

## **The Racial Origins of the Non-Human: an analysis of monstrosity in Masahiro Mori's "Uncanny Valley." (Jenny Moran, Cambridge University)**

Despite the attendance to race in scholarship responding to the Freudian uncanny, and despite similar scholarly attention to the racialisation of non-human, humanoid robots, Masahiro Mori's influential "Uncanny Valley" graph has received surprisingly little scrutiny from critical race theorists. In the case of Freud, the original delineation of the *unheimlich* invokes both monstrosity and foreignness (1919). This formulation has been interpreted, primarily by postcolonial scholars (Bhabha 1990, Fanon 1952, Bergland 2000, Ahmed 2000), to be co-produced with the discourses of race, ethnicity, and nationhood that construct the imaginative boundaries of belonging. The construction of these imaginative boundaries is similarly taken to task in the realm of gothic horror, where literary scholars note the racial undertones of fear which certain non-human, humanoid monsters embody (Cohen et al. 1996). Like Freud's *unheimlich*, and like the non-human monster, the uncanny robot is racially-coded in different ways. AI and human-approximating robots have been described as exceedingly-white in their nebulosity (Katz 2020), othered as Asiatic via techno-Orientalism (Roh et al. 2015), or surrogate to Black, enslaved populations in a neo-liberal US economy (Atanasoski and Vora 2019), to name a few examples. Given these trajectories, a thoughtful interpretation of uncanniness, race, and monstrosity in imperial imaginaries is evidently called-for, and yet the epistemological genealogies which implicitly inform Mori's graph are not reflected upon in the written portion of his initial essay, which is only three pages long (1970). This paper suggests it is inadequate to surmise, as Mori does, that a universal, biological fear of death is the sole cause of discomfort produced in the encounter with non-human, humanoid objects, parts, or monsters. Focusing on the historical origins of the humanoid, and placing this history in conversation with dominant literary representations of racialised monsters, it locates the colonial encounter as a moment which produces the uncanny effect, using this positioning to analyse Mori's *zombi* – the Black-coded figure determined to be most terrifying in his graph – as the dispossessed double to the normative (white) coloniser.

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