



Midsommar: Thing Theory

Robert Spadoni

Death is surely one of those rare events that justifies the term ... *cinematic specificity*.

André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon”¹

Not all bodies, even dead bodies, perform their thingness in the same way.

Lesley Stern, *Dead and Alive*²

Moments in *Midsommar* (Ari Aster, US/SE, 2019) that point to the film’s apparent political agenda include an early scene in which a book, *The Secret Nazi Language of the Uthark*, can be seen on a coffee table cluttered with items. The anthropology graduate students who sit around this table pay the book no mind, and only attentive viewers will see it. Later, after the student, Pelle, has brought his friends to his home village in Sweden on the occasion of its once-in-90-years midsummer festival, one of the visitors sees some runes on a stone and guesses it to be the Younger iteration of a variant of this language. Pelle’s communal brother Ingemar informs him that it is the Elder. The virulence baked into this death-obsessed cult’s belief system is thus both ancient and it has produced catastrophic manifestations in much more recent world history as well. Attentive viewers, unlike the film’s luckless visitors to the remote Hårga commune, have been warned.

In 2019, Sweden is experiencing an increase in right-wing, populist, anti-immigrant feeling.³ Roots of this sentiment trace at least as far back as the country’s efforts, in the twentieth century’s first half, to reclaim and revitalize its national heritage by casting a nostalgic eye to folkloric traditions. In fabric, glass, furniture, and other applied arts, Swedish modern design artists interwove and celebrated images of nature, tradition, and mythology. For example, Stig Lindberg’s 1947 pattern on linen, *Melodi* (Figure 1), evokes a midsummer maypole dance like the one that results, near the close of Aster’s film, in the crowning of the American character, Dani, as

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Figure 1. *Melodi* (*Melody*), 1947. Stig Lindberg (Swedish, 1916–1982), Nordiska Kompaniet (Swedish, est. 1902). Plain weave bleached linen, loom width, printed; overall: 94.6 × 78.1 cm (37 1/4 × 30 3/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. B. P. Bole, Mr. and Mrs. Guerdon S. Holden, Mrs. Windsor T. White, and the L. E. Holden Fund 1947.212.

may queen.⁴ Aster refers to both current and past moments of Swedish nationalist resurgence when he says that

there are politics woven into the periphery of this film—we’re talking about contemporary Sweden, we’re talking about Swedish history, especially during the Second World War and European history in general, and again, America is not exempt from the kind of thing I’m talking about. ... I’m reluctant to expand too much further but there is stuff to say about racism and xenophobia.⁵

Aster’s net sweeps up a wide swath of history and many countries. Reluctant to expand much further, he leaves it for us to decide whether his film mounts a critique of xenophobia or if it espouses it, and whether the real locus of this ideology in the film is the commune (and by extension Sweden) or the United States.

A good place to look for answers to these questions is the film's Grand Guignol climax, which bothered many critics. Some see the ending revealing the true nature of this "art movie"—"essentially exploitation fare"⁶—and find that the "grotesque imagery ... exists for no other reason than shock value"⁷; "the gore doesn't lead to much"⁸; and the "painstakingly crafted aura of growing unease suddenly dissolves into absurdity."⁹ Another reviewer, however, takes in the whole film and sees a "deranged integrity to its sprawl."¹⁰ I do as well, including in the awful inevitability of the ending, where the film places itself squarely within a genre's tradition. As Robin Wood influentially wrote, horror films stage encounters with various manifestations of the Other, one of which is "Other cultures."¹¹ And issues of culture come to the fore in most considerations of the sub-genre *Midsommar* fits snugly into, folk horror, as the clashes these films stage—between citizens of the modern world and pockets of society that cling, lethally, to ancient beliefs—invite meditations on rural versus urban peoples and landscapes, and pre-Christian versus Christian ideologies, considerations that can quickly open out to wider reflections on patriarchy, gender, sexuality, class, race, and other cultural matters.¹²

In surmising what *Midsommar* has to say about xenophobia, I will take a largely different path than one that proceeds through folk horror, the most proximate and well-established context for situating Aster's film. Instead, the answer to the central question I pose will emerge through a consideration of a vein of early and classical film theory. Envisioning a dialogue between *Midsommar* and this body of thought, I will envision the film in a dialogue with its *medium*, and claim that where the film comes down on the visitors' encounter with the "Other culture" of the Hårga hinges on the way these characters come out at the end, and on the film's interpenetration of the characters with two senses of thingness.

Animism

Since the inanimate is featured in many paintings, one might question the legitimacy of characterizing it as a cinematic subject. Yet it is a painter—Fernand Léger—who judiciously insists that only film is equipped to sensitize us, by way of big close-ups, to the possibilities that lie dormant in a hat, a chair, a hand, and a foot.

Kracauer, *Theory of Film*¹³

Horror films signal their awareness of convention when they exploit this ground of shared experience to unsettle and shock viewers. This ground can include conventions of other horror films. So, while another horror film will save its worst scares for nighttime settings and other dark places, *Midsommar* unfolds in a bucolic place where the sun shines down for most of the 24-hour cycle. Other ingrained expectations the film taps into, and



Figure 2. In *Midsommar* (Ari Aster, 2019), Christian meets the leader of the cult in a room covered with ornate designs.

twists, run deeper than any governing a genre film's settings and lighting, and here the manipulations and attacks become more perverse.

For example, the film loads narratively significant details into its backgrounds. Viewers are alerted in a few ways to pay attention to what, in another film, would constitute merely a decoration or a backdrop. The opening shot fills the frame with a mural-like illustration packed with occult folkloric images. Later, as the camera tracks laterally to follow some characters walking on the compound, a caged bear slips into the foreground. The incongruous sight, which in another film might function merely as set dressing, is noticeable enough, but then a visitor asks, "So are we just gonna ignore the bear, then?" The same shot glides past a textile depicting scenes—obscene, and predictive of events to come—narrating what Ingemar calls "a little love story." Elsewhere in the film, the American student, Christian, sits in a waiting room covered floor to ceiling with ornate designs. The scene begins on a close-up of a wall illustration of a bear engulfed in flames, which is assigned by the next shot to Christian's point of view. Like, in the folk horror classic *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, UK, 1973)—the hare-shaped confection in the sweet shop followed by the young girls' hare drawing—this repetition makes the bear seem significant now, although we have no idea why. Christian is then led into a room where more blue-and-white designs cover the walls (Figure 2).

Some shots in the film, then, isolate "background" elements, but these are probably not enough to alert all viewers to other moments when closer views do not similarly come to their aid. These include scenes in the bunk-house, where portentous illustrations line the walls and ceiling; the book on the coffee table; a foreshadowing painting (by a Swedish artist), seen in Dani's room before she embarks on the trip, of an enormous bear kissing a



Figure 3. In *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946), action plays out in the foreground and no characters or viewers pay attention to the wallpaper.

diminutive crowned princess; and Pelle, peering through a narrow gap between some planks in the background—a detail in the shot that is easy to miss—while Christian succumbs to a powder that renders him unconscious and moves him a step closer to his doom.

In most films, backgrounds and decorations do not figure in, and prefigure, the narrative so significantly (Figure 3). Even in *The Wicker Man*, a film whose influence towers over *Midsommar*, hares, inn signs, cakes, a foreshadowing beetle attached by a string to a nail, and other portentous elements all get their close-ups so that, while perhaps initially bewildering, they are not likely missed. It is more common in films—even folk horror films that seed their mise-en-scene and dialogue with hints and signs that, in grim retrospect, turn out to have been important—for visual salience to align with narrative salience. This helps to ensure narrative clarity, and it reflects the long-established tendency of narrative cinema to relegate visual bric-a-brac to ancillary tasks such as set decoration and “atmosphere.” Tracking the emergence of this broad aesthetic—lauded by the cinema’s champions, who sought to associate the medium with the fine arts and to distance it from the applied arts—Rosalind Galt cites Vachel Lindsay’s call, in 1915, “to bring ‘Doric restraint’ into cinema to replace the ‘overstrained’ and ‘overloaded’ nature of current films.”¹⁴ Across early film theory and into later writings, Galt traces a preference for films that strive for



Figure 4. Women dance in concentric circles.

“classical” balance and harmony, tying this thinking to André Bazin’s “Protestant” preference for austere cinematic styles.¹⁵ As cinema came increasingly to be viewed as an art form, critics favored films that avoided trifling detail in favor of a functionalist, modernist aesthetic. Aster tosses these principles aside when, like other folk horror filmmakers but pushing it further, he litters his settings with adornments that refuse to announce their significance in predictable and reliable ways.

The book on the table reminds us that a small detail need not, of course, confine itself to a wall. It can be a three-dimensional object, which in a typical film will fulfill its prescribed purpose as a prop or piece of set dressing.¹⁶ Objects do not keep to such subordinate roles in *Midsommar*, for another hierarchy the film upsets involves humans and things and their rarely challenged separateness.

The film disturbs this separateness in small and large ways. We see as the drugged visitors do when, at the height of the festival, flowers woven into Dani’s crown dilate and contract like mammalian heart valves. These flowers react to stimuli in unflowerlike ways, opening and closing with greater excitement when Pelle kisses the newest member of the Hårga family on the lips. The behavior of these vegetal objects moves them closer to animals (or animal parts), while other scenes move humans closer to them. Christian sexually penetrates the cultist Maja while, seen from a straight-down angle, a semicircle of naked women, swaying sympathetically to the act, dilates and contracts. Another bird’s eye view, of maypole dancers swirling in three concentric circles (Figure 4), turns them into an animated pattern—in a shot immediately preceding the one of the bear-in-flames, another flat decorative image. After Dani’s coronation, centerpieces on the dining table undulate and writhe, and later Dani is subsumed in a mound



Figure 5. Distraught, Dani drags herself under the weight of her ceremonial mantle.

of flowers that makes it hard for her to move (Figure 5). Decorations behave with uncharacteristic vivacity, and humans start to look like things.

But things have always exhibited a kind of life in cinema. The animistic beliefs that animate the witches and other cult societies of folk horror resonate, in Aster's film, with beliefs held by some early film theorists. Rachel O. Moore, quoting Lindsay, traces ways that a "yearning for personality in furniture" is a theme throughout early film theory.¹⁷ The essence of cinema and the essences of filmed objects merge in the mystical concept of *photogénie*. Moore writes that, "in Jean Epstein's essay, 'On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*,' he delivers a full account of cinema's phantasmagoric transformation of dead things to live objects."¹⁸ This liveness, Epstein points out in his 1924 essay, and Moore emphasizes (2000, 73), is not like that of a film's human characters. Of *photogénie*, Epstein writes that

those lives it creates ... have little in common with human life. These lives are like the life in charms and amulets, the ominous, tabooed objects of certain primitive religions. If we wish to understand how an animal, a plant, or a stone can inspire respect, fear, or horror, those three most sacred sentiments, I think we must watch them on the screen, living their mysterious, silent lives, alien to the human sensibility.¹⁹

Epstein finds objects teeming with inhuman life, in a view that accords to cinema a power comparable to the runic language of the Hårgas, who cast love spells by hiding runes under beds and adorn their walls and clothing with the magic symbols.

An object under Epstein's *photogenic* lens is, while alive, devoid of human life. This idea takes on a darker cast when it comes into contact with another strand of thought that finds its way into early film theory. Considering the modernist architect and architecture theorist, Adolph

Loos, whose writings include a 1908 essay, “Ornament and Crime”—the title of which only hints at the revulsion with which Loos regards this concept—Galt writes that “architectural simplicity opens onto life, whereas ornament literalizes the fetish by turning the unfortunate subject into a dead object.” She adds that “ornament confronts the subject with an image of himself as corpse. Ornament is not merely a crime, but a synonym for death.”²⁰ Galt follows this thinking into early critical formulations of film as art, linking it to theorists, including Epstein and Lindsay—and Siegfried Kracauer, of whose 1927 essay, “The Mass Ornament,” Galt writes: “Ornament is that which excludes and is excluded from life.”²¹ Ornament excludes life—and cinema, she shows, radically tames the ornament. Considering Loos and Epstein together inspires a vision of filmed objects stirring with a form of dead-aliveness, a disconcerting ontological status that, while suppressed or ignored by most films, a horror film might embrace.

The same strain of thinking that sees a camera elevating objects also finds it demoting persons. For Kracauer, this leveling power of cinema sets it apart from theater: “Stage imagery inevitably centers on the actor, whereas film is free to dwell on parts of his appearance and detail the objects about him.”²² Of the actor, he writes: “Nor is the whole of his being any longer sacrosanct. Parts of the body may fuse with parts of his environment into a significant configuration which suddenly stands out among the passing images of physical life.”²³ Not just objects, then, but a body part may acquire an expressive power unmatched on the stage.

How does *Midsommar* flatten the playing field between persons and objects, and whole and partial persons, and imbue these objects and parts with special life? Flowers move in ways that push them up the chain toward human beings, while swaying women mimic the flowers; and circles of dancing women evoke a wall pattern, perhaps when viewed under the influence of a Hårga drug. Other ways the film is “cinematic” are more jarring. Its shocks include a character’s foot sticking out of the ground like a garden tchotchke. (The gnomes were out of stock but the feet were on sale.) The camera invests this sight with dread significance and a kind of “life” that is palpably different than the one that formerly invigorated this extremity. Another disappeared visitor, Simon, turns up in a chicken coop, suspended, skillfully mutilated so that his lungs now protrude from his back like enflamed red wings, the gentlest movement of which tells us he is alive. More accurately, he exists in a state between life and death, a distinction most films take for granted and leave alone—although of course a horror film might churn stomachs with just this sort of category jamming.²⁴ Flowers affixed to his eye sockets, Simon has been stored like a parade float until it is time for him to play his part in the death pageant that brings the

film to its fiery close. Or maybe he is like the pig curing in a shed until the big feast, or the Christmas angel stowed in an attic until December.

These things recall their former lives in ways that make their present status more terrible to behold. Bill Brown, describing thing theory to an interviewer, offers an illustration:

You go to pick up the glass and it breaks in your hand, suddenly you notice it and you notice lots about it. It's at that moment, I would say, that that object becomes a thing. But I would also want to say that if you're using a glass and you suddenly recognize, oh, this is a glass that your grandmother owned, and so it has a certain kind of value because of its, the genealogy of its use, that also to me would be a kind of thing-ness, right? So on the one hand, something that's very physical, on the other hand, something that's very metaphysical, but in both instances, a real retardation of our interaction with the object. We're stopping, right? We're stopping because we broke the glass or we're stopping because the glass has, in some sense, broken our habits of use.²⁵

How much more severe is the retardation when the object is not a glass that belonged to grandmother but an appendage, or when the float memorializing the war veterans is made out of war veterans? The retardation becomes a crashing halt. Realizations not easily disentangled from one another explode into consciousness: "That was once ... *that still is* ..." We race to assimilate the thing while it resists, obtrudes, insists on its thing-ness, invoking and invading the memories of persons who were once like us. Reviewers might not have liked being ambushed in this way, but this is what horror films do. A horror film invests the edges of the frame, which another film might treat with indifference, with searing significance when a tentacle darts across it, suddenly an inch from the face of a character we didn't know was in trouble. A figure scurries across a ceiling, in an out-of-focus background we didn't know was important. An edit, invisible in another film, amplifies the slash of a killer's blade. Background realities of film viewing and form burst into the foreground. In *Midsommar*—and like in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, US, 1974), with its human-face lampshade and its sofa made from human bones—something woven so deeply into the fabric of the viewing experience that we seldom think about it, an order that places humans above things and keeps them separated, is being scrambled by these jolting sights.

Commodity

ÄTTESTUPA: Cliff sites of ritual senicide, depicted in *Midsommar*

AVSIKTIG: Black-and-white pattern available on napkins, rugs, and furniture at IKEA

Midsommar teaches a sour object lesson in cinematic specificity, including its dirty secrets. The liveness of an object sighted by the camera lens may reek of death. A second secret the film exposes returns us to the foot, which is like the glass grandmother owned, although of course it is not exactly like it. Even the faintest similarity, however, points to a second sense of the thingness that descends on these characters. Moore describes a second quality of the life *photogénie* imputes to objects, this one—unlike the animistic dimension—not acknowledged by Epstein: “This image/thing is freed from its context, that is, its own production. Set loose from its material context, second nature, the nature after nature, takes on a life of its own. The break from a thing’s use value, once produced through ‘natural’ social relations, turns a thing into a commodity.”²⁶

I do not make light of the climax of *Midsommar* when I say that it is staged like a *Martha Stewart Living* magazine spread on how to fabulously decorate your home just in time for autumn. The arrangement consists of some Hårgas (two living) and all the visitors (one living) except Dani. Simon (now dead), flowers for eyes, we have seen before, and we have seen someone (who is not clear) wearing the student Mark’s face like a Halloween mask, and so we know he has not fared well while he has been off screen. But the film has saved some surprises for the end.

Mark now wears a jester’s cap with jangling bells. He seems considerably *lighter* than he should be and is mostly missing, we suspect, when a cultist sets him down with inappropriate ease—like a festive, straw-stuffed scarecrow that will sit next to the fireplace until after Thanksgiving. Mark takes his place among the other figures, each of which is being spaced just so. Some have tree branches for arms, or fruit for hair, or a fruit arrangement filling out their emptied abdominal cavity, or flowers or branches springing out their mouths. Two, who will be living sacrifices, will soon assume their charred thingness to the accompaniment of their own screams.

The symmetrical arrangement mostly conforms (and fire will soon zero out any incompatibilities) to criteria set down by the film and fine-arts theorist, Rudolph Arnheim: “An ornament, as we can now define it, presents an easy order, undisturbed by the vicissitudes of life. Such a view is quite justified when the pattern is not intended as an independent whole but as a mere component of a larger context.”²⁷ Each bauble has been subsumed to the larger context that is being assembled before our eyes with such delicate care and a bizarre sense of tastefulness. The figures demonstrate a power of cinema that makes it different than theater, as Kracauer might agree:

Screen actors are raw material; and they are often made to appear within contexts discounting them as personalities, as actors. Whenever they are utilized this way, utter restraint is their main virtue. Object among objects, they must not even exhibit

their nature but, as [René] Barjavel remarks, “remain, as much as possible, below the natural.”²⁸

Restrained figures, pliant raw material, objects among objects, submit themselves to Aster, who sinks them as far below the natural as we find in any film in recent memory.

The figures take their places around the edges of the structure’s interior, the entrance to which has been festooned with vines. The high barnlike ceiling and deep orange browns of the color scheme suggest a homey space done up country style. Runes, inscrutable to us and maybe seeming merely decorative (although by now we know better), fill painted circles on the walls and peaked ceiling. The hay bales on which the figures have been placed reinforce the themed interior-decorating feel of the scene.

The conflagration starts small enough, warming the space with deeper hues—as a hearth fire might warm a cozy family room—before consuming the structure, sweeping smoke up past the peak and into the sky, in a mockery of the smoke curling out of a cottage chimney. The bales on which Christian has been placed resemble an overstuffed armchair—while Christian, paralyzed, eyes dilated wide so he doesn’t miss a thing, has been sewn into the now-eviscerated bear, with only his alert, silent face peeking out of the creature’s open mouth. The gruesome sight might have been inspired by Viking warriors donning bearskins before the battle, but the inert and carefully placed Christian does not much conjure that association, for he has been turned into an enormous stuffed teddy bear, bigger, even, than the biggest bear for sale, for the most spoiled child, at an FAO Schwartz.

Bogeymen

‘Hours Dreadful and Things Strange’ is as apt a description of the post-Brexit climate as Folk Horror itself; with its normalisation and spiked increase in xenophobic attacks, a gestalt mentality, any questioning of the result labeled a heresy by the pro-Brexit tabloids, and a wide-scale embracing of political fantasy and inwardness.

Adam Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*²⁹

The man of our day who, in response to an inner urge, smears the walls with erotic symbols is a criminal or a degenerate.

Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime”³⁰

What do you do when you need to jerk off? Especially with all these dicks on the wall. There’s a lot of dicks.

Mark, shortly after arriving at the bunkhouse



Figure 6. Ikea advertisement photographed in Switzerland.

The project of “commodifying” the characters unto and beyond death might seem to point to a “Sweden thesis” of the film’s political agenda, for the Swedish modern design movement forms the basis of the IKEA aesthetic.³¹ Since its beginnings in 1943, the global retail behemoth has, Ursula Lindqvist notes, never tried to hide its Swedishness but instead emphasizes it, from the recalcitrantly Nordic names of its showroom items to the meatballs for sale in its restaurants (Figure 6).³² Research into the company’s past has revealed that its founder, Ingvar Kamprad, was a white supremacist who once recruited for Nazi groups and who continued to associate with Nazi sympathizers well past the end of the Second World War.³³ IKEA creates “rooms” throughout its stores, to help us imagine that bunkbed or armchair at home in our rooms. Aster creates one, too, suggesting that his film links the murders of the visitors to a nationalist agenda that is longstanding, ongoing, and resolutely Swedish.

I believe the film is not engaging in such a critique, or not with full awareness and not very successfully, and that what it more wholly expresses is a swampy, symptomatic xenophobia that is entirely homegrown. The *Swedishness* of the Hårgas is a chimera made up to fool the non-Swedish. *Midsommar* was shot in Hungary. Working alongside Swedish contributors, including production designer Henrik Svensson, and Martin Karlqvist and

Patrik Andersson—who supplied the concept of the Hårgas—was costume designer Andrea Flesch, who is Hungarian. The film melds elements from Swedish folklore and legend—from the maypole dance to the cliffside murders of elder folk—with elements that derive from pure fancy, and in this regard the film hews close to folk horror antecedents; Adam Scovell writes that the subgenre, “whilst often appropriating various aspects of folkloric themes and aesthetics (as well as history itself), is never all that fussed with a genuine, accurate recreation of folklore. It instead plays it through broad-stroke ideas which, in a populist medium, often build into genuine forms of rewrites of history and culture.”³⁴ Neither was Aster and his team all that fussed. When Robert Eggers asks if he is correct in detecting Slavic influences in the villagers’ costuming, Aster says that he is, and, yes, he also saw some Elizabethan embroidery. Aster adds: “It’s a stew.” His friend agrees: “I think it’s a very successful melange.”³⁵ One reviewer calls the village “a hodgepodge of European tradition, folklore, and mythology.”³⁶ The Hårga world is a phantasmagoria, the mere *projection* of foreignness. The visitors encounter not Sweden but the Other in all its nightmarish inscrutability and menace.

Stig Lindberg’s *Melodi*, the Cleveland Museum of Art curators write, “combines Swedish folk culture and classical mythology, depicting acts of infatuation such as carving hearts into trees and keeping a lover’s lock of hair.”³⁷ A video accompanying the installation notes that “many of the paintings and illustrations Stig Lindberg did were for children’s stories, so we see the same whimsical element in many of his textile designs, as well.”³⁸ This whimsy weaves through Swedish modern design, extends its influence into the IKEA esthetic, and infiltrates *Midsommar*’s art direction. The look of the film reminded me of the “It’s a Small World” ride at Disney World, a quaintly, creakily artificial panoply of brightly dressed, happy foreigners singing to an endless stream of tourists, many of whom have never left the United States. David Edelstein writes: “Aster and the production designer, Henrik Svensson, have designed the ‘Hårga’ village from scratch. It’s like a child’s rendering of a happy, bucolic place, a mixture of circles, squares, and triangles that’s so elemental it’s otherworldly.”³⁹ If the Hårgas call to mind the cheerful animatronic figures in that old hodgepodge of a theme-park ride, the message here is less inclusive. The visitors to the commune join a line of curious filmmakers, photographers, and anthropologists, in films stretching back through *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, IT, 1980) and earlier, who travel to the far-flung locus of their curiosity and never return. And like another film, one that doesn’t aspire so high as Aster’s but which also sends American students abroad and makes them pay, *Hostel* (Eli Roth, US/CZ, 2005), this film is saying: No, it’s a big world, and you should stay home.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Bazin, "Death Every Afternoon," 30.
2. Stern, *Dead and Alive: The Body as Cinematic Thing*, 5.
3. Becker, "The Global Machine Behind the Rise of Far-Right Nationalism."
4. "Cultural Heritage and Festivals."
5. McGrew, "Interview: Writer/Director Ari Aster for *Midsommar*."
6. Sachs, "Midsommar Is Nothing More Than a Dressed-Up Piece of Scandinavian Schlock."
7. Reed, "Ari Aster's Grisly 'Midsommar' Is Downright Sickening."
8. Stoeber, "Midsommar Is a Sumptuous Experience That Never Finds Meaning in Its Horrors."
9. Andersen, "'Midsommar' Review."
10. Dowd, "Midsommar Is a Deranged (and Funny!) Folk-Horror Nightmare from the Director of *Hereditary*."
11. Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," 11.
12. See for example Brooks, *Searching for Sycorax: Black Women's Hauntings of Contemporary Horror*, the chapter, "Folkloric Horror: A New Way of Reading Black Women's Creative Horror."
13. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, 45.
14. Galt, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*, 247.
15. *Ibid.*, 247.
16. In the original theatrical release, the book is—for all but eagle-eyed viewers and some repeat ones—set dressing; in the director's cut, released later in the year, someone brings the book on the trip, and a conversation about it in the car on the way to the compound, which ties the book more explicitly to the Hårgas, turns the book into a prop.
17. Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic*, 8.
18. *Ibid.*, 73.
19. Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*," 317.
20. Galt, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*, 115.
21. *Ibid.*, 117.
22. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, 45.
23. *Ibid.*, 97.
24. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, 31–33.
25. Allen, "Big Think Interview: Bill Brown."
26. Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic*, 75.
27. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, 152.
28. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, 97.
29. Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*, 184.
30. Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 19.
31. Lindqvist, "The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store."
32. *Ibid.*, 43–44, 49, 52.
33. *Ibid.*, 48–50; "Ikea Founder Ingvar Kamprad's Nazi Ties 'Went Deeper.'"

34. Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*, 28.
35. Aster and Eggers, "Deep Cuts with Robert Eggers and Ari Aster."
36. Dowd, "Midsommar is a Deranged (and Funny!) Folk-Horror Nightmare from the Director of *Hereditary*."
37. "Melodi (*Melody*)." In the film, Christian is served a meat pie containing a pubic hair belonging to Maja, in a tradition viewers saw depicted on the textile the camera tracked past.
38. "Textiles, Ceramics and Glass."
39. Edelstein, "Ari Aster's *Midsommar* Is an Ambitious, Blurry Horror Trip."

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