

Horror As A Narrative

We are scared of many things; this is a primitive response to the world. This is an instinct that has allowed us to survive, we fear a poisonous snake as a natural response. We are naturally interested in the morbid and macabre. It allows us to develop a greater understanding of life. But what about fear, when there is no danger present?

Just look at some inherently creepy images, there is something that just feels off about them! Why is this that we fear them, where there is no danger in looking at them? There is no obvious answer; it is a combination of many factors; that have been by society and natural choice. In a way we fear them because the unsettles us in one word they are creepy.

Some say fear is learnt at a young age, things are more likely to scare us if one has had a traumatic experience and have been introduced to something from an early age. This is why many scary stories play with the feeling of nostalgia. Turn something that was once a fond memory into something sinister. A good example of this would be the abundance of CreepPastas out there based on Disney. The most well known one being abandoned by Disney.

Aristotle's idea of Catharsis, suggests that we view horror related material, to release our negative emotions/ pent-up aggression. But in reality it is the opposite. Horror is more likely to make someone aggressive, but it hasn't fully been disproven, there might still be a correlation between watching a scary movie and a reduction of one's fears. Excitation Transfer Theory proposed by Dolt Zillmann, suggests that any negative feelings created by horror, will allow us to feel happier or more excited when a victim beats the killer.

This is all partly due to our natural curiosity with human sociology and interaction. Horror is outside the norm of human behavior, as it creates unreal situations and interesting but yet disturbing characters. There is a correlation between an interest in behavior that violates the normality of everyday life and horror.

Dispositional Alignment Theory or even Schadenfreude, we enjoy horror because people end up getting killed in it. In a way we believe at heart that they deserve it, in one form or another.

One of the greatest horror writers of all time; Stephen King suggests there are three kinds of scares. The first one being The Gores, the smell of rotting flesh or the look of a dead corpse. It taps into something primitive and gives the basic response. The second being Horror, what can be said to be seeing unnatural or experiencing the unreal. Seen in one of the many movie monsters. And lastly Terror, what is the unease that comes with not knowing. The feeling you get, when you are lost in the woods on a dark night. The sense of fear when you realize that, there might be something in the house with you; when you thought you were alone.

Ambiguity plays a big role in things, the less you tell someone the more you wish to know. It's like over hearing your name, you will suddenly want to know what they were talking about. This can be personified as a mask; masks are inherently creepy, we fear them as they remove the ability of facial recognition. We are no longer able to perceive one's intentions. As it hides the emotions of the one underneath, it stops us from knowing if the person is a threat or not.

This ties in with the Uncanny of the human form. There is a fine line between something looking almost human and being completely off. It is at the point in-between that makes something creepy, not so off that it looks indistinguishable and not so on that it looks normal. The Creepy straddles the line between what we can understand and what we can't put into words.

We could say that the creepy, is created by the ambiguity of others. Instead of feeling horror with the creepy, we feel uneasy. Our brain doesn't know how to perceive the figure. So it might be a threat? It may elicit a typical fear response, but it might not. If you read this you might die? Maybe! That is the terror of ambiguity. Have you ever been up in a high place and felt the need to jump or something pushing you forward? Have you ever sat on the ledge with a loved one and realized you could push them? This is a form of cognitive dissonance that your brain has to deal with ambiguity.

Jump scare is something you see in every horror movie and in most horror survival games, even when you know it is coming; it will still make you jump. This is because your brain starts to recognize your tension preparing yourself for the scare. But when it actually happens your brain will overact, due to all the stress that has been put upon it. Sound and visual imagery are both scary, but sound travels faster than light in this case. Visuals have to be flipped and deciphered, while sound is more direct and instantaneous.

Role-play, whilst playing any survival horror game; one becomes the character. Your life and their life are now connected. When they die you are shocked as you were living out your fantasy through them. It also can easily kick in a fight or flight response. When someone feels like their character is in danger, they often panic and try their best to save them. This is because progress can be lost, quite like one's own life.

Lore, anything with horror can become a lot more frightening by adding some context. Yes that giant monster over there is scary, but give it a background. Now that giant monster has feelings of resentment and only wishes to see you dead, for the misdeeds you done. This can easily be seen in horror games such as Five Nights At Freddy's and Slender Man 5 Pages, within both games you are given some basic insight. But the more you look the more you uncover and the thing becomes more terrifying. Those Animatronics don't want to kill you because of bad programming; they wish to kill you for revenge. Also due to the fact that there is a lot of ambiguity, maybe fan theories come out. Maybe you are acutely the monster, the one that killed the kids and put their dead corpses into the animatronics.

Culture, one belief system the largest roles in what makes something creepy or horrific. It has been said that horror is a reflection of our societies fears. For example the British are primarily scared by killers and ghosts in a modern environment, this is because most of our atrocities of the modern age were committed in the back alleys of society. We sent those kids down the chimney only and kept those people in chained to a dungeon wall. While Americans fear aliens and monsters, as most of their atrocities occurred in the out back. They killed off the Native Americans and pillaged the land. And when someone views another cultures fears, they are generally either misinterpreted or shrugged off, instead of horror it becomes a thriller. This is much in the same

way as if one has no belief in paranormal, if something goes bump in the night, they will say it's the house settling.

The considerable fears of a society are highly dependent on the era and current social developments. The 1950's was a fear of nuclear war, this can be seen in the movies of the time; such as *The Thing* and *the Creature From The Black Lagoon*, The 1960's was a fear of the atrocities of humanity, so we becomes the monsters; In movies like *The Night Of The Living Dead*. The 1980's were a great mistrust in authority and the establishment, leading to movies such as *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare On Elm Street*. And now we see the reemergence of the Zombies again, due to the viral media's spread of a combination of fears portrayed shared and collected on the Internet.

Fear and horror is also lightly dependant on the viewer, we each have or own take on what is scary. This is partly due to the many archetypes we have as individual. There are those that like view horror for the gore, these kind of people will tend to identify with the killer. People that seek thrills will identify with the victims. With each person comes a different experience on how they approach the genre. And this is what makes the genre amazing.

Experiencing horror is similar to having a nightmare. It allows for growth and experience, it's our brains way of testing the outcomes and informing us on how to cope with certain situations. We have nightmares so that we can sort through our emotions and arrive at a positive outcome and experience things that we may or may not encounter in an every day scenario. This is why zombie movies have gained a cult following. People identify with zombies. They are, our indiscretions and uncontrollable range; they are we reduced to a force of nature. But these kinds of movies are also based on an underlining social message. Zombies are not the only things you need to see as a threat, you also need to be wary other survivors; as they get there first chance, they will likely turn on you. So, they may live another day.

Horror in many ways is the thing that we will never truly understand, as it will mean inventing new words to comprehend the complex feelings that we cannot truly express in words. Horror will always have what truly makes it scary and that is the unknown.