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INNER REPRESENTATION OF OUTER FEARS

Vicente Javier Pérez Valero & Francisco Cuéllar Santiago
Miguel Hernández University of Elche

REALITY IN HORROR

The forms in the representation of the abject or monsters in fantasy and horror stories have traditionally been deformities, magnification of scale or any other facial or bodily features that might be associated with the ugly or bizarre. In contrast, the evil has also been represented through extreme beauty and sometimes as the flip side of evil –as, for example, the woman who becomes a decrepit old woman in *The Shining* (Kubrik, 1980) or the character of Melisandre in *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019)–. The sophistication of the horror genre, and here we can also include science fiction and fantasy territories, has given way to a multitude of representations of the monstrous, the out of the ordinary and, in the end, evil. Among them, a point of view has been gaining ground whereby horror is shown, actively –not as a complement to the plot– from old age, but also from everyday life, through the creation of stories that are close to the spectator and so real that he or she can identify with the protagonists, whether they are victims or executioners.

Over the last few decades there has been a gradual change of paradigm in which beauty, or the absence of it, are the two main parameters in the "real" representation of the terrifying. A clear example of this, and a clear reference for later creators of horror and science fiction, is David Cronenberg and his films from the 1970s to the early 1990s in which he explores body horror through bodily transformations and mutations and, in general, the use of the body in a symbolic way. Perhaps the clearest exponent of the contrast between beauty and inner evil that is shown to through, in this case, the female body, is his film *Dead Ringers* (1988), where the physical appearance and successful environment of twin gynaecologists and a famous actress are set against uterine mutations.

Figure 1.

Frame from *Dead Ringers* (David Cronenberg, 1988).



In horror and science fiction cinema after the Second World War, new monsters began to be introduced with a symbolic and contemporary variable in the representation of evil and, by extension, of monsters. This came about as a representation of the social reflex in the face of the atomic bomb and the cold war, and was further accentuated by the changing audience in the mid-1960s and as the censorship of the Hays code was disappearing. Clear examples of this trend are *The Thing from Another World* (Nyby and Hawks, 1951) –which served as the basis for John Carpenter's film *The Thing* (1982)–, *Godzilla* (Honda, 1954), *The Blob* (Yeaworth, 1958) or later *Alien* (Scott, 1979).

Figure 2.

Images from *Godzilla* (Ishirō Honda, 1954), *The Blob* (Irvin Yeaworth, 1958), *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) and *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982).



The use of this resource as a denunciation began to transform, at the beginning of the 1990s, into an increasingly real representation of evil with *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991) or *Seven* (Fincher, 1995) where we would have a cultured murderer capable of producing greater admiration in the spectator and another with a "normal" appearance. These films would mark the aesthetics and narrative of future films such as the film adaptation of Brett Easton Ellis's literary work, *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000), in which the most perverse aspects of human beings come to the surface through a physically attractive character who exposes the internalisation of the cult of beauty in Western culture.

Figure 3.

Frame from *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000).



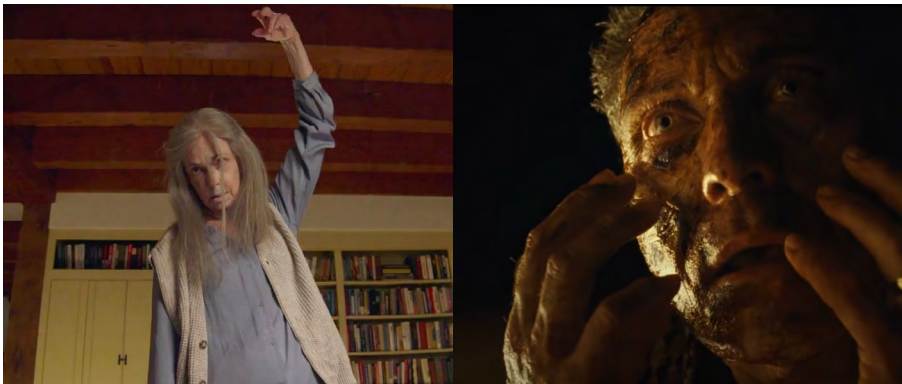
This approach to reality is perhaps provoked by the insensitivity or lack of affection towards classic horror and the need to go a step further in our fears. This is reflected in the creation of plots and situations with a high degree of verisimilitude, real, after all, that are capable of conveying physical sensations, if we take into account Linda Williams' classification of Film Bodies in *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess* (1991)¹. On the other

¹ Williams classifies the only three genres that are capable of conveying physical reactions and sensations –pornography, horror and melodrama– and sets out their comparative characteristics through the viewer's bodily reactions, preferred audience and perversion, among other classifications. Today, some of this analysis, while useful as a reference, has become obsolete, as the evolution and juxtaposition, above all, of pornography and horror have been modifying this 1991 photograph.

hand, there is also the appeal to our own fears, projected towards the "other" (Pérez Valero and Copmans, 2023) –be it racism, xenophobia, sexism and LGBTBIphobia– or the fear of old age and the rejection of all its physical projections of the abject and the passage of time of which, for example, Gore Verbinski's *Wellness Cure* (2016), Brandon Cronenberg's *Infinity Pool* (2023) and M. Night Shyamalan have been advocates. Night Shyamalan has echoed in *The Visit* (2015) and *Old* (2021). Importantly, the representation of the aged, mutilated, transformed or mutated body is almost exclusively projected onto women.

Figure 4.

Frames from M. Night Shyamalan's *The Visit* (2015) and *Old* (2021).



Undoubtedly, there is a sociological component that is bringing to the surface, in any artistic expression –literature, comics, videogames or cinema– a tendency to show reality, credible and stark, in fiction, and accentuated, in contrast, by the extreme exposure and pressure we face through the Internet and Social Media concerning physical appearance and the intrinsically human desire to stay young.

OLD AND NEW REPRESENTATIONS OF HORROR

In this journey, which we present in the book, *Unusual Shapes, Fantasy and Horror*, we delve into the different faces of personified horror but, more

specifically, into this current tendency to diversify these forms of representation through the reality and everydayness of the terrifying and fantastic fact.

Marta Miquel-Baldellou in her text *C'est L'autre Qui Est Vieux: Old Age as a Source of Abjection and Otherness in Paco Plaza's La Abuela*, addresses this proliferation, in the last decade, of horror films dealing with old age and the representation of the elderly. In this case, from Paco Plaza's point of view, his film aims to raise a deeper reflection in society, about how the cult of the body is venerated and old age becomes a trope of possession. In this way, old age, and especially the female nude, is denounced as the devil in today's society.

The second text, entitled *Corporeality in Elderly Women and Art House Horror. Towards a Categorization of Certain Modern Gorgons* by David Fuentesfría Rodríguez, delves into the decrepitude of old age, analysing it as a resource and treating it from different points of view, historical, aesthetic and social, cataloguing its use as a "new" entity in the horror genre, isolating the specific figure of "the decrepit old woman" as a modern gorgon. To this end, he analyses three productions in which the presence of the naked bodies of old women transmits, throughout the film, its own atmospheric vibrations: *La Abuela* (Paco Plaza, 2021), *Relic* (Natalie Erica James, 2020) and *X* (Ti West, 2022).

In Marta Miquel-Baldellou's second text in this publication, she addresses another aspect of current reality through racism - in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement - in *From Gothic Romance to Plantation Horror: Spatial Dynamics, White Manors and Black Zombies in Jordan Peele's Get Out*. Peele's film conveys covert displays of contemporary racism, depicting and denouncing a current context of pervasive racial discrimination. This aspect crystallises through a horror narrative rooted in the sub-genre of plantation horror from gothic romance. According to Elizabeth Christine Russ, this resource becomes the crucial narrative of the post-slavery era that extends beyond the turn of the twenty-first century (2009). Miquel-Baldellou's analysis highlights the symbolic use of the trope of zombification as a metaphor evoking the trauma of slavery.

The fourth work, by Fran Mateu, explores the innovative aspects in the study of advertising strategies to promote films, through the ingenious tricks or *gimmicks* of the American director and producer William Castle.

In *Floating Skeletons, Electric Shocks and Interactive Punishments in William Castle's Horror Films*, Mateu presents a case study focusing on three of Castle's most significant productions: *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), *The Tingler* (1959) and *Mr. Sardonicus* (1961). In this analysis, the figure of the director, considered as "the other Hitchcock", is extolled and the influence he has had on subsequent horror films, both in the independent and mainstream circuits, is assessed.

Sara Calvete-Lorenzo also examines the theme of the female body in horror cinema in *Violence, Imperfection and Vengeance of Female Bodies in The New French and Canadian Cinemas*, but this time through the cutting of flesh and its physical and explicit representation of violence on the female body and, in particular, on the multiple ways of destroying and fragmenting it on screen. The study, which is based on doctoral research in which the theory of the Triple Cut is set out, is centred on two different but directly related cinematographies, the French case and its Canadian equivalent, where in recent years a large number of horror productions have been produced by female directors.

To close this block, Mario-Paul Martínez Fabre presents his work *Slasher, Heavy Metal, and Digital Games. The Exemplary Productions that Inaugurated the Horror Genre in Videogame Cinema*, in which he analyses, transversally, films whose themes are based, on the one hand, on the interweaving of the virtual universe of videogames and their correspondence and effects with the real world. And, on the other hand, films that approach digital games from a social approach, more connected with the "real" everyday space, and with the questions raised by their network of relations based on their consumption and market. To this end, Martínez Fabre considers three films that can serve to outline a cinematographic panorama of the videoludic horrors, or "ludic evils", that initiated this trend of representation in videogame cinema: *Nightmares* (with its episode *The Game Master*, Joseph Sargent, 1983), *Brainscan* (John Flynn, 1994) and *Stay Alive* (William Brent Bell, 2006).

FANTASTIC TERRITORIES AND NARRATIVES IN THE ARTS

The second part of this volume, in the form of a miscellany, deals with various formal representations of the approach to the fantastic terrain from the different arts, as well as in education.

Cynthia Bagousse, Nathalie Bonnardel, Grégory Lo Monaco and Thomas Arciszewski offer a vision of educational alternatives through science fiction in *Science-Fiction: Critical and Creative Cognition of The World to Come*. This genre seems to be able to contribute to the development of students' skills to enable them to envision the future in its alternative forms and adapt to the changing environment of the 21st century. In this chapter, the authors focus on the development of creativity and critical thinking –as two of the competences necessary for adapting to the future (OECD, 2019; P21, 2019; UNESCO, 2015)– and how science fiction, as alternative knowledge, fosters creative thinking.

Andrew Connor, from the College of Art at the University of Edinburgh, presents "*Meanwhile...*" *Multiplicity of Plots in Vr Experiences*, an essay in which he demonstrates the versatility of videogames in allowing the player to engage with the story and shape their own character (within limits), as well as explore a diverse set of pre-established plots. Connor emphasises the importance of creating immersive experiences through the use of Virtual Reality (VR) and the enrichment of the main plot with subplots that the player can navigate.

The Fritz Lang's Fantastic Territories is the title of the chapter in which Juan Agustín Mancebo Roca explains the fundamentally fantastic aspect of the work of the filmmaker Fritz Lang. Lang's imagination, cultivated from his earliest readings thanks to the works of Emilio Salgari or Karl May, constructed, without any previous reference, completely new visual and narrative contents. His films are cinematographic and cultural archetypes that have marked the science fiction of the last two centuries and are permanently relevant in contemporary visual culture.

Cristina Ogando González deals in her chapter with the resource of retelling, or retelling the same stories through myths (Lévi-Strauss, 1955) or

archetypes (Propp, 1968), that is, small repetitions of ideas that are mixed into a story and become easily recognisable to the public. In his text *Retelling: a way to unlock gameplay*, Ogando argues that, faced with the practical impossibility of creating original ideas, videogame developers have found in the retelling of legends a way to reach players directly and efficiently. And it does so through the creation of immersive game-fictional worlds with stories that the public is already familiar with. However, this begs the question of whether the adaptation of these stories to the new medium represents yet another way of keeping them alive, or simply a new form of storytelling.

Finally, Verónica Navarro Navarro and M^a Isabel de Vicente-Yagüe Jara present *Influence-S. Escher's Drawing. Escher's Drawing, a journey through the fantasy of the artist M.C. Escher* and how different authors in the arts and other disciplines have found inspiration in his works. Impossible spaces, abstract mathematical concepts such as infinity, optical illusions and the representation of three-dimensionality, project a fantastic and captivating vision onto Escher's work, but at the same time linked to our environment and reality, which explains the fascination that it has provoked in a large number of creators.

TOWARDS A TERRIFYING REALITY

Through the eleven works presented here, *Unusual Shapes, Fantasy & Horror* proposes, in short, to show a wide range of visions of the forms adopted by horror and the fantastic through the different arts. This volume aims to be a place for analysis and creation through research and dissemination. From cinema, videogames, education and, in general, all the arts involved in their processes, we reveal a continuous dialogue both in the revision of what has happened and in current narrative trends. The evolution and applications of the fantasy and horror genre stimulate an increasingly broad and complex creative panorama, with innovative contributions and hybridisations, but also with a retrospective view. At this point, one might ask whether these unusual forms of horror and, more broadly, science fiction have a wider route to a more complex conception of the genre in which we, as spectators, are questioned directly. The monster can be ourselves regardless of our appearance, age or situation; the plot can be as complex as life itself. So, is reality

more terrifying or fantastic than fiction itself? Is our mirror the witness of our own fears? The trend indicates that the narratives and plots of the future will continue to emphasise sophistication through direct interpellation of the spectator, to put him or her in situations where once we only saw the obvious evil, but where now, increasingly, we see ourselves through the passage of time.

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Focusing on the representation of fantastic and horror territories, this volume delves into the different faces of personified fears, but more specifically into the current tendency to diversify these forms of ideation through the reality and everydayness of the terrifying and imagined event.

This work aims to be a place of analysis and creation through research and dissemination. From cinema, video games, education and, in general, all the arts involved in its processes, we reveal a continuous dialogue both in the revision of what has happened and in current narrative trends. The evolution and applications of the fantasy and horror genre stimulate an increasingly broad and complex creative panorama, with innovative contributions and hybridisations, but also with a retrospective view.

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