

Role of fear in "Love, Death, and Robots: THE WITNESS EPISODE."

Huang ZhuoYing, Zoe

20023121

BA (Hons) Animation

Informed Practice 1

26 August 2022

Select a visual narrative of your choice (either comic, film, television programme, animation or video game) and discuss the role fear plays within the narrative. What is the source of the fear? What formal techniques are used to manipulate the feelings of the audience? Explain how the narrative, and in particular the representation of fear within the narrative, relates to broader cultural, social or political issues in play at the time the work was made.

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Introduction

“The Witness” Episode in Love Death and Robots presents a bizarre narrative of a young woman who witnesses murder across the street, an ordeal that pushes her to flee for her life in a surreal city (Secul Giusti, 2021, p. 147). This essay aims to examine the role of fear within the narrative and its influence on socio-political issues in its production period, and to discuss methods used to manipulate the audience’s feelings. It is examined in the context of contemporary times as a timeframe, being produced in 2019. The 12-minutes episode imminently evolves around fear as the primary theme through the struggles of the young woman attempting to escape the murderer after making eye contact with him (Lukas & Marmysz, 2010, p. 22). Fear is an unpleasant feeling or emotion that originates from perceived danger (Feinstein et al., 2011, p. 35). Upon full observation, “The Witness”, with a balance of specific visual elements, invokes Surrealism’s resurgent influence on conversations of contemporary society. And so, as a visual narrative, it is given form and structure by our particular terrors of death and the unknown concurrently existing with the mundane of our everyday.

Role of of Fear within the narrative

In "The Witness," fear presents itself as an unsettling and frightening quality for motivating visual hunger to completely immerse the audience in an artistic experience therefore revealing

the disturbingly-vivid sensation of “The Uncanny”. Set as present-day to future Hong Kong, the disturbingly-vivid sensation of “The Uncanny” is revealed by appealing to our strange, but natural attraction to the primitive, during an immersive, artistic experience.



Fig 1., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)



Fig 2., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

From hyper-realistic 3D renders to crisp, hand-drawn 2D graphics to keyframe animation (shown above), visual impressions of fear are created and confined within the narrative as creating and confining fear within the narrative as visual impressions to lure the audience deeper into the story. “The Witness” leverages its storytelling in a constant, high note of tension, tying fear and desire into an unresolved state of enthrallment for the audience. The inclusion of the strip-show interlude (as shown) could be seen as a way of toying with the audience’s feelings through a virtuoso performance of technique and technology. This visual invention alludes to the consequential taming of desire and the reassertion of the power of fear as an overwhelming, omnipresent narrative aspect. The manipulation of the audience’s emotions in continued enthrallment happens through spectacle arising from a combination of various narrative techniques that appeals to the primal side of the audience as human beings.

Source of Fear in "The Witness" episode

Fear assumes a sort of performative element within the narrative so the audience can emotionally resonate with the experiences depicted. For many decades, living in a woman’s body also means living in constant fear of violence. The female figure is perennially presented as fragile forms of male-dominated erotic satisfaction, and optical objects religiously exploited in society.



Fig 3., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

The emotional distress experienced by the protagonist while running for her life (shown above) after witnessing a murder alludes to said generational gender-based violence and sources of fear portrayed as a collective consciousness in the visible world. The objectification and violence against women belongs to a prevailing narrative still relevant to viewers today. Thus, such poverty of reality reflects women's vilative fears in a fast-paced, claustrophobic domestic setting.

Cosmic horror entails the fear of the unknown within our natural setting, making the reader feel helpless and inconsequential in the face of organic, natural phenomena (Davis, 2019). "The Witness" takes on the theme of tension in the audience's experience as they watch in systematic suspense of the chase that occurs. It all ultimately represents our innate, instinctive fear of death and danger in a picturesque pursuit for self-preservation.

Formal techniques used to manipulate the audience's feelings

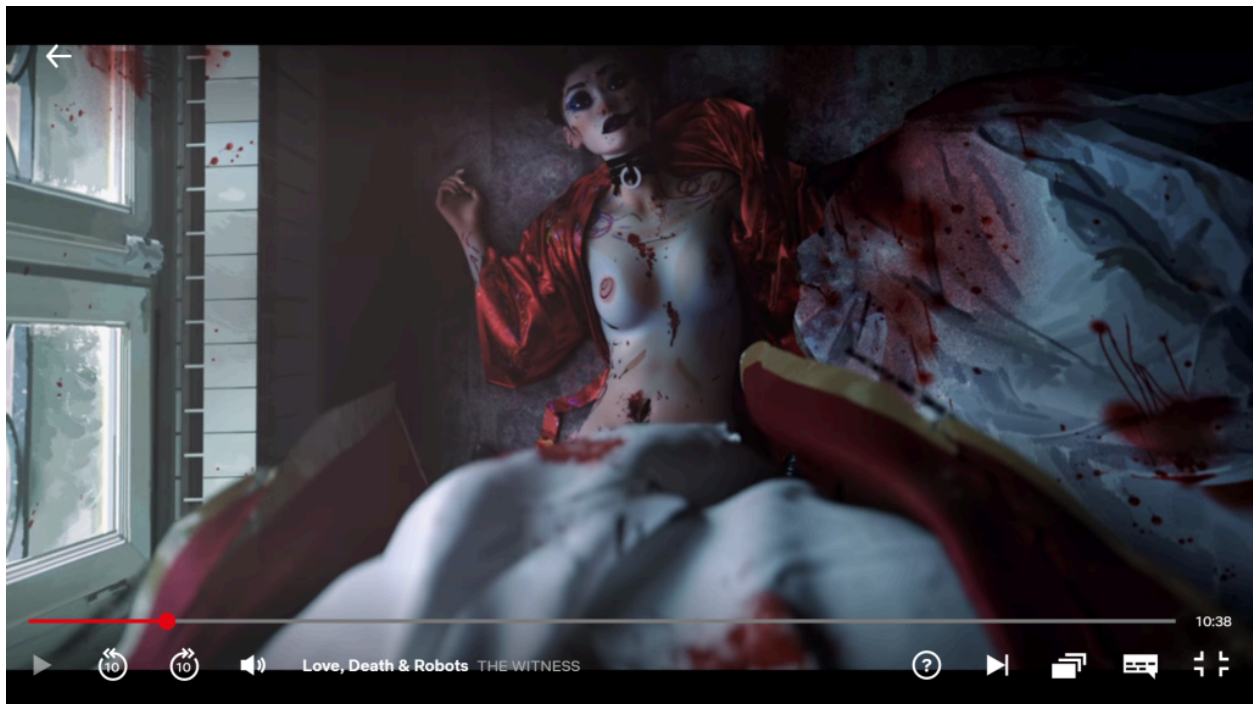


Fig 4., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

The episode uses *body horror* as the primary formal technique to manipulate the audience's emotions. Body horror is a cinema genre emphasizing deep-rooted fear of the living body's despoliation and disfigurement (McIver, 2016, p. 144). It is a technique that reminds the audience of their vulnerability, frailty, and mortality to instill fear of possible life threats.



Fig 5., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

Cinema and film producers use various elements such as visceral violence towards the human body, horrific sounds, and dark images to initiate body horror to create an emotional connection with the audience, including violent scenes like the man's murder with a gun and the woman shooting him, causing a bloody body. Such deliberate, evidently-evocative visuals instill fear in the audience as they realise that anyone can quickly become a victim of violence.

Symbolic properties of fear are reflected in a conflation of violence and hyper-sexualised neo-Oriental imagery, and a manipulation of perspective of the audience into one of a voyeuristic and Orientalist "male gaze". The gleefully pornographic visuals depicted in the chase and strip-show scenes infers to the film's genre as an adult, sci-fi animated series.

The episode also employs *cinematic world-building and composition* as narrative forces. Anatomical adaptations of the environment manipulate familiar shapes into surrealistic, organic objects meant to invoke fear, anxiety and tension for the audience. Cosmic horror is inherited rather than created from the natural, everyday settings alongside our primitive instincts in a suspension of storytelling that directs the audience's emotions. The world design serves to convince viewers of the terrors existing in the mundane. This is dependent on the balance between realism and surrealism. Walters (2004) states that all horror movies must display a sense of unrealism. Hand-drawn words and textures overlap with precise computer-made models to enhance the feeling of surrealism in viewers. The settings are of a wild and untamable world that simultaneously resonates familiarity for the audience. Hyper-realism encroaches on the mundane of conventional, everyday life, insidiously haunting all of commonplace, as traces of "The Uncanny" in "The Witness". This new world of heightened-reality as such most-pursues viewers as an invitation for entrancing experiences.



Fig 6., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

How the representation of fear in "The Witness" relates to broader social, political, or cultural issues during the production period

"The Witness" explores the representation of fear relates to the concept of surrealism as an agency for cultural change in gender politics. Surrealism aims to revolutionise human experience. It balances a rational vision of life with one that asserts the power of the unconscious and dreams. The movement's artists find magic and strange beauty in the unexpected and the uncanny, the disregarded and the unconventional (MODERN, 2022). "The Witness" infers a need for a female perspective (because it) was central to Surrealism from its birth in the aftermath of World War I (Brown, 2020).



Fig 7., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

Taking the form of a naked woman all stripped-down into a stereotypical victim stuck-in-a-vicious-timeloop, the role of fear exposes transcendent potential of societal gender-biased expectations and beliefs changing in our current moment. The oblique hyper-sexualisation of the female body may seem gratuitous but in the tumult of today, considering contemporary climate, the erotic exhibition could propose advancements in societal settings regarding sexuality, desires, and the female body. Historically, surrealism was a male-centred movement involving women as mere muses or artistic objects of masculine desires. Today, representations of fear are juxtaposed urging feminist efforts. “For me, sexuality is in the body. And you should certainly not be a victim. It’s not something that you go through, it’s something that you are active in, and it’s perfectly okay.” (Thomas, 2017) Thus, subversion of role of fear casting the woman as a victim of ills into a Surrealistic position of power no longer a victim of her body.

Conclusion



Fig 8., *The Witness* (Netflix, 2019)

To conclude, “The Witness” fear so insidiously unfolds in the mundane everywhere. In a world so chauvinistic and phallocentric, the intimate, uncensored and subversive visual experience become progressive precursors. Macabre symbolisms and hyper-stylized, violent imaginings employed so effectively challenge and expand perceptions regarding Surrealistic contemporaries. Fear, as such, plays a pivotal role in inspiring confrontational, feminist and lifelike narratives to encapture the audience.

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