

Video Script

Intro

Over the last century, there has always been some kind of looming threat that has led us to feel vulnerable and fuel public paranoia of an invasion whether it be domestically or culturally. Cinema has helped give us a visual medium to express our feelings, and with the popularity of the movies, with thousands go out every week to watch them, makes it one of the widest and most accessible art forms for creators to express their fears (Giroux, 2001). Horror films, in particular, created villains out of their insecurities and as you will see, were and still are used as ways to show political messages, warning us of the dangers of stepping too far out of line (Romano, 2016). They allow us a gateway into the past like no other, they not only show us what terrified them at the time but also, how they dealt with it.

I've chosen three specific time periods: 1950s and the 1960-70s and the 1980s. While it may seem a bit strange to pick those over something more modern, the warnings and messages are so vital to the stories told at the time, they are arguably the most identifiable and iconic to choose from (Russell, 2010). From the Red Scare, to the invisible enemy, let's have a look at how societies anxieties have influenced the Horror Genre in the last century.

McCarthyism

During the 50s, the world was quickly recovering from the largest war it had ever seen, and America was entering a new Atomic age where everything from flying cars, to space travel seemed on the horizon (Homer, 2017). However, under the surface, tensions between the US and the USSR were reaching their boiling point. Each side wanted to prove they were the superior country and the threat of nuclear war or a full-on invasion both from the outside or within was on a lot of people's minds (Westad, 2017).

Before I go any further, it would be important to talk about what the Horror genre actually was in this generation. Science fiction had seen a boom in popularity with cheaper ways to get your hands-on serials and magazines that specialised in all things sciencey, as well as the lines between science fiction and fact becoming thinner by the day (Hantke, 2016). This, and the realisation of the power of the atomic bomb used during World War II, people became worried what else science would be capable of, if in the wrong hands (O'Donnell, 1990). This led to the two genres fusing together, and the effects would be felt for the next few decades.

When it came to mainstream Hollywood, gone were the vampires and ghost stories, and in its place were monsters that were affected by atomic radiation, reeking destruction on suburban America such as "*Attack of the 50ft Woman*" (*Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, 1958) and "*Tarantula*" (*Tarantula*, 1955) or men mutating their bodies into hideous, inhuman creations like "*The Amazing Colossal Man*" (*The Amazing Colossal Man*, 1957) and "*The Fly*" (*The Fly*, 1958). This new wave of science-based horror, directly inspired by the destruction that was brought on Japan, was a metaphor for the danger that these weapons posed on middle America as these monsters trampled cities and attacked small communities (Matthews, 2007).

But it wasn't only what was on this planet that frightened us but what was beyond the stars. With the space race in full swing and numerous emerging high-profile accounts of UFO sightings, horror

films started to focus on alien invaders bent on destroying us or controlling our minds to create a new perfect, uniform society without love, patriotism or individuality. It's hard not to see this as a metaphor for the looming threat of the Soviet Union as the communist favoured the needs of the community rather than the self which was a stark contradiction to the more capitalist way of life that American's had gotten used to (Towlson, 2014).

Arguably two of the most infamous metaphors for the incoming Soviet threat are "*The Thing from Another World*" (The Thing from Another World, 1951) and "*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*" (Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 1956). In the former, a group of scientists are trapped in the Arctic with a hulking alien who threatens society, if it was to make it off the base they're stuck on. The film has our heroes' band together in effort to hold back the foreign menace (Duchaney, 2015). The patriotic theme is arguably its most clear with the film's closing monologue as Scott briefs the news about what happened there that night. He describes the people there as war heroes, fighting off the alien invasion detailing those who have suffered casualties and comparing themselves to stories from the bible, saving the world with an arc of electricity instead of wood. This speech not only holds up the conservative, religious viewpoint of the American government of the time but also warns people to 'keep looking', a possible statement on the increased level of espionage at the time, imply that the threat, like space, is all around us. (Delton, 2013)

Invasion of the Body Snatchers also finishes with his pro-government agenda as the main character is seen hurling himself into traffic trying to warn people that that aliens are already here and are coming "insert line here". With this pretty clear attempt to boost paranoia of an incoming Communist invasion, the film ends with doctors try warning the government to get ready as the invasion is spreading, and they need to be prepared to block off and eradicate this threat. (Eggertsen, 2010)

Free Love

While the 50s was a time fuelled by the need to preserve the American way of life, the next few decades were all about social change. People had grown past the fear of a Red invasion with 60s, 70s and 80s bringing in a boom of cultural revolutions, with civil rights coming to the forefront of US politics, but one area that remained prevalent in through Horror films in this period was the idea of 'free love' (Clover, 2015). Americans were slowly becoming disinterested in the idea of long-term relationships with divorce rates rising significantly and the invention of the contraceptive pill allowed for much more sexual freedom (Mattson, 2016).

While films like "*Psycho*" (Psycho, 1960) took some early steps in portraying these more voyeuristic times, by having a likeable but still flawed heroine actively engaging in a martial affair during broad daylight and even some scenes of partial nudity, films such as the 1978 remake of Invasion of the Body Snatchers that paint a very different story (Rodowick, 2014). Its theme revolves more around of the danger this freer attitude to sexual can have on society (Muir, 2012). These 'pod people' as they're called in the film, while looking and acting somewhat like regular humans, they strive for a society that they see as perfect, one in which we are all joined together where things such as love have little to no value (Higashi, 1981).

They have been discussed as a metaphor for the concept of how a relationships drifts apart over time. The overnight transformation of these characters could be seen as how relationships fade over time until, the person in question falls out of love and moves on. Our heroes, through their organic love for each other seem to be the only ones to save the day until they both eventually succumb to

this new alien threat, with the film's iconic ending Donald Sutherland screams into the camera, showing that he too has given in to this new agenda.

Body Horror

Through the next five years, fear of free love remained at the forefront of Horror until, a new invisible threat began to surface, one that changed the world and the horror genre for decades (Weaver & Tamborini, 2013). The rise of HIV and AIDS presented an epidemic that the world had never really seen before. Yes, there had been other illnesses that had killed millions but this one could only be transferred through blood or by sexual contact. The effects of the virus aren't pretty either, it attacks the immune system, leaving the victim vulnerable to infections or even other diseases, letting the body waste away slowly and painfully (Hardy, 2017). Reflecting back, the way that it seeming made the human body unrecognizable somewhat assisted in the birth of a new sub-genre: Body Horror (Jancovich, 2002).

When talking about this, David Cronenberg is normally the first director that springs to name (Riches, 2012). His films feature heavy gore and mature themes, some of his films have acted as commentaries for American society, such as "*Videodrome*" (Cronenberg, 2014) talking about the effects of violent TV (Lucas, 2010). However, many consider his masterpiece to be 1986's "*The Fly*" (The Fly, 1986), a remake of the 50s original. Where this differs from the other is how the transformation is portrayed. Vincent Price's metamorphosis is more hidden from the audience, we know it's happening however it is saved for one moment of shock at the end. In Cronenberg's version, we see every last gritty detail. We see Brundell change both physical and mentally until he literally becomes an unrecognisable horror. This slow physical transformation we see is where a lot of the comparisons to AIDS come from, even though the director himself denies it (Cronenberg, 2014). We watch as he loses his humanity bit by bit until, we hardly recognise him anymore. He is a shell of his former self until, he begs for his suffering to end. (MacKinnon, 1992)

Although less argued, another remake of a 1950s film, John Carpenter's "*The Thing*" (The Thing, 1982), also has some potential themes referencing the epidemic (Muir, 2011). The obvious comparison is to mention the body horror transformations as the best evidence however, there are two more interesting theories: During the 80s, the disease was stereotypically associated with the gay community so having the cast be entirely male, with a 'parasite' transferring between them is some form of evidence. The second is the infamous blood test scene where they use blood to try and identify who has transformed into a 'Thing', being a possible metaphor to the other most common way to attract the disease. (MacKinnon, 1992). While it took a few years for the filmmaking community to treat the disease with some respect in mainstream Hollywood, these films, in their grotesque, inhuman depictions of physical change, amplified the conditions of HIV and AIDS to help fuel public hysteria and warn them what catching it could do. (Waddell, 2018)

The Modern Day

So, we've seen the West paralysed by anxieties of a Communist invasion, we've seen how the idea of free love scared 70s America and how fear of a virus that changes us physically has made us much more fearful of our bodies morphing and how these have helped shape the horror genres over the last few decades. The important question is: why is it so important to know all of this?

While some may be quick to question the legitimacy of these claims, stating that it is white, conservative critics pushing their own anxieties on these films. (M. Sipos, 2010)

I believe as a creator, understanding the past is crucial to changing the future. As pretentious as that sounds, seeing how these fears were perceived at the time, will allow us to develop different ways to express those issues (Alvarado, 2008). It can show us how much we have changed our attitudes towards certain issues. For example, gay film writers took offence to how they the AIDS epidemic was being plastered on *The Fly's* themes and visuals, which arguably led to films such as "*Philadelphia*" (Philadelphia, 1993), that took a more grounded and realistic approach in portraying the virus (Benshoff, 1997).

Or, on the other hand, it could be the opposite. With Post-9/11 horror, we have found ourselves back to the evil invader storylines but instead of aliens from a distant country, we now have zombies, vampires and ghosts that aim to attack us domestically and from within (Wetmore, 2012). What the future holds is unsure. In recent years, films such as "*Get Out*" (Get Out, 2017) and "*Unfriended*" (Unfriended, 2014) are bringing in a new, more direct, wave of political and social horror that focuses on our views on race and cyber security respectively. All we know for sure is, if you haven't got anything to be afraid of, look around you, you'd be surprised.

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