

SUE deBEER: Testing...

IAN COOPER: Yeah, 1, 2, 3.

S: The music (loud howling sound in background) playing in the background is the advertisement for GINGER SNAPS 2, which is the sequel to GINGER SNAPS 1, which is this movie about a teenage girl that gets her period and turns into a werewolf.

I: Right.

S: And in movie number two she returns as a poltergeist and haunts her sister. Which is incredibly appropriate, because Ian happens to be working on a very wonderful new sculpture, which happens to be thematically linked to POLTERGEIST as well as beautiful girls, although possibly not to teenagers.

I: The forbidden.

S: Not forbidden for me.

I: No, no, no. (Sue laughs)

S: So, tell me about your interest in POLTERGEIST, Ian. How did it start? Can you get the lights?

I: My interest in POLTERGEIST probably started—well, I saw the movie obviously when I was younger, and I've seen it many times. My fascination with the movie, and my fascination subsequently with the sequels, and with films in general where something like this occurs, was that there was a parallel with the film and with reality. The main character who plays this mysterious conduit for the dead ends up in reality, succumbing to death herself in a mysterious way, literally right after turning 13, right after being a pre-teen.

S: So, Carol Anne's (Heather O' Rourke's) mysterious and unexpected death is a unique link for you?

I: Exactly. It's one of my main fascinations with the movie. My original link to the movie was as a result of doing those paintings that I was doing before. My focus was on the idea of this American dream house, which is a classic trope in horror movies. Where there's like—Cheers, anyway.

S: Oh yeah, cheers. (clink of glasses)

I: Where there's a house that represents American idealism that is purported to have one small problem. Or one catch, and the catch is a real moralistically atrocious one. Where it's basically that the house was built in vain atop, or with disregard of a burial ground or a gravesite or some—(loud scream in the background)

I: (laughing) some marker of the dead or something.

The painting series used the house from POLTERGEIST, which is like this California tract house, South Pasadena, or actually more like San Diego, or something like that. But, that was sort of a different focus, the dead rising from the grave to reclaim the sanctity of the ground in which they were buried.

S: And communication as well, because your main sculpture is going to be a communication place, and the focus of POLTERGEIST is the communication from the dead to the living. Speaking through the TV.

I: Or the toy phone.

S: Can you talk about electronics being a conduit for the dead?

I: Sure, definitely.

S: It has been a consistency in your work as well.

I: Definitely, definitely. Especially in film and video; it's being able to use that idea as a reason for making video. The history of communicating with the dead, well, there's a couple of times, (laughter)...but originally the first known communicators with the dead in the "modern world," on this continent, were young girls. Teenage girls.

S: In what context?

I: Well, in the end it was said to be a hoax, á la THE CRUCIBLE etc. But, the context was girls developing this sort of code or system which was actually a system of knocking on tables, as a way of knocking and getting responses with—it's sort of an early Ouija Board scenario, before legitimized Ouija Boards existed. And creating that kind of made-up system, which I'm really interested in, especially with teenagers, or pre-teenagers. Where there is that heavy focus of trying to construct your world and trying to make sense of your world vis a vis this cockamamie structure that you create. So, because

communicating with the dead has always been this fantastical exercise, people have always sort of brought to it these weird, intuitive systems. Like knocking, or then later people particularly used horns, like trumpet-shaped horn devices where supposedly the dead could speak through the horns to people. That's where I take off for this project, because there is this blend of early telecommunication, where Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone, but his original purpose was to construct a way for communicating with his mother who had died. And he accidentally, or supposedly accidentally discovers this arguably more profound or practical, I should say, way of communicating with actual people.

S: And this is the first piece that I know of yours that actually points to a period backward in time. Although it feels very contemporary it also has this sort of Victorian overlay over the communication device. Can you talk about that impulse? Is that going back to Goth culture, pseudo-Victorian, corsets, the fetishization of a fictional past, or is it actually going back to a real historical past? (another loud scream in the background) (laughing) We're also torturing people in the back room.

I: Sue's roommate shall die. (laughs) No, actually it's funny, because my interest with the switchboard, this early system for telecommunication, whether it's operators who would connect people, my interest in that sort of lends itself definitely to the more classically Gothic. My main focus, cause I'm not a real—well, my focus, and it may sound stupid, but I'm not really interested in historical accuracy, as much as selective memories, or sorry, collective memory or an accumulation of ideas that project backwards onto a time. So we know certain things about early telecommunication. I've obviously researched things to see how devices actually worked, but I am really also interested in intuitive devices like the whole idea of the cup with the string and another cup, and these kind of things that look like they should work, because it's something connected to something else, they are an illustration of something and thereby when kids are building things like that, they know it should work, because it looks like it should work.

S: We were calling them "faith activated" devices when we were talking about them before.

I: I guess that I jumped ahead, because you asked me another question before. Before I talk about that, the thing that brings in the role of women, as we talked about before, again how these girls were the first discoverers or tried to patent a way to communicate with the dead. Also, women are historically the first connectors for telecommunication. Women as operators have this sort of principle connection to that activity. Which is great because also the connection with witches and witchcraft, and in general women are classically more open to the possibilities of connections with the supernatural and thereby connections with each other. That all plays into this piece, which is involving five girls in this sort of sleepover party scenario and these five operators who are these kind of fictitious, supernatural women who are connecting these girls to girl characters in films. As opposed to connecting people across time and space, this sort of faith-based, Ouija-board, séance activity is connecting quote, unquote real girls, who of course are going to be actresses, to these fictional characters who are in film. To try and actually connect the characters, not even the actress, but the character!

S: Have you chosen your film staff?

I: I know a lot of them. Let's just say I haven't really committed to anything yet. I know I want Neve Campbell to be one of them, to bring the post-modern notion and actually to communicate with her character even though she is self-conscious about being a character in a film that is activating a horror film. I think that will be good.

S: Jamie Lee.

I: Jamie Lee and people like that. I am basically looking for footage specifically where girls are getting calls. Because the way the operators are connecting them is through this faith device that the girls built. And through the film clip where their character is actually on the phone, answering the phone in one of those moments where they are already kind of scared and they answer the phone sort of like "hello?", you know. So, just sort of appropriating that psychological frame of mind that

the character is in. She is sort of afraid—starting to get scared, and abusing that to make it seem like she is getting this weird other-worldly call. She's like "hello?" (dramatic, distressed voice) And maybe just looping that and I haven't made it yet, but I think the whole thing is going to be a failure in that the communication and connection will never—

S: So, there will be a rupture, so the first contact will be the last contact.

I: Something like that. It's never gonna quite get there.

S: Did you ever try to contact the dead when you were a kid?

I: Definitely.

S: Did you ever succeed? Or did you think that you succeeded?

I: Yeah. Definitely.

S: Who did you talk to? And how old were you?

I: I think most of that activity—it took place in periods. There is a really early, Jesus, this is really digging it up, but this is good. When I was really young, my bedroom was really small and I faced the door to my bedroom. I don't think that I ever told you this actually, and my bed was parallel to the door and I would lay in bed when I started to fall asleep at night and just stare at the open door frame and I couldn't have the door closed, it was too isolated and I wanted to hear my parents and be able to access them if need be.

S: Of course.

I: But, I would always lay there and would stare at this black rectangle, this open door. I would always imagine seeing something walk by and how terrifying that would be and I focused on it so much, and I always imagined it to be skeletons. And I think it is partially from that early, early Warner Brothers' cartoon of these skeletons playing their own bones. It's a classic black and white.

S: Yeah, yeah.

I: And I imagined these skeletons walking by and I did it so much that I think I blended the reality with my fantasy and I would think that I really saw something, and that was a different sort of thing. But, I have always been really interested in communicating with the dead and I had a

babysitter who was really focused on that with me.

S: With Ouija Boards?

I: Yeah and into like, he told me all these stories how he saw dead people and he saw ghosts, and I was like five years old.

S: And he really believed in it?

I: He really believed in it.

S: Did your parents know about it?

I: Yeah, I think so. I was very attached to him. I started doing the Ouija Board when I was pretty young, and it's funny, cause it never really worked until adolescence. It maybe was chemistry or something, more wanting to really make it work with your friends.

S: That kind of charge and energy. I remember that.

I: Right.

S: Were you ever with a group of people who thought that they talked to the dead while you were there?

I: I was with a couple of people and we were really convinced that we had channeled a spirit. And we kept accessing more and more information and it was more and more oblique and bizarre. In retrospect, I am sure there's the possibility that it was our collective unconscious making this, and fictionalizing this bizarre account of some life. I don't remember any details specifically.

But, how about you?

S: Yes. Absolutely.

I: Oh really. Let's hear it.

S: I went through an ecstatic period during childhood where I could see ghosts.

I: That you could see them?

S: Yeah.

I: Wow.

S: Yeah. When I was like nine years old. I actually remember one sleepover, I was with a couple of other girls and we had hysterically worked ourselves up to the fact that we were going to be able to talk to the ghosts in this house. The house had once been burned down and we had seen that all the family in it had perished in terrible deaths. Then separately in the night three different people had seen an aberration and I saw a dog.

I: Oh wow. You remember seeing it?

S: I remember seeing it come towards me. In retrospect the amazing thing is that age and that kind of energy. I think of that too in your piece with the five operators and the sleepover party and a faith-based device. And whether or not it's true, the belief and longing for the event makes it so physically present. You kind of construct it out of this psychic energy that you build up.

I: Right, right. So, that is as much about the possibility as it is about the mental connection between whoever amasses the group of people.

S: It's such a specific energy. It is really interesting, this sleepover energy. And I always thought of it as particularly feminine, but I was only invited to female sleepovers.

I was never at any all-boy sleepovers.

I: I spent most of my time with girls, and my best friends were girls. The friends that I had that were guys, there was some of that, definitely. But it wasn't nearly as intense. Or there wasn't as much of a possibility to suspend disbelief and go with that sort of feeling.

S: That makes sense because girls are more into communication and emotional transference at that stage. That's really interesting.

I: Yeah. Definitely. Let's talk a little more about past experiences with communicating with the dead, because I think it's a really interesting topic obviously. (Loud scream in background)

S: Yeah (laughing)

I: Cue.

S: Who did you communicate with?

I: It's interesting, because what I recall, most specifically, is communicating with male spirits. It was always like—actually this ties into our project a little bit too, were these questions

S: Fantasy, fantasizing death, fantasizing being dead.

I: Right. The Séance Ephemera Kit Project that we have been working on when we—

S: Which is this extraordinary project that everyone should mail away for a kit.

I: Yeah!

S: You get a coffin in the mail and you get to use the coffin to describe your own death and make lemon juice

letters, and it's incredibly great. To get the coffin you mail to The Empty Grave...

I: The Empty Grave, at 14 Verona Street, apartment 2B, Brooklyn, NY 11231.

S: You get a coffin in the mail.

I: You get a coffin in the mail.

S: But to get the coffin you have to describe your own death eloquently to us.

I: Through a series of activities. Because what we were trying to get at is those classic things when you are trying to communicate with the dead. Those standard things that you want to know. You want to know something about the person. You wanna know how they died. You wanna know and be able to obtain some sort of memorabilia and some sort of tangible thing from the person. This is all linked to the internet too. It is also connected to telecommunication and its most advanced form now, as a spirit communication device and it's more ethereal because you don't know if they really exist and if they really are who they are. Likening the internet to this sort of spirit world, and we're luring people out of the spirit world to communicate with us in a more traditional mail art kind of way.

S: Yeah.

I: Just jumping back from before, my fascination with Heather O'Rourke (Carol Anne from POLTERGEIST), she is really dead. She is a person who is really dead. In her films, she crosses over. It has been really creepy for me to use her. As an aside, do you have a really good ghost story?

S: Good ghost story?

I: Or a good ghost story that happened to someone else?

S: Probably, but they probably have their own personal quality.

I: That's fair enough.

S: What about you? Do you have a good ghost story?

I: Um. I've never seen anything, but I had this one weird experience. I'm sure that I have had more than this, but this is the one that always comes to my mind. Which was being young and sleeping and I had this loft bed thing with a hatch on the floor, which I kept closed at

night. This is years later, from said incident mentioned earlier. Now I am elevated above ground and the door is closed. But, it was one of those weird instances where you wake up and you don't know why. All of a sudden you are wide-awake and I heard someone knock on the hatch. It had this really weird effect, because it was knocking from below. It was a really specific sound. And it was very late at night, and I had already been awake, or so I thought. And to hear silence and then hear that. It wasn't like I woke up to that. And I remember responding, and saying, like "hello...mom?" (dramatic, distressed voice) And, immediately realizing that there was no one, i.e. my mom or my dad, and there was this really awful dynamic of what to do next. What decision to make.

S: I remember that feeling. When you're listening to ghost stories. That decision-making proces—How do you escape death by specific kinds of games. That also talks about specific invented symbol systems, which is what you were talking about before. And also the child-like rules that either create protection, or create supernatural-ness.

I: Definitely, or wards away things. Stephen King loves that kind of shit.

S: Keep the spirits at bay.

I: Absolutely. Going back to the female connection or the mass hysteria in THE CRUCIBLE, when they are all seeing spirits. There's this incident that happened to Rachel when she was younger where she and her girl-friends in junior high school were having a sleepover. I forget exactly how it starts, but basically one of them was convinced that they saw this little creature, like this little man, which I thought was this great allegorical thing, because they were all coming of age. There was this little man-like creature that was in the room. And it got them really scared, and the person named it and named it Bobbit. And I thought that was such a great, creepy name. And this would go on for days and weeks would go by and girls would be like, "oh my god, I saw Bobbit in the girl's room." "I saw him when I was in there." And they would get really hysterical. And it got

to the point where moms would call other moms and be like "This is ridiculous. This has to stop. This is crazy." I love that whole idea.

S: I thought that Peter Jackson captured that really well in his film HEAVENLY CREATURES.

I: Very well.

S: It's one of the few movies that I have seen that addresses this phenomenon. That teen girl, visionary hysteria.

I: That's an amazing movie obviously.

S: Ends in a lovely murder.

I: And again based on completely unfounded, cocka-mamie decision-making.

S: Do you think about the ecstatic moment at all in relation to your work?

I: I think the really interesting difference in our work would be the interest in the physical. I always see your work especially in relation to the body and blood and body transformation and mutilation. Especially, in the earlier photo—having been one!

S: (laughs).

I: Having had a close personal encounter. Even when we first met, and we were both working with on this scene from NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET in very different ways. I always shy away from actual blood, actual murder, and actual violence. And my interest is more in the cutesy, strike that, more of the possibility.

S: They're simple systems. Like the alphabet or language, they surround an experience. What I was asking, if the experience related, or there's a transformative moment. The object that becomes animated by the spirit; these tract houses that get filled with the supernatural, or even the coffin getting filled with the living human being. Where the inanimate becomes animate.

I: Yeah, I love that.

S: An annihilation of deadness.

I: Re-animation.

S: But, it doesn't create un-deadness. It's really tender and it's seen through the eyes of a living being. It's like nostalgia, but it's nostalgia in a sweet way. A sweetness of memory.

I: Yeah. Totally. A darkness and sweetness.

S: Completely. Or sweetness coming out of darkness.

I: That animation that you were discussing. I really like the idea of objects becoming animated. It is such an amazing trope in horror films. And also classically when something is supposed to be animated with limited function, like a doll or a toy. And then there is that great moment when it breaks the boundary. Like in CHILD'S PLAY, where the mom is exasperated by what's going on, but is still in the dark and she has the doll on her lap and she realizes there are no batteries in it. And it's that great moment where she's not scared right away, your instinct would be that it must operate in some other way, but still there's that moment of—there's no batteries. It's gone beyond that.

S: It's like in the movie GOONIES when they actually find the pirate ship.

I: Definitely.

S: That moment when the unbelievable becomes real.

I: That's great.

S: That's the basis of the optimism in your work, because your fantasy world is based around images of death and ghosts. There is this kind of beauty and sweetness and optimism. Somehow it ties to that as well.

I: That's a great movie to reference for that. That and elements of E.T. and THE EXPLORERS and there is this collective—Steven Spielberg is obviously really interested in that. Where a group of kids can make something happen, just based on belief. Which is what this faith-based device is all about in my work.

S: And there's a dark thread to all those films as well.

E.T. looks like this walking fetus that is kind of slimy and he's living in the closet.

I: And that moment where he gets sick by the river in the daytime is the most awful thing ever.

S: Completely gross. Which is also interesting too. And in GHOSTBUSTERS where there is the satanic ritual, or the pseudo-satanic ritual at the end.

I: Obviously GHOSTBUSTERS is a complete foundation for everything for me.

S: I wonder if our culture was more satanic than others.

Nuclear annihilation and finding pleasure in the macabre. (Loud scream in background)

S: Cue scream. I guess that's also what's interesting in SCREAM 2. It is us looking on the idea of the fear that we experience through voyeurism and through fiction and finding it to be real. It's also got the faith-based device effect, because you will things to be through belief.

I: And through dedication, that the making of a film into a reality can be possible. This self-reflexive relationship, especially for our generation, and generations younger than us. That it is all mapped out for them and that you fit yourself into this groove. What you should be like and fitting yourself into a narrative framework like a film. Imagining yourself as "X" character from THE BREAKFAST CLUB. Identification is really interesting.

S: The interesting thing about those films is that they were all about creating unification from difference. Where everyone comes in different, and discovers that they all seem to have the same innersoul. Where as now, difference remains difference and archetypes get knocked off at different points.

I: Totally!

S: Like BLAIR WITCH or BLAIR WITCH2. Or that other movie where people are fighting death—

I: FINAL DESTINATION.

S: FINAL DESTINATION and FINAL DESTINATION2.

I: Totally.

S: Rent it! Rent it!

I: Definitely!

S: And rent GINGER SNAPS and GINGER SNAPS 2. And get our coffin in the mail.

I: What else can we plug here?

I: It's funny because the show at Anton Kern is called SCREAM. I just started to read the essays. I think it's an interesting choice of a title for that particular show beyond the obvious thematic motif. What they're saying, or what Michael (Clifton)'s curatorial agenda is that the idea of self-reflexiveness is now inseparable from that name. It's funny because I think a lot of work in that show, I guess it's kind of a mix, but I guess I'm wondering

how that fits in. I am sort of rambling.

S: How it fits into self-reflexiveness? In a way the work in the show felt different to me from that. It all seemed to be from some very, for the most part, from a very sincere position. Like, Brock's kidnapping project, on the surface it seems very fast, but when you go over to his space it actually gets very complicated. When you see what he is doing there it is completely intense. Or David Altmejd's really beautiful piece, with the ears.

I: Yeah. I just read the essay on his work. It is really interesting.

S: Yeah, he's really great.

I: He's a really interesting artist, I think. When I first saw it I was initially disinterested, but the more I see it, the more it's worth considering.

S: It's really beautiful. It's really beautiful work.

I: It's almost amazing that it does that. It has a real transcendental effect.

S: All the details are so kind of sweet and loving and focus on intimacy.

I: Totally. I love how idiosyncratic all the elements are. Especially, when we were talking about your newer sculptural work, where there is this collapse of the image and the actual. Part of it's flat and part of it's three-dimensional. Especially how you build up with the guitars and the amps. They're built up, kind of like strata. There's a physical element and then there's an image of a physical element, then there's another physical element, and then another image. And he is building things and there are sort of these plateaus, and there are these elements and these layers. Which I think is great.

S: Yeah. It's very subtle. It's great to see an artist's work expand over time.

I: I've only seen it since last summer, but yeah. (Loud scream in the background)

S: Maybe we should be done?

I: I think that was good.

S: I think we rocked it. Should we add anything else?

I: I think we hit a lot of topics...

S: Bye! Sk

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE NOT DEAD

(and what to do if you are)

HOLD THIS TO MIRROR:

1. Place two fingers at the middle right side of your neck. If you feel a pulsing you are not dead.

2. Place a finger on your eyeball. If you blink you are not dead.

3. Hold your mouth open as long as possible. If you start to salivate on yourself you are not dead.

4. Grab your tongue with a pair of tweezers. If your tongue throbs you are not dead.

5. Wrap dental floss around one tooth. Pull forward as hard as you can. If your tooth is difficult to pull out and your gums bleed you are not dead.

IF YOU FIND YOU ARE DEAD:

1. Drink seventeen pens full of ink to winste black.

2. Take a bath in bleach. Now you're a ghost!

3. Place your hair up your nose, through your sinus cavity out your mouth.

4. Push bottle caps into your soles and palms and perform an elaborate tap dance.