

Psychological Horror Aesthetics within the Visual Sublimity of Cinema and Video Games: A Contemplation on Human Emotions

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Abstract

The research paper contemplates on the architecture of grotesque visual imagery and psychological horror aesthetics in contemporary popular culture through the study of visual narrative discourses. The research framework examines how corporeal horror, eco gothic distortions, visual sublimity, voices, memory, human emotional archetypes and visual symbols in James Wan's *The Conjuring* and the psychological horror survival game *Silent Hill f* articulate the idea of unconscious human untamed emotions. The paper argues how untamed emotions like uncontrollable rage, ambition, repression and emotional excess lead to female monstrosity, tragedy and metamorphosis into villainy through Vladimir Propp's theoretical framework. With the help of Jacques Marie Émile Lacan's psychoanalytical concept of the "Three Orders" and Alfred Jarry's "science of imaginary solutions," namely Pataphysics, the research focuses on psychic fragmentation and absurdity underlying human emotional subjectivity both internally and externally. While Lacanian concepts like *jouissance*, *méconnaissance* and *objet petit a* focus on psychic division, Pataphysics with its paradoxes, ambiguity and contradictions foregrounds the absurd situations generated through external actions. Bathsheba Sherman's character highlights maternal monstrosity, whereas Hinako Shimizu symbolises uncontrollable rage shaped by patriarchal domination. Through cinema and video games, the paper foregrounds visual aesthetic experience alongside emotional instability through archetypal iconography.

Keywords: Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Pataphysics, Visual Horror Aesthetics, Psychic Fragmentation, Female Monstrosity

1. Introduction

Visual imagery has been a prominent element in popular culture, especially in horror thriller cinema and psychological story-based video games, which frequently represent human subjectivity, emotions and unconscious states. Psychic fragmentation presented through visual imagery often provides a deeper understanding of human emotions than conventional gothic figures within literary texts. The grotesque and corporeal symbols, traumatic voices, environmental distortions and repetitive visual structures continue to dominate contemporary horror aesthetics. The materialisation of untamed human emotions through cinema and video games therefore provides a powerful understanding of human archetypes.

The sublime, decaying nature, monstrosity within domestic spaces, sound, music and horror aesthetics transform visual imagery into a powerful medium for articulating intense emotions. Emotional excess originating from rage, power, desire or ambition and culminating in monstrosity or tragedy becomes a

significant discourse of study. The dramatization of these ideas through clothing, environment and sound further explains the symbolic and archetypal figures represented in movies and video games.

Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” states:

“The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking. but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form” (Mulvey 9).

Horror cinema and video games visualise unconscious anxieties through archetypal projections. These visual imageries can be critically aligned with Lacanian psychoanalysis and Jarry’s Pataphysics.

2. The Making of a Maternal Villain in The Conjuring: Propp’s Theoretical Study on Bathsheba Sherman

In The Conjuring Universe, the first movie The Conjuring, directed by James Wan and written by Chad Hayes and Carey W. Hayes, presents Bathsheba Sherman as an archetypal symbol of untamed ambition, unconscious rage and narcissistic monstrosity.

John L. Fell in “Vladimir Propp in Hollywood” discusses Propp’s theory of character roles and narrative functions. Bathsheba’s character exceeds the conventional representation of maternal monstrosity. Her hamartia originates from emotional turmoil and obsessive ambition, eventually leading to rage and madness. Such emotional excess transforms her into the villainous force within the narrative.

The narrative framework of the movie begins with demonologists Ed and Lorraine Warren investigating the Annabelle doll case in 1968. The film then focuses on the Perron family, who shift to a farmhouse in Harrisville, Rhode Island, in 1971. From the beginning, the dog Sadie refuses to enter the house and is later killed by Bathsheba’s demonic presence.

Amalia Indradewi and I Gusti Agung Sri Rwa Jayantini explain that Bathsheba sacrificed her infant child before committing suicide near the tree behind the farmhouse. The tree functions as a symbol of historical trauma and intensifies the horror associated with Bathsheba’s legacy.

Bathsheba’s suicide becomes a symbolic representation of emotional excess leading to tragic destruction. Her ambition and obsession continue even after death, transforming her into a vengeful supernatural entity. Her possession of Carolyn and the attempt to sacrifice Carolyn’s children reveal the continuity of violent desire.

Bathsheba’s visual representation through distorted corporeal imagery, shadows, dead birds and blood symbolises emotional excess and psychic instability. The dialogue “She wants this family dead” represents the repetitive nature of violence, while “She made me do it” demonstrates Carolyn’s loss of identity under possession.

Bathsheba’s character can also be interpreted through Lacan’s “Three Orders.” The grotesque imagery, domestic chaos and distorted environment symbolise emotional fragmentation and the Real Order. Her desire for domination aligns with objet petit a, while sacrifice and possession become forms of jouissance. Barbara Creed’s concept of abjection in The Monstrous Feminine further explains Bathsheba’s maternal monstrosity. The conventional image of motherhood becomes distorted into violence and destruction, creating a Pataphysical contradiction within domestic space. The home, usually associated with safety and comfort, becomes a terrifying site of supernatural violence and emotional instability.

3. Silent Hill f: A Study on Hinako's Uncontrollable Rage and a Labyrinth of Trauma, Voices and Memory

Apart from cinema, contemporary video games also present narrative structures through immersive visual and interactive experiences. Stephanie Patridge explains that video games operate as “self involving interactive fictions,” allowing players to participate directly within fictional worlds.

The Silent Hill series combines cinematic storytelling, visual imagery and interactive horror aesthetics. Ewan Kirkland in “Storytelling in Survival Horror Video Games” explains how virtual camera movements and environmental structures produce cinematic experiences within gameplay.

Silent Hill f, developed by NeoBards Entertainment and published by Konami Digital Entertainment, is set in 1960s Japan within the fictional town of Ebisugaoka. The protagonist Hinako Shimizu navigates a horrifying landscape filled with fog, corpse flowers and monstrous entities.

The title itself symbolises multiple layers of meaning. “Silent” reflects isolation and the silencing of women within domestic structures. “Hill” symbolises both nature and devastation, while the lowercase “f” may represent femininity, vulnerability and psychological fragmentation.

Hinako's emotional instability develops through patriarchal violence and familial domination. Dialogues from the launch and reveal trailers foreground manipulation, emotional repression and rage. Her mother, father and elder sister contribute to her psychological vulnerability.

Lacan's theory becomes essential in understanding Hinako's fragmented subjectivity. Mulvey's discussion of the mirror stage can be applied to Hinako's unstable self identity and emotional disintegration. The faceless women holding kitchen knives, monstrous imagery and dream world sequences reflect the oscillation between the Imaginary and the Real.

The dark shrine within the game symbolises Hinako's unconscious state. In the “Fox's Wedding” ending, Hinako becomes an emotionless monster who murders her parents while wearing the Shiromuku garment. The symbolism of purity becomes transformed into violence and monstrosity.

The Kashimashi creature functions as Hinako's alter ego, representing suppressed rage and emotional accumulation. Screams, gore and monstrous visual structures become important symbolic representations of emotional excess.

Pataphysical contradictions are also visible throughout the game. Hinako's red capsules operate as imaginary solutions to psychological suffering, yet her condition deteriorates continuously. The visual beauty of corpse flowers exists alongside devastation and death. Similarly, the wedding garment traditionally associated with happiness becomes linked with violence and emotional collapse.

Hinako therefore emerges as an archetypal symbol of uncontrollable rage shaped by repression, trauma and patriarchal violence.

4. Conclusion

The psychological horror elements within cinema and video games construct both visual aesthetic experience and archetypal representations of human emotions. Visual symbols intensify rage, desire and emotional instability through grotesque imagery and corporeal horror. Bathsheba Sherman's maternal monstrosity and Hinako Shimizu's psychic fragmentation foreground bodily horror and emotional excess within domestic spaces.

The theories of Vladimir Propp, Lacan's “Three Orders” and Alfred Jarry's Pataphysics further articulate the emotional and psychological intensity of these characters. Their monstrosity originates not merely from actions but from overwhelming emotional excess leading to tragic outcomes.

The future scope of the research lies in feminist readings of female monstrosity, eco gothic horror studies and comparative analyses between cinematic and video game visual pleasure. Future research may also explore the intersection of mythology, gendered violence and psychological horror aesthetics within contemporary popular culture.

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