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**FROM TV TO TIKTOK:
WHAT TECHNOLOGY IN HORROR FILM SHOWS ABOUT SOCIETY'S SHIFTING
FEARS**

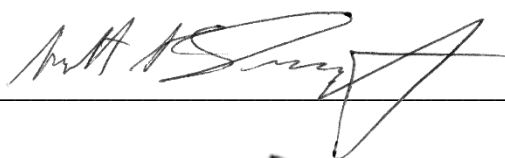
**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

**by
Nhi Nguyen
May 2023**

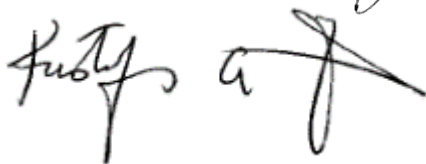
Thesis written by

Nhi Nguyen

Approved by



_____ Thesis Advisor



_____ Thesis Reader or Co-Advisor

Accepted by



_____ Director, Regis College Honors Program

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Abstract

Name: Nhi Nguyen

Major: Accounting and Finance

FROM TV TO TIKTOK:
WHAT TECHNOLOGY IN HORROR FILM SHOWS ABOUT SOCIETY'S SHIFTING
FEARS

Advisor's Name: Scott Dimovitz

Reader's Names: Kristofor Voss

Contemporary horror movies are a reflection of different fears over different eras. Since 1982, there has been an increase in films that use electronic recording technologies to better relate to the modern audience. From *Poltergeist* in 1982 to *The Blair Witch Project* in 1999 to *Host* in 2020, filmmakers recognize how peoples' daily lives change with new technological innovation. In this thesis, I explore how each subgenre of technohorror reveals a particular societal fear, which, as I show, shifts over time. Horror movies act as a visual representation of our shifting anxieties, allowing us to see a connection between our own psyche and the surrounding culture.

Introduction

When photography was introduced to the public in the 1870s, it was a novel invention, and so a lot of people did not understand how photography worked. Taking advantage of the public's lack of knowledge, a practice called "spirit photography" developed. "Spirit photography" was advertised to the public as a way to see the ghost of your family members that have moved onto the next life. The creator of spirit photography and a prominent swindler at this time was William H. Mumler, who "figured out how to produce images with double exposures, giving one of the figures a ghostly quality" (Waldorf). He preyed on the grieving vulnerable to make a profit and gave false evidence of connection to the supernatural world. The people were desperate to buy these photographs, as they believed this new medium of technology, the photograph, was able to see a world that human eyes cannot detect.

Society at the time believed that "ghosts" could be seen on camera because of how widespread "spiritualism" was. 'Spiritualism' is defined in that context as "a new religion based on the belief that spirits exist and could communicate with the living" (Barry and Snailham, 56). Within this thesis, spiritualism refers to how ghosts along with other spiritual or supernatural beings communicate. The belief in spiritualism and the supernatural was and is the foundation of why there are so many different channels or mediums existing that can be used for the sake of contacting the spiritual realm. People seek answers to their questions, no matter what they may find in the end. The photographs from "spirit photography" act as the medium in which ghosts can convey their existence to their grieving loved ones. They act as a kind of comfort to know



Illustration 1 - Mrs. Tinkham

that even if you can no longer see your deceased loved ones with human eyes, you have photos to know they are always with you in spirit. Illustration 1 is one such example of spirit photography by Mumler, titled *Mrs. Tinkham*.

The photograph is no longer a distant and unfamiliar concept to us. We understand that photos can be manipulated to show things that are not completely accurate. But with each new piece of technology that emerges, there is a learning curve before the majority of the population more fully understands these new technological capabilities. A considerable amount of people in society in the 1870s readily believed in spirit photography. Not only because of the desire to know where their deceased loved ones are, but because of the photographs themselves, after being manipulated, act as proof that their loved ones are still with them in an intangible form.

Every era introduces new technology that can be used for good and for ill, depending on the hands of its user. As there continues to be innovation and more widespread usage, humans begin to realize the capability of what technology can do. The fear of technological capabilities, technophobia, emerges. People realize technology can be used in a large variety of ways that not only makes our lives easier but can be used to hurt others as well. As technology begins to seep into every aspect of our lives, it is hard to do anything without the use of technology nowadays. No matter what we do or where we go in society, it is necessary to use or interact with technology of some sort, making it an unavoidable part of life. Filmmakers realize this trend as well.

All the movies and discussion mentioned here in the thesis will incorporate the use of electronic technology as a tool for either the humans trying to get in touch with the supernatural world or as a way for the supernatural world to extend its reach into contacting physical reality. There have been numerous movies that dive into the genre of humans and fear of technology, but

the focus of this thesis is not on how humans are afraid of technology with technology as the enemy itself. Instead, this thesis explores the relationship between old understanding of spiritualism and more contemporary fears and explores ways of connection through the use of technology as a tool or medium wielded by supernatural entities, specifically through the mediums of audio or visual recording electronic technology. The technological creation of Artificial Intelligence, AI, is not the enemy of humanity when we speak of technophobia, but the fear of technological capabilities being involved in every part of human life. Considering electronic devices like cell phones, televisions, the Internet, etc., we know that our current level of luxury, innovation, and comfort involves some use of these technologies. Just as humans are able to use these technologies to communicate with one another in some sort of way, keeping in mind the concept of spiritualism, supernatural beings are able to do the same thing.

Comparing records of how spirit photography showcased the fears and beliefs of society during its emergence, we can see similar record keeping of stories told through horror movies and films that incorporate how people are communicating with the supernatural. Examining horror films will show how the methods of communication with the supernatural evolve over time, especially on how we understand and interpret the supernatural.

There is widespread enjoyment of horror films nowadays, but how does this link to these technological changes in culture? The horror movie genre spans a vast number of years, as it is a common movie genre that people critique and deeply examine to learn more about human nature and the impact of human imagination. Putting into film different fears highlights an aspect of human nature that can be visually traced through what horror films portray. There is a line of progression through what humans can continuously fear even as the way they live changes.

Society marches forward through time, so of course the culture and fears highlighted can change to reflect our modern fears.

An aspect I focus on specifically is the use of electronic technology within horror movies. I examine technologies that began to be more widely circulated with the films being released in the 1980s and onward ending in 2020 as the most recent film release. Widespread use of certain technology reflects in films to better relate to their audience, especially when it becomes more common in the household, films reflect the new norm. In the films being examined, technology is to be wielded as a common tool, not acting as the antagonist. Era and innovation go hand in hand, as horror movies incorporate aspects of reality into their film. Not only can horror movies draw from the past, but they can use our everyday surroundings and situations to make fear more tangible to their audiences.

Technology does not act as the main antagonist within itself, capable of independent thought and action, but is used as a common tool by any entity, whether human or otherwise, that can directly impact the lives of both people within the films and bring threatening realizations to audiences watching the films. It can be a weapon to be wielded, a means of transportation for people to get from one destination to another, an alternative form of communication between two beings, etc. No matter the means and methods, the different applications and usage of technology all help to showcase the fears that people have about technology. Film makers are the ones telling the story, showing that anyone, especially the supernatural in these cases, can take advantage of technology to bend it to their own whims, regardless of the original purpose of why the technology was invented. In the horror films analyzed, it is the supernatural entities that use this to their advantage.

Before we look through modern electronic examples of spiritualism, it is important to examine earlier examples of connecting the spiritual and physical realm with one another. Spirit photography had come out in the 1870s, but humans have had belief in spiritualism long before then. While humans believe that spirits were being recorded in spirit photography, there have been past techniques used to communicate with the supernatural and other beings. Through using items such as ouija boards and tarot card reading, people have made numerous attempts to attain more information about the spiritual world.

Even without tools, humans have long believed in the existence of supernatural entities. Whether they come from stories of warning or of comfort, these tales show how these entities exist in the hearts and minds of people. Numerous supernatural ghost stories or hauntings exist throughout the world, spanning through cultures and countries. Famous ghosts such as Mexico's La Llorona or more general societal panic with fear of witches that came from America's Salem Witch Trials. Children's tales of the Boogeyman living under the bed, or Sandman interacting with people's dreams. Humans share such supernatural tales and stories with one another across time and culture. The concept of the supernatural is not a new idea, but the new technological methods of communicating with the supernatural change the way audiences can examine and interpret the supernatural in a new light.

Through these folklore and historical events, humans have used supernatural stories to explain events in which they have no other logical reasoning for. Bringing up the example of spirit photography again, most of society did not understand how photographs would be able to show the scene where the deceased were able to be seen in images with their loved ones in a shadowy form without the explanation of ghost. The photographers selling spirit photography knew it was residual from past photos, but others had no knowledge or understanding of that.

Ghosts and supernatural beings no longer make their presence known by moving around objects or creating sounds that could have other explanations, but recordings through electronic technology allows humans to better see the supernatural being.

Horror films act as a physical representation of the anxieties of an era, being able to combine the technology for the era and using the technology in different ways to convey the belief in spiritualism again. Technological innovation allows for better spiritualism, as spirits are able to more clearly communicate with humans that are trying to contact them. Nowadays, electronic technology can exist as a new medium for the supernatural to interact and interfere with human lives. It is a tool that can be used by anyone to different degrees of effectiveness and with different intent. Humans have had the history of trying to contact the spirit world, but electronic recording technology is now a new medium to do so. And a lot of electronic technology in modern society can be used to communicate in ways never seen before.

Technological advances and innovation continually improve and grow with the needs and desires of society. From the original development of items such as the radio, television, Internet etc., human society developed or innovated items in order to make their lives easier in some sort of way, or to fulfill a need or desire that people have. It is up to people to continue to adapt and innovate to fulfill needs in order to stay relevant and maintain their place in the world. Through this message of adaptation, there have been numerous horror movies that incorporate supernatural or spiritual entities into ones that are able to have innovation alongside human society.

Through horror movies, most of the time, the supernatural entities that use real technology use it to push their own agenda onto the physical realm, and that usually does not end well for the humans that the supernatural entity is haunting. The concept of spiritualism is again

in play, as these spiritual beings are communicating with others in ways never seen before.

Technology now acts as a medium for spirits to communicate. And because of innovation and technology, there are many ways that they can interact with us through screens or recordings.

Technology can be a way to be entertainment and a way to pass along messages to a large group of people at once. The whole movie industry itself is a way to entertain people through recordings. Or look at television sets within people's homes that brings news and shows. Technological innovations such as these allowed mass media to impact the everyday person's life more directly. Starting with such technologies, humans began incorporating more and more technology in their daily life, making their lives not only easier, but into forms of entertainment as well.

Another way that people use technology is to record events that are happening. To share what one experiences and sees with other people, especially if it may be hard to visualize or believe without a recording as proof. Recordings can be used to store data, to pass along messages, to keep record, etc. Everybody has a phone and is able to record videos and take photos. Recordings exist in this medium as living memories or an easy way to recall past events. It is easy to send a friend a photograph or a video recording to recall a memory, especially if one is recording from a first-person perspective.

A lot of homes have home security systems that allow direct access to security cameras and other such venues. Recordings of such security cameras bring evidence and a sense of security to people who have such systems. Recordings on security footage allow for better understanding of the situation and aids in recalling or looking over evidence again to better gain clues as to what happened. Being able to think again and to review evidence in the form of

recordings allows for people to have greater understanding of situations and lends to believability.

In addition, technology can be a means of communication and a way to stay connected to people in times of isolation. With the pandemic that began in March of 2020, people were stuck in quarantine and encouraged to use video calling platforms such as Skype, zoom, etc. as the means to contact one another, as it meant they were at least able to see and hear one another. Of course, connecting through the screen is not the same thing as being there in person. Because of the worldwide pandemic, everybody using such platforms had incorporated it into their daily life. If you were to ask anybody in the present day whether or not they have used platforms such as Skype, Zoom, RingCentral, Microsoft Teams, etc., the answer would probably be yes. So, technology used in this manner in horror films can be showcased as a way that people are still physically disconnected by space even if they are able to see and speak to one another in the moment.

The anxieties of an era can be found reflected in the film as era and film work in tandem with one another. Playing off society's fears to propagate fearful actions and issues can also be used to put fear into perspective. Technophobia can be seen going hand in hand with spiritualism as it can combine to play into multiple fears and lack of understanding at once. With technophobia being the fear of technology and with spiritualism drawing connection with spiritual beings, spiritual beings interact with and use our technology in ways beyond our understanding and bring attention to how technology can be utilized to do both harm and good.

Film and movies reflect how eras fear changes. As we track the history of horror film, we are also tracking how society's worries have waned and evolved. Christopher Kelly, in the article *Terror Alert: How The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Introduced us to Pure Dread*, had stated,

“...the horror genre, perhaps more than any other, often reflects the mood of the time...” (54).

Horror movies want to strike fear in people. So, incorporating their everyday surroundings makes people more wary of what they have seen, it allows for personal experience and better relations with their audience.

It is only with the large-scale adaptation of electronic technology that I deeply examine the progression of human fear in more contemporary horror movies. The time range of horror movies being examined will span from those released in 1982 to 2020. Horror movies will draw inspiration from what are the latest technological innovations incorporated into the everyday person's daily life. Contemporary Horror movies are a reflection of different fears over different eras, starting with the more common use of various electronic technologies incorporated into everyday life. Contemporary horror movies use modern recording technologies to better relate to the modern audience. The themes and elements found in horror movies target audiences, revealing a fear they did not know they had or reimagining a past fear. In this thesis, I explore how each category of visual media technology reveals a particular societal fear, which, as I show, shifts over time. Horror movies are a reflection of different fears over different times, showcasing the mindset of how culture and society progress. Horror movies act as a visual representation of our changing psyche, allowing us to see a connection between our own psyche and the surrounding culture.

Map of reading

Delving into the contemporary technology-based horror allows for deeper examination into the intersection of technophobia and spiritualism. But before reflecting upon the intersection of technophobia and spiritualism, it is necessary to take a step back to put into perspective how humans throughout history had relationship with the spiritual realm and spiritualism.

In the first chapter, I will explore human fear of the supernatural before the modern electronic technological innovations became common in everyday life. Looking at the history of religion, ghosts, demons, and other such supernatural entities that exist in folklore and tales that parents used to tell their children. It is clear to see that humans long had the fear of things they were unable to explain and used supernatural entities to fill that gap in knowledge. In the different eras of human history, humans use different kinds of supernatural entities to either give them comfort or as a warning to others. But later on, as humans continue to innovate and eras continue to evolve, the methods in which we tell our stories change as well. We are able to record and write down past recollections of monsters, ghosts, demons, etc. not only for survival, but for enjoyment as well.

In talking about how humans view the supernatural, what also changes is the way in which we interact with and seek the supernatural. This chapter shifts tone and delves more into the category of spiritualism and communication with the supernatural world. Though humans have long been afraid of the supernatural, it has not always been a common case to want to seek out those entities. Spiritualism draws a line of connection between the supernatural realm and the humans it is trying to communicate with, a two-way street.

Chapter two delves into the genre of horror movies themselves, examining the history of how horror movies developed and changed throughout the eras. The first horror movies to come

out were based on books portraying monsters. Horror movies later develop and incorporate aspects of the average citizen's everyday life. It is through this change and development that we know film changes with an era, or vice versa. The history of human fear and our interaction in society appears in horror movies.

After laying the foundation in chapter one and two, we begin to delve into both spiritualism and horror movies reflecting era at the same time. Technophobia is an ongoing theme as more and more technological innovations are being created, influencing how people begin to live life after incorporation. Technology changes how we do things, replacing or improving old methods when people may not want that change.

Chapter three talks about how supernatural entities begin to adapt with the common man's lifestyle. Beginning with analysis of the movie *Poltergeist*, the plot encompasses how the TV was the doorway in which a suburban family is haunted. This occurs while cable begins to become more commonplace, so that people are in front of their televisions more often for entertainment.

Chapter four examines the found footage phenomenon. This is where, after electronic recording technologies begin to be more commonplace, many more households have access to recording technology and use it more often.

Our analysis between spiritualism, technophobia and fear of an era ends with chapter five. Chapter five delves into the most current widespread technology in society. Video calling platforms had become much more common during this era as from 2019 to 2022, most of society was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 1: History of Humans and the Supernatural

What we define as horror stories existed before the first horror movie. The human fear of the supernatural has not just existed through horror novels and films, but through their appearance through folklore passed down throughout generations and of famous historical events that can tie their influence with the supernatural. Humans have had a long history with supernatural events already. There are numerous tales crafted to explain the unexplainable. Stories that tell of a strong belief in beings such as ghosts, demons, witches, and other such supernatural entities, that cannot be backed by pure logical sense or understanding at the time. Peter Gutiérrez states, “We acknowledge that the unknown and the frightening exist, experience doubt that our existing frameworks can adequately address them, and then feel those frameworks doubly reinforced from having withstood unprecedented onslaughts” (45). The supernatural are those occasions unexplainable by our current logic. Because we cannot understand or comprehend, we are unable to fully make sense of what is happening and are at a loss on how to react, and so create our own explanations for what has occurred.

Examining how the first religions gained traction or the folklore that developed as an explanation of then unexplainable events leads to how humans have long believed in nonhuman entities. “Supernatural” in these cases is defined by Susan Sered as “a cognitive category indicating that which is above and beyond nature” (216). Supernatural in this definition would indicate ideas or explanations of what is beyond our current capabilities or logical understanding.

It can be seen in the existence of religion, where humans believe in a higher power or an outside being that has human intelligence outside of themselves. Numerous religions have their own evil entities that are against humans within them. Catholicism had developed early in the first millennium but was predated by Greek and Roman pagan pantheons. In Greek and Roman

mythology, there had been many famous monsters that appear, such as the Minotaur or Hydra. So, humans long had belief and fears about “monstrous” beings, or belief in something distinctly non-human.

Human history with the supernatural is not only seen in the past through religious lens but also through stories of folklore and historical events. When humans did not have a scientific logical conclusion for answers, then the supernatural was a way to explain and fill in the gap of logic. Religion had given reasoning for the origin of the world and its nature and creatures, while the evils in the world were given personification and origin stories as well.

In every part of the world, there are stories to keep people wary of the unexplainable, that portray monsters, ghosts, demons, and other such supernatural creatures that like to prey on humans. Humans have long experienced the fear of being lost in the dark, haunted by ghosts, chased by monsters, etc. These folklores were a way to protect others, give them a belief that warns others against doing anything to harm themselves. As stated by Sarah M. Gordon, “Folklore insulates us against precarity by strengthening our social networks and differentiating a category of ‘them,’ which is made up of people or institutions who embody risk or threat, from ‘us,’ made up of people who insulate each other against risk and threat” (11). Humans protected themselves and their communities through such stories and beliefs, uniting the community against whatever “other” there was that preyed upon them.

Some of the most famous folklores or explanations of historical events fall into the category of “supernatural”. According to an article titled *The Undead by Archaeology Ireland*, “In folkloric sources as diverse as Babylonian literature, the shroud eating Nachzehrer of Germanic tradition, and the Chiang-Shih “hopping vampires” of Chinese legend, notions of corpses rising from the grave have long been documented.” Different cultures from around the

world seem to share the same types of fears and draw the same conclusions as they try to explain possible horrors a human can face.

People not only react with fear or reverence when thinking of the existence of the supernatural, but humans have had a history of trying to make sense of the supernatural as well. They try to learn more about the spirit world, or about more mystical knowledge in general, coming up with different tools or procedures on the ways to connect or communicate with the supernatural. The supernatural were both the explanation for an unexplainable event, and as an area of deeper study. Humans have had a history of trying to contact the supernatural already, or at least suspect its existence. In the very first tales of danger and superstition, humans have been wary about any other supernatural or spiritual entity out there that could harm people in some sort of way or give more meaning or clarification to their lives. Tales of demons, ghosts, spirits, witches etc. have existed long before the first horror films were ever recorded. Humans had used such supernatural creatures to explain the unexplainable.

Regardless of the wariness shown by people warning against the supernatural through tales of folklore, humans also want to interact with the supernatural. In religion, people can both fear the capabilities of the supernatural and take comfort in or learn from the nonhuman beings. Humans sometimes take comfort in knowing who else is there beside them, even if they are not human. Regardless of whether people fear or find comfort in the supernatural, there is common ground that we can use different mediums to continue to try and connect to the supernatural in different ways.

Focusing on this theme of interaction with the supernatural draws on “spiritualism”. Humans believed that those of the spirit realm can have logical thought and communicate with people through different means and methods. Historically, humans created methods and devices

to communicate with those in the spiritual realm. According to the article *Secrets of the Ouija Board*, some tools such as "Ouija boards, mystical pendulums, and dowsing rods are all devices used for “divining” (attempting to learn or find something using magic or paranormal forces)” (Linse et al., 65). With the existence of items such as tarot cards, Ouija boards, crystal balls, etc., humans strive to connect with the spiritual realm regardless of whether the connection will have a positive outcome for those participating. These items were meant to allow humans to contact the spiritual world, to receive answers and fulfill their desires. The use of these items indicates that humans had a strong belief that there was something more out there, and just because we cannot see it now that we are alive, does not mean that we are unable to see it if we were to use the right tools.

The existence of Ouija boards is a prime example of how humans used different tools and items to contact the supernatural. Even if the specific letters and pieces of the modern-day Ouija board may differ from the historical ones, there have been earlier occurrences of such board existing, as “one such Ouija-like device was built almost 1,700 years ago by Roman soothsayers” (Linse et al., 65). People have been trying to reach and get answers from the supernatural for thousands of years. While historically, the process was focused on prophecy, humans continue to have different reasons to try to communicate with and prove the existence of the supernatural.

Humans continued to show interest in finding new avenues to connect to the supernatural world. Another example of spiritualism that incorporates more of what we perceive to be modern electronic technology comes with the first instances of photography. Tying together this tool of photographic technology and spiritual beings gained notoriety in the late 1800s, where spiritualism was gaining popularity along with the technological boom of the Industrial

Revolution, there came spirit photography. Spirit photography acts as a more modern example of the direction this thesis will take, as recording tools, such as a camera, can now act as a medium to create a pathway between our physical reality and the spiritual realm. Spirit photography shows how “Spiritualists saw themselves operating in a scientific context and a technological framework” (Firenze, 70). Belief in the supernatural and the latest scientific breakthroughs could exist hand in hand. Technology was meant to help prove how the supernatural were real, not yet interfering with how humans believed in supernatural folklore or explanation.

In the 1900s, spirit photography became a popular movement after the Civil War that ravaged America. It was a way that society proved the existence of ghosts and the afterlife. Spirit photography can be summarized as occurring “Almost concurrently with the development of photography, the phenomenon of spiritualism sought to use photos as a technological means of gaining access to the departed” (Firenze, 70). Technology and the supernatural play a role of comfort to all those that are grieving after the devastating impact of the Civil War, where so many people died. A major example of this comfort in those who are no longer human is the idea of ghosts or contacting ghosts. Ghosts used to be human but are no longer human beings. Spirit photography combines belief in spiritualism with the technological capabilities of technology to depict images of people with their deceased loved ones. Spiritual photography took advantage of those who are grieving and want to have reassurance their loved ones are still there even if they are on a different spiritual plane of existence (Barry and Snailham). The most famous example is the image of Mary Lincoln being embraced by a ghostly Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president who had been assassinated not too long before spirit photography became popular. Illustration 2 is the image of Mary Todd Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln.



Illustration 2 – Mary Todd Lincoln

In the era of technology, logic, and science, it is a wonder how humans can still believe in the supernatural. How we understand the world now in a more science and logic-based world differs from the past because of cultural and difference in mindsets. We are no longer as wary or superstitious compared to the past, but belief in the supernatural still exists today. Society still has those that believe in another power outside of the human realm, whether it is ghosts, demons, etc. And even amongst those that do not believe, such belief is still incorporated in the culture and society around us. Not only through religion,

but these kinds of horror stories still play a prominent role in culture today.

Ghosts and other such supernatural beings are still a major part and source of inspiration in horror entertainment. Monsters such as vampires, werewolves, etc. all still have popularity within our culture, even if people no longer fear them as much as they used to. Numerous forms of entertainment still refer to these historical monsters, and these first appearances of these monsters still inspire new pieces of entertainment.

The supernatural had a presence in history and in today's time, and with the original belief in spirit photography that came with the first manipulations of the new photograph. With humans using such tools to make a connection to the spirit world, it is only natural that the tools used to communicate with the spirit world change with the times. With the example of spirit photography, there was a belief that there was life after death, existing in the form of ghosts that can continue to stay with their still living family members. The recording capability of modern

electronic technology is another avenue that would allow human beings to be able to contact the spiritual world in a clearer way, blurring the lines of what is truly real or what only exists in imagination.

Together with the history of how the supernatural world and the physical human world connect, there is new technology being created and incorporated into society that can be used as a medium or modem of connection. Not only prominent in how spirit photography gained traction in the early 1900s, but even in today's time where mediums such as live footage and ESP machines are used to show evidence of how the supernatural are real.

The innovation of technology as society progresses allows for more tools where spiritualism can occur, not only in photography, but in items such as televisions and VHS, captured video camera footage, and even with live video calling platforms. As more methods of sharing and communication are invented so that humans can better connect with one another, these methods can be used by people to try to connect to the supernatural world as well, or vice versa.

Chapter 2: Development of the Horror Film Genre in the First 100 Years

Most initial horror movies were movie adaptations of horror books. This film genre started out with humans fighting a supernatural or non-human entity, based on now famous supernatural creatures such as vampires, werewolves, or zombies. In “The Horror Film and the Horror of Film,” David Lavery argues that horror movies are what “we define such to be all films whose primary effect is to surprise, terrify, or alienate an audience by means of a narrative and cinematic techniques which are disorienting and aggressive, violent, or discomforting...” (48). So, the purpose of these initial movies was to frighten or terrify the audience in some way, especially with things they did not fully understand, like this fear of unexplainable monsters.

The first movie to ever be categorized as a horror did not even include monsters but was frightening to their audiences. G. Neil Martin states,

The first horror film can probably be dated to 1855/1856. The Lumiere Brothers’ *L’arrive d’un train en gare de la Ciotat* depicts the arrival of a train into a station, the appearance of which, if anecdotal although possibly apocryphal accounts are to be believed, resulted in the audience becoming consumed with a fear that the train would emerge from the screen, such was the novelty of such a depiction at the time. (2)

Even though what is considered to be the first horror movie does not depict the supernatural in any way, the film was to terrify the audience according to what they feared or did not understand during this time period. Movies and recordings are common today but were novel and frightening to the audiences who had watched the film back in the 1850s. How audiences had perceived the movie during the time of its release shows how societal fears are reflected in

horror, in what people perceive to be frightening. Though this first example of horror does not include the supernatural, the movies examined in this thesis all have elements of the supernatural entities and how we categorize horror in today's time.

The modern definition of horror used in this thesis will not only be something frightening, but to draw upon imagery of "nonhuman." As defined by Peter Gutierrez, "The definition that I tend to use is that horror movies are distinct from other genres because of the centrality of a monster – a malevolent entity that is either explicitly non-human or presented as such because it is no longer relatable as human (for example, an 'insane' sadist or psychopath)" (45). The genre of horror is distinct from the genre of thriller because of this "non-human" entity. All the horror movies that are used in this thesis draw upon this horror imagery of something that lies outside of logical human explanation.

In the contemporary world, there are a lot of movies that contain elements of supernatural creatures or entities. But in the past, monster movies were amongst the first to distinctly mark the horror genre. The first horror movies drew upon monsters depicted in horror literature. Monsters are an example of something disorienting or violent towards humans, not only told through folklore, but then reimagined and written down into literature to create a genre of books meant to scare audiences. One such example is in 1922's *Nosferatu*, which was an early depiction of vampires, where Count Dracula "never hides his passion for blood or his admiration for throats" (Kinal, 72). Dracula is a famous monster even in today's time, even if his initial existence existed as a folklore passed down through word of mouth that was eventually written down as horror literature. Literature has had the tendency to be a source of inspiration for horror entertainment ideas for a great period of time, such as literature from the Victorian age. Through an analysis done by Dr. G. Neil Martin, a Hon. Professor of Psychology and former Head of

Psychology at Regent's University London, “Victorian literature has exerted a much greater and direct influence, as evidenced by the re-imaginings and remakes of films based on literary characters from this period, such as Dracula, Frankenstein (doctor and creation), Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, the Phantom of the Opera, Dr. Moreau, Dorian Gray, the monsters and protagonists in Grimm’s Fairy Tales, and the trolls of Nordic literature” (3). Victorian monsters were the first instances where cinema drew upon the supernatural to be a theme and fear in early horror movies.

As the horror genre later evolved and developed subcategories, it also expanded in what it is that humans ought to be afraid of—not only of what is hiding in the woods, but what can come creep closer and exists within humans themselves. Horror movies developed not only to incorporate the supernatural but other concepts and ideas as society began to have different fears that could be visualized through film. The periods of the 1930s and the decades onward begin to show the biggest expansions of the genre in which we are now able to identify subgenres and concepts that still impact film even decades after the first instance it was used.

The 1930s and 1940s were impacted by the Great Depression and World War 2. The 1930s was when the early horror movies still stuck to old monster horror imagery. This famous Victorian monster influence on horror movies included famous films such as *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Invisible Man* (1933). Dr. Rick Worland, a film professor at Meadows School of Arts and with a M.A. and Ph.D. in motion picture/television critical studies from UCLA, states, “Hollywood horror films first attained great popularity and prestige as A-budget features in the worst years of the Depression, generally considered the genre's classic period” (47). This era of film stuck to its roots and there was not much expansion in horror subgenres yet, as the classic horror genre was still being created. This was the starting point for mainstream horror genre, and

later as the genre expanded to include more than just monsters, this era is referred to the classics period, in which other films and popular entertainment still refer to the monsters made popular at this time.

The 1940s focused more on war propaganda, as this was the era of World War II and people did not focus as much on the onscreen horror films as they did on the real-life horrors of war that were happening around them. American culture and society were focused on promoting war efforts, so the horror of this era reflected either portrayals of war, or to strengthen and show instances of American triumph over their enemies. One such prominent movie at the time was the recreation of the *Invisible Man* (1933). The movie *Invisible Agent* (1942) is a remake of the old classic to promote American triumph, as Worland states “the Invisible Agent's transparent outline looms menacingly over the scene. The wartime variation of the series that began with James Whale's well-regarded *The Invisible Man* (1933) finds scientist Frank Griffin (Jon Hall) using his amazing power to infiltrate Germany, where he steals a list of Japanese spies operating in America and finally wipes out a Nazi air fleet primed to attack New York” (52). The focus is no longer on fear or horror but used to promote morale for war time efforts. Movies within this era all target uniting in the face of war as there is greater scrutiny for portrayal of people and allies.

In the 1950s, the nuclear family and suburbia was becoming much more popular and prominent for American society. The war has come to pass, and people begin moving out to suburbs. As a result of this change, Heather Hendershot in the article, *Ghouls, Gimmicks and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business*, explains how “kids used to spend all day at matinees, but this became harder in the 1950s as families moved far from downtown movie theaters” (73). As adolescents spent more time at home, they had to find other ways to entertain

themselves, which includes watching television. Michael Goodrum and Philip Smith in *Monster Kids – Bridging the Pre- and Post-CCA Eras* comment that “The successful release of Universal horror films from the 1930s on American television in 1957 sparked a monster craze among a certain subculture of adolescents” (147). Reintroducing the horror classics focusing on monsters to a new audience began a new horror craze.

Also prominent in the 1950s was the ongoing fear of nuclear warfare. Wes Gehring, a professor of Film at Ball State University and an Associate Media Editor of USA Today Magazine, provides that “Monsters of the 1950s nuclear age were sometimes also children of the atomic bomb --an "accidental" variation on the man-made creature syndrome” (72). The 1950s fear of mutation and man-made monsters resulted in films like *Godzilla* (1954), where nuclear contamination resulted in monsters being created. Man-made monsters introduced a new subgenre of the man-made horrors, where humans bring disaster upon themselves. Monsters no longer act as a result of supernatural influence, but are set upon others by humans themselves, differentiating it from the classic horror genre and gaining much more prominence in the differences even if *Frankenstein* (1931) came out years ago.

Beginning with what is a new age of horror, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* came out in 1960. The period of the 1960s focused on violence to be found in suburbia, with *Psycho* (1960) was the start of a new subgenre that was only possible with culture now focusing on the neighborhood of suburbia as an ideal. The culture and society at the time had a great migration towards suburbia, and movies were able to reflect this setting as it better related to the lifestyles of their audiences. *Psycho* innovated what and who to fear, as the setting reflected what life was like for the everyday family, not only limiting fear to what was hiding in the woods around their house but questioned who to fear in the neighbor who lived around them. Gehring acknowledges

“*Psycho* said horror was no longer limited to old myths and the old world; modern American monsters could live right next door, like that nice Norman Bates boy” (73). Goodrum and Smith corroborate with this analysis as they explain “As the decade progressed, however, *Psycho* came to serve as a model for other horror narratives, both in the trope of the ‘killer next door’ and in its formal elements such as the use of high strings at moments of dramatic tension” (153). The common setting of suburbia was relatable to a great part of society because of the shift from city to suburbs became commonplace, and the subgenre of “slasher” horror films was created. Goodrum and Smith follow up on their analysis as “*Psycho* spawned many immediate imitators and, arguably, went on to create the ‘slasher’ genre of the 1970s and 1980s” (153-154). The horror setting in suburbia showcases how to fear the people in plain sight. The audience no longer fears the monsters or man-made monsters, but to be wary of the human beings hiding the darker parts of themselves in society.

The horror genre creates new subgenres and reimagines horror to incorporate the era. The horror genre is meant to entertain people by having their audience become scared or worried about the events that happen on screen. Horror movies and films exist as a form of entertainment for people, and entertainment is constantly updated and reimagined. There are great classics that start off a genre or remain very iconic in pop culture today. But new films are constantly created every year, updating the horror genre within itself and providing new entertaining content and iconic scenes to the audience.

Human belief and fear in the supernatural did not just exist in history but is still a prominent piece of culture today. Horror movies worked not only to make this fear as prevalent as in the past but used different methods to bring more relevancy to the present audience. This genre of films has its classics and most iconic scenes and monsters, and fans of the genre still

enjoy the classics. But even as we look back, there are remakes and references to keep bringing attention to the original content, keeping older stories relevant even as later audiences appreciate different things.

The direction in which horror movies evolve depends on the culture, technology, and societal fears available at the time. Kinal states, “This is how horror achieves its aim of carrying the fear and threat generated by a story into the lives of its audience. By reflecting the society in which it is created, the film gives the audience the ability to associate itself with the characters in the film” (72). For example, it would be hard to imagine the horror movie that takes place today without incorporating the use of a cell phone in some way. Updated horror movies retell a story to involve new tools and theatrical elements while maintaining its root origin purpose.

Remakes of movies bring back past themes, ideas, and monsters in a new way to reconnect to audiences. The settings of movies are redone to incorporate the changes in how people live and what technology they use or have access to. To remake a movie, most audiences have a sense of nostalgia for the old classics, but filmmakers want the character or themes to continue to be relevant for their current audiences.

Movies have already existed as a reflection of the cultural and societal norms, events, and technologies. It would be hard to imagine a movie including the widespread usage of smartphones in the 1980s, as such technologies did not exist then. This theme of adaptation lies as the basis for how horror films change with each era. As the surrounding culture and environment of people changes, horror movies portray new ways in which the audience can fear their surroundings.

From then on, the development for movies continued onward creating all the subgenres that exist in today’s repertoire of horror movies. As each decade created their own classics in the

horror genre that incorporates the themes of their times, the time period from the 1980s onward had their own genres created as well. The subgenres to specifically examine are the portrayal of how modern electronic technology is used in film, the found footage subgenre of horror, and the latest “desktop” or “laptop” horror. These examples of films delve into how the technological innovations and widespread use of such technologies is reflected in how directors portray movies accurate to their time period.

It is not only the historical events that can inspire technohorror, but the fears and anxieties that come from new technology. This thesis delves into how new technological innovations change the way movies are able to present their ideas. I am not focusing much on how historical events impact the themes of movies, but how the plots and filming styles acknowledge and use technology surrounding the time periods in which the movies were released.

Chapter 3: Supernatural Entities Adapt

As society continues to progress and create better technology, visual and audio electronic recording technologies also continue to develop. Innovation and progression happen with the passing of time, as each era has its own struggles and technological innovations. Movies incorporate the culture they are surrounded by, in order to both be more relatable to their current audience and to use new ways to present different ideas and themes. Just thinking of past movies, it would not be logical to have scenes where the characters look up information on the Internet, but instead scavenge through old library news articles and books to find relevant information. Technology is part of everyday society. In this thesis, technology includes/focuses on items such as film footage, cameras, televisions, cellphones, etc. Any piece of electronic equipment that has the capability to record or play recording footage will be in the scope of deeper examination in exploring the fears and progression in society. The films that audiences watch are shaped by the filmmakers' intent. This thesis analyzes the different roles of technology in contemporary horror movies in three different ways.

In this chapter, the first role of technology in contemporary horror movies is in how technology is a tool. Society changes the tools they use to make life easier, adapting to a new lifestyle, and using these technologies is the new status quo. In horror films, it is not only humans that take advantage of using technology, but supernatural entities who are able to adapt as well. The focus of this chapter is not the historical context of the era that inspires the themes of the film, but in the technology of the era that inspires plot to how technology is used by the nonhuman characters within the films themselves.

First, to clarify the title of this chapter "Supernatural Entities Adapt", supernatural adaptation of technology is the role that electronic technology plays in the setting of horror

movies, in how technology is used in everyday life that can be mimicked by those not human in a horror movie setting. An adaptation of technology allows supernatural entities, such as ghosts or demons, to continue to spread their influence and impact in modern horror. Technology acts as a conduit, with supernatural creatures using technology as a medium. *Poltergeist* (1982) had ghosts communicate through the television. *Ringu* (1998), and the American remake *The Ring* (2002) act as an example of supernatural entities using modern technology to continue to influence the lives of a greater amount of people. These three movies offer greater insight into the fears that people have when technology is a tool to be wielded by anyone who deems to use it. Therefore, those that exist in the supernatural world can adapt to the technological setting of their current targets and influence these targets' lives.

Supernatural entities begin to use technology as a tool in this age of horror. These movies dive into the concept of not knowing who is behind the scenes, of who the perpetrators can be, and whether they are even human. The term "medium" or "conduit" describes how supernatural entities use technology as a tool to impact the lives of others. The supernatural world had long been a part of human history, but the supernatural still live on and adapt to the world around them. In his book chapter "Contemporary Ghosts", Murray Leeder affirms as he says, "Thus, in contemporary text, ghosts are tethered to ancient traditions and yet are also fundamentally new, adaptable and malleable" (131). The supernatural changes with the world around them, adapting with new ways to stay relevant in the lives of people as humans not only live out in nature, but in a society filled with electronic technology. Ghosts will continue to live on, but how they haunt people living in a new setting change with the new environment.

Steven Spielberg's 1982 film, *Poltergeist*, is an example of a supernatural entity using technology as a tool of communication, as it tells the story of ghosts haunting an upper middle-

class suburban family through their television set. The ghosts seem harmless at first, only interacting in little ways with the family's young daughter, but towards the climax of the movie we watch as the ghost kidnaps the daughter. Ghosts are communicating through the television set, which is a common household item, in order to extend their reach into the lives of the family that now inhabit the home buried on top of the graves of indigenous people. The housing developers moved only the gravestones of the burial ground, but did not move any of the buried bodies, so the neighborhood is built on top of graves and desecrating their bodies. The ghosts that later haunt the family are those same ones whose bodies have been disturbed and are no longer at peace, and later reclaim the land as the family's house is destroyed in retribution. The iconic movie poster shows the back of a young girl holding two hands towards a static television screen. As seen in Illustration 3, this movie poster centers around two subjects, the back of a young girl and a television set she is sitting in front of.

The movie poster advertises that the movie's content centers around television, a little girl, and the movie title *Poltergeist*, indicates a supernatural entity. Brooke Lilek clearly describes that the movie *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Poltergeist* (2015) “offer deep insights into the representation of societal fears—more specifically, into America's fear of lack of privacy and control as a result of technological advancements” (125). Horror movies are reflecting the evolving fears of society as more technology is used in daily life and what technology is now capable of. Technophobia and paranoia surrounding technology

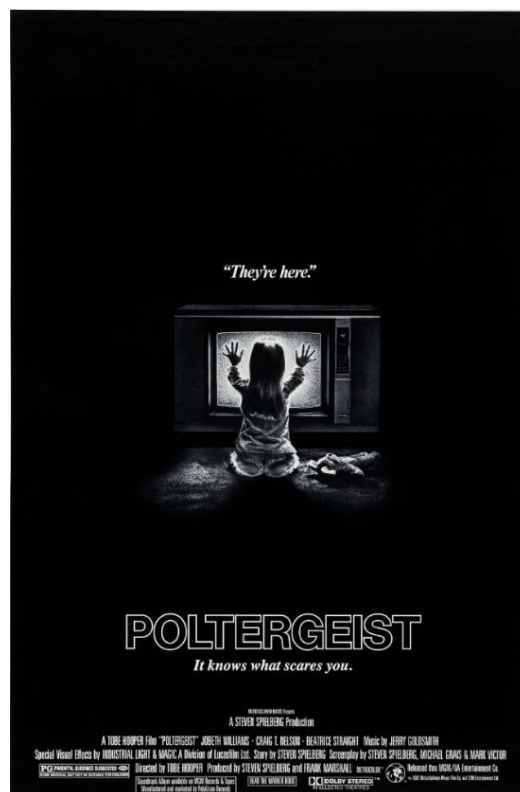


Illustration 3 – *Poltergeist* Poster

reflects in how the family was unable to fully fight against this ghostly presence in the safety of their own home. Technology is too permeated into every aspect of life, and the sentence “They’re here” that lies just above the head of the little girl in the poster indicates a sense of pervasiveness.

The first scene in the film begins with the camera slowly moving away from a TV showing static (00:01:30) and shots of a quiet house in which all the family members are asleep, except for the youngest daughter, Carol Anne. The little girl is answering questions aloud to someone in the TV static that no one else can hear (0:03:36). TV is a method of communication in which the girl is able to hear ghostly voices. The supernatural have adapted themselves to be able to be heard in a conventional way, even if the movie audience and members of the family within the movie are unable to hear the messages. Carol Anne is able to hear and respond, indicating that there is something there.

Not only through using the TV to communicate, the TV is also how the ghost initially came into the physical world. The first time movie audiences see the ghost is when ghostly hand reaches out towards Carol Anne from the static television (00:23:38). The rest of the family is already asleep, but Carol Anne hears ghostly voices coming from the television and was sitting in front of the television by herself when the hands came through. The ghostly hand extends its existence, not only through sound that only Carol Anne was able to hear, but physically as the house shakes after the ghosts come through the TV and into the walls (00:25:03). The TV not only allowed for contact with humans in the physical world through passing on vocal messages, but also acted as a spiritual doorway for ghosts to infiltrate the physical world.

Communicating through the TV reoccurs in the movie, as after ghosts kidnap the youngest daughter, Carol Anne, and her family first clearly hears her voice through the TV

saying “Mommy, I can’t see you mommy. Where are you?” (00:42:27). It is not only ghosts able to communicate and use this tool, the TV allows for those trapped in the spiritual world to communicate with those in the human world. The TV has no control over the message that is being communicated, only acting as a tool to whoever wants to use it, whether it be the little girl or the poltergeist haunting the family.

Not only does *Poltergeist (1982)* highlight fear of technology, but also focuses on supernatural adaptation of technology. The ghosts that appear in the film have historical origin as the unsettled souls of indigenous people that were residing underneath the neighborhood. The supernatural have their origins as those who die with an unfulfilled wish. It is through tying the origins of the supernatural and their new methods of communicating with the living that reflect the era’s worries. The supernatural origins of the ghost reveal the historical struggles of the erased indigenous people, while the technology incorporates the fear of never knowing who to trust when technology begins to permeate more of the lifestyles of society. Earlier in the film, it was the neighbors changing the channels on one another’s TVs (0:08:52). Later in the film, it is not the human neighbors who control the TV, but the ghost of those who reside buried underneath the home. The old ghosts use the new electronic tools to haunt those who inhabit the homes built upon their bodies, blending old supernatural belief and everyday reality.

In *Poltergeist (1982)*, the film credits open with sprawling shots of ideal American suburbia, where there are uniform rows of houses, children playing on the streets, and people crammed in living rooms watching TV together (00:04:50-00:06:40). The movie’s falling action shows the family fleeing their home and the originally ideal American suburbia. The end of the movie physically destroys this idea of the beautiful American suburban neighborhood as ghosts tear apart the home of Carol Anne and her family as their neighbors wake up to see the

commotion (01:46:00). This idealistic neighborhood was built upon the graves of the indigenous people, and the ghosts of those graves were disturbed from their slumber to incite revenge. The ghosts then destroyed the home, and this final act of destruction demonstrates restitution as the ghosts reclaim the land that was once theirs. The fear of the TV comes as the TV was the initial contact point between ghost and man, but the TV is only a tool because the true issues in what is “wrong” with the house has nothing to do with technology.

The father at the end of the movie throws out the television in the motel the family is staying in after they escape their haunted home in the neighborhood (01:50:36). The TV is no longer trustworthy as it has been wielded against the family, showing that technology is dangerous, and people should be wary of the technology in their own homes. The core issue of the hauntings is not the TV itself, but with how land developers built homes on top of a cemetery and disrupted the peaceful graves. *Poltergeist (1982)* shows the dangers of TV and a sense of technophobia, but the TV is only a tool. The TV is the means for invasion, but the true enemy to fear is the graves the suburban homes are built on top of. The ghosts took advantage of the tools available to them when they were woken up in the new reality. It is through human actions that the family has ruin brought upon them for unknowingly living on top of graves.

In the decade leading up to the release of *Poltergeist (1982)*, there was a growing number of cable subscribers and TV owners. In the article “Legal Issues Concerning Cable Television: The Greek Case”, Petros C. Iosifidis, and Joanna P. Kiki help explain the history of cable television, “Throughout the 1970s, continued lessening of cable restrictions, coupled with cable's pioneering of satellite communications technology, led to a pronounced growth of services to consumers and a substantial increase in cable subscribers” (6). TV was prominent in this time as it was a common household item in this time period, especially in the more upper-class suburban

neighborhoods in which the movie takes place as seen by the sprawling opening credits shots (00:04:50). Cable TV was a common household item and form of entertainment at the time, and so was used as the plot setting of the movie as it was relatable to audiences. *Poltergeist (1982)* was able to blend in supernatural themes and integrate electronic technology in an effective way.

This theme of technology continuing to be a tool to be wielded continues with the films *Ringu (1998)* and *The Ring (2002)*. Both movies use VHS tapes, phone calls, and television screens for the supernatural to extend their influence. *The Ring (2002)* was an American remake of *Ringu (1998)* and follows its source's plotline. Though the panoramic shots show different landscapes, and the cultural norms of both countries are different, the ultimate message of the supernatural entities wielding technology remains the same. The plots of both movies star a reporter who investigates a story about a ghost curse killing people after they have watched a haunted VHS tape, and then is haunted herself after watching the tape. The main method of spreading ghostly contact was by watching the haunted VHS tape. All those who watch the VHS are foretold to die on the seventh day, as the victims are warned in a phone call after watching the tape.

In *Ringu (1998)*, the ghost is named Sadako, while in *The Ring (2002)*, the ghost is named Samara. The VHS tape exists as a channel for Sadako/Samara to spread her curse, and the TV acted as a doorway to have her present in the physical world. It has been repeated throughout the film that all those who watched the VHS die in seven days. The main character later had this realization and encouraged her son to make a VHS copy so that her son would not end up dead like her ex-husband, unless they make a copy of the supernatural entity's haunted VHS so that she can spread her influence unto others.

The VHS tapes are the are method of continuous infection, encouraging others to watch the VHS and allow Sadako/Samara to curse other victims in order to save themselves. In the article “The Medium is the Monster”, Finn Cohen states “the only way a character can cheat death is to make a copy of the VHS cassette and share it with someone else who then faces the same fate, a viral video before the age of social media”. Sadako/Samara know that technology has its place in every household and the VHS was common to use. People used VHS tapes to share videos and entertainment with one another before the age of the Internet, and Sadako/Samara encouraged the dispersal of the tapes through her curse. In today's time, the reality of instant viral videos is seen in all forms of electronic media. Sadako/Samara extended their reach limited by the technologies of their time. They had adapted using VHS tapes, and if this movie were to be reshot currently, viral videos would be shared through means such as email links and social media posts. The basis of these films lies in supernatural horror, but how Sadako/Samara reaches new victims lies behind how she has adapted to society's use of the VHS as a form of more widespread entertainment. VHS is a common way to spread entertainment and is therefore the key to how the ghost curse is spread.

In the 1970s, consumers in both Japan and America preferred VHS over other of portable home entertainment, especially Japan as VHS was invented by the Japanese company JVC (Hammer & Powell). During the period of the 1990s, VHS grew into an even more popular commodity among consumers as an easy way to share films and shows. The time period in which both films take place takes advantage of how society consumed entertainment at their times, especially since the late 1990s where people are familiar with VHS, even if it was no longer the peak of VHS usage. Sadako/Samara want to reach as many people as possible, and VHS was the medium is which they could do so. After the curse is laid upon those who watch

the tape, Sadako/Samara kills all those who do not participate in dispersing the tapes on the seventh day of them watching the haunted tape.

The death on the seventh day since watching the haunted VHS shows how *Ringu* (1998) and *The Ring* (2002) both show how Sadako/Samara adapted to their environment using another piece of technology, the TV. The method of death was unknown to the audience until towards the end of the movie, where the audience watches Sadako/Samara crawl out of the TV to go after those who had watched the cursed VHS tape. Like how ghosts were able to impact the physical world by coming through a TV in *Poltergeist* (1982), the ghosts in *Ringu* (1998) and *The Ring* (2002) are able to bring out their physical bodies through a TV as well.

The most iconic scenes of the movie are very similar as both films have one long shot of a TV showing a bedraggled woman climbing out of a well and slowly coming closer to the TV's viewer, moving closer and closer until she touches the screen and climbs out. Sadako/Samara not only spread their curse through VHS, but used another technology, the TV, to haunt their victims as well. In screenshots from the movies below, the left shows *Ringu* (1998) (01:26:44) while the right shows *The Ring* (2002) (01:41:36).



Illustration 4 – Scene from Ringu



Illustration 5 – Scene from The Ring

In these iconic movie scenes, the use of the television shows that the characters in the movies are not only impacted by the curse through the VHS tape and phone call warning, but also by the TV. Sadako/Samara took advantage of more than just one common technology at the time. *Poltergeist* (1982) only shows the adaptation of the TV, while the ghosts in *Ringu* (1998) and *The Ring* (2002) also use VHS and phone calls in addition to the iconic scenes of the television. Using the VHS to spread their influence, giving a daunting warning through the phone call, and even physically manifesting into the physical world through the TV, Sadako/Samara are aware of the times they live in and what are the common electronic technologies used by people.

Throughout all the films examined and analyzed in this chapter, all these movies portray supernatural entities taking advantage of their environment and the lifestyles of people to more fully infiltrate and extend their reach. As technology becomes more and more intertwined with daily life, it is not only humans that are able to use their technology, but act as tools for anyone to use as they please, not just the humans. In *Poltergeist*, the TV was a tool of communication and later on was used to infiltrate the home, while in *Ringu* and *The Ring*, the ghosts were able to spread their curse along to others because people shared VHS tapes. All the supernatural entities were able to take advantage of the technology used at the time as a way to find their victims in the physical world. The supernatural adapted to the contemporary technological landscape to their advantage and made use of electronic technology as a tool.

Chapter 4: Found Footage Phenomenon

Another incorporation of technology into horror movies is the found footage phenomenon. Chapter 3 spoke of how the supernatural wielded technology against humans, found footage shifts the ideas to how humans use technology to track and record the supernatural instead. Within this chapter, technology is no longer a medium for the supernatural, but acts as a tool for people to record evidence of their experiences with the supernatural. The “found footage” refers to films in which recordings of the supernatural experience of people are later found by others and shared with a wider audience. “Found footage” is a new filming style in which it changes the perspective of how audiences watch the movie.

The primary technique of the found footage genre constructs the medium such that the character in the movie is the one responsible for filming the events that occur. The term “found footage” refers to a fake documentary style of filming, where the footage found in the film was by ordinary people instead of the professional setting of traditional film. Ahn Sungyong makes this distinction in her article, “Found Footage and the Speculative Economy of Attention”, by stating, “Contrary to other classical genres, found footage has established its generic dimension not by sharing a thematic prototype, but by its conscious deployment of a camera’s sensorimotor relations to a space according to its redefinition of reality-effect, no longer based on the seamless interconnection of the actions the camera(s) take(s) in different angles” (5968). The same stories and themes can be told again, but the specific horror subgenre of found footage is a completely new style of filming that is purposely not as polished as traditional films to lend to a greater degree of believability. The limitations of perspective allow for the audience to piece together what could have happened and is a new tool for filming. Although today’s audience realizes that

visual media can be distorted and faked, the initial release of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) shocked society into thinking the movie was real.

The popularity and rise of found footage subgenre began with the two movies, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007). According to Adam Charles Hart in the article “The Searching Camera: First-Person Shooters, Found-Footage Horror Films, and the Documentary Tradition”, the subgenre of found footage only

received major exposure in the BBC’s 1992 broadcast of *Ghostwatch* (Lesley Manning), but it first reached the global mainstream with 1999’s *The Blair Witch Project*. However, it did not solidify into a major generic trope until between 2006 and 2009, when the cycle went digital and *Diary of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 2006), *Paranormal Activity*, [REC], *Cloverfield*, and countless other films finally picked up on the form and structure behind *Blair Witch Project*’s blockbuster success (75).

The two films in this thesis analysis, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007), are some of the most famous and prominent of the found footage subgenre and were the innovators which spawned other films that followed in this subgenre. The basis of found footage follows the idea of ordinary people recording their own experiences, subverting traditional filming styles.

Traditional horror movies allow for the audience to be omniscient as they can see the victim, the setting, the monster, etc. as an invisible third party. But with the found footage phenomenon, the scope of the camera is limited to whoever the supposed “victim” is, limiting the audiences’ omniscience and putting the audience into the limited viewpoints whoever is “filming” and whoever is editing the video afterwards. Scott Dixon McDowell says, in *Method*

Filmmaking: An Interview with Daniel Myrick, Co-Director of the Blair Witch Project, “In Blair Witch, the subjective camera locates the audience not in the monster’s position, but in that of the victim’s, thereby increasing audience identification and anxiety.” The directors knew that since the time period in which the movie was released and the technology that audiences had access to, it allowed for this filming style to be effective. It is not only believable because of the limited omniscience of the first-person style of filming, but also from the purposeful missing information and jumps in scenes as the audience would be able to understand and feel fear from what is not shown. *Blair Witch Project* was one of the first most prominent instances where the phenomenon of using visual recording technologies as a filming style. Found footage movies had existed even before the *Blair Witch Project*, but the *Blair Witch Project* was told from a different perspective that made it more relatable, instead of viewing it as an omniscient third person who has nothing to do but see the characters take place. This movie pulls the audience in as we become a bystander who has found visual evidence of a supernatural event occurring so close to where we are.

The audience during the late 1990s and early 2000s was becoming more and more immersed with the emerging technologies of their time. The news article, “The Blair Witch Cult. (Cover Story)” supports the growing popularity of “found footage” by mentioning, “To a Gen-X and -Y audience raised on handheld TV programs like “Cops” and MTV’s “The Real World,” deliberately low-fi recordings by groups like Pavement or the Wu-Tang Clan, and the funky misspellings of Internet newsgroups, grainy equals real, immediate. Wholly created by the production process, the jerk of a video camera or the crackle of a scratchy vinyl record has come to stand in for the truer reality behind the process” (Leland, John, et al.). Since there were other forms of entertainment that kind of followed along with this style of shaky camera, moving with

the characters, the style of filming was not uncommon for TV programs to use. But for films in the horror industry, it was not common or traditional with the past narratives of how film was presented. First person perspective allows audiences to see what life was really like for those that were shown on these types of TV programs.

The first-person style of filming seems to indicate that it is more reliable than other styles of filming because it gives the audience a better perspective of them having control and as if they were doing it for themselves. Found footage subgenre does not only include documentary style filming, but any film that indicates the characters in the movie are the ones responsible for the film the audience currently watches. Though traditional documentaries are more informative and professional, found footage is purposely not as polished and has more “behind the scenes” kind of film so that the movie’s content does not seem as edited. The characters within the movies are not professionals or have not had time to edit the final project on whatever piece of technology they choose to film on, so there are many ways that movie audiences can watch “found footage”. This can be seen through devices such as security cameras, film, pictures, etc. to see direct evidence of supernatural events occurring. People especially rely on visual evidence, as opposed to how people can lie through word of mouth, so it is accurate to state how people follow the quote “Seeing is Believing”. Through the analysis of how some contemporary horror movies incorporate the technological aspects of modern culture, with a focus on video recording technologies.

Through the existence of recording technology, we now can record physical “proof” of such supernatural events occurring. We are not just relying on word of mouth and having to experience it ourselves, but through visual proof. In today’s time, thinking of security cameras as

an example of how to collect and sort evidence of what happens, humans rely on such a visual recording to prove or disprove one another, and to have solid evidence on the validity of a claim.

For the found footage phenomenon, the greatest example would be *The Blair Witch Project*. *The Blair Witch Project* had come out in 1999 for its official premiere, but their method of advertising targeted those who had propensity to believe in the supernatural and it was disseminated as a documentary. Promotions for the movie diverged from traditional advertising methods such as “instead of broadcasting to the passive masses, they targeted the small, rabid and influential clique that might seek out a witchy Internet site” (Leland, John, et al.). The rise of the internet was also a prominent part of this time period as the internet became publicly available in 1989 and was the gateway in how *The Blair Witch Project* was presented and shared among people with similar interest in the supernatural. The purpose of those obscure websites was rooted in those of similar interest sharing the truths and testimonies they discovered.

From the beginning of *The Blair Witch Project*, the opening disclaimer says “In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary. A year later their footage was found” (00:00:45). From “Taking Horror as You Find It: From Found Manuscripts to Found Footage Aesthetics”, Tomasz Sawczuk points out, “Instead of showing the opening credits, both *Paranormal Activity* and *The Blair Witch Project* (henceforth PA and BWP) attempt to trick the viewer into believing that the discovered video material has been in control of an alleged editor” (230). It is not the audience that finds the footage, but whoever has found the footage and is distributing the film to others. The disclaimer indicates that whoever has “found” the footage, they put in a disclaimer and edited the video with their own motivations before distributing the edited versions. In editing the movie, the editor purposely includes this disclaimer is to convey to the audience that this is a “real”

documentary, not a film telling a story, by adding context for audiences to understand the real-life implications of what could possibly happen to missing people in the woods. The disclaimers at the beginning of both movies want to clearly state that the events that occur in the movie are the last moments and paranormal journeys of real people caught up in unfortunate events. Other films have traditional opening film credits as there are clear shots that are still and angled to audiences to see the setting and actors clearly, while the “found footage” filming style does not seem as intentional and purposeful. The beginning of the movie sets the tone for how the rest of the film will play out as we are introduced to the three film students recording, Heather, Will, and Josh.



Illustration 6 – Scene from The Blair Witch Project

Depicted above is the famous scene where the female lead, Heather, has her “last moments” be recorded to let others know what is going on in the woods, apologizing and letting out all her regrets as she feels she will not survive an encounter with the Blair Witch (01:10:15-01:12:24). This final confession scene allows the movie viewers to understand the precarious situation Heather is in, as well as inviting them to be witnesses to someone else’s final moments due to a supernatural creature. The rising action to this moment slowly builds up fear and paranoia to the possibility of a supernatural existence haunting the woods. The movie viewers had slowly followed along with Heather to learn more about the existence of the Blair Witch and held the same reservations of whether such supernatural entity could even exist, but this final confession scene lets audiences know the gravity of the situation.

Towards the end of the movie, after Heather and Will explore an abandoned house for their missing friend, Josh, the camera drops for the final time (01:17:22). The audience never gets confirmations as to what exactly attacks the movie characters, on whether the witch is the true enemy. The camera moves and falls with whoever is recording at the moment, such as when the camera dropping to the floor because there is no longer anyone alive to hold the camera and record. The shaky camera helps the audience infer the state of the person recording, who is the victim running away from whatever is hunting them down. In *The Blair Witch Project*, it is the persecuted within the woods that is hunting down humans. The audience sees the camera dropping one final time and infers that all the students have died as they are unable to pick up the camera.

People continue to incorporate and rely on new electronic recording technologies as there are innovations. With the rise in usage of security footage or camera footage to collect evidence, there have been numerous movies using such a device to capture evidence of what happens to

people. *The Blair Witch Project* had film students try to create a documentary, but movies where characters use recordings to document and review their supernatural encounters arise as well.

Another popular movie that uses cameras to capture evidence is *Paranormal Activity*. The movie follows the premise of the found footage phenomenon from the *Blair Witch Project*, as it comes from a first-person point of view, where a character in the movie is the one supposedly responsible for the recording audiences are currently watching. The style of filming allows for a more deeply interactive setting, as though the audience is reviewing visual evidence of what happened to the characters in the film, where the audience feels that an actual person is just recording daily instances of their lives or sharing their own personal experiences. While *The Blair Witch Project* had the audiences following the point of view of three students lost in the woods while trying to hunt a witch, *Paranormal Activity* comes from the found footage phenomenon of characters in the movie filming what audiences are seeing as security footage with the characters trying to discover more about the supernatural entity haunting them.

The supernatural story of *Paranormal Activity* is summarized as a demon has been haunting a woman, Katie, all her life. *Paranormal Activity* is filmed from the perspective of her partner Micah making surveillance video recordings in order to help determine what is happening to Katie as weird things begin to happen after they move in together. The recordings from the perspective of surveillance videos are what categorizes this movie as found footage phenomena, even though the shots do not move with characters as in the documentary style of filming as in *The Blair Witch Project*.

The opening scene of *Paranormal Activity* is a disclaimer that the events that occur in the film actually happened, with the words “Paramount Pictures would like to thank the families of Micah Sloat and Katie Featherston and the San Diego Police Department” (00:00:44).

Resembling the disclaimer that appeared at the beginning of *The Blair Witch Project*, the editors of the film intended to lead the audience to believe that Paramount Pictures was able to access the footage from the San Diego Police Department and had the permission of the movie characters' families in order to show the film. In thanking the Police Department and family members of the victims, the film leads audiences to believe that the characters have connection to the real world and are able to be verified, beyond what audiences see happened to the people on screen. And within the film, it is Micah who is documenting what is happening to him and Katie in their home.

Just after the movie disclaimer, the next scene shows Micah showing off his new video camera that he then uses to record Katie around their home (00:00:54). Micah showing off the camera establishes him as the videographer and explains the motivations why he begins to record. Micah himself giving logical explanation as to why the footage exists and what the couple is intending to capture evidence fills in outside explanation to audiences. The videos he records are for his own peace of mind and investigations. Unlike documentaries that are purposely filmed to show to an audience, the security film is to discover what is going on in his own home. Also, unlike documentaries, Micah switches back and forth between security camera like shots that remain still, Micah also records himself when reviewing his security footage and glimpses of his own personal life with Katie.

There are numerous still shots in *Paranormal Activity* where the security camera remains in the same corner of the bedroom, meant to capture evidence of supernatural influence into the lives of the young couple a demon is haunting, as seen in Illustration 7. Micah puts up a security footage in the corner of the bedroom that points directly between their couple's bed and the door.

These shots combined with time lapses as indicated by the times in the corner of the recording document a long-time duration of what happens to the characters throughout the whole night.

Illustration 7 is a shot angled from the corner of the bedroom where some of the most iconic scenes in *Paranormal Activity* take place. This angle conveys Micah's intent to record any possible evidence of supernatural activity as the couple sleeps. From the open door to the full view of the bed where Micah and Katie sleep, it can record anything that can come into the room. The time stamps in the corner of the frame would also give Micah additional data of what times the paranormal events happen and for how long.



Illustration 7 – Scene from Paranormal Activity

Paranormal Activity takes advantage of the contrast between the surveillance footage shots from the corner of the bedroom and later shows analysis and reactions to the footage when the characters review the footage themselves. Context for the specific scene presented in Illustration 7 takes place after Micah and Katie have confirmed the existence of the demon's haunting presence, and at Micah's insistence, has laid down baby powder on the floor of the hallway leading to the bedroom to catch the demon in action (00:54:39). The still shots of the couple sleeping in their bed with the time lapse that passes by tracks exactly when the demon

chooses to make its presence known and trek into the bedroom. The sped-up time lapse compared to when the couple wakes up due to noise the demon makes when creating baby powder footprints creates tension as the couple takes the camera from its still shot angle to Micah crouching down with the camera to show off the footprints (00:55:38). The juxtaposition of the calm still shot from which the couple was asleep to the frantic and inquisitive energy of Micah and Katie after they wake up and investigate the footprints imbues the audience with same tension of what to do next after the discovery.

In the scene leading up to the camera being set up in the bedroom with baby powder on the floor, there was Katie and Micah discussing the effectiveness of carrying out this experiment (00:52:05). The scene that takes place the next morning after they found the baby powder foot in their bedroom Katie and Micah are arguing about what to do next (01:00:46). The directors and editors of the film intentionally left in these scenes to show audiences that there has been careful thought and consideration of its characters to explain their motivations in actions instead of leaving people second guessing. The reflection over what happened and the argument that ensued show the consideration of its characters lies in the first person.

In comparing *Paranormal Activity* to *The Blair Witch Project*, though both are prominent as innovators in the “found footage” genre, *Paranormal Activity* uses time stamps and dates to give more context to movie audiences on the time that spans for the story. The story’s duration spans a continuous number of days and the still shots in the bedroom begin to show how the demon escalates its actions almost every time the audience is shown another long shot from the corner of the bedroom. Not only with the time stamps from the shots of the bedroom, but the films editors label which night it has been since Micah and Katie have been recording their lives, but also a clear date to help audiences understand.

There are numerous occasions where the demon haunts the couple for a night. Initially, the demon's antics were minimal, like shifting the bedroom door open and close (00:21:21), but the actions escalate to several events like how the demon later walks into the room leaving footprints in baby powder laid on the floor (00:55:01), an occasion where the demon is pulling Katie out of the bedroom (01:16:54), and even possessing Katie's body to do things she never remembers in the morning (00:38:05), etc. These mishaps happen further along in the story's duration and the audience also has a clear timeline of how long it took for the supernatural events to build up over the span of months.

This kind of security film would be even more relevant today as technology continues to advance, and more people have home monitoring equipment installed around many different parts of the home. Technological innovation allowed for a completely new genre to be formed within the horror genre itself, as it introduces new filming styles and audiences can use other clues in the filming style in order to try to make sense of what is happening themselves. Limited scope in film in first person shots allow for diversification in tools with which future film makers can tell another story.

Chapter 5: Video Calling Platforms (Screenlife)

As horror movies change their settings to remain more relevant to their audiences, they bring in current technologies to highlight the ongoing social issues. Films have historically been a way to critique and comment on society, and, as we have seen with technological adaptation within both supernatural characters in films and the filmmakers, there are numerous ways to do so. The latest horror innovation is the filming style of “desktop” or “laptop” horror, where a whole movie is seemingly filmed all online within one video call. The most famous movies that fall into this specific category are *Unfriended* (2014) and *Host* (2020), showing how film creators tell a story within one frame.

Unfriended (2014) was the first movie to take place all on a single screen, creating a subgenre to refer to as “screenlife”. “Screenlife” takes place all within a single screen of someone’s electronic device, like a laptop or tablet. Since all the action viewed is in a single screen, it is necessary to have the Internet in order to connect with friends through calls within the screen that drives the plot along and introduce more characters. Both the characters and the audience are familiar with navigating the Internet, browsers, website links, social media, etc., as this sub channel only makes sense to those who understand the capability of the Internet in connecting people. Because of the connections and anonymity from the internet, people do not only use the means for good, but to hurt others as well.

Unfriended was the first movie where the entire plot of the film took place over Facetime, a Skype like interface. This filming style is not common or traditional, and limits the places that characters move and is able to introduce multiple perspectives at once. The article “The Horror of Dis correlation: Mediating Unease in Post-Cinematic Screens and Networks”

more deeply examines how these new subgenres of horror movies moved into a new stage, as it says, “Unfriended’s glitchy studio bumper speaks to this danger, which it folds into its own production of fear by evoking the uncertainty and loss of control that one might experience after clicking on a malicious download link... The result is an intense feeling of panic as the user tries in vain to stop the downloads, close the browser, or even shut off the computer”. This kind of panic and unease seen in *Unfriended* is only possible with how common laptops screens and the Internet are immersed in daily life. This style of storytelling allows the audience to better understand the logical mindset of the main character as we are able to not only see the main characters’ friends’ video call, but the website she pulls up for the other social media she’s logged in through her laptop device. The growing popularity of living and documenting one’s life on the internet contributes to the themes of *Unfriended*.

Unfriended (2014) tackles issues of the Internet and online bullying. This plot is quickly summarized as a ghost comes back for revenge, but much more technological than others following the same concept as it takes place on the video calling platform. The movie looked like any other video calling platform, echoing how real life was like for those in the audience who are familiar with calling their own friends. The audience also may have experienced issues of negative comments and cyber bullying over the internet as well, as there is a rising number of social media users. As social media and the internet become a bigger and bigger part of teenagers’ lives, numerous issues of cyber bullying and mental health issues crop up. Especially since the 2010s, more and more of life can be lived over the internet.

During the times of the late 2000s and early 2010s, social media gained even more traction into the lives of adolescents. According to the “Cyberbullying Increases in 2005: Report”, the study shows that online harassment or cyberbullying had increased from 6% in

1999 to 9% in 2005, and the trend is expected to continue. Alison Knopf in the article “Suicide Rates Increasing; Researchers Especially Worried about Teens” states, “The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in June reported a 30% increase in suicides from 2000 to 2016, and although rates went up across all age groups, the researchers were particularly concerned about adolescents. Concerns centered around social media use, anxiety, depression, and self-inflicted injuries, all of which are on the rise among teens.” There was a rising epidemic of social media and cyberbullying during the time of 2010 era. *Unfriended* was released in 2014 and notices the trends amongst teenagers and social media, and how cyberbullying increases rates of suicide. Issues of cyberbullying are presented to show how social media directly impacts the lives and actions of the teenagers in the film, how social media can permanently record one’s worse moments, and how, although social media can enrich people’s lives, it can encroach people’s freedoms.

Unfriended makes social commentary on the reality of cyberbullying as people can remain anonymous and hurt others. The ghost in this story retells a traditional tale of revenge against those who committed a wrong against the ghost. The ghost in this film is a victim of cyber bullying that committed suicide exactly one year before the setting of the film took place. The group of teenagers in the movie were all supposedly friends with the suicide victim, Laura Barnes. As they met up in the video call on the anniversary of Laura's death, none of them seem to particularly like her or were that mournful of her passing. Later on, as each of the teenagers are mysteriously possessed and die in different horrific ways, the numbers slowly whittled down as it seemed like they all had committed suicide, just like how they commented on Laura for her suicide earlier. The things said and done online will continue to be on the internet.

The opening scene of the movie shows a recorded video titled “Laura Barnes’ suicide” and mentions how she committed suicide because of an embarrassing video posted online (00:00:38). Laura was a victim of cyberbullying, and in turn, she wants revenge against those who caused her to be cyberbullied in the first place. This first video scene shown in the movie gives context to the impact of bullying and adds to the story’s duration and shows the audience that videos uploaded to the internet are there for anyone to view with no restrictions if one knows where to look.

The ghost initially enters the facetime call as an anonymous user named billie227, and the group of friends question the identity of the extra person (00:06:55). With this anonymous name, the group of teenage friends all question one another on who that is. With the anonymity available on the Internet, it was hard to find the identity of who it was, but audiences were able to see how the main character, Blair, traced the e-mail account to an abandoned Facebook page of Laura Barnes. This initial anonymous user entering the chat does not raise the characters’ suspicions, as they initially assume it is a glitch or someone else playing a prank. It is only later when billie227 makes suspicious comments that the characters suspect the user has malicious intentions.

The entire movie took place on the first-person interface as if it were the main character, Blair’s, laptop screen. This includes whatever she clicks out of web pages, pulls up new apps, and can call and message her friends. The audience and the movie characters begin to suspect something supernatural at play, as it is no longer just a prank or attack from another person on the Internet, but a supernatural ghost that is haunting them. As the plot progresses, the ghost of Laura then utilizes the vast internet to reveal secrets of others in the group, and as depicted in

Illustration 8, Blair is trying to download an antivirus so that whoever is hacking the group's technology cannot do so anymore (00:41:05).

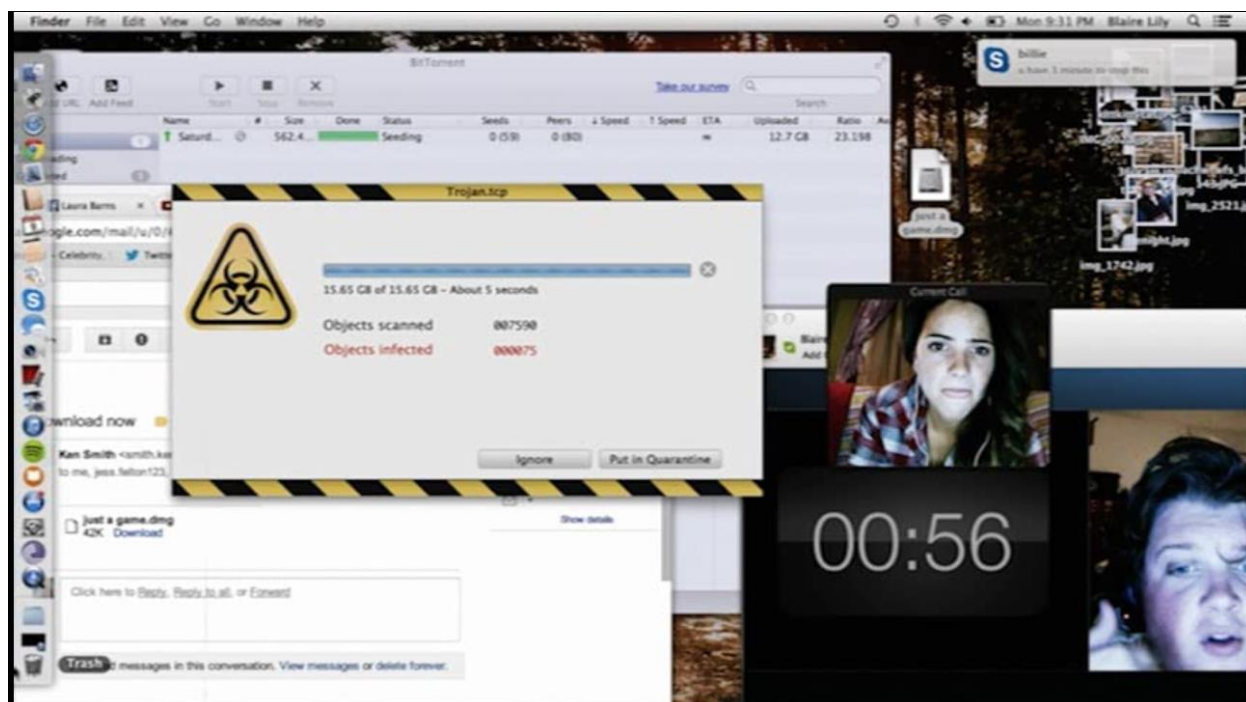


Illustration 8 – Scene from *Unfriended*

The final scene of the movie is when the ghost of Laura Barnes reveals the identity of who has posted the video that ruined her life. It was her friend Blair who ruined her life by posting the video of her and refusing to take it down. Though everybody in the friend group contributed to Laura Barnes' cyber bullying and her eventual suicide, Blair, as the final character remaining, is the one who the audience is unable to see the death of as the screen blanks and she screams in regret (01:16:00). Laura completes her mission of revenge against everyone who had brought harm upon her.

Movies such as *Unfriended* (2014) or *Host* (2020), which take place on video calling platforms, show accurate depictions of what life was like for people during this time. The movie *Host* takes place during the time of Covid quarantine, so everyone is feeling the sense of

isolation. The internet allows people to better communicate and continue to live their lives even away from people, but humans are still feeling lonely and isolated from one another,

In 2020, there was an abrupt change in lifestyle. Video calling platforms have become a major aspect of people's lives as the pandemic began. It was no longer just teenagers or those interested in calling friends and family in this way; the COVID pandemic expedited the usage of video calling platforms as so many aspects of daily life required the video calling platforms just to operate, such as job interviews, school classes, “visiting” relatives far away when travel was restricted. It is during this time that video calling platforms were widely used. From virtual classrooms, to workspaces, to interviews, everyone was on video calling platforms to interact with one another.

Host (2020) is a movie made during the pandemic spurred quarantine when people were experiencing this sense of disconnectedness. While *Unfriended* had come out in 2014 and was more niche in its style of filming as not everybody had been talking or connecting in that way, by the time *Host* came out in 2020, everybody was communicating in this way. The real-life impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and society forced everybody to use the same type of technology, and therefore can better understand the setting in impact of a horror movie taking place completely over one video call.

The opening scene begins with someone opening a zoom meeting by herself (00:00:02) and slowly inviting her friends to the room. The friends slowly joining the room all greet one another and give background to how and why people are doing the online séance together online. Slowly the friends begin updating each other on how their life is like in quarantine. *Host* verbally and visually acknowledges the ongoing current events of quarantine, and cues to the audience they are living the same experiences.

Host delves into the feelings of isolation as it takes place amidst society being in lockdown. The movie takes the classic horror film trope of a seance gone wrong into a new filming style. Scenes in the movie include items such as audio issues, background settings, face filters, Internet connection etc. to highlight the issues and tools that all those who used calling platforms, such as Zoom, were familiar with.



Illustration 9 – Scene from Host

Within the movie scene depicted in Illustration 9 above, the different squares of the zoom participants represent some memories or technology audience members may have used during their own zoom quarantine meetings. The top left square shows a face filter while the bottom right is the glitchy background. The squares each have the name of the characters, and there is even the entire zoom tools bar located along the bottom row in the image, accurately showing the zoom video platform that people were familiar with, even if the audiences did not experience the supernatural events that occur on screen. The inopportune moments in which the face filters,

background screens, chat bubbles, and internet connection issues show the reality of Zoom calls during COVID.

The entirety of *Host* takes place within the specific time length of a free zoom call. Towards the end of the movie, there is an abrupt ending as the zoom call ran out of free minutes, while there was also an earlier warning that there was only ten free minutes left in the zoom call. The film editors and directors were mindful of the length of the film so that the film's plot duration, screen duration, and story duration all matched up to the accurate amount of time a free group Zoom call would allow.

Both movies' perspectives present film to the audience in a new style. The video calling platforms utilize new technology so that friends can call and see one another at the same time while everyone is still in their own space, but the plot in both movies does not hint towards a character within the film being responsible for the recording. The audience just happens to be able to see how a call can go wrong without anyone within the plot utilizing the screens and internet connection with friends for their own nefarious purpose. The supernatural entities in either film can be seen making internet post or interfering with the lights, reminding us of how supernatural entities adapted to their times in chapter three of this thesis, but differ in filming style so that it shows that the kinds of technology that can be adapted change with how people within society change.

Conclusion

Beginning with spirit photography, humans are able to use technology as a means to get in touch with the supernatural world. Technology allowed people in society an alternative way to examine and investigate the supernatural which they could not completely understand. The camera and photographs were a new technological innovation that gave people the means to record moments in time that they never had access to before.

Historically, though spirit photography was later proven to be a scam, people took comfort in seeing “evidence” of an afterlife. The understanding of the supernatural at that time was in line with solid belief in religion, ghosts, and other such supernatural creatures in order to make sense of the unexplainable. Being able to see the shadowy forms of lost loved ones had no other explanation but to be a supernatural occurrence. This was a time where there was great unease and uncertainty about the future of the country and gave answers to people who had lost so much during the time period of the civil war. So not only was the photograph introduced in times of great strife, combining the lack of understanding with this new technological innovation and the supernatural beliefs of the people at the time, society turned to the supernatural to explain what they cannot understand.

In this thesis and in today’s time, there is not such solid belief in the explanations of supernatural entities for unexplainable events. Society today looks towards more logic and science-based explanation for any events that occur. As such, technology is used every day as just another part of life. With every analysis of all the horror movies in this thesis, the supernatural is to be taken as a metaphor for the unexplainable and the unknown.

The purpose of horror movies has always had the intent to frighten and scare their audiences. No matter the changing fears in society, horror films adapt to the era and act to renew and revitalize fears. The latest adaptation of using technology in film reflects a new reality for people and is therefore recognized by filmmakers in order to better connect to their audiences. Technology is already incorporated into how people experience their lives. The supernatural is no longer a solid belief or explanation for events, but through analyzing the presence of the supernatural in horror films, it acts as an anxiety of the time.

There is a strong contrast between how spirit photography was initially developed and how technology is now presented in horror film. Though there are a wide variety of examples of how technology is used to contact the supernatural in the contemporary horror films used within this thesis, the supernatural are not viewed in the same way. In the horror movies analyzed, the supernatural acts as an unknown and uncontrollable entity who infects the technology embedded in people's daily lives to bring them harm. There is a difference between how ghosts had revealed an afterlife in spirit photography compared to how uncontrollable forces wield technology in the contemporary horror films. In all the horror films analyzed in this thesis, the supernatural are dangerous.

This thesis reveals that humans once again face new fears that are showcased in the latest horror movies. Continually adding new electronic technology into the plot, setting, and devices of horror movies shows how real-life events and fears inspire horror movies that are presented back towards society. Humans have shown a long tradition of wanting to attain more information about the spirit world, and they continue to incorporate more and more of the latest technological innovations to contact, connect, and study the supernatural incidents that still haunt audiences today. Horror subgenres are created as new technological innovations change the way people

live their lives, therefore changing the setting, filming styles, and plot devices available to film editors and film directors.

The creation of these subgenres traces their origins to the events and technological innovations of their times. The new subgenres of technological horror adaptation, found footage, and screenlife all gained popularity and recognition during the times when such themes and the average member in society experienced their reality. Once the subgenre is established, it can be reinterpreted by future filmmakers in accordance with the ongoing issues of their time.

Humans continue to have technological advancements and innovations to improve their own lifestyle. So, it makes sense that as society continues to have these technological breakthroughs, technological innovations become more readily available in every household, changing society and culture as we come to understand how to operate in a newer world. Old supernatural fears and stories that have dominated the beginning of the horror genre are reinvented as the stories are told to a new audience. Old supernatural fear is not understood in the same way, but the fear of the unknown remains a staple concept in horror films.

Technology is a new tool and plot device in movies that have a setting in the time period of their audiences. Beginning with America in the 1980s, cable television has millions of subscribers. As mentioned before, *Poltergeist* (1982) came out at a time when cable television became much more common and multiple households began to have and use their own television as a means of entertainment. As one of the first prominent horror movies involved in techno horror, this movie set groundwork for how to incorporate the reality of television into people's daily lives. This movie is able to incorporate the idea of old historical trauma found in how Americans have historically treated Native Americans, especially since the supernatural presence in the horror movie is from the disrespected graves in which a neighborhood was built on top of.

The viral sharing of VHS tapes in *Ringu* (1999) and *The Ring* (2002) share the same underlying plot even in the context of different cultures. The time period of the late 1990s and early 2000s had VHS were the most popular way to share shows and movies with one another. Technology is not only seen by spreading curses through the VHS, but also for how it incorporates how all the victims introduced having a TV and cell phone within their home in order to most actively haunt them. If *Poltergeist* was the groundwork for incorporating technology into daily life, the curse of viral sharing found in these two movies shows how technology was gaining a bigger role in an everyday social setting. Technology was no longer only dangerous in its form of entertainment, but in how people interact with one another and the things they share. The role of technology continues to be just a tool that people can use and misuse.

The subgenre of found footage horror movies has expanded the genre by diverting our attention from how the supernatural wield technology to how humans use technology to track the supernatural. Found footage shakes our understanding of recordings as proof, as technology can now be used to manipulate our understanding in all sorts of ways. The opening disclaimers in *The Blair Witch Project* and in *Paranormal Activity* indicate an editor with unknown motivations while claiming that all the footage was direct evidence of supernatural entities hunting down people. *The Blair Witch Project* had film students filming a failed documentary, while *Paranormal Activity* had an ordinary couple trying to record evidence of what was happening to them in their daily lives. Found footage shows the era of home video and how found footage changes the perceptions of viewers. This genre reveals a change in how society thinks, acts, and interacts with having readily available recording devices for the mass public.

The latest genre of “screen life” horror movies are considered a subgenre of the subgenre of found footage. This style of film is very new and niche as there are only a few that fit into this category so far. *Unfriended (2014)* was the first movie to all happen in one long continuous video calling film with the theme centering around how social media and cyberbullying can ruin people's lives. The shift to how audiences are able to watch this movie comes with the new technology of video calls to have live interaction with one's friends. Although Skype had existed before FaceTime or Zoom, being able to have video calls with friends on mobile devices allowed more people convenient access and added to its popularity.

Host was the most recent example that came out in 2020 and dealt with the worldwide reality of how COVID-19 and quarantine lockdowns impacted society. *Host* was filmed in the same filming style as *Unfriended* but was able to relate the audience as almost everybody in society was experiencing quarantine and had to familiarize themselves with the video calling platforms in order to maintain a relatively normal lifestyle as physical contact was limited. This movie mixed references the time when lockdown happened, people are getting sick, and everyone needed to stay home for the safety of others. This movie allowed for its audiences to see representation of what quarantine was like for the majority of people throughout the world, and act as records for future generations.

In examining the role of technology within horror movies, how technology is used and presented within the film reveals the relationship that people have with technology, both the good and the bad. Films have historically addressed ongoing issues at the time, and the incorporation of more technological devices into films will reveal new and ongoing issues spanning different time periods. Though all of the horror movie examples in this thesis have supernatural elements through them, there are numerous horror movies that tie into the idea of

technology in modern society as a means of horror and danger without the supernatural elements but show the same fear of events outside of one's control and the unknown.

Looking forward to how technological innovations continue to influence the horror genre, we are in the age where live streaming, social media, and artificial intelligence have advanced to greater stages than ever before. Horror movies reflect these changes as well, with movies that incorporate these innovations like *Spree* and *M3GAN*.

Spree is a horror movie that recently came out in 2020 and utilizes live streaming as the film style to show audiences. *Spree* delves into issues of Internet popularity, the obsession with gaining followers, and the reality of whether or not viewers and audience members are able to believe what is being seen on screen. *Spree* came out during these times when there are many popular live stream channels, such as Twitch, YouTube, and even TikTok. Being an influencer or streamer is a viable and popular method of making money, especially amongst a younger generation, and leads to people being more obsessed with being online famous than ever before. Live streaming is no longer just about the obsession with social media, but involves monetary transactions in the careers of people to being celebrities.

Shifting the tone from the popularity of live streaming platforms and gaining followers, another big technological innovation is the advancement of artificial intelligence. *M3GAN* is a horror movie that came out in 2022 with how the plot premise circles around how advanced artificial intelligence could be even more dangerous than before. Since the movie *Terminator* came out many years in the past, the study and development of artificial intelligence has progressed exponentially. *M3GAN* is a horror movie that examines exactly how far artificial intelligence has progressed, and how artificial intelligence can deviate from its intended purpose to develop a mind of its own, as the self-thinking program and ability of artificial intelligence is

plausible in today's time. It can be especially relevant now at the time of writing this thesis, where there are online artificial programs that have become so advanced that they can examine information from the internet to write their own essays.

Not only do people look to the past to show what they fear, but looking forward towards the future, we ask ourselves what are the other capabilities of technology that we will begin to desire and fear? The supernatural is a metaphor for things outside of human control and from what is unknown. Though all the movies chosen in this thesis were supernatural, the fear of how the technology is used and can bring harm onto oneself as seen in movies without any supernatural explanation at all.

Storytelling has always been a way to recount or highlight experiences of reality one wants to share with others. Movies are a visual mode of storytelling. Films are a way to retell and re-examine history, and in the context of horror films, can help to show historical trauma. As new horror films continue to be made, and new technological innovations continue to occur, the film makers and storytellers will continue to have material they can scare their audiences with, scaring audiences with the newest tech fad.

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