VERTICAL HOLD

Nostalgia can pull at us to times or places we've never known. This yearning, untethered from personal memory, is called anemoia: a longing for imagined eras that were never ours, yet somehow resonate, perhaps because they echo what feels absent in the present. Anemoia not only reaches backwards, but draws us to what could have been.

If technological progress measures time's passage, then its glitches become markers of the past. As the quirks of our machinery are ironed out, what was once irritating becomes strangely cherished. The phosphorescent glow of a low-resolution CRT television, the texture of 35mm film, the vinyl crackle and pop, and the lo-fi compression with its analogue warmth; these textures return as filters, presets, and skeuomorphic design, digitally manufactured to imitate the imperfections that once made them obsolete.

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Static is an analogue phenomenon, the residue of transmission made visible. What we now see or hear as white noise is usually a digital imitation, either reproduced for its nostalgic effect or to make the failure of transmission legible. True static is the signal of the universe itself: background electromagnetic noise, with the broadcast image only ever a brief interruption. The picture, in other words, was the exception; a curtain drawn across the constant hum beyond. The "vertical hold" on analogue televisions is what kept that signal steady. When the signal faltered, the picture would roll endlessly, revealing the hum of static between severed frames.

As television took hold in the postwar decades, cinema gradually entered the home, bringing its own distinctive atmospheres. Transferred from photochemical film to electronic signal, and later to magnetic Betamax and VHS tape, cinema adopted the soft blur and phosphorescent glow of television. Horror, science fiction and melodrama were no longer confined to dark theatres. The collective, public ritual became a private, domestic habit in 4:3 resolution. The monsters and cosmic forces of film now flickered inside everyday life.

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Like anemoia, horror and science fiction work through displacement rather than depiction, showing things as they are not in order to reveal what they are. In these genres, our latent anxieties or desires become visible. Yet where nostalgia tends toward earnestness, horror and science fiction revel in camp excess. Their distortions are lurid, theatrical, and often grotesque, giving shape to unconscious fears that are otherwise inexpressible. After all, it is easier to say you are afraid of a coven, a haunted house, or a cosmic force than to admit you fear losing control over your body, your safety, or your sense of home. These films of the analogue era combine potent narratives of fear and transformation with the visible glitches, grain, and distortions of their medium.

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In *VERTICAL HOLD*, Sarah Contos channels the bombast of old cinema as it appeared on television, when spectacle met the intimacy of the home. Her soft wall sculptures are vignettes of films that open like portals into parallel worlds. The works are composed from tufted fabric, metallic vinyl, and screen-printed textiles featuring geometric pattern and pointillist Ben Day dots, collaged into dense, tactile forms that loop, shimmer, and spill beyond their edges. Within their weight and ornament, they fold the languages of screen, set, and costume, creating intimacy with worlds we never lived in but still long for.

Sarah Hibbs, Independent Curator (2025).