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### The Uncanny Valley In Entertainment

The creepiness of the uncanny valley is not one of the most researched topics. In fact, it is unheard of among many people. Being such a subtle phenomenon, most people just describe their reactions to the uncanny valley as “the creeps”, and dismiss it. However, the creeps run deeper in the brain than some other things that scare us, especially in this day and age of easy survival.

“Since most humans in modern society no longer regularly need a fight-or-flee reaction from predators and hazardous living conditions, they seem to have developed an instinctual need to keep their minds and abilities sharp via frightening films and novels, thrill rides, and negative newscasts” (Elsensohn 2003).

This newly-developed immunity to simple fears of the past is why things like the uncanny valley that tap into new places of the human brain need to be used more. The uncanny valley and ambiguity is one of the best ways to utilize fear in entertainment.

With this fear-fatigue, it is no wonder why horror entertainment has become such a popular pastime. However, as the years go on, horror entertainment is getting less and less easy.

“Movies from the 1960s and 1970s appear to score much higher than movies from later decades. For example, just three movies from the 2010s (The Conjuring, The Conjuring 2, and Don’t Breathe) and two from the 2000s (Paranormal Activity and The Others)

have a higher Rotten Tomatoes rating than 80% while 12 movies from the 1960s and 10 from the 1970s achieved this feat” (“Has The Quality of Horror Movies Declined Over Time?” *Where's The Jump?*).

As can be seen, viewers are getting more and more used to what directors bring to the table to scare their socks off. What directors perhaps have not brought to the table enough, is proper development of ambiguity and uncanny themes in films to tap into the real fears of the audience. This is why less popular sources on the internet like independent film makers and horror short story writers are growing more in popularity; people slowly have less and less desire to pay money to see big-budget producers flaunt around their CGI that everyone has already seen.

Some of the most famous films in history have aspects of the unknown and the uncanny that make them so special to the world. For example, the ending of *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, is famous for the breaking of the fourth wall from the very talented Anthony Perkins, as his sociopathic character Norman Bates stares into the camera. This makes his intentions and mindset seem very unpredictable and unknown and directs it towards the audience. As another example, one of the best rated horror films of all time, *Get Out*, directed by comedian Jordan Peele, used a prominent unknown element as the heart of the fear it evoked in viewers. “His film is essentially about that unsettling feeling when you know you don’t belong somewhere; when you know you’re unwanted or perhaps even wanted too much” (Tallerico 2017). Viewers are engaged so much in this film because they feel unsettled as the plot moves along, rather than surprised by weak and prominent one-sided bits.

As explained in *The Punk Writer* about the third kind of fear Stephen King says exists (terror), “It’s irrational and unfair; it is not a respecter of persons. It comes for us all” (2016). The

feeling of the creeps and ambiguity of uncanny entities toys with the soul more than other things that we fear. It scares us, but not for reasons we can understand, which is scary in itself. Movies that deliver more of this almost always deliver better critic and audience reviews. As movies with smarter scares are not quite abundant, we can only hope that similar to the level of good horror reviews in the 60s and 70s, directors will soon see room for improvement with uncanny elements, and horror movies will get back on their feet, using the uncanny valley and ambiguity as a great way to utilize fear in audiences across the globe.

## Notes

The uncanny valley is important in the context of horror entertainment because horror movies are one of the biggest ways that the science of fear connects with the public, societal interests, and most importantly, popular culture. Much like books, horror movies are a great way to study what scares us, and they are a key aspect in engaging people in one of the most complex emotions of the human brain in a way that is fun and thought provoking. These are the sources that were used:

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*The Punk Writer.*, 11 Aug. 2016, [burnttongueblog.wordpress.com/2016/07/16/the-chilling-power-of-ambiguity-in-supernatural-horror/](http://burnttongueblog.wordpress.com/2016/07/16/the-chilling-power-of-ambiguity-in-supernatural-horror/).