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*Cg X Eg*

Digital animation

If anything was made clear through my research, it's that we as a society love hyper-violence. So, I thought, what would prove this point more than creating a melodramatic violent piece of media of my own? Inspired by 2010's web animation and psychological horror media, Julissa Ortiz-Marufó and I collaborated to create a short animated film. Our film is an exploration of violence and obsession, through a playful and surreal lens. My goal was to create a piece that got to the core of both my and Julissa's research topic, and also to create a work which stands on its own as a polished and entertaining watch. While each of us had a hand in all parts of the production, I was most heavily responsible for color, environment art, and concept. A lot of my time was spent painting digital landscapes and props. Please love our animation and prove my research correct, thanks!

# Why We Love Violence and Murder



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OS46

*Writers note: My intention with this essay is to explore the reasons people are drawn to violent media. I am not interested in discussing whether violent media causes violence, or the morality of engaging with said media. I believe that art including the full range of human emotions and experiences should exist.*

American film director Sam Peckinpah was a pioneer in the field of violent media. He's best known for the academy award-nominated classic, *The Wild Bunch*, which was innovative as one of the first depictions of explicit violence in cinema. He was moved to create such a film by devastating and grizzly footage of the Vietnam War and other violent cultural events of the 1960s, like the JFK assassination. Never before was violence so widespread and accessible to the public eye. The unprecedented coverage of violence caused a fundamental shift in the way Americans engage with tragedy.

A quote from writer and film journalist Jacob Shelton describes it well: "with *The Wild Bunch*, Sam Peckinpah really thought that he'd stripped all the romanticism out of the western. Gone were the cowboys who always got the girl, there were no more white or black hats, and when characters were shot they bled out on screen in gruesome fashion. By covering the actors in gore, he thought that there was no way the audience would enjoy what they were seeing" (Shelton, 2019).

Peckinpah's goal was to show violence as it is. He wanted to depict real violence, the types that happen in wars, and terrors they couldn't dismiss as cheesy effects. Peckinpah wanted to shock and terrify audiences with ugly portrayals of hyper-violence. Despite his intentions, audiences ate it up. Sam Peckinpah's brand of extreme violence would go on to become a staple of contemporary westerns and action films, revolutionizing the Genres. Real-life violence decidedly influenced how

violence was portrayed on the screen, but for whatever reason, onscreen tragedy didn't instill the same trauma within viewers.

A great place to start examining our love for violent media is through a neurological lens. When we experience something unnerving, we become more attentive. This happens because when we are frightened, neurotransmitters such as dopamine and norepinephrine are released. This triggers our fight or flight response, our body's way of preparing us to either take on or run from a threat. Dopamine is commonly associated with the brain's reward system, but really it just signals to us what we need to pay attention to (Mcgowan, 2004). Biological researcher Kat McGowan explains, "If you are hungry and you get a whiff of a bacon cheeseburger ... your dopamine skyrockets. But the chemical will also surge if a lion leaps into your cubicle. Dopamine's role is to shout: "Hey! Pay attention to this!" Only as an afterthought might it whisper "Wow, this feels great" (Mcgowan, 2004). This might explain why watching crime media or horror films can be so thrilling to some people. The chemicals that flood our brains when we are facing a real threat are still present when watching a disturbing movie within the safety of our homes. These chemicals ultimately make us more attentive, which explains why it's hard for us to look away.

While thrill-seeking is a significant reason why someone might enjoy violent media, it's far from the only one. To some, the gruesome and bloody facade of something like an action blockbuster or a first-person shooter is an afterthought. Video games in particular are a prime example of this. As someone who enjoys their fair share of hyper-violent video games, I wouldn't say that it's the bloodshed that attracts me to them. I like to play because it feels really good to achieve mastery within them. Yes, In the beginning, it felt really exciting and rebellious to immerse myself within such a visceral firework of blood and guts. But after a dozen or so hours of play, the violent aesthetics kind of fell into the background.

In Jacob Gellers' video essay 'Rationalizing Brutality: The Cultural Legacy of the Headshot' he remarks "Shooters have essentially turned human bodies into a skee ball scoring range" ("Rationalizing Brutality" 13:06), I think this is a great way to put it. When I'm playing a game like Counter-Strike, and I blow some guy's brains out, I don't consider the moral implications of that action, I'm just trying to get the highest score. The soldiers, the guns, the conflict, none of it is real, and honestly, it's not really the point either. I could be shooting my target with a water gun and there wouldn't be a meaningful difference. The aesthetics of violence might draw us in, but we keep playing because, like any other game, it's fun to try and win. I feel like the same logic can be applied to action movies, murder mysteries, and really most kinds of violent media. Violence is conflict, and conflict is great storytelling. Many of these stories could be told without assault, murder, and destruction, but these things act as a convenient and poignant vehicle to deliver the story. In particular fictionalized contexts, it could be easier for us to desensitize ourselves to violence, especially if that violence is far enough removed from our personal experiences.

"The crime of murder is a most fundamental taboo and also, perhaps, a most fundamental human impulse" says forensic pathologist Paul Mattiuzzi. The taboo of extreme violence, especially murder, is another reason it can be so enthralling to us. Things out of our reach are exciting. Forbidden topics such as murder and death aren't things the average person meaningfully engages with very often. Discussing the macabre is largely looked down upon. Because of this, consuming violent media gives people the freedom to explore their natural curiosity. University of Rhode Island researcher Kseniya Dmitrieva theorizes that "The majority of us are neither criminals nor do we want to commit crimes; yet we are curious to see what lies in the mysterious, unknown

underside of our society where the rules are broken without regard to human life or authority. So crime media becomes a peephole into this lifestyle” (Dmitrieva, 8).

Extreme violence is so interesting to us precisely *because* most of us aren’t surrounded by murder and gore on a daily basis. As an artist, I think this alienation is one reason why some of us are Especially drawn to the creation of fictionalized violence. All of us go through tragedy, pain, and suffering. While maybe that suffering isn’t traumatic anime backstory “ *all my friends and family are dead, and I must seek revenge*” level, it still hurts. It feels validating to channel that hurt into something more fantastical and dramatic. The idea that the creation of violent media is a form of catharsis is a widespread one, and for good reason. It’s relieving to release our suffering onto a canvas in the form of a bloody massacre or a catastrophic crime scene. Sometimes when our emotions are too overwhelming, using something extreme, such as depictions of murder, as a vessel for our feelings can be liberating. Our inner worlds are expansive and intense, so it makes sense people would use atrocities far removed from daily life to attempt to conceptualize, at times, indescribable emotions. I see these types of creative pieces as some of the most unapologetically pure works of art out there. Violent art uses evocative symbolism to describe our most visceral passions.

There’s this quote by writer Ursula LeGuin I can’t help but always come back to, “Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist; a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain” (Leguin, 1). The human mind has a bias for the negative. Whether it be a product of evolution, or just the desire to be entertained, we’re guilty of being infatuated with the egregious and bored by the tranquil.

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