

PENELITIAN “STRATEGI SERAM” DALAM FILEM RUMAH BERHANTU MALAYSIA DAN AMERIKA

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama artikel ini adalah untuk membongkar pelbagai strategi seram yang terkandung di dalam filem seram berkonsepkan rumah hantu Malaysia dan Amerika Syarikat. Kewujudan rumah berhantu di alam nyata mampu menimbulkan rasa takut dalam kalangan penonton apabila mereka menonton filem seram. Ini adalah kerana, penggunaan latar rumah berhantu mempunyai beberapa motif, elemen dan aspek teknikal tertentu. Artikel ini ingin menjelaskan dengan lebih terperinci tentang makna *uncanny* untuk mengenalpasti akan kesannya terhadap filem-filem rumah hantu dari seleksi klasik dan juga yang terkini. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan teoretika, hubungan *uncanny* dan filem rumah hantu di Malaysia dan Amerika Syarikat dapatlah difokuskan. Berdasarkan theory *uncanny* Sigmund Freud, Andrew Bennett dan Nicholas Royle, dapatlah disenaraikan beberapa aspek yang mempunyai potensi seram yang kebiasaannya boleh mempengaruhi penghuni rumah hantu dan secara keseluruhannya aspek-aspek tersebut juga telah digunapakai untuk membikin filem-filem rumah hantu yang lain di Malaysia dan Amerika. Hasil perbincangan ini akan mempamerkan hubungkait diantara strategi-strategi seram dan *uncanny* di mana ianya boleh digunapakai untuk analisis filem-filem rumah berhantu di Malaysia dan Amerika Syarikat.

Kata kunci: rumah berhantu; filem; *uncanny*; strategi seram; objek berhantu

INVESTIGATING THE STRATEGIES OF FEAR IN MALAYSIAN AND AMERICAN HAUNTED HOUSE FILMS

ABSTRACT

The main intention of this paper is to interrogate the strategies of fear deployed in Malaysian and American haunted house films. Haunted houses have been known to exist in real life which trigger the impulses of fear in the viewers when they watch such horror films. There are a few elements which constitute a haunted house that is also related to its motif and technical aspects. This paper also delves deeper into the meaning of the *uncanny* to determine its effects on

classical and contemporary haunted house films by applying a theoretical approach that focuses on the relation of the word uncanny to haunted house films in both Malaysia and America. Based on Sigmund Freud's work on the Uncanny, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle have drawn up a list of thirteen forms that the Uncanny can take. This paper utilises these thirteen forms to formulate a framework that examines how these components affect the inhabitants of the haunted house. The contention is that most of these features have been coopted in the makings of many haunted house films. The outcome of this discussion will show a correlation between the strategies of fear and the Uncanny which may be applied to the analysis of both American and Malaysian haunted house films.

Keywords: Haunted houses, Films, Uncanny, Strategies of Fear, Haunted Objects

INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to interrogate the strategies of fear utilised in the making of Malaysian and American haunted house films, specifically by deploying Sigmund Freud's theory of the Uncanny and positioning it within a structuralism-inspired framework to investigate the films analysed in this paper. The trope of the haunted house is very prominent in both classical and contemporary Malaysian and American horror film productions. Examples of films which deploy such motifs include *Congkak* (2005), *The Conjuring* (2013), *Annabelle* (2015), *Highland Tower* (2013), *The Amityville Horror* (2005), *The House on Haunted Hill* (1999) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1963). In order to explore the different ways in the Uncanny is deployed in movies that centre on the haunted house trope, this paper utilises thirteen of the components of the Uncanny proposed by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle in their extensive discussion of the phenomenon (2004). The finding indicates that these thirteen uncanny parameters are found in the chosen corpus. As a matter of fact, these parameters are part and parcel of what we call the "strategies of fear", thus augmenting and magnifying the element of fear and horror within these films. Furthermore, the utilization of the theatrical strategy of breaking down the fourth wall is one of the ways in which these strategies of fear take root in the audience, thereby creating an impactful filmic experience suffused with the markers of the Uncanny.

The corpus of choice includes the Malaysian movies *Congkak* (2005) and *Flat 3A* (2011). These movies will be compared with the American-produced titles *The Amityville Horror* (2005) and *The Conjuring* (2013). Even though James Wan, the director of *The Conjuring* is an Australian of Malaysian-Chinese descent, the movie was produced in America and therefore evidences a specifically American slant on production values. The basis for selection is primarily that all of these visual texts utilize the haunted house as the primary setting. The different production values and cultural aspects behind the making of these movies impact the deployment of the strategies of fear and the impact of the phenomenon of the Freudian uncanny. In order to further investigate these strategies in accordance with the thirteen parameters, one example from the corpus will be used per parameter in order to provide a fully-dimensional look at the operation of the uncanny. The discovering and examining of the existence of these parameters is particularly what Anthony C. Thiselton (2016) meant in describing Vladimir Propp's notion of Structuralism as 'narrative grammar', to primarily understand and discover its narrative structure instead of explaining its existence. Therefore, we utilise the Proppian version of Structuralism in order to devise out of Bennett and Royle's thirteen aspects of the Uncanny a structural framework.

Another aim of conducting this research is to discern the relationship of horror strategies in relation to the breaking down of the fourth wall. Suggested by Patrice Pavis (1998), the term of breaking the fourth wall is used by the characters in the films to interact with the audiences,

to enhance further the audience's experience making them feel connected to the film. This research will therefore showcase the application of film techniques in channelling the strategies of fear to the audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maria Belville (2009:171) writes that Gothic tropes include “the haunted house, the tyrannical figure, the doppelganger, the serial killer, the un-dead, the atmosphere of mystery and suspense, supernatural occurrences and the dominating presence of the Gothic sublime.” This marks and establishes that the haunted house is not a single entity or a sub-genre but a trope deployed in Gothic writings as one of the crucial settings in Gothic or horror fiction. The earliest application of the haunted house trope may be widely seen in the works of the early Gothic Revival authors, namely, Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. All of their works are very dependent on architectural features in order to deploy instances of fear and horror. To date, the application of the haunted house trope in Gothic and horror fiction began to bloom rapidly in the 19th century instances such as *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe and other countless novels. The house is the primary setting that hides other Gothic tropes and hauntings. As contended by David Punter and Glennis Byron (2004), during the Victorian era, the Gothic experienced a transition called “Domestication” and “Realism”. These two factors have also brought about a tremendous change in the Gothic and the haunted house industry even in today's modern scenario, as concurred by Comaroff and Ong Ker-Shing (2016:45) who write that horror is “one by-product of the modern, and thus shares many of the characteristics of its advanced forms, evolving with them.”

Domestication means that the attributes have been domesticated or localized according to the writer's setting and time frame. The more modern and local element of the writing, the more familiar it is to the locals. Writers have been domesticating Gothic villains, characters, plots, themes and the settings as according to the locality and customs of the producers and target audience. These have made the readers aware about the hidden domestic or local evil and violence which silently lurks within the society instead of isolated or deserted castles. Realism is when the elements such as real setting, real characters and real life events are used to making the threat closer to the audience. The supernatural has also been simultaneously modernized, realized and domesticated; thus it has transformed and become diverse with possibilities.

However, these Occidental Gothic elements also inhabit classical Malay horror films owing to cross-cultural influences. For instance, classical Malay film productions in the 1950s have the tendency of inviting foreign film directors and Malay film directors who were equipped with foreign knowledge. Among the imported classical foreign film directors are B.N Rao, Dhires Gosh from India and Ramon E. Estella from the Philippines. Although they are of foreign origin, they have managed to utilize and combine the Western-European Gothic motives and the local supernatural elements with success and subtlety. This can be seen in one of Estella's horror films, which is entitled *Pusaka Pontianak* in 1965. This film is the first haunted house film in the Malaysian cinema. This film has obvious Gothic markers and motifs. The film depicts a rich man who distributed his will to his “descendants”. Whoever stays the longest will inherit the house and the money. Soon, one after another began to die mysteriously and later it was revealed that the house was not haunted but there was a serial killer disguising as a ghost. This film borrows the Gothic motives from the film *The House on Haunted Hill* in 1959. This is an example of a cunning and subtle familiarity in deploying the Gothic motive, yet not many have realized these occurrences. The similarities between the two movies may be discerned in the following scene in *Pusaka Pontianak*, taken during the exposition - the gathered descendants are listening to the lawyer's reading of the will. The camera pans from

left to right at the descendants who are sitting in two rows. The ambience of silence is accompanied by slow and constant tempo of rhythm signifying the tension and the concentration of listening to the will. The dialogue of the money motif is as follows, Lawyer: In order for every one of you to obtain the money, one must stay at this orchard for at least four weeks.

Meanwhile in *The House on Haunted Hill*, the scene of will hearing is also present in the exposition act. The *mise en scene* displays a massive house in one particular frame. Slowly, a head emerges from the house, approaches the screen and begins to speak. The head's face is addressing the camera, as it attempts to invite the spectators to join his speaking position in the film. The speech is also accompanied by a slow and constant rhythm which brings about the ambience of tension and spookiness. The monologue that presents the money motif is as follows:

Frederick Loren: If any of you would spend the next 12 hours in this house, I'll give you each 10, 000 dollars. Or your next of kin if you don't survive.

Ahmad Muhyiddin B Yusof et al (2017) have coined this recurring motif in haunted house movies as the money motif, as it is a peculiarly subtle and sinister trope in which money becomes the bait in luring the victims to live in haunted houses for the purpose of inheritance. The haunted house is extremely territorial in nature, as it only haunts within the areas and the compounds of the house. In Malay, however, territorial haunting is referred to as *keras dan berpenunggu* (dangerous and guarded). The Malay practice dictates that other people's territory as dangerous, as demonstrated through a number of *cerita hantu* (ghost stories), as it becomes a tool to deliver good advice in a fearful manner to the people (Rahimah, 2015). The deployment of such an element in Malay horror films contains a different set of values. Often, the strategies of fear incorporate a code of conduct: that one must respect nature, one must exhibit good behaviour, and one must not trespass another person's property in order to commit mischief. The aim of the Malay strategies of fear is therefore to create a respectful individual. This element of the *cerita hantu* as an element to spread good deeds in the filmic platform is aligned with Rosmawati Mohamad Rasit's (2012) conclusion that the existence of film is not just simply as a tool for providing entertainment but a medium to spread goodness and decency by injecting elements such as morality, good deeds and religious values.

The haunted house is also known as the "ghost house", "monster house", "horror house" and perhaps "hell house". According to A. Alias, D.F Hamsani, S.J.L Chua and S.M Zaid (2014), haunted house can also be referred to as the "Tainted House" because it may have been tainted or polluted with ghosts, hauntings and the uncanny. From a gendered perspective of Malay movies, Azlina Assari and Jamaluddin Aziz (2013) in their article entitled *mencabar ideologi maskulin: wanita dan saka dalam filem seram Di Malaysia* discuss the relationship between the object of *saka* or *hantu Raya* and women through the feminist point of view. Amran Kasimin (2002), on the other hand, has carried out a thorough research regarding Malay black magic in his book entitled *tanda sihir dan kekuatan mengatasinya*. In this book, he describes the types of black magic that are commonly found in the Malay supernatural realm such as *santau* or the *minyak pengasih* and how to neutralize its threat.

In the case of haunted house films, there are also instances where the film attempts to break the fourth wall and is at the same time equipped with strategies of fear in horrifying the spectators and causing them to engage with the films because of a collective identification with the trope of the haunted house and its implicit voyeurism. Phillip J. Auter and Donald M. Davis (1991) claim that the application of the fourth wall in films or television programme has also become a platform for the film directors to inject their suggested feelings and emotions in films to the spectators. As the breaking of the fourth wall have made the spectators to be involved in

the films and of course this can be done through numerous camera tactics other than the conventional ones such as deploying a point of view shot (P.O.V). Although the POV shot is meant to signify the character's point of view this simultaneously have forced the spectators to share the same view and feel as the characters in the film. In fact, there are numerous camera tactics that are deployed in making the spectators to be involved in the film. Additionally, according to Auter and Davis (1991), their findings in their research also proves that the spectators themselves are intrigued to be involved in the films vary as the fourth wall have somehow invited them to participate in the emotions and progress of the film. The breaking of the fourth wall as a filmic strategy may be discerned in films evidencing a direct eye contact to the camera, as the camera represents the spectator's eyes and persona. The characters then converse in a dialogue addressing the camera. This paper intends to explore and uncover the relationship between the breaking of the fourth wall and the equipment of fear strategies found in Malaysian and American haunted house films, both of which are instruments employed to petrify spectators.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional European Gothic tropes may be discerned in their influence upon Malaysian horror cinema particularly in relation to the tropes that govern the haunted house subgenre of films. However, they come hand in hand with local influences and practices in Malaysian horror films. Hence, it is important to examine the mixed strategies of fear deployed within these movies through an exploration of the Uncanny. The Uncanny is a term which was introduced by Sigmund Freud (2003: 123), in which he defined "one such is the Uncanny. There is no doubt that this belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread." This definition by Freud allows readers to speculate aspects and items that relate to the realm of the frightening which include ghosts, serial killers, arachnophobia, and cats. The concept was expanded by Nicholas Royle (2003: 1) in which he suggested a more sophisticated, contemporary yet eerie notion in defining the uncanny:

"The uncanny entails another thinking of the beginning: the beginning is already haunted. The uncanny is ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural".

It is necessary to understand this quote from Freud's (2003) conception of the unknown and the unfamiliar, commonly associated to the uncanny, directly translated as the *das unheimlich*. Another aspect of mystery relates to emotions that humans commonly feel afraid if they are dealing with something that they are not unaccustomed to. The unfamiliar is one of the features in the uncanny and the process of the unknown does not direct itself into a single motion, from the familiar into the unfamiliar as expressed by Royle (2003: 1) who says that "It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context." The uncanny which was firstly introduced by Sigmund Freud has now undergone into a revolution of sophistication and expansion as the supernatural has expanded its factors that elicit fear and dread.

Although the Uncanny involves fear and the unfamiliar, we need to be reminded that every human is dynamic when it comes to fear, the unknown, frightening and the unfamiliar. As in some cases not all unfamiliarity can arouse the Uncanny, this have somehow made the Uncanny a tricky study to understand and grasp, which Freud (2003: 124) expands as "difficulties attendant upon the study of the Uncanny, the fact that people differ greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling." Royle (2003: 8) concurs that "our concern is with a feeling or a concept, however spectral." The Uncanny has its own beauty in defining the fearful aesthetics. In order to group the items that bends the shape of the human aesthetics, Royle

(2003) has suggested a line of potential fear factors such as unhomely, mechanical repetition, curious coincidence, meant to happen, losing of limb, epileptic or insanity, automaton (dolls), death, corpses, cannibalism, burial, déjà vu, the double, telepathy, uncertainty solitude and silence.

Freud (2003) suggests that in order to learn and appreciate the aesthetics of the Uncanny, there are two courses available: The first one is the semiotics of the term according to history and culture. The second course is the collected factor such as impression, person, thing and situation that evokes the uncanny sensation. But towards the end, Freud emphasizes that these two branches will soon lead to the same conclusion which is “The Uncanny is that the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud, 2003: 124). Freud (1919) also explains that the origin of the Uncanny word (*Das Unheimlich*) the Canny (*Das Heimlich*) means the familiar, and moreover it can also be into four categories of meaning; 1) Belonging or homely, 2) Animals, 3) Peaceful or pleasure and 4) ‘Concealment’, ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’. Meanwhile, the counterpart of the Canny (*Das Heimlich*) is the Uncanny (*Das Unheimlich*). In this case, the *unheimlich* means uneasy, eerie, unhomely, unfamiliar and bloodcurdling.

There is a relationship between the idea of concealment and the haunted house. The outcome of this explanation will lead to a deeper understanding on Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling Schelling’s definition; objects that are hidden will show their physicality. Furthermore, they are crucial in the transformation of the haunted house. Their initial concealment acts as a mask. It is an act of secrecy, and the best place to hide is a place where no one can see or dare to enter, because only the owner may enter it and only he may hide its secrets. Additionally, a house is spacious and at the same time secretive in nature as the sections in the house and walls block the vision of the man from seeing what object exists inside the house. This particular space is deployed when the owner has failed to eliminate something or someone. In some cases, the owner will keep the door shut either temporarily or permanently shut. The item inside will remain hidden for its new owner to opens. This is supported by Berry Curtis (2008: 38):

“These spaces within walls constituted one element in a ‘secret’ architecture of maintenance and storage that sustained the ‘conscious’ uses of the house by finding places for objects occasionally deployed or dismissed but not eliminated”

Curtis (2008) further commented that the secret space is usually menacingly hidden due to the closed and open space in the house and also the involvement of furniture. It is no longer established to be homely but an unhomely, uncanny place full of secrecy, similar to a labyrinth. This act of concealment is one of the methods that transforms a normal house into a haunted one. Sarah Burns (2012) argued that the contributing factor found in most American haunted house films is the style of architecture and mysterious events which lurk behind the walls of the house. Common mysterious events and secrets that are traceable in most haunted house films are dead bodies, and actions that include murder, suicide, curses, black magic rituals (Satanism) and diabolical experiments.

There are chain reactions that follow the notion of secrecy in the house. Hidden dead bodies and rituals usually attract, manifest and at the same time create vengeful ghosts to occupy, haunts and roam relentlessly within the compound of the house. The primary reasons of the return of the dead as Eidinow and Kindt (2015) explain are attributed to the souls’ inability to reach the underworld appropriately. It can be achieved through burial or other burial techniques. Scenarios such as the improper disposal of a corpse could enrage the spirits. In the case of haunted house, dead bodies are usually buried within the house such as in the closets, cellars and basements. Some spirits might wander, in the case of the *Amityville House*, although the bodies of the deceased have been buried properly, the manifestations of spirits or the ghosts

of the deceased still linger and haunt the house. In other cases, materializations of the dead can be extremely horrific in appearance and create menacing disturbances from the range of repetitive and eerie sounds such as footsteps, scratches, screams and whispers to moving objects and possessions. Sarah Iles Johnson (1999: 147) surmises:

“Some cultures believed in specialize forms of the dead who manifest themselves physically, such as vampires or poltergeists, in most cultures ghosts simply frighten or derange their victims through fearsome noises or horrible appearances, or at most insinuate illness into their victim’s body”.

The answer to these mind-boggling expressions is the notion of violent, unpleasant and unjustified death. Usually murdered individuals curse the ones who murdered them and have sworn to seek for revenge someday. Due to their violent deaths, spirits are not able to rest in peace. They continue to roam and mingle in the world of the living, haunting them until their unfinished business is finally resolved. Eidinow and Kindt (2015: 399) elaborate:

“Violent death was commonly considered a source of pollution. Such dead become hostile and resentful and turn into restless souls or ghosts, spirits who interfere in the world of the living who cannot - or do not wish to - be part of the underworld, to which they should normally belong”.

Every secret, death, ghost, and evil remain hidden within the house, and all of these can be discovered only by its new owner. The opening of the door, flashing of light, breaking of walls and exploring of secrets within the house provide teasers to the mystery that lies within. Dead bodies, secrets, souls and ghosts remain trapped in the house for years or decades, alone and silently build up momentum waiting for its new owner to open its door, releasing a mix of unstoppable force of evil. The sets of definitions are not enough to explain grasp and measure the level of the Uncanny and the aesthetics of fear and the frightening. Therefore, Freud has suggested a set of parameters in identifying the evocation of the uncanny sensation. They can also act as horror techniques or methods.

FINDINGS

Although Royle (2003) has written his own discussion on the different elements of the Uncanny, in formulating a framework of the Uncanny we have used the thirteen aspects he devised together with Bennett as their framework is more comprehensive for the interrogation of the strategies of fear in the four selected movies. Bennett and Royle (2004) suggested that the uncanny is divided into thirteen (13) sub aspects which are known as: involuntary repetition, odd coincidences or fate, animism or the omnipotence of thought, anthropomorphism, automatism, intellectual uncertainty, buried alive, silence, darkness, doppelgänger, telepathy and finally death. These are the findings that have been elicited from applying these thirteen aspects to the studied movies. The parameters are used to provide further explanation on the deployment of horror strategies. The parameters are: intellectual uncertainty, the castration complex, the double, the involuntarily repetition, omnipotence of thoughts (animism), odd coincidences or fate, anthropomorphism, telepathy, automatism, buried alive, silence, darkness and death. Some of the corpus deploys a similar strategy of fear while some differ. Again this is to demonstrate the diversity on the involvement of culture in showcasing the strategy of fear. Although the same elements arguably exist in all four of the movies, different cultural markers contribute to differentiating factors.

Intellectual Uncertainty

Freud (2003: 135) has appropriated Jentsch's definition in explaining the notion of the intellectual uncertainty, commenting that doubt "as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive, and conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate" which serves as an explanation as to how the uncanny may be triggered by the sense of uncertainty and doubt created by lifeless figures such as dolls, automatons, wax figures and mannequins. The concept of intellectual uncertainty in the case of the Malay corpus has somehow expanded as the concept dictates the feeling of uncertainty which arouses due to the inability of the characters and the spectators to judge between the living and the dead. The reason is because in *Congkak*, Kasman stumbles upon a spirit that resembles an old woman wandering in a remote orchard alone. At first, he is not aware of it but the idea of an old woman wandering alone in a remote orchard does raise a sense of uncertainty among his family and the spectators. There is an attempt to break the fourth wall, where the film invites the spectators to experience the fear of uncertainty first hand through the eyes of an *ustaz*, a religious character. The film uses camera point of view shot as a representation from the *ustaz*'s eyes. Through his eyes, he did not see anyone except for the bus stop. In the case of *The Amityville Horror*, it contains similar occurrences. Kathy and Chelsea Lutz are confused and uncertain whether the spirit Jodie is either alive, a human or an imaginary friend created by Chelsea. Likewise, in *The Conjuring* and *Flat 3A*, the protagonist are uncertain whether the spirits that they have encountered upon their arrival into the house is either dead or alive, as the spirits appears in their previous forms. These shows that the characters are not able to make rational judgments on the spirit's deceitful appearance but they do display eerie behaviours and appear at questionable locations, thus igniting the idea of uncertainty. Simultaneously, through the breaking of the fourth wall, the horrifying experience is now a two-way process: the experience inhabits both the characters and the spectators. Although most of the time the spirits or demons in the chosen corpus did not made any eye contact to the audience to break the fourth wall, the feeling of disorientation and confusions manages to break through the barriers between cinematic text and the spectator to the point in which the spectator is afflicted by uncertainty.

The Castration Complex

The castration complex is utilized in the *Amityville Horror* as a means of a more sinister motive. As mentioned by Freud (2003), Bennet and Royle (2004), the castration complex is used to explain the fear of losing one's limb. In the film, the castration complex has resulted into two effects. It is firstly used to create a restless figure by deforming it into a horrific figure. For example, in *The Amityville Horror* the Native Americans were brutally tortured and their limbs were severed in an underground chamber beneath the house. The camera instantly pans and closes up at the deformed Indian, where his eyes and lips are sown shut with a black thread. The next scene also closes up at the Native American's sown lip, and his hand slowly cuts the thread with a stick. Blood gushing out from the wound and his mouth slowly opens. Again, the fourth wall has been breached by making the spectators experience it first-hand through cinematographic techniques – an important component of the strategies of fear. Similarly, in the rest of the corpus such as *The Conjuring*, *Congkak* and *Flat 3A*, the spirits or demons in the corpus have their appearances either distorted and there are previous injuries on their body to promote the idea of the grotesque. For example, in *The Conjuring*, one of the restless spirits appears in the form of a maid that has a long red slit on both of her wrists. The spirit haunts the inhabitants by repeating the same verse:
Spirit Maid: Look what she made me do.

In all of the chosen corpus, the application of the camera zoom has enhanced or perhaps magnified the eeriness of the castration complex traits found on the spirits and demons. The camera is seen zooming either at the distorted face of the demon or zooming at the castrated parts of the limbs. In this case the spirit maid. The focusing or perhaps the zooming of the castrated part is a form of breaking the fourth wall as the zooming represents the audience's perspective looking at the horrors of the castrated parts of the spirits and demons.

The Double

According to Freud (2003), his motif is closely related to repetition, the doppelgänger effect and telepathy due to the practice of repeating and doubling. Freud (2003) utilizes the motif of the double from Otto Rank (1971); he explains that the double has an intimate connection which relates and links to the aspects such as mirror-images, shadows, guardian spirits, the soul and death. The application of the double or the doppelgänger is clear, as the concept is merely used to scare and act as a premonition. This can be seen in *The Conjuring*, the plot where Lorraine sees an image of her daughter swimming facing up in the lake. The camera uses an aerial shot to capture the moment where Lorraine and the double in one particular frame, the double continues to sway from left to right as Lorraine watches it in awe. In the next scene right after she calls home, she then begins to talk to her husband:

Lorraine: I had a vision of Judy in the water, I know that it is some kind of warning.

Similar to previous examples, the walls have also been breached, in the same scene where Lorraine saw Judy's double. There is an instant change of scene where the camera angles and pans at the image as if the spectators are seeing it with their own eyes, although the Judy's image is not directly looking at the camera but looking at Lorraine. The zooming of the image is forcing the spectators to see the horrors of the double up-close. The image acts as a warning to her family; the danger they face is magnified because the incident is uncanny and disturbing. On the contrary, in the other corpus, the idea of the double are used to ignite fear and confusion. Instances in *The Amityville Horror*, George Lutz keep on seeing his double in his dreams. As this a strategy used by the demon reverend to possesses and confuses George Lutz. In *Congkak*, the demon guardian impersonates Lisa. Essentially, the demon guardian wanted to trick and separate the Kasmans from their daughter Lisa, as the demon guardian have grown fond of her. In relation to breaking the fourth wall, the camera usually focusses on the character's double to make the audience stare on the strangeness of the double.

Involuntary Repetition

This parameter was defined by Freud (1919: 236) as the "constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or in same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations." The term refers to the compulsion to repeat without consent, thus making the victims experience the same sensation of helplessness and even though they want to escape, they are trapped in an endless loop. Royle (2003) asserts that this parameter is not just limited to recurring plots and settings, it can also be expanded to other senses as well such as sight and sound. The involuntarily repetition can also appear in the form of a disturbance. The intrusions repeat until the root cause of the house's haunting is solved. The repetition can also lead to a grimmer haunting as the mystery heightens. This can be seen in *The Conjuring*, where every night Cindy repeatedly sleepwalks into a closet and repeatedly bangs her head onto the closet's doors. The camera uses a tracking shot, taking the point of view of her sister watching her sister Cindy repeats the action of hurting herself. After Cindy is dragged back to bed by her sleepy sister, suddenly the camera angles at the

wardrobe using an angle shot focusing on the demon Bathsheba crawling on the wardrobe and jumping on Cindy's sister. Soon after the arrival of the Warrens, their investigation reveals that the closet has a secret room which leads directly to the cellar, and the cellar is where all the restless spirits and the demon Bathsheba reside. Similar to the rest of the corpus, the hauntings reoccur throughout the film.

The Omnipotence of Thought (Animism)

According to Freud (2004: 87), "Animism is, in its narrower sense, the doctrine of souls, and, in its wider sense, the doctrine of spiritual beings in general." It is an acknowledgment that a formless, spiritualized or invisible beings exist other than mankind, object and animals.

There are a few items which are commonly related to the notion animism such as the soul, spirits, ghosts, demons, *Hantu*, *Jinns*, *Semangat*, angels and God. In both of the Malaysian corpus, the notion of animism is quite recognizable; as this parameter is the primary contribution to the occult occurrences. For example, in both films the practice of rituals and shamanism is clear and have resulted in the summoning and controlling of demons and spirits. In *Congkak*, the demon guardian was summoned during the *congkak* ritual. Without the practice of animism, the demons or the spirits would not have inhabited the house or the land in the first place. Additionally, the idea of spirits inhabiting a lifeless object is also very clear in both corpus as a lifeless object which is infested with spirits is considered a haunted item. In the corpus, haunted items such as the *congkak* and other items are displayed. In the climax scene, the camera takes on the mother's view as a means of breaking the fourth wall which invites the spectators to see for themselves the demon that resides in the *congkak*. The camera pans at the demon that sits next to the *congkak*, in congruence with increasing speed tempo to heighten the suspense. This particular aspect of the uncanny manifests in different ways in the selected corpus as the items are infested by spirits due to the death of the previous owner of the items. The spirits have latched itself onto the items, thus making it a haunted item. For example, in *The Conjuring*, the jukebox was originally owned by a dead boy named Rory. After his death, April Perron finds it and every time April makes contact with the item will causes the spirit Rory to appear. This effect may also be discerned in *Flat 3A* and *The Amityville Horror*, the haunted items release the spirits that reside within these objects.

Odd Coincidence or Fate

Odd coincidence is another triggering factor in evoking the uncanny. According to Bennet and Royle (2004: 36), "Odd coincidences and, more generally, the sense that things are fated to happen. Something might happen, for example, that seems 'too good to be true' or that suggests, despite the fact that you do not believe in God, that someone or something is pulling the strings." In other words, it is the phenomenon of the fated family; the family is either chosen by fate or pure coincidence upon entering the haunted house. Usually the family that has issues are broken families, members who face disrespect from other family members and perhaps a family who wants to seek a new life. According to Bailey (1999), the common types of family which are fated to enter the haunted house are from the middle-class, skeptical or in the know about supernatural. Odd coincidences in the chosen corpus are also evident as this parameter displays that the characters are ill-fated to be entering the house. For instance, the Kasmans, the Perrons, the Lutzs and Fiqah were ill-fated because they have entered the haunted house although their main intention of purchasing or moving into a new house is to start a new life. This is an unexplainable phenomenon as it is an ill-fated chance. This odd coincidence or fate befalls all the characters in the corpus as they are ill-fated in entering and residing within the haunted house. It is an occurrence that sparks an eerie sensation which is felt by the viewers as

well because it serves as a reminder to them that perhaps someday they may face into a similar unfortunate predicament. Here, the boundary between fiction and reality is broken.

Anthropomorphism

As defined by Bennet and Royle (2004: 24), “It is the rhetorical figure that refers to a situation in which what is not human is given attributes of human form or shape”. Non-human entities were given form, shape, mind and emotions of a human being. The aspect of anthropomorphism can be seen in the appearance and the interior of the house. This is present in the interior of the Amityville house is somewhat alive. Perhaps the interior of the house is controlled by poltergeists or the fact that the house has a life of its own, absorbing the evils in the house. During the exorcism scene by Father Callaway in the Amityville house, when the holy water makes contact with the floor board, the camera pans and closes up at the floor board and the boiling water, this action alludes to the human skin coming into contact with acid. This connection is given emphasis because the colour of the floorboard is quite similar to a human skin. The camera zooming in on the burning wooden floor is almost similar to the spectators looking at their own skin burning; the diegetic sound of fire making contact with water increases the likeness of experience. On the contrary, the rest of the corpus showcases different ideas of the house’s anthropomorphic-like traits. This is done through the use of high and low camera angle shot. Through these shot gives the image of the house is anthropomorphically alive and starring down at the characters.

Telepathy

Freud (2003) defines the concept of telepathy as a spontaneous transmission of a mental process from one person to the other. This means that the receiver is the co-owner; this allows them to receive the first party’s emotion, thought, memory and experience making them the co-owner of the other’s knowledge. In the case of telepathy, some instances can be seen in the film *The Conjuring* (2013) in one of the characters, Lorraine Warren, a clairvoyant who is able to read thoughts and see memories of other people. At a particular scene where Lorraine and Caroline hold a family portrait at the same time, it suddenly shows a clip of little girls running together at the beach. The ambience of warmth is added through a soothing and slow sound of the piano. Her daughters’ laughter informs the spectators regarding Lorraine’s the telepathic or clairvoyant ability as illustrated below:

Lorraine: “Wow, that’s a nice day at the beach”

Carrolyn: “How did you know?”

Although it may sound heartwarming, this particular aspect of the uncanny is extremely disconcerting as a character’s secrets, privacy and memories are being violated through this parameter of the uncanny. The rest of the corpus shows no sign of other characters with telepathic abilities in predicting danger or read the character’s thoughts.

Automatism

Recommended by Bennet and Royle (2004: 49), automatism is a term that may be utilized “when what is human is perceived as merely mechanical.” It is the opposite of anthropomorphism and intellectual uncertainty where inanimate objects are given human traits. This concept can be seen in humans when they are sleepwalking or are perhaps hypnotized, as their speech and actions are similar to a robot or an answering machine. The concept of automatism is usually displayed by a character of a little girl. Before the little girl begins to

display a robot-like behavior, this particular character would usually be jovial. This happens due to her constant encounters with the spirits in the house or it could also happen because the spirits have become fond of this character. This relationship is an indicator to determine a haunted house. In both films, the character of the jovial little girl transforms into a robot-like state after being possessed or after having an encounter with the spirits of the house. For instance, Lutz's daughter named Chelsea becomes robot-like after her encounter with the spirit Jody. In the scene at the boat house, the camera angle pans at Chelsea's back standing static facing the lake. When her father increases his voice, a sound effect like 'Swooshing' is heard before she snaps out from the moment of automatism and becomes jovial again. This parameter can also be an indicator of supernatural presence in the vicinity. For example, when the characters suddenly show cases an automaton-like behaviour means there are spirits nearby or the characters are being targeted and possessed. In *Congkak*, Lisa is seen in an automaton state as well. In fact, during this state, hauntings and spectral manifestations began to occur.

Buried Alive

Bennett and Royle (2004) argue that the idea of being buried alive can best be explained through the images and experience of claustrophobia, which means fear of being trapped or confined within a small space. Other instances or situations in relation to claustrophobia provided by Bennett and Royle (2004) are being stuck in an elevator, in a swamp and alone in a room. The uncanniness of being buried alive does not cease at this point where it is only limited to small confined space, as it may also may lead to a psychological disease called morbus sacer or epilepsy. According to Royle (2003: 151), "Morbus sacer is the uncanny disease with its incalculable, apparently unprovoked conclusive attacks, its changing of the character into interrability and aggressiveness, and its progressive lowering of all the mental faculties." Being buried alive can be seen in the chosen corpus through the entrapment of the characters in the haunted house with spirits and their hauntings. For example, in *Flat 3A*, Fiqah is constantly trapped with the spirit Fatin; this situation is traumatic and claustrophobic. In one of the scenes where Fiqah is trapped with ghostly spectre, the camera angle is positioned lower and at the corner of the room; this technique reveals the available space as small and in one frame. Additionally, the room is very dark, dimly lit by a white light bulb. Additionally, the lighting fails to reach some parts of the room, enhancing the threat that awaits. Sounds such as high pitch shrieking, laughter, giggle and cries further reduce Fiqah to a state of debility that she becomes speechless and shaken. Likewise, the other corpus also showcased similar patterns. Where the characters were separated, trapped alone with spirits and spectral assaults such as lights began to switch on and off haphazardly and the sound of knockings.

Silence

In relation to this particular parameter, Bennett and Royle did not elaborate and discuss about it. Freud (2003: 159), commented that, "As for solitude, silence and darkness, all we can say is that these are factors connected with infantile anxiety, something that most of us never wholly overcome." In general, most people need to be in a quiet and calm surrounding in order to be at peace but silence is a strong word to describe quietness. This parameter or element is able to spark the feeling of uncanny and uncertainty raging to the point where we begin to question our own and the existence of the supernatural. The slightest of sounds is able to break that silence leaving the individual in shock, feeling intimidated, fearful and morbidly distressed especially when someone is alone. In haunted house films productions, the application of silence occurred through strange noises accompanied by a high monstrous tone which are intended to break the character's and audience's concentration. In *Congkak*, the scene where

the mother is left alone in the bathroom, deploying a tracking shot follows her movements to the sink silently and suddenly a loud menacing knocking knocks the door repetitively. She was extremely startled and in fear wondering who is knocking at the door with such menacing behavior. There is no background music, as this technique helps in intensifying the loudness of the knocking sounds. This phenomenon also attempts to inform both characters and audiences that is something or someone is lurking within the silence. This uncanny parameter is also prominent and occurs endlessly throughout the Malaysian and American corpus. This strategy of fear is equally deployed by the rest of the corpus as well.

Darkness

Freud (2003) has argued that darkness, solitude and silence is traceable to infantile fear or anxiety. In fact, most individuals are not capable of facing it. This is because the nature of darkness that can blind and trap people in a dark space thus making people wander in fear and uncertainty. Fortunately, at one end, Royle (2003) has begged to differ, where he argued that the uncanny thing about darkness is not about trapping people in the dark and uncertainty, but what entity that may appear out from the darkness. "The uncanny is what comes out from darkness." Royle (2003: 108). Royle's (2003) argument dictates that one is not able to feel afraid in blackness because the individual's eyes have been cloaked in obscurity. This particular technique is usually deployed when a certain character is left alone in the dark and a horrifying figure suddenly accompanies them with a loud noise which is sudden in nature. For instance, in *Congkak*, the scene where Lisa is trying to sleep after switching off the lights, and as she returns to bed, the tracking shot of the camera angle behind Lisa which faces the window, and a sudden vague figure of the demon guardian suddenly emerges at the window, grimly waving at her. A sudden, loud and instantaneous sound accompanies the appearance of the demon. The tracking shot technique have somehow breaks the wall and have made the spectators shares the same view as Lisa, watching the demon guardian at the window.

Death

The word "death" itself presents an avoidable uncanny feeling that all living things will experience. Bennet and Royle (2016) also explain that death is the absolute unfamiliar, the unthinkable and the unimaginable. Images of horror accompany the notion of death - food for the insects or decomposition of body parts. In the corpus *Congkak*, for instance has showcased a few instances of the death motif. The first instances of the death motif can be found in the exposition scene in *Congkak*, the aerial shot captures mise en scene where the mother carries a rotten human carcass thinking that it is her daughter's body. The aerial shot, like other shots explained, invites the spectator to see the same view as the mother. This twofold technique increases suspense and feelings of trepidation. Secondly, the death motif manifested in the form of tombstone, which can be found in the film's setting and finally is during the 'information and rumour stage' (Ahmad Muhyiddin B Yusof et.al (2017). This stage explicitly describes the haunted house film plot where the central characters began to hear bad or unpleasant rumours of the house (Ahmad Muhyiddin B Yusof. Et.al, 2017: 179). Here the mother heard unfortunate information that the old lady she met earlier in the orchard has died years ago. Although the action of death did not occurred in the film, yet it has manifested into other forms such as a rotten carcass, tombstone and the unfortunate rumour. All of these deathly manifestations have become the harbingers or the death drive that trigger immediate repulsive and eerie response to the subject matter of both character and audiences. Death is the opposite of life, its unfamiliarity able to conclude and destroys all idea of being alive, feared by all living beings. The rest of the corpus also uses other images to signify the symbol of death, as the corpus

utilizes the spirits to signify death. *The Amityville Horror*, the spirit Jodie and the demon reverend is the incarnation of death. Because each and every time these spirits manifests, the family will experience deathly events. For instance, when the spirit Jodie manifests, Chelsea will be in danger. In the film Chelsea almost died from falling down the roof, luckily she was saved by Kathy and George. Chelsea was lured and hypnotized by the spirit Jodie.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After the findings in the Malaysian and the American corpus were compared and combined, it is evident that all four movies display to varying affect all thirteen of the aspects of the Uncanny proposed by Bennett and Royle (2004) which is termed “the strategies of fear” in this paper. Through the lens of the uncanny, it is shown that the aspects of the uncanny have been utilized to erupt and evoke the sensation of eeriness, anxiety, strangeness, evil presence, insecurity and uneasiness in the house as well as in the film. As mentioned previously, the uncanny is meant to explain and frame the aesthetics in evoking an eerie and fearful feeling, but now the aesthetics have been widely utilized in film especially in the haunted house films. The aesthetics have also been modified to the extent that it is able to induce fear of contemporary viewers. As Vidler (1992:10) emphasizes:

“The interpretative force of the uncanny has, in turn, been renewed in literature and painting but above all in film, where traces of its intellectual history have been summoned in the service of an entirely contemporary sensibility”.

The aspect of intellectual uncertainty has been revised in which the feeling of uncertainty no longer focuses on the doll figure, but towards the spirits due to their deceitfulness in their appearance, behaviour and location. Another sample is the concept of automatism in which its cause has been revised in displaying the effects of spirit possession, exemplified by the character of the little girl named Chelsea in the film *The Amityville Horror*. The aspect of involuntary repetition has also been modified to exhibit the repetition of disturbances and hauntings instead of repeatedly getting lost at the same location.

In conclusion, this paper has disclosed thirteen strategies of fear that are commonly deployed in haunted house films in Malaysia and America which are silence, involuntary repetition, omnipotence of thought, odd coincidences, automatism, anthropomorphism, being buried alive, intellectual uncertainty, darkness, the double or the doppelganger, ghost, language, the castration complex and finally, death. At the surface level, these parameters exist and have been utilized to elevate the eeriness of the haunted house to spook both characters and audiences. On the contrary from the abysmal level, these parameters have become a benchmark to identify and spontaneously understand the types of fear or phobia that any ordinary humans may have, as the chosen corpus have showcased almost all of the stated parameters. The haunted house has become one of the best platforms to manipulate these parameters to simulate these aspects of fear. The haunted house has summoned these fearful aspects into different form of manifestations or proxy as simulation. Perhaps and although this claim that is about to be made is still at the early stage, these parameters and platform permits the characters, especially the audience to experience, dive and understand their own fear, hoping it will become a therapy. Hence, will no longer bound to these fears.

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