumatic experiences and help one another recover. This produces unique narratives where a singular traumatic event is told from a range of diverse perspectives as characters' consciousnesses and/or bodies amalgamate. (2022: 93)

The network of shared trauma in DaCosta's *Candyman* is the Hive: an amalgam of individuals comprising Candyman, Black men across time who experienced the most extreme trauma of violent death at the hands of authorities. This element of the film is why Travers considers it 'suitable for analysing in terms of polynarration' (2022: 122). In my view, polynarration not only represents a suitable lens for analysis but also highlights the film's connection to the concept of place. If Candyman exists as a combination of multiple people, the unifying factors in establishing his identity are the trauma and the place that these men share. Travers addresses the trauma angle, but the idea of place has yet to be fully explored.

The layered historical trauma associated with a particular place or community allows those affected by the trauma to name it, deal with it, and move on. In this instance, dealing with it means participating in apotropaic superstitions meant to ward off the ghost's presence. Similarly, to 'move on' means to live in fear of Candyman himself, but also of the communal, racially motivated trauma that created and sustains him. It is certainly a contradiction. The more the residents of Cabrini-Green deal with the problem of Candyman, the more they become mired in the hell he creates. As long as they are residents of Cabrini-Green, they will be caught in this impossible position of providing strength to the ghost through their belief and fear. In light of this layered, place-based expression of shared trauma, Travers observes, 'The Hive reflects Black communal healing' (2022: 125). Ultimately, she concludes that the coming together of

these various persons in the figure of Candyman results in a 'polyphonic narrative' that (Travers 2022: 129), much like online support communities, provides a path forward for talking about and processing the numerous communal traumas that comprise the whispered legend of Candyman.

While Travers highlights the diachronic nature of Candyman and his narrative(s), Christopher L. Robinson (2021) focuses on the ways in which Rose's *Candyman* represents a synchronic expression of a particular time and place. Summarizing some key points from Jeffery Jerome Cohen's classic 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)' (1996), Robinson points out that 'the monster is an embodiment of a given cultural moment,' and 'its body incorporates history, and the real-life political and social experiences that constitute that history' (2021: 415). In the same vein as Travers's polynarration, Robinson indicates that the monstrous figure of Candyman tells a narrative that transcends time due to its association with a place. Of the first *Candyman* film's immediate social context, he writes:

> *Candyman* was released in a year when racial tensions in the United States reached fever pitch. With the trial of the Central Park Five, the tensions that had built up over the 1980s came to a head. These same tensions boiled over yet again in the Rodney King riots three years [after the trial]. If the Central Park jogger case traumatized a city, the L.A. riots traumatized a nation. (2021: 416)

Robinson, then, positions the first film as firmly tied both to the late 1980s/early 1990s and to the United States. The trauma associated with that time—when government spending on social services all but dried up while drugs and crime pervaded many communities—is here portrayed as casting its shadow across the entire nation.

As Jon Towlson would put it, the US was at that time coming to terms with the return of the repressed issues left ignored and unattended throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and the violence of the late 1980s in particular that eventually led to landmark legislation in the 1990s (2018). The implication is that such traumas leave their indelible mark on the places where they happen and where their effects are felt most keenly, a common enough trope in the horror genre. Since the effect of the L.A. riots, for example, is national in scope, it is

likely not to be felt equally throughout the country. The space is simply too big. On the city level, however, one might begin to feel it more sharply. As Robinson indicates, the Central Park jogger case had traumatized New York without the same national reach as the later riots. Similarly, Candyman's relationship to the cycle of trauma in Cabrini-Green amplifies his ability to haunt the residents and to feed on their fear of and belief in him.

A Haunted Place

In order to develop the idea of Candyman's connection to a specific place, it is helpful to consider Adam Ochonicky's 2020 article, '"Something to be haunted by": Adaptive monsters and regional mythologies in "The Forbidden" and *Candyman*.' The quotation in the title comes from the penultimate sentence in the short story. As Helen burns in the bonfire, she searches the crowd for Trevor, hoping to catch his eye, 'Not so that he could save her from death—she was long past hope of that—but because she pitied him in his bewilderment and wanted to give him, though he would not have thanked her for it, something to be haunted by. That, and a story to tell' (Barker [1985] 2007: 37). Ochonicky draws the following distinction between the story and the film in reference to what it means to be haunted:

> For Barker, to 'be haunted' is linked to personal values and identity—that is, the state of being haunted is somewhat akin to having a conscience or perhaps simply denotes the ability to have empathy for others. By contrast, Rose's film broadens the condition of being haunted to include all those who witness grotesque violence, rather than the intimate and individualized scale of 'The Forbidden.' (2020: 103).

Rose's movie, therefore, more firmly embraces the notion that traumatic violence is shared by the community, requiring the kind of communal healing that Travers describes. In shifting to the community, Rose also indicates that place figures prominently in this story. The nation is too large to be haunted acutely, and the individual can (usually) move to a new community to escape a haunting.

In the Rose and DaCosta films, Candyman generally does not venture beyond his boundaries on Chicago's North Side. He remains with the place to such an extent that Ochonicky notes, 'The relationships of Candyman to place and legend are the defining features of this supernatural entity' (2020: 108). In accommodating himself to the site of original violent trauma, Candyman reveals his nature as an 'adaptive monster,' which are 'horrific beings who assume symbolic attributes of the historical, cultural, and/or spatial environments into which they are adapted' (2020: 104). It makes sense that those symbolic attributes would be more specific to a city or neighborhood than to a country or region. As Ochonicky observes in pointing out the distinction between Barker's fictional housing estate and Rose's real-life Chicago project, 'The story's somewhat imprecise setting underscores that the original version of Candyman haunts a general *type* of place (public housing sites), whereas the film associates its central monster with a very particular location' (2020: 109). The next consideration, then, in the telescoping of place in the scholarly conversation about *Candyman* is the role played by the city and the neighborhood.

It would be impossible to tell an authentic version of Barker's story without engaging in discussion and onscreen dialogue about gender and class. Race became a significant part of this story in the 1992 movie, when Candyman was portrayed as a Black man. As mentioned previously, the setting also changed from a run-down housing estate in Liverpool to a public-housing ghetto in Chicago. On the implications of this alteration, Ochonicky observes, 'By changing the location of the narrative and the background of Candyman, Rose adds overt commentary on the history of race—especially racialized violence—within the United States to Barker's concerns with gender and class' (2020: 109). Although the original setting in England provides ample opportunity for Barker to raise issues of gender and class, the film's new setting invokes a specifically American version of racial violence. In directing a sequel, DaCosta inherits an overarching narrative that addresses the topics of gender and class but that also binds issues of race to a particular place. She preserves this framework and tropes it thematically and stylistically in the form of multiple inversions.

DaCosta's Inversions

The first of these inversions encountered by the viewer can be found in the opening credits. In Rose's film, the opening credit sequence is shot from above, a perspective to which he returns to emphasize what Stacy Abbott describes as 'a segregation [that] is repeatedly visualized via the overhead shots of the highway that separates the university and high-rise condo locations from the urban deprivation of the projects' (2018: 75). The audience is a celestial observer, seeing the situation from on high—much like Helen, whom 'both versions of the narrative consistently frame […] as a self-serving interloper who callously exploits the living conditions of public housing residents in order to develop her project and, as she openly aspires, to advance her career' (Ochonicky 2020: 104).

Before the film even begins, DaCosta announces that inversion will feature prominently by showing mirror images of the studio logos for Universal, MGM, Bron, and Monkeypaw. From there, the opening credits place the viewer on the ground looking upward at the Chicago skyline, in contrast to Rose's bird's-eye-view shot. The effect is twofold. For those familiar with the details of the 1992 film, this subtle nod to the previous movie will indicate that something new will be offered to a conversation with which they are already familiar. For this group as well as for new viewers with no experience of the earlier movie, the thematic importance of DaCosta's camera placement invites them to consider what role their perspective will play in the film that follows. That is, by placing the point-of-view shot at the street level, the director suggests that the audience will be less the distant academic observer like Helen and more a participant capable of identifying closely with Anthony's experience. This view also anchors the viewer more firmly to the Chicago setting, since we are shown a view that we might encounter in our daily lives: that of looking up at buildings rather than down on them from the air. Rose's top-down view displaces the audience from everyday experience and thereby makes us more aware of our status as outsiders like Helen. By inverting the placement of camera and audience, DaCosta not only tropes the approach taken by Rose but also hints that emplacement and perspective will be foregrounded in her film.

The second major inversion in DaCosta's film involves the gender, race, profession, and class aspirations of the main characters and their significant others. On the surface level, Helen is a white woman dating a white male professor who can help her career; in DaCosta's, Anthony is a Black man dating a Black female art dealer who can help his career. This inversion signals a perspective shift similar to the one in the opening credits. It is fairly clear from the beginning that this version of the story will be told primarily from a Black perspective, rather than that of a white person studying the Black community. Further, Anthony is an artist whose work comments on social issues such as police violence, lynching, slavery, and other institutionalized crimes against the Black community in the United States, and especially in a city with a history like Chicago's. Helen, by contrast, is a social scientist whose thesis focuses on the graffiti-style art in the predominantly Black Cabrini-Green. Both are focused on art; both engage with art as expressions of social realities and ideals. Both also struggle with their significant others over the authenticity of their pursuits. Helen clashes with Trevor when she begins to value the truth of the Candyman mythos more than the data it might generate for her thesis. In a similar fashion, Anthony's dedication to the truth of Candyman eventually drives away Bri, who would prefer that Anthony fall in line with her artworld colleagues for the advancement of both of their careers.

Unlike Trevor, however, Bri is at least partially redeemed in that she witnesses firsthand the truth of the Candyman story, and she proves able to wield the story against the corrupt cops who confine her in their vehicle and try to coerce her into saying that their killing of Anthony was justified. Candyman's injunction to 'tell everyone' (DaCosta 2021) indicates that Bri will be instrumental in keeping his story alive. These inversions of character allow DaCosta to sustain the theme of inversion and to use that theme as a mechanism to shift the storytelling perspective while maintaining enough similarities that the respective models are clear, further highlighting the chosen differences. We recognize Anthony as a version of Helen because of their commonalities; we understand DaCosta's directorial hand at work when we note the distinctions she makes. The same goes for Trevor and Bri: as always, identity and definition are produced through Derridean *différance*, which in this case also serves the director's editorial ends.

The most prevalent inversion takes the form of gentrification, a concept at the center of the series. DaCosta sets her film in a now-gentrified portion of the neighborhood that, in Rose's film, was portrayed as pure ghetto, as noted by Aviva Briefel and Sianne Ngai in their application of the label 'ghetto film' (1996: 76) to the 1992 *Candyman*. Buildings from that original Cabrini-Green remain in the 2021 film, but they are mostly boarded up, giving the sense of a traditional ghost town to match the contemporary haunting and the abandonment foreshadowed in the earlier movie. However, the former residents did not vacate the place willingly. The inexorable gears of gentrification grind the poor and marginalized at the behest of the rich and powerful. The former housing project was abandoned by those making political and financial decisions, not by those struggling to exist in American society. The look, function, and demographics change, then, through the common urban development practice of gentrification by the time of DaCosta's sequel to Rose's original film.

Yet Candyman remains. One explanation for his persistence lies in his connection to the place he haunts. Important structural and thematic elements of the original film can be changed (or inverted), but as long as the location is the same, he can continue feeding on the fear that strengthens his presence. DaCosta builds toward Candyman's connection to Chicago and Cabrini-Green through the inversions of perspective, character, and gentrification described above. First, she indicates that something about the perspective of the movie will be new by flipping the viewer's position during the opening credits. The audience is invited to see things differently than they did in Rose's film. Second, DaCosta inverts the gender and race of the main characters (and their romantic partners). This change clarifies to the audience the details of the shift in perspective indicated by the first inversion. In the 1992 movie, the audience's experience is mediated through the perspective of a white woman, but we see the events of *this* film from a Black man's viewpoint. Finally, we see the inversion of the Cabrini-Green neighborhood through gentrification. Despite all these differences, DaCosta seems to suggest, Candyman cannot be eradicated. We can take various perspectives: we can identify with the powerful, the powerless, and the ambitious. Society can attempt to erase the past by knocking down buildings and vacating certain areas. The communal trauma that Candyman represents and perpetuates, however, cannot be so easily set aside because the place is imbued with it. Cabrini-Green exists

in two forms simultaneously—one clearly degraded, the other glittering with surface-level affluence—both of which are equally haunted by Candyman.

Haunting Space and Place

The choice to portray Cabrini-Green as both an upscale artists' paradise and a boarded-up ruin of the former housing project also puts Anthony in a curious position as insider/outsider and emphasizes the centrality of place in the movie. Anthony and Bri technically live in the former Cabrini-Green neighborhood, but they both have careers in the arts that are on the rise and live in a luxurious apartment in post-gentrification 'safety.' They are not the traditional residents of that area (despite the fact that Anthony lived there as a baby) who face the deprivations of poverty, the violence of police and fellow residents, and the endemic cycle of factors causing intergenerational suffering and trauma. Anthony's take on gentrification is spelled out clearly in his interview with the art critic, Finley Stephens (played by Rebecca Spence). After initially being snidely critical of Anthony's art, Finley now appears excited at the prospect of his developing a new solo show based on Candyman:

> ANTHONY: I'm surprised at how positive your take on my piece seems to be now.
> FINLEY: Well, it grew on me.
> ANTHONY: Seemed like you didn't quite get it.
> FINLEY: No, I get it. It's the hood, gentrification, et cetera.
> ANTHONY: Artists gentrify the hood? Who do you think makes the hood? The city cuts off a community and waits for it to die. Then, they invite developers in and say, 'Hey, you artists, you young people, you white, preferably or only, please come to the hood, it's cheap. And if you stick it out for a couple of years, we'll bring you a Whole Foods.' (DaCosta 2012).

Anthony acknowledges his dual position as insider and outsider. He is a resident of Cabrini-Green (more than he realizes at that moment in the film), but he is also one of the artists he mentions who move in only after the developers give the all-clear. Viewed from this perspective,

the film's narrative becomes focused on Anthony's Oedipal search for knowledge of himself as both native of the original Cabrini-Green and as a member of The Hive, the group of Black men (and one white woman, Helen) who have been amalgamated into the image of the Candyman through acts of traumatic violence. Even the title of his work, 'Say My Name,' points to this blind search for what turns out to be his own identity.

Much as Oedipus could not escape his fated return to Thebes, Anthony is brought back to Cabrini-Green, as well as to the ghost with whom he has been linked since he was a baby in the original movie. In the character of Anthony, we see reaffirmed once again the inalienable connection between the place and the ghost. Despite the upscale changes in the neighborhood and his seemingly guaranteed entry into the artistic elite of Chicago, Anthony is pulled back to the same neighborhood where he lived and almost perished as an infant. Cabrini-Green is built on the site where Daniel Robitaille was tortured and lynched in a fire, transforming him into Candyman. Similarly, when Antony was a baby, he also emerged from a large bonfire in Cabrini-Green. He had been abducted by Candyman as a sacrifice but escaped due to Helen's heroic efforts. Anthony and the ghost, therefore, share a site of symbolic rebirth. Candyman is bound to the place by virtue of his death; Anthony is bound to return to the site of his near-death in order to die his full death.

In both the scholarly tradition and in DaCosta's own thematic foregrounding of inversion, therefore, we arrive at the concept of place and its role in the Candyman legend. Tim Cresswell, drawing on ideas from Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and John Agnew (1987), defines place thus: 'Space, then, has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning—as a "fact of life" which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place' (2004: 10). From this point of view, Candyman is connected to both the space and the place. He haunts a particular zone that can be described with 'the basic coordinates for human life,' in Cresswell's terms. However, the traumatic racial violence that spawned him and the fear that sustains him are indicative of place—based in the meaning created and supplied by those who live(d) and die(d) there. DaCosta's project of inversion attempts to clarify this connection by altering elements of the place and the space.

Cultural Circulation and the Power of Storytelling

Since the Candyman story itself counts the cultural circulation of storytelling as a primary theme, one useful pathway for further analyzing the idea of place can be found in a recent publication in the field of rhetoric. In his 2020 monograph *The Corruption of Ethos in Fortress America*, Christopher Carter draws on the classical concept of ethos to discuss the contemporary state of political discourse in the United States. As Carter points out, the original meaning of this Greek term included the sense of 'dwelling-place.' Over the course of his book, he demonstrates that the concept of the US was transformed from dwelling-place to fortress, 'but one of a particular kind in which militarized border regimes excluded and terrorized the brown-skinned poor while remaining friendly to capital flows, especially those that the White House deemed consonant with the country's competitive advantage' (2020: 5). For many people—from recent immigrants and refugees to those born in places like pre-gentrification Cabrini-Green—the US has always been a nightmarish dwelling-place. This reality is reflected in the film by the historical amalgam represented in The Hive. The film suggests that even a nightmare can be made worse by the stories we tell ourselves and each other. Because storytelling is a powerful method for creating meaning, and place results from imbuing a space with meaning, stories can play a central role in the creation and transformation of place.

The connection between storytelling and the ongoing existence of Candyman is also one of dwelling-place corruption by means of ethos. In that context, the neighborhood of Cabrini-Green rots like a portrait in the attic while Candyman thrives on the propagation of his legend. The monster relies on tragedy and trauma to terrify people into telling his story. These tragedies and traumas are inflicted on individuals, but they also leave their mark on the community, the place. As this communal suffering gathers historical momentum and the traumas form layers through repetition, the cyclical structures of oppression reaffirm the narrative structures of the Candyman legend. As Carter observes:

> The corruption of ethos does not happen all at once but rather proceeds as an incremental
> building project where varied materials fasten tightly together or give durability to the

existing frameworks. The results may appear tangled or disorderly while nevertheless being exceptionally resilient. (2020: 8)

Replace 'building project' with 'housing project,' and this passage is a remarkably keen insight into the effects that rhetorical and narrative circulation of the Candyman story have on Cabrini-Green. In the clearest expression Carter offers for how the corruption of ethos affects and effects a communal dwelling-place, he remarks, 'Hard subjects build hard dwellings' (2020: 10). I think that the relevant lesson from DaCosta's *Candyman* is that traumatized subjects perpetuate traumatizing dwellings. The blame for Candyman's origin does not lie with the individuals traumatized by him. It lies, rather, with the people who lynched Daniel Robitaille. His continued existence results from the actions of those who continued the original racial violence and oppression, the marginalization of communities like Cabrini-Green, and communal belief in the ghost. The resulting desuetude of the actual dwelling-place increases Candyman's ethos as 'something to be haunted by' (Barker [1985] 2007: 37) and cements the relationship between legend and location.

Conclusion

The power of wielding Candyman, then, is to remember him, to remember the traumas that engendered him and those that have sustained and continue to sustain him. As Travers notes, 'The story of Candyman is not only about a traumatic event but literally inflicts trauma in its telling in how repeating Candyman's name in front of a mirror summons the character, who then inflicts trauma on the person who summoned him' (2022: 127). The legend might serve as a reminder of past injustices, but the continued violence of that same legend has been carried out mainly against the community members themselves. It is the fate of the place and those who live there to be revictimized by the shared memory of victimization, and no amount of gentrification can wash out a stain that is replenished decade after decade by renewed violence and oppression. DaCosta's new Candyman, however, promises to be more than a reminder of these injustices. He remains bound to the space, but DaCosta provides some hope that he can be a catalyst for altering the place. In the final inversion, in which Bri uses Candyman against the police, the film

suggests that the ghost could become a protector, an embodiment of the community's violent history whose memory and mention will terrorize the oppressor more than the oppressed. Due to this change in perspective, we can confidently place DaCosta's *Candyman* in Means Coleman's "Black horror" films category of movies that raise Black issues from a Black perspective. Just as with George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the numerous other victims of racialized violence, to say the name is a form of power based in memory and community

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Endnotes

[1] For anyone interested in additional summaries of both films, I recommend those provided by Travers (2022: 119-121). Of course, (re)watching the films is always recommended.

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