

An investigation of priming, self-consciousness, and allegiance in the diegetic  
camera horror film

by

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## **Statement of originality**

Some of the discussion of *The Blair Witch Project* throughout this thesis has formed the basis for a book, *Devil's Advocates: The Blair Witch Project* (Auteur, 2014). Some of the discussion of priming in chapter four was also used in a conference paper, *Behind the Camera: Priming the Spectator of Found Footage Horror*, delivered at The Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image in 2015. Sections on personal imagining also formed the basis of a conference paper, *Personal Imagining and the Point-of-View Shot in Diegetic Camera Horror Films*, delivered at The Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image in 2017. Finally, significant amounts of Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 will be featured in two chapters of an upcoming edited collection on found footage horror films with the working title *[Rec] Terror: Essays on Found Footage Horror Films*.

## **Abstract**

The main research question underpinning this study asks why and how the diegetic camera technique has become so popular to both contemporary horror filmmakers and audiences. In order to answer this question, this thesis adopts a mainly cognitive theoretical framework in order to address the mental schemata and processes that are elicited and triggered by these films. The concept of the diegetic camera is explored by analysing specific films and constructing an argument for the effects that this aesthetic and narrational technique can have on the cognition of viewers. Applying theoretical notions such as **schema, priming, identification, recognition, alignment, and allegiance** to the analysis of the focus films, I examine how the viewer's mind works when watching these films. Another central concern of this thesis is the way in which mediated realism is constructed in the films in order to attempt to make audiences either (mis)read the footage as non-fiction, or more commonly to imagine that the footage is non-fiction.

I demonstrate that the films under scrutiny create a sense of increased immediacy and alignment with the characters through various techniques associated with the diegetic camera. The concepts of identification and character engagement are interrogated by using cognitive concepts such as recognition, alignment, and allegiance (Smith, 1995). These individual concepts break down the notion of identification into distinct processes, allowing for a more rigorous examination of the notion of character engagement. The thesis also considers how priming and self-consciousness eventually affect the audience's perception and cognition of the films, most significantly in relation to the theory of personal imagining (Currie, 1995).

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Scope and significance: why do found footage films matter?

The cinematic image of a young woman staring into the camera - crying, hyperventilating and talking directly to her audience (fig. 1.1) - has become the definitive image of *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sanchez, 1999). It is arguably the most famous scene, and certainly the most parodied image of found footage horror cinema in general. Perhaps it can be even be called one of the defining images of cinema in the 1990s *tout court*. This character, Heather Donahue, is played by a hitherto unknown actress called Heather Donahue, in her feature debut. From what we see on screen, and the manner in which her monologue is delivered, it can be inferred that she is not reciting scripted lines. She does not seem to be acting; her fear appears genuine. Heather is alone in a dark tent, shooting this footage herself with a handheld camera. The shot did not look like most other horror films that had been previously shown in cinemas; it is poorly framed, poorly lit, and the character knows and acknowledges that she is on camera.

COPYRIGHTED IMAGE REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION

**Figure 2.1: Heather Donahue in *The Blair Witch Project*.**

There had been previous films in this style: *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato, 1980) contains the use of ‘found footage’ within its narrative structure and *Man Bites Dog* (Belvaux, Bonzel and Poelvoorde, 1992) is a mock-documentary that purports to be completely filmed by a diegetic film crew. However, neither of these films had the cultural impact or box office success of *The Blair Witch Project*, a film that eventually spawned numerous imitators, and arguably the entire found footage horror sub-genre that now consists of over a hundred films.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to fan-made lists on IMDb, for example, here: <http://www.imdb.com/list/ls052694809/> Though there is some debate about whether all of these films could be categorised as ‘found footage’, there are over a hundred that are recognisable examples. There are also an increasing number of studies that have paid attention to this sub-genre including an entire issue of *O13Media: e-journal of Cinema, Television and Media Studies* [http://host.uniroma3.it/riviste/O13Media/archivio\\_files/O13Media%2009%20Horror.pdf](http://host.uniroma3.it/riviste/O13Media/archivio_files/O13Media%2009%20Horror.pdf) as well as

There is a straightforward economic reason why filmmakers continue to produce found footage films. *The Blair Witch Project* made over \$ 248 million at the worldwide box office<sup>2</sup> on a \$ 60,000 production budget thus ensuring that a new sub-genre of horror films, labelled by critics as found footage films, was born. As Brigid Cherry (2009, p.34) argues, ‘since many horror films are produced at the low budget end of the scale, filmmakers are forced by circumstance to be innovative or inventive with what little resources they do have access to, often making a virtue of necessity’. Found footage horror films are cheap to make, with the highest budget to date being \$ 25 million for *Cloverfield* (Reeves, 2008), but most are far cheaper. The majority of these films have budgets below one million dollars, and with the exception of a few, all have made a profit. With such small budgets, the financial outlay for investors is low, and the potential gross can be significant in the case of some of the popular found footage films. The most successful titles grossed over twenty times the amount that they cost to produce: *The Last Broadcast* (Avalos and Weiler, 1998) reportedly cost only \$ 900, but made \$ 4 million; *Paranormal Activity* (Peli, 2007) had production costs of \$ 15,000 before earning \$ 193 million at the global box office.

<b>Film</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Gross</b>	<b>Budget to Gross Ratio</b>
Paranormal Activity	\$ 15,000	\$ 193,355,800	1: 12,890
The Last Broadcast	\$ 900	\$ 4,000,000	1: 4444
The Blair Witch Project	\$ 60,000	\$ 248,639,099	1: 4144
Unfriended	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 64,056,643	1: 64
Paranormal Activity 2	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 177,512,032	1: 59

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Alexandra Heller-Nicholas’ volume *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality*. See appendix A for a list of the found footage films produced between 1999 and 2009.

<sup>2</sup> All budgets and box office figures are sourced from Box Office Mojo and/or the Internet Movie Database in order to triangulate data and confirm reliability where possible. On some occasions, the figures can only be found on one of these two sites.

The Zombie Diaries	\$ 10,668	\$526,552	1: 49
Paranormal Activity 3	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 207,039,844	1: 41
The Last Exorcism	\$ 1,800,000	\$67,738,090	1: 37
Paranormal Activity 4	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 142,817,992	1: 28
Cannibal Holocaust	\$ 100,000	\$2,000,000	1: 20

**Table 1: Top 10 Budget to Gross Ratios in the found footage sub-genre.**

Economics are not the only reason for the ubiquity and popularity of these films. Their cheap-looking aesthetic is in fact a virtue because it is their look that makes them appear similar to authentic documentaries and home videos. It is my argument that most of the impact of the aesthetic is due to the systematic use of the ‘diegetic camera’. Filmmakers working in genres other than horror have also begun to utilise the diegetic camera to create this distinctive aesthetic. For example, the release of *Chronicle* (Trank, 2012), *End of Watch* (Ayer, 2012) and *Into the Storm* (Quale, 2014), have seen budgets raise dramatically and the employment of found footage aesthetic and narrative strategies in superhero films, police dramas and disaster films respectively. Science fiction films such as *Earth to Echo* (Green, 2014) and *Project Almanac* (Israelite, 2015) have also recently adopted the approach, indicating the influence of low budget horror filmmakers on more mainstream practitioners.

## **1.2 Approaching the diegetic camera**

The main research question underpinning this study asks why and how the diegetic camera technique has become so popular to both contemporary horror filmmakers and audiences. In order to answer this question, this thesis will adopt a mainly cognitive theoretical framework in order to address the mental schemata and processes that are elicited and triggered by these films. I will explore the concept of the diegetic camera and argue that this aesthetic and narrational technique can have an effect on the cognition of the viewer, including his or her moral evaluation of characters and the empathy s/he feels with the characters. Utilising and applying theoretical notions such as **schema**, **priming**,

**identification, recognition, alignment** and **allegiance** to the analysis of the focus films will enable me to examine how the viewer's mind works when watching these films. In particular, Jean Piaget (1952) defined the notion of schemata as units of knowledge that people can draw upon when reacting to incoming stimuli. This suggests that viewers can organise information from films and use this information as a framework for future understanding. This is enmeshed with the concept of priming suggesting that the early scenes in a film are vital in creating a mood for the viewer based on their previous knowledge of the techniques that they are seeing. I will also be considering how **restricted narration** is set up and maintained in these films. This is narration that is restricted beyond most other films previously made, with the exception of *Lady in the Lake* (Montgomery, 1947). The strict adherence to the employment of a diegetic camera creates many limitations on where the camera might be placed and this narration has an impact on the viewer's perception of diegetic events. It will also be necessary to analyse what cues are present to convince the viewer that the camera is diegetic and, furthermore, that the shot is a point-of-view shot. Finally, another central concern of this thesis is the way in which mediated realism is constructed in the films in order to attempt to make audiences either (mis)read the footage as non-fiction, or more commonly to imagine that the footage is non-fiction.

My hypothesis is that the films under scrutiny create a sense of increased immediacy and alignment with the characters through various techniques associated with the diegetic camera trend. It is less important that these films are known as 'found footage', and more significant that they are shot with a 'diegetic camera', hence my use of this term to describe the films henceforth. Some of the films contain reference to the actual 'finding' of the footage (e.g. *The Blair Witch Project*) and others do not (e.g. *Man Bites Dog*). There is always the implication that the footage has been found and can now be revealed to the viewer. More importantly, however, there is always a diegetic camera operator present at the events being revealed. I will be interrogating the concept of identification by using cognitive concepts such as recognition, alignment and allegiance (Smith, 1995). These individual concepts break down the notion of identification into distinct processes, allowing for a more rigorous examination of the idea of



identification. Analysing these films from a cognitive perspective will allow me to explore the mechanisms of an audience's responses to the characters and to narrative and aesthetic strategies, including how priming and self-consciousness eventually affect the audience's perception and cognition of the films.

In this thesis, it is my aim to analyse the aesthetic, technological, and perceptual elements of these films in order to first ascertain the most significant antecedents of diegetic camera horror films as concerns production, perception, and aesthetics. Based on this, I will then establish the aesthetic, technological, and psychological means by which the audience is primed for the viewing experience of these films. Subsequently, I will determine with whom the viewer is encouraged to empathise when viewing the films and why. This will involve an analysis of how the diegetic camera film affects enunciation and how the diegetic camera must be theorised differently from the traditional notion of the camera theorised in film studies to date. This analysis will also allow me to consider how off-camera space is privileged in diegetic camera films. Furthermore, I will consider the construction of realism, and more precisely what type of realism is being created. I will also investigate how the level of self-consciousness (e.g. the characters' awareness that they are being filmed) impacts the viewing experience and thought processes of the viewer. Finally, I will investigate the notion of allegiance in relation to the charismatic killer category of diegetic camera films.

### **1.3 The corpus of focus films: found footage and the diegetic camera**

I will use the term 'diegetic camera films' rather than found footage films, even though this category of films can be defined in many different ways. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas (2014, p.13) offers the definition that they are simply 'films that feature material that is literally found or discovered'. In films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* there is clear reference to the retrieval of tapes or memory cards that contain footage and the entire narration consists of revealing this supposedly discovered material. However, in others such as *The Last Broadcast*, only certain sequences in the film consist of found footage and are

situated within a given framing narrative as part of a larger mock-documentary narrational and aesthetic strategy. Therefore, Heller-Nicholas broadens the definition to include all ‘movies filmed with diegetic hand-held cameras, surveillance cameras, or both’ (2014, p.13-14). For the purpose of clarity and precision, it is also important to distinguish diegetic camera horror films from the preceding use of the term found footage. In scholarly work on film, found footage was traditionally a term used to describe those films that ‘employ material shot by someone else for another reason’ (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p.14) such as *A Movie* (Conner, 1958) and *The Clock* (Marclay, 2010). The films analysed in this thesis can to some extent be considered fictional versions of these original found footage films. Originally, the term found footage referred to a moving image collage of non-fiction footage. The films now being labelled as found footage and, in particular those that are the subject of this thesis fictionalise this conceit. They are comprised of footage that has supposedly already been shot by someone (a character within the film) and has now either been edited or left as it was found, and finally released as a film product.

Scott Meslow (2012) recognises that found footage films are ‘built on the conceit that the movie was filmed... by a character that exists within the film’s world - and whose footage was discovered sometime after the events of the film’. While this is an excellent definition, it does not do enough to separate and recognise the diversity within this group of films. Heller-Nicholas (2014, p.16) calls this body of films ‘a distinct horror category with its own readily identifiable features, some of which stem from documentary traditions and associated evolving trends in the field of mockumentary’. However, many of the films analysed have features that appear more familiar when compared to home videos and reality television. Therefore I will divide the focus films into three distinct, albeit overlapping, categories: documentary and reality TV, home videos, and charismatic killers. More specifically:

- 1) The first category contains those films whose conventions most resemble **documentaries, mockumentaries and reality television programmes**. I will focus on *The Blair Witch Project* and *Rec* (Balaguero and Plaza,

2007). *The Blair Witch Project* is about three student filmmakers who enter the woods of Burkitsville in order to make a documentary on the legend of the Blair Witch. The film is comprised of the footage they supposedly shot before their disappearance. *Rec* is about the presenter of a reality television programme who is quarantined in an apartment block in Barcelona when a virus is unleashed. Her camera operator Pablo keeps filming through the night and therefore, *Rec* is supposedly all of Pablo's footage.

- 2) The second category includes those films whose conventions most resemble **home videos**. In this case, the focus films are: *Paranormal Activity*, *Exhibit A* (Rotheroe, 2007) and *Cloverfield*. *Paranormal Activity* is about a couple, Katie and Micah, who believe they are being haunted, which prompts Micah to buy a camera and film everything that is happening in his home. *Exhibit A* follows a middle class family who are undergoing financial and domestic problems as the daughter films the family. *Cloverfield* is about a group of friends who are in New York when the city is attacked by a monster. One character, Hud, films the events as they unfold overnight.
- 3) The third category bridges the aesthetic, technical, and perceptual gap between the first and the second category; that is, between the most seemingly professional examples and those that look the most amateurish. This category - which I call **charismatic killers** - includes examples ranging from those filmed by documentary crews to outright amateurs using domestic camcorders. What distinguishes these films from those in the first and second categories is that the camera operators are less victims of the horror, and more complicit with the actions of the monsters they are documenting. The 'monster' may even be considered by some to be an appealing anti-hero, hence my use of the term 'charismatic killers'. In this category, the focus films are: *Man Bites Dog*, *The Last Horror Movie* (Richards, 2003), and *Zero Day* (Coccio, 2003). *Man Bites Dog* is about a documentary crew who follow a serial killer as he goes about his business,

and eventually become accomplices with his actions. *The Last Horror Movie* follows a serial killer who has convinced an assistant to make a documentary about him. *Zero Day* is comprised of the footage of two teens who film themselves as they prepare to commit a massacre at their high school.

Category	Focus films
Documentary/Reality TV	<i>The Blair Witch Project</i> <i>Rec</i>
Home movies	<i>Paranormal Activity</i> <i>Exhibit A</i> <i>Cloverfield</i>
Charismatic Killers	<i>Man Bites Dog</i> <i>The Last Horror Movie</i> <i>Zero Day</i>

**Table 2: Categories and focus films.**

#### **1.4. Review of critical literature: diegetic camera horror, cognitivism and identification**

##### **1.4.1 Diegetic camera horror**

Recently, there has been an increasing amount of scholarly attention to this corpus of films. Referring to them, Zachary Ingle uses the term ‘diegetic camera’, which he defines as ‘a camera within the diegesis, acknowledged by the characters, which is quite different from the typical subjective camera’ (2011, p.32). The diegetic camera is different to the subjective camera due to the supposed origin of the footage. With the subjective camera, the origin is supposedly the eye of a character, whereas with the diegetic camera, the origin is the lens of a camera that is present within the diegesis. Ingle also points out that this particular technique could be ‘regarded as a descendant of cinéma vérité’, noting that the latter ‘has

also had an influence on reality television, perhaps making a case for reality television's influence on the diegetic camera movement' (2011, p.33).<sup>3</sup> Using the adjective 'diegetic' to describe the camera in these films is accurate in that it indicates that the camera is a prop that is part of the fictional world, and therefore a profilmic element. To be more precise, the camera is being used to narrate at what Gérard Genette (1980, p.228) calls the intradiegetic level. This is where a character within the story appears to tell the narrative, rather than some unseen extradiegetic narrator or narrating instance.

Keira McKenzie (2011) calls the trend 'Reality Horror' but takes a more contentious approach, claiming that 'the viewer has become one of the characters, the imaginary real has become experiential and the viewer is directly involved in the narrative as it unfolds around them' (2011, p.39). This statement requires some attention and further consideration in the thesis, particularly with reference to off-screen space and the idea that important narrative events are occurring behind the camera. McKenzie also argues that 'Reality Horror enforces engagement and in becoming one of the hapless characters within the film, the viewer cannot maintain distance between the events of the story and their own viewing' (2011, p.40). The spectator's position is like that of a character immersed in the diegetic events, rather than being in the position of the more traditional invisible observer. However, when watching a diegetic camera film, I contend that there is still some distance. The viewer is forced to imagine some of the events and characters that are behind the camera and therefore the viewer still feels some detachment from the story and events.

Don Tresca (2011) also uses the term 'reality horror' and argues that these films place 'the audience in the "documentary mode of engagement," creating an expectation of reality, and then undercutting such expectation by introducing elements into the film that cannot exist in reality (e.g. ghosts, giant monsters, demons, witches, etc.)' (2011, p.45). Tresca (2011, p.47) also asserts that after viewing reality horror:

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<sup>3</sup> This link will be explored in greater depth later in this thesis, as will the differences between the diegetic camera and the traditional subjective camera.

the audience no longer feels safe and comfortable in the real world because the films imply that such terrors exist outside the movie experience. Even though, logically, the audience understands the fictional nature of the films, the audience mindset has been conditioned to create an assumption that any film presented in a documentary fashion is reality.

Although Tresca's claim points to a different experience for viewers of diegetic camera films, I would argue that he has overstated the power of these films to convince the audience. This is a central concern of this thesis as I consider the ways the spectator is primed to read and interpret the film in a different manner to more traditional narrative films. Diegetic camera films may not make audiences feel less safe in the real world as Tresca suggests, but they do encourage viewers to engage in a more visceral imagining that what is presented is real footage.

#### **1.4.2 Cognitivism and the processing of point of view**

In order to investigate notions such as priming, identification and self-consciousness in the diegetic camera horror film, it has been necessary to review several areas of existing scholarly work. Cognitive philosophy has been the most important area of research, and the most significant in formulating a theoretical perspective on the corpus of focus films. The framework of this thesis will be informed by Edward Branigan's writings on the point-of-view shot, Noël Burch's theory of off-screen space and David Bordwell's theories of narration. I will be combining these to offer an account of how point of view is created and structured in these films and how its persistent use encourages specific responses from the viewer in terms of how s/he imagines off-screen space. My account will follow Bordwell's work that emphasises the importance of schemata in the viewer's processing of films and more specifically how point of view and off-screen space cause specific schemata to be drawn upon. I will also consider the work of Murray Smith and other cognitive theorists as they account for the concept of identification from a cognitive perspective. Broadly speaking, much of the literature consulted has a focus on realism and the horror genre. As the application

of these theories to diegetic camera films is a relatively unexplored territory, this thesis will be an original intervention in film theory.

Bordwell's seminal contributions stand out as a key turning point in cognitivist approaches to studying how viewers perceive films. As he argues: 'when spectators are confronted with a film that emphasizes its stylistic features, they will seek cues for constructing a story' (1985, p.36). The corpus of films analyzed here certainly emphasize their own stylistic features, constantly reminding the spectator that they are constructions that have been shot by a camera that is within the story world of the film. However, I believe that when these films highlight their own construction, they encourage the viewer to imagine that the film is a documentary, reality television show or home video. By foregrounding the construction, mediated realism is invoked in order to support their supposed non-fiction status. Their self-consciousness makes them more immersive than traditional films and this is largely due to their privileging of off-screen space and the viewer's imaginings and perception of this space. Of course, Bordwell is not addressing the same issues as this thesis, arguing that 'unlike prose fiction, the fictional film seldom confines its narration to what only a single character knows' (1985, p.58). However, this is almost exclusively what occurs in diegetic camera films with the narration always tied to the camera(s) which are predominantly carried by characters. With the camera so often in the hands of a character, these shots must often be categorised as point-of-view shots. A consideration of existing literature on the point-of-view shot that follows below is therefore essential.

Branigan (1984, 1992, 2006) frequently focuses on the point-of-view shot and I will apply his work by investigating if his theories on point of view structure are applicable when looking at the diegetic camera film. As a rule of thumb, the POV shot can generally be used in an objective manner, in order to simply show what a character is looking at, or it can be more subjective, as is the case in diegetic camera films. The POV shot offers a sense of what the character is feeling or thinking by putting the viewer into the eyes (or camera lens) of that character. I will adopt Branigan's work on POV structure in order to theorise the diegetic camera. Branigan identifies a number of variants on the POV structure, but

diegetic camera films utilise one of these variants more than others: the continuing POV. This has implications for the viewer's processing of the film particularly in regards to imagining off-screen space. Branigan's concept of focalization<sup>4</sup> will also be key here, as diegetic camera films are clear examples where characters provide the spectator with information about the story world. As Branigan states, 'focalization (reflection) involves a character neither speaking (narrating, reporting, communicating) nor acting (focusing, focused by), but rather actually experiencing something through seeing or hearing it' (1992, p.101). Though we may hear the camera-operating character speak, and we may even see their actions (or decipher them from the camera movement), diegetic camera films offer something akin to internal focalization, where 'story world and screen are meant to collapse into each other, forming a perfect identity in the name of the character... the spectator's task is to identify the story world with the mental understanding of a specific character' (1992, p.102). The continuing point-of-view shot offers the viewer the perception of the character and also some impression of their mental state. Each of the focus films is presented as a restricted narration where internal focalization as described by Branigan is utilised. Some of this reveals what Branigan calls deep internal focalization (perception and thoughts of the character), but the majority is surface internal focalization, revealing the speech and perception of the character. Therefore, due to deep or surface internal focalization, the viewer gains considerable knowledge about a character. This is knowledge about what the character is both seeing and feeling. This increased familiarity with the character's point of view should promote or assure empathy with the character.

Branigan's (2006) later work also deals with point of view, raising an interesting question: 'whose point of view needs to be analyzed as being embodied in a camera: the author, implied author, tacit narrator, explicit narrator, invisible observer, character, ideal spectator, or actual spectator, to name a few

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<sup>4</sup> Focalization is a term used in narratological studies recognising that characters also provide spectators with relevant information. Branigan borrows the term 'focalization' from Genette (1980) who uses it to distinguish between three different types of restriction of narrative information: zero, internal and external. Branigan positions focalization in a hierarchy of narrations below the first four levels that make use of narrators.



possibilities?’ (2006, p.40). Branigan’s questions about the nature of the camera and its status as being embedded in a text only go so far, as they generally do not consider the diegetic camera. Branigan considers not only what a ‘camera is’, but more importantly, ‘what we do with the word “camera”’ (2006, p.66). He considers eight major conceptions of the camera (2006, p.95), from the simplest conception of the camera being a literal box that captures the image, through to expressionistic, communicative and psychoanalytic conceptions of the camera. In diegetic camera films, only three of these conceptions are of significance due to the position of the camera in the fictional world of the film: i) the camera is an actual profilmic prop that must be imagined by the viewer, ii) it is used for expressionistic purposes (i.e. to give some indication of the consciousness of the character that operates it), and iii) for communicative purposes (i.e. to convey information to the spectator and to other characters).

Branigan quotes Raymond Durgnat’s (2002) ‘A Long Hard look at Psycho’ in saying ‘a spectator does not watch a scene through a profilmic camera nor think about a scene by picturing a camera that is watching the scene nor imagine a camera to be an invisible narrator or invisible character’ (2002, p.92). While this may be true of classical Hollywood films, this claim does not apply to the body of horror films under discussion in this thesis. In the diegetic camera horror film, we do watch the film through a profilmic camera and therefore I suggest that we do picture a camera that is watching the scene. Branigan also argues that ‘although a spectator may well imagine that he or she is “inside” a fiction (or “inside” a character), he or she is in a different place within the fiction from the view that appears on screen’ (2002, p.176). When a spectator remembers most films, s/he is likely to assemble what Branigan calls, a ‘mental matrix that permits us to freely visualize’ (2002, p.176). However, with diegetic camera films, I argue that our memory is tied to the point of view of the diegetic camera much more closely. This means that our memory of the film is not only of what we witnessed, but almost exactly how we witnessed it. The origin of the footage is the camera that is involved in events on screen, and therefore the experience must be more immersive. The cinematography is a key factor in our memory as we must imagine the position of our diegetic narrator who holds the camera. For example,

when we remember scenes from *Cloverfield*, we recall details of the camera's position at street level as Hud pans the camera to watch the head of the Statue of Liberty crash nearby. The position of the camera is memorable because when watching the film we are likely to imagine the character holding the camera. However, in our memory of the film the camera-operating character is less likely to be remembered: instead, the captured image - and therefore the camera's placement and our alignment with it - is much more important. We are just as likely to recall how the scene was filmed (and our ideas about why it was filmed this way) as what was filmed. Our imagination of what is happening behind the camera in off-screen space is vital to our understanding and memory of many scenes.

Thus far the literature considered does not include any detailed application of a cognitive framework to the horror genre specifically. However, Noël Carroll's (1990) book on the philosophy of horror is a crucial text for the development of my methodology as it functions as a bridge between cognitivism and the genre-based study of horror cinema. Carroll's work has been criticized for its focus on the abnormal monster to the exclusion of other objects of horror and causes for fear, and much of this criticism is valid. His 'position with respect to art-horror requires that the emotion be focused upon monsters where those are understood to be creatures not countenanced by contemporary science' (1990, p.37). However, not revealing the monster is a defining feature of some of the films analysed here. There is no visible monster on which to focus emotion in either *The Blair Witch Project* or the majority of *Paranormal Activity*. Furthermore, Carroll notes 'the drama of proof plays (...) an important role in horror stories, since (...) the object of art-horror is that which is excluded from our conceptual schemes. Thus, the plots make a point of proving that there are more things in heaven and earth than are acknowledged to exist in our standing conceptual frameworks' (1990, p.102). While this is partially true of the focus films, the use of video technology is an attempt at providing proof of the supernatural; the video footage supposedly captured by the characters is often to some extent inconclusive and lacks the proof generally included in the resolution of the horror texts that Carroll references. More events of considerable narrative importance (such as the deaths of the

characters) are left to the imagination of the spectator due to the protagonists being off-screen as the film ends in examples such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*. Diegetic camera films deliberately limit the concrete proof of monsters, ghosts and witches in order to further their claims of mediated realism. If a genuine amateur or documentary camera operator were to try and film these kinds of supernatural beings without knowing exactly when and where they would appear, the footage would likely only contain fragments of concrete evidence.

This thesis will complicate Carroll's dismissal of the concept of identification. He asserts that 'what is meant by character-identification [is] emotional duplication [but] very often we have different and, in fact, more information about what is going on in a fiction than do the protagonists, and consequently, what we feel is very different from what the character may be thought to feel' (1990, p.91). However, in these films the viewer is confined to the point of view of the character and there is therefore much greater alignment with the character. Duplication of emotions is much more frequent and common in found footage films than Carroll would suggest due to the viewer's almost identical knowledge as the character. But identification is still a problematic idea that will need further exploration, particularly with reference to Murray Smith's theory of 'recognition, alignment, and allegiance' (1995, p.73) which will be considered in chapter 7.

### **1.4.3 Towards a cognitive theory of identification and the diegetic camera**

This thesis will also contest some of Gregory Currie's assertions on identification and the photographic image. Currie posits that 'identification with the camera would frequently require us to think of ourselves in peculiar or impossible locations, undertaking movements out of keeping with the natural limitations of our bodies, and peculiarly invisible to the characters' (1995, p.26). In the case of the body of films under investigation, this is generally not the case. The camera is almost always in the hands of a human character and therefore moves and stays in possible locations. The camera is visible to the characters in the diegesis and is frequently acknowledged by them. Even when the camera is not in the hands of a

character, a viewer can easily identify and picture the camera, whether it be on a tripod in the corner of a room (*Paranormal Activity*) or dropped on the ground (*Cloverfield*). Even the editing encourages the viewer to imagine how the camera is being operated, as it is undemanding to envisage that cuts between shots are moments when the camera has simply been switched off and then switched on again between shots. Currie also claims ‘a significant fact about photography and cinematography – one that distinguishes both rather strongly from painting – is said to be this: just as one can see only that which exists, there can be photographs only of things that exist’ (1995, p.75). Though this statement reflects why the films discussed here are perhaps convincing to many viewers, it does not apply to the use of computer-generated special effects in a film like *Cloverfield* in which a giant rampaging monster is created; a monster that never really existed as a physical object being photographed, but is still perceptually realistic. Photographs and photographic moving images can be manipulated and with the advent of digital manipulation, this has become increasingly convincing. Other special effects are used in some of the films such as *Paranormal Activity* for example where it appears that an invisible entity is interacting with the visible environment. Filmmakers can create photo-realistic images of things that do not exist (like monsters or ghosts) using digital technology or they can manipulate images in such a way as to suggest the appearance of things that were actually never in front of the camera. However, special effects are generally limited in diegetic camera horror films, not only due to budget restraints, but also because they are often about more realistic human ‘monsters’ and the mediated realism of the way these monsters are captured by cameras in the hands of characters.

The diegetic camera’s promise of increased point-of-view shots is a key factor affecting the viewer’s cognition when watching these films. Berys Gaut (1999) posits ‘the reaction shot can be a more effective vehicle for affective and empathic identification with a character than is the point-of-view shot. The reaction shot shows the human face or body, which we are expert at interpreting for signs of emotion’ (1999, p.210). Gaut goes on to state that ‘if we are confronted with visual evidence of an individual’s suffering, we have a strong tendency to empathise and sympathise with her’ (1999, p.210). If, in these films, the viewer is

witness to the point of view of the diegetic camera lens and not just the POV of a character, then this raises interesting questions about the use of the camera in films such as *The Blair Witch Project* where a character will turn the camera round to frame their own face in close-up. This moment of alignment with the point of view of the camera, but also recognition of the human in the frame will need to be explored as it is a recurring feature of the films under discussion in this thesis. If it is assumed (and sometimes it is made clear) that the camera has a viewfinder screen that can also be flipped to allow the camera operator to see themselves as they film their own face, then this further complicates the notion of identification and the use of the POV shot and close-up. In essence, and to use contemporary parlance, the characters take moving image ‘selfies’ and these shots appear very similar in style to vlogs where people look directly into the camera to capture a moment in their lives; a self-representation that requires no one else to hold the camera. The camera operator as enunciator now becomes visible, and therefore the viewer does not have to imagine off-screen space. We can learn about the character not only from their facial expressions and dialogue, but also how they choose to film themselves (from what angle, for how long, how often, etc.). These are diegetic camera POV shots, but also character POV in the sense that the character is still in control of the camera. Unlike more traditional POV shots however, these are also reaction shots where the character’s face is visible. Therefore Gaut’s claim that the POV shot can move us to affective identification, ‘but it has the disadvantage of having less information to convey about what the character is feeling’ (1999, p.210), is not strictly true in diegetic camera films where a POV shot can convey a lot about a character’s feelings in a variety of ways.

Branigan’s work on point of view is of particular importance in developing my cognitive framework as it will be used to theorise how narration and identification in the diegetic camera film works. Most significantly, I will refer to Branigan when theorising how audiences process these films with more imaginings of off-screen space than they do when watching other films. However, it must be noted that the comprehensive literature considered for this thesis has ranged from critical evaluations of the focus films to broader works on genre, horror,

documentary, mockumentary and realism. Further critical references that I engage with in the genealogy section that follows have helped in assessing the relevance of the focus films in relation to reality TV, Mondo films, the Dogme 95 manifesto, video games, YouTube and the Internet, leading to a thorough chronology of antecedents of the diegetic camera horror films. This reasoned chronology will provide the necessary contextualization of diegetic camera films within the horror genre, cinematic history, and technological developments, extending beyond simply tracing a possible genealogy of the genre as detailed below.

### **1.5 Genealogy of the diegetic camera horror film: faked representations, first person point of view, real death on screen, developments in camera technology, and the horror genre**

By tracing the impact and effect of certain devices, movements, and forms, such as handheld and improvised cinematography, the subjective camera and first-person viewpoints, I will establish a thematically organised range of antecedents that have influenced the production, technology, and aesthetics of diegetic camera horror films. By drawing systematic comparisons, I have found many similarities between the structural techniques of diegetic camera horror films and their antecedents. These are relevant because the viewer's knowledge, awareness, and familiarity with some of these antecedents is essential in order to understand the priming strategies of diegetic camera horror films and their attempts at creating mediated realism.

I will discuss these antecedents by dividing them thematically. A common theme across the antecedents is that they are faked representations of real documents, as in the case of epistolary novels or the *War of the Worlds* (Welles, 1938) radio broadcast. Other influences on the diegetic camera horror film consistently utilise first-person POV as a central narrative and aesthetic choice. A further theme that I have identified in these antecedents is the inclusion of actuality footage of real death. I will also consider technological antecedents such as developments in

camera technology, precursors in the cinematic horror genre and finally those media forms that diegetic camera films specifically mimic.

### 1.5.1 Faked representations

Firstly, there are those antecedents that take the form of faked representations of real documents such as letters, news reports, or photographs. These examples include epistolary novels, ghost photographs and some scenes in mondo films. Martin Harris (2001) points to the influence of epistolary novels on *The Blair Witch Project* with particular reference to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740). The reader of such novels only experiences the story from one point of view, that of the main character who 'writes' the letter or diary entry. This prefigures the restricted narration employed in diegetic camera horror films. Heller-Nicholas (2014, p.30) argues that epistolary 'texts rely on creating a sense of authenticity by replicating the familiar documentation of everyday life, and thus creating a sense of realism unavailable to the omniscient third-person narrator that has traditionally dominated literary fiction'. This implies an attempt to hide the presence of an omniscient author (or, in our case, a camera operator) by emphasising that the origin of the footage appears to be the diegetic camera.

This attempt to create a fake narrator is similar to the historical attempts to offer a faked representation of reality by creating media products that appear to tell the 'truth'. Sarah Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2004, pp.13-14) point to the 'ghost photographs so popular at the turn of the twentieth century' that suggest to an observer that something extraordinary has occurred and been captured by a keen camera operator. The idea that photography is reliable evidence of what is represented was being questioned at this early stage in the history of the medium. Viewers of these photographs were divided over their faith in photography to capture the 'real' and their belief that supernatural beings do not exist. Contemporary horror audiences experience a similar conflict between the force of the film's claims to realism and the fantastical events that they represent.

Barry Keith Grant (2013, p.155) also draws an interesting comparison between ghost photographs, or what he calls ‘evidential survival pictures’ and ‘the realistic gore effects of the Grand Guignol’. Between 1897 and 1962, Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol offered spectators the opportunity to witness gruesome and brutal violence, torture, and simulated murder on stage. All faked for audiences, the producers of such fare strived for convincing effects, aided by the naturalism and limitations of working in the theatre. With inventive use of lighting and sound, the Grand Guignol productions aimed for verisimilitude. Grant argues that just like the ghost photographs, the makers of Grand Guignol entertainment used ‘the technological means available at the time to present horror in the most realistic manner possible’ (2013, p.155). Similarly, the use of digital technology in diegetic camera films is an updated way to make horror appear more perceptually realistic to a contemporary audience.

Many diegetic camera horror films pretend ‘to capture evidence of a paranormal event. Like the radio production of H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, it depicts a fantastic situation as though it were fact’ (Higley and Weinstock, 2004, p.14). The footage in *The Blair Witch Project* appears to capture inconclusive evidence that a witch attacked three student filmmakers, while *Paranormal Activity* offers footage that seems to reveal a woman possessed by a demon that kills her partner. These films do not present themselves as fictions, but attempt to resemble actuality footage, demonstrating a clear link between the diegetic camera horror trend and these earliest examples of the faked reality of violence, fear, and the grotesque. Similarly, reports about the impact of Orson Welles’s radio production suggest that his faked news report was so convincing that listeners did fear that Earth was being attacked by aliens. For example, Stefan Lovgen (2005) states that ‘scores of adults reportedly required medical treatment for shock and hysteria. The hoax worked, historians say, because the broadcast authentically simulated how radio worked in an emergency’. This ‘authentic simulation’ is key to understanding how diegetic camera films work as well. While the *War of the Worlds* broadcast was structured as a series of news bulletins with actors playing the reporters and broadcasters witnessing the unbelievable events unfold, diegetic camera films similarly simulate eye witness accounts of extreme situations. Some



characters are reporters (fig.1.2) or television crews on the scene (*Rec*) and some are ordinary people with cameras that capture the chaos around them (*Cloverfield*). If the mimesis of mediated reality is convincing, the diegetic camera technique is successful and is more likely to have the desired impact on audiences that want a convincing film.

## **COPYRIGHTED IMAGE REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION**

**Figure 1.2: Ángela Vidal presents *While You're Asleep* in *Rec*.**

For example, *Cannibal Holocaust* is a fiction film that mimicked mondo films successfully, leading some viewers to think that they were watching real footage of death. Mondo films combine elements of documentary, mockumentary, and exploitation movies and, as a result, are sometimes referred to as 'shockumentaries'. As described by Mikita Brottman (2004, p.167), they 'consist of compiled camera footage of murders, suicides, accidents, assassinations, and other real-life disasters'. Hallam and Marshment (2000, p.231) pinpoint *Mondo Cane* (Cavara, Jacopetti and Prospero, 1962) as 'the founding film of the (mondo) genre, a compilation of customs and rituals from around the world, mostly drawn from actuality footage but with some staged sequences'. The existence of mondo films led some viewers to believe that at least some parts of the footage in the film were real. Neil Jackson (2002, p.35) identifies the similarities between *Cannibal Holocaust* and mondo films; 'these films mixed documentary and staged footage, presented as travelogues which purported to demonstrate the lifestyle conditions and peculiarities of cultures in underdeveloped nations'. The mixing of staged and documentary footage can lead to viewer confusion over what is fiction and non-fiction; a confusion that diegetic camera films wish to achieve through their mimicking of non-fiction media forms and their use of a diegetic camera operator.

### **1.5.2 First-person point of view**

As previously established, diegetic camera films consist largely of the camera operator's point of view on events and many antecedents have experimented with subjective camera work and ongoing point-of-view shots. These include early

footage of war reporting from the Second World War, the player's perspective in first-person shooter videogames, some user-generated content on the Internet and an often cited film noir called *Lady in the Lake*.

Diegetic camera films also imitate the genuine subjective camerawork of war reporters, and others who film in dangerous situations. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914, sets a precedent for subjective camerawork that can be seen in some cases of war reporting. Though it is difficult to find surviving examples of such footage, H. Mario Raimondo-Souto (2006, p.52) refers to a case where:

after the battle of Verdun one of these cameras [The Aeroscope] was found on a cameraman's lap, A Frenchman named Dupre, who had died in action: apparently he was killed while he was filming, but the camera went on running by itself (...) recording the scene in which the courageous camera operator gave his life and where an enemy patrol is seen approaching.

This kind of sequence may not actually depict a real death but suggests it through the overturning of the camera. It is a clear influence on numerous diegetic horror films from *Cannibal Holocaust* through to *Cloverfield* which feature characters killed while still filming shown through the convention of the overturned camera.

Some first-person shooter (FPS) video games also suggest the killing of the protagonist through a viewpoint that falls to the floor (for example, see *Goldeneye 007* on the Nintendo 64 console). Therefore, another influence on diegetic camera horror films is the increasing use of a subjective viewpoint in videogames, particularly in the 'first-person shooter' format. The key conventions borrowed by the diegetic camera film from FPS games include multiple character viewpoints, the visceral and hectic nature of the first person perspective, immersion in the environment, identification with the characters and the use of different views such as night vision. There are many similarities and differences between these films and this type of game, making this a rich area for further exploration and what I offer here is an introductory overview.

J. P. Telotte (2004, p.47) briefly alluded to this similarity between watching a diegetic camera horror film and playing a FPS videogame when discussing *The Blair Witch Project*, about which he said:

The “pleasure” – along with the frustration – of agency dissolves into transformation, as we do indeed “become,” by turns, Josh, Heather, and Mike, sharing their points of view within the same scene, as one character’s vantage through the colour video camera shifts to that of another, filming in 16mm black and white, almost as if we were “team-playing” a video game.

This idea of becoming the characters, or at least any character that holds the camera, is central to the pleasures of both first-person videogames and horror films. Immersion and alignment are increased, with the viewer becoming, or ‘transforming’, into the character that operates the camera. However, without agency or the ability to control or make choices for the character, diegetic camera films are significantly less immersive than first-person video games. We are viewers rather than players, experiencing violence from behind the camera’s lens rather than the avatar’s eyes. In FPS videogames, the viewpoint is from the eye of the protagonist at all times, but in diegetic camera films, the viewpoint is from the lens of the camera which may be set up on a tripod, or turned around to film the character, so it is not always a straight-forward character point-of-view shot.

On the other hand, American film noir *Lady in the Lake* is a notable antecedent of diegetic camera films as, with only a few exceptions, the entire film is a point-of-view shot; not from a diegetic camera, but from the protagonist’s eyes. In *The New York Times* review of the film, it is stated ‘YOU [sic] do get into the story and see things pretty much the way the protagonist, Phillip Marlowe, does, but YOU don't have to suffer the bruises he does. Of course, YOU don’t get a chance to put your arms around Audrey Totter either. After all, the movie makers, for all their ingenuity, can go just so far in the quest for realism’ (Pryor, 1947). This anticipates the appeal and critical reaction to films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*. Screenwriter John Swetnam says of the diegetic camera trend that it ‘just makes sense for horror because it puts you in the shoes of the

story. You get to experience those scares in a more visceral and direct way' (Frappier, 2012). Swetnam could more accurately refer to the shoes of the camera-operating characters, or even more precisely, the lens of the diegetic camera. While the protagonist of *Lady in the Lake* is not carrying his own diegetic camera and the audience is not witnessing the supposed footage filmed by him, the position of the spectator is constantly aligned with the position of the character. Though the diegetic camera in the more contemporary examples does not always have to be aligned directly with the eye of the character, the technique of seeing the entire events of the film from a single character's perspective was a step towards diegetic camera horror. Ingle (2011) also recognises the link, arguing that there is a 'relationship between these films and earlier subjective camera experiments in such films as *The Last Laugh*, *Lady in the Lake*, and *Dark Passage*' [sic]. *The Last Laugh* (Murnau, 1924) 'is often described as the first film to make great use of a moving point of view' (Ebert, 2000) and *Dark Passage* (Daves, 1947) is another film noir that extensively used the POV shot. Therefore, the diegetic camera film was influenced by previous uses of the POV shot in cinema, but developed the technique by making the POV solely that of a camera, rather than a character's eye.

### 1.5.3 Real death on screen

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Highway Safety Foundation produced a series of short films with the intention of revealing to audiences the damage and death that can result from careless driving. These documentary films, including *Signal 30* (Wayman, 1959) and *Wheels of Tragedy* (Wayman, 1963) 'combined pantomime-like re-enactments of small town Americana with grisly footage of actual car accidents and their mangled, bloody victims' (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p.42). In her volume on 'found footage' horror films, Heller-Nicholas explores these films at some length, arguing that the 'authenticity of their real-life carnage provides their primary lure for its cult horror audience today' (2014, p.42). Like diegetic camera films, the highway safety films often feature poor production

values on purpose in order to mark them as authentic. The perceptual realism of diegetic camera films depends on the aesthetic cues that make them appear similar to mediated versions of reality. As they do not use real footage of murder and death (except briefly in *Cannibal Holocaust*) Heller-Nicholas perhaps overstates the influence of Highway Safety Films on the diegetic camera subgenre.

With their images of real death, snuff films are similar to Highway Safety Films, though their purposes significantly differ. Snuff films depict the actual rape, torture or murder of a person. The act itself is shown without any faked footage and the film is then released for an audience to view it. There was debate over whether such films actually existed, but in recent years it has been confirmed that snuff video footage has appeared on the Internet and is also known to be being bought and sold by international paedophile rings (Davies, 2000). There is limited scholarly interest in snuff films but certain scholars such as Brottman (2004) and David Kerekes and David Slater (1993) have written about the existence of snuff material. Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment (2000, p.230) argue that these films have become 'a byword for the ultimate blurring of violent fiction and actuality'. Horror fans that draw a moral line line at witnessing real death and dismemberment, might be drawn to promises of authenticity proffered by diegetic camera horror films that are constructed to appear like a genuine snuff film might.

Paul Barker (1996. p.355) considers reality television programmes like *I Witness Video* which shows videos of real deaths and disasters. This programme appeals to voyeuristic desires of the audience to witness the suffering of real people. The occasional failure of the protagonists of diegetic camera horror films to even capture proof of what they are searching for (e.g. the Blair Witch) is exacerbated by their failure to keep out of harm's way. Their ultimate failure is in keeping themselves alive and separate from the violence they film. Like viewers of *I Witness Video* that enjoy the thrill of seeing real people in danger, viewers of diegetic camera horror films gain pleasure from imagining that the characters are in real danger. The aesthetics of the footage screened in *I Witness Video* bears a strong resemblance to the footage captured with the diegetic camera. In both cases the viewer gains pleasure in witnessing hardship and distress, sympathising or

empathising more with the people in the footage due to the manner in which it has been filmed. Programmes like this are similar to mondo films, except that some of the footage in mondo films is far more graphic and extreme and also some of it is staged. This means that when watching diegetic camera films, the viewer may be responding to the films with feelings of doubt over the veracity of the contents of the footage, but also perhaps with a knowledge of what real footage of terrible events looks like.

#### **1.5.4 Developments in technology and the impact on aesthetics: cameras, surveillance, and the dominance of mediated reality**

Developing camera technologies have had a considerable impact on the evolution of the diegetic camera in modern horror. While diegetic camera films often appear to use handheld consumer digital video cameras, other significant developments in camera technology influence the production and cinematographic techniques of these films. CCTV, webcams, and personal micro-surveillance cameras have all been used to varying degrees in the films analysed. Though many of these technologies have been referred to previously in this chapter due to their use in forms of media from cinema vérité to reality TV, the impact of developing technologies on the formation of the diegetic camera subgenre of horror itself has been significant. Biressi and Nunn (2005, p.16) establish that ‘since the 1960s the relative portability of hand-held cameras, changes in sound recording, the availability of home movie equipment, video and CCTV, the possibility of live web-streaming and DV cameras all appeared to liberate filmmakers, allowing them to represent reality all the more convincingly’. This freedom allows filmmakers to put small, easy-to-use cameras in the hands of their characters. These characters are then free to run and hide from the horrors they experience at the same time as they film themselves and those around them.

Joel Black (2002, p.5) considers ‘memorable newsreel footage of World War II military campaigns and early nuclear-weapons tests, filmed and taped records of the Vietnam and Gulf Wars, and unedited amateur footage such as Abraham Zapruder’s home movie of John F. Kennedy’s assassination or George Holliday’s

videotape of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King'. Significant events of the last century are remembered very much through their recordings and this footage is often captured by amateurs who just happened to be in the wrong/right place at the right time. The videotape of Rodney King's beating for example is grainy and clearly recorded on a domestic camera by an amateur. Yet it featured on the worldwide news and led to riots and was used as evidence in the trials of the police officers involved. Because of the small size of the camera and the zoom function, an atrocious event was caught on tape without the camera operator having to make his presence known to the subjects of his video. This discreet filming occurs in many diegetic camera horror films and is only possible with modern camera technology. *The Tapes* (Alliston and Bates, 2011), for example, features a scene where the protagonists secretly film the meeting of a cult in a barn. The audience sees through the video camera as the character cautiously films what looks like potentially incriminating activity.

Black (2002, p.5) also makes note of the 'growing reliance on satellite surveillance and security camera footage' that means 'the presence of a human operator behind the camera has become increasingly superfluous'. This can be seen in the final scene of *Zero Day* (that uses CCTV) as well as the use of surveillance cameras in *Paranormal Entity 2* (Fankhauser, 2010). Though many examples do, not all diegetic camera films end when the camera-operating characters die or their cameras are destroyed, as the filmmakers can switch to an imitation of the footage produced from other sources such as CCTV. This positions the handheld camera footage as being just one form of possible audio-visual evidence of an event and alludes to the possibility of there being other footage that could have been captured of the same or similar events. It may also remind the viewer of the authorial presence that is responsible for editing together these disparate sources of footage, an enunciator that is very rarely mentioned in these films.

Documentary, reality television, video sharing websites and feature films have all adapted due to changes in available recording equipment. Diegetic camera horror films often use a variety of these media forms to create their narratives and

enhance their claims to realism. The increase in the presence of CCTV cameras has led to more use of CCTV footage on television and therefore horror filmmakers in turn recreate the look of security footage in their films. Similarly, as webcams, video blogs, and phonecams become ubiquitous and their footage is used more in news programmes and reality TV, diegetic camera filmmakers can increasingly depend on footage that is designed to resemble these sources to create more perceptually realistic aesthetics. Craig Hight (2008, p.209) argues that this integration of surveillance systems into society and the ‘acceptance of surveillance footage within television programming’ is leading to ‘a collapse of distinctions between public and private space and an increased realm for personalized forms of confession and expression’. The impact of this can again be seen in diegetic camera horror films. Audiences are more willing to except this so-called ‘found footage’ because it is increasingly believable that if a video was to emerge showing the death of some young people at the hands of something terrible, the footage would be bought, edited, and released either on the Internet or as part of a documentary or true-life television show. Deborah Jermyn (2004, p.83) notes that ‘CCTV and video footage are able to transport the viewer into the ‘scene of the crime’ (...) it carries a sense of immediacy and privileged access’. So when viewers of diegetic camera horror films witness the terrible events portrayed on screen, supposedly from the perspective of an eyewitness holding a camera or from the omniscient eye of a security camera, they perceive the events as more realistic because it looks like mediated footage of actuality.

### **1.5.5 The horror genre: history, aesthetics, and technology**

The diegetic camera horror film is a relatively new sub-genre of horror and therefore must be considered in the context of the wider horror genre as a whole and its cinematic history. Mark Jancovich (2002) has usefully outlined a brief history of the horror film from the early influence of the fantastical films of Georges Méliès through German Expressionism, Universal’s classic monster films of the 1930s, the monsters associated with modern scientific America in the 1950s and low budget efforts from American International Pictures and Hammer Studios in Britain. Of more interest to this thesis is the shift to contemporary



horror films that is generally considered to have occurred around the time of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The horror in many of the films that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s was situated in America itself and, furthermore, seemed to have been spawned from American society itself and, more specifically, the nuclear family. Robin Wood (1984) used a Marxist and psychoanalytic framework to argue that repression is the central concept of the horror genre. We see the 'return of the repressed' (1984, p.173) in the 1960s and 1970s as the horror genre deals with what has been repressed in American culture and civilisation more generally.

Wood (1984, p.192) argued that some of these horror films were radical in nature, but that this radical potential was then undermined by the slasher film cycle that emerged following John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978). However, the reactionary nature of slasher films has been debated with Carol Clover offering an alternative reading that emphasises the progressive presence of the 'Final Girl' (1992, p.35). Clover's analysis is particularly significant as it follows a notable focus on the usage of the POV shot in horror films (and elsewhere). Clover traces the POV shot from Hitchcock's work (in particular *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*) through to the subjective shots from the killer's point of view in slasher films. Clover's argument is that the point of view shifts towards the end of slasher films from the killer to the final victim. This is when viewers are encouraged to identify with the female victim-hero (1992, p.4) as she tackles the monster alone. Referring to Christian Metz's theory of primary and secondary identification and Laura Mulvey's theory of the cinematic gaze, Clover suggests that the pleasures of horror films extend beyond what others had previously theorised. Clover argues that young males, who are the main audience of horror films, are capable of identifying with female victims, rather than simply with male killers. She argues that the sadistic, voyeuristic pleasures of horror have been overstated (1992, p.19) and that 'horror is far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it' (1992, p.8). This is relevant to the emergence of the diegetic camera film as the viewer is aligned with the victim's POV for the majority of the film. In the case of *The Blair Witch Project*, the final girl is the camera operator, and it is her POV that we see events from.

Much of the critical theory on horror films has revolved around the issue of gender and taken a feminist and psychoanalytic framework to argue for or against the progressive nature of the genre. Barbara Creed (1993) focussed on the female monster specifically, pointing out that this is a common feature of the horror film despite many theorists' previous concern with male monsters. Creed sees the use of female monsters in Freudian terms, arguing that the representation of such monsters is down to a patriarchal concern over sexual difference (1993, p.2). To illustrate her argument, Creed's analysis chooses those films where femininity is clearly monstrous from witches to aliens to castrating women seeking revenge. With their focus on the slasher film and feminine monsters, Clover and Creed's volumes are important to the history of the horror genre, but the pleasure of horror has still not been fully accounted for and certainly not the particular pleasures of diegetic camera horror films. In strictly gendered terms, the diegetic camera operators are often male and in the charismatic killer category specifically, the monsters are all male.

Returning to the history of horror outlined by Jancovich (2002), he argues that *The Blair Witch Project* represented a reason for horror fans to celebrate after the genre had started to be dominated by self-referential imitations of *Scream* (Craven, 1996) starring the casts from popular teen-themed television shows. At the time of writing, Jancovich noted that '*The Blair Witch Project* increasingly looks like a one-off gimmick' (2002, p.7), but the cycle was revitalised around 2007 with the release of *Paranormal Activity* and *Cloverfield*. While this history of the horror film is necessarily very limited, it does demonstrate how the genre has developed and more importantly how it has been theorised in the past. This summary also allows me to suggest my intervention, which is to take a specific sub-genre of the horror film and apply a cognitive approach to understand how it affects viewer emotions. In chapter 3 I will elaborate further on why I reject the psychoanalytic readings of horror in favour of a cognitive approach.

### **1.5.6 Mimicked forms: documentary, reality television, and home video**

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1993, p.180) state that ‘the distinction between “documentary” and “fiction” films often rests on the difference between the staged and the unstaged. In a fiction film, the filmmaker controls the *mise-en-scène* completely, but the documentary film purports to present unstaged events’. This is not true of all modes and types of documentaries (Nichols, 2001), with the performative (those that highlight the filmmaker’s involvement) and reflexive (those that draw attention to the conventions of documentary filmmaking) modes having clearly staged scenes within them. Nevertheless, this structuring of the *mise-en-scène* can be seen in diegetic camera horror. Similarly, Hallam and Marshment (2000, p.227) argue that ‘in fiction films, as in documentary films, the closer certain aspects of a film’s depictive elements correspond to actuality recording practices, the greater their capacity to appear to mediate actuality directly rather than perform a representative or symbolic function’. Therefore, when these diegetic camera horror films use interviews, shaky footage, direct address, and other techniques commonly found in documentaries, they are attempting to make claims that their footage should be read in the documentary tradition.

Later developments in documentary practice have also influenced the diegetic camera horror film. *Cinéma vérité* is the form of documentary that combines many of the naturalistic techniques of what Bill Nichols describes as (2001) the ‘observational mode’ with more intrusive and stylised techniques. The camera is often used to provoke subjects and the interaction of filmmaker and subject is seen as a method of increasing the perceived realism of the situation. The observational documentary filmmakers’ route to realism attempts to make subjects feel as though they were not being filmed and also tried to make audiences feel that they were witnessing real life, edited very little and presented as it was filmed. The filmmakers of *cinéma vérité* instead recognised that subjects will likely always be aware of the camera’s presence and, therefore the documentary would be more authentic if it drew attention to this. The camera and documentary makers’ presence should be noticeable to the viewer as it creates a different kind of realism where viewers are more aware that what they are

watching is a construction. Audience awareness of construction makes the films more transparent and therefore arguably more real.

Reality television is also a key influence on diegetic camera films. There are numerous television precedents for these films, which use reality TV tropes to increase their mediated realism. This influence can be broadly divided by considering the formal and aesthetic strategies of the reality television format as a whole and, more specifically, sub-genres such as crime appeal programmes and docudramas. Reality TV cues certain emotional responses and these emotional strategies coincide with those felt by the viewer of diegetic camera horror films. Our experience of reality TV helps to orient our cognition and emotional responses to diegetic camera horror films. We must understand how we conceptualise reality TV, in order to understand how diegetic camera horror films try to make us feel.

Critical literature about reality TV helps to suggest why audiences have responded so strongly to the aesthetics and formal strategies of these films. James Keller (2004, p.57) asserts that ‘the same unsteady images that reveal the presence of the camera also suggest “reality TV,” a genre that lacks the polish of cinematic realism but signifies the authenticity of the events depicted’. Authenticity is a key factor that both reality TV and diegetic camera film audiences desire. John Leland et al. are quoted in *Newsweek* arguing ‘to a Gen-X and -Y audience raised on handheld TV programs like *Cops* and MTV’s *The Real World* (...) 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’ (Higley and Weinstock, 2004, p.21). Signifiers of mediated realism are important in maintaining a sense of authenticity, and to a contemporary audience an awareness of the process of mediation and the ability to read this self-reflexively is increasingly an important part of creating the ‘reality’ effect.

Signifiers of mediated realism are consistently evident in home videos; a specific form of media that has emerged due to relatively recent developments in camera

technology. Though the technology used by amateurs in their homes today has developed a great deal since the time of Roger Odin's writing, much of it still applies. Odin (1979, p.345) defines a home video as 'a film made by a member of a family, with regard to objects or events linked in one way or another to the history of this family, and for the privileged viewing by members of this family'. This type of video has inspired many diegetic camera horror films including *Exhibit A* and *Home Movie* (Denham, 2008) among others. These two examples, as well as many other of their type, mimic many of the textual characteristics Odin (1979, cited in Buckland, 2000, pp.102-103) identified 'that prompt the spectator to read a film as a home movie (...) absence of closure (...) discontinuous linear temporality (...) spatial indeterminacy (...) dispersed narrative (...) jumps (...) blurred images, jolting camera movements, hesitant pan shots (...) address to the camera'. There is not a narrative or script and the cast may acknowledge the camera frequently. The camera may switch hands between family members and the audience is likely to be limited to those family members who were present at the filming of the video.

This section has identified and thematically arranged a range of influences feeding into the development of the diegetic camera horror film. From first-person literature of the eighteenth century to the Internet, I have mapped how these antecedents have influenced diegetic camera horror films. Some experience of consuming examples of any and/or all of these antecedents is also essential priming for the spectator of diegetic camera horror films. The existence of many of these precursors shapes the viewer's understanding of the techniques used to invoke mediated realism in diegetic camera films. An awareness of the conventions of reality television, documentary, or home videos will aid the viewer's imagining that the films are non-fiction. Similarly, if the viewer is aware of the existence of snuff films, and footage of real death in other media forms, it enables them to imagine that these films are what real tragedies look like when caught on camera.

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis and chapter outlines**

The thesis is divided into two parts. Following this introduction, the first two chapters will develop the thesis' theoretical context. The second part of this thesis will be divided into three analytical chapters, utilising the focus films as case studies.

In Chapter 2, I will establish my theoretical framework by expanding on the review of the extant critical literature mentioned in the introduction. Key to developing this theoretical framework will be a detailed conceptualisation of the diegetic camera. Drawing on Branigan's theories of point-of-view, I will argue that the diegetic camera creates POV shots that are different from the traditional POV shot featured in films that do not employ a diegetic camera; I will also emphasise the importance of priming in the process of ensuring that audiences recognise the shots as taken from the point-of-view of a diegetic camera.

I will then consider issues of narration and enunciation by following Branigan and Bordwell's work on levels of narration and self-consciousness. Here I will argue that in diegetic camera films, narrator and character are frequently collapsed into one and that the author, narrator and character are all aware that there will be a viewer. I will also argue that diegetic camera films are distinctive as the narration is confined to a single character or occasionally multiple characters; the key point being that the audience's knowledge is limited to that of the camera-operating character, or the restricted viewpoint of the fixed diegetic camera as with surveillance cameras. These films posit a fake enunciator within the diegesis, whose role it is to mask the presence of the real enunciator (the films' production teams).

In chapter 2, I will also introduce the concepts of metatextuality, performance, and dialogue as central concerns of this thesis. The diegetic camera has an impact on the tone of the films, creating a critical commentary on other media forms such as documentary, reality television, and home videos. Performance and dialogue are also affected by the use of a diegetic camera, as I will argue that cinematography is a part of the performance of a diegetic camera operator. These films privilege

off-screen space significantly by having dialogue with off-screen characters and the performance of a key character - i.e. the diegetic camera operator - occur largely off-screen. Noel Burch's work on off-screen space will be significant here due to his focus on theorising the implications of what occurs behind the camera.

I conclude chapter 2 by interrogating Gregory Currie's theory of personal imagining. Currie (1995, p.166) argues that:

when I imagine merely that such and such happens, without imagining that I see (or have other kinds of epistemic contacts with) what happens, we have a case of *impersonal imagining*. When imagining involves the idea that I am seeing the imagined events, we have a species of *personal imagining*... more specifically, it is a case of *imagining seeing*.

Currie rejects personal imagining and what he calls the 'imagined observer hypothesis', and by extension the 'view that the imagining appropriate to film is imagining seeing' (1995, p.167). However, Currie does concede that in the case of a few exceptional shots (such as the POV shot), imagining seeing (personal imagining) is appropriate. This is why I insist upon a theory of personal imagining in this thesis given that the diegetic camera clearly constitutes a stronger form of personal imagining.

In chapter 3, I argue that psychoanalytic theories of horror as detailed by Robin Wood, Barbara Creed and others that attempt to explain the popularity and endurance of the horror genre are inadequate because they do not consider the cognitive activity of the spectator while watching horror. These theories lack emphasis on the processing required to understand and interpret these films. While psychoanalytic film theorists argue that interpretation of films involves the unconscious mind, I propose to use cognitive film theory as an analytical tool to account for the pleasures of diegetic camera horror films. I particularly stress the active, conscious processing that the viewer's mind conducts and more specifically point to the importance of cognitive processes such as priming, engagement, empathy and allegiance. The diegetic camera generally enforces

prolonged and intense alignment with a character and this has repercussions for all four of the previously mentioned concepts. This chapter will then lead on to a close analysis of the focus films in part 2 where priming, allegiance and other concepts are used as the basis for an in depth analysis of specific case studies.

Part 2 will be divided into three chapters. Chapter 4 will analyse how the viewer is primed while watching diegetic camera horror films. Chapter 5 will focus on the home video examples and analyse how interaction between diegetic camera operators and the subjects on screen affects the emotions of the viewer. Chapter 6 will consider the charismatic killer examples and analyse how allegiance is problematic despite the promises of the diegetic camera.

The concluding chapter will build on, and question, existing literature to suggest new ways of defining found footage films and their influence on mainstream media productions. I will evaluate how other scholars have categorised these films and then evaluate my own system of grouping them. I will attempt to find some more defined and narrow classifications for the focus films, particularly with regards to their distinctive cinematographic techniques and how these imitate other media forms. In chapters 4 to 7, I will draw conclusions around the key notions of priming, self-consciousness, and allegiance in diegetic camera horror films. My conclusions revolve around the activity of the viewer, particularly in terms of the imagining of the film as a non-fiction document, and the imagining of off-screen space in order to recognise the camera operator as a character. I argue that this imagining can heighten empathy with camera-operating characters, particularly when these characters are involved in interactions with profilmic subjects. With regards to allegiance, I conclude that the diegetic camera is unlikely to affect the viewer's moral evaluation of characters, except in the case of camera operators that become profilmic subjects and engage in amoral behaviour. Finally, I will highlight my contributions and interventions to the ongoing critical and theoretical debate on the focus films and in the field of cognitive film theory at large.



## **PART 1: Theoretical context**

### **Chapter 2: Narration and the diegetic camera**

In this chapter, I suggest a theoretical framework that contextualises and develops my core arguments regarding the diegetic camera horror film; that the diegetic camera prompts specific imaginings from the viewer, and that it can affect the viewer's empathy with characters, if not his or her feelings of allegiance. Firstly, I wish to theorise the diegetic camera as a distinct entity, one that is different from traditional formulations of the camera in film studies. Then I will move on to issues of narration and enunciation which become central to analysing the focus films in subsequent chapters.

#### **2.1 The diegetic camera and point of view**

Due to the relative scarcity of scholarly work on the diegetic camera<sup>5</sup>, it is necessary and also illuminating to consider how the non-diegetic camera has been theorised. In order to highlight the similarities and differences between the diegetic and non-diegetic cameras as narrating devices, I will employ theories of the non-diegetic camera in order to theorise the diegetic camera. This initially raises a number of questions because the non-diegetic camera is traditionally not seen by the characters and therefore not acknowledged by them. It is not a prop that is used by the characters and the cinematography associated with its use is generally supposed to go relatively unnoticed by the spectator, particularly in Classical Hollywood cinema. I am mainly interested in Branigan's conceptions of the non-diegetic camera, but they need to be extended in order to address films that utilise the diegetic camera as a narrating device. I will consider the important distinctions between the two ways of using the camera as a narrating device. While both a non-diegetic or a diegetic camera (or even a mixture of both) can be used to create any film, each way of using the camera as a narrating device engages a different kind of schema in the viewer's mind. In the focus films, the

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<sup>5</sup> Some of this work has been discussed in the previous chapter.

diegetic camera is typically employed to mimic other types of media forms such as documentaries, reality television programmes, and home videos. I therefore argue that this is an attempt to encourage the viewer to imagine that the artefact that s/he is watching is not a fiction film, or that what is being watched is what non-fiction media products look like. The attempt here is to encourage the viewer to respond more strongly to the footage; whether that be to empathise, sympathise or feel angrier at the characters. Documentaries, reality television, and home videos are generally believed to convey a more realistic narration. The purpose of the diegetic camera is to create a kind of mediated realism, in which the spectator recognises the codes of other media forms and therefore considers the diegetic camera film to be like an authentic non-fiction media product.

To increase this realist aesthetic, the diegetic camera can usually be understood to be in the hands of a character in the diegesis. Therefore, most shots in diegetic camera films can be considered POV shots, but they are often distinctly different from the traditional POV structure because it is usually simplified from a two or three-shot sequence to a single shot in diegetic camera films. Furthermore, the traditional POV shot is supposed to represent the vision of a character, whereas the POV shot in diegetic camera films represents the vision of the camera, not always the character. Branigan pays great attention to the point-of-view shot; however, he discusses those shots where ‘the camera assumes the spatial position of a character in order to show us what the character sees; the camera lens, so to speak, becomes the eye of the character... with the result that our sensory perception is restricted to that of the character’ (1984, p.6). In diegetic camera films, what the spectator sees is what the camera captures and this is not always exactly what the camera-operating character sees. Our sensory perception is limited to the lens of the camera, not the character’s eye, because a diegetic camera lens does not need to ‘become the eye of the character’. In fact, the diegetic camera does not replace the eye of the character, as it is a prop in the film and is held either at the eye level of the character or elsewhere in many cases. This is significant because although the viewer feels privileged in terms of the prolonged alignment with a character, s/he will also feel limited by the POV perspective if the camera is for example pointing to the ground as the camera

operator is running. We have to imagine that the camera-operating character can see where s/he is going, but because of the camerawork, our vision is more frustratingly limited.

Branigan (1984, p.7) also acknowledges that:

something more – beyond the merely formal – is required for a film to be “genuinely” subjective. The difficulty of equating optical (perceptual) POV with the experience of *being that character* (feeling the character’s feelings) leads critics toward attitude, identification, or language as additional conditions on subjectivity, or as an entirely new attempt to define subjectivity.

The formal traits of diegetic camera films are consistently noticeable to the viewer, but I argue that there are more than just formal qualities to consider in the creation of so-called identification with imperilled characters, such as a consideration of the behaviour and actions of the characters.<sup>6</sup>

With the exception of their opening titles, diegetic camera films do not contain other levels of what Branigan calls ‘impersonal’ or ‘neutral’ narration (1984, p.57). Branigan distinguishes character narration as just one of the narrational levels and includes the point-of-view shot as a way of achieving narration that appears to originate with the character. This level of narration is more likely to align the audience with a character than other levels of narration such as non-diegetic narrators or historical authors. Only the opening titles and closing credits have no clear origin and therefore appear omniscient; like the additions of a non-diegetic narrator. Other than these opening shots, the films only contain narration delivered by the character holding a camera, or by a camera that has been set up by a diegetic entity (whether a character in the narrative or not), for example the final shot of *Paranormal Activity* in which the camera has been positioned on a tripod by one of the main characters. Furthermore, POV in diegetic camera films does not always contain what Branigan theorises as the six elements of the POV structure in classical films. Elements 1 and 2 comprise the Point/Glance shot in which a character is seen looking (usually off-screen). Here the point at which the

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<sup>6</sup> Identification will be discussed in chapter 6.

character is positioned is established, as well as the point where the character glances. Element 3 is a transition to a new shot. Elements 4 and 5 comprise the following Point/Object shot, in which the object being glanced at in the preceding shot is revealed from the point of view of the character's position as established in the preceding shot. Element 6 is the presence of the character. Diegetic camera films often lack a point/glance shot and therefore no transition to the point/object shot. Diegetic camera films almost exclusively consist of elements four and five of Branigan's POV structure: the point/object shot. Element six of the POV structure is character, but in the case of diegetic camera films, 'the sentient observer in whose viewpoint we may participate' (1984, p.58) is the camera. The camera delivers the glance, not always the character. In fact, the character and camera may be glancing at different objects in the diegesis and the spectator has to decipher this without direct visual cues; without the point/glance shot. This causes the viewer to spontaneously imagine what is occurring in off-screen space.

What we have in diegetic camera films instead of Branigan's six elements of the POV structure is a three or four element structure, depending on the camera's position and movement:

#### Shot A: Point/Object

1. *From Point*: the camera is located at a point in space undefined until this shot begins.
2. *Object*: the camera films the object

#### Shot B: Point B/Object B

Elements 1 and 2 are repeated. The camera films from a new point in space and films a new object.

#### Shots A and B:

3. *Camera*: the space and time of elements one and two are justified by the presence of a diegetic camera.

4. *Character* (optional): the movement, or lack of movement, and the object of the camera's attention will often be justified by the presence of a character operating the diegetic camera.

Therefore, if we consider Branigan's six elements of classical representation - namely origin, vision, time, frame, object, and mind - the lack of the point/glance shot in the diegetic camera film has significant implications. Without the point/glance shot, it is harder for audiences to discern the origin of the POV shot through which both character and spectator are seeing. This means that the viewer must be primed carefully to accept and understand that (almost) everything shown is from the POV of a diegetic camera. Branigan alludes to the importance of 'one of the most pervasive of film narrating/reading conventions: sound perspective' (1984, p.63) and the voice of a camera operator can often be vital in discerning the origin of the representation in diegetic camera films.

Unlike an ordinary POV shot, the vision of the character behind the camera is not a contingent factor in diegetic camera films. It is the vision of the camera as a diegetic entity that is of primary concern. Sometimes this will be the same or almost the same as a character's vision and, at other times, such as when the camera has been set up on a tripod, it can be completely different and separate from any character's vision.

A similar principle is at work with the element of time. Branigan argues that in a POV shot, the time of narration is equal to the time of the narrative, except in a flashback structure. Here, 'there is a discontinuity in the narration... in the classical film this effect of the narration is often justified by character memory' (1984, p.64). However, in the diegetic camera film, the flashback is justified by the memory of the camera. There can be discontinuity in the narration when the camera is stopped and footage is watched by characters. This is where the memory of the camera and what it has recorded previously, can be revealed for brief moments of the narration. The old footage remains 'underneath' the new footage and emerges for the viewer's sight and attention only in gaps created during the recording of the new footage. Examples of the camera's memory being

revealed as flashbacks occur in both *Exhibit A* (figs. 2.1 and 2.2) and *Cloverfield* (figs. 2.3 and 2.4).

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**Figure 2.1:** Present time in *Exhibit A* as Gary King walks the camera towards the family television to show a group of friends what he has recorded.

**Figure 2.2:** Cut to the camera's memory of the past when the camera was left recording on the beach on a family day out (*Exhibit A*).

**Figure 2.3:** Present time in *Cloverfield* as Hud decides to show a group of people what he has just recorded on his camera on a New York City street. He points the camera toward the ground before, pressing the stop button to stop recording and look back at the previously recorded footage.

**Figure 2.4:** Cut to camera's memory of the past when Rob films Beth on a day out to Coney Island (*Cloverfield*).

What is perhaps most significant is the framing element here. Branigan states that 'framing sets a boundary; if there were no boundaries, then the system would be totally open and everything would be related to everything else' (1984, p.65) and points to Noël Burch (1973) for his emphasis on 'off-screen space'. Burch divides off-screen space into six segments, four of which are 'determined by the four borders of the frame' (1973, p.17), the fifth is the segment 'behind the camera' and the sixth is the 'space existing behind the set or some object in it... the outer limit of this segment of space is just beyond the horizon' (1973, p.17). While Burch acknowledges that static shots are much easier to analyse using this theory, than shots with camera movement, diegetic camera films are not only (like Burch's example of Robert Bresson's *L'Argent*) in a 'constant state of flux' (1973, p.30), but they consistently emphasise the importance of the fifth segment: the space behind the camera.

Off-screen space is often articulated in diegetic camera films, and to a lesser extent in the horror genre more widely, as being of equal importance to the spectator as the on-screen space. Burch identifies three ways off-screen space can be defined: entries and exits from the frame, having a character look off-screen, and framing a character so that parts of the character's body remain out of frame.

While all three of these methods are important in the diegetic camera film, it is the second and third that warrant further investigation. On-screen characters often look off-screen in diegetic camera films, not to the left or right of the frame, but beyond the camera to look at the camera-operating character. Similarly, the camera operator will occasionally reach out from behind the camera with his or her free hand, therefore framing a part of his or her body on screen. In many instances, the camera operator will also be audible as s/he speaks from off-screen space. Burch states that ‘off-screen sound... *always* brings off-screen space into play’ (1973, p.26) and highlights that it is even possible to discern distance and direction of some off-screen sounds. When considering the camera operator’s voice, it is clear that behind the camera space is given great prominence in diegetic camera films, and must consistently be imagined by the viewer, until it becomes what Burch calls ‘concrete’ (1973, p.21) by sometimes being revealed later (for example, when the camera-operating characters turn the camera around to film themselves).

This example of a camera-operating character eventually turning the camera around to reveal him or herself is an example of what Branigan calls a ‘retrospective’ (1984, p.111) POV structure. This is where the point/object shot comes before the point/glance shot. In this type of structure, the viewer may only become aware that they are seeing from a character’s POV when the point/glance shot appears. However, in many diegetic camera films, this point/glance shot may never occur and therefore there must be other methods of recognising the point/object shot as being a POV shot in case it does not become a part of the retrospective POV structure.

Branigan also identifies ‘simple variants of the POV structure including structures which may be termed closed, delayed, open, continuing, cheated, multiple, embedded, or reciprocal structures’ (1984, p.112). Branigan uses the word structure to emphasise the importance of the shots that surround the POV shot itself. His analysis demonstrates that these surrounding shots (e.g. the point/glance shot) allow the spectator to recognise the single POV shot as being from a character’s point of view. The POV shots in diegetic camera films do not always

fit easily into these categories and it is useful to consider the effects of this on the spectator. Though the POV shots in diegetic camera films are rarely, if ever, part of a closed structure, Branigan's point that 'time is momentarily suspended in the closed POV... we do not expect events to be happening to the characters while we are looking at an object' (1984, p.112) is particularly pertinent. Because diegetic camera films contain little more than point/object shots (and are therefore not closed), this suspension of time is frequently destabilised through sound and cinematography. There are often events happening to the characters while we are trapped into seeing only from their POV, which causes a greater tension between on-screen and off-screen space. For example in *Cloverfield*, Hud is knocked over by an explosion and falls down some stairs. All of this occurs while we are seeing events from his point of view. We see the explosion far above him (fig. 2.5), then the visuals become very difficult to discern (figs. 2.6 and 2.7) until Hud's camera hits the ground next to one of his feet (fig. 2.8). Most films would forego displaying the entire sequence through a POV shot and instead opt to use an omniscient camera that would show Hud's fall down the stairs.

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**Figure 2.5: POV of explosion far above Hud (*Cloverfield*).**

**Figure 2.6: Difficult to discern POV visuals (*Cloverfield*).**

**Figure 2.7: Difficult to discern POV visuals (*Cloverfield*).**

**Figure 2.8: Hud's camera hits the ground next to one of his feet (*Cloverfield*).**

Similarly, Branigan's identification of a delayed POV structure where 'the point/object shot is withheld for a number of shots... or a number of scenes' (1984, p.113) in order to create suspense as to what the character is glancing at does not apply in diegetic camera films. However, the inverse delayed POV shot where 'the point/glance shot is withheld' (1984, p.113) is occasionally in evidence instead. These would be diegetic camera films where the camera operator eventually turns the camera around to film their own face, either with a camera movement or a cut.



Most commonly, diegetic camera films use examples of Branigan's 'continuing POV' (p.114) structure. This is where 'one character looks at several objects or one object a number of times. The objects are typically rendered by cutting from object to object or by camera movement - the subjective traveling shot' (1984, p.114/115). Diegetic camera films consist mostly of the continuing POV structure as the camera operator points his or her camera at object after object, both by using handheld travelling shots and by supposedly stopping and starting the recording of the camera, thereby creating the cuts between shots. This limits our view of the character and therefore our ability to read facial cues and recognise characters and means that the viewer must work harder to imagine who is behind the camera and what is happening to them. On the other hand, as we constantly see what the operator chooses to record, it can often be less demanding for the spectator to imagine what the operator is thinking about or feeling; or at least what his or her attention is focussed upon.

Of course, it is not the character that creates the cuts by turning the recording device off and on. It is the job of the editor and director of the film to position these cuts. The characters in diegetic camera films, though they may be holding cameras and appear to make decisions about where to point the cameras, are not the real 'authors' or cinematographers of the films. This is the central fictional deceit. Even in *The Blair Witch Project*, where the actors were given a great deal of freedom to improvise the cinematography and dialogue, the directors outside the fiction are still the final arbiters of meaning.

To summarize, the diegetic camera is thus a narrational tool employed to create a specific kind of realism; a mediated realism that attempts to mimic the recognisable codes of other media forms such as documentary and home videos. The central conceit is that a character is holding the camera and therefore almost all of what the audience sees can be conceived as point of view. These POV shots are significantly different to what Branigan has identified as the common POV structures, but nonetheless draw upon these structures' traditions. The POV shots in diegetic camera films can be categorised as examples of the continuing POV structure and they often crucially lack the point/glance shot. This means that off-screen space and the way the viewer imagines this space must be considered.

Sound and cinematography become key indicators of what is occurring off-screen because, unlike in other films, there is no suspension of time during point/object shots and anything could happen to the camera operator while they are filming. The mediated realism of the diegetic camera film therefore relies on mimicking non-fiction media products, and also making the diegesis more immediate by having the camera operator within it and affected by it. The viewer must therefore be more active in his or her imaginings of who is narrating this story by holding the camera and what is occurring to the operator when they are off-screen.

## 2.2 Issues of narration and enunciation

Branigan (1984, p.1) argues that with any text, ‘there must of necessity be some conception of a *subject* who presents the text (author), tells the story (narrator), lives in the fictional world (character), and who listens, watches, and desires that the story be told (viewer)’. In diegetic camera horror films, there is a subject who presents the text - the filmmakers and scriptwriter and production and post-production crews. There is always a diegetic narrator who tells the story, with the exception of the opening titles: the camera operator (mostly off-camera, but within the diegesis), or the presenter on-screen who narrates the story. Therefore, at most times, narrator and character are conflated into one. Most importantly, the author, the narrator, and the character are all aware that there will be a viewer.<sup>7</sup>

Branigan’s theory of levels of narration and point of view is a useful foundation to theorise the diegetic camera. In this thesis I extend it in order to properly consider the strategies and techniques involved in diegetic camera films. Branigan states that ‘point of view becomes a function of the position of the hypothetical observer who stands in for the viewer of a painting or movie, that is, we are invited to imagine ourselves within a certain perceptual array’ (1984, p.6). The observer in diegetic camera films is never hypothetical. There are two levels: the cinema or home viewer and the presumed future diegetic viewer. We either see the camera or imagine its presence and we then imagine that we are seeing from its point of view or from the point of view of the implied observer.

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<sup>7</sup> The character’s awareness of this is important and will be discussed further later in this thesis.

Bordwell also questions to what extent the narration displays a recognition that it is addressing an audience, calling this 'the degree of self-consciousness' (1985, p.58). This notion is vital in the analysis of the body of films under scrutiny here in order to consider how empathy is encouraged between viewer and characters. Narration in these films is often extremely self-conscious with the characters frequently directly addressing an imaginary future audience of their home video/documentary. Bordwell's ideas can be applied to this shift in horror when he states that 'in watching films, we are seldom aware of being told something by an entity resembling a human being' (1985, p.62). This is untrue of these films where the viewer is frequently made aware that a character is holding the camera, choosing to show us things, talking from behind the camera and telling the imagined future viewer his or her thoughts. I argue that these films posit a fake enunciator within the diegesis, whose role it is to mask the presence of the real enunciator, the filmmaker. In Branigan's elements of classical representation (1984, p.57), the origin is the diegetic camera, rather than an omniscient invisible camera, and the vision is what the operator of this camera chooses to reveal. With this perception, the viewer is encouraged to forget the existence of the real enunciator and the viewer therefore finds it easier to imagine that the film is a real home video or documentary. There is a greater sense of mediated realism because the enunciator appears to be in the diegesis and this should make the film feel scarier, more immersive, and lead to greater sympathy for the camera operator.

The following pages introduce the notions of self consciousness, tone and metatextuality, performance, dialogue, and personal imagining that I use to develop my argument that diegetic camera films highlight the presence of a fake enunciator in order to encourage the viewer to imagine that the film is solely narrated by a character in the diegesis. The purpose of this is to make the characters more engaging and sympathetic. The effect of imagining that the camera-operating character is the enunciator is that the viewer will empathise more with the fear that the character feels. The above notions help to further elucidate how the diegetic camera enforces imagination of off-screen space and the implications of this on the viewer's processing of the films.

### 2.2.1 Self Consciousness

Building on Bordwell's degrees of self-consciousness, I will now explore the ways that diegetic camera films and the characters within them recognize that they are addressing an audience. This involves identifying the audience and how they are addressed. Many diegetic camera horror films show evidence that the characters address different audiences: sometimes imagined, other times more specific. Self-consciousness is fundamental in encouraging specific cognitive activity and in promoting certain emotional and intellectual responses from the spectator. Characters that address the audience are acknowledging that off-screen space exists and, furthermore, these characters seem to be communicating from within the diegesis to a viewer who s/he believes is also a part of the story world, but who is, in fact, non-diegetic.

The vast majority of traditional films are not self-consciously constructed, as their characters have no awareness that they are being filmed or are being watched by an audience. Conversely, the characters in diegetic camera films are almost always aware of the presence of the camera and also that they are going to appear in a piece of footage viewed by others. They may address the camera operator, the camera itself, or the audience they envisage one day watching the footage; or they may choose to ignore the camera altogether. Either way, they are aware of being in a film (if not a fictional one) and this makes the characters inherently self-conscious. The spectator is similarly aware that the characters know that they are being watched and recorded. Unlike other films that maintain a certain amount of distance between the character and the audience, diegetic camera films involve and engage the viewer more by having characters communicate with audience members. Kendall Walton (1990) emphasises the part that "make-believe" plays when spectators interact with a representational work of art: diegetic camera films specifically urge the spectator to make-believe that what s/he is watching is not a traditional film. Walton describes films that 'limit our involvement in fictional worlds' as being like 'a spectator sport' where 'our stance is more akin to that of an onlooker than a participant in games of make-believe' (1990, p.274). Diegetic

camera films attempt to increase the viewer's involvement in the fictional world through self-conscious techniques, thus encouraging the audience to engage as participants rather than spectators.

Bordwell defines the degree of self-consciousness in a film by asking 'to what extent does the narration display a recognition that it is addressing an audience?' (1985, p.58). There is a range of different degrees of self-consciousness within the diegetic camera horror sub-genre but all of these films are marked by a greater degree of self-consciousness than traditional fiction films. In all of the examples analysed, the majority of the characters who appear on screen are aware of the camera's presence. In every example, the footage 'deliberately breaks the rules of cinema by having its characters gaze directly into the camera and verbally address it' (Rose, 2009, p.51).

In most fictional films, the camera is not a part of the diegesis and it is neither acknowledged nor addressed except in very rare instances of postmodern playfulness where the fourth wall is broken. Ed S. Tan and others have called the camera an 'invisible witness'. In his work on emotion and the structure of film, Tan argues that the camera is neither addressed nor ignored because to 'the characters of the fictional world the witness simply does not exist' (1996, p.76). Therefore, when the characters are undergoing painful or miserable circumstances, the audience is protected in a sense from what the character is going through. This is partly because the character is unable to address the spectator (through the camera) and beg for his or her help. Tan calls this 'a happy circumstance' (1996, p.76) for the spectator. However, in diegetic camera horror films, part of the appeal relies on the characters being able to directly address the diegetic camera and therefore the audience in order to intensify feelings of sympathy. Our investment in the profilmic events can be heightened if the characters ask for the viewer's help, or at least for the viewer to remember the characters once they are deceased. This leads to an increased level of engagement and a heightened sense of empathy with the characters, as I will argue in chapter 3.

While in most traditional films the characters do provide information about the story and diegesis, they do so by interacting with one another: observing, acting, and speaking. Branigan notes that a character in a traditional film is different from a narrator because the character 'is not strictly telling or presenting anything to us for the reason that spectators, or readers, are not characters in that world' (1992, p.100). However, in diegetic camera films the audience is acknowledged as existing as part of the diegesis. The viewer may not be present or visible to the characters, but the camera and therefore the means of communication with the viewer is there. Therefore, the characters do in fact know that they can tell the viewer anything they want, and that it is likely that one day in the future, the footage will be watched by a spectator.

The audience of diegetic camera films becomes aware that the character is communicating with him or her. Whether the viewer sitting at home and watching the film on DVD is the desired audience that the character hopes for is a different matter but the point is that the character reaches out and tries to leave a message for someone who has found the footage. Though there is still very little sense of a traditional extra-diegetic narrator, the sense of being narrated to by a character is consistently accentuated through various techniques. This has the effect of heightening the engagement and empathy of the spectator, altering his or her emotional reaction to the films. Similarly, Walton argues that 'it is not commonly fictional, in our games with representational works, that characters notice or respond to us, or that we exchange glances with them or hold conversations with them' (1990, p.229). Diegetic camera horror films do not give the viewer an actual opportunity to interact with the characters but the characters do make it clear that they are aware of being watched: by the camera and a future viewer.

Diegetic camera films appropriate some of the conventions of documentary, reality television and television news in self-conscious ways. Warren Buckland (2000, pp.98-9) notes that the addressee of these formats is 'modalized as real' compared to those in fiction films, who are 'modalized as imaginary'. Diegetic camera films also modalize their addressees as real, and this can have a range of effects. As Janet Staiger puts it, 'direct address by television narrators to the

viewers increase distanciation instead of promoting identification' (1992, p.62). Diegetic camera films often contain an element of direct address, be it from an ordinary amateur camera operator or by a more professional documentary maker, news reporter or reality television presenter. While the more formal mode of address used by some reporters and narrators will distance the viewer, the diegetic camera film often breaks down the cool, calm, and objective facade of these presenters and eventually uses their on-camera presence and direct address to increase the possibility of the viewer's sympathy for the character. This highlights the importance of performance, particularly of the presenter characters.

The idea that direct address can involve the viewer in diegetic events has been considered by cognitive theorists. When characters speak directly to the audience, Currie argues that the spectator can 'come to play a dual role', becoming 'both spectators *of*, and actors (or sometimes merely props) *in*, the production' (1990, p.96). The members of the audience do not become props or actors in the diegesis but they may increasingly identify with the participants in the action, make-believing and imagining how the camera operator taking part in the events would be feeling. Walton (1990, p.232) notes that in the theatre it is impossible for a narrator to make eye contact with every spectator individually at one moment; in film it is possible for the character to share a semblance of eye contact with every viewer simply by looking into the camera. Walton finds it disconcerting, 'if pleasantly so' to be recognized by a character on the screen and argues that when the character 'sees' the spectator, it marks 'an important shift in one's relation to the fiction'. He compares the act of directly addressing the audience with being recognized in real life, arguing that it 'marks a significant change in one's social situation (...) one feels included in a manner one wasn't previously' (1990, p.233). When Heather Donahue talks directly to me as a viewer from the diegesis, I feel like a privileged witness to her most personal testimony. Even if the footage is not shot from the most ideal position to capture the best and clearest visuals of an event, the fact that a character has a viewer in mind for the footage s/he creates, produces an important sense of privilege and intimacy. This points to the immersive experience of watching a diegetic camera horror film for a viewer.

However, there are limits to what direct address can achieve and while Currie (1990, p.96) suggests that a spectator becomes an actor in the fiction, Walton takes a more restrained approach to the interaction between film and spectator. Walton contends that 'the interaction remains severely limited' (1990, p.235) with characters rarely carrying on long conversations with the spectator. Similarly, the viewer is not able to communicate back to the character and while they may find themselves more engaged in the world of the film, they have not become a part of the film. Walton suggests that 'asides do not introduce the appreciator into a fictional world he did not previously or would not otherwise belong to. But they do give him a slightly fuller presence in the world of his game' (1990, p.237). A viewer will be immersed in many fiction films but by being directly addressed, it is as though the character is actively attempting to keep the viewer engaged in what is happening in the diegesis. This will lead to a different cognitive response to the films and the trials of the characters within them. By looking directly into the lens of the diegetic camera, it is almost as though the character can see into the off-screen space that is not behind the camera, but is in front of the screen that the viewer watches and that this space (which the character appears to know exists) is in the same diegesis as the character. This means that the viewer can feel as though the character is actually talking to him or her and is therefore more invested in the events occurring on-screen.

A constant tension is present in these films between the filmmakers' attempts to make them appear as authentic pieces of 'found footage' and the frequent reminders, and spectator's own knowledge, that s/he is watching a constructed film. On the one hand, the self-conscious techniques that remind the viewer of the presence of the camera (such as shaky camera movement) act as a marker of realness; on the other hand, they are also a sign of the film's construction and point to the film being a representation rather than reality. In a traditional cinematic experience this could clearly be conceived as a negative effect: however, in diegetic camera films, these moments where the camera's presence is noticeable to the audience are not interruptions; on the contrary, they are a way to convince the spectator that what they are watching is not traditional cinema. Walton argues that some films discourage participation 'by prominently declaring



or displaying their fictionality, betraying their own pretense [sic]' (1990, pp.275). Diegetic camera films do not display their fictionality; however, they do display their construction. The filmmakers have many techniques to convince the viewer of the veracity of the events depicted and some of these include emphasizing how the footage has been created by a camera operator who is present in the diegesis. Diegetic camera films are clearly artificial representations (filmed footage) but their artifice (e.g. shaky camera, poor lighting, etc.) is designed by the filmmakers to specifically enhance their authenticity and their mediated realism.

Self-consciousness is crucial to creating authentic-looking 'found footage'. When the spectator is attentive to the construction of the film and alert to the fact that the character is aware of the camera's presence, it can make the diegetic events appear more like mediated reality. Geoff King suggests that techniques such as 'a limited view and problems of access signify authenticity, something not set up for the cameras,' but also acknowledges that 'such qualities also tend to draw our attention to the process of mediation' (2005, p.54). Being made aware of the process of mediation is central to the believability of such films as the characters within the diegesis are the people who appear to be mediating for the viewer. The more amateur the characters appear in their camerawork, the more it convinces the viewer of the apparent authenticity of the footage.

Similarly, when a character acknowledges the presence of the camera, it does not detract from the mediated realism of the film. Instead, Bill Nichols argues that 'such moments authenticate the presence of characters (...) and filmmakers on the same plane of historical coexistence' (1991, p.184). An audience familiar with documentaries, home videos and amateur videos on the Internet is attuned to accept the events presented in diegetic camera horror films as believable. When a subject addresses the camera, it corresponds with the behaviour seen in many documentaries and home videos, and making the 'found footage' feel like a genuine document from the contemporary world where so much of what we see is mediated by amateurs capturing everyday life. If, as Gary D. Rhodes notes, it is a 'generally-established cinematic convention (...) that characters in fiction films did not gaze directly into the camera lens and thus at the audience' (2002, p.49),

then when a character in a diegetic camera horror film does gaze into the camera, it prompts the spectator to consider the film's attempts at realism in relation to non-fiction texts.

Directly addressing the camera is also increasingly familiar from contemporary media products, both amateur and professional. News reports, television presenters and more recently vloggers address the camera frequently, if not constantly. The growing number of amateurs attempting to use cameras and the media to speak to a mass audience is what Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn describe as 'a desire for the mark of authenticity, for the social legitimisation of one's existence' (2005, p.101). By addressing the camera, recording their thoughts and then distributing the videos to an audience, the person appears to require some validation. Their videos become proof of their existence to many people beyond those that know them. This trend corresponds with diegetic camera horror films and the characters that often desperately want the camera, and therefore some imagined future audience, to know that they were alive, they did exist, and they did try to survive in the face of the threat presented.

### **2.2.2 Tone and metatextuality**

Diegetic camera horror films show not only a high degree of self consciousness in that their characters often address the camera and audience: they are also self-reflexive because they are marked by their own artificiality. Branigan argues that 'a camera movement that is motivated by the narrative is relatively "invisible" as an element of style with the result that plot and story are foregrounded for a spectator (2006, p.26). However, in diegetic camera films, it is almost constantly noticeable to the viewer that they are watching an artefact; a film captured on a camera. Where classical films will not foreground their style, the camerawork in diegetic camera films is frequently at the forefront of the spectator's mind.

Zachary Ingle argues that 'the diegetic camera takes self-reflexivity to a new level that resembles metafiction, as viewers are consistently aware that the characters are conscious of making a film' (2011, pp.34-5). Metafiction texts such as *Last Action Hero* (McTiernan, 1993) where a movie character enters the 'real world',

or *Funny Games* (Haneke, 1997) where a character can ‘rewind’ the film that he is in, draw attention to themselves as constructions, encouraging the reader/viewer to question the relationship between fiction and reality and their own role as spectators. The filmmakers of diegetic camera films aim to convince the viewer of the veracity of the footage by borrowing techniques from artefacts such as documentaries and home videos and therefore there is reference to a range of other media products that are still artefacts but have a closer relationship with the ‘real’, and a more immediate relationship to horror.

Numerous stylistic techniques found in these films make the audience focus on the presence of the camera. Don Tresca contends that such techniques make ‘the audience hyperaware of the camera’s presence in a way that is atypical for either fictional or documentary film’ (2011, p.46). These techniques may not be found in the majority of professional media products but they are becoming increasingly familiar to modern audiences of user-generated content on the Internet, mobile phone recordings played on news programmes and other formats where amateur videos can be viewed. In order to ascertain the level of self-consciousness in the films, careful consideration of the use of the diegetic camera will be required to determine how camera movement can impact the audience. The metatextual tone of the films creates a tension between the fact that the footage was recorded in the past, but the camera operator’s reactions feel immediate and present and also between the artifice and the realism of the mediation. I contend that the sensitive viewer does not constantly sense this tension and is instead mostly engaged with the immediacy and familiarity of the mediation; creating a metatextual experience only insofar as the films are designed to remind the spectator of other non-fiction media artefacts.

### **2.2.3 Performance**

The self-conscious, metatextual nature of these films extends to a tendency for characters to display themselves for the camera in some diegetic camera films. There is a sense at times that some characters ‘perform’ for the camera, much as people often do in home videos or other instances where they become aware of

being filmed. Some characters' desire to be observed is seen by Biressi and Nunn as extending 'beyond the masochistic desire to submit to another's gaze or the exhibitionist's desire to display' (2005, p.102). The characters 'caught' on camera in these films often acknowledge the cameras and their reactions to being filmed range from not wanting to be filmed to putting on a 'performance' for the camera. The camera can become a confidant, a means to record a last will and testament, or a way to communicate with whomever the subject believes will eventually watch the footage.

Furthermore, in some cases the camera can become a central part of the characters' motivations. The camera can be the reason that the characters behave in particular ways (for example, posing) and the audience recognise the behaviour of a person who is reacting to the gaze of a camera. Biressi and Nunn insist that the camera 'can even be a provocateur and stimulant to action. Signs of performance provide evidence of this awareness of the camera' (2005, p.128). In fact, the characters often display signs of knowing they are on camera and performing in ways that emphasize this. The viewer is therefore privy to this performance and can learn more about the characters from their response to being on camera. Having the camera drives characters to action as they are often determined to capture something by recording it. This leads them to behave in certain ways such as staying in situations that are becoming increasingly unsafe. In this way, the use of the diegetic camera becomes an integral part of the performance of the character and the horror effects of the genre. In this kind of situation, the diegetic camera device also justifies the narrative.

Despite this emphasis on the performative, the diegetic camera rarely allows for close-ups. Close-ups have long been a technique used to convey character emotions to the audience, giving the viewer a chance to see the performance of the actor or subject up close. Torben Grodal considers that 'classical film-theory laid great emphasis on the role of close-ups of facial expressions as a central means of cinema and its communication of emotions' (1997, p.90).

Close-ups are indeed a vital tool used in showing emotions but Murray Smith (1995) is right to point out that the performance of the actors is as important as the shot type used. Both are intrinsic parts of making an audience acutely aware of how the characters on screen are feeling and even what they are thinking. Most of the diegetic camera horror films analysed contain close-ups, but they are seldom (if ever) focussed on the camera operator. These close-ups reveal the performances that convey the emotions of certain characters; however, with one character always behind the camera, this character may be more difficult to identify with as their face and the actor's performance is rarely, if ever seen. Some of the films get around this by having the camera-operating characters turn the camera on themselves at pivotal moments in the story. Smith argues that 'performance rather than POV is the central device of "identification"' (1995, p.158). I argue that performance can be captured from off-camera if the viewer pays attention to both the cinematography and the voice of the off-camera operator. In addition, Gaut offers that 'while the first-person-point-of-view shot (...) is obviously important in securing our *perceptual* identification with a character (...) it is less central to producing affective identification with characters than the reaction shot' (Shaw, 2008, p.57). However, despite the obvious lack of reaction shots in diegetic camera films, I argue that there can still be increased affective identification with camera-operating characters due to the amount that we can learn about them through the cinematography. Nevertheless, when camera-operating characters do turn the camera around to film themselves, this is clearly comparable to a reaction shot. Thus, the diegetic camera operator is not excluded from appearing on-screen in some of the films. With the cinematography being an indicator of performance, as well as the possibility of reaction shots, the camera operator becomes a likely character that the viewer will empathise with.

Even though there are an abundance of point-of-view shots in the diegetic camera horror sub-genre, some feature several close-ups, thus giving the audience an unobstructed look at the performances of the actors. These close-ups are usually of characters other than the camera operator, but can also occasionally be of the operator. Jane Roscoe argues that 'the position constructed for the viewer through the characters' use of the video camera is clearly voyeuristic' and that 'we are

given privileged access to (...) personal moments that otherwise would be denied us. We are encouraged to gaze at the characters' faces as the camcorder captures their every emotion' (2000, p.5-6). The camcorder is useful for getting very close to characters' faces and its size and portability make it easier to take the camera into what Roscoe calls the most 'personal and intimate spaces' (2000, p.5). Like the confession cams and diary cams used in reality television shows like *Big Brother*, the camcorder can become confidante and provide a seemingly intimate means of communicating with a wider audience. In diegetic camera films, the camera can become the site of confession and diary and as Amy West argues about reality television programmes, these sequences can 'heighten the desired affect of immediacy and authenticity' (2005, p.89). Communication with the diegetic camera and imagined future audience intensifies engagement and empathy with the characters, whether it be communication from the camera operators or their profilmic subjects.

#### **2.2.4 Sound and dialogue**

Sound can be a particularly effective tool for eliciting and enhancing audience identification with characters. Music is rarely used in these films unless it is diegetic. Music is a significant tool in passing on information to the spectator about the emotions and even thoughts of characters. Instead of having an extradiegetic soundtrack added in post production, the dialogue and sound effects are elevated in importance in the diegetic camera film. The sounds made by the camera operator are particularly useful to the viewer when ascertaining how the character is feeling: for instance King (2005, p.53) points to the 'startled reactions of people close to the camera'. Despite the lack of close-ups and visible performance of the camera operators, they are still present and clearly audible. Often the voice of the camera operators relay their hopes, fears, and desires, revealing much about their emotions and state of mind. It even allows the audience to gain insight into the characters' innermost thoughts, and what they would like to say to others including the future audience, but refrain from doing so.

Sound is also essential in making the audience aware of what is occurring in off-screen space. While the viewer is limited to seeing only what is captured by the camera, the character sees more because they have access to off-screen space. Bordwell contends that ‘sound has a particularly strong potential for cueing us about offscreen space’ (1985, p.120) and I argue that this can be heightened in diegetic camera films. Often the darkness and erratic camerawork make the shot unreliable or incomprehensible. However, sound becomes revelatory. Sound can terrify characters and the audience alike, thus creating corresponding emotions. It can also mystify both the audience and character. It therefore plays an integral part in creating character engagement in diegetic camera films, for example when the characters in *The Blair Witch Project* can only hear distant noises in the night outside their tent. Both characters and spectator are equally unsure of what they are hearing.

### **2.2.5 Personal imagining**

Currie differentiates between impersonal and personal imaginings, rejecting psychoanalytic ideas about spectator belief that suggest that the viewer believes that s/he is a spectator of a genuine event. Instead, Currie argues that watching fiction films causes the viewer to have imaginings about what they see. He also objects to ‘the idea that cinematic fictional works encourage us to imagine ourselves to be observers of the fictional events, placed within the world of the fiction’ (1995, p.166). In terms of defining impersonal and personal imaginings, Currie argues that ‘when I imagine merely that such and such happens, without imagining that I see (or have other kinds of epistemic contacts with) what happens, we have a case of *impersonal imagining*. When imagining involves the idea that I am seeing the imagined events, we have a species of *personal imagining*... more specifically, it is a case of *imagining seeing*’ (1995, p.166). Currie rejects personal imagining and what he calls the ‘imagined observer hypothesis’, and by extension the ‘view that the imagining appropriate to film is imagining seeing’ (1995, p.167). Currie also concedes that in the case of exceptional shots (such as the POV shot), imagining seeing (personal imagining)

is appropriate. This is why I strongly advocate a theory of personal imagining as foundational to the diegetic camera horror film.

When Currie asks, 'do I really identify my visual system, in imagination, with the camera, and imagine myself to be placed where the camera is?' (1995, p.171) he is not specifically considering the diegetic camera film. However, in these films, I argue the viewer does frequently imagine the camera and its operator. The spectator may not always imagine what it would be like if s/he was the actual character holding the camera, but the spectator is encouraged to imagine the position of the character who is filming. Currie suggests that the imagined observer hypothesis is comparable to imagining oneself in an 'invisible, massless time machine capable of discontinuous movement' (1995, p.172) that gives the viewer 'magical access' to the world of the film. However, in diegetic camera films, there need not be a massless time machine, as we have the diegetic camera itself to imagine. This is the means by which the viewer can travel through time and space, anchoring the point of view. The diegetic camera forces us to imagine a camera operator, or some other device that holds the camera in its position. Thus our visual system is constantly identified with the diegetic camera, and usually its operator. The imagined observer in the diegetic camera film is the diegetic camera and its operator. Therefore, the viewer does actually imagine this central prop and character because they both exist in the story world.

Similarly, Currie argues that fictions preclude the presence of a witness in the world of the fiction and beyond. He states that 'naturalistic fictions do not leave open as to whether someone is watching the scene *from another world*: such an idea would be wildly at variance with their conventions' (1995, p.174). Again, this is where diegetic camera films represent a divergence, as their conventions do not rule out the presence of witnesses. They are filmed by an internal witness: the camera operator within the diegesis. The characters do not realise that they are in a fiction, but they are aware of being filmed and witnessed and they are therefore aware that in the future, there may be an internal diegetic witness. This means that they may perform for the camera (and future witness), or monitor their behaviour due to the possibility of other characters seeing the footage.



Identification takes a degree of imagination from the spectator. The viewer must either imagine being the character (Currie, 1995, p.175) or at least imagine what the beliefs and desires of the character might be (Neill, 1996, p. 183). Films, and more specifically diegetic camera horror films, are adept at aiding the reader's imagination and putting the spectator 'into' the film with the characters. In no way is the spectator actually sharing the same diegetic space as the characters (even though their perception may be aligned). Rather, the viewer imagines, as Gaut (1999, p.203) argues, being in the situation experienced by the character; what it would feel like and what the character would be wanting. Gaut (1999, p.206) notes that 'the fact that we are imagining seeing from her perspective does not *require* us to imagine wanting what she wants, or imagine feeling what she feels'. However, seeing the diegetic world from the point of view of the character can help achieve what Neill (1996, p.185) calls an 'internal understanding of another' character. Perceptual alignment is just one part of identification but it can aid the spectator's imagining of what the character is experiencing.

Another reason for increased audience identification with the characters in diegetic camera horror films is what the spectator sees as common ground between his or her self and the character. The desire to film, the desire to witness horror, and the urge to flee when put in harm's way are all aspects that many viewers will understand, and tap into Smith's notions of recognition, alignment, and allegiance. Despite not being able to see the camera operators for much of the films, there is clear recognition of a character behind the camera. The spectator may have to imagine details about the character, but due to the alignment with the character, this imagining should be undemanding. If the viewer understands the compulsion to film, even in extreme circumstances, then allegiance may in some cases be stronger. The compulsion to film must be a realistic and believable motivation of the character, and therefore the realism of the films requires some discussion.

### **2.3 Realism**

Diegetic camera films are attempting to create a very specific type of realism; one that is based on the viewer's perception of other media forms such as documentary and home video. Debates surrounding the notion of realism are important to my conception of mediated realism and I offer here an overview of some of the key theories of realism that inform my own use of the term.

For Andre Bazin, the ontological realism of the cinematic image stems from its basis in photography. Bazin argues that 'the objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making' (1945, p.198). The moving image becomes more real than still photography as moving images are even more lifelike than a still photograph. Bazin suggests that 'we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-*presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction' (1945, p.198). Diegetic camera films rely on this Bazinian conception of ontological realism. If cinema's claim to realism is based on its photographic imagery, then the diegetic camera film heighten their claims to realism through explicit reference to the filmmaking apparatus. If we can trust cameras to capture what actually existed, then the diegetic camera becomes the enunciator of what the spectator witnesses. The diegetic camera film also shows that the photographic image is far from objective as the camera is wielded by a character in the diegesis.

Thus diegetic camera films rely on another type of realism: subjective realism. Similar to Branigan's conception of 'deep internal focalization' (1992, p.87), this is where cinema 'deals with the reality of the imagination as well, but treats this as if it were as objective as the world before us' (Bordwell, 1985, p.206). We do not see into the imaginations of the camera-operating characters in diegetic camera films, but we do frequently see from their point of view, or more precisely from the diegetic camera's point of view. We see a memory card or tape's 'memories' of what has been previously recorded and we are given a sense of the experience of the camera and the character holding it. The diegetic camera offers both its own flashbacks to previously recorded material and through the cinematography, it offers the viewer the opportunity to imagine the experience of the character

holding it. The diegetic camera forces us to imagine the operator in off-screen space (behind the camera) and to imagine their experience as they film in challenging circumstances. This means that a schema of subjective realism is in play when watching these films. In this framework, the spectator is encouraged to imagine that the real enunciator is the camera operator and that the footage offers a realistically subjective experience.

Both Stephen Prince (1996) and Joel Black (2002) highlight the deceptiveness of modern cinematic images and how even the most fantastical of images can still be perceived as realistic. For Prince (1996, p.92):

a perceptually realistic image is one which structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space. Perceptually realistic images correspond to this experience because filmmakers build them to do so. Such images display a nested hierarchy of cues which organize the display of light, color, texture, movement, and sound in ways that correspond with the viewer's own understanding of these phenomenon in daily life.

Perceptual realism suggests that even an image with no indexical link to what was placed in front of a camera; no physical referent, can be considered realistic by a viewer. This is both relevant in films such as *Cloverfield* where computer generated images are utilised, but also in the performance of camera-operating characters to make their cinematography seem realistic. The viewer must recognise the cinematography and other visual cues belonging to genuine documentaries and home videos that s/he has seen in his or her own life in order to find diegetic camera films "realistic". As in computer-generated images, diegetic camera films have their own 'nested hierarchy of cues' to convince the spectator that s/he is watching non-fiction footage. The viewer must be primed to respond to these cues, as will be shown in chapter 4.

Similarly, Black argues that 'today's sophisticated effects are increasingly used to produce a heightened illusion of reality itself (crashes, disasters, wars, space travel, etc.) - of truth as visible spectacle, of reality as anything that is filmable' (2002, p.8), what he calls the reality effect. Diegetic camera films use effects, but not the kind of sophisticated effects that Black describes. His argument that 'ever

more talent and resources are devoted to making artifice seem natural' suggests that it is computer generated imagery, prosthetics, and make up effects that help to make films more explicit and graphic, but not necessarily more realistic. Diegetic camera films are a direct response to this. If showing more in the way of graphic details can sometimes fail to make films more realistic, then a diegetic camera device can hide details, but make this hiding a part of a believable aesthetic. Diegetic camera films reveal less because narration is restricted and off-camera space is often privileged as a site for important narrative events to occur. The reality effect in diegetic camera films is something different to Black's formulation. It is not pro-filmic effects that give diegetic camera films their realism, but their cinematography and centring of the diegetic camera in the midst of a diegesis where off-camera space is consistently emphasised.

The handheld camera and off-screen voice of the operator contribute to the solidity and centrality of off-screen space. These aspects continually remind the viewer that there are important elements of the diegesis that are not on screen. They exist, even if they are not shown. This is what Richard Allen calls the 'optimum preconditions for the experience of projective illusion' (1995, p.108). Projective illusion is central to the viewer's experience of cinema for Allen; the idea that while we know we are watching a film, 'we nevertheless experience that film as a fully realized world' (1995, p.4). Spectators actively enter into this experience because 'the cinematic image provides an *impression of reality*' (Allen, 1995, p.2). In diegetic camera films, the documentary or home video aesthetics make it easier to imagine that you are perceiving events from within the diegesis, because that is where the diegetic camera is positioned. The camera exists in the diegesis and therefore the world on-screen is more fully realised and convincing. Therefore, the viewer is more likely to experience the film as what Allen calls a 'projective illusion'. But it is not so much an impression of reality that is important in these films. Instead, it is the impression of mediated reality that is more important.

In diegetic camera films, like in other films, we should imagine that the fiction we are watching is non-fiction, in order to engage with the films as the filmmakers

intended. To make this process easier for the viewer, the visual and auditory cues are designed to make the films appear like non-fiction moving image texts such as documentaries and home videos. Diegetic camera films are no less fictional than others, but the illusion created is that of non-fiction and therefore imagining them this way can be easier. The films offer a subjective experience of both the camera and the camera-operating character, and at the same time promote imaginings about the space behind the camera where the character is most often positioned. This makes the diegesis feel more real to the viewer as there is much that needs to be imagined which occurs off-screen. This creates the vivid impression that the events on screen are only what the camera operator was able to capture; just a small framed part of a wider world, while there is clearly more action that would be of interest to the viewer, often occurring all around the camera operator.

The mediated realism of diegetic camera films allow us easier imagining of off-screen space and therefore of a world beyond the frame of what is shown on-screen. They align us with camera-operating characters, positioning us as witnesses to horrific events. The cognitive activity of the viewer (imagining, empathising, hypothesising etc.) is therefore affected by the diegetic camera and its sense of mediated realism.

### **Chapter 3: Developing a cognitive approach to diegetic camera horror films**

Cognitive theory in film and media studies began in the 1980s with scholars such as David Bordwell and Noël Carroll initially challenging the psychoanalytic theory that had dominated film studies since the 1970s. In order to justify my use of cognitive film theory to elucidate the pleasures and purposes of diegetic camera horror, I will first clarify why I reject psychoanalytic theories that have been predominant in discussions over concepts such as identification and of the horror genre more generally. I will argue that psychoanalytic film theory relies too heavily on cinema's relation to theories of the unconscious; instead, I explore the cognitive processes of the viewer when s/he is watching diegetic camera horror films. I emphasise how the use of the diegetic camera orients our emotions and cognitions when watching these films. Understanding how we cognize the diegetic camera will help to gain an appreciation of how we feel about the characters that operate it, and furthermore how this can lead us towards certain emotions. My argument is that the diegetic camera is a key stimulus that provokes our emotional responses to these films, and that these emotions are far more complex than simply labelling them as pleasure and desire.

#### **3.1 Limits of psychoanalytic theories for diegetic camera horror films**

Psychoanalytic film theorists from Christian Metz (1982, p.4)<sup>8</sup> to Laura Mulvey (1989, p.14)<sup>9</sup> as well as countless others are preoccupied with cinema's relation to the unconscious. However, in this study of diegetic camera horror films, I am primarily focussed on cinema's complex relationship with the world, realism, and other non-fiction media forms such as documentary and home videos. I wish to look beyond Metz and Mulvey's assertions that a Freudian/Lacanian approach is required to explain the pleasures and desires of film viewing. Although I will be referring to the process of identification that Metz sees as the most important pleasure of film viewing, I argue that this is more intricate than psychoanalytic theory suggested and requires a more active engagement with the text that

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<sup>8</sup> Metz argues that cinema can be used to explore the unconscious dream state.

<sup>9</sup> Mulvey argues that the structure of film form reflects the unconscious of patriarchal society.

involves significant cognitive processes. I agree that identification is a crucial concept, but in following notable cognitive scholars such as Murray Smith, I will be breaking down the process of identification into numerous parts in order to explain the complex array of emotions that a viewer feels when watching a diegetic camera film. My concern is with the specifics of emotional experience and how these are tied to the utilisation of a diegetic camera in the horror film genre. According to Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, ‘the best of recent psychoanalytic theory is attempting to elaborate and enumerate pleasures instead of “pleasure,” desires instead of “desire”’ (1999, p.12). For this thesis, however, the concepts of pleasure and desire are still too limited as there are more complex emotions to consider when a diegetic camera is utilised such as empathy and sympathy, fear, dread and anticipation. I will be relying on the work of cognitive scholars because their central attention is on emotions and more specifically how these emotions are tied to cognitive activity. This approach stresses the activity of the viewer’s mind when watching the films and moves away from subconscious drives.

I argue that the viewer of diegetic camera horror films has control over his or her cognition, actively making connections between media forms during the priming stage of the film and choosing who or what to identify with through a process of recognising characters and making moral evaluations about their actions. I will also argue that the viewer brings his or her own previous individual experiences, memories, schemata, and expectations to the film, meaning that s/he will interpret meaning, narrative, and aesthetics individually.

Furthermore, Metz’s notions of primary and secondary identification lack the precision of cognitive theorists and their fuller explorations of what identification entails. The diegetic camera also opens up many new avenues of investigation as its employment contradicts much of Metz’s conception of the camera in cinema. For example, the diegetic camera does not provide the spectator with an illusion of power over the screen images, nor does it offer the spectator the feeling of avoiding being seen by those on screen. The diegetic camera is a fundamental

component in the creation of identification, but this concept needs interrogating and clarifying beyond what psychoanalytic theory has offered in the past.

### **3.2 Cognitivism and how we think about the diegetic camera**

Cognitive theory is about studying the process of cognition or thinking. Encompassing a range of factors including attention, learning, memory, reasoning, problem-solving, and perception. Cognitive theory explores the conscious mind and this makes it a suitable framework for analysing the diegetic camera horror film. I will contend that the films encourage the viewer to actively process the information contained within the films in specific ways, such as by imagining off-screen space and empathising with off-screen camera-operating characters. This is significant because it immerses the viewer and increases their investment in on-screen events. My question is: how do viewers respond to diegetic camera films and why do they respond as they do? I believe that cognitivism is central to answering this question because the use of the diegetic camera fundamentally affects the attention, learning and perception of the film viewer. With their priming techniques, self-conscious strategies and the moral orientation of characters, diegetic camera films encourage viewers to be more engaged with the films.

In the following sections, I will explain how priming, engagement, empathy, attention, alignment and allegiance are key factors in the cognition of the viewer while watching diegetic camera horror films. I argue that priming (the subject of chapter 4) is the initial process that must occur in order for the viewer to be able to recognise the off-screen camera operator as a character and begin imagining of off-screen space. The diegetic camera then affects the level of engagement of the viewer, the empathy generated for the characters, the way the viewer pays attention to the film and how s/he becomes aligned with, and morally evaluates the characters.



### 3.2.1 Priming for point of view

Peter Wuss's theory of priming argues that 'since the opening of a film has the function of programming the information processing of the whole reception process, the first sequences serve as a kind of priming. They formulate the aesthetic rules for the following course of experience' (Wuss, 2009, p.34). This is especially true of the films in this horror trend as they have to prime their audiences with relatively new, but easily identifiable, aesthetic rules for a different viewing experience. Wuss continues by stating that 'the formation of a successful opening sequence (...) must (...) prepare the spectator for a specific way or style of film perception that leads to the aesthetic code of the artwork here called its "priming pattern"' (2009, p.49). The priming patterns of many diegetic camera horror films are strikingly similar. This will be developed with a detailed analysis of the opening scenes of *The Blair Witch Project* and *Rec* in chapter 4.

Branigan's work on the POV shot will inform my discussion of the stylistic techniques used in the early scenes of the film as priming. This is of particular importance because diegetic camera films do not often conform to Branigan's theory of the most common POV structures. Without what Branigan calls the 'point/glance' shot to prepare audiences for the 'point/object' shot, the use of POV must be signalled in other ways. Therefore, these films must contain cues to ensure that the spectator understands the footage as a continual POV shot. Also, it must be understood by the viewer that the POV is not strictly that of any one character, but that of the diegetic camera.

POV shots help to limit what the viewer sees and therefore aid in creating feelings of anxiety. With reference to Greg M. Smith, I will also consider how the early scenes establish an emotional orientation for the viewer and help to create what Matt Hills (2005, p.25) refers to as a mood of anticipation. The opening text of the films is often a key element in establishing an anticipatory mood that will then orient the viewer's emotions for the remainder of the film. The viewer is primed for two major responses: to anticipate a disaster befalling the characters and to recall other media artefacts that they have seen in the past that have a closer

relation to reality than fiction film - for example documentaries and home videos. Diegetic camera films and particularly their opening pieces of text also activate what Jaak Panksepp (1998) calls seeking emotions. Torben Grodal (2010, p.65) argues that these emotions are often activated when watching what he calls 'classical detector fictions' - films that set up a mystery for the viewer to attempt to solve. Many of the diegetic camera horror films, specifically those that follow the victims of violence (as opposed to those who commit acts of violence) encourage the viewer to hypothesise and to search for clues as to what exactly is going to happen further along in the narrative. The viewer should ideally seek answers to the mystery that is teased in the opening text and s/he will hope that a character with a camera can provide some evidence as to what exactly happens to the characters. What we also see in diegetic camera films is the seeking system appearing to be activated in the camera-operating characters as they search for evidence. This I argue creates an alignment of systems - a shared seeking - between character and viewer, especially exaggerated because of the continuing POV shots.

However, these POV shots also restrict the narration creating a strong alignment, but limiting what the viewer sees. In Ed Tan's volume on emotion and the structure of narrative film, he suggests that 'as a privileged witness, viewers are allowed to see precisely what they need to see, at precisely the moment they need to see it' (1996, p.55). This may be true of the formal strategy of classical Hollywood with the tradition of seamless continuity editing and traditional cinematography but the horror films discussed here do not position the spectator in a privileged way. While we may feel privileged in the sense of having access to a character's vision and perhaps even their emotions, the narration is also highly restricted because the viewer of the film is confined to the (often less than ideal) POV of a character and their camera. The viewer is primed to experience the film from a less privileged position than the traditional invisible observer camera. Similarly, Tan's assertion that 'the invisible witness is not addressed, indeed, not even ignored: for the characters of the fictional world the witness simply does not exist' (1996, p.76) does not apply to diegetic camera horror films, where the camera operator and camera is frequently acknowledged. The viewer must be

primed to accept this shift in their spectatorial position compared to when s/he watches a classical film. I argue that this can create a stronger form of the fear that Julian Hanich (2014) labels dread. Hanich argues that dread is created when we anticipate a shock or threat in a scene and that dread is therefore a meta-emotion, where the viewer actually fears another emotion, for example the shock or terror of something jumping out of the darkness at the end of a suspenseful scene. This is exacerbated by the diegetic camera as we see constantly from vulnerable character's POV and the threat may launch itself not only at the character, but the camera itself (and by extension, the viewer). Hanich argues that 'something we can see is manageable, whereas unseen horror cannot be controlled' (2014, p.31). With the lack of privilege associated with the diegetic camera, many terrors remain half-glimpsed and therefore do not allow viewer's dread to dissipate.

### **3.2.2 Heightened engagement in diegetic camera films**

Feeling, and being primed to feel, an increased level of dread will heighten the viewer's engagement, as will the activation of the seeking system. I argue that viewers feel a sense of heightened engagement with diegetic camera horror films. This is largely due to the diegetic camera horror film's use of off-screen space and correspondingly the prolonged use of the POV shot. The crew in fictional films are conventionally completely invisible to the audience. Their presence on screen would shatter the spectator's engagement with the fiction as a believable and engaging narrative. Even documentaries largely keep their crews off-screen as audiences are more concerned with the stories being presented than the people behind-the-scenes who have created them, with notable exceptions such as documentaries by Michael Moore and Louis Theroux.

However, the operators in diegetic camera horror films turn the camera on themselves or film themselves in mirrors, emphasising their pronounced involvement with the subjects they film. Not only are these cameras engaged with the profilmic event, but they are also often communicating with, and explicitly attempting to engage with their audience. The camera-operating characters are

aware that someone is watching and the viewer can imagine that the character is communicating with him or her from within the fiction. This communication and engagement can lead to greater empathy with the diegetic camera operator. It is tempting to assume that this equates to a greater sense of identification with the characters, but it is vital to dissect the idea of identification before making this claim.

Identification has already been broken down into different processes by Murray Smith who defines specific concepts within it. Concepts that make up his 'structure of sympathy' involve three different ways that the spectator can 'apprehend the fictional world': these in turn involve different levels of engagement with the central character. The viewer may 'imagine the events of the narrative from the (physical and mental) perspective of the character' or they might imagine themselves 'in the exact situation of the character' (1995, p.80). Diegetic camera horror films prove adept at helping the spectator share the perspective of the character but the question of whether this leads them to imagine themselves more easily in the situation of that character is debatable. I argue that diegetic camera films do allow the viewer to easily imagine themselves in the situation, but that this is not necessary as the viewer is more likely to imagine the off-screen camera-operating character in the situation. Smith also argues that the spectator simulates the emotions of the character that they are observing by hypothesising about what the character is experiencing (1995, p.97). Furthermore, he suggests that hypothesising, imagining and simulating, is not always required. When the viewer reads the facial and bodily cues of a character, they may mimic those cues and, therefore, feel corresponding emotions. This 'affective mimicry' (1995, p.99) may be harder with very limited or even non-existent facial cues of the camera-operating character, but their bodily cues will often be registered by the cinematography. For example, if a camera operator is running in fear, the camerawork will reflect this. Similarly, if a camera operator is startled by a noise, their camerawork will register this shock and may also register their seeking of what made the noise. Smith also identifies 'autonomic reactions (...) such as the startle response' that are involuntary and can also add to the emotional processes of the audience (1995, p.102). Though the character and spectator can often be

aligned when they are startled by a shock, Smith notes that this is not a case of the spectator 'responding "through" the response of the character' (1995, p.102). In other words, we do not jump because the character jumps; we jump because whatever it is that made the character, also makes us jump. However, diegetic camera horror films provide an example that suggests a counter argument: when the character who holds the camera is startled, it is the operator's response itself that can startle the spectator. For example, if a character screams from behind the camera or suddenly drops his or her camera on the floor, this can encourage the viewer to respond through, or to, the character's response.

Character emotions are an important factor in making the spectator respond in an emotional way. The emotions of the camera-operating characters can often be expressed through their use of the camera, rather than in the regular use of close-ups. Branigan suggests that the viewer 'is expending energy in reacting to something that is familiar' (2006, p.175). The energy that Branigan suggests the spectator is applying is the energy of imagining and drawing links with our own experience of the real world and making links between the characters and the people we know in real life. Moreover, in diegetic camera films, we are expending energy recalling other media such as documentary and home videos. We must recognise these forms in order to understand what is being mimicked in diegetic camera films. We activate what Bordwell calls mental schemata (1985, p.31) derived from those previous experiences of watching other media forms and these schemata allow us to assess the new experience and recognize the similar pattern. Walton claims that 'we seem to be in *psychological* contact with characters, sometimes even intimate with them (...) Often we are privy to characters' most private thoughts and feelings. And we respond to what we know, apparently, in many of the ways in which we respond to what we know about the real world' (1990, pp.191-192). Similarly, Tan argues that 'when we watch a film, our general interest in the fortunes of our own loved ones and friends takes the form of sympathy with the fate of a particular character or characters' (1996, p.48). Clearly the viewer often cares deeply for the fictional characters, despite knowing them to be works of fiction. I would suggest that this is not due to interest in our loved ones as Tan suggests. Horror filmmakers that utilise the diegetic camera

attempt to make this psychological link between the character and viewer as close as possible by persuading the audience that what they are watching is not an ordinary film but the video testimony of a real person. Audiences are not generally fooled, but they may find it less difficult to project their imaginings on to the fiction. Because the characters communicate with the audience, our psychological contact with them is closer and therefore we are more likely to share certain character's emotions. However, this does not mean that our sympathy for the characters is in any way linked to a more general interest in the fortunes of actual people that we know and care about. The viewer imagines that the characters are real. We do not think of our loved ones because we are imagining that the characters have their own loved ones and own reasons for feeling fear or sadness.

Horror filmmakers often aim to create corresponding emotions between characters and the audience to increase the visceral impact of their films. According to Carroll, in horror 'the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters' (1990, p.17). It is a fundamental point of diegetic camera horror films that the viewer shares a significant amount of the perception of events with a character. Identification, then, can be a case of almost literally putting oneself in the shoes of the character, as in we see from where the character sees. Gaut argues that when the spectator does this, he or she may then come to care for that character (1999, p.202). Furthermore, Gaut maintains that 'the viewer imagines herself to be the character with whom she identifies' (1999, pp.202-3). By imagining oneself in the place of the character under the same stresses and in the face of the same horrors, the spectator may share or simulate the emotions of that character. This task is made easier by the constant alignment with the character's POV and imagining the off-screen space behind the camera.

The extent to which the viewer is invited into the mind and emotions of the character is another important factor when considering how these films engage the viewer. Subjectivity is key to encouraging identification with a character, as the more the spectator is aware of the character's thoughts and feelings, the more likely s/he is to understand and potentially simulate those emotions. This suggests

that the camera-operating character is the most likely source of identification if we assume that by holding the camera, the spectator is getting their subjective viewpoint on events. Cherry argues that 'subjectivity can account for the way in which the emotional and physiological responses of the spectator are oriented around a specific character' (2009, p.129). If the viewer is 'inside' the character's head, as opposed to simply seeing events as if from 'in their shoes', then they are more likely to respond with the same emotions as the character. Being inside the character's head involves a greater subjectivity, than merely seeing from the same position as the character. This again demonstrates the importance of off-screen space. Hearing the character and being encouraged to imagine their movement through the cinematography creates a direct link to the reactions and emotions of the character. The viewer is forced to imagine what occurs not only behind the camera, but to some extent what is occurring in their mind.

Identification is unlikely to be the same for all viewers. Some viewers will resist any attempts at making a connection between themselves and the characters in the film. Many viewers would be less likely to accept the invitation to imagine that a diegetic camera horror film is a non-fiction document featuring real people. On the other hand, horror fans that particularly enjoy being terrified will welcome the techniques displayed and the chance to imagine that they are watching a non-fiction piece of media. Currie draws a line between sensitive and refined readers, arguing that 'the sensitive reader is one who knows what emotion is expressed in the work and is therefore able to respond congruently to it; the refined reader is one who responds congruently only to works that have a certain kind of merit' (1990, p.214). Currie also suggests that 'our responses to fiction are appropriate, then, when they are (...) congruent with the emotion we make believe is possessed by the fictional author' (1990, pp.214-215). In diegetic camera horror films, the fictional author is the camera operator and his or her emotions and fears are often registered in the camera work and the audio, making it easier for the spectator to respond congruently, particularly if they are what Currie deems to be sensitive readers. For example, when Hud is screaming in fear and his camera shakes as he is caught between soldiers advancing towards a monster on the streets of Manhattan, it could be easy for viewers to feel a similar sense of the terror and

confusion that Hud feels and performs. On the other hand, a refined viewer may be resistant to the techniques of the diegetic camera film, choosing not to imagine Hud, or to find his constant screaming from off-screen intrusive on the unfolding of on-screen events.

There will also be times of greater and lesser emotional connection between character and viewer throughout the course of the film. Often in films, climactic moments produce the most emotional responses in spectators and diegetic camera films are no different. When the characters face difficulties and have to make decisions, emotional engagement and cognitive involvement become heightened in the spectator. Wuss argues that ‘the affective arousal of the audience always rises when decisions and problem-solving seem to be approaching (...) and the viewer becomes both cognitively and emotionally involved in what is happening’ (2009, p.109). I argue that this affective arousal can be heightened when a camera-operating character is involved in this decision-making process and particularly if there is conflict between the camera operator and a character on screen. For example in *Cloverfield*, Rob makes the decision to find Beth who is trapped in a building far away from his current location. The camera operator Hud is not in love with Beth, like Rob is, so has different feelings about risking his life to find her. Hud films Rob’s face in close up as Rob receives a voicemail message from Beth saying that she is trapped. Hud remains silent as this message is played. In the following shot, Rob is ahead of Hud moving fast down a street (fig. 3.1), while Hud is trying to convince Rob that finding Beth is too risky. In this sequence, we are not only emotionally involved with Rob, who is clearly determined to save a woman he loves, but we are also cognising about where Hud is, how he must be feeling and whether or not he should be following his friend into danger. The cinematography in both figures 3.1 and 3.2 reveals something of Hud’s emotions, but only if the viewer is willing to imagine Hud behind the camera. Figure 3.2 offers an excellent example of a conflict for the viewer: Rob is troubled by what he hears on the phone and caught in close up, while Hud films silently to give his friend the impression of privacy. We can easily imagine that Hud is concerned both for his friend’s emotional state, but also for what Rob might decide to do after listening to this message.



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**Figure 3.1: Rob is ahead of Hud moving fast down a street (*Cloverfield*).**

**Figure 3.2: Rob is troubled by what he hears on the phone and caught in close up (*Cloverfield*).**

Despite arguments about the congruence between character and spectator emotions, there is often a disparity between the audience and the characters' emotions. Carroll argues against many of the commonly held assumptions about identification, though his arguments do not always apply to the characters in diegetic camera horror films. Firstly, he argues (1990, p.17) that there is a disparity between the belief in fictional monsters held by the characters and the lack of that belief in the viewer. This is not always the case because often the characters in films such as *The Blair Witch Project* remain sceptical about the existence of the 'monster' just as the viewer does despite growing evidence of its presence. The scepticism is therefore shared by both some of the characters and the viewers. Because the characters resist drawing supernatural conclusions, the films engage the seeking systems of the cynical viewer as s/he attempts to hypothesise other reasons for what is happening to the characters. Carroll identifies some convergence between the emotions of the characters and the emotions of the viewer but not total duplication. Characters provide examples of how to respond to monsters - with fear, disgust, or panic (Carroll, 1990, p.22). Carroll's theory rarely considers the object-less fear of films like *The Blair Witch Project* where the monster is unseen by either the protagonists or the viewer. However, the Blair Witch is still an object of terror, even if she is never witnessed.

I aim to extend Carroll's reading beyond the typical horror genre to include diegetic camera films. Carroll argues that character-identification 'cannot be based on postulating an audience illusion of being identical with the protagonist' (1990, p.90). One of his key arguments is based on the fact that the viewer is often given more information than the protagonist, particularly in the typical

methodology of filmmakers creating suspense (1990, p.91). For instance, the audience knows that the monster is approaching but the character does not. Therefore we experience different emotions to the character. However, in diegetic camera horror films this is rarely the case. By limiting the viewer to the perceptual experience of the character with the camera, there is an epistemological alignment between character and spectator. Even when the viewer does have ‘parallel emotive appraisals’ (1990, p.92) Carroll argues that this ‘does not entail identification’. Instead he argues that ‘what we do is not identify with characters but, rather, we assimilate their situation’ (1990, p.95). We do not duplicate the character’s mental state but come to an understanding of it. With the prolonged alignment of diegetic camera films, however, I argue that there is a more pronounced attempt to make the viewer duplicate the feelings of the character that holds the camera, particularly empathising with a character’s feeling of dread.

### **3.2.3 Encouraging empathy through information acquisition**

Neill (1996, p.183) highlights the importance of empathy in the process of identifying with a fictional character. Empathy is the intellectual identification with or vivid experience of another person or character’s feelings. I have already suggested that the utilisation of the diegetic camera technique in films can create stronger feelings of empathy between viewer and characters and that this is due to the viewer and the character having similar cognitive processes; including formulating hypotheses about what is happening. Empathy suggests something beyond feeling the same emotions as someone else; it also implies a distinct cognitive process that allows someone to actively engage with how another person is feeling. Neill goes on to suggest that identification and empathy depend on a viewer’s ability to imagine what the character’s beliefs and desires might be. Without detailed knowledge about the character, it will be harder for the spectator to imagine things from his or her point of view. Neill’s argument also considers the similarities between the person in the audience and the character on screen. He suggests that the greater the extent to which the character resembles the viewer, the more will the viewer be able to imagine events from the character’s point of

view. While I do not strongly advocate that this similarity between viewer and character is strictly necessary, Neill's work is useful for highlighting the amount of knowledge the viewer has about characters and how easily the viewer can imagine what the character is feeling. This ties in with Smith's idea of 'recognition' as the viewer must be able to recognise the construction of a character, and imagine and understand some of the emotions of that character in order to feel empathy.

Grodal (1997, p.93) describes identification as the sharing of a given character's emotions that leads the viewer to simulating such emotions. Grodal suggests that the end result of cognitive identification will not always be empathy, but that feeling empathy for a character is likely to be a consequence of prolonged identification. For example, the longer we spend identifying with the characters by being positioned in alignment with their point of view, the more likely we will empathise with them by the end of the film. This is also important to the study of diegetic camera horror films for obvious reasons. If we accept that a continuing point-of-view shot throughout the majority of a film could lead to increased identification and therefore empathy, then Grodal's account is useful.

Often the character and the spectator share similar interests: for instance, the character wants to survive, and the viewer hopes that the character will. The spectator of diegetic camera horror films is forced into perceptual alignment with a camera-operating character for much of the duration. Therefore, though the viewer knows it is a fiction, he or she still sees the threat (or senses the presence of the threat) in similar ways. Carroll believes the audience's emotions are altruistic (for the character) whereas the character emotions are egoistic (for themselves). Grodal (1997, p.85) counters that there is compatibility between their interests. The spectator that is forced into perceptual alignment with the character does not only fear for the character, s/he fears for his or her self if they were in that situation (though s/he is aware that s/he is not). The viewer is expending effort in imagining that s/he is the character behind the camera or in imagining the mental state of the person that carries the diegetic camera. I posit that the effort spent imagining what a character is feeling is reduced due to the aesthetic and

aural strategy of the films. Over the duration of the film, if the techniques have been effective then Grodal argues that ‘empathy will very often be the consequence of a prolonged cognitive identification’ (1997, p.93). The prolonged use of point-of-view camera allows the viewer to face the same situations as the characters (albeit from the safety of a seat outside the diegesis) and this makes the experience more immersive.

However, it is not simply the case that audiences identify and empathise with characters in terms of fulfilling goals such as staying alive. Between spectator and character there is empathy beyond this convergence of desires. Grodal (1997, p.94) points to the empathy that occurs as a result of human bonding. Characters and their interactions are equally as important in aiding the spectator to identify and empathise with particular characters. This is important because in some diegetic camera horror films, the camera operator does not interact frequently (if at all) with his or her subjects, whereas in other examples there is frequent interaction. In chapter 5, I will analyse the interactions between camera operators and their subjects to ascertain how empathy is produced and how the diegetic camera aids this process.

Even the most vicious of charismatic killers converses with the camera operators that film them. Whether it is a killer or a victim behind the camera, the narrators are often unreliable. For example, Heather in *The Blair Witch Project* is more concerned with filming than getting out of the woods quickly and likewise Micah in *Paranormal Activity* seems more concerned with capturing evidence of the supernatural than keeping his partner safe. The characters often descend into increasingly erratic, paranoid and unstable mental states. Horror films in general, and diegetic camera films even more so, often end in the protagonist’s death. The handheld camera and first-person point of view do not offer any safety or respite from a decline in mental stability, which is not shared by the viewer. Though some spectators may become increasingly jumpy, nervous, even bordering on hysterical at certain points during the films, they do not go through the same cognitive and emotional process as the characters within the fiction. Horror viewers will likely have bodily responses such as muscle tension, speeding up of

eye movements and rises in adrenalin, but Grodal argues that horror fictions often use ‘problems of cognitive consistency and of paranoia, as both major elements in the creation of emotion and as means of involving the viewer in a claustrophobic, non-distanced experience’ (1997, p.245). The camera-operating characters often cannot believe their eyes, but by capturing proof on camera, they seek to rationalise the irrational, or at least record it. When confronted with something they cannot fully understand, they wish to communicate an imagined witness. This reflects the activation of the seeking system, so although the character and viewer may not have similar problems of cognitive consistency, they will at least share a desire to have the camera seek out and capture something that they can then try to understand. Both viewer and character may not believe in monsters or witches, but both are more likely to believe in these things if they witness examples on film. The viewer knows that s/he is watching a fiction, but becomes increasingly engaged as the characters strive to make the viewer believe the truth of what is being captured with the cameras. For example, the spectator of *Cloverfield* may not scream and run like Hud, but both viewer and Hud are left with a sense of awe and confusion when faced with the monster.

Those theorists who have specifically looked at diegetic camera horror films in relation to identification have used words like ‘trapped’ (McKenzie, 2011, p.37) to describe the experience of the spectator of found footage films. McKenzie compares the films to being on a ‘horrific ride’, and argues that the ‘blinkered limitations of the camera/viewer’s eye are the only visuals and the viewer passively experiences the untenable situations in which the characters are acted on by external forces’ (McKenzie, 2011, p.37). The idea that the spectator passively experiences these films may be true in terms of physicality but because of the continuing POV shots, I argue that the viewer is actively imagining his or her position in the narrative.

While we are ‘trapped’ in the continuing POV shots, as on a ride, the viewer shares this experience with the characters. When analysing most fiction films, Carroll argues that ‘the audience (...) frequently has access to many more scenes and incidents, as well as their implications, than are available to individual

characters' (1990, p.100). However, this is not the case with diegetic camera horror films. More frequently, due to the confinement of positioning to the character's camera's gaze, the spectator and character share almost identical knowledge. Tresca (2011, p.46) argues that in diegetic camera horror films, 'the camera (and, thereby, the audience) only knows as much of the reality as the person behind the camera; therefore, if the person behind the camera cannot perceive the "reality" of the situation, it will remain forever beyond the grasp of the film to capture it'. The viewer is rarely separated from the point of view of the character and therefore does not get to see elements that are hidden from the character.

I will argue that if the spectator accumulates information in a consistently similar way as the character, then empathy will be stronger. The viewer and the character have similar cognitive processes; formulating hypotheses about what is happening. Currie points out that 'the illusion peculiar to film is that the viewer is present at the events of the story' (1995, p.23) but also that 'people watching movies do not behave like people who believe in the reality of the fictions they are watching' (Currie, 1995, p.25). In this sense, diegetic camera horror films and other more traditional films are no different. The focus films do not have the 'capacity to make the viewer think that he or she is actually watching real events' (Currie, 1995, p.22-3) but they do often offer increased intimacy and immediacy through their specific stylistic presentation and aesthetic and narrative strategies. The believability of the characters and situations and the way they are presented to the spectator are key to increased identification, but this identification is an active process.

#### **3.2.4 Attention and cognitive participation: activating the seeking system**

I argue that diegetic camera horror films encourage active cognitive participation from the viewer even more so than other films. The spectator does more than

identify with the characters, hypothesise about how the film will end and empathise with the victims of the monster. They are encouraged to become participants in the film, searching the frame for monsters withheld from view and attempting to spot the subject that the camera-operating character is trying desperately to film. Grant (2013, p.165) argues that these films 'encourage or construct a spectatorial position that requires an intensely active engagement with the image'. He believes that they arouse 'the epistemic drive of the spectator' (2013, p.168), thus forcing the viewer to look carefully and search the frame shrewdly for evidence of what is menacing the protagonists. The films then shock the viewer by rewarding their careful gaze with an attack on the camera itself 'and by extension, the spectator' (2013, p.168). While the character attempts to see (and therefore gain knowledge) by using the camera, the spectator is similarly searching. The spectator is limited to scanning the frame presented, rather than being in control of the camera. Most importantly, the seeking system is activated by both character and viewer and the aesthetics of the footage encourage this seeking to become intensified. This seeking is also exaggerated as the viewer feels like a privileged witness to the footage. S/he does not imagine that s/he is the finder of the footage because the footage has already had opening titles added and there is often evidence that editing has taken place, but the viewer does also feel that the footage is evidence that needs careful consideration to reveal its truths.

This means that the viewer is constantly working to maintain his or her careful observation. Characters with cameras can zoom in to highlight important details, whereas at other times (particularly when the camera is put on a fixed rig) the viewer is left to search the frame. Branigan (2006, p.62) argues that 'attention is at work making what is "blurry" or "ambiguous" at a specific point in the space clearer and more vivid while making the rest of the space temporarily less distinct or not visible'. The spectator of diegetic camera horror films often does not have a physically present protagonist in front of the camera and therefore his or her attention is not taken up by this individual. Instead, s/he is more active in searching the frame for what is catching the attention of the protagonist who holds the camera. This also encourages the viewer to imagine what is occurring off-screen and particularly behind the camera more.

The amateur camerawork also stimulates cognitive activity. The impulsive and often frantic movement of a diegetic camera operator makes it difficult for the viewer to maintain attention on an object. Focus can be lost and disorientation may occur. When this happens, the viewer's mind must work harder on making sense of the on-screen action. Wuss notes that in Dogme films<sup>10</sup> where the camerawork is allegedly improvised to some degree, there is a similar 'orienting reaction' (2009, p.206). The camerawork, he argues, 'seems quite uncertain and rarely allows reliable prognoses about the coming plot development' (2009, p.206-7). This leads to increased anxiety in the viewer, an effect in congruence with the feelings of the protagonist who holds the camera in diegetic camera horror films. Dogme films share similarities with many diegetic camera films in their shooting style, emphasis on improvised performances, lack of artificial lighting, and use of location shooting. Wuss adds that 'the agitation consequently produced in the viewer... [is] produced by the camera's attempts to find an orientation, provoking renewed orienting reactions in the viewer' (2009, p.207). If the cinematography appears improvised and uncertain and the camera operator's agitation can be perceived through the cinematography, then the spectator will not only be more agitated, but will have to work harder to maintain a degree of orientation. This in turn makes their forensic searches of the frame more difficult and, perhaps, more urgent. I argue that this search for orientation involves imagining off-screen space, and an increased anxiety over what is occurring outside the frame of the continuing point-of-view shot.

### **3.2.5 Alignment and allegiance with camera operators and charismatic killers**

In this thesis, I will be heavily drawing on Murray Smith's notions of alignment and allegiance. Instead of using the term identification, Smith uses these terms to provide an alternative for 'the psychoanalytic explanations that are put forward

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<sup>10</sup> Wuss refers specifically to *Breaking the Waves* (von Trier, 1996). *Breaking the Waves* is not strictly a Dogme film as it does not follow all of the rules laid out in the manifesto.



almost automatically for both the making and viewing of perverse material' (1999, p.218). Smith breaks the notion of identification down into three different concepts: 'recognition, alignment, and allegiance' (1995, p.73). He dubs these constituent parts of the 'structure of sympathy'. Sympathy is similar to empathy in that it is the sharing of feelings between people, but it often is used to describe a feeling of sorrow or distress for another person. Firstly, Smith asserts that we must recognise and perceive the construction of a character. The next stage in the structure is alignment. This is the process of placing the spectator in a position whereby, using a variety of techniques, he or she has access to certain actions, knowledge, and feelings of the characters. Finally, through allegiance spectators will make moral evaluations about the characters and choose whether they will identify with them or not.

Smith differentiates between alignment and allegiance, arguing that 'the contrast... is one between the narrative information that a text provides us with and the way a text directs our evaluation of this information' (1999, p.220). This distinction can determine how increased alignment with certain characters affects the viewer's responses, particularly in the case of the charismatic killer characters, which I will explore in depth in chapter 6. I will not suggest that empathy or sympathy can be automatically produced by increased alignment, but that the viewer may have more complex feelings of attraction and repulsion when s/he is forced in alignment with a character. As Smith notes, 'sympathetic allegiance is not automatically produced by alignment with a character' (1999, p.220), and the charismatic killer examples challenge the viewer's feelings of antipathy to atypically monstrous characters. Something more than morals are at stake here, and ideas of allegiance are entangled and challenged in some of the diegetic camera films.

Smith's argument is that 'fictions designed to elicit perverse allegiance... are actually exceptional and unusual, and that the major popular traditions that appear to elicit them (like horror) often reveal underlying structures that are more complex but also more conventionally moral than... psychoanalytic arguments have suggested' (1999, p.222). In the diegetic camera films, perverse allegiance is rarely present. The monstrous characters are not sympathetic and their actions are

more likely to provoke disgust than allegiance. They cannot even be considered antiheroes; they are not vigilantes and none have any sympathetic moral code. The desire to watch them stems from curiosity, of which Smith (1999, p.234) notes that:

we appear to have a limitless natural curiosity in and fascination with the bizarre and the horrific. Such fascination and curiosity have an essentially amoral character and can take two forms: the first premised on the human kinship between ourselves (spectators, readers) and the object of our attention; the second on the complete absence of such kinship.

The psychopaths represented in the charismatic killer examples are the subject of the spectator's amoral fascination, rather than perverse allegiance. The techniques used in diegetic camera films reward this amoral fascination in a number of ways, but they do not generally encourage allegiance as will be discussed in chapter 6.

Smith considers the casting of Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991) as a way of heightening the spectator's awareness of 'the fictional status of the character' which allows 'our imaginative play with morally undesirable acts to an even greater extent' (1999, p.227). However, diegetic camera films often lack stars, encouraging a greater sense of mediated realism and making the process of evaluating the character's monstrous actions potentially more straightforward. The spectator is not confronted with a fantasy world filled with stars, but something different; something more like non-fiction media forms. Actors in the majority of these films seem to have been cast on their ordinary appearances, adding to the mediated realism as the cast look as though they would more likely feature in a home video than a feature film.

For the remainder of this thesis, I build my analysis on these existing frameworks, paying particular attention to Murray Smith's concept of allegiance in order to discuss how identification is created with morally dubious characters in diegetic camera horror films (particularly the charismatic killers and the camera operators of documentaries and home videos). I will also use the concept of affective

identification to further deconstruct how empathy is created in these films, especially with characters that hold cameras and are therefore off-screen for large amounts of diegetic time.

Taking priming, engagement, empathy, attention, alignment and allegiance as my theoretical tentpoles, I analyse how diegetic camera films provoke different cognitive activity to many other more traditional films, such as imagining of the camera and its operator, recognising and empathising with an off-screen character and activating the seeking system in order to empathise with the camera operator. I will be using the theories of Murray Smith, Peter Wuss, Torben Grodal and Gregory Currie to demonstrate, challenge, and build on the ideas of allegiance, personal imagining, affective identification and priming when watching diegetic camera films. The diegetic camera is the key variable here, and its usage in horror films will be shown to have an effect on the imaginings, empathy, and engagement of the viewer. I argue that the viewer imagines off-screen space frequently in order to recognise and empathise with the camera operator. I argue that the camera operator and profilmic subjects' interactions with each other and the viewer create increased engagement. Finally, I will argue that allegiance is not affected by the use of the diegetic camera.

### **3.3 Methodology for the analysis**

In the second part of this thesis, I will analyse a small sample of diegetic camera horror films in order to apply the theoretical framework developed in part one of the thesis. I begin this by investigating the priming pattern, looking at approximately the first ten minutes of the focus films. Here I will examine how the opening text encourages viewer hypotheses and how the employment of the diegetic camera in the early scenes prepares the spectator to perceive the films in a manner which is repeated and adapted in all diegetic camera horror films. This will involve shot-by-shot analysis of key scenes, looking particularly at the cinematography, dialogue and reference to off-screen space. In chapter 4 I will also explore how codes of various other media forms are mimicked in order to give diegetic camera horror films a convincing non-fiction aesthetic and

narrational style - i.e. their mediated realism. I will focus particularly on *The Blair Witch Project* and *Rec* and how these films mimic the forms of documentary and reality television. In order to analyse how mediated realism is created, I will identify the cues nested within the films designed to convince the viewer of the supposed authenticity of the product. In my consideration of priming, I also analyse the use of the point-of-view shot and, more specifically, how it functions in relation to Branigan's POV structure. This will require analysis of how point-of-view shots are constructed and emphasised within diegetic camera films. Following Burch's work on off-screen space, I will then analyse how what is behind the camera is created and privileged as part of the priming process for the viewer. Finally, in terms of priming and point of view, I will address mood and emotions that are encouraged in the early scenes of the films. The outcome of this chapter is that I argue that diegetic camera films use a variety of techniques to encourage the viewer to imagine both off-screen space and that the footage on screen could be real. The effect of this is to heighten emotions of fear and dread that are central to the horror genre.

When analysing the viewer's response to diegetic camera horror films, I will be continually complicating Currie's theory of personal imagining. I will be developing this theory to demonstrate that the viewer is encouraged to imagine a camera operator that remains largely off-screen. The continuing use of POV shots forces the spectator to imagine seeing from within the diegesis, counter to Currie's argument for impersonal imagining. I will reveal how the viewer is forced into active imaginings, both about where the camera is positioned within the diegesis and about what is occurring off-screen. My intervention here is in reconsidering Currie's claims that we do not imagine seeing the film from the point-of-view of the camera. When watching the focus films, imagining seeing or personal imagining is exactly what we do. The analysis will also examine the cinematography in diegetic camera horror films and its effects on the spectator's emotions and mood. The cinematography heightens anticipation and agitation, and inputs frequent cues to encourage the viewer to imagine the film is non-fiction.

I will also analyse the engagement and empathy created between camera operator and viewer, most notably when the diegetic camera is used as a tool for communication with the imagined future audience. From behind the camera or in front of the camera, many of the camera operators in diegetic camera films will reach out beyond the diegesis to the finder of the footage. This means that we must identify cues that aid recognition of the camera-operating character, including the cinematography that becomes a part of the performance of the character. My analysis of alignment and allegiance in the diegetic camera horror film will involve further examination of the POV shots used, but also how sound and off-screen space help to increase this alignment between viewer and character to aid in creating a mood of dread. I will focus on the alignment between responses of the spectator and camera operator, both in the cinematography and in the cognitive response of viewer and character at crucial moments of decision-making in the films. The analysis will examine how information is accumulated by spectator and camera-operating character and the effects of this epistemological alignment on empathy. The viewer becomes an imagined (by the character) part of the diegesis that the characters are in as the witness or finder of the footage. Unlike in traditional films where the fourth wall remains largely unbroken, diegetic camera films deliberately have their characters imagine their audience. This prompts the viewer to feel a heightened level of engagement with the film and leads to him or her being more attentive to what the character says. I will also examine the interactions between camera operators and their profilmic subjects to ascertain how empathy can be produced, and how the diegetic camera aids this process. Finally, I will argue that allegiance is affected if the camera operator engages in amoral behaviour, as the shift from observer to participant is shocking and unexpected and therefore the viewer's moral evaluation of these characters is increasingly negative.

In chapter 6 I analyse how the killers on screen are constructed as amorally fascinating characters that are both 'inhuman' in their lack of remorse and undeniably human in their complex relationships with other supporting characters. This leads to an examination of the interactions of these killers with the viewers of the films and how this might affect allegiance. I also analyse the broader aesthetic approach defined by the killers being camera operators, particularly in *Zero Day*,

and how this affects our allegiance with the characters. I will then consider how empathy, affective identification and sympathetic allegiance are limited in these films, both with killers and their victims, before analysing how diegetic camera films complicate what Plantinga labels ‘scenes of empathy’ (1999, p.239). I argue that allegiance is not always a result of recognition and alignment, and that diegetic camera horror films are more concerned with engaging viewer’s curiosity than their empathy with monstrous characters. I will show how diegetic camera films, particularly those with charismatic killer characters reward the amoral fascination of the viewer using a range of techniques offering the viewer an experience unlike most other horror films. I will also argue that feelings of disgust and sadness can be heightened when the diegetic camera is used in these films to create mediated realism.

The analytical chapters of part 2 of the thesis will investigate the cognitive processes of the viewer when watching specific diegetic camera horror films. The use of the diegetic camera is revealed as a central tool to orient our emotions when watching these films. With detailed reference to these filmic examples, I will reveal how the diegetic camera causes the viewer to feel specific emotions about the characters that operate it. The analysis will leave no question that the diegetic camera is a key piece of stimuli that provokes our emotional responses of fear, dread and anticipation to these films, and that these emotions are specific and significant.

## **PART 2: Analysis and Case Studies**

### **Chapter 4: Priming the spectator**

This chapter details how spectators are ‘primed’ for the experience of watching diegetic camera horror films. To this end, I offer close readings of the techniques employed in the opening sequences arguing that these are essential in encouraging the viewer to respond with specific cognitive activities. By looking at these techniques (e.g. point of view shots and direct address), I will establish how the formal, aesthetic, and narrative strategies encourage the viewer to respond to the film in specific ways such as imagining that the film is a non-fiction text, imagining who is behind the camera and what s/he is doing (as s/he is filming), and how the viewer is encouraged to perceive the diegetic camera as the enunciator. I will build on the ideas of Peter Wuss (2009, p.34), particularly on his argument that the first sequences of a film prime the viewer for the rest of the experience of watching the film (or at least until there is a reframing of expectations in which case a repriming may need to instigated). As I will illustrate in this chapter, the focus films share many similarities in their priming patterns, aiming to convince the spectator quickly that what s/he is watching is non-fiction footage captured by a camera in the hand of, or set up by, a character within the diegesis. This priming encourages the viewer to react with stronger feelings of fear and dread and empathy for camera-operating characters.

In order to limit repetition, the films under discussion have been grouped into the three categories set up in the introduction and analysis is focused on representative examples. To recap, the groupings revolve around the mimicked media form central to the films’ aesthetic. These are:

1. Documentary and reality TV crews, such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Rec*;
2. Home videos recorded by amateur camera-operating characters, such as *Exhibit A* and *Cloverfield*;

3. Charismatic killers with a camera crew in tow, such as *Man Bites Dog*, *The Last Horror Movie* and *Zero Day*.

I will investigate how an impression of authenticity is created and what techniques are used to achieve this. This will include:

- an analysis of how the audience are primed to accept the shots they see as being point-of-view shots; and
- an analysis of how technical limitations are systematically used in these films as cues that enhance the sense of mediated realism.

I then look at how the camera's presence is emphasised and what the viewer learns about the diegetic camera operators. This aids recognition and alignment and in turn primes the viewer to empathise with the camera operators. Finally, I will investigate how a mood of anticipation is created in the opening scenes and what hypotheses are encouraged in the minds of the spectator, such as hypotheses regarding the deaths of the characters. This involves considering whether the viewer is being persuaded to feel fear due to what is being presented on screen. However, instead of a feeling of object-directed fear, the viewer is often being encouraged to imagine that the film is non-fiction due to the cues being presented in the opening scenes.

#### **4.1 Defining priming**

In his work on cognition and priming, Wuss (2009, pp.48-49) refers back to the work of Meir Sternberg (1978) who 'borrows a term from cognitive psychology, the "primacy effect", to describe how initial information establishes "a frame of reference to which subsequent information [is] subordinated as far as possible"'. The underlying idea of the primacy effect is that people have a cognitive bias towards recalling information presented towards the beginning, rather than towards the end of a sequence. In terms of film consumption, this suggests that the viewer will be able to recall earlier scenes more clearly than those that are later in the film. Priming occurs when stimuli such as dialogue, actions, or stylistic



elements including cinematography, music or editing coax the viewer into hypothesising about the remainder of the text. The receiver responds to the stimuli in ways that the filmmakers wish by anticipating and extrapolating not only where the narrative is leading, but also how the film should be read. The individual stimuli build up to an overall priming pattern that helps to further create expectations and establish a mood that the viewer will be able to sense. The priming pattern needs to be consistent and coherent so as to establish a way of reading and anticipating the remainder of the film. This will then need to be frequently updated and adapted (or reframed) as the film progresses and new stimuli are introduced.

Thus, the opening sequence is of critical importance in a genre in which the goal is frightening viewers. Diegetic camera films have very particular aims and ways of setting up priming patterns. Their opening scenes are structured and presented specifically to get viewers to imagine that the films are documentaries or home videos, or to allow the viewer to make cognitive assumptions about how the footage has been filmed, who was filming it and for what purpose. In the focus films, authenticity is promoted through a range of techniques such as jump cuts, direct address and seemingly improvised camerawork employed in the opening scenes: the camera's presence in the diegesis is highlighted and the audience is invited to imagine that what they are watching is footage captured by a character. Therefore, the viewer is primed to imagine this camera-operating character, being attentive to the cinematography and audible dialogue from off-screen throughout the film.

Priming the viewer of diegetic camera horror often begins with a consideration of the marketing that has pre-primed the spectator before s/he even begins watching the actual film. Both *Cannibal Holocaust* and *The Blair Witch Project* used innovative marketing techniques that attempted to establish the films as real documents of deaths and disappearances. The actors remained out of the press to convince early viewers that they might indeed be deceased: *The Blair Witch Project* had 'missing' posters put up at the Sundance Film Festival and a website and accompanying mock-documentary to further deceive the audience by adding

to the mythology. The IMDb web page also listed the actors from *The Blair Witch Project* as ‘deceased’ for some time.

## 4.2 Viewer hypothesising

Priming is essential in encouraging viewers to create advance hypotheses of further developments in narratives and, particularly, their resolutions. From the opening sequences, the viewer can create cognitive evaluations about the direction and outcomes of the stories. Diegetic camera films are no different from other films in this respect, but have precise ways of setting up specific hypotheses of how the film will end. Their introductory text often leaves little doubt in the mind of the viewer as to the fate awaiting the characters: for example by mentioning a ‘murder scene’ (*Exhibit A*, fig. 4.1) or ‘bodies found’ (*Paranormal Entity 2*, fig. 4.2) or the ‘disappearance’ of filmmakers (*The Blair Witch Project*). Therefore, the viewer can formulate a smaller range of hypotheses with regards to how the film will end, and more theories about the specifics of what will become of the characters leading to their eventual deaths. However, knowing a fundamental part of how the story will end often does not limit the spectators’ enjoyment of the films in question. This is a function of genre cinema - horror in particular. Some research even insists that knowing the ending allows for enhanced enjoyment (Cohen, 2011). Knowledge of the fates of the characters can in fact add to the mood throughout the film and therefore increase the pleasure for horror fans that wish to be kept in an anticipatory and fearful state.

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**Figure 4.1: First diegetic information presented in film is text informing audience that the diegetic camera in *Exhibit A* was found at a ‘murder scene’.**

**Figure 4.2: Text informing audience that the footage in *Paranormal Entity 2* was found ‘alongside the remains of the six victims’.**

*The Blair Witch Project* dispenses with opening credits and only shows the studio logos before announcing:

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**Figure 4.3:** *The Blair Witch Project* opening text.

This immediately alerts the viewer to an extra-diegetic enunciator that appears to have added this title at the start of the footage to offer some context before the film begins. This also suggests an editor, which primes the viewer to expect edited footage rather than raw footage. This may only occur to the attentive and media-literate viewer when it becomes clear that the footage from two cameras is being intercut, rather than the footage from one camera being shown. However, while the opening title cards prime the viewer to expect an extra-diegetic narrator and some editing to have occurred, the rest of the film encourages the viewer to forget about this extra-diegetic narrator. Instead, the opening scenes immerse the viewer in the point of view of the camera operators, thus priming the viewer to read the film as the enunciation of its diegetic camera operators only.

In *The Blair Witch Project*, *Exhibit A* and *Paranormal Entity 2*, the use of words such as ‘murder scene’, ‘disappeared in the woods’ and ‘remains of the six victims’ are also examples of the iconography and narrative conventions of the horror genre. Wuss (2009, p.86) notes that genres ‘provide for certain types of probability with regard to coming events and their narrative stereotypes set up corresponding patterns, for example with regard to the final resolution of the plot’. Diegetic camera films are a sub-genre of horror, as these films have their own conventions that lend their endings a degree of predictability, most literally with these types of priming intertitles.

The words chosen for the opening titles prime the viewer for a specific ending by instilling a sense of dread as s/he is likely given the knowledge that the characters will die. Their knowledge of the genre and their further knowledge of the more specific fates of the characters causes audiences to feel the meta-emotion of dread as they anticipate and fear the emotions of shock and disgust that they will feel

later in the film. This could have an empowering effect, as the viewer feels able to hypothesise the fate of the characters confidently. However, the effect is more likely to be that viewers will be primed to feel a fearful anticipation that, with the appropriate emotion cues throughout, will endure until the end of the film.

Some of the films allude to the secretive nature of the footage and the fact that what the audience is about to witness has been suppressed. For example, *Cloverfield* displays a 'DO NOT DUPLICATE' watermark stamped over its opening frames (fig. 4.4). The audience will likely feel a desire to see something horrific that is also forbidden. This activates the seeking system, leading to hypothesising and an anticipatory mood.

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**Figure 4.4:** Deliberately faint 'Do not duplicate' watermark in *Cloverfield*.

**Figure 4.5:** The origin of the footage is a 'digital SD card' in *Cloverfield*.

*Cloverfield* opens with vertical colour bars on screen, a time code at the bottom and a high-pitched sound. This gives the audience the impression of the start of a tape being watched, the colour bars familiar to users of some domestic cameras from over a decade ago. The words on screen anchor the film as diegetic camera about to be played. Some of the titles include 'digital SD card' and 'camera retrieved at incident site' (fig. 4.5). The screen also features a faint watermark stamp that reads 'Property of the U.S. Government. Do not duplicate' alluding to its secret and controversial status. The audience is primed to expect the footage that follows is recorded on a diegetic camera and they can hypothesize that this camera was found by someone who then surrendered it to the government. It therefore likely contains something whose secrecy is of interest to the government. The title also reveals that the camera contains 'sightings of case designate "Cloverfield"' which immediately prompts hypotheses about what this 'Cloverfield' is and what it might look like. This is particularly true in this film as *Cloverfield*'s marketing campaign withheld any image of what the monster looked

like. A third title card states that the camera was retrieved in Central Park allowing the viewer to predict that the film may end in New York's Central Park and that whoever was holding the camera either died or had the camera taken from them.

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**Figure 4.6: Opening text of *Paranormal Activity***

*Paranormal Activity* takes a different tactic by acknowledging that a distributor is releasing the film as entertainment but also attempting to convince the audience that what they are about to see involved real people. By thanking the families and the San Diego Police Department (fig. 4.6), the director of *Paranormal Activity* Oren Peli (and Paramount Pictures) insinuate that the footage has been released from police evidence and that the families of the two characters have given permission for Paramount to release the film. This also primes the viewer to expect Micah and Katie's deaths or disappearances. It is a tactic only slightly altered for the sequel, where the character names are replaced with 'the deceased' to narrow the hypotheses that audiences can create. The specific inclusion of the named police departments gives further weight to the alleged facts. The viewer not only hypothesises about the end of the films, but is engaged in seeking clues from the beginning of the film as to what is going to happen to the characters.

### **4.3 Representing mediated reality with the diegetic camera**

One of the most essential purposes of priming in diegetic camera films is to construct the impression of authenticity and to have the viewer cognize in a manner concurrent with viewing a non-fiction piece of media. The audience is aware of watching a film but in this particular type, the task of the creative team is to make it easier for the viewer to imagine that s/he is watching some non-fiction footage.

The opening words that appear on screen impart specific information informing the film's claim to realism. In films like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*,

there are no credits listing the director, the stars, or any of the crew. There is no clear evidence within the opening seconds of the films that marks them as works of fiction. This lack of credits also gives the impression that the material is authentic and that it has not been ‘created’ by anyone to be a piece of fiction that pretends not to be.

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**Figure 4.7: Pixelating production company logo (*Rec*).**

Some films have credit sequences whereas others do not. The production company logo of the film *Rec* is shown but it briefly pixelates (fig. 4.7), along with the sound of static interference. When the first picture from the film appears on screen, it emerges as though an old television has been switched on, complete with accompanying audio and briefly distorted image. This connotes a disruption to the production of the film and primes the audience for technical disturbances. *Man Bites Dog* has a company logo and a single title announcing the filmmakers’ names, followed by the title of the film on screen, but there is no introductory message claiming authenticity. These title cards are therefore an element introduced by *The Blair Witch Project* that has been employed systematically in later films to prime the audience for the mediated realism approach, encourage viewer hypothesising, and promote an anticipatory mood.

There are certain common techniques used in the opening scenes of the films to trigger specific responses and cognitive processes. The camera may be glimpsed or shown fully in a mirror, such as in the first shot of *Exhibit A* or the early scenes of *The Last Horror Movie* (fig. 4.8). This stimulus causes the viewer to become hyper-aware of the camera’s presence<sup>11</sup>. While the majority of classical Hollywood films do not wish to draw attention to their artifice, editing and cinematography, diegetic camera films do draw attention to the fact of their mediation. They invite the viewer particularly through these early sequences to dwell on the fact that there is a camera being used and that the characters can see it and interact with it.

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<sup>11</sup> Similar techniques will be analyzed later in this chapter.

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**Figure 4.8: Visible camera in *The Last Horror Movie*.**

In some instances, one operator films another; thus the audience can see that there are two different cameras and can expect the footage to be a combination of both cameras' footage. The audience will also see who the camera operators are and what they look like. The viewer may store any information about the operator that they are given. More importantly, the diegesis of the film is much more comprehensive than in the imagination of viewers of traditional films. We see the camera, the person behind it, and the world around them. The space behind the camera is important and will often be imagined by the viewer if s/he is primed to recall that this space, and more vitally, this camera-operating character, exists off-screen.

In order for the audience to get a better sense of the character behind the camera and be primed for their involvement with diegetic events, most of these films have their camera operator speaking to other characters. Some examples limit this, such as *Rec* which appears as a professional media production rather than an amateur home video. In *Rec* the camera operator is heard from off-camera on only very rare occasions. On the other hand, the camera operators of the home video examples are not the detached and silent professionals of many of the other types of diegetic camera films. Not only is their cinematography often rougher, but they are far more involved in the on-screen events. They are audible and addressed by those in front of the camera. The operator is clearly someone who has a rapport with the subjects and therefore conversations between the operator and subjects are more frequent. Establishing characters' relationships and roles is also part of the priming strategy. The operator is included in the events, not a detached observer. For example, Judith, the daughter in *Exhibit A*, holds the camera most often; while Micah and Katie, the couple in *Paranormal Activity*, are the only people present and therefore unless the camera is set up somewhere, one is always filming the other. In these home movies, the camera is more likely to change hands than in the other categories. The informal and amateur approach and the

fact that the camera operators are a part of the family mean that there is often a desire to capture all people present in the scene including the camera operator. This means that the audience are primed to know more about the camera operators, effectively increasing our alignment and empathy with them.

Priming of the audience also extends to characters discussing details concerning the camera itself and its operation, for example what tape it takes and how much battery they have left. This, like Chekhov's gun, becomes crucial later. Some instances include discussions of framing as in *Rec* when the presenter asks the camera operator if her hand is visible in shot (fig. 4.9). This technique of talking directly to the camera operator is also often used as priming. The characters speaking often look beyond the lens of the camera. This is different from direct address as the characters are not staring into the lens and communicating with a television or documentary audience but clearly trying to look past the camera to the face of the person behind it. This again alerts the viewer to off-screen space, ensuring that they recall the camera operator and imagine their position.

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**Figure 4.9: Angela checks the framing with her camera operator in *Rec*.**

Editing and other aspects of the production of the media product are also instrumental to priming structures. For example, in *Rec* the presenter whispers into the ear of the camera operator to cut if the interview she is conducting gets boring. Her concern is with saving tape and providing entertainment for her audience. She is thinking about what should and should not be included in the final edit to make the show as appealing as possible. There are also other references to the construction of the media product with visible clapperboards, microphones, and presenters calling for retakes if a piece to camera does not go as well as they wanted. These nested cues prime the viewer to expect the artifice of media representation, while simultaneously urging the viewer to read the film as more authentic than its traditional fictional counterparts. Each cue is another



reminder for the viewer to imagine that they are watching a mediated piece of non-fiction.

The presence of the camera is also emphasised for the audience by having minor characters notice it. For example, a character in *Rec* immediately glances at the camera as the operator is moving up the stairs towards him. The body language and repeated looks directly into the camera suggest a man ill at ease with the technology that is facing and filming him. It also forces the viewer to imagine the off-screen space directly behind the camera, because we have to remember what is making the man uncomfortable and remind ourselves that this is a continuous point-of-view shot from the camera and the audience by extension.

Sometimes these characters will simply steal a wary glance at the camera (fig. 4.11), while others will try to avoid its gaze by moving out of shot (fig.4.10). Other characters demand or ask for things not to be filmed, particularly in extreme circumstances. For example in *Rec*, when the characters first discover that they are trapped in an apartment block, a police officer asks for the camera to be switched off and even tries to block its view (figs. 4.12 and 4.13). The nervousness or hostility towards the diegetic camera displayed by some characters invokes and exacerbates the activation of the viewer's seeking systems. We want to see with our own eyes what is going to happen and so we want the diegetic camera to remain on and in an appropriate position for the fictional narrative to continue. The characters' demands for the filming to be discontinued usually increase in frequency as events take a turn for the worse. Often the camera operators must be more discreet with their filming as evidenced when the camera has an obstructed view because it is partially hidden. In *The Blair Witch Project*, Mike and Josh repeatedly ask or tell Heather to stop filming (fig. 4.14). These demands, and altercations between subject and camera operator, become more heated as the characters feel under threat. In *Cloverfield*, Hud films an argument between a couple from a slightly hidden position down a hall and around a corner from the subjects (fig. 4.15). Again, the viewer must imagine and infer Hud's position from the point-of-view of his diegetic camera with a wall covering almost half of the frame. This primes the spectator for a film where camera-operating

characters may have a lack of privileged access to film their subjects, but also a film in which content may be of a secretive nature. Having a lack of privileged access can heighten the engagement of the seeking system as viewers find they have to search the frame more carefully and pay more attention to the screen to find answers. It will also force them to imagine off-screen space more as the framing does not allow for an ideal vantage point of certain events.

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**Figures 4.10 and 4.11: Minor characters in *Rec* repeatedly glance at the diegetic camera.**

**Figures 4.12 and 4.13: The camera itself, and its primary function, are discussed in *Rec*.**

**Figure 4.14: Mike demands that Heather stop filming (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

**Figure 4.15: Hud films a heated exchange from a hidden position (*Cloverfield*).**

The audience is also primed in the early scenes to understand the form of media product that the production team within the diegesis are planning on making. *The Blair Witch Project* features students making a documentary and the audience sees their behind-the-scenes footage as well as the official documentary footage intended to be included in their final product. *Rec* and other films take the form of reality television shows being filmed. These latter examples, including *Episode 50* (Smalley and Smalley, 2011) and *Grave Encounters* (The Vicious Brothers, 2011) all feature a presenter in keeping with the typical convention of many reality television shows. There is often an element of performance from these presenters as in *Rec* where the presenter dresses up as a firefighter and waddles around (fig. 4.16). She is clearly doing this for the amusement of the audience, engaging them with her irreverence and providing light entertainment. In the home video examples, there is still an element of performance for the camera present with

some of the characters. The audience is primed to expect that the characters are aware of the camera and some may be shy of its gaze and others use it as an opportunity to perform. The fathers in *Exhibit A* and *Home Movie* are particularly keen to act in ways to impress their imagined future audience (which will most likely be only their family) and even take to presenting by directly addressing the cameras and narrating what is shown. In this way, they show awareness of actual media products such as reality TV and documentary and behave in a similar, if far more informal manner when addressing the camera.

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**Figure 4.16: Presenter Angela performs for the diegetic camera (*Rec*).**

A prominent feature in the charismatic killer category is subjects who perform for the camera. The killers directly address the camera and occasionally even direct the camera operator, becoming presenters and directors. For example, in *The Last Horror Movie*, the charismatic killer Max tells his camera operator to get a shot looking over the edge of the building that they are standing on. The spectator must imagine the camera operator, who they have briefly glimpsed earlier in the mirror, because they have been prompted to do so by Max's gaze. Max's shifting gaze signifies that he is no longer addressing the viewer by looking at the diegetic camera lens, but is now addressing his camera operator (fig. 4.17). The camera movement that follows this request draws attention to the origin of this footage and the camera's position in the diegesis (fig. 4.18). It also reminds the viewer that though the diegetic camera is the origin of the footage, this camera can also be influenced by the pro-filmic events and subjects on screen and that it is a character's POV.

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**Figures 4.17 and 4.18 : Max directs his camera operator to get a shot over the edge of the building (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

The viewer is primed to expect these murderers to reveal a great deal about themselves, their methods and their psychosis. The subjects often introduce themselves, explaining their actions and motives. This moves beyond the viewer imagining off-screen space behind the camera; instead the audience imagines that the character knows about us as viewers, making us complicit in the violence and in some cases, potential victims. Thus it becomes easier to imagine that both character and viewer are on the same plain of existence. The character knows that we are watching, and we know that he is addressing an audience. These killers appear comfortable and charismatic in front of the cameras, allowing the filming to take place and inviting the diegetic filmmakers to capture their deeds. The extra-diegetic filmmakers attempt to shock the viewer by having the characters use the engaging direct address mode and also by revealing elements of the humanity of the killers, even as these characters commit morally repugnant and socially unacceptable actions.

The murderers featured are almost likeable in their jovial, friendly, and casual manner with the cameras. For example, Ben from *Man Bites Dog* chats amiably about the practicalities of corpse disposal and Max dismisses conventional horror films and narrates how he got into killing with a matter-of-fact tone. The spectator is primed for a confusing experience where the killer confides in him or her, making the viewer complicit in the killer's actions. The direct address and desire of the killers to tell their stories and share their point of view make these murdering men less monstrous than in traditional horror films. At the same time, the realistic aesthetics and matter-of-fact way these men discuss murder is unsettling for the viewer. The camera operators often question their subjects, asking the kinds of questions that a viewer might also wish to ask and further drawing the viewer into the minds of these mundane monsters. In this way, the charismatic killer category of films offers the viewer privileged access to the subjects whereas in many other diegetic camera films, the point of view camerawork limits the viewer, restricting what they can know and see in the story.

The privileged access offered as people directly address the camera and speak about themselves in great depth is becoming increasingly familiar to modern

audiences due to the conventions of reality television and vlogging. This creates an intertextual awareness as the viewer is reminded of other media forms. Wuss (2009, p.199) argues that 'in order to create the necessary stimuli for the reality effect, the individual film must neither remain behind the general development of cinematic technologies, nor ignore the expectations of the audience regarding the current standards for a true representation of reality'. In referencing these cinematic technologies on and off-screen (with visible cameras and other techniques that suggest the camera's presence), diegetic camera films prime viewers for a recognizably contemporary and self-conscious representation of mediated reality. The stimuli differ depending on the form of media that is being emulated by the diegetic camera horror film.

Some films in the charismatic killer category share the conventions of the mock-documentary form. *The Last Horror Movie* has a camera operator documenting the life and murders of a charismatic killer. Similarly, *Zero Day* is a document of two killers and their preparations for a school shooting - resonant of the Columbine shootings - but filmed by the perpetrators. Some films prime the viewer to read them as documents of mediated realism with the use of traditional documentary conventions such as voiceover, cutaways and interviews. *Zero Day*, however, has more in common with home movies with the effect of increasing intimacy and engagement with the killer characters. *The Last Horror Movie* has elements of a personal video diary as part of its overall mock-documentary.

*The Last Horror Movie* and *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* (Glosserman, 2006) are also relevant for their attempts to 'double prime' the audience. They prepare the audience for a traditional fiction film viewing experience by using a range of stimulus, before then changing their aesthetic and perceptual strategies, replacing the fictional film with a mock-documentary aesthetic. This juxtaposes two distinct aesthetic strategies, to emphasise the mediated realism of the parts of the film that mimic non-fiction media.

*The Last Horror Movie* uses a very brief moment of black and white static accompanied by the familiar buzz that signals the disruption of normality and

indicates to the audience that they are watching something that has been recorded on tape. The filmmakers often use this technique to indicate that there has been a jump in the tape. This could be caused by a number of factors that audiences will be familiar with if they ever owned a VCR or are familiar with video-recording technologies. Sometimes the moment of static can mean the camera was dropped or knocked and the recording mechanism stopped working for a moment. In the case of *The Last Horror Movie*, it represents the moment that Max, the killer in the film, decides to start taping his own 'home-made' film over the teen slasher film that was originally on the tape (called 'The Last Horror Movie' and available to rent from Max's local video store).

To emphasise that everything after the moment of static must now be read by the audience as 'real', the preceding few minutes of the film (the real VHS of the 'The Last Horror Movie') are stylised and recognisable as a conventional slasher film. The credits resemble a traditional film's title sequence (fig. 4.19) and are accompanied by a radio news report detailing the escape of convicted murderers and a typical horror film soundtrack, orchestral and dramatic, with a suspenseful tone that would clearly suggest to the audience the genre of the film. An establishing shot of a neon-lit diner with text announcing that the diner is in 'Grand Rapids, Michigan' (fig. 4.20) precedes a shot in which a waitress answers a call from a child. The diner's exterior and interior both hint at iconic Americana, also emphasised by the diegetic country and western music playing. We only hear the waitress' end of the conversation, but can infer that it is a child on the other end of the phone as she says to him, 'Michael... you shouldn't be watching that on your own. I told you it was scary'. The use of the name Michael obviously recalls *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978) in the minds of horror fans, which draws associations between this part of the film and other horror fictions. The camera movements are smooth and conventional, such as tracking close behind the woman as she walks around the diner closing doors and turning off lights. The isolated young woman in danger is a common feature of slasher films and genre fans will recognise the cues that suggest this character is likely to be killed in the opening scene. When her phone rings again, there is only the sound of a distorted laugh and then there is the sound of glass breaking within the diner itself. Here we

see the typical use of POV structure in films with a point/glance shot revealing the woman's face (fig. 4.21) as she hears the noise. This is followed by the point/object shot as she looks in front of her in the direction of where the noise came from (fig. 4.22), and then there is a cut back to the point/glance shot of the woman looking scared. As she moves towards the noise, she treads on a mask on the floor and as she bends to pick it up, the killer is revealed as he attacks the woman from behind with a knife.

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**Figure 4.19** The film's title (*The Last Horror Movie*).

**Figure 4.20** Establishing shot (*The Last Horror Movie*).

**Figure 4.21** Point/glance shot (*The Last Horror Movie*).

**Figure 4.22** Point/object shot (*The Last Horror Movie*).

These moments help to contrast the 'movie' with the 'home video' that follows the static (fig. 4.23). Max's face stares in close-up directly into the camera and at the audience (fig. 4.24). He directly addresses the camera and audience and says that what he has filmed will be 'much more interesting' than the film that was previously on this tape. The lighting is now more naturalistic (Max is lit by a visible desk lamp) and Max appears casual in front of decor that suggests a bedroom. Tapes are also visible in the background, highlighting Max's use of video technology in the making of 'his' film. He begins by criticising the characterisation and script of the original film on the tape, again reinforcing the idea that the footage in which we are seeing him is more real than a fictional film. It is mediated realism created by stimulus that we would normally associate with a vlog or home video. The camera's static shot implies the use of a tripod and Max's hushed tones and intimate dialogue suggest the camera is not being operated by anybody. His handsome face (in full view and not hidden by a mask) suggests that this killer is more real and recognisable from the news media than from the slashers of fiction films.

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**Figure 4.23** Static (*The Last Horror Movie*).

**Figure 4.24** Max stares directly at the diegetic camera lens (*The Last Horror Movie*).

Viewers of these films<sup>12</sup> enter into a silent contract with the filmmaker, accepting certain ‘truths’ in order to gain the fullest enjoyment from their sadistic or masochistic, voyeuristic thrills. Through the priming techniques and recognizable stimuli, the viewer imagines that the film really is being captured by a character within the diegesis and that s/he is now watching the recorded evidence of what happened to the characters. The desired effect is that the viewer will be convinced by the beginning of the film that his or her mind will not need to consciously continue making assumptions and processing new stimuli and this will become a spontaneous reaction to the narrative events and stylistic techniques of the film. Walton (1990, p.15) argues that ‘spontaneous imaginings tend to be more vivid than deliberate ones (...) evidence of the falsity of a proposition imposed forcefully on one’s consciousness makes it difficult to imagine vividly that the proposition is true’. Therefore, if the film immediately causes certain imaginings due to the priming techniques of its early scenes (for example imagining that what is being watched is the footage filmed by a real person) then the imagining for the rest of the film will be more spontaneous and therefore more vivid and terrifying for the viewer.

#### **4.4 Stylistic techniques**

Several techniques - such as handheld camera, continuing point-of-view shots, and direct address - are used in diegetic camera films to prime the audience into reading the film and reacting to it by imagining that it is a non-fiction piece of media. Many of these concern the stylistic choices of the production team from cinematography and mise-en-scène to editing. Diegetic camera films follow specific recognizable patterns, for example revealing the presence of the camera on-screen, making the camera operator audible, and having a character address the operator, in order to influence the spectator into deliberate cognitive processes such as recognising and empathising with the camera-operating character.

Bordwell (1985, p.52) argues that ‘when alternative techniques exist for a given

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<sup>12</sup> Unless under the illusion that they are watching a real documentary, as was allegedly the case with a few early viewers of *The Blair Witch Project*.



*syuzhet* purpose, it may make a difference which technique is chosen (...) whatever stylistic choice is made may have different effects on the spectator's perceptual and cognitive activity'. For example, while still intending to scare the spectator, a traditionally-shot horror film does not so insistently try to limit the viewer's perception to one character's point of view and this limiting of the viewpoint will cause specific cognitive activity. In films such as *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980) there are discreet moments shot from the point of view of the murderer. Reading the diegetic camera film is more akin to reading the experience of the victim characters.

The cinematography encourages us to imagine the operator, but it is also a reflection of the media product being made by the diegetic production team. As is the case with documentary footage, a significant amount is handheld and therefore shakier if the camera operator is required to move fast or catch something spontaneously. Some of the early scenes of *The Blair Witch Project* appear more carefully composed (figs. 4.25, 4.26 and 4.27), as these shots show the official documentary footage of the student filmmakers in the film. Interviews are shot with conventional 'talking head' framing and the students of *The Blair Witch Project* use an establishing shot when visiting the graveyard for their first shot of the documentary.

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**Figure 4.25, 4.26 and 4.27: Carefully composed shots (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

**Figure 4.28: 'Talking head' interview framing (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

In these scenes, the camera operator is silent as is conventional in a professional documentary crew and Heather directly addresses the audience as a professional presenter might. The framing appears controlled, and planned with some care. The viewer does not necessarily imagine the camera operator when these shots are on screen because the camera operator's presence in the diegesis is not emphasised. The shots also seem to have been edited together because as Heather speaks, her voice is then used as a sound bridge over a series of shots of the graveyard. To the

sensitive viewer, the editing itself provides cues to perceive this as distinct to the raw footage that was supposedly found in the woods.

However, the next shot immediately tries to undo this by cutting back to what appears to be raw uncut footage straight out of the camera. Here the cuts are where the camera was turned on to record and then off again. In contrast to the 'official' documentary footage, the following shot foregrounds the presence of the camera operator and appears clearly unplanned and spontaneous (figs. 4.29 and 4.30). Heather's voice can be heard from behind the camera exclaiming, 'Yeehah, well we have shot the first scene. The cemetery scene... the opening... is shot'. This line of dialogue, while appearing improvised due to her sentence structure, also refers to the official documentary footage and prompts the viewer to interpret that what s/he is now seeing is behind-the-scenes footage. It also takes Heather around five seconds to bring the camera to focus on the road ahead of her (fig. 4.31) as she is now filming from within a car as the diegetic filmmakers drive to a new location. In the previous five seconds of footage before Heather focuses on the road, the camera is pointing at the dashboard inside the car, making it clear that she has just turned the camera on to record and is then deciding where and what she is actually going to shoot. She finally pans the camera around to film Josh driving (fig. 4.32), and then cuts immediately after saying the above sentence. This cutting from a camera not focused on anything to pointing at a human subject for a only a fraction of a second is executed to reflect the way that the operator is thinking. Heather wants to capture the joy of getting the first bit of footage. The visuals that she actually films are of little narrative importance, except perhaps to show that the film crew are moving locations. However, the manner in which this shot has been filmed and edited ensures that the audience reads it as a realistic depiction of spontaneous behind-the-scenes filming. With so little visual information in the shot, the viewer must work harder to piece together what is happening in the shot and also imagine off-screen space to understand where the diegetic camera is and who is in control.

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**Figure 4.29 - 4.32: Spontaneous, unplanned filming by Heather as she finds her focus (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

Films in the home movie category are distinguished by their domestic settings and also the use of more amateur-looking photography than other examples. They are closer to the behind-the-scenes footage seen in *The Blair Witch Project* than to the students' conventional documentary framing at the film's start. The handheld camera provides shaky images, the camera and its operator are still glimpsed in mirrors occasionally, and the characters frequently discuss the presence of the diegetic camera thus showing their awareness of it. All this primes the audience to accept the camera as an electrical prop that actually works that is present in the world of the film. There are the typical technical imperfections of diegetic camera films that add to its claims of authenticity. The audience is primed to accept that the camera is not being operated by a professional or even by a film student. The film is designed to look as though it has been shot by a complete amateur with unnecessary zooms, quick cuts, and incomplete takes. Like genuine home videos, there is a persistent sense of spontaneity, with the camera seemingly turned on just at the right moment (or even seconds later than desirable) to capture something important.

*Exhibit A* opens with the subject on screen, a middle-aged father named Andy King, asking 'Yes?' to an unseen camera operator behind the camera (fig. 4.33). The voice of the camera operator (later revealed as Andy's daughter Judith) can then be heard replying 'Yeah'. This immediately ensures that the viewer will imagine off-screen space. The viewer feels as though s/he is positioned in the middle of a conversation, not just temporally, but almost spatially. In front of the viewer, on the screen is Andy, and somewhere off-screen, behind the camera is a young girl. Beginning the shot in this way also alludes to what has been missed in this conversation. The viewer will question why the man is asking 'Yes?' The viewer can easily speculate that the camera has simply been turned on midway through a conversation between camera operator and subject. Andy had likely asked Judith if the camera is switched on just before the moment she pressed the record button. She had not replied as she was waiting for the red record dot to

appear in her viewfinder perhaps. Then, Andy asked impatiently, ‘Yes?’ and that is the first moment captured. The viewer of *Exhibit A* will instantly complete at least part of this process in order to comprehend the scene.

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**Figure 4.33: The opening shot of *Exhibit A* as Andy communicates with camera operator Judith.**

**Figure 4.34 Judith films herself in a mirror (*Exhibit A*).**

Judith’s filming of Andy as she follows him into their house is filmed from a low angle as she is much smaller than he is and it is clear that she is not a professional camera operator as she films into the sunshine, meaning Gary’s face is dark in the opening shot. This first shot also lasts for two minutes, as there is clearly no thought about when to cut. The camera changes hands in this shot, as Judith’s brother Joe takes the camera from her. This emphasises the relaxed approach to who is responsible for the camera operation in home video examples and primes the viewer to imagine and to re-imagine who is in off-screen space behind the camera. This imagining is continuously aided by dialogue and visuals. For example, in the first shot Judith films herself in the mirror (fig. 4.34), and when Joe takes the camera from her, she is seen emerging from behind and to the left of the camera saying ‘get stuffed’ (fig. 4.36). The cinematography as the camera changes hands is also notable as the camera appears to wobble and be swung around as if being pulled around by two pairs of hands. The viewer must therefore imagine what the brother and sister are doing before it is confirmed by the dialogue (‘let him have a turn’) and the appearance of Judith in front of the camera. Another notable element of this first shot is that both Andy and Joe perform for the camera; Andy while showing the camera around the house and Joe when he first sees the camera starts to make faces directly at it (fig. 4.35)

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**Figure 4.35: Joe performs for the camera (*Exhibit A*).**

**Figure 4.36: Judith appears from behind the camera (*Exhibit A*).**

Other stylistic elements encourage the audience to ponder why the character is filming, and this is usually answered quickly through dialogue, but it also helps to set up a narrative. The films that take the form of mock-documentaries are constructed to make their forms (documentaries) obvious from the opening scenes. Presenters that directly address the camera, having characters shout ‘cut’ and presenters that ‘repeat’ takes to get them right, all add to the sense that the spectator is watching either the finished product, or a documentary in progress of being produced. Films such as *The Blair Witch Project* purport to show the viewer some of the raw footage of a (mostly behind-the-scenes) documentary with very little editing compared to a finished piece. Some films such as *Rec* establish what appears to be the production of made-for-television documentaries or reality television shows. Either way, the opening scenes make clear the viewing experience that is offered to the spectator.

In essence, the priming patterns of the opening scenes consist of numerous techniques aimed at misdirecting the audience. The elements already mentioned are designed to correspond with the visuals of non-fiction films. The early scenes of the film must be convincing in their depiction of these practices in order to make the cognitive processes of the spectator follow assumptions and emotions of responding to a documentary or reality TV programme. Hallam and Marshment (2000, p.227) argue that ‘the closer certain aspects of a film’s depictive elements correspond to actuality recording practices, the greater their capacity to appear to mediate actuality directly, rather than perform a representative or symbolic function’. In order to trick the viewer, or allow the viewer to respond as if tricked, the priming techniques used must be carried through the film. This creates a consistent sense of mediated realism that is, if not complete enough to deceive, at least complete enough to prompt spontaneous imaginings that what is shown on screen is what non-fiction footage of these events would look like.

Sensitive readers want to play the game that the filmmakers intend for them. If a viewer wishes to imagine a film’s characters are real in order to be able to respond to them with real emotions, then the viewer will use the nested cues in the film’s aesthetics to make this imagining more vivid. The audience of diegetic camera

films desire a certain thrill from watching the films, a thrill that is most likely founded on pretending or imagining that the film is a real documentary or home video. If the viewer is not primed efficiently and correctly, then the imagining will be a harder task, less natural and less pleasurable. In his work on make-believe, Walton (1990, p.23) argues that ‘imaginings induced by prompters (...) are often less contrived and deliberate, more spontaneous, than are imaginings in response to instructions’. The ideal priming patterns in diegetic camera films are not instructions but prompters. They do not tell the audience what to think and feel or how to respond, but the elements on display prompt the audience to imagine spontaneously, most notably about the mediated reality of the situation they are watching.

There are three notable stylistic techniques that warrant further consideration: the camera’s presence, POV shots and technical imperfections. These are immediately noticeable when watching diegetic camera films and are essential to their priming strategies.

A key element in the priming strategy of diegetic camera films is preparing the viewer for the self-conscious strategies displayed in the films. The fact that a character in the diegesis is holding the camera and filming the events that are being watched by the film audience has to be carefully constructed. This is achieved through cinematography, dialogue and other techniques. The priming strategy then aims at making the spectator aware of the camera’s physical presence within the diegesis, not simply when recording events, but also the impact that the camera has on the characters that are present. James Keller (2004, p.56) posits that ‘the audience becomes hyper-conscious of the camera’s presence, not because of the artful, well-designed images, but because there are so few of them’. Unless the camera is glimpsed in a mirror or one camera films a second (which often happens in the early scenes of these films) the viewer does not actually see the camera. If the films have more than one diegetic camera, part of their priming strategy is to prepare audiences for the switching between cameras. Often this is made easier by showing differences in the footage from each camera. For example, the characters in *The Blair Witch Project* use a colour digital camera

and a black and white film camera (see figures 4.25 and 4.29) to help differentiate between the behind-the-scenes and official documentary and also to prime the audience to remember who is carrying which camera. In the opening scenes, Josh holds the film camera, while Heather holds the digital camera. We know this due to seeing the cameras in their hands and particularly with Heather's footage, the fact that we hear her from off-screen as she films.

The cutting between different cameras also draws attention to the fact that these films have been edited. Some films prime the audience to expect this editing in their opening titles, referencing the fact that the footage has been trimmed and ordered to create a narrative, but others take it for granted that the viewer would understand that someone has done this. For example, *The Blair Witch Project* appears as the diegetic camera footage of the students and, in many ways, unedited (as I already established in this chapter). However, the intercutting of two different cameras throughout the film clearly suggests that the footage has been edited for narrative and dramatic effect. The early intercutting primes the viewer to expect this and, ideally, not to question it. Viewers may find themselves questioning why the footage of both cameras is intercut and, furthermore, the presence of an editor complicates the identity of the enunciator. However, the sensitive viewer should be able to accept the intercutting of both cameras' footage as a technique utilised by the extra-diegetic filmmakers in order to make the narrative flow.

In films where the camera is not visible because there is no second camera to capture a shot of it (such as *Man Bites Dog*), other techniques are used to prime the spectator for the viewing experience and for being continually aware of the camera's presence. This is done through the continuous point-of-view shots. These shots often reflect the actions, feelings, curiosity and fears of the camera-operating character. If camerawork draws attention to itself by being shaky, jerky, and disorienting, then viewers are likely to be aware of its use. The construction of POV shots aids in viewer awareness of the camera because (particularly if the camera operator is coded as amateur) their camerawork will often be noticeable and distracting. This forces the viewer to imagine off-screen space, and moreover

to question and hypothesize about what the camera operator is doing behind the camera. This creates uncertainty and fear and can ensure that the viewer is actively searching the visuals for clues about what is happening behind the camera.

The spectator is primed early in diegetic camera films to accept what s/he sees as POV shots, even without the use of point/glance shots. The significance of these shots is likely to be diminished when compared to a more traditional film's use of the technique. As these shots constitute a substantial part of diegetic camera films as opposed to being used sparingly in other films, they are simultaneously more and less significant. Branigan (1984, p.71) argues that 'the POV shot cannot be recognized until we learn its elements and attach special significance to them'. Although Branigan is not referring to diegetic camera films, it is worthwhile considering how the POV shot is established in these films if they do not follow more traditional construction patterns such as including a point/glance shot. POV shots are more significant because of the frequency of their use in the films, but this means that they potentially have less impact than carefully chosen moments of POV in other films. For example, the use of a POV shot in a slasher film can create incredible tension as it signifies the killer's presence in close proximity to his or her potential victims. These shots are carefully, and sparingly, used to suggest that the victims are being watched at critical moments.

Diegetic camera films use POV shots continuously. If we accept that the camera itself as a prop in the diegesis provides a point of view, then every shot is a POV shot. If we only accept that a sentient, living, breathing entity can have a point of view, then only whenever a character is holding a camera, can the shot be called a POV shot. However, there are different degrees of subjectivity to these character POV shots and I argue that some of these shots when the character holds the camera are actually only showing the point of view of the camera, rather than the point of view of the character. For example, when Josh films the official document in *The Blair Witch Project* (see Figs 4.25-4.28), these shots might be taken from his point of view, but they are not subjective. They do not offer an insight into Josh's mind. Similarly, some shots in *Rec* are more accurately



described as POV shots than others, even though all of the shots in the film are filmed by Pablo the camera operator. Sometimes he is attempting to make a piece of television and at other times he is clearly just filming everything he witnesses like an ordinary bystander with a camera. As a general rule, when the cinematography becomes more hectic, there is a greater sense of the POV of the operator. These shaky shots are more like traditional POV shots than the former, because they remind the viewer to imagine the operator off-screen and what must be occurring to the operator that has caused the cinematography to become so erratic. This implies that the operator is reacting to what is around him/her rather than merely setting up a shot for the programme (see fig 4.37 and 4.38). In the shot represented by the still image in figure 4.37, the camera moves slowly and evenly as Pablo walks backwards while keeping his subjects framed in the centre of the shot. In this shot, it is easy to forget that Pablo is present as we are concentrating on his subjects and their conversation. In the shot represented by the still image in figure 4.38 the camera moves rapidly as Pablo chases Angela frantically and the framing is erratic and we are given a much greater sense of Pablo's fear and panic. Pablo remains quiet throughout the film, whereas less professional camera operators such as Hud in *Cloverfield* and Heather in *The Blair Witch Project* give us an even greater sense of the shots being their point of view because they are so frequently audible from off-screen.

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**Figure 4.37: The camera moves slowly and evenly as Pablo walks backwards while keeping his subjects framed in the centre of the shot (*Rec*).**

**Figure 4.38: The camera moves rapidly as Pablo chases Angela frantically and the framing is far less careful (*Rec*).**

In some shots, POV and subjectivity is less important than the subject being filmed. The cinematography and the operator are less noticeable and therefore the viewer concentrates more on the character on screen (see fig. 4.37). In other shots, the cinematography and camera operator are just as important as what is on screen and this makes the shot more like a traditional POV shot (see fig. 4.38). Finally, there are shots where what appears on screen is almost completely irrelevant as the most important visual and aural information being conveyed to the viewer is

contained in the way the filming is being conducted and the off-screen sound of the operator. For example in figure 4.39, it is impossible to tell what Heather is filming in *The Blair Witch Project*. Her torchlight and some twigs are visible but in the entire 13 seconds of the shot, there is very little visual information conveyed. It is mostly pitch black with a torchlight illuminating a small circle of the ground around Heather. However, her audible breathing and the rapid movement of the camera and torch encourage the viewer to imagine how Heather is feeling and what she is doing off camera.

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**Figure 4.39: Heather's torchlight and some twigs (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

Shots like Heather's torch-lit run through the woods are technically frustrating. They are underlit and the camera movement is too rapid to allow a clear look at the scene. Editing is also significant, as diegetic camera films often prime the spectator for a heavily disjointed experience. Jump cuts, shots that seem unnecessary, shots held too long or cut during someone talking all feature in the films and often the early scenes set this out in order to prime the viewer for what appears to be raw footage. For example, about six minutes into *Cloverfield*, when Hud is first given the responsibility of being the camera operator, a sequence of shots reveals little to the viewer except that Hud is inexperienced with the camera. Jump cuts like the one shown in figures 4.40 and 4.41 below also encourage the viewer to imagine what has occurred between the camera being turned off and on again. In the first shot (fig. 4.40) we can see that Hud is panning the camera to find a new person to get a 'testimonial' from. We can infer this because he has just recorded his first testimonial with Jason and has declared that the task of capturing testimonials is 'actually kinda fun'. As soon as he captures this character in frame, the shot cuts immediately to the second shot (fig 4.41). It can be inferred from this cut that Hud has had a short conversation with this character while the camera was switched off. He has at the very least secured this character's attention and ensured the man is positioned quite centrally in the frame. This means that the viewer has imagined the off-screen time and space between cuts and attempted to fill in the blanks. However, there then follows a

series of shots (figs. 4.42 - 4.45) that only last a second each and appear to be not focussed on capturing much useful visual or narrative information. The viewer sees what looks to be the ceiling, and then three shots of a room full of people. The camera is always moving fast and does not seem to have a focus. The purpose of these shots is to show that Hud is still at the party, and that he is arbitrarily pressing the record button while he finds people to capture for their testimonies. What is in frame is less important than the erratic yet authentic manner in which it is filmed. The viewer's seeking system may be activated as s/he tries to make sense of this quick succession of shots, but more likely s/he will imagine Hud behind the camera learning how to operate it.

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**Figures 4.40 and 4.41: Hud finds a subject, then stops recording to explain what he is doing, before starting to record again (*Cloverfield*).**

**Figures 4.42 - 4.45: Quick shots capturing little useful visual or narrative information (*Cloverfield*).**

The impact that these techniques have on audience members' cognitive functions is debatable. Anna Powell (2005, p.5) writes about the use of 'fragmented images and blurred focus' in horror films in general and how these techniques undermine 'normative perspective'. These techniques, while not the technical imperfections like those previously discussed, can have similar effects. Powell (2005, p.5) goes on to argue that these techniques affect 'the spectator's sense of cognitive control over the subject matter as our optic nerves and auditory membranes struggle to process confusing data'. If the opening scenes of these films are shot and edited in a way that confuses the viewer, then we are being primed to process the information we receive by imagining what is occurring behind the camera. In order to process the visual data, we must imagine the camera operator and attempt to understand why s/he is filming in the manner s/he is.

Technical imperfections also prime the spectator for the ongoing presence of a camera operator within the diegesis. The viewer is primed to accept that his or her

perspective will be limited to what the camera operator chooses to shoot, and therefore the majority of the film will be from the point of view of the character carrying the camera. The stylistic techniques employed in diegetic camera films will all aid the audience in reading the cameraperson as what Buckland (2000, p.101) calls ‘the embodiment of the real enunciator’. The impression given is that there is no director or writer here, but instead just a character creating their own film with a camera as real events occur in front of them. To return to the scene from *Cloverfield* analysed above, the quick cuts and camera movement suggest that what we are seeing is what Hud is choosing to film. He is the sole operator of the camera. A viewer would imagine that a director or a writer of a fictional film called *Cloverfield* would take more care over the scripting, filming, selection and editing of footage for the fiction film. Every stylistic technique employed in the film primes the viewer to imagine that the camera operator is the real enunciator, and it is therefore an important cognitive task for the viewer to imagine the presence and actions of this operator in order to comprehend the scene and the manner in which it has been filmed. When the viewer imagines that the camera operator is the real enunciator, a particular mood of anticipation is created and the viewer is then primed to respond to the film in emotionally congruent ways.

#### **4.5 Creating mood and emotion**

Diegetic camera films, like most other films, attempt to establish a mood early so that audiences will be more likely to feel certain emotions as they continue watching such as a sense of dread or anxiety that will likely orient how they will feel for the remainder of the film. Joseph Laycock (2011) argues that diegetic camera films are particularly adept at instilling ‘an enduring sense of unease’ in the audience. This is largely due to the stylistic techniques they employ, as previously discussed. Following on from Greg M. Smith’s (1999, p.120) claim that ‘a primary task for a film’s early sequences (...) is to establish an emotional orientation that will guide the audience through the film, encouraging them to evaluate cues in mood-congruent ways’, the priming techniques will now be considered beyond their use in helping viewers to understand how to interpret and

read the films but also in how they establish mood and therefore lead to the desired emotions for a horror film. Films must attempt to create emotion in order to satisfy the audience. Emotions occur in no small part due to the mood that is created during the course of the film and set up early by the priming strategy. Hills (2005, p.25) concurs by arguing that ‘horror can immerse its audiences in an “anticipatory” mood or ambivalence that endures across the text’.

Different to emotions, moods last for longer and are less intense. Greg M. Smith (1999, p.113) argues that their ‘orienting function encourages us to express a particular group of emotions. While they are not as intense as emotions, their longevity helps make them a crucial part of the emotion system’. If a viewer is convinced to become anxious (mood) then they are more likely to jump at shocks and feel fear at the presence of a monster because their mood points them towards these emotions. Moods are likely to continue throughout a film, particularly if they are fed by certain techniques, predominantly in the priming pattern at the start of the film. Smith (1999, p.113) argues that moods ‘have an inertia. Moods tend to keep us oriented toward expressing and experiencing the same emotion’. Smith (1999, p.114) goes on to discuss the impact of a fearful mood on the audience:

[It] puts us on emotional alert, and we patrol our environment searching for frightening objects. Fear makes us notice dark shadows, mysterious noises, and sudden movements and thus provides more possibly frightening cues. Once we see a frightful sight, this bolsters the mood and makes it more likely that we will continue to evaluate future stimuli as frightening, thus sustaining the fearful mood. This cycle continues as long as emotional stimuli are present.

Diegetic camera films often put the audience on emotional alert with their stylistic cues from early scenes. Putting the viewer on emotional alert begins with the choice of words in the opening text as established earlier in this chapter (see figs 4.1-4.6). Except for the charismatic killer examples, none of the focus films feature any monsters in their opening scenes. *The Blair Witch Project* has a number of visual cues that hint at the horror element of the narrative; Heather

films her book 'How to Stay Alive in the Woods' and there are a number of iconographic elements such as cut-out ghost decorations on display as the film is set around Halloween. Only the dialogue spoken by the interviewees that Heather questions further hints at the monster that is central to the narrative, but it is also made clear that the documentary that the characters are making is about the legend of the Blair Witch. Similarly, in *Rec* there is no real evidence of the film having monsters, but because the film mimics reality television, it is clear that the presenter is looking for something exciting to occur to keep viewers interested. The home video examples, *Cloverfield* and *Exhibit A*, have nothing apart from their opening titles to suggest the horror element of what is to occur. Therefore, these films not are not creating a typical horror mood in their opening scenes. Without emotive music cues or the ability to intercut scenes and distance the audience from the protagonists and create suspense by introducing monsters, the early scenes create a particularly realistic mood by mimicking other media forms. While the opening text instils dread, the opening scenes do not offer much in the way of visual cues to ensure that this mood is continued.

In contrast to Carroll's cognitive account of art-horror and object-directed emotions, Greg M. Smith and others have claimed that an object is not needed in order to feel emotions and that a pervading mood will push audiences towards certain emotive reactions to films. Hills (2005, p.24) argues that 'by restricting discussion to object-directed emotion, such theories have removed objectless affects (such as mood and anxiety) from scholarly analysis altogether'. In addressing this, Hills has opened the door for a rigorous analysis of how emotions are not solely directed at or caused by single objects. Rather, horror, and in particular diegetic camera horror, primes the spectator to experience more than just what Hills (2005, p.25) calls "occurrent" emotions, that is emotions that occur at one moment and then pass'. Horror films often instil a sense of dread from the earliest frames, even before any monster or threat is made visible. By creating a mood or 'affective experience of anticipation' (Hills, 2005, p.25), certain emotions are likely to recur throughout the viewing of the film. The opening text introduces this mood; the viewer anticipates the disappearance, murder or 'sighting' that is suggested in the text. The opening scenes then focus

on creating not only the anticipatory mood but, more prominently, the ‘reality mood’. This is promoted through the nested cues that create mediated realism. Furthermore, the viewer must imagine that the real enunciator is the camera operator in order for this reality mood to be continued throughout the film.

A mood has to be sustained over the course of a film in order to increase the chances of certain emotions being felt in the audience. A film will not only rely on its early priming scenes to establish the mood but will also require what Greg M. Smith (1999, p.118) labels ‘emotion markers’. These textual cues elicit ‘brief moments of emotion’ and therefore ‘reinforce the mood’s predisposition and encourage the mood to continue’. Analysis of the opening scenes reveals that these are not often strictly what I would label emotion cues because they are very much focussed on reinforcing the reality mood, rather than an emotion of fear or anticipation. The primary function of the early scenes of these films is not to create fear but to convince the audience of authenticity and encourage them to imagine that the film is a documentary or home video or reality television programme. These cannot be accurately labelled emotion cues; instead, they are the nested cues that create a perceptually realistic film and prime the audience for mediated realism. These pro-filmic conventions of documentary realism such as location shooting, presenters talking to camera and on-camera interviews with ‘witnesses’ work in a similar way to emotion markers, frequently reinforcing the reality mood. In *The Blair Witch Project*, Heather immediately addresses the camera in the first shot, acting similarly to a documentary presenter. In the following shot, we see from her POV as she films some books and talks about them from behind the camera. Her left hand is visible in the frame (fig. 4.46) as it picks up some of the books to show them to the camera more clearly. This shot is less typical of a documentary presenter and more reminiscent of a home video. A similar shot is used in *Exhibit A* as camera operator Judith shows the camera/audience some belongings in her room while talking about them (fig. 4.47). The following shot in *The Blair Witch Project* reveals the location of a road being used and within five minutes there are voxpops that act as on-camera interviews to therefore reinforce the reality mood.

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**Figure 4.46 and 4.47: Visible body parts of camera operators (*The Blair Witch Project* and *Exhibit A*).**

On the other hand, there are other cues that cause the viewer to empathise with the camera operator, establishing a more empathetic mood. For example in the opening scenes of *Exhibit A*, we are privy to private moments when the camera operator Judith is alone with her camera. She even introduces the camera to the girl next door (that Judith has a teenage crush on), saying ‘camera... meet Claire’. Combined with the zooming in and extreme close up that Judith tries to capture of Claire, this ensures that the audience is likely to empathise with Judith’s feelings. Emotion markers such as these encourage the viewer to sympathise with the camera operator from the beginning of the film. In a similar way, Heather’s determination to get her project underway in the opening scenes of *The Blair Witch Project* is frequently reiterated by her dialogue from behind the camera. When Heather says things like ‘we’re already going to be behind schedule’, the viewer can either find her relatable as a determined young filmmaker, or perhaps annoying for being too ‘pushy’ or ‘bossy’. In either case, these moments of point-of-view shot combined with audio from the off-camera operator work as emotion cues to encourage the viewer to be aware of the camera operator’s mood and feelings.

If the style does not convince the viewer to imagine that what they are watching is ‘genuine’ footage, then the impact of the film will be considerably lessened. Rhodes (2002, p.60) argues that the problem with many diegetic camera films is ‘the (un)believability of film crews shooting in the kind of terrifying environments depicted’. However, if the priming is successful and the audience is convinced to imagine that they are watching the footage filmed by a believably dedicated filmmaking character then this will be less of a problem when the events become more terrifying. Recent examples such as the recent sequel to *The Blair Witch Project*, *Blair Witch* (Wingard, 2016) have overcome this criticism by employing cameras that can be worn like ear-pieces. This wearable technology can be left filming constantly (no matter how dangerous a situation the character



is in) and captures an embodied continuous point of view of the character that wears it. But in the focus films of this thesis, the cameras need to be held by the characters or set up somewhere by the characters. In this case, the viewer must believe that the character would continue to film even in dangerous or terrifying circumstances. Again, markers such as Heather's mention that they are 'behind schedule', or that Judith likes to take photos and has just received a new camera, prime the audience to expect that these are characters that are committed to capturing their experiences. In the home video examples, there is more of a focus on specific events that give the camera operators a believable and realistic reason to be filming. For example, *Exhibit A* shows a father announcing his promotion to his family and *Cloverfield* begins with a leaving party. These events prime the audience to believe in the use of a camera for seemingly ordinary domestic events. Similarly, in many of the films the camera is newly purchased (*Paranormal Activity*, *Exhibit A*) and the operator wishes to test it and to use it frequently as it is their new gadget or toy. The continuing point-of-view shots only make sense to the viewer if s/he is convinced of the camera operator's intentions. The reality mood and empathy with the camera operator has to be achieved for the viewer to have spontaneous imaginings that the film could be a non-fiction document.

In the case of *The Blair Witch Project* and *Rec*, the subjects of these documentaries and shows are often the search for proof or investigations of supernatural or events shrouded in mystery. This gives the characters believable motivations for continuing to film even when they are in danger. These reasons to keep filming and desires to capture proof or reveal some truth are essential and the viewer must be primed to expect that the characters will keep filming to achieve their goals and to create a satisfying media product for their intended future audience. Our seeking system is activated by the recognition that these characters are also seeking evidence, and that our points of view are aligned with the characters'.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The viewer of diegetic camera films is primed from the earliest scenes to hypothesise that what s/he is witnessing is authentic footage captured by real people in real situations with their own diegetic cameras. The technical quality of the footage is often very rough except in the case of those that mimic professional expository documentaries. The camera's presence is repeatedly emphasised through a number of recurring techniques such as having the operator point the camera at a mirror or hearing the operator speak from off camera. Often the audience learn details about the camera operators from what they say and what they choose to film in these early scenes. This causes the viewer to become extremely active in imagining off-screen space; locating where the camera is, in whose hands it is held and often even imagining the immediate situation, emotional state, and activity of the camera operator.

The effect of these techniques is to allow for more spontaneous imaginings that what is on screen could be real and thus to heighten the sense of dread and fear central to the horror genre. The viewer is primed to engage with the films as if s/he is watching a media product that deals with factual evidence or that purports to be real documented proof of a supernatural or horrific event. The viewer is not duped into believing in the veracity of the footage, but s/he can more easily imagine it is if the priming has been effective. The sensitive viewer is engaged in spontaneous imaginings of the film as a non-fiction piece of media. The opening titles prime the viewer to hypothesize about the fates of the characters as very often it is made clear that only the footage remains from the event captured.

Audiences are also limited to the point of view of one or perhaps a small number of characters. There are no objective shots unless there are instances when the diegetic camera has been set up by a character. The camera always has limitations and the audience are primed for a more restricted experience than they are used to from other films. The characters that are holding the cameras are frequently central to the stories and they are established as important by either being shown (in a mirror, on another camera) or heard (their off-camera voice). The other characters will acknowledge and converse with the camera operators unless what the viewer is seeing is supposed to be a final cut of a mock-documentary. Usually

however, the footage is either being shown supposedly with limited editing or it was an amateur production where the camera operator is not a professional to be ignored by the people in the pro-filmic event. This has important implications for the viewer's engagement with the characters, and this will be discussed in chapter 5.

Finally the priming strategies of the films create a mood. The mood will be an anticipatory one with opening titles that make the viewer concerned for the characters and the viewer will feel heightened fear for characters that s/he imagines are in a non-fiction piece of media. Most of all, the desire is elicited to get the viewer to imagine that the film is a genuine recorded audio-visual document in order to heighten feelings of sympathy, empathy and fear. This will create the 'reality' mood and a more immediate and immersive response to the films and the characters that appear to be real and caught on tape, not actors performing in a fiction. The stylistic techniques previously mentioned work as emotion cues to keep the viewer primed for this realistic experience and it is the intention of the filmmaker that these stylistic cues will be inputted into the memory of the viewer so that when events get more supernatural or less believable, the viewer will retrieve these cues that led them to read the film as plausible and realistic.

## **Chapter 5: Camera operator interaction with viewers and profilmic subjects: The case of home movies**

In this chapter I will analyse heightened engagement in diegetic camera horror films which creates empathy between the viewer and the camera operator, most notably when considering how the camera is used as a tool for communication with an imagined future audience. To this purpose, I will focus predominantly on examples from the home video category: *Exhibit A*, *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity*. These films feature the greatest interaction between the camera operator and the viewer, and the camera operator and the profilmic subjects.

Firstly, following Murray Smith's notions of recognition, alignment and allegiance, I will consider how the camera operator is constructed as a character. This will involve further examination of the POV shots used and, more specifically, of how these shots become a significant part of the performance of the camera-operating character. As a result, I will show how sound and off-screen space encourage the viewer to imagine the camera operator. I will then analyze how information is accumulated by the viewer and camera-operating character and the effects of this epistemological alignment on empathy. I will also consider alignment between responses of the spectator and camera operator, both in the cinematography and in the cognitive and bodily response of both viewer and character at crucial moments of decision-making (for the characters) in the films.

After demonstrating that the camera operators are recognisable as predominantly off-screen characters and therefore must frequently be imagined by the viewer, I will then analyse how interactions affect allegiance. I will focus on the interactions between camera operators and the viewer, and between camera operators and profilmic subjects. I pay particular attention to the ways that many camera operators and other characters in diegetic camera films seek to reach out beyond the diegesis to the supposed 'finder' of the footage. I will demonstrate how the viewer becomes an imagined (by the character) part of the diegesis. I argue that this makes the viewer feel a heightened level of engagement with the film and its characters, thus becoming more attentive to what the character says.

Despite this, the viewer may not increasingly empathise or have a differing moral evaluation of the character. Finally, an examination of the interactions between camera operators and their profilmic subjects will ascertain how empathy can be produced, and how the diegetic camera aids this process.

### **5.1 Recognition of camera operators and cinematography as performance**

There are many examples of characters in these films using the camera to demonstrate their interests, motivations, concerns and feelings. The cinematography becomes a key part of the performance of these off-screen characters. In *Cloverfield*, Rob lovingly films Beth when she is asleep. Jason only has the camera for a few minutes but turns it around to film his own face twice, demonstrating his narcissism. Hud spends a significant amount of time at the party trying to film Marlena discreetly. All these examples reveal the desires of the camera-operating characters, but there is more to their use of the camera than just being able to tell who a character desires. Hud assumes the role of citizen journalist when he and his friends leave the party. He takes it upon himself to capture his surroundings and the spectacular nature of events going on around him. For example, on the Brooklyn Bridge he films the headless Statue of Liberty, the burning overturned oil tanker and the people trying to escape Manhattan by crossing the bridge. Joe in *Exhibit A* is a different camera user from either Hud or his sister Judith. He uses the camera for play and to amuse himself and his future audience. He films his father's buttocks, beatboxes to camera, and pretends to spank his father by holding his hand in front of the camera and using forced perspective. Judith demonstrates her increasing concern for her father by secretly filming him using night vision and investigating what he has been doing while alone in the shed at night. Her camerawork suggests she is often distant and hidden from her subjects (peering from behind objects, using night vision) and is a result of her decision that she has made to hide her filming from her parents. In *Paranormal Activity*, Micah is deeply sceptical about the paranormal as he constantly moves towards strange noises and possible sources of danger. He even grabs his camera first before rushing to see why Katie is screaming, a clear sign that this is a character determined to keep filming and to capture proof no matter

what the cost. Through their cinematography, we can imagine the characters and the performances of the actors that play them.

The amateur camerawork emphasises the emotions of the users as they do not need to remain calm and objective when shooting a home video. In *Exhibit A*, when Andy asks Judith ‘why do you hate me?’, he zooms in to an extreme close-up on her eyes, mirroring his desire to read her thoughts, by examining the expression in her eyes. This is followed by his taking the camera and prying into his family’s belongings, giving him access to their secrets and letting him inside their heads. Micah in *Paranormal Activity* shows a similar need to control and understand what is going on around him by using his camera. His decision to set up the camera overnight on a tripod with a clean view of his bed and the hallway leading to his bedroom demonstrates his desire to capture everything, even when he is asleep. At the time when he is at his most vulnerable, he leaves the camera in the best possible position to watch over him and Katie, in order to give himself a better understanding of what is menacing them. Similarly, when Andy puts the camera down in *Exhibit A*, he does so in order to break into his daughter Judith’s secret padlocked box and to then capture the photos she keeps inside. Again, Andy’s determination to reveal to his family the secrets that they all keep, is clear by his ensuring that the photos he finds can be seen by the camera, and by extension his family in the future. This reveals that even when the camera is put down by characters, its employment and positioning are still revealing in terms of the thoughts and feelings of the characters that set it up. Though a camera placed on a tripod or other static surface may disconnect the viewer’s perceptual identification with the character, it still allows the audience to understand and learn about the character, such as Micah, who placed the camera in this position.

These moments when the camera is not being held by the operator also allow the viewer to see the operator on screen. The producers of home videos are more likely to turn the camera on themselves, with Micah, Hud, Judith and Andy all extending their arms at points in the films to then switch the cameras’ gazes to their own faces. Micah does this when he is talking to his camera, pretending it is a living creature and asking how it feels. Hud films himself in order to tell his

imagined future audience that 'if this is the last thing you see, then I died'. Andy also uses the camera, not as a last will but as a confessional tool, finally choosing to admit to the camera (and future viewers) that it was him who assaulted his work colleague. These close-ups filmed by the operators themselves provide an intimacy that would not be present if there was another camera operator or character present in the shot. Most revealingly, Judith sets up the camera in her room in order to practice her manner of behaving in front of Claire. These private moments are only supposed to be seen by Judith herself when she plays them back and therefore the viewer is given a privileged insight into this character's insecurity and how she wishes to be seen by others.

The creators of home videos are less likely to go out in search of danger than professional (or even amateur or student) documentary makers. In *Cloverfield*, Hud is driven to keep filming for posterity and his desire to ensure the curiosity of his intended future audience is satisfied, but he is also trying to escape the monster. In home videos, the threat usually comes to the victims. In *Paranormal Activity*, Micah is more determined to capture evidence, even if that means putting his girlfriend at risk. He may not go out in search of the danger, but he taunts the demon by shouting at it and he also goes out and purchases a Ouija board, in order to try and make contact with it. Hud's camerawork suggests a character that is trying to evade a threat and therefore only catches glimpses of the monster, whereas Micah's camerawork suggests a character actively attempting to capture and therefore confront a ghost.

The camera operators of home videos are also by definition more amateur than the documentary-making characters. This means that cinematography can frequently be more stylised and meant to look less carefully considered than in other examples of diegetic camera films. In *Cloverfield*, Hud's cinematography is often incredibly hectic, as he is running for his life or being attacked. Hud generally does not stop filming the monster; instead, he catches very brief glimpses before turning and running the other way. In the subway tunnels in *Cloverfield*, not only does the darkness make it difficult for the audience to see what is happening, but the attack of the small creatures also mean that the camera is more active as Hud

is flailing around, concentrating on fighting off the creatures. Just like Hud does in the tunnel, Judith uses night vision in *Exhibit A* in order to be able to film her father smoking in the garden. Andy then uses this same mode to film his family when he has cut the electricity in the house. Thus the film's switch to a green tint that makes profilmic events visible in the pitch-black darkness, but is not as effective as traditional lighting for filming in the darkness. However, it does reveal the determination of the camera operators to capture their subjects even without optimal filming conditions. Furthermore, night time and reduced vision will increase the mood of dread.

The home video camera operators are identifiable by their exaggerated amateur filming techniques that add to the mediated realism. Aspects of the cinematography are recognisable to many viewers from genuine home videos. Short bursts of filming accompanied by abrupt cuts suggest the excitement that comes with carrying a camera at a party for instance, where events grab an operator's attention for brief moments but the character is clearly not giving their full concentration to filming. The amateur may miss the start of conversations or events and then get bored of filming them before they end. They may be amused by the camera and their own ability to record. For example, Judith experiments with the camera's visual settings while filming herself and looking at her own face on the camera's viewfinder screen. Similarly, whereas a professional operator like Pablo in *Rec* is unafraid to get as close to the action as possible, the distance from which amateurs film their subjects can also be telling. Judith films Claire from afar as she is shy. When Rob has to tell his mother that his brother Jason is dead, Hud also films from afar, demonstrating not only a lack of professional commitment to capturing the emotions of his subject in close-up, but also his inability to express his sympathy for his friend. In this case, we are more likely to empathise with the emotions of the off-screen Hud, than with the sad emotions of the on-screen Rob. The camera's position has become a stimuli that the viewer uses to process the off-screen performance of the character. In figure 5.1, we can interpret and imagine Hud's desire to offer Rob privacy. Hud is a considerable distance from his subject and films from a slightly low angle. There is an object in the lower third of the frame that suggests Hud is positioned behind this object. He



is also to the left side of Rob and not in Rob's eye line. His camerawork is not driven by a desperate need to acquire the specific information contained in the conversation between Rob and his mother on the phone, but instead his camerawork suggests a camera-operating character demonstrating concern for his bereaved friend, but providing his friend the space he needs for privacy. He is watching his friend, but not from an intrusive position. Hud films this shot primarily to get his audience to feel for Rob, but the shot reveals Hud's feelings as well.

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**Figure 5.1: Hud films Rob from a discrete distance (*Cloverfield*).**

## **5.2 Alignment of information accumulation and cognitive and bodily response**

Much of the camerawork in the home video category of films suggests that the camera operator is attempting to systematically acquire information about profilmic events and, as a result of this, this information is received by the viewer as well. Our vision is aligned with the operator's vision. If the operator chooses to film something, we gain some visual knowledge of the object. If the operator's point of view of the object is limited by his or her position, then our own knowledge will be limited. This epistemological alignment will have an impact on the viewer's empathy for these characters. Furthermore, said alignment might affect not just the emotions of the viewer but also the bodily responses of both camera operator and viewer when they are startled by something, for example, that appears suddenly in front of the lens and on the screen. Here, we can see that the startled bodily response is linked to the emotion of being shocked or surprised. When a diegetic camera operator is shocked, the cinematography reflects this character's shock, and the camera movement itself may cause the viewer to be startled more so than if the object that shocked a character was captured by a static camera operated by an extra-diegetic operator that remains unaffected by the object.

In *Cloverfield*, it is mainly Hud who is systematically attempting to acquire information by wielding the camera. Having Hud hold the camera limits the spectator's knowledge of what is happening in Manhattan to what Hud captures. Generally, our knowledge is exactly the same as his knowledge, except that he can see more than what is captured through the lens of the camera. In that sense, our vision of the diegesis is restricted to only what is captured, whereas he can use his eyes to look around and see more of what is off-screen. However, despite this discrepancy between our (and the camera's) vision and Hud's own vision, we learn things as he does; the only exception being when it is revealed that Hud does not know that Rob and Beth have slept together. As viewers, and because our vision is aligned with the camera that had already previously recorded Rob and Beth's morning in bed together, we were privileged witnesses to events that the camera recorded. This is significant as it makes Rob's investment in saving Beth more intense for the viewer. However, from the moment that Hud takes control of the camera, we learn about the events in the diegesis as he learns. For example, when the first impact of the monster's presence is felt in Manhattan, the camera and its microphone capture an audible rumble and the sight of the lights of many buildings going out. We are 'trapped' with the vision of Hud's camera as he and his friends watch the television news, race to the roof of the building and then escape the building. It is telling that Hud spends significant time filming the television screens he finds in a store, as these screens show images of the monster from the privileged vantage point of a television camera in a helicopter. This is the only opportunity for the real enunciator to show any other perspective on the profilmic events apart from Hud's camera's perspective. The real enunciator has fake enunciator Hud rely on a further diegetic narrator (a news programme camera operator) to reveal the kind of footage of the monster that Hud cannot capture. What is achieved by this double framing is the effect of further mediated realism. If the camera operator wishes to find out more about the events that are occurring in the diegesis, then their attention would naturally turn to the news media. *Cloverfield* is a film that allows for object-oriented fear as eventually there are some relatively clear glimpses of the monster from Hud's POV, not just glimpses of the monster on the television screens that Hud films. When we see the monster on the television screens, we know there is no immediate need to fear for the

camera operator, but when Hud captures the monster itself on-screen, there is a more immediate fear for him. The monster is revealed to Hud in the same way that it is revealed to us and we learn about its appearance in the same manner as him, making us more able to empathise with his awe and fear.

In *Exhibit A*, the camera is often in the hands of Judith, the daughter of the King family. Though her brother and father take the camera out of her hands at some points, it is mainly Judith's POV the viewer is aligned with. She is often peering around corners and spying on her family and others from a distance, therefore never giving the audience a privileged or ideal view on a scene. However, while some of what is in the frame might be obscured due to her hidden position, Judith is comparable to Hud in her determination to understand what is happening in the diegesis. To some extent Hud is trying to give his imagined future viewers a glimpse of the monster, while Judith is trying to find out the reasons why her father is behaving strangely. We learn about Judith's father's financial problems as she does. She films the lottery tickets in a dustbin bag and captures her father's face in close up when it is revealed that he has to find a large sum of money within a few days. Because of her camera-operating position, we are more likely to empathise with Judith's concern for her father than empathise with her father's own stress and anxiety. We accumulate information as she does and this means that our minds process the new information through a lens of how Judith will be feeling. We do not feel as though we are Andy's daughter and mimic Judith's responses the new information, but due to our access to, and alignment with Judith, we are encouraged to imaginatively project ourselves into her situation. Because of Judith's careful filming of her father's face, we are also focussed on his reactions which means Judith and the viewer knows more about how Andy really feels than the rest of his oblivious family members that are not seeing a privileged view of his face in close up.

In *Paranormal Activity*, it is mostly Micah that does the filming, but his partner Katie also holds the camera on occasion. The spectator sees much of the events from Micah's POV as he investigates his house for the source of strange noises. Significant sections of the film are also filmed from the perspective of the camera

which has been set up on a tripod in the corner of the couple's bedroom to give them, and the viewer, a privileged view of what is occurring during the night while they sleep. While the viewer is often forced to search the frame (particularly in darkness) as the characters search for evidence of what taunts them, the camera remains static overnight, making the process of searching the singular framing of the room for movement easier than the hectic camerawork in *Cloverfield*. On the other hand, the static single shot limits our vision in terms of the number of angles, positions, distances or focal range that an extra-diegetic narrator could employ. There may be no distinct object that is visible and promotes object-oriented fear, but there are enough strange occurrences such as the bed sheets being moved by an invisible force that are caught on camera that will make fear a likely response to the film. This positioning of the camera overnight also means that there is a disconnect between characters' knowledge of events and the viewer's. While the characters, including Micah, are asleep our knowledge of what is occurring in the diegesis is greater than theirs. This lack of perceptual and epistemological alignment moves us away from empathy and more towards a sympathetic fear for the couple who we can see are in danger but who are not aware of it until they watch back the footage on the tape. This is resonant of the traditional narration of horror where the viewer is aware of danger when characters may not be.

Even without a camera operator behind the camera in these scenes, having the origin of the vision being a diegetic camera still leads to a startled response when the camera itself is attacked. In the final shot of *Paranormal Activity*, Micah's lifeless body is thrown at the camera and knocks it over. In this shot, we have no knowledge of what is happening outside of the bedroom as the diegetic camera is positioned inside the bedroom and beyond the door of the room is only darkness (fig. 5.2). Katie had been audible screaming earlier thus leading Micah out of the room without the camera. The silence and the static shot continues and there is no new audio or visual information until Micah is suddenly launched from the dark space beyond the door frame into the camera (fig. 5.3). The viewer is likely to have an involuntary startled response here because of the epistemological alignment with the camera. Though the camera itself does not have the capacity to

be startled, it does move its position when it is hit by the body and then falls to the floor (fig. 5.4). By having the origin of our vision in the diegesis disturbed, we are startled. Despite our possible previous hypothesising, it is only after this movement that it is confirmed that Katie has probably killed Micah as she is visible in the door frame with blood on her shirt. Again, because the death of Micah occurs outside of the frame where Micah has set up the camera, we must imagine off-camera space beyond the door frame to hypothesise about what is occurring in the diegesis. This heightens dread as the viewer is imagining possible scenarios and fears what s/he is about to find out.

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**Figures 5.2 - 5.4: Micah is thrown at the camera, knocking it to the floor (*Paranormal Activity*).**

There are several other more visceral examples of this in *Cloverfield* when Hud is attacked while holding the camera. In these cases, Hud's startled reaction to new stimuli in his vision is reflected in the cinematography and the viewer is likely to be in turn startled by both. For example as Hud is flying over the city, he witnesses and films the smoke that has erupted from explosions caused by bombs dropped on the monster. His audible reaction from off-screen is one of elation as he films the smoke, clearly believing that the monster has been destroyed. Moments later, the monster leaps from the smoke and hits the helicopter that Hud is in, causing him to silence his exclamations and move the camera abruptly and most likely involuntarily. The viewer of this is likely to have a similarly startled reaction as the monster and rapid camera movement are both unexpected new visual stimuli. As illustrated in figures 5.5 and 5.6, the monster emerges so rapidly from below the large cloud of smoke that it is barely discernible visually, but the response of the operator (both audio and visual) confirms its presence for the viewer. Therefore, the epistemological alignment with the camera can create a similar response from both viewer and operator because of the interaction between the operator and the profilmic events.

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**Figures 5.5 and 5.6: The monster emerges so rapidly from below the large cloud of smoke that it is barely discernible visually (*Cloverfield*).**

### **5.3 Interaction with the viewer**

In the home movie category, there are many characters that choose to directly address the camera and, by extension, the viewer of the footage. In these films, the subject is more likely to have a personal relationship with someone that s/he intends to view the footage. In this section, I will examine how the viewer is engaged in this type of communication in *Cloverfield*, *Exhibit A* and *Paranormal Activity*. I will also consider who exactly the viewer is imagined to be by the characters, and how this affects the actual viewer's cognition of the films.

Firstly, in *Cloverfield* many characters share their testimonials that are intended for Rob to take away with him and watch in the future after he moves to Japan. These characters address the camera directly and have a very specific viewer in mind. For example, Lily looks directly into the camera (fig. 5.8) and says 'I think of you as a brother, and I hope you think of me as a sister'. This message reveals that Lily is using the camera as a tool of communication, looking into its lens with a specific intention to address Rob. She imagines the future viewer watching the footage as being Rob only. The actual viewer does not imagine being Rob and receiving this message, but feels an increased engagement in the events taking place and sympathy for Lily who appears to be using the camera as confidant as well as a communication device. Lily's gaze into the lens gives the impression of eye contact with the viewer (Rob), and we are given a sense of immediacy, as though we are seeing the footage at the moment of its recording. This is a message she may not feel comfortable giving to Rob in person and it is easy to imagine that it helps Lily to know that the use of the camera provides temporal distance between delivering the message to Rob and him receiving it. This is easy to empathise with for many viewers as they will be aware that speaking to a camera lens is a different experience to speaking (emotionally, personally and directly) to someone with whom you are making eye contact. This is in part due to

confessional conventions of vlogging and reality television. The viewer feels as s/he is intercepting a personal message during the temporal jump between the recording of the footage and Rob's viewing of it. The viewer may also be encouraged to imagine what it would be like for Rob to receive this message after he has moved to Japan and how that would feel. This perhaps leads us to empathise more with Rob; he is the protagonist and he has made the decision to leave all of his friends for a new life in Japan. Throughout the testimonials when the camera is being directly addressed, we are more likely to imagine Rob as the future viewer, rather than Hud as the present camera operator. However, this is instantly reversed when the characters on screen finish giving their messages to Rob and then revert to directing their gazes beyond the camera to Hud (figs. 5.9 and 5.10) who is now relegated to the off-screen space behind the camera. This small shift in eye line (compare figs. 5.7 and 5.9) reminds the viewer that Hud is the current viewer of the footage as he is recording it with the diegetic camera. Here, the viewer returns to imagining Hud in off-screen space.

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**Figures 5.7 - 5.10: Jason and Lily both shift their gaze depending on whether they are communicating with Rob, the imagined future viewer, or Hud, the current camera operator (*Cloverfield*).**

When the intended audience is acknowledged in these films, the imagined future viewer is usually someone that the subjects know. At Rob's party in *Cloverfield*, the profilmic subjects are talking to Rob who they know will take the tape away; but later, when Hud is filming the disaster in New York, he is uncertain about who exactly will watch the footage, and therefore he is communicating with his unspecified imagined future viewer from behind the camera. He may not have a specific viewer in mind, but he is aware that there will be people that will want 'to see how it all went down', leading the viewer to imagine who might watch this footage (we know from the titles that the government has possession of it), or at least who Hud might imagine will watch the footage.

In *Exhibit A*, Judith often communicates with a very specific imagined future viewer from behind the camera. Judith seems to hope that Claire, the girl she likes, will one day see the footage. She films Claire and leaves quiet messages for her, for example when she whispers ‘we’re thinking of moving. Can’t believe it... as soon as you move in here’. She also leaves messages for her father, such as ‘I want to help’ and ‘I need to show you how much you’ve changed’. When Judith films her subjects, she does so from a distance so that the subjects do not know that she is filming them and cannot hear her words. We are the privileged viewers that hear her thoughts that she speaks aloud (similar to traditional voiceover narration), and the words that she would like to say to others but cannot. Because the origin of her point of view is distanced from her subjects, we imagine where Judith is; usually hidden indoors behind a window while her subjects are outside (figs. 5.11 and 5.12). Her voice reminds us of her presence and encourages us to imagine where she is standing in relation to the people that she films; the people with whom she uses the diegetic camera to communicate. Later when Andy is holding the camera, he tells his family that he loves them, again hoping that they will one day see the footage. The camera is a means of communicating and more specifically of saying things that characters are too afraid to say directly to others. While this occurs, we receive privileged access to the private thoughts of the camera operators and increased empathy with them.

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**Figures 5.11 and 5.12: Judith films from inside while her subjects are outside (*Exhibit A*).**

Despite this clear awareness of having an audience, the characters also sometimes use the camera as a surrogate confidant. Whether they are considering who will watch the footage or not, some characters find that talking to the camera is a means of expressing how they really feel, without having to reveal these thoughts to an actual person. In the home video category, it is often the camera operators who reveal their thoughts from behind the camera. For example, Hud mutters to himself in *Cloverfield*, ‘no one ever listens to me ever’. Both he, and then later Rob and Beth, turn the camera on themselves (figs 5.13 and 5.14) in attempts to leave a kind of final message for the future viewer of the tape. In *Exhibit A*, Andy



also uses the camera to deliver some final words of love for his family before he dies. The camera is the keeper (and then later distributor) of secrets and Andy uses it to admit that it was he who earlier attacked his co-worker. He even asks the camera: ‘Happy now?’ after murdering his daughter. So central has the diegetic camera become to the plot and the family’s communication that Andy even blames it for making his son hate him, his daughter betray him and his wife give up on him. His actions are motivated by Judith’s earlier use of the camera. The footage of her father that she has captured previously has subsequently been screened to a party full of guests, including all of the family members. He now blames the camera for revealing his secrets. We feel like privileged witnesses, but do not share a killer’s desire to murder his family. Perhaps, his use of the diegetic camera can increase our sympathy for Andy because we have a privileged insight into how he feels about his family.

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**Figures 5.13 and 5.14: Hud and Rob turn the camera on themselves (*Cloverfield*).**

Similarly, in *Paranormal Activity* and *Exhibit A*, there are other points when both Micah and Andy talk to the camera as if it were a character. Rather than imagining a future viewer or the off-screen camera operator, we imagine the off-screen camera itself. For example, Micah asks the camera if it is okay and if it has enough batteries (fig. 5.15), treating his new toy like a pet. Andy’s attitude towards his family camera is much bitterer: he tells it that it works for the family and even insults it by saying: ‘No one else will listen to me so now it’s your turn, you one-eyed little fucker’ (fig. 5.16). The cameras are hubs of family activity as there is always a character that enjoys using the camera and capturing important moments in the family’s life. The viewer must therefore imagine the camera’s presence in order to comprehend the scenes. When a character like Micah or Andy addresses the camera itself, there is no need to imagine a future viewer, but only the actual piece of technology itself and where it is positioned in the diegesis. The viewer does not imagine what it is like to be the camera, nor does s/he empathise or sympathise with the camera. In these cases, the camera operator has positioned

the camera away from the eyes of any of the characters, and therefore we are not sharing the point of view of anything except the camera. Our perception is aligned with the camera, and as it is conceived of as the only current viewer, we do not imagine ourselves being directly addressed despite the eye contact that seems to occur due to the character's gaze into the lens. This makes the viewer imagine the camera and its position, but allows us to focus on the subject on-screen, rather than imagining the actions of an off-screen operator. For these moments, we are perceptually aligned with the camera as a prop, but are learning about the on-screen subject.

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**Figures 5.15 and 5.16: Micah and Andy address the cameras directly (*Paranormal Activity* and *Exhibit A*).**

These moments when a camera operator puts the camera down or turns the camera around to film themselves are more common in the home video category than in other diegetic camera films. For example, Judith practices saying 'hi' to the camera (fig. 5.17) in order to impress Claire. In *Paranormal Activity*, Micah sets the camera up every night to film him and Katie in bed (fig. 5.18). In these cases, we must imagine the camera and its position in the diegesis, but also that the future viewer is likely only to be Judith or Micah who are filming themselves only to watch back the footage themselves. We do not necessarily imagine these characters watching their own footage in future, but we must imagine that this is the purpose of the footage and for this reason, we feel privileged that we are watching footage that has not been intended for an audience to watch. Like *Cloverfield's* governmental warning, this footage is forbidden. This can have an impact on our emotions about the characters, particularly in the case of Judith where we can sympathise with her lack of confidence.

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**Figures 5.17 and 5.18: Cameras are set up by characters to film themselves (*Exhibit A* and *Paranormal Activity*).**

In both *Paranormal Activity* and *Cloverfield*, there are times when we do not need to imagine that the camera operator will one day watch the footage back as this process is explicitly dramatised. In *Cloverfield*, Hud replays the first sighting of the monster for a crowd on the street, whereas in *Paranormal Activity*, Micah uploads the footage to his computer and watches it back for evidence of the paranormal activity he hopes to capture. This is necessarily presented differently in both films. In *Cloverfield*, because Hud is using the camera's LCD viewfinder screen, the viewer misses the moment of seeing people gather around the camera for a glimpse at the monster. The moment when Hud stops recording is signalled by a cut to Rob and Beth on their Coney Island trip, which was on the card before Hud started filming. When it cuts back to the scene on the street, it can be interpreted that Hud has rewound the footage, screened it for the people around him and he is now recording again. Here the viewer is left to imagine what happens in the temporal jump between Hud saying that he has the monster on the tape, the shot of Rob and Beth, and the cut back to the street. The viewer has to imagine that the camera has a tape being recorded over, thus justifying the Rob and Beth flashback, but must also imagine the moment with the people on the street actually watching the footage. Here we feel less privileged than in a traditional film, as the employment of the diegetic camera device means that we cannot see something of interest (the people watching the footage). However, in *Paranormal Activity*, because Micah has taken the card out of the camera and uploaded the footage to his computer, the viewer then gets to watch him watching back the footage. Either way, the audience is aware that the characters within the film can watch the footage, which is a part of the diegesis and can now affect the narrative. For example, capturing the monster or footage of the ghostly activity spurs both camera operators on to keep filming. This heightens the mediated realism of the films as the footage captured is afforded the status of evidence by the characters. We are to imagine that the footage is not only visible to the non-diegetic audience, but it is also central to the character's knowledge of the diegesis.

Though the home video category films do not have formal presenters as in *Rec* and *The Blair Witch Project*, the amateur filmmakers in home videos often take

on the role of a surrogate presenter. This is their chance to present themselves to a wider audience of whoever they imagine might watch their footage in the future. At the end of *Cloverfield*, Rob explains what has occurred so far, gives the time and date, and introduces himself to camera (see fig.5.14 ). This is Rob being formal and emphasising the mediated realism by grounding events in a specific time. He knows that he is in the middle of a huge catastrophe and that if someone finds the footage, it might be of great importance. Here we feel privileged again that the character in the diegesis recognises that there is a viewer. If we imagine that the film is real, as a sensitive viewer that wants to play the film's game would do, then we are the finder of the footage and we can imagine that Rob's words as enunciator have reached us from the past.

Due to the footage being intended for a limited, intimate and personal audience of only other family members, some of the characters are willing to act foolishly. Part of this is the fake presenting that Andy does in *Exhibit A*. Andy's fake presenting and his direct address to camera are often supposed to be amusing and engaging for the audience, such as when Andy puts on glasses, a fake beard and holds a spoon to his mouth as if it is a microphone (fig. 5.19). The idea of making his ordinary domestic life more interesting and his attempts to represent himself as a fun-loving father figure are exaggerated by the presence of the camera. This references the convention of TV reporters directly addressing the camera and emphasises that the characters are aware that they are subjects of a camera's gaze and creators of a "real" media text. In *Exhibit A*, the family even try to set up an accident for 'You've Been Framed', the television show where viewers send in their amusing home video clips. The references to film and television also extend to the character's attempting to make their home videos more exciting by adopting certain other conventions of the movies. For instance, when Joe is filming his family members chasing each other, he can be heard making fast-paced exciting music with his mouth, to accompany the chase.

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**Figure 5.19: Andy puts on glasses, a fake beard and holds a spoon to his mouth as if it is a microphone (*Exhibit A*).**

Despite the fact that these films all begin as home videos, their characters still show awareness that other people could watch the footage and a certain amount of shyness when confronted by a camera. In *Cloverfield*, Beth worries that the footage of her in bed could end up on the Internet, while Katie in *Paranormal Activity* does not explicitly state her concerns, but always rebuffs Micah's sexual advances on camera. In *Exhibit A*, Judith is concerned about her father playing back the footage in front of a party full of people, as only she is aware of the full contents and the secrets contained on the tape. All of these instances encourage the viewer to imagine other ways that this footage could be used and abused. This also reminds the viewer of their privileged position as voyeur; someone who is supposedly watching footage that s/he is not supposed to be seeing.

The characters in *Cloverfield* are the most acutely aware that they have stumbled into the middle of something truly incredible and horrific. The home video of a farewell party becomes a newsworthy amateur recording of an apocalyptic event where thousands of people die due to the destruction in the city. Hud very clearly recognises this, stating 'people are gonna wanna know how it all went down' and 'people are gonna watch this', referring to his footage as an important article that will need to be shared with the world. We are frequently reminded that Hud has a wide audience in mind for the footage and in our minds, we are a part of that audience that Hud has imagined. Therefore, we can imagine that we are a part of the diegesis, connected to Hud by his desire to share the footage with the world.

Micah in *Paranormal Activity* and Andy and Judith in *Exhibit A* have no clear intentions of sharing their footage with anybody. Judith may address her narration to Claire, but she is unlikely to ever show the other girl the footage. On the other hand, Andy is keen to ensure that the curiosity of his family is satisfied by revealing all their secret belongings to the camera. It is interesting that Andy uses other forms of visual media as proof of his family members' secrets. The photos of Claire, Joe's video of a sex act that he recorded on his own phone and finally a photo of an ultrasound scan that reveals that his wife had a third baby that she aborted. This double framing is where the camera is considered to be the ultimate

tool of proof, providing evidence of facts that cannot be questioned, although Andy still manages to misread the ultrasound, thinking that it is not of an aborted child, but an ultrasound of his son Joe. The viewer imagines that the footage is just one more piece of visual proof like the photos and the phone video in the diegesis, but is also reminded that photographic evidence can be misleading and can be misread. This employment of photographic evidence adds to the mediated realism as we are encouraged to interpret footage and photos as authentic documents, like the diegetic camera footage itself. However, we also become increasingly aware that while the footage has clearly been made with a viewer in mind, it is subjective and is in many ways skewed by the presence of the camera operator.

#### **5.4 Interaction between camera operators and profilmic subjects**

In the home movie category, the cameras' presence in the diegesis is also emphasised by the camera operators' lack of objective distance from the on-screen proceedings. The operator is likely to be audible as s/he interacts with the people s/he films. At the same time, the camera is also more likely to change hands than in any of the other types of film. For example, in *Cloverfield*, the camera changes hands from Rob to Beth to Jason to Hud within the opening scenes of the film. Similarly, in *Exhibit A*, the mother is the only person in the family who does not hold the camera, meaning that it ranges from being in the hands of Judith, Andy and Joe at various points. This means that the camera operator and profilmic subjects can often switch positions between being on and off-screen. The viewer does not have to expend as much mental energy remembering what the camera operator looks like, because they are more likely to have seen the character recently. It also makes imagining the character holding the camera easier for the viewer, than if we rarely or even never see the camera operator. Though we may spend less mental energy remembering the character because of their obvious presence in the diegesis, we are more likely to imagine them behind the camera. In turn, we are more likely to interpret the footage as specifically the operator's (often subjective) point of view. In terms of recognition, alignment, and

allegiance, the recognition of a character being constructed behind the camera is clearer because they are more often visible and audible, but our alignment with the point of view of characters might shift rapidly. When the camera changes hands, we often see what Branigan calls a retrospective POV shot. This is what Burch calls off-screen space becoming concrete. For example in the sequence below (see figs 5.20 to 5.22) from *Cloverfield*, the camera is taken from Rob's hands by Beth. In the first shot, we see Rob's POV of Beth and the following shot begins with part of a hand covering the lens of the camera before the camera is positioned in the hands of the new operator and we now see Beth's POV of Rob. The hand obscuring some of the frame acts as a reframing as we can literally imagine that Beth is holding the camera and positioning it more carefully in her hands so that she can film Rob from her point of view. This is an example of what Branigan defines retrospective POV shot structure as we know the identity of the character whose point of view we have shared confirmed for us when the point/glance shot is revealed after the point/object shot. In the case of *Cloverfield*, the point/glance shot that reveals Rob's face is also a new POV shot, this time of Beth's POV. The shot of Rob also makes what was previously off-screen space and imagined by the viewer, now concrete as we no longer need to imagine Rob behind the camera. Rob's voice is also audible in both shots in the sequence which means there is a continuity of audio from Rob's off-screen voice through to seeing him on-screen and hearing his words in the second shot.

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**Figures 5.20 - 5.22: The camera is passed from Rob to Beth (*Cloverfield*).**

This kind of camera operation is also a clear indication of how the cinematography is often more amateurish than in any of the other categories of diegetic camera film. In no traditional fiction film would the viewer be made aware that the camera operator is changing. Even most non-fiction media products would not have the camera being passed from operator to operator and this is why the interaction of the camera operator with the profilmic subjects is an excellent cue to enhance the mediated realism of these films and to ensure the viewer's imagining of off-screen space. Only in a home video would such switching of

viewpoints between operators be considered typical. Another example of amateur camera operation is when the operators occasionally reach out from behind the camera, so that their hands become visible in the frame as they interact with people or props. In *Exhibit A*, when Judith films the belongings in her room, she reaches out to pick up a shell and holds it up for the camera. In *Cloverfield* Rob throws food at Beth as he films her. In these cases, personal imagining is strongest as we imagine seeing from the POV of the character, and we have that character breaching the edge of the frame with a part of their body. The off-screen character must be imagined in order for what is seen on screen to make sense to the viewer. This is typical of the horror genre, in particular the use of the POV shot in slasher films that encourages the viewer to imagine that the killer is watching potential victims.

This imagining of the off-screen character is also strongly supported when the camera operator is involved in conflict or decision making with the profilmic subjects. At these times, there is also the possibility of increased empathy with the camera operator. The best examples of this are not in the home movie category of films, but in the segments of *The Blair Witch Project* where the protagonists have largely forgotten about filming a documentary and are in essence now only filming a home video of their time lost in the woods. In the scenes where the three student filmmakers cannot find the map that they have been relying upon to get them out of the woods, the camera is first used by Josh to interrogate Heather. In this shot (that has a duration of over one and a half minutes) Josh questions Heather about the whereabouts of the map, and Heather also questions Josh. Heather is the profilmic subject captured in a medium shot (fig.5.23), whereas Josh is the off-screen, but audible, camera operator throughout the shot. Although Heather is the subject and it is her performance that we witness on screen, it is not Heather that we empathise most with here. Josh's voice as he questions Heather and persistently claims that he does not have the map permeates the mind of the viewer more forcefully than the visuals. The way that Josh has targeted Heather with his gaze and refuses to stop filming for a minute and a half and his persistent voice from off-camera adds to our understanding and recognition of Josh as a character and we may even feel more allegiance with him as he voices his



concerns. This is because we have more access to his feelings than we do to Heather's.

Similarly, in a scene a few minutes further into the film, Heather holds the camera when Mike admits to kicking the map into a creek. This is another shot that lasts for roughly a minute and a half and although Mike and Josh are on screen, it is clearly with Heather that the viewer will feel most allegiance. Her camerawork is less stable than Josh's in the previous shot discussed and her tone from off camera turns to screaming and crying. As she screams at Mike, she cannot even keep the camera on his face (fig. 5.24), demonstrating her fury. Not only do we feel a moral allegiance with her due to the fact that Mike has done something stupid and dangerous; it is her persistent dialogue from off-screen and the frantic cinematography that aids in our allegiance and empathy with her. This demonstrates the importance not only of point-of-view shots, sound and off-screen space to the viewer's cognition of diegetic camera films, but also how important the specific interactions are of those that are behind and in front of the cameras.

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**Figure 5.23: Heather is the profilmic subject captured in a medium shot, whereas Josh is the off-screen, but audible camera operator throughout the shot (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

**Figure 5.24: As Heather screams at Mike, she cannot keep the camera on his face (*The Blair Witch Project*).**

There are other examples where, due to the camera operator's interaction with profilmic characters, we are more likely to empathise with the operators. Judith uses the camera and its viewfinder to show her father what he looks like when he starts behaving strangely at a barbeque. Filming Andy's face, Judith tells him to look at himself. The viewer recognises that she is flipping the viewfinder as Andy's eyes move slightly to the left of the lens so that he can see himself. She uses this live recording footage to try to make him see that he is acting manically in front of the barbeque guests. This interaction through the diegetic camera is intimate between father and daughter. Even though Andy is the profilmic subject,

it is Judith (the off-screen camera operator) with who the audience more strongly empathise as she feels concern for her father.

The camera operators in home videos are more likely to be noticeably involved in events. They are not objective documentary makers to be ignored by the characters on screen, but instead they are insider members of a group; whether that be a family or friends. Therefore, their interactions with the other characters and the events depicted are increased and it is easier to recognise them as constructed characters. Micah and Katie are a couple and take it in turns using the camera. Hud is part of a group of friends and while he does most of the filming, others also get times when they use the camera. Similarly in *Exhibit A*, three family members share the task of filming. The ease with which the camera can be moved from one character to another shows the informality of the productions and the transient nature of the fake enunciator. The camera-operating characters become more identifiable due to their shifting roles in the diegeses. Perceptual identification becomes stronger when the POV is shared between viewer and camera operator and also when that operator interacts with the other subjects on screen. This is most notable with Hud in *Cloverfield* as he engages with other characters and the extraordinary events unfolding around him. The camera falls as he falls and when people run from the Brooklyn Bridge, Hud is amongst them. Though we may not see his terror, it is imprinted on the camerawork, the audio and the editing as he runs for his life. He is more participant than observer. Similarly, when Andy takes the camera towards the end of *Exhibit A*, it is his hand the spectator sees emerging from behind the camera to set off the smoke alarm in the house. While the viewer may not feel allegiance with Andy because of his actions, they get a deeper understanding of him as he stands in the dark of his house, filming his family with night vision and desperately attempting to make them realise why he is behaving this way. So integral and integrated are the camera operators to the groups that they film, that their footage is often replayed for the subjects on screen. The desire to watch and share footage immediately is an increasingly recognisable trait in contemporary media culture with the prevalence of YouTube and social media and this adds to the mediated realism of the films.

## 5.5 Empathy, affective identification, and allegiance with camera operators

The audience feels a strong sense of empathy with camera operators Hud in *Cloverfield*, Judith in *Exhibit A* and Katie in *Paranormal Activity* due to their almost overwhelming imprint on the film. Hud and Judith are persistent talkers. They reveal what they are thinking frequently from off-screen while holding the cameras. Hud's fear and awe are all clear from his camera movements, his audible screams, and his talking as if to himself, but really for the camera. Hud makes it clear that he wants the world to see his footage as he imprints his feelings over the audio and visuals. This is clearly *his* document and *his* experience of the monster attack. As a result, it is very difficult for the viewer to forget that Hud stands as the enunciator and that he is present in the diegesis. His voice requires us to imagine him behind the camera. It also means that, regardless of what Hud is capturing with his camera, our empathy often lies with him as his feelings overwhelm the performance and visible emotions of those he films. We are constantly getting a privileged insight into the minds of the vocal camera operators.

Judith also makes her feelings very clear. Unlike Hud, she hopes that no one will ever see her footage, except perhaps the object of her affections. Judith has strong feelings for Claire, but instead of revealing her emotions to her, she addresses Claire through the camera, secure that Claire will never view that tape. However, Judith's love/lust is clear from her zooming in on Claire and it is easy for the viewer to affectively identify with Judith's sense of longing. Though the spectator may not be in allegiance with Judith as they may question the decision to film a girl without her permission, the spectator will be able to empathise with Judith's longing through her use of the camera. Later, she is sad that the family will be moving and then feels concern for her father's deterioration, and because she talks to the camera about this, the audience gets a privileged insight into her feelings, helping the viewer to share those emotions.

In *Paranormal Activity*, Micah is much less open about his feelings and so is harder to affectively identify with. Katie on the other hand may not control the camera as often as Micah but is more open with her emotions and therefore easier to empathise with. Her failure to cope with what is happening in the house makes it easier to affectively identify with her than with Micah, who feels in control and tends not to take things as seriously. However, motivational identification with Micah is more likely as he is driven by a desire to capture evidence of what is happening in his house. The viewer of a horror film called *Paranormal Activity* will want to witness some kind of evidence of a supernatural entity so will identify with Micah's desire to document an explanation. This means that the viewer and Micah have an alignment of activated seeking systems. Even though there is this alignment of systems and motivational identification, it does not necessarily lead to empathy or allegiance. Micah may not believe in the supernatural explanation at first, but he wants to capture proof that something is tormenting his girlfriend and the viewer will also want him to capture this proof. Both viewer and character seek proof through the utilisation of the diegetic camera.

This means that the viewer can strongly relate to the characters' compulsion to keep filming, no matter what the circumstances. This is a fundamental part of recognising the character that is being constructed behind the camera. In *Cloverfield*, Hud is at first reluctant to take the responsibility of filming Rob's leaving party but he almost immediately begins to enjoy the process. The quick cuts and flurry of camera movement that follows his assumption of the camera, along with his frequent declarations of 'I'm documenting' suggest that he is excited by the camera and keen to capture whatever he can. His off-screen voice is almost constant; whether he is telling people why he is filming, screaming or praying to God, his emotions come through insistently. Throughout all of this, it is generally easy to understand why Hud keeps filming as we have rarely stopped imagining him behind the camera.

Micah's use of the camera is for documentation and evidence collection rather than for communication. He wants to capture proof of whatever is taunting his girlfriend. Katie states that he is fascinated with electronics and this is clearly evident by his decision to buy a big camera. Katie finds his choice of camera startling when she first sees it but Micah is unmistakably keen to have the best gadgets. His television is large, his laptop setup contains software for editing and analysing audio and his camera has to be capable of picking up very quiet sounds and minute movements in high definition. Often from behind the camera, Micah emerges as a controlling and somewhat arrogant presence in the film. His determination to capture on camera a sighting seems to take precedence over Katie's wellbeing as he goads the demon in their house into revealing itself, even when advised strongly not to communicate with it.

This makes Micah a difficult character with whom to ally. On the other hand, Katie appears to be the victim of both the demon and Micah, and is therefore much easier to empathise with. Similarly, when Andy takes the camera from Judith in *Exhibit A* and decides to go through his family's belongings in order to find out their secrets, the spectator cannot be in allegiance with him in the same way that s/he can with Judith. His actions may be in some ways understandable and we may feel some empathy with him, but his behaviour is also morally reprehensible. When he finds and films his wife's dildo, his son's drugs and his daughter's collection of photos of Claire, he is clearly trying to rid the house of secrets as well as taking some revenge on his family for turning on him. Our seeking system may be satisfied that the character has sought and found objects of interest, but because these were private and hidden objects, it is difficult to feel allegiance with the seeker of such objects. The diegetic camera, the recognition of the camera operators as characters, and the alignment with their points of view can increase empathy, but they are unlikely to affect feelings of allegiance with some characters.

Most of all, the home video camera operators demonstrate both a desire to be witnesses and a lack of faith in their own sight or their own cognitive capacity for memory. The footage is their proof of an event and nothing less will do. This is

confirmed continuously in the films, particularly *Cloverfield*. Hud captures testimonials from the people at Rob's leaving party so that Rob will have proof of the event and also proof of how everyone feels about him. The fact that Hud's footage is being recorded over the older footage of Rob and Beth at Coney Island means that Rob has no proof of his enjoyable day spent with Beth. It is not just Hud that feels this need to record everything in order to have proof of it happening. When Rob enters the party and makes a short speech, there are other cameras visible in the frame, as other party attendees feel the desire to record Rob's speech as something to remember him by. When there is a distant rumble and tremor, the people at the party gather around the television to witness the news footage before running to the roof of the building to see for themselves. This urge to watch recorded footage continues with Hud filming a TV in an electronics store. McKenzie (2011, p.41) notes that:

there are several instances where the wider world is seen as Hud aims the camera at television screens (...) where the footage of the monster is finally clear, contrasting with the first-person view which barely see the monster because of its great size and the smoke and destruction around it. But it is a world-view mediated by news readers and commentary.

When Hud finally captures a glimpse of the monster through the smoke, it has to be replayed so that others can gather around and see what he saw and recorded. Viewers who have ever felt a strong desire to film or photograph something in order to maintain a memory of the subject will understand and empathise with all of these examples of diegetic camera use. However, this does not mean that we are always in allegiance with these characters, especially when they act immorally.

### **5.6 Allegiance with camera operators engaging in amoral behaviour**

Many of the diegetic camera films feature scenes where camera operators engage in what most viewers would consider to be ethically questionable behaviour. For example in the home movie category, Andy in *Exhibit A* takes and controls the

camera in the last act of the film. Eventually, he leaves the camera recording as he murders his family both on and off-screen. However, this is the only example in either the documentary and reality television and home video categories where the camera operator actually engages in murder. On the other hand, what is particularly significant in the charismatic killer category of films is how the diegetic production crews become increasingly complicit in their subjects' crimes. In *Man Bites Dog* and *The Last Horror Movie*, the camera operators become more and more involved in the killers' plans. Remy and the sound recordist characters in *Man Bites Dog* are increasingly on camera as the film continues and eventually take part in disposing of bodies and actually participating in some of Ben's crimes. Equally, Max's camera-operating assistant in *The Last Horror Movie* is often directed by Max, not only in terms of telling the operator where to point the camera, but eventually Max persuades and directs the assistant to carry out a murder himself.

The decisions of the camera operators to continue filming is often extremely morally dubious in itself. Even before some of the crews join their subjects on screen and participate in murder, rape, and body disposal, their complicity in murderous actions is unquestionable. All of the camera operators stand by as objective observers to murder as their subjects kill in front of the cameras. In the films featuring charismatic killers as the subjects of the mock-documentaries or mock-home-videos, there is less likely to be perceptual identification with a recognisable camera-operating character. Though *Man Bites Dog*, *Zero Day* and *The Last Horror Movie* all have diegetic camera operators, they are often not constructed as recognisable characters throughout much of the films. This is because the camera operators are mostly silent and their cinematography is not persistently used as a stimulus to encourage the viewer to imagine the operator's off-screen presence. We learn much less about these camera operators than we do in the home video examples. Only Andre and Cal in *Zero Day*, who mostly film each other, can clearly be identified as strong presences behind the camera, interacting with events and characters on-screen frequently. Their film is more like the home video examples as opposed to *Man Bites Dog* and *The Last Horror Movie*, which are in some ways closer to the mock-documentary examples. In the

former, there are shots that are more clearly coded as the subjective point of view of a character whereas in the latter, the majority of shots are more objective with less of the operator's presence stamped on them through movement or off-camera audio. Therefore the viewer is less likely to feel as though they are recognising and in perceptual alignment with the camera operator because there is less imagining of off-camera space and a stronger focus on the profilmic subject rather than the operator.

For example in *The Last Horror Movie*, the camera operator does not speak or emerge from behind the camera until over 20 minutes into the film. It is also relevant to note that this is the moment when the operator is asked by Max to help him move a dead body. Though the operator has been visible in mirrors earlier in the film, his face has always been obstructed by having the camera in front of it. As the operator has always remained silent even when being spoken to, our imaginings of him are limited, and there is not a great deal of character construction until he speaks and then emerges from behind the camera. Only when the operator says 'but I'm filming' in response to Max's request for help moving the body do we now recognise that this is a character being constructed that we may need to start imagining more fully. As the operator puts the camera down and moves on screen to help Max (figs. 5.25 and 5.26), he becomes concrete and our imagining of him in off-screen space becomes more persistent. However, he largely maintains his silence behind the camera except in a couple of scenes and it is only when he decides to try committing murder himself that we learn more about him as a character. The moment where we first see the camera operator properly on screen (and not reflected in a mirror) is also the moment where we are likely to begin to morally evaluate the character. Our imaginings of the character lead us to question the morals of someone who would stand by and film as people are murdered in front of his camera.

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**Figures 5.25 and 5.26: The camera-operating assistant becomes profilmic subject (*The Last Horror Movie*).**



Max's assistant in *The Last Horror Movie* wants to commit a murder but decides against it when faced with his first victim. He then displays traits that the viewer might desire to possess as he chooses to stand up to Max and therefore here we may feel some allegiance with him. However, even before this, we must consider that the horror film fan may find the camera operator sympathetic or may feel a strong sense of empathy with him or her because both operator and viewer share a fascination with the murderers. Any viewer that continues to watch these films through to the end shares a similar desire with the diegetic camera operators to watch these killers at work. The difference is that the audience knows that none of the on-screen murder is real, whereas the characters have no such knowledge.

In these films, recognition of the camera operators as constructed characters can be enhanced if they are audible from behind the camera. The more interaction they have with their subject, the likelier it is that the viewer can recognise them as a construction. In *Man Bites Dog*, it is frequently Remy the director who appears on screen, not the camera operator. The subject of the film, Ben, does not often address the camera or its operator. Instead his gaze is usually to the left of the camera, emphasising that there is another person present apart from him and the camera operator. Occasionally Andre the camera operator is audible, but such occurrences are infrequent and the only time he emerges from behind the camera is when he passes the camera to Remy, while Andre takes part in the rape of a woman. This makes Andre quite a difficult character to imagine as his appearance becomes fully concrete in the mind of the viewer for a brief moment towards the end of the film, as his time on screen is so limited. Similarly, we do not learn a great deal about the camera-operating character from the cinematography either. Only on the rare occasions that Andre is addressed by the profilmic subjects, or when the camerawork emphasises his presence (such as when he is running after Ben and the camera shakes as he runs) are we likely to imagine Andre behind the camera.

With their desire to investigate and reveal the daily lives of these killers, the crews are in constant danger. By following serial killers, these camera operators are risking their lives in keeping the camera close to the murderers. Usually, camera

operators follow their subjects until the end (their own deaths or the death of their subjects). In *Man Bites Dog*, the crew continue to follow Ben despite the clear danger after having multiple sound recorders killed. They follow their killer until they become accomplices, their footage becoming the proof of how complicit they have become with Ben's crimes. Because of this transference from being documentarians to accomplices, the crews are not sympathetic and seem to have engaged in their own perverse allegiance with the killer they document. However, when the production crew engage in rape on camera and appear to take pleasure from the act, this is when any allegiance with the characters will surely disappear. There is no perverse allegiance with the characters, only an amoral fascination with the idea that camera operators can indulge in such behaviour after being exposed to the actions of a murderer for a prolonged period. There is no sympathy or empathy for the characters when they choose to rape an innocent woman. We might expect this from the charismatic killer characters, but the production crew have thus far been observers and their transgression is impossible to ally with. I will explore the behaviour of camera operators further in chapter 6.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

To consider how the viewer is affected by diegetic camera films, we must understand that the camera operator is a character in the diegesis and this character must frequently be imagined in off-screen space. The cinematography of operators can aid in this imagining as it becomes a part of the performance of the character behind the camera. The presence of the frequent off-screen dialogue and the cinematography that increasingly reflects the feelings and distress of the camera operators in the home video examples creates more empathy and a greater engagement with the films. We feel as though we are receiving a privileged insight into the camera-operating characters' thoughts. We recognise the characters' compulsion to keep filming and though we do not share the desire to film, we do want the characters to keep filming in order for their story to continue. Both the operator and the viewer want to investigate and learn things about what is happening in the diegesis. This can be described as either motivational identification or an alignment of seeking systems. This may lead to a degree of

empathy between viewer and character, but I do not believe that in many cases it will have an effect on allegiance, particularly when camera operators act immorally.

Therefore, if we learn about the emotions, thoughts and desires of camera operators even when they are off-screen, then cinematography in the diegetic camera film becomes a significant part of the performance of the actors. The use of the cameras aid in demonstrating the interests, motivations, concerns and feelings of the operators and can encourage us to empathise more with the emotions of the off-screen operator, than with the emotions of the profilmic subjects. Even when the camera is set up outside of the hands of an operator, its position can still inform us about the character that set it up.

However, in a small number of cases when the camera is set up by a character it can mean that there is a lack of perceptual alignment with any character. Furthermore, these are rare moments when there is a lack of epistemological alignment between the viewer and the camera-operating character. This can move us away from empathy and more towards sympathy with the subjects on screen. These are relatively infrequent moments in the film and more often due to the perceptual alignment between operator and viewer, our knowledge of what is occurring in the diegesis is similarly limited thus leading to epistemological alignment. We should feel a similar sense of object-oriented fear as the operator when they film something extraordinary, monstrous or unexplainable. This is heightened in the way that we do not have a privileged view of such monstrous phenomenon. Our insight into the camera operating character's emotions might be privileged, but the vantage point from which to get the best view is often compromised.

Establishing who the intended or imagined viewer of the film is supposed to be in the minds of the characters is also part of the imagining that the viewer must engage in when watching the films. The intended audience can be a specific character in the film, or the camera operating character might imagine that his or her footage will be viewed by a much wider audience. On other occasions, the

diegetic camera seems to be the only viewer and the camera operator or the characters on screen do not seem to be envisaging that anyone else will watch the footage in future. In all of these cases, the actual viewers can feel like we are in a privileged position because we imagine that we are the interceptors of the footage. Some of the footage is clearly not intended to be seen by strangers and some of it is, but in both cases, we imagine ourselves to be the privileged few with access to this footage.

When characters are exposing their emotions because they are using the camera to communicate with loved ones, this heightens the sense of privilege, but also the empathy with these characters. We affectively identify with these characters more than others, and more than with those characters that do not have such a specific intended audience in mind for the footage. Our personal imagining is also affected because while we may continue to imagine the camera operator, there will be occasions where we are encouraged to imagine the specific future viewer that the operator or profilmic subject has in mind for the footage.

In the cases where we are strongly reminded that the camera is also the viewer of events, we do not affectively identify or empathise with the camera, but we are more forcefully encouraged to imagine its presence in the diegesis.

The interactions of the camera operator with the profilmic subjects are also important to analyse in order to ascertain how the diegetic camera device affects the cognition of the viewer. In these interactions the voice of the off-screen operator is significant in encouraging empathy with the operator and our imaginings of the operator. Our recognition of a character being constructed behind the camera is much stronger if the operator is audible, or if s/he frequently appears on screen due to the camera switching to different operators or the operator filming themselves a lot. The frequent changing of camera operators can act like a retrospective POV structure, therefore making off-screen space become concrete and confirming the viewer's imaginings of off-screen space and characters. I have also argued that due to the strong recognition of the character

behind the camera and the prolonged alignment with their POV, allegiance can be heightened with these operators in moments of conflict with profilmic subjects.

However, having a character as the camera operator does not change our moral evaluations of that character because the action remains immoral, and the shock of a camera operator acting immorally provokes a negative emotional response. The diegetic camera will not cause viewers to forget their morals or empathise or feel more allegiance with a character that engages in morally objectionable actions such as murder. What does need more investigation is the idea that the charismatic killers themselves may be able to provoke unusual emotions in the viewer due to the employment of the diegetic camera, as I will investigate in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Problematic Allegiance with Charismatic Killers: *Man Bites Dog*, *The Last Horror Movie* and *Zero Day***

In this chapter I will focus on how the use of the diegetic camera affects the viewer's cognition of the stories, events, and characters in films belonging to the charismatic killer category of focus films. Firstly, in order to show how the killer characters can be recognised as subjects that are worthy of our attention and elicit amoral fascination, I will analyse how the narration generates what could be considered a combination of human and 'inhuman' aspects of the killer characters. I will then analyse the techniques used to reward this amoral fascination, and based on this evidence, I will ascertain how these techniques affect allegiance by complicating the moral orientation of the killer characters. Perhaps, the most significant of these techniques is the interactions between the profilmic killer characters and the viewer. In order to demonstrate the importance of these interactions, I will analyse how they affect the viewer's moral evaluations of the killer by having the characters encourage the viewer to evaluate some of their own moral choices outside of the diegesis. With particular reference to Max in *The Last Horror Movie*, I consider how his combination of video diaries, footage filmed by his assistant and his questioning of the spectator provoke the viewer to evaluate some of their own moral choices, not only with respect to spectatorship, but in other areas as well. All of the charismatic killer films encourage the viewer to question their own fascination with on-screen violence and the killers that perpetrate it. The origin of our vision of the films is the diegetic camera and as the camera operators become more involved in the crimes of the killers that they document, our own complicity with the crimes committed on camera is at stake.

Furthermore, I will determine how increased alignment with the killer characters affects viewer's responses. By this I do not mean the POV alignment discussed in the previous chapter. Instead, I mean the alignment with the killers in the sense of our access to their knowledge and feelings. By analysing the viewer's alignment with these characters, I will demonstrate how the viewer may experience more complex feelings of attraction and repulsion than if a diegetic camera were not utilised. The viewer's access to the subjectivities of these killers provokes feelings

of intimacy, but also heightened disgust towards these characters. Based on this evidence, I will ascertain if feelings of hatred or fear are lessened due to the empathy and sympathetic allegiance encouraged through the employment of the diegetic camera. In particular, to ascertain the role and affect of charismatic killer characters, I will analyse the use of video diaries and interrogate Carl Plantinga's concept of the 'scene of empathy' (1999, p.239) in order to set forth how diegetic camera films complicate ideas around close-ups and performance. Instead of offering an emoting character, the video diaries use close-ups and performance to reveal characters that are difficult to empathise with due to their lack of emotions when discussing immoral activities.

I will be referring back to Murray Smith's structure of sympathy throughout this chapter, but I also wish to offer an intervention by evaluating this structure when applied to the diegetic camera film. I argue that recognition and alignment are heightened in the charismatic killer film, but that allegiance is largely unaffected due to the importance of our moral evaluations of the actions of characters, as opposed to how these actions are stylistically represented.

### **6.1 Recognition of killers and amoral fascination**

Recognising characters as killers in diegetic camera films requires far less imagining on the part of the viewer than was the case with off-screen camera operators. The killers are presented on screen for much of the film's running time and their actions are clear from the early priming sequences. Max in *The Last Horror Movie* is first revealed while beating a man over the head with a brick within a few minutes of his first appearance on screen. Similarly, Ben in *Man Bites Dog* is first seen strangling a woman to death on a train and then disposing of her body. Only Andre and Cal do not kill in the opening scenes of *Zero Day*. In fact, they do not kill until the final scenes of the film. However, they hint at the 'big-ass mission' that they are planning when they film themselves outside of their high school. The following scene shows them talking about the ammunition that they have collected and therefore the viewer can hypothesise that their plan may involve guns and what they refer to as their 'nemesis': their high school.

*Zero Day* tells a similar story to *Elephant* (Van Sant, 2003), but with the diegetic camera as a narrating device in order to make the film more authentic to the actions of the real killers in the Columbine shootings that inspired both films. This lack of immediate violence makes the two boys in *Zero Day* perhaps more worthy of attention and fascination than the killers in the other films. *Zero Day* builds towards its shocking and violent climax, slowly feeding the audience information about what is going to occur at the end of the film, rather than offering an immediate representation of murder from the opening. The diegetic camera is key to this release of information as it is almost always (except in a couple of scenes where Andre's father or Cal's friend does the filming) the boys themselves who must take it in turns filming each other. This also gives the film a greater sense of mediated realism. When the pair have to set their camera up on a tripod to film themselves or pass the camera between each other's hands, these moments act as nested cues that can potentially remind the viewer of home video productions that s/he has seen in the past. When watching *The Last Horror Movie* and *Man Bites Dog*, the most difficult thing to imagine is the kind of person who would be a camera operator when making a documentary that follows a killer, or the kind of person who would watch the footage. Because Andre and Cal hide their intentions from everyone around them and only reveal their plans to the future viewer of the footage, it is easier to imagine that the footage is real, particularly to viewers that are aware of the real-life tapes (labelled "The Basement Tapes") that the Columbine High School killers (Langman, 2014) are known to have made preceding their massacre.

The diegetic camera functions as the medium for all of the killers to share their plans, methods and actions. The killers immediately tease the audience with their matter-of-fact discussions of their actions. The conversational tone of the killers and the direct address in the case of Max in *The Last Horror Movie* is unexpected and unsettling considering the subject of their dialogue. In *Man Bites Dog*, Ben recounts how he disposes of bodies and how he finds targets based on how much money he thinks he can rob from them. He reveals the more mundane aspects of murder than committing the killing itself. This is also intercut with far more commonplace scenes where we meet his jovial, shop-keeping mother who



discusses what a 'lovely boy' Ben was when he was younger. Similarly, in *Zero Day*, we meet Andre's family in a typical suburban home and learn that he has caring parents (who have just bought him the diegetic video camera for his birthday) and what seems to be a good relationship with them. They sit at the table, chat informally and make jokes with each other. Also in *The Last Horror Movie*, scenes of murder are intercut with scenes of Max showing his more ordinary job of being a wedding videographer and his regular relationships with family and friends. In the opening scenes, Max also describes in great depth how he came to commit his first murder, attempting to justify it to the viewer and explain how someone might become a killer.

The banality of these killers and their facial characteristics complicates the idea of a generic moral structure associated with the horror film. If monsters are often encoded through their iconic appearances and therefore ensure the disgust or fear of viewers, the charismatic killers defy this easy recognition of a monster and belong more fittingly to the serial killer subgenre. The killers do not wear masks, have hideous deformities or hold distinctive weaponry. Neither is their presence on screen or their essentially 'evil' traits emphasised by non-diegetic music to aid our moral orientation as in the case of many films that foreground villains. The diegetic camera device does not allow for the inclusion of non-diegetic music as this would be undesirable when the conceit is that the film is unpolished raw footage. Furthermore, the moral structure of these films is not defined along binary oppositions such as good vs evil or natural vs unnatural and therefore the filmmakers are not encouraging our antipathy towards the killer characters by placing them into opposition with other characters that we may have been more temporally and spatially aligned with. Techniques such as sinister music, or the iconography of the traditional horror monster are not utilised here in order to distinguish the killers from their more ordinary, and morally neutral victims. This means that the viewer's response is less guided towards fear and hatred in typical ways. However, it enhances the mediated realism, which in turn makes viewers respond to these characters by imagining that they could be real, and are therefore deserving of fear.

Smith introduces the idea of 'relative desirability' (1995, p.194) where our sympathies are directed towards some characters because within the film, these characters may appear less repulsive than others. We recognise that outside of the diegesis, the behaviour of these characters would be considered amoral but because the film has positioned them alongside other characters with even more morally objectionable behaviour, we might create a hierarchy of sympathies during the film. Watching the charismatic killers, we may try and recognise the characters that are in some way 'worse' than them. The killers may even direct our assessment of other characters in order to attempt to gain sympathy for themselves. For example in *The Last Horror Movie*, there is a scene in which Max is dining with his sister Sam, her husband John, and their son Ben. Max impersonates a gecko in the way he eats. Ben then copies Max. When John chastises Ben, the diegetic camera (held by Max's assistant) pans back and forth between John and Ben. John's tone of voice, his lack of a sense of humour, and our lack of alignment with him in the film position him in opposition to Max. John sits at the opposite end of the table from Max, further highlighting the antagonism of these men that have different ways of modelling behaviour for a child. The following scene aligns us with John and Sam as they discuss Max's behaviour at the dinner table. Although we are not aligned with Max in this scene, the diegetic camera's position behind the bars of the stair rail (fig. 6.1) encourages us to imagine that the assistant (or perhaps Max) is filming the couple unbeknownst to them. Their hushed tones and the fact that John does not raise these concerns directly with Max might for a moment make us consider John an unpleasant character. Sam disagrees with most of what John is saying, further making John appear to be an unreasonable character. Even though we are not aligned with Max, this scene is exemplary of how we might be encouraged to position John lower in our hierarchy of sympathies than Max. However, most viewers will remember that Max is a murderer and that the assistant is secretly filming a private conversation. Therefore, this hierarchy might be directed by the film, but viewers are unlikely to consider John relatively less desirable than Max. Max is a recognisable murderer, whereas John is simply a stern father that wants his son to learn table manners. However, the following scene after John and Sam's hushed conversation shows Max addressing the camera directly while he is

driving. We are now again aligned with Max. He gives us full access to his thoughts on John, calling him a ‘wanker’ and eventually conceding ‘I suppose I shouldn’t be too hard on him’. This prompts the viewer to consider John as someone who does not understand Max and by directly addressing the camera and speaking his thoughts, our alignment with Max is cemented even if we do not necessarily ally with him. We are encouraged to understand Max and his opinions and motivations, even if John does not.

### **IMAGE REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION**

**Figure 6.1: The camera operator films from behind the stair rail (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

For viewers interested in the processes that turn people into murderers, the matter-of-fact way in which all of these killers discuss their activities appears to offer privileged access to the minds and lives of the killers. The diegetic camera aids this sense of privilege; the killers are offering the cameras an insight into their lives that they could not reveal to most people. But in *Man Bites Dog* and *The Last Horror Movie*, the character that is getting the killer to share so many details about himself is behind the camera. As a result, the viewer often feels as though s/he is being addressed by the killer.

### **6.2 How the diegetic camera directs moral evaluations of the characters**

The most significant element of the narrational and aesthetic approaches of these films is the diegetic camera and, moreover, the direct address of the killers. Many of the subjects of the charismatic killer category act as presenters of documentaries and TV shows. They directly address the cameras and acknowledge their future audiences. Cal and Andre in *Zero Day* introduce themselves to the camera and frequently explain their actions. They show the camera and audience their preparations for ‘Zero Day’; acquiring weapons, throwing eggs at a bully’s house and Andre even pretends at one point to be presenting a TV show. In this particular scene (fig. 6.2), Andre directly addresses the camera saying ‘Hello, and welcome to today’s episode of *Home Gun Review*. Today, we’re going to be showing you how to make a big gun small and easier to

conceal'. He then points behind him (fig. 6.3) and moving away from the camera, says 'come on in' with a smile. Andre imitates the conventions of presenters in television programmes directly addressing audiences with a welcome, a description of what is coming up in the show, and inviting the audience (and camera) to follow him somewhere. Similarly, Ben and Max from *Man Bites Dog* and *The Last Horror Movie* respectively, all explain their actions gleefully to camera. The combination of killer characters and direct address can be disarming. While the killers talk about actions such as preparing weaponry, murder, and disposing of bodies, their gaze into the camera and often jovial manner can create mixed emotions in the mind of the viewer. The imitation of presenters primes the viewer to feel welcomed and to perhaps mirror the smiles of the character on screen. The response invited is one of incredulity that characters can at once seem friendly and frightening.

### **IMAGES REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION**

**Figures: 6.2 and 6.3: Andre behaves like a TV presenter (*Zero Day*).**

Max in *The Last Horror Movie* and Cal in *Zero Day* shoot their own video diaries where they set up the camera themselves, pointing at their own faces as they speak about their thoughts and feelings directly to the viewer. In these scenes, they use a more intimate and confessional tone, rather than performing as presenters. This also creates a greater alignment with these characters than with other characters. When profilmic subjects behave more like presenters, the viewer can imagine that the character might be performing as much for the camera operator as they are for the future viewer. This is why the behaviour of characters might seem different when they have set the character up themselves; there is less of a sense that they are acting for a person who is in the room with them. The idea that there will be a gap between when they record their thoughts to the camera and when a viewer will actually watch the footage seems to provide the characters with a greater urge to reveal their emotions. Because we can infer from the killer characters' behaviour and monologues that they are filming their video diaries themselves, the viewer then does not have to imagine a diegetic camera operator. Particularly in the case of *Zero Day*, where the camera operator (Andre or Cal) is

usually audible, Andre's absence is noticeable when Cal makes his private video diaries. The viewer can sense that Cal is not talking to Andre who is usually behind the camera and is instead directly addressing his imagined future viewers. Without this need to imagine the operator in off-screen space, the viewer can feel added engagement with characters like Cal and Max, but arguably still not increased empathy.

For example, Cal confesses to the camera in his first video diary some of his reasons for committing the massacre that ends the film. His monologue reveals a great awareness of having a future audience. He says things like 'I'm staring at you through the tape' and 'we're going to leave you all behind'. His eyes gaze directly into the camera when he says this (fig. 6.4). The viewer is unlikely to empathise with Cal's feelings that the massacre is going to be 'unreal' or 'beautiful'. However, we can come to a greater understanding of Cal's personality through this video diary. It is similar to a traditional theatrical soliloquy, giving the viewer access to the thoughts and feelings of Cal that he might even be resistant to share with Andre, his accomplice in the crime. It is also interesting to note that only Cal makes video diaries. Even though Andre often seems to present to viewers when Andre and Cal are together and therefore it might be inferred that he is the ringleader, Cal's video diaries suggest that he is just as keen (if not more so) to commit the massacre. The object-oriented fear that viewers may feel when faced with a very human 'monster' like Cal is due to his ability to discuss the massacre he intends to commit with a smile on his face and then moments later discuss something incredibly banal like the tuning of his sitar that he plays in one of his video diaries (fig. 6.5). Rather than feeling empathy when watching Cal's video diaries, the viewer is more likely to feel fear or surprise that a person can outwardly appear so 'normal', but have such antisocial and sadistic personality traits that he only reveals to his diegetic camera.

IMAGES REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION

**Figures 6.4 and 6.5: Cal's video diaries (*Zero Day*).**

Similarly, Max in *The Last Horror Movie* reveals a great deal about his personality in his video diaries that punctuate the other footage filmed by his assistant. We can infer from the first video diary that Max is filming these himself as we see him move away from the camera after he has presumably started recording (fig. 6.6). Again, in the scenes where there is no camera movement or audible camera operator, the viewer is much more likely to feel as though Max is directly addressing him or her (fig. 6.7) and there is no need for the viewer to imagine a camera operator. This means that when Max directly addresses the camera, the viewer will feel a heightened sense of engagement with the film. When Max addresses us saying ‘you probably don’t approve’ and leans into the camera to say ‘me evil, you good?’ (fig. 6.8), the viewer is prompted to make judgements about their own life, rather than the character in the film. Max does this repeatedly, posing questions to the viewer in order to encourage them to consider their own behaviour, rather than contemplate anything from the diegesis itself. He asks the viewer why they would not sell their television in order to use the money to help save a starving child for example. While this question does not make a viewer think any differently about the character Max perhaps, it does encourage the viewer to consider what their answer to Max’s question actually is. When Murray Smith refers to the notion of ‘relative desirability’, he considers this to be something that occurs when we create a hierarchy of sympathies with characters within the text. When Max reaches out beyond the diegesis to the viewer, our hierarchy of sympathies may breach the internal/external division. Perhaps we may start to consider our own moral choices as less sympathetic and this will make us see Max in a more sympathetic light. In this case, we may potentially place ourselves as the future viewer below Max in our hierarchy of sympathies.

## **IMAGES REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION**

**Figures 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8: Max’s video diaries (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

However, it must also be noted that some of these killers are not as determined to try and reach out to the future viewer and instead have more pronounced relationships with the camera operators and crew. Whereas Cal and Andre have

only each other, all the other killers have a crew to follow them around. Ben from *Man Bites Dog* more frequently talks to the director Remy than he does to the actual camera and future audience. This ensures that we have to imagine off-screen space and it can also lessen the immediacy of the film. When Cal or Max talk directly to the camera and therefore the viewer in their video diaries, it can make the viewer feel a more immediate connection with the footage. When we are forced to imagine the presence of a camera operator and production crew, it can remind us of the fact that this has been recorded previously, and that we are watching the footage after a temporal jump between the time of recording and the time of viewing. In the case of imagining the camera operator that films a killer, we may enjoy the transgression of watching the killer, or even imagine what it would be like to be the camera operator that is in such close proximity to the murderous behaviour. In this case, our moral judgements may be of both the killer on screen and also the diegetic production crew.

While Ben in *Man Bites Dog* seems slightly less media-savvy and is much more likely to address the crew or camera operator than some imaginary future audience, Cal and Andre from *Zero Day* and Max from *The Last Horror Movie* are preoccupied by ensuring they give their future audience the exact message that they wish to share. The use of the word 'you' is crucial here in pointedly directing their speech at their intended audience. As Cal and Andre approach completion of their mission, they leave a message directly for their parents, the media, and the bullies who taunted them. They are consistently aware of who they hope will see the tapes and when they should see them. The viewer of the film is addressed as one of the privileged people with access to these tapes. Our emotional reactions to scenes like this are likely to be sadness and perhaps fear. Ethically, we abhor the premeditated nature of these killers' actions, but there may also be another side to our emotional response. Due to the young age of the characters and the way they address us directly, we may feel sadness that we cannot converse with these characters; that someone cannot speak to them and try to change their attitudes and affect their future behaviour. Some viewers may even feel sympathy for these young men who are so clearly based on the real Columbine killers and leave these messages for the world in order to explain their behaviour. Here, the iconography

of fresh-faced white middle class young adults encourages us to sympathise with the characters more than if they were masked, disfigured, or repulsive monsters.

Max from *The Last Horror Movie* is similar in that he also looks like an ordinary man and he also knows exactly who he is supposed to be addressing as well. He has recorded his own 'movie' over the tape of another movie called '*The Last Horror Movie*'. Anyone who now rents this fictional film will get to see Max talking directly to them. He constantly taunts the viewer, questioning them and making assumptions about them. He opens with 'Hello, I realise this isn't what you were expecting' before teasing the viewer with short bursts of violence and asking 'you're interested now aren't you?' Max is targeting the average horror movie viewer, but trying to make him or her realise that s/he is hypocritical if s/he does not like his film of supposedly 'real' violence when s/he is happy to watch a fiction film full of fake murder. He continually interrogates and accuses the viewer, saying things like, 'now you really hate me don't you?' and 'why are you still watching?' More than any other charismatic killer, Max tries to engage with the viewer. In this case, Max believes that although he is being watched on screen by a viewer, he is not a fictional character in a film. He has made it clear that this is not a film that you can rent in a video store, and rather it is a real home video that he has created. An audience will find themselves evaluating their own moral choices because Max directly speaks to the viewer from out of the diegesis. He is not speaking about other characters in the story world, but directly asking the viewer questions about their own moral choices. When Max questions how many children could be saved from starving if the viewer would only sell their television, the direct address monologue encourages the viewer to consider his or her own ethical behaviour. By the end of the film, he even attacks a person who he has followed home from the rental shop after they rented '*The Last Horror Movie*'. The filmmaker attempts to destabilise the boundaries between diegetic and non-diegetic and convince the viewer that Max could be waiting for the real viewer to finish the film before he attacks. How scared the audience might feel towards this ploy may depend on how they morally evaluate themselves for sitting through a film that purports to contain scenes of real murder.



The charismatic killers in these films are also generally keen to gain some prominence or validation from being filmed. Andre and Cal from *Zero Day* are particularly keen for people to know how they went about preparing for their mission. They make reference to the fact that after their massacre, people will want to scrutinise their videos for clues as to why they committed it. Similarly, Max has points he wants to make and is determined to make sure that people see his film and question their own beliefs while watching it. Andre, Cal and Max all want their audiences to see them as rational individuals who do what they do for their own reasons, and not simply because they are crazy. Ben in *Man Bites Dog* even offers to help finance the remainder of the film so that the crew can continue to follow him. These instances explain the need for the camera in the diegesis and make the prolonged and sustained alignment with these characters a desire of the killer characters themselves, rather than a desire of an extra-diegetic narrator.

The act of filming and capturing footage on camera is essential to the killer characters' desire to be revelatory and transparent, and allow access for audiences to their subjectivities. In *The Last Horror Movie*, Max directs his assistant with the camera and treats his film as an experiment in some parts. For example, he sets up the killing of a couple who are facing each other and tied to chairs, with two cameras so as to be able to capture the stabbing of each, but also the reactions of the opposite victim. In the sequence below, he explains the experiment (fig. 6.9), then instructs his assistant to film the male victim as he stabs the female victim (fig. 6.10). We must imagine the murder of the female victim from the sounds we hear coming from off-screen. In figure 6.11 the assistant then films the female victim (now deceased) as Max stabs the male victim, leaving us to imagine the second off-screen murder from the sounds we hear. However, Max has set up a second camera to capture the moments where he commits the murders, but he withholds the footage. This allows Max to pause between committing the murders and revealing the footage. In this pause, he directly addresses us and asks if we are curious to see the footage of the murder (fig. 6.12). The footage of the murders (figs. 6.13 and 6.14) are then cut in to make our imaginings of the off-screen murders concrete. There is no alignment with either Max or the victim at the moment of murder. Instead of sympathising with the victims, we are encouraged

to question our own curiosity and amoral fascination with the killer and the graphic details of the murders.

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**Figures 6.9 - 6.14: Max's experiment (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

Andre and Cal in *Zero Day* are the most deliberate in documenting their preparations, but also their motives. One of their major concerns is that the footage will be pored over by the media in the aftermath of their school shooting. The footage is therefore precious to them, and it is their desire that it will be watched by people after their deaths. They introduce themselves to camera as the 'army of two', Cal creates frequent video diaries and they even film themselves storing their footage in a safety deposit box. These scenes show how precious they consider their footage to be and how it must remain undiscovered before their deaths. The pair talk about who will watch the tapes and how they 'bequeath' the tapes to the media when they are gone. We are given constant access to their subjectivities due to their reliance on the diegetic camera. Cal calls those who see the tapes first – in their unedited form before the media cut up the footage – the 'privileged few'. Andre and Cal have the benefit of planning the time and manner of their own deaths. This means that their footage can contain what they deem is proof of their parents not knowing anything about their plans, and also Andre's cousin's innocence of any wrongdoing as they show that they stole his guns without the character's knowledge. Andre and Cal even burn many of their possessions in an attempt to convince the viewer that music, films, and videogames are not responsible for their actions. They acknowledge that by the end, there will be thirty hours of footage 'to sift through', giving the viewer a detailed account of their preparation but also leaving the viewer of the film to understand that what they are watching must be edited excerpts. However, despite perhaps imagining what might be in these thirty hours of footage, the viewer feels like s/he has privileged access to these characters through the diegetic camera. Their keenness to relieve anyone or anything else of any blame in their crime makes it challenging to place Andre and Cal in a hierarchy of sympathy with any other more or less morally objectionable characters.

Furthermore, in the penultimate scene of *Zero Day* when Andre and Cal have put down their diegetic camera and left it outside the school, the film switches to surveillance camera footage supposedly taken from inside the school as Andre and Cal commit their shooting spree. In this scene, there is a lack of access to the subjectivities of either the killers or their victims. We can see the killers' actions as they move around the school and shoot students but our perspective is always limited to what the surveillance cameras can see (fig. 6.15). This does not allow the viewer to read the facial expressions of either victims or killers. The audio is from a phone call made to the police by one of the victims that is now deceased. In this audio we hear screams and the killers talking and shouting and the sound of gun shots. However, it is often impossible to ascertain who is screaming or crying (fig. 6.16). The employment of surveillance camera footage means that this is where our alignment with all of the characters is most limited and it is also the moment where the killers commit their most heinous actions. Therefore, at this crucial moment in the film, alignment and allegiance converge as we are distanced from the killers in terms of our perception of them and also our moral evaluation of their behaviour.

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Figures 6.15 and 6.16: Surveillance camera footage (*Zero Day*).

### **6.3 Empathy, the killer's face, and the close-up**

More often than not, medium shots and close-ups are used to capture the performances of the actors, and therefore the facial expressions and bodily actions of the characters. In the video diary scenes of *The Last Horror Movie*, Max chooses to film himself in close-up. In each of the films, there are moments when a killer's face is caught in close-up but these are unlikely to make the spectator ally with them as s/he has made a negative moral evaluation of the character. No matter how familiar the characters become through recognisable emotive facial expressions, the viewer resists empathising with the killers due to a number of factors. Plantinga (1999, p.239) labels certain moments in a film as 'scenes of

empathy'. This is where the locus of attention is on a face often in close-up, the pace of the film may slow to allow the viewer time to read the character's facial expression, and consequently the viewer is invited to contemplate the interior emotional experience of a character. Plantinga argues that these moments linger on the human face to 'elicit, clarify, and strengthen affective response - especially empathetic response' (1999, p.240). The video diary scenes in diegetic camera films work differently from Plantinga's concept of scenes of empathy, but there are similarities that are worth exploring.

Plantinga argues that scenes of empathy work because the viewer is likely to experience emotional contagion. We 'catch' the emotions of the character on screen due to affective mimicry and facial feedback (1999, p.242). Affective mimicry occurs when we simply mimic the facial expressions of others and facial feedback is the theory that our facial expressions cause us to feel the emotions we express. Therefore if we see a character smiling, we are also likely to smile (affective mimicry) and furthermore when we begin to smile, signals are sent to our brains that make us feel happier (facial feedback). Plantinga references an experiment that demonstrates that the faces of people who are listening and watching a storyteller will often mirror the facial expressions of that storyteller. The charismatic killer characters are excellent examples of storytellers whose facial expressions we could potentially mirror. For example in *Man Bites Dog*, when Ben enters the apartment of an elderly lady with a heart condition, he kills her by shouting at her unexpectedly, knowing that she will have a heart attack. Ben smiles with what could be read as a mixture of pride and amusement on his face (fig. 6.17). He speaks to the camera directly, while the woman presumably dies behind him. The viewer could mimic Ben's smile and find Ben's amusement at the situation humorous, but I believe that most viewers will resist the affective tenor of these characters despite many aspects of the film that might ordinarily elicit empathic responses. Though Ben's direct address draws the viewer's attention to him, it is the elderly lady who attracts our sympathy. Some viewers will locate black humour in this scene, finding its horribleness funny. However, Ben's amusement is directed towards the viewer and the diegetic camera's claims

to realism make this harder to laugh at than other examples where black humour is used in films.

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**Figure 6.17: Ben's amusement at murder (*Man Bites Dog*).**

Plantinga identifies a range of elicitors (1999, p.248) that he argues are characteristics of the film that are designed to elicit an emotional response. These elicitors are attention, duration, allegiance, narrative context and affective congruence and are worth considering in turn in relation to the charismatic killer category of diegetic camera films. I argue that charismatic killer films do not encourage empathy despite some scenes sharing the traits of what Plantinga defines as 'scenes of empathy'. The diegetic camera can be used to elicit responses from the viewer, but in the case of charismatic killer films, the response elicited is rarely empathy. For example, to return to the video diary scenes in *The Last Horror Movie* and *Zero Day*, it is clear that many of Plantinga's elicitors are present. Attention is focussed on the facial expressions of the killer characters (see figs. 6.4 and 6.7) and furthermore, these are often long, uninterrupted takes so the duration of the shots should potentially give the viewer time to 'catch' the emotions of the character. What is missing is the allegiance of feeling attraction to these characters. Both Max and Cal have their video diaries positioned intermittently through the narratives and although Cal does not kill anyone until the end of the film, the viewer is unlikely to develop any allegiance with him. Max kills regularly, so in between moments where the camera is positioned to focus our attention solely on him and what he is saying, we are frequently reminded that he is capable of committing murder.

On the other hand, Cal's video diaries are not positioned between scenes of violence. They are leading to the violence we know is coming, therefore heightening viewer feelings of dread. We see Cal and Andre playing with fireworks and then preparing bombs in the scenes before Cal's video diaries. The use of fireworks appears harmless, but having Cal discuss what can be used as shrapnel in a homemade bomb will leave the viewer with a feeling of anger

towards Cal. This means that the narrative context does not encourage allegiance. However, Plantinga also argues that laying the proper foundations for eliciting empathy also involves watching a character in a private moment. He argues that scenes of empathy work most effectively when the character is not being observed by any other character and, therefore, when the viewer reads the character's facial expression, s/he will know that the character is not performing or faking an expression for the benefit of other characters. This is where the use of the diegetic camera complicates the notion of elicitors. Although the video diaries clearly show the killer characters Max and Cal alone, they are also both aware of their imagined future audience. We witness long takes of the characters speaking their private thoughts, often pausing and revealing shifting facial expressions, but their employment of a diegetic camera is more likely to create feelings of antipathy than sympathy or empathy. We feel privileged as viewers to get what seems to be an insight into the minds of the killers, but we must also question how much the killers are performing for the audience they know will one day watch the footage. The video diary offers some illusion of privacy but the diegetic camera also affects how the character behaves. Therefore, the employment of the diegetic camera does not elicit empathy and, conversely in fact, is more likely to elicit antipathy. I would suggest that this is the case because the viewer may resent the character and camera for keeping secrets from the authorities. The viewer dislikes the character for revealing his thoughts to a camera and not to another character who might have been able to stop the murders. The viewer also may feel an irrational antipathy towards the camera for not being found by someone who could stop the killers from committing murder.

Finally, Plantinga also argues that scenes of empathy are aided by affective congruence (1999, p.254). For example, if sad music accompanies a close-up of a character with a morose facial expression, then the viewer will be more likely to catch the emotion from the character. Diegetic camera films are notably lacking a non-diegetic soundtrack. While music could be utilised to make the viewer feel sad, happy, or angry at the character, diegetic camera films do not encourage this affective congruence. A soundtrack could be added to the films but it would lessen the mediated realism. The charismatic killer category of films therefore

privilege mediated realism over encouraging empathy or antipathy. While the lack of music to reinforce the affective congruence could feel estranging, it does not because of mediated realism. We might expect sinister music when a murderer discusses their behaviour in a traditional film, but in diegetic camera films, the music would actually have the effect of lessening the realism created by the aesthetics.

Furthermore, there is not a non-diegetic soundtrack added over scenes of murder. The camera does occasionally linger on the faces of victims during murders in *Man Bites Dog* and *The Last Horror Movie* but these are not structured like Plantinga's scenes of empathy in terms of narrative context, allegiance or affective congruency. For example in *The Last Horror Movie* Max stabs a woman in the stomach and directs his camera-operating assistant to get a close-up of the woman as she dies. The close-up guides our attention as the woman breathes rapidly and stares at the diegetic camera. The duration of the entire shot is approximately three minutes from Max descending the stairs in the woman's house to when she finally appears to take her last breath. The final two minutes of this shot is focussed on the woman's face and for the majority of those two minutes, Max's face also shares the frame (fig. 6.18). The scene is less about encouraging our sympathy for the victim and more about aligning us with Max and giving us access to his thoughts on the murder. Due to our lack of access to the victim (prior to this scene), if this is a scene of empathy, then it is designed to elicit our catching of Max's feelings of excitement. Nevertheless, despite our alignment with Max, the duration of the shot and our attention being guided, it is difficult to feel any allegiance with Max during this scene.

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Figure 6.18: Max and one of his murder victims (*The Last Horror Movie*).

#### 6.4 Moral Structure: Killers and camera operators

I will now return to Murray Smith's concept of allegiance in order to consider how allegiance might be encouraged by creating a moral structure or hierarchy within a film. To return to the scene from *The Last Horror Movie* described in the previous paragraph, it is important to remember that three characters are present - Max and his victim, and the off-screen camera operator. With three characters to morally evaluate, it is therefore useful to employ Smith's notion of the graduated moral structure (1995, p.207) and how this may affect allegiance. The charismatic killer films have quite complex moral gradations with the characters frustrating clear binary oppositions of values. The killer characters, their victims, and the camera operators are often all in the same scene. We generally learn very little about the characters and the camera operators must frequently be imagined in off-screen space. Therefore, our attention is mostly on the killers who are represented as being capable of evil actions. However, they have a combination of culturally negative and culturally positive traits. Smith calls a character like this an 'alloy' (1995, p.209), arguing that our judgement of such a character is less severe than if s/he were to have no culturally positive traits. Smith believes that an alloy character denies the viewer the opportunity to have an uncomplicated hatred towards that character. For example in *The Last Horror Movie*, because we see Max picking his nephew up from school and having a generally positive relationship with his sister and his grandmother, we are encouraged to think about Max in a more nuanced manner than if he were only seen killing people throughout the film, as in a traditional serial killer film.

However, even a scene such as this one is structured to create suspense and encourage the viewer to fear Max's intentions. In this scene, the diegetic camera first films the boy from a distance as other children from the school can be seen in the frame but walking away (fig. 6.19). The camera zooms in slowly and as the sound of the group of children starts to dissipate, the boy standing against the wall is framed so that he is the only character in shot (fig. 6.20). We immediately sense that the camera operator is watching this lone boy specifically and waiting for the other children to disperse. There is a cut to the following shot which is almost like a point/glance shot, in that if we read the preceding shot as Max's camera-operating assistant filming the child (the point/object shot) then the following shot



of Max's face (fig. 6.21) as he looks off-camera suggests that it is he that is watching the child (along with his camera operator). Max is also surrounded in the frame by the bushes behind him, suggesting he may be hiding himself from the other children that exited the previous shot. In the next shot, we follow Max as he approaches the child (fig. 6.22). Since this is the first time that we have met the child, we do not yet know that he is in fact Max's nephew. When Max says 'are you waiting for your Mummy?', it also suggests that Max might not know the child and therefore he is not supposed to be picking him up. Everything we have been told about Max up to this point suggests that he is a killer and that the film he is making is about killing. When he asks the boy 'do you want to be part of our film?' and points towards the diegetic camera (fig. 6.23), it raises the viewer's concern for the boy. Here we have a case of Max as murdering psychopath appearing to be abducting an innocent young boy. When Max leads the child away, the last audible part of his conversation is Max telling the boy he has his car nearby (fig. 6.24). The diegetic camera operator does not follow as Max and the boy walk away. This has two functions; as a result, we cannot hear the rest of Max and the boy's conversation. Secondly, we can imagine that if the camera operator has any morals, perhaps he does not want to film what Max is about to do to the boy. However, the next shot then reveals that Max is dropping the boy at home and we are now led to realise that this is the home of Max's sister and this boy is his nephew.

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**Figures 6.19 - 6.24: Max picks up his nephew after school (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

Due to the viewer's lack of information about Max and the boy's relationship, s/he cannot assess the risk of the situation. In fact, we are positioned to read Max as a threat to the boy and to morally evaluate Max in the most negative terms. The revelation that he is actually taking the boy to his mother ensures that our moral evaluation of Max must change. We recognise that Max does not simply display culturally negative traits and that he is being represented in the text as morally complex. This scene and a number of others play with audience expectations of

what Max is capable of. Similarly, in a later scene where Max visits his grandmother, the relationship between Max and the old lady is not revealed at the beginning of the scene. We see Max arriving at a door, knocking on it and then the door is opened. However, before the door is opened Max turns to the diegetic camera and stares at it for a moment. This shot is not a scene of empathy, but as Max turns to face the camera and allows the viewer to see his facial expressions clearly, it does give the viewer a chance to try and read Max's facial expressions. With the narrative context setting Max up as a murderer in the mind of the viewer, the look that Max gives the camera is unsettling (fig. 6.25). His eyes narrow and his jaw clenches slightly. It is likely that a viewer might hypothesise that Max has bad intentions towards whoever opens the door. When his grandmother says 'yes?' as she appears, it is not a warm welcome of recognition, but more of a questioning of who Max is and what he wants. When she asks 'what's all this?' and stares at the diegetic camera (fig. 6.26), Max tells her (like he did with his nephew) that they are making a film. This again reminds the viewer of the presence of the camera operator, but also that the purpose of this film is for Max to explain why he kills people. It is only after a minute of the grandmother pouring tea, when Max finally calls her 'grandmother', that the viewer may feel able to relax in relation to Max's intentions. In terms of storytelling technique, this creates a rhyming pattern. Like the scene with his nephew, this scene also sets Max up as a threat to what appears to be an innocent and vulnerable character. We fear Max as a cold-hearted murderer and question his intentions towards these secondary characters. But again, like in the scene with his nephew, we are forced to re-evaluate our perception of Max's morality.

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**Figures 6.25 and 6.26: Max visits his grandmother (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

What complicates the moral structure of these films further is the inclusion of the diegetic camera operators. Where do these characters fit in the moral structure? Do we receive enough information about the camera operators to make informed moral evaluations about them? I believe that we do, but where we would position these camera-operating characters on a spectrum of moral behaviour differs across

the films. Because these camera operators are predominantly off-screen in *The Last Horror Movie* and *Man Bites Dog*, perhaps their subjectivities are not clear enough to the viewer so that they cannot function as what Smith calls ‘a personalized emblem of a clear moral state’ (1995, p.214). What is clear is that there is likely to be a disparity between the viewer’s responses to what s/he sees and how the fake enunciators respond to what they film. While the spectator is aware of watching a fiction text, the camera operators are responding to what is real in the diegesis to which they belong. The fictional filmmakers witness murder and rape and do little to interject in most cases; sometimes they participate. We must contemplate the morals of the diegetic camera operators who believe that what they are filming is real. Our moral evaluation of these camera operators can in some cases be more unsympathetic than towards other characters. For example, Remy and his crew in *Man Bites Dog* become accomplices to Ben’s rape and murder of a woman. In this case, we judge these characters more severely for their actions. Their emergence from off-screen observers to on-screen participants is a shock. Prior to this scene, the diegetic crew had only participated in activities such as drinking with Ben. If the viewer related to the operator, it was because they shared the position of observer to Ben’s crimes. The emergence of the crew (director, camera operator and sound recorder) from off-screen to engage in a rape on camera is a shock and a jarring betrayal for the viewer. It questions the culpability of observers and encourages viewers to question their own culpability when watching such events. However, because the viewer is aware that they are watching fiction, but imagines the diegetic crew as engaging in what they perceive as real events, the viewer judges these characters more critically. We expect evil actions from Ben, but to see the diegetic crew engage in these actions is shocking. The amoral fascination with Ben that the viewer and the diegetic crew shared has now become something else. The viewer might be forced to question whether amoral fascination can lead to amoral behaviour. It is during this scene that Ben starts to be repositioned on the moral spectrum. Instead of evaluating Ben as the most morally reprehensible character, the crew have become the more guilty characters for their part in Ben’s crimes.

Furthermore, soon after this scene takes place, the narration begins repositioning Ben again. He is represented as a victim because a number of the characters that he is close to are murdered. Due to our alignment with Ben, it is his distress that we witness as his family members are killed. However, due to our persistent alignment with Ben throughout his random, unprovoked and cruel killings earlier in the film, viewers will not easily forget what they have seen. Even when Ben discovers the body of his mother and there is a prolonged shot of Ben reacting to the discovery, it is not a successful scene of empathy due to the viewer's memory of the crimes Ben has committed. Although Ben is experiencing a terrible event and this might be an ideal time for the viewer to feel some sympathy for him, this would suggest that the viewer forgets the narrative context developed thus far in the film. The memory of the viewer and the narrative context developed thus far in the film will ensure that the viewer remains disgusted by the actions of both Ben and the crew that follow him, particularly as the viewer is never given the opportunity to recognise or become aligned with whoever is attacking Ben's family. Our moral orientation is not dynamic in this case because though we may be being encouraged to sympathise with Ben by the end of the film, it is a rare viewer that will change their earlier evaluation that Ben is a monstrous character.

On the other hand, our moral evaluation of the camera operator in *The Last Horror Movie* is likely to be less severe and more dynamic. When the camera operator does emerge from off-screen to participate in a murder, he is unable to go through with it. He is first interviewed on camera by Max in a lengthy single shot. We can imagine that Max is now the off-camera operator in this scene as his voice can be heard as he speaks from somewhere presumably behind the camera. This long take works like a scene of empathy and Max continually zooms in from a wide shot to a close-up (fig. 6.27) thus ensuring that our attention is focussed fully on the assistant. Max does a significant amount of the talking, which also allows the viewer to concentrate on the facial expressions of the assistant. It becomes clear that even if he is claiming that he is ready to start committing murder, the assistant's facial expression suggests that he is conflicted. In the following shot, Max is again the camera operator as we can infer from his off-screen voice as he tries to choose a victim for his assistant (fig. 6.28). This shot again shows that the

assistant is having doubts. Max's control of the camera and filming of potential targets reveals his willingness to target anyone from businessmen to mothers with children. Our point-of-view alignment with Max does not create allegiance with him, but instead we feel more closely aligned with the assistant as this is another opportunity to read his facial expressions and decipher how he is feeling (fig. 6.29). The shot ends with the voice of Max saying 'this one looks a possibility'. Again, the assistant does not seem to be an active participant in choosing this victim so we may place him in a more positive position on our moral spectrum. The next shot reveals the assistant trying to hurt the victim with a piece of wood (fig. 6.30), but after some failed attempts to kill her, Max enters from off-screen to kill the victim because the assistant is unable to do it. Our evaluation of the assistant remains more positive than our evaluation of Max here. Max taunts and questions the assistant (fig. 6.31). Though it is still Max's point-of-view we are aligned with, we are given time to read the assistant's facial expressions, recognise his emotions and we are aligned with him as a character more so than when he was an off-screen operator. When the assistant holds a knife out towards Max and tells him that Max must stop committing murder (fig. 6.32), the assistant finally becomes a subject for our allegiance. This is an example where moral orientation is dynamic and our feelings for this character are likely to shift and develop.

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**Figures 6.27 - 6.32: The camera-operating assistant becomes the subject (*The Last Horror Movie*).**

What is lacking in all of the films is any time spent aligned with the victims making it almost impossible to feel much empathy towards them. The use of the diegetic camera and our prolonged and total alignment with the diegetic crews and the killers mean that the narration largely avoids aligning us with any victims. The only scenes featuring victims are the scenes in which they are murdered. There is no opportunity to fully recognise these characters as likeable, sympathetic or complex human beings. Even altruistic emotions for the dying characters are not

encouraged because of the lack of alignment. Murder scenes may even feature some elements of scenes of empathy such as attention and duration, but these scenes also lack the narrative context and affective congruency to encourage an empathetic, or even fully sympathetic response. In the case of most murder scenes, the viewer's attention is divided between the face of the victim and the face of the murderer and it is our amoral fascination and continued alignment with the murderer that encourages us to focus our attention more on the face of the murderer. This aligns the viewer more with the camera operators who choose to make killers the subjects of their films, rather than focussing their (and our) attention on victims.

As a result, the moral centre of the charismatic killer films lies with the murderers. Only the morality of the diegetic crews is considered beyond the central character. The viewer is not aligned enough with the victims to learn anything of them as people. The secondary characters in all of the films fail to deliver their own moral stances except in rare occasions. In *The Last Horror Movie* for example, it is only the assistant who challenges Max's morals and he is murdered soon after. Max's sister and her husband argue over Max's behaviour at the dinner table, but Max is never challenged directly. Max's moral stance is so pervasive that he uses it to question the morality of the viewer, as I have previously discussed. Similarly, Ben is never challenged in *Man Bites Dog* until someone begins killing his loved ones. This only suggests that Ben is a part of a cycle of vengeance where violence is doled out as retribution for former acts of violence. Likewise, Andre and Cal in *Zero Day* argue that their actions are vengeance for being insulted and tormented at their high school. Their moral stance is delivered directly to the diegetic camera in a video diary where they both carefully explain the reasons for their future massacre. By aligning us so completely with the killers, their morality is rarely challenged and it is up to the active viewer to make moral evaluations of his or her own, perhaps in opposition to the morals of the principal killer characters.

Furthermore, the moral resolutions of the films complicate allegiance in the charismatic killer category. The killer's morals remain unchallenged in all of the films. In *The Last Horror Movie* most obviously, the film ends with Max

threatening the viewer directly by suggesting he is targeting the current viewer of the film as his next victim. In this case, the moral resolution is one that directs us to imagine that Max's crimes can go unpunished and that by watching his film, the viewer has become positioned as a target. Max may have encouraged the viewer to question his or her own morals, but when Max directly addresses the camera at the end of the film, his words are supposed to create object-oriented fear as the viewer evaluates him as a dangerous character. On the other hand, both *Zero Day* and *Man Bites Dog* offer slightly more complex moral resolutions. Andre and Cal achieve their goal of massacring students and then killing themselves. Their parents and the police fail to stop them and because the boys' desire was to kill themselves, they essentially die unpunished for their actions. The final scene of the film however takes place in the days following the massacre. Crosses for each of the killed students have been erected outside the school. There are also two crosses for Andre and Cal. After the surveillance camera footage of the shooting massacre, *Zero Day* switches to a new fake enunciator for this final scene where a group of young people go to the newly erected crosses, find Andre and Cal's and set light to them. This is an unsettling final image as the immediate association of burning crosses in the minds of many viewers with some knowledge of American history will be the actions of the Ku Klux Klan. Whether the young men in the final scene are ignorant of this association or whether they are aware, but unbothered by the signification, the moral resolution of the film is complicated by their actions. The viewer may empathise with the desire to desecrate the crosses of the killers, but the imagery of burning crosses is a symbol of intimidation, racism and a misguided use of religious symbols. This image ends the film with the killers as the final victims of vengeful actions and therefore further complicates the moral resolution.

Finally, *Man Bites Dog* is more conventionally moral in its resolution. Ben and the diegetic crew are all killed in the final shot of the film. Being aligned with Ben as he discovers the murder of his loved ones might have directed the viewer towards a fleeting moment of sympathy for him, but seeing both Ben and his crew die feels like a conventional form of justice as violent characters are often killed in films in violent ways. Ben and the crew's deaths at the end of the film are likely

to be the only moment of the film where the viewer can feel any relief or delight in amoral actions. We do not get to see the character that commits these final murders. There is no recognition or alignment with this unknown character, but his or her actions feel like the most moral actions in the context of the narrative that has preceded this final shot. It is unlikely that our allegiance has been swayed by the presence of a diegetic camera, even as its fall to the ground signifies the death of the camera operator. As a result, I believe that no truly perverse allegiance with monstrous characters has been constructed or even encouraged.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

To consider how the viewer is affected by films belonging to the charismatic killer category, it is essential that we understand how the employment of the diegetic camera affects how we perceive the characters that are in front of the camera. The diegetic camera offers increased intimacy and engagement with these characters, heightening our fascination with them and limiting our access to the victims. However, it also encourages us to imagine these killers as more realistic and recognisable than traditional film villains and therefore to find them scarier. Murray Smith's structure of sympathy allows our engagement with these films to be broken down into recognition, alignment and allegiance. The process of recognising the killer characters is a less demanding task than recognising the camera operators as characters as I have established. Recognising the killers is easier because it requires less imagining of off-screen space (if any at all) and instead the viewer can give the on-screen killer their full attention. This attention is rewarded because these killers may not be attractive in terms of culturally positive traits, but they are subjects that are amorally fascinating, particularly due to their combination of bizarre and banal facets in their lives.

In these films, the diegetic camera is employed less as a device to ensure that we imagine the off-screen operator and more as a method for the killer characters to speak directly to their imagined future viewers. This means that the viewer is in prolonged alignment with these killer characters, not in terms of their visual point of view, but in terms of access to their subjectivities. The video diary segments of



the films are a particularly notable aspect of diegetic camera use and are in stark contrast to the surveillance camera footage employed in some of the final scenes of *Zero Day*. I have argued that video diary scenes share some of the elicitors as Plantinga's 'scenes of empathy', but that the video diaries in charismatic killer films work in a different way. The narrative context and lack of affective congruency created by non-diegetic music almost ensures that we do not ally with these killer characters and despite our privileged alignment with these killers, these video diaries would be more accurately be labelled scenes of antipathy than scenes of empathy.

Finally, I have considered how the recognition and alignment with killer characters does not necessarily lead to allegiance even when the killers appear to be the moral centres of the films. There is a moral spectrum in the films, but this is affected by our prolonged alignment with the killer characters. We perceive secondary characters through the prism of the thoughts of the central killer characters. However, this does not necessarily lead to the viewer positioning the killers higher in a hierarchy of sympathy compared with other secondary characters. The diegetic camera is again at the centre of the moral resolutions of the films, but it is not necessarily the contingent factor that affects our final evaluation of the characters.

## **Chapter 7: Re-definitions, classifications and summary conclusions**

In light of the analyses presented in the preceding chapters, there are many conclusions to be drawn about the widespread use of the diegetic camera in contemporary horror. I have argued that the systematic employment of the diegetic camera is likely to have an effect on viewer emotions and the way the viewer processes the films. I have situated mediated realism as a key factor that moulds our response to these films. Priming and nested cues in the early stages of the films aim to elicit mental schemata associated with the viewing of non-fiction media forms. The stimuli that arise from the use of the diegetic camera are organised in the viewer's mind and encourage the viewer to respond by imagining that the characters are not works of fiction. The diegetic camera allows for a more pronounced and prolonged alignment with camera operators and charismatic killer characters. However despite this, I am not convinced that this sustained alignment provokes increased allegiance with characters that we morally evaluate in negative ways.

Diegetic camera films combine the two directions taken by the earliest films; using elements of both documentary and fictional narratives and merging them into a distinctive contemporary media form. Arguably, they could be considered more interactive and immersive than the recent spate of films made utilizing 3D technologies. While many 3D films attempt to immerse the viewer in the diegetic world through the use of stereoscopic cameras, or of a post-conversion process, diegetic camera films rely more on the off-camera sound of camera operators, point-of-view shots and shaky, fast camera movements to immerse the audience and encourage their imaginings of off-screen space. In many ways, diegetic camera films are an evolution of film towards other media forms such as virtual reality, video games, simulators and theme park rides. While bigger budget films attempt to innovate and improve the audience experience using more expensive technologies such as 3D and IMAX cameras, diegetic camera films feature innovations at the lower end of the budget scale. Critics have started to write about 'found footage fatigue' (Brew, 2011), but the aesthetic and perceptual strategies of these films seem to be showing no signs of abating. Diegetic camera

films are still being made in the horror genre, but increasingly other genres such as the superhero film (*Chronicle*) and crime drama (*End of Watch*) are benefitting from employing some of the strategies of these films. However, in light of the analysis contained in this thesis, the classification of these films under the ‘found footage’ catch-all title has become unfit for purpose and new ways of classifying and interpreting these films must be established.

### **7.1 Re-definitions and classifications**

The usefulness of the term ‘found footage’ has its limitations. It was previously coined to describe ‘films like Bruce Conner’s *A Movie* (1958) or Christian Marclay’s *The Clock* (2010), assembled out of existing footage scavenged from different sources’ (Bordwell, 2012). Bordwell has suggested the term ‘discovered footage’ in order to avoid confusion and while both of these terms allude to the ruse that these films are made up of footage that has already been shot by someone and is now being made available to the public, there are more distinctions that must be considered. In this thesis, I have divided the films into three categories; firstly those that take the form of mock-documentaries or reality television shows. These ‘pseudo-documentaries’ (Bordwell, 2012) still have differences within them that are significant. Some take the form of expository documentaries and the ‘found footage’ is actually only a small part of the total film, such as *The Last Broadcast*. More commonly, there are those that begin in the participatory mode and continue in this way, but become less about making a sellable media product and more about documenting a hitherto unforeseen disaster unfold such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Rec*. The ‘charismatic killer’ films straddle the line between documentary and home video. The killers themselves, or the crews that follow them, clearly want the footage to take the form of a documentary, but the amateurishness, and also the fact that the killers must often film themselves, give these films an aesthetic quality closer to home videos. The ‘home video’ examples are more self-explanatory; amateurs wield their cameras in the domestic sphere in order to capture special occasions in the home or mysterious events in and around the home. However, in some cases, again these classifications are not sufficient. For example, *Cloverfield* begins as a home video,

but by the end Hud is attempting to document a cataclysmic event that is newsworthy and could easily constitute a large part of a documentary on the subject.

In some of the films, it is made very clear that the footage has been found, and often by whom it has been found, whereas in others this knowledge is assumed. In most cases, the films end with the death of the camera operator and the dropping of the camera, but in others the film continues after the death of the camera operator, as in *Zero Day* when the final scene introduces a completely new camera operator who captures the burning of the crosses. Very few of the films allude to the author, or editor of the final cut of the footage. What they all share is their use of the diegetic camera, making Ingle's use of this term to describe the films very apt. However, while this term applies to all of the films, further differentiation is needed to classify the breadth of different camera types that are used in order to create these films. This is becoming increasingly important as diegetic camera filmmakers have innovated and added new technologies to the roster of camera types that have already been used in these films. It is difficult to use this as a means to classify the films. For example, the climax of *Chronicle* utilises footage from a multitude of cameras in the hands of many different operators. There is camera phone footage, surveillance camera footage, and TV news camera footage. These films can therefore not be divided by how they are shot without significant areas of overlap.

Heller-Nicholas (2014) categorises the films further by considering the 'thematic and subgeneric diversity that has flourished' (p.149) since 2007. Heller-Nicholas divides those found footage films that have taken exorcism as their subject matter such as *The Devil Inside* (Bell, 2012), those that centre the family at the heart of the horror such as *Exhibit A* and finally those films from around the world that 'engage with a number of diverse socio-political elements' (p.150) such as *The Tunnel* (Ledesma, 2011). These useful subdivisions help to identify recurring tropes of diegetic camera horror films, but only account for a limited number made since 2007.

A further consideration for classifying these films should be the increasing use of surveillance cameras and cameras that are used for communication purposes. Originally, this thesis considered these films as a separate category, but in order to limit the scope, films such as *The Collingswood Story* (Costanza, 2002), *My Little Eye* (Evans, 2002) and *Alone With Her* (Nicholas, 2006) remain unexplored. In these films, webcams, surveillance cameras and tiny portable spy cameras are the diegetic cameras and there is an increasing employment of such technology in recent films. *Paranormal Activity 4* (Joost and Schulman, 2012) exclusively uses built-in laptop cameras, as does *Unfriended* (Gabriadze, 2014) which only shows what one character is seeing on her computer screen as she communicates with her friends through Skype and also occasionally engages in instant messaging and browsing the Internet. *Invasion* (Pyun, 2005) and *End of Watch* are also notable for their use of police car dash-cams, particularly the former whose footage is almost completely captured on the dash-cam of one car. The employment of the diegetic camera in films such as *Invasion* and *Unfriended* have implications for narrative structure, alignment and self-consciousness and must be explored further in order to consider the changing relationship between audiences and screens and characters and cameras.

## **7.2 Conclusions and contribution**

Throughout this thesis, I have drawn numerous conclusions with regards to priming, self-consciousness, and allegiance in diegetic camera films. In chapter 1, I have identified a thematically organised genealogy of the diegetic camera horror film, explaining how these antecedents have influenced diegetic camera horror films and allow contemporary audiences to comprehend the aesthetics of these productions and their mediated realism.

### **7.2.1 The importance of priming**

With regards to priming, chapter 4 has explored how the audience is invited to imagine that the footage before them is more authentic than the footage presented

in a traditional fiction film. The camera's presence is emphasised in order to highlight to the viewer that they are watching a construction. However, if viewers are to play along with the game that the filmmakers designed, then they must imagine that the characters within the film are responsible for at least the shooting of the film, if not the editing. Within some of the films, this means learning about the characters who operate the cameras, and in others priming merely involves understanding that there is someone (who remains largely anonymous) operating the camera. The production techniques and aesthetics make imagining that the footage is non-fiction and filmed by an enunciator in the diegesis easier. The viewer is active in imagining off-screen space; imagining where the camera is, in whose hands it is held and often even the emotional state and activity of the camera operator. No viewer, particularly those who have seen more than one diegetic camera film, is fooled into believing that what s/he is watching is real footage. However, for those who wish to imagine that this is what a ghost sighting looks or feels like, or what a serial killer would sound like in real life if captured by available media technology, the apparent capturing of these moments by a diegetic crew make them seem more real, more immediate, and often more engaging.

Audiences of diegetic camera horror do not engage with the films as if they are documentaries, but the priming techniques attempt to ensure that if a viewer wants to imagine that they are watching real footage, then it will be easy to do so. Drawing on techniques that will be recognisable to most people from news footage, documentary, reality TV, user-generated content on the Internet as well as home videos, the filmmakers blur the boundaries between fiction film and non-fiction forms of media, creating an affective mediated realism. This creates a 'reality mood' which has the potential to generate a more immediate and immersive response to the films and the characters. The stylistic cues that lead to mediated realism have been inputted into the memory of the viewer so that when events become more extraordinary, the viewer will retrieve these cues that led them to read the film as plausible and realistic.

However, these films are also clearly products of a commercial industry and can be delineated by the conventions that they share with other films in the horror genre. As well as the 'reality mood', the priming that occurs in the early scenes creates an anticipatory mood, even if the horror is not yet present. Diegetic camera films deliberately allude to the fate of their protagonists in their opening titles. This primes the audience to hypothesise pessimistically about how the films will end and also allows the mood to be fearful, even when nothing immediately threatening is occurring in the opening scenes. While the opening scenes prime the audience for something akin to a genuine non-fiction media product, the opening titles before these scenes prime the viewer for the more extraordinary and horrific events to take place later.

Finally, the opening scenes of found footage films must prime the spectator for the experience of seeing the majority of the film from one character's point of view. This camera-operating character is often central to the story as s/he converses with the characters on screen, is affected by the events s/he witnesses, and offers the viewer both a privileged insight into his or her own thoughts, while also limiting the viewer's knowledge of events to what the character knows and sees. Many of these films make a point to reveal their camera-operating character early on in order to aid with character construction and thus they allow the viewer to 'recognise' that there is a character there to be considered and to empathise with.

### **7.2.2 Self-consciousness and camera operator interaction**

Once the viewer has been primed to imagine a character in off-screen space behind the camera, the cinematography takes on increased importance as it can be conceived as a vital component of the performance of the camera operator. I have shown in the analysis how the cinematography can reflect the feelings, desires and distress of the camera operators and I believe that this recognition through imagination can lead to greater empathy and therefore engagement with the films and the camera-operating characters. One of the most recognisable traits of these characters is their compulsion to continue filming even in extreme circumstances.

I believe that diegetic camera films will be more engaging to viewers that share this compulsion with the camera-operating characters. Viewers who have experience of making their own home videos, for example, will empathise more with a character that displays a similar desire to film events around them.

However, diegetic camera films are also engaging because their aesthetics encourage the viewer to search the frame quickly and carefully. The hectic camerawork and the POV alignment with a curious camera-operating character encourages an activation of seeking systems as character and viewer frantically search for focal points, clues that are hidden in darkness and threats that might attack the camera and operator. The manner in which the diegetic camera is utilised can reveal the interests and motivations of the operators and can encourage us to empathise more with the emotions of the off-screen operator, than with the emotions of the profilmic subjects. The revelation of the motivations of the camera operators even extends to when the camera is set up separately from the hands of the operator. The viewer is perceptually aligned with the camera and not the character, but we can still learn something about the character from their positioning of the camera. The diegetic camera often provides epistemological alignment between operator and viewer, but in cases where the camera is not at the eye of the operator, we learn more than what the character learns (unless the character plays the footage back during the course of the narrative, as is the case in *Paranormal Activity*). Therefore, the viewer of diegetic camera films can feel like s/he is receiving a privileged insight into a character due to the prolonged alignment, but also a view of the diegesis that is lacking in privilege compared to if s/he was watching a film with a more traditionally omniscient narrative strategy.

The viewer can also imagine who the intended or imagined viewer of the film is supposed to be in the minds of the characters. By imagining that there is an intended viewer, the actual viewer can feel like s/he is in a privileged position because s/he can feel like an interceptor of the footage. This is heightened when the footage is clearly not intended to be seen by strangers and when characters appear to use the camera as a confidant. Our personal imagining is affected



because while we may continue to imagine the camera operator, there will be occasions where we are encouraged to imagine the specific future viewer that the operator or profilmic subject has in mind for the footage.

I have also analysed the interactions of the camera operator with the profilmic subjects because I believe that these moments are crucial in encouraging empathy with the operator. Frequently audible (or visible) camera operators continually confirm who is behind the camera, and this encourages our clear recognition of the character behind the camera and might in some cases heighten empathy and even allegiance.

### **7.2.3 Allegiance with charismatic killers**

The charismatic killer category required separate attention in this thesis as the diegetic camera is used less to provoke imaginings of off-screen camera operators and more to allow morally negative characters to communicate with the viewer. In terms of recognition, alignment and allegiance, the process of recognising the killer characters is less demanding because it does not require the viewer to imagine off-screen space. This means that the viewer can focus their full attention on the killer characters, rather than dividing their attention between imagining off-screen camera operators and pro-filmic subjects. The pro-filmic subjects in this category are amorally fascinating killers and they are particularly captivating due to the combination of bizarre and banal facets in their lives, but also the manner in which the diegetic camera captures them.

The killer characters speak directly to their imagined viewers, putting the viewer in a prolonged and sustained alignment with them. Our access to their thoughts is heightened because they often use the diegetic camera to create video diary segments. However, even though these scenes share some of the elicitors of what could be considered scenes of empathy, they in fact often have an opposite effect on the viewer. The narrative context and lack of affective congruency can lead to viewers feeling increased antipathy towards these characters as the killers offer the viewer a privileged, but disturbing insight into their minds.

Overall, despite the importance of the diegetic camera, I am not convinced of its ability to affect allegiance. Recognition and alignment does not necessarily lead to allegiance and the diegetic camera provides the viewer with opportunities for clear recognition and sustained alignment, but their moral orientation is not shifted as a result. The diegetic camera fails to offer the viewer a chance to be aligned with victims before they actually become victims. This means that the killer characters are the moral centres of the films and their morals are not positioned in opposition to other characters' values. The only way that the diegetic camera has a notable impact on allegiance is in fact, on the viewer's evaluation of the diegetic camera operators when they engage in morally objectionable actions. We expect the killer to kill, whereas we expect the camera operator to be an objective observer. The shock experienced when the camera-operating characters move from observers to participants is perhaps the most unexpected and upsetting of events. As a result, the viewer is likely to morally evaluate these characters in harsher ways than the killer characters that are expected to engage in immoral behaviour.

### **7.3 Further areas of exploration**

Despite the repetition that is inherent in any genre or sub-genre, diegetic camera films are often criticised for being particularly dependent on what critics such as Simon Brew (2011) consider to be predictable conventions. However, there is still constant adaptation and innovation of the diegetic camera conceit and these films will offer more to consider analysing in the future. Developments in camera technology are key to developments in the genre, with filmmakers exploring many different types of cameras that can be used. Surveillance cameras, GoPro and other 'action cameras' and phone cameras are still relatively unexplored media for filmmakers. With the ubiquity of these kind of recording devices increasing, it is likely that films that use these technologies will continue. For example, *V/H/S 2* (Barrett, Eisener, Evans, Hale, Sanchez, Tjahjanto and Wingard, 2013) contains a sequence filmed entirely with a GoPro camera, much of *Afflicted* (Lee and Prowse, 2013) also utilises a similar camera and *Blair Witch* utilises a camera attached to a drone. So-called 'action cameras' can go to places inaccessible to earlier technology. They can be attached to people's bodies with special mounting

equipment and can free the hands of the operator. This can lead to more subjective point of view, where the camera is close to the eyes of the operator but crucially the cinematography remains unaffected by the hand movements of the operator.

It will also be interesting to map the impact of the so-called ‘selfie stick’ and other devices that are becoming increasingly popular for tourists, festival-goers and others to use in order to put themselves in the foreground of the picture they wish to take. Not only are cameras getting increasingly smaller, easy to use and portable, but the technology used to support and position these cameras is changing. The ‘selfie stick’ will become a useful tool for camera-operating characters to put themselves back on-screen and to allow filmmakers to ensure that the entire film is not simply a point/object shot, without any chances for the viewer to see the character holding the camera. Therefore, a more thorough consideration of the technology surrounding camera operation could prove useful when studying diegetic camera films. The limits to what a character can achieve with a camera are being tested by technological advancements and also new narrative conceits. For example, drone technology is going to become increasingly affordable. As these devices allow domestic camera users and documentary makers to create aerial shots on a minimal budget, diegetic camera films have begun to adopt these techniques. For instance, in the film *Chronicle*, a character’s telekinetic abilities are used to control the movement of the camera, allowing for a more diverse and unique aesthetic experience than in many other diegetic camera films.

One of the major areas that still needs to be explored is how diegetic camera techniques and aesthetics have started to be used beyond the horror genre. I have chosen to focus on what could loosely be described as films in the horror genre as this is where the trend for using diegetic cameras began. However, it is debateable that some of these films would be categorised as horror; for example *Zero Day* and *Exhibit A* could both be considered dramas. While a comprehensive genre analysis is outside of the scope of this thesis, it would be prudent to consider the use of the diegetic camera in relation to the conventions of various genres. The purpose of using a diegetic camera in what I have broadly categorised as diegetic

camera horror films has been interrogated in the preceding chapters. The question of what makes filmmakers turn to diegetic cameras in other genres has only recently started to be considered. Films such as *Chronicle*, *End of Watch*, *Project X* (Nourizadeh, 2012), *Project Almanac* and *Earth to Echo* have all attempted (in a manner similar to *Cloverfield*) to take the found footage aesthetic into more mainstream genres such as the superhero movie, the cop thriller, science fiction and the teen comedy. Some have experimented in using both diegetic and extra-diegetic cameras within the same film (*End of Watch*) and some have experimented with using countless amounts of cameras to cut together a range of different perspectives from various characters (*Project X*, *Chronicle*). The chapter on priming in this thesis is still applicable to many of these films as the priming strategy is often very similar. However, it would be significant to consider how these films differ in terms of concepts such as interaction, cinematography as performance, and allegiance and if the purpose is not to scare an audience, then what it is that the techniques are being used to achieve.

Another area that this thesis leaves relatively underexplored is what I consider a separate category of diegetic camera films - surveillance and communication films. In this category, which includes films such as *The Collingwood Story*, *My Little Eye*, *Alone With Her* and most recently *Unfriended* and *Ratter* (Kramer, 2015), the diegetic cameras are all either expressly used for surveillance purposes (in *My Little Eye* for a webcast competition and in *Alone With Her* for discreet spying) or for communication across the Internet between individuals (as with the webcams in *Unfriended*). These films raise many distinct issues as the camera is not generally held by characters, but it is still diegetic and the characters self-consciously understand that they are being filmed (in most cases except *Alone With Her* and *Ratter* where the characters are recorded without their knowledge or consent). The implications in terms of allegiance and priming could be explored in a further study. For example, priming in a film such as *Ratter* where the central character is not aware of being filmed by the camera on her hacked laptop and phone is necessarily different to the priming scenes in my focus films. The notion of who controls the cameras is complicated as they may be in the hands of the central character, but she does not know that the cameras are recording her and

that the footage is being watched. Allegiance is also complicated in many films like *Ratter* and *Unfriended* where there is an unseen character controlling the cameras and taking the place of fake enunciator.

To conclude, despite its many detractors, the diegetic camera does not seem to be disappearing as a popular concept for filmmakers. If horror films respond to contemporary anxieties, then the diegetic camera trend is a continuation of this. These films are quite astute at reflecting how people are increasingly experiencing life through a camera lens, or by watching events (filmed by someone else) unfold on a screen. With this blurring of what is real and what is a media construction occurring everyday in audience's media consumption, diegetic camera horror can capitalise on this.

The diegetic camera is undoubtedly a popular technique with inexperienced filmmakers due to the limited budget needed to make a film in this way. The reasons for these films occasionally crossing over into the mainstream and enjoying overwhelming success (or developing a cult following and some critical praise) cannot be wholly attributed to the diegetic camera. Detractors may criticise the stories, performances, scripts or aesthetics but these films do on occasion attract a large number of viewers. I believe that this is because of their claims to mediated realism, and their attempts to force the viewer to imagine off-screen space and empathise with an off-screen character to make the films more terrifying. The interaction between diegetic camera operators, profilmic subjects and the viewer can be more engaging than films that do not break the fourth wall. The mediated realism of these films makes imagining that they are real an easy, spontaneous process for the viewer and this adds to their immersion and empathy. Finally, I argue that the diegetic camera offers the viewer what appears to be a convincing insight into amorally fascinating characters and the mediated realism created by the diegetic camera encourages us not to ally with these characters, but to imagine that they are real in a more spontaneous and forceful way than if the diegetic camera was not utilised. Thus the acts of these characters are more disturbing.

More than any other horror films, those that employ the diegetic camera 'impress upon their spectators the proximity, the immediacy of their terrors, avoiding the conventions that mark them out as safely contained entertainments' (North, p.88, 2010). By avoiding many traditional cinematic conventions, they have created new ones. Unfortunately for viewers that want to imagine that these films are non-fiction, the more familiar that the conventions of the diegetic camera film become, the more difficult that imagining will be. Consequently, the harder it becomes to imagine that the events on screen are real, the safer the experience of watching a diegetic camera film feels.

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*Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon*, 2006. [film] Directed by Scott Glosserman. USA: Glen Echo Entertainment and Code Entertainment.

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*Collingswood Story, The*, 2002. [film] Directed by Michael Costanza. USA: Cinerebel Films.

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*Devil Inside, The*, 2012. [film] Directed by William Brent Bell. USA, Italy, Mexico, Romania: Prototype and Room 101.

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*Elephant*, 2003. [film] Directed by Gus Van Sant. USA: HBO Films, Fine Line Features, Meno Films, Blue Relief Productions and Fearmakers Studios.

*End of Watch*, 2012. [film] Directed by David Ayer. USA: Exclusive Media Group, Emmett/Furla/Oasis Films (EFO Films), Hedge Fund Film Partners, Le Grisbi Productions, Crave Films, 5150 Action, Knightsbridge Entertainment.

*Episode 50*, 2011. [film] Directed by Joe Smalley, Tess Smalley. USA: Compound B and Impaler Entertainment.

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*Paranormal Activity 2*, 2010. [film] Directed by Tod Williams. USA: Paramount Pictures, Blumhouse, Solana Films and Room 101, Inc.

*Paranormal Activity 3*, 2011. [film] Directed by Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman. USA: Paramount Pictures, Blumhouse Productions, Solana Films and Room 101.

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*Psycho*, 1960. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Shamley Productions.

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*Silence of the Lambs, The*, 1991. [film] Directed by Jonathan Demme. USA: Strong Heart/Demme Production and Orion Pictures.

*Tapes, The*, 2011. [film] Directed by Lee Alliston, Scott Bates. UK: Exile Media Group.

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*Unfriended*, 2014. [film] Directed by Leo Gabriadze. USA: Bazelevs Production and Blumhouse Productions.

*Vertigo*, 1958. [film] Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions.

*V/H/S 2*, 2013. [film] Directed by Simon Barrett, Jason Eisener, Gareth Evans, Gregg Hale, Eduardo Sanchez, Timo Tjahjanto and Adam Wingard. USA, Canada, Indonesia: The Collective Studios, Bloody Disgusting, 8383 Productions, Snoot Entertainment, Haxan Films, Yer Dead Productions, Studio 71.

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*Zombie Diaries, The*, 2006. [film] Directed by Michael G. Bartlett, Kevin Gates. UK: Bleeding Edge Films and Off World Films.

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*I Witness Video*, 1992-1994. [TV programme] NBC.

*Real World, The*, 1992-Present. [TV programme] Bunim-Murray Productions.

**Appendix A: a list of the found footage films produced 1999 - 2009.**

1999	<i>The Blair Witch Project</i> (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez)
2000	<i>909 Experiment</i> (Wayne A. Smith) <i>Blackwood Evil</i> (Richard Catt) <i>Legend of the Chupacabra</i> (Joe Castro) <i>The Big Finish</i> (The Heather Brothers) <i>The Dark Area</i> (Oliver Hummell) <i>The St. Francisville Experiment</i> (Ted Nicolaou,) <i>The Unknown</i> (Michael Hjorth)
2001	<i>August Underground</i> (Fred Vogel) <i>Gang Tapes</i> (Adam Ripp) <i>Series 7: The Contenders</i> (Daniel Minahan) <i>Strawberry Estates</i> (Ron Bonk) <i>The Black Door</i> (Kit Wong)
2002	<i>My Little Eye</i> (Marc Evans) <i>The Collingswood Story</i> (Michael Costanza)
2003	<i>August Underground's Mordum</i> (Jerami Cruise, Killjoy, Michael Todd Schneider, Fred Vogel and Cristie Whiles) <i>Murder in the Heartland: The Search for Video X</i> (James D. Mortellaro) <i>The Dark Hunter</i> (Duncan Cowan and Mark Jackson) <i>The Great American Snuff Film</i> (Sean Tretta) <i>The Last Horror Movie</i> (Julian Richards) <i>The Wicksboro Incident</i> (Richard Lowry) <i>Zero Day</i> (Ben Coccio)
2004	<i>Incident at Loch Ness</i> (Zak Penn) <i>Off the Beaten Path</i> (Jason Stephenson) <i>Septem8er Tapes</i> (Christian Johnston)
2005	<i>Il Mistero di Lovecraft: Road to L</i> (Federico Greco and Roberto Leggio) <i>In Memorium</i> (Amanda Gusack) <i>Invasion</i> (Albert Pyun) <i>Noroi: The Curse</i> (Kôji Shiraishi) <i>The Magician</i> (Scott Ryan)
2006	<i>39: A Film by Carroll McKane</i> (Gary Sherman) <i>Alone With Her</i> (Eric Nicholas) <i>Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon</i> (Scott Glosserman) <i>Offscreen</i> (Christoffer Boe) <i>The Hunt</i> (Fritz Kiersch) <i>The Zombie Diaries</i> (Michael Bartlett and Kevin Gates)
2007	<i>American Zombie</i> (Grace Lee) <i>August Underground's Penance</i> (Fred Vogel) <i>Diary of the Dead</i> (George A. Romero) <i>Exhibit A</i> (Dom Rotheroe) <i>Head Case</i> (Anthony Spadaccini) <i>Long Pigs</i> (Nathan Hynes and Chris Power) <i>Look</i> (Adam Rifkin)

	<p><i>Paranormal Activity</i> (Oren Peli)  <i>Redacted</i> (Brian De Palma)  <i>Rec</i> (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza)  <i>The Disappearance of Jenna Matheson</i> (AJ Wedding)  <i>The Poughkeepsie Tapes</i> (John Erick Dowdle)  <i>Under the Raven's Wing</i> (Susan Adriensen)  <i>Video X: The Dwayne and Darla-Jean Story</i> (James D. Mortellaro)  <i>Welcome to the Jungle</i> (Jonathan Hensleigh)</p>
2008	<p><i>A Necessary Death</i> (Daniel Stamm)  <i>Chronicles of an Exorcism</i> (Nick G. Miller)  <i>Cloverfield</i> (Matt Reeves)  <i>Home Made</i> (Jason Impey)  <i>Home Movie</i> (Christopher Denham)  <i>June 9</i> (T. Michael Conway)  <i>Lake Mungo</i> (Joel Anderson)  <i>Monster Movie</i> (John Polonia and Mark Polonia)  <i>Quarantine</i> (John Erick Dowdle)  <i>The Ghosts of Crowley Hall</i> (Daren Marc)  <i>The Moretti House</i> (Todd Douglas Bailey)  <i>The Project</i> (Ryan Piotrowicz)</p>
2009	<p><i>1013 Briar Lane</i> (Michael Bayouth)  <i>Cropsey</i> (Barbara Branaccio and Joshua Zeman)  <i>Evil Things</i> (Domic Perez)  <i>Hunting Grounds</i> (Matthew Charles Hall)  <i>In the Dead of Night</i> (Joey Evans)  <i>Keramat</i> (Monty Tiwa)  <i>Lunopolis</i> (Matthew Avant)  <i>Murder Collection V.1</i> (Jerami Cruise, Fred Vogel and Shelby Lyn Vogel)  <i>Occult</i> (Kôji Shiraishi)  <i>Paranormal Entity</i> (Shane Van Dyke)  <i>Rec 2</i> (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza)  <i>Russia 88</i> (Pavel Bardin)  <i>The Dead... Will Rise!</i> (Brandon Salkil and Jordan Salkil)  <i>The Lift</i> (Brady Starr)  <i>The Ritual</i> (Anthony Spadaccini)  <i>The Turnpike Killer</i> (Evan Makrogiannis and Brian Weaver)  <i>Timetravel_0</i> (Scott Norwood)  <i>Trash Humpers</i> (Harmony Korine)  <i>Unaired</i> (Tim Buel and Derek Sigmund)</p>

Source: Found Footage Critic