Diegetic Wounds:
The Representation of Individual and Collective Trauma in Found Footage Horror Films

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Abstract

The type of horror film known as "found footage" was prominent in the 2000s and early 2010s. The term refers to films that aim to scare their audience, and which are primarily shot diegetically, with handheld and surveillance cameras that exist within the world of the film. The thesis identifies conceptual, aesthetic, and thematic links between found footage horror films and psychological trauma theory. For example, in each film the premise of the characters and viewers *finding* footage of a frightening event evokes the victim's belated recollection of a traumatic experience. Additionally, the often-frantic cinematography and ambiguous formulation of the monster evokes the shocked and disoriented cognition of the trauma victim in the wake of their experience. Finally, the experience and effect of trauma on society is a recurring theme of found footage horror films.

By examining 14 films, this thesis aims to answer the question: how do found footage horror films represent the relationship between individual and collective trauma? It theorises that individual trauma is conveyed through the films' point-of-view (POV) aesthetic, while collective trauma is conveyed through their narrative themes. The thesis groups the films into four categories, each of which addresses a different aspect of trauma theory. Firstly, *Remote* found footage horror films, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez 1999), are examined as depictions of national historical traumas. Secondly, *Urban* found footage horror films, such as *Cloverfield* (Reeves 2008), are read as depictions of contemporary global traumas. Thirdly, *Domestic* found footage horror films, such as *Paranormal Activity* (Peli 2009), are framed as depictions of systemic domestic trauma. Fourthly, *Perpetrator* found footage horror films, such as *Man Bites Dog* (Belvaux, Bonzel and Poelvoorde 1992), are examined as depictions of perpetrator trauma.

The thesis disputes the claim made by numerous critics and theorists that found footage horror films do not constitute a subgenre, but merely a cinematographic style or marketing gimmick. By demonstrating their aesthetic and thematic consistency, and the manifold ways that found footage horror can be read as representing trauma, the thesis argues that the films constitute a specific subgenre of horror cinema.

The thesis makes significant contributions to knowledge by identifying, testing and demonstrating links between horror film theory, genre theory, spectator theory, and psychological and collective trauma theory. It conducts a broad survey of a recent subgenre of horror films that has, thus far, only received sporadic and insubstantial academic attention. It also presents an original theory that explains the psychological and sociological subtext of the subgenre, and the cultural insights that the films provide.

Declaration

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgment in the main text and reference list of the thesis. No editorial assistance has been received in the production of the thesis without due acknowledgement. Except where duly referred to, the thesis does not include material with copyright provisions or requiring copyright approvals.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION

In her final address to camera, the protagonist of *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez 1999) confesses: "I'm scared to open my eyes and I'm scared to close them." The line is a powerful articulation of the overwhelming experience of psychological trauma. The words and their trembling delivery evoke the cognitive fissure—between comprehension and confusion, between frenzy and detachment—that characterises the traumatised mind. These same symptoms can also be used to characterise a broader subgenre of horror films known as "found footage." *The Blair Witch Project* is credited with popularising the found footage concept, which became prominent in horror filmmaking of the 2000s and early 2010s. Such films typically employ a diegetic, first-person style of cinematography, which essentially aligns the audience's perspective with the characters' lived experiences. The audience is presented with footage of a frightening and allegedly real event. This footage constitutes all or most of the film's running time.

In this thesis, I argue that the premise, aesthetics and recurring themes of found footage horror films represent the theoretical structure, lived experience and social legacy of psychological trauma. I examine a range of films by drawing on the research of trauma theorists, such as Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. I further argue that this theoretical relationship between found footage horror films and psychological trauma is crucial to understanding found footage horror as a cinematic subgenre and as an expression of socio-cultural experiences.

This introduction outlines the topic of the thesis; provides background information on found footage horror films and trauma theory; outlines the research methodology; and presents an argument for how this research contributes to the field

and why it is significant. It concludes with an overview of the thesis structure, including brief summaries of each chapter.

Research Topic

This thesis examines a subgenre of horror cinema called "found footage" (hereafter abbreviated to "FF") through the framework of psychological trauma theory. I define FF horror films as films that (1) are primarily designed to scare their audience, and which (2) are primarily shot diegetically, with handheld and surveillance cameras that exist within the world of the film. That is, the footage that *constitutes* the film, is presented as being recorded by the characters *within* the film. All FF horror films depict a frightening incident or series of incidents that typically claims the lives of the characters.[2] The utilisation or supposed utilisation of performers in the operation of the cameras gives FF films a raw, amateurish quality. Critics and film scholars, such as Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, have noted that this aesthetic demonstrates a greater resemblance to amateur video recordings, such as home and holiday videos, than to professional films. For example, FF horror films consistently feature long takes, handheld camera movements, available light, and low-resolution images. Heller-Nicholas claims that this "raw style" grants FF horror films a greater sense of immediacy and immersion when compared to mainstream narrative films.[3] This visceral and embodied mode makes FF films unique within the horror genre, and—as this thesis argues—allows it to effectively represent and simulate trauma as an event, response and recollection.

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[2] There are some examples of *non*-horror FF films, such as *Project X* (Nourizadeh 2012) and *End of Watch* (Ayer 2012); that is, they are shot diegetically, but do not depict frightening narratives or images.
[3] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2014), 3-4.

This project addresses the following hypothesis: FF horror films depict the relationship between individual and collective trauma. Caruth and Herman define psychological trauma as damage to a person's mind, and the consequences of that damage, all of which is caused by an intense or shocking experience. Here, individual trauma refers to post-traumatic symptoms as experienced by an individual person. Collective trauma denotes the way that large-scale or recurrent traumatic events can psychologically harm a plurality of people, and the way that individual trauma can transmit vicariously between members of a society and across generations of history.

FF horror evokes psychological trauma through its narrative premise. This premise is exemplified in the opening title card of *The Blair Witch Project*: "In October of 1994 three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland, while shooting a documentary. A year later their footage was found." This title card introduces a series of concepts that are common across FF horror films – an event occurred in the past; the nature of the event is unknown but was recorded by the witnesses; it disrupted or ended the lives of those who witnessed it; the recording may contain answers; and we, the viewer of the film, are witnessing the event through this footage. I argue that this premise corresponds with the structure of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); that is, the premise suggests a destructive event that occurred in the past, and which has now re-emerged or been recovered in the present. The fact that this "found" footage takes the form of a monstrous or supernatural encounter can be read in relation to psychological literature and testimonies that describe traumatic experiences as re-emerging subconsciously as nightmares or as sublimating into frightening sensations.

FF horror further evokes trauma through its depiction of the monster, which is portrayed as a sudden threat that the characters within the film are unable to document or comprehend. For example, in *The Blair Witch Project* (hereafter referred to as *Blair Witch*), the student filmmakers are continually menaced by something that never appears within the footage they record; yet, whatever it is, it causes the characters significant stress and suffering. I argue that the depiction of the Blair Witch, along with monsters in other FF horror films, is a representation of a traumatic experience. This reading is supported by the research of Caruth, who reports that real-life victims of trauma have described their condition as both an eerie absence within the mind and the presence of an experience that they are unable to recall.[4] Caruth, along with other trauma theorists such as Judith Herman and E. Anne Kaplan, write that trauma may re-emerge within the victim's subconscious in the form of nightmares, hallucinations and various physiological neuroses.[5] While many horror films take an understated approach to the presence of the monster, the active, character-driven gaze of the camera in FF horror films amplifies that sense of psychic ambiguity. Several of the subgenre's most popular and prominent films employ an evasive, fragmented figure as the source of their horror. Examples include the gargantuan creature in *Cloverfield*; the infected zombies in *REC* (Balaguero and Plaza 2007); and the demon in *Paranormal Activity* (Peli 2009), which are all frequently obscured or hidden to the characters and audience. This pattern demonstrates how FF horror represents the effect of a traumatic experience through both its content and form.

This thesis demonstrates the aesthetic and thematic links between FF horror films and trauma theory, by employing close textual analysis of FF horror films. The

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[4] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 39.
[5] *Ibid.*, 11.

research draws upon specific areas of trauma theory, such as scholarship about PTSD and complex PTSD, historical trauma, vicarious trauma and perpetrator trauma. The thesis uses this conceptual framework and its results to support the claim that FF is a distinct subgenre of horror cinema. It offers a unique approach to FF horror films, providing a new account of what the subgenre means in relation to cinema, media, communication, society, the horror genre, and psychology. This approach also offers a new perspective on understanding psychological trauma and the different ways it has been expressed and is being expressed through screen mediums.

While the findings of the analysis are extensive, the thesis identifies how FF horror films repeatedly represent the relationship between individual trauma and collective trauma. This is demonstrated in the relationship between the protagonists and the way their traumatic experiences engage, interact and echo traumatic events of their respective settings and culture. The thesis argues that the FF horror subgenre reimagines collective traumatic events as recurring nightmares that haunt the citizens of a respective society, and restages these events through the lived, subjective, first-person accounts of its characters. It is this sense of textual, subtextual and metatextual repetition upon which the horror of FF is founded.

Background

This thesis examines 14 FF horror films, undertaking a close analysis of each text in relation to the research topic. The films are all feature-length and were released between 1980 and 2016. Most of the films were made in the United States, but a few originate from Europe and Australia, and all were produced by independent studios. The analysis of these films incorporates scholarship on psychological trauma,

including Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), E. Anne Kaplan's *Trauma Culture* (2005), along with a range of articles by these and other trauma theorists. It is important to note that the majority of this trauma scholarship was carried out in the fields of psychology and sociology, and does not link its research to film theory. However, over the past decade, film scholars such as Linnie Blake[6] and Adam Lowenstein[7] have combined film and trauma theory in order to examine horror cinema.

FF horror has only received sporadic attention within academia. Some academic texts address individual films, such as David Banash's *Nothing that Is* (2004)[8] and Leslie Hahner's et al. "*Paranormal Activity* and the Horror of Abject Consumption,"[9] but stop short of acknowledging or examining the wider subgenre. David Bordwell describes FF as a "technical style" or "marketing gimmick."[10] Kevin J. Wetmore cites several FF horror films as instances of post-9/11 cinema.[11] Likewise, Erik van Ooijen refers to the subgenre in relation to audience desensitisation to violent imagery[12] and Emanuelle Wessels refers to it in relation to paratextual storytelling.[13] However, none of these examples identifies or analyses FF horror as a distinct subgenre. They either examine works in isolation or make only peripheral reference to the subgenre in scholarship of other film topics. One notable exception

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[6] Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
[7] Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma*, *National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
[8] David Banash, *Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).
[9] Leslie A. Hahner, Scott J Varda and Nathan A. Wilson, "*Paranormal Activity* and the Horror of Abject Consumption," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30, no.5 (2012): 1-15.
[10] David Bordwell, "Return to Paranormalcy," *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema*, last modified November 13, 2012, http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/11/13/return-to-paranormalcy/.
[11] Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 59-60.
[12] Erik van Ooijen, "Cinematic Shots and Cuts: On the Ethics and Semiotics of Real Violence in Film Fiction," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 3, no.1 (2011): 6.
[13] Emanuelle Wessels, "'Where were You when the Monster Hit?' Media Convergence, Branded Security Citizenship, and the Trans-media Phenomenon of *Cloverfield*," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17, no.1 (2011): 73.

to this gap is Alexandra Heller-Nicholas' 2014 book *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality*. Heller-Nicholas provides a genealogy of the subgenre, tracing its potential origins in exploitation cinema and journalism hoaxes, its influence over blockbuster and independent productions, as well as identifying key films. This thesis aims to re-define and re-examine the FF horror subgenre through the lens of trauma theory. The project also incorporates FF horror films that have yet to receive academic attention or focused textual analysis, such as *The Last Broadcast* (Avalos and Weiler 1998), *Willow Creek* (Goldthwait 2013), *The Bay* (Levinson 2012), *Pandemic* (Suits 2016)*, Gang Tapes* (Ripp 2001), and *Zero Day* (Coccio 2001).

The most renowned and highest-grossing FF horror films are *Blair Witch*, *Cloverfield* (Reeves 2008) and *Paranormal Activity*. However, hundreds more films using the FF premise and aesthetic have been released in cinemas and online. FF emerged as one of the prevalent[14] cycles of early 21st century horror, so much so that some critics have likened its cultural and formal influence to the "slasher" cycle of the 1970s and 1980s.[15] The *Found Footage Critic* website contains the most comprehensive database of FF films. As of 2019, the curators have indexed almost 800 titles. To be included in the *Found Footage Critic* database, films must first meet the criteria of "found footage" as stipulated by the site. These criteria state that "all of the cameras used to shoot [found footage] must have known sources within the film itself."[16] Such films, as well as shorts and web series, must also present the diegetic footage as though it was evidence of actual (non-fictional) events that were lost and

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[14] That is, in terms of number of films and their financial success.

[15] Scott Tobias, "V/H/S," *The A.V. Club*, last modified October 4, 2012, https://film.avclub.com/v-h-s-1798174453.

[16] *Found Footage Critic*, accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.foundfootagecritic.com/.

"subsequently discovered and made available to the viewer."[17] However, in the rare instances where a FF horror film contains non-diegetic footage—for example, as a framing narrative—then this footage is exempt from having to meet this criteria. Like Heller-Nicholas, the website identifies an amateur or raw documentary style as being characteristic of FF films, which it claims contributes to the footage appearing unplanned and unrefined, and thus genuine. Notably, not all FF films are listed as horror films; for example, the film *Project X* (Nourizadeh 2012) is about three teenagers recording a wild house party and is primarily comedic in tone. However, the vast majority of entries (95.75%) in the database are classified as horror.[18] This ratio supports the argument that, while FF is a premise and aesthetic that can be utilised in any genre of film, there also exists a distinct subgenre of horror-based FF films. My analysis of FF horror will define the subgenre and demonstrate how trauma is a central theme of the subgenre.

The definition and term used to describe these films—"found footage"—is contentious. Firstly, the term "found footage" already denotes a filmmaking practice that originated in the early half of the 20th century. Experimental collage films, such as Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936), were dubbed "found footage" because they involved the appropriation of already existing footage—such as newsreel, documentary and archival footage—for another purpose.[19] The second source of contention is that the cycle of late 20th and early 21st century horror films called "found footage" have been referred to by other names, such as "fake/faux-found footage films,"[20] "diegetic camera films,"[21] "POV horror films,"[22] and "folk horror

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[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films*, 13-14.

[20] Dennis Harvey, "Grave Encounters 2," *Variety*, last modified October 11, 2012, https://variety.com/2012/film/reviews/grave-encounters-2-1117948541/.

[21] Peter Turner, *Found Footage Horror Films: A Cognitive Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 3.

films."[23] Thirdly, some films categorised as FF horror, such as *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato 1980) and *Lake Mungo* (Anderson 2008), feature non-diegetic content or post-production treatment, and therefore blur the boundaries between FF and mockumentary.[24]

Nevertheless, the term "found footage horror films" is used in this thesis for several reasons. Principally, it is the term most frequently used by film critics and viewers when referring to *Blair Witch, Paranormal Activity*, and similar films.[25] Moreover, the "found" premise of these films—that is, the presentation of these films as being discovered by the diegetic characters and the non-diegetic audience—is a crucial characteristic of the subgenre. Concerning the alternative historical use of the term, Heller-Nicholas argues that contemporary FF films share artistic links with their early 20th century counterparts, and are arguably a hybrid of avant-garde documentary filmmaking and mainstream genre narratives.[26] Finally, this thesis aims to demonstrate the link between FF horror and trauma theory, in that the films evoke the concept of a frightening experience that was once lost and is now being rediscovered. The use of the word "found" is an apt description of this representation, and will thus be retained.

There is a significant relationship between cinematic images and traumatic events. Media researchers such as Kaplan, Lowenstein, Blake, and Roya Morag, as well as documentary filmmakers Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer, have documented this relationship. This association lends gravity to the thesis and its endeavour to understand how trauma is experienced, how it affects individuals and

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[22] "About," *POV Horror*, accessed March 17, 2020, https://povhorror.com/webtv-v3/about.
[23] Dana Keller, *Digital Folklore: Marble Hornets, the Slender Man, and the Emergence of Folk Horror in Online Communities* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2013), 23.
[24] Mockumentaries, as I will outline in chapter one, differ from FF films in several ways, including their use of editing.
[25] Tobias, "*V/H/S.*"
[26] Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films*, 16-17.

societies, and how those experiences and effects are culturally expressed. Ever since trauma was first identified and diagnosed by 19th century psychoanalysts, such as Sigmund Freud,[27] it has been understood as a process of dissociation – a psychological cocooning against harmful experiences, as well as a collective endeavour to suppress or sublimate harrowing events from the past. However, as Janet Walker argues in *Trauma Cinema* (2005), "people do not escape unscathed from the shooting, chopping, bombing, burning, twisting, thrusting, starving, cutting, and suffocating that they suffer, witness or even perpetrate"; their scars are mental, as well as physical.[28] For example, where public opinion regarding World War II preferred to treat it as "an unhappy event, now safely over," trauma theorists recognised that "[its] impact and proliferating results [were] only beginning to be understood," let alone ameliorated.[29]

FF horror films are frightening, not not merely for their content, but because of the unusual way that content is forumulated. Heller-Nicholas and other scholars have observed the recurring premise of FF horror—mysterious camera footage being discovered and presented to the audience—but none of them have connected this premise to trauma theory. Nor have any of them pointed out the themes of repressed memory, mental dissociation, and interrogation of historical atrocity, which are shared between films. This thesis aims to mend that gap.

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[27] Sigmund Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria, 1896," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume III (1893-1899): Early Psycho-Analytic Publications* (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), 187-221.
[28] Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005), xv.
[29] E. Anne Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 85.

Methodology

The thesis utilises textual analysis of films and applies a conceptual framework that combines film theory with trauma theory. The framework draws upon formalist film theory, which is concerned with technical elements of films, such as set and sound design, cinematography, acting, and editing. Formalism considers how these elements function and work together to produce emotions and ideas.[30] The framework also draws upon film genre theory, which is concerned with identifying categories of films based on similarities in either their narrative and aesthetic elements or the emotional response of their viewers.[31] The framework combines these theories with trauma theory, by examining how the formal elements of FF horror represent trauma. This thesis argues that trauma is represented not so much in the presence of formal elements, but in the lack or subversion of formal conventions commonly associated with narrative films. For example, FF horror films often lack film signifiers that audiences expect from professional filmmaking, such as designed sets, composed shots or lighting, scripted dialogue, rehearsed performances, music scores, and edits. The destabilisation of conventional film form in FF horror signifies the destabilisation of a cognitive comprehension of the world. Furthermore, the thesis argues that the recurring aesthetic and thematic conventions of FF horror films situate psychological trauma as an essential and inherent component of its subgeneric structure.

This conceptual framework was used to analyse 14 FF horror films. These texts were selected based on a survey of primary and secondary sources. I reviewed Heller-Nicholas' and the *Found Footage Critic* website's definitions of FF horror,

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[30] J. Dudley Andrew, "Béla Balázs and the Tradition of Formalism," in *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 76-79.
[31] *Ibid.*, 76-79.

along with articles by Neil McRobert,[32] Claudio Vescia Zanini[33] and Xavier Aldana

Reyes,[34] and used these works as the basis on which to assemble a list of relevant

films. While I prioritised academic sources in my research, I also relied on popular

publications for background information. This was due to the limited scope and

quantity of FF horror scholarship. I used the internet to search for the most

commercially successful and critically acclaimed FF horror films thus far, as well as

films that were recommended on film critic websites and horror fan forums. For

example, the *AV Club*[35] and *Vulture*[36] published articles ranking noteworthy FF

horror films and filmmakers. I compiled a list of about 60 films that had received high

aggregate scores from critics or audiences on websites such as *Rotten Tomatoes*[37],

Metacritic,[38] *the Internet Movie Database,*[39] and *Found Footage Critic.*[40] I viewed

these films and took notes on their formal and structural compositions.

This initial study identified several aspects of FF horror that can be read to

represent symptoms of psychological trauma. These elements include the belated

occurrence and reoccurrence of an event; a threatening absence in the films' content

and form; the dissociation and fragmentation of the characters' psyches; and media

and technology becoming infected by frightening images. These observations are

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[32] Neil McRobert, "Mimesis of Media: Found Footage Cinema and the Horror of the Real," *Gothic Studies* 17 (2015): *137-150.*
[33] Claudio Vescia Zanini, "Found Footage and Gothic Conventions," *Soletras* 27, no.1 (2014): 194-206.
[34] Xavier Aldana Reyes, "Reel Evil: A Critical Reassessment of Found Footage Horror," *Gothic Studies* 17 (2015): 122-136.
[35] Randall Colburn, "Beyond *Blair Witch*: Why Found-Footage Horror Deserves your Respect," *The A.V. Club*, last modified October 28, 2015, https://film.avclub.com/beyond-blair-witch-why-found-footage-horror-deserves-y-1798286059.
[36] Jordan Crucchiola, "Charting *The Blair Witch Project's* Influence Through 10 Horror Films That Followed," *Vulture*, last modified September 16, 2016, https://www.vulture.com/2016/09/10-horror-movies-inspired-by-the-blair-witch-project.html.
[37] "Top 100 Horror Movies" (based on movies with 40 or more critic reviews), *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed January 7, 2020, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/top/bestofrt/top_100_horror_movies/.
[38] "Horror Movies by Metascore," *Metacritic*, accessed January 7, 2020, https://www.metacritic.com/browse/movies/genre/metascore/horror?view=detailed.
[39] "Top 100 Found Footage / POV Horror Movies," *Internet Movie Database*, last modified October 24, 2017, https://www.imdb.com/list/ls025259936/.
[40] "Top Films," *Found Footage Critic.*

expanded in the conceptual framework presented in chapter one. The remaining chapters analyse the films by applying trauma theory, questioning how the characters can be read as representations of traumatised individuals and how their diegetic recordings signify the re-emergence of a contextual social trauma.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of each text, the initial list of 60 films was reduced to 14. These 14 films were identified as representative examples of typical or significant aspects of the subgenre. Within the thesis, these films are divided into four distinct categories according to narrative, setting, perspective, and the specific way that they each represented trauma. The categories are:

- Remote FF horror: films that depict characters travelling to a remote location, such as a forest, in order to investigate and document evidence of a folkloric monster. *Blair Witch* is one such example. Unresolved historical atrocities is a central theme of these films.

- Urban FF horror: films that depict characters recording daily modern life, only to be interrupted by the arrival of a destructive monster or monsters. *Cloverfield* is one such example. Contemporary atrocities, such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters, are a central theme of these films.

- Domestic FF horror: films that depict a household being invaded by monstrous forces, which the characters attempt to document via surveillance cameras. *Paranormal Activity* is one such example. Domestic abuse and complex PTSD are central themes of these films.

- Perpetrator FF horror: films recorded from the perspective of morally monstrous characters as they carry out violent attacks on others. *Man Bites Dog* (Belvaux, Bonzel and Poelvoorde 1992) is one such example. Perpetrator trauma and social guilt are central themes of these films.

Most FF horror films can be situated in one of these four categories.[41] The categories redefine the entire FF horror subgenre in relation to trauma theory and consequently inform the structure of this thesis. Notably, the first three categories are identified in terms of the trauma victim, and are defined by setting. The fourth category is defined by the perspective of the trauma perpetrator and can take place in any setting.

Significance

The thesis contributes to film studies and horror film studies by developing and advancing the field of FF literature and theory. As mentioned, one academic book and dozens of articles have been published on FF horror, most of which focus on defining the concept and style, and identifying and examining key films. However, these publications do not incorporate trauma theory into their analysis. In contrast, Linnie Blake, Adam Lowenstein and Michael Elm et al.,[42] have published academic books that apply trauma theory to other subgenres of horror film. The thesis bridges this gap between FF horror scholarship and research on cinematic representations of trauma. I will examine the conceptual, aesthetic and thematic role of trauma in FF horror films, as well as how individual films represent historical and contemporary collective traumas. By combining film theory, trauma theory, horror film theory, and analysis of FF horror, the thesis expands those fields, while also developing a new field of FF horror studies. Additionally, while FF scholars such as Heller-Nicholas, Zanini and Aldana Reyes hesitate or refuse to label FF horror a subgenre, this thesis

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[41] However, some films do blend categories; for example, *Cannibal Holocaust* functions as both a Remote FF horror film and a Perpetrator FF horror film.
[42] Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek and Julia B. Kohne, *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence Void Visualization* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

argues that it is a subgenre and that its unique representation of trauma is an important component of that categorisation.

The project also contributes to understanding the relationship between FF horror films and the theories of psychological trauma that were published in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This relationship will be substantiated in several key ways. The thesis argues that the forms and structures of FF horror films represent the experience of a traumatic incident, emphasising sensory shock and paralysis, as well as a collapse of narrative cohesion. Drawing upon Caruth's and Herman's definitions of trauma, the thesis also explores how the belated discovery or uncovering of film or video material in FF horror evokes the dialectical qualities of trauma. In a similar manner to the experience of a nightmare or flashback, FF films depict a collision between the past and present. That is, the viewer experiences a frightening event as something that *has* happened, something that *is* happening, and even as something that *will* happen again. This dialectic, the thesis argues, locates the viewer within the unstable state between living a disaster that the subject cannot escape or survive and watching that disaster re-enacted without the power to alter or intervene. As a film subgenre and cultural artefacts, FF horror films simulate trauma by creating a unique interplay between image, mode, performer, and viewer, wherein our perceptions of time, the world and our place within them, are scrambled.

By examining the formal and structural elements of FF horror films, including camera movement and framing, lighting, sound design, and performances, the thesis identifies an aesthetic that is consistently evident in this subgenre. It argues that this aesthetic both represents the individual's experience of being overwhelmed and psychologically fragmented by an event, and simulates the representational modes through which traumatic events are conveyed in the 21st century. Thus, the thesis

investigates how FF horror expresses the links between individual and collective psychological trauma, and their complex, tangled relationship to the past. For example, the thesis will investigate how mass violence or ecological disasters are perceived by individuals and the collective, and how this perception is depicted by and through FF horror.

Cinema has proven to be a vital tool in expressing trauma, especially collective trauma associated with or stemming from large events, such as war, genocide and civil unrest. Rather than relying on spoken and written words, cinema introduced a new language – a unique combination of images, movements, sounds, music, and perspectives that can articulate feelings, sensations, thoughts, and even dreams. Film historian Tom Gunning argues that cinema has a "special relationship" with the "shock" experience of modernity.[43] In contrast with the "dead" fixed histories of documents and records, film was ideally placed to witness the movements, transitions and, most importantly, disorientations of the modern world.[44] This reflection of the present is especially relevant for cinema's relationship with psychoanalysis, a scientific inquiry that, like films, also emerged from and was shaped by modernity.

The thesis reads FF horror films as representing aspects of historical traumas and contemporary mass traumas. A key difference, the thesis argues, is that 20th century traumas, such as World Wars and ethnic genocides, were initially buried away and repressed by society, before being gradually excavated by psychologists and artists of succeeding decades. Conversely, the traumas of the 21st century are broadcast in real time. They are available through a multitude of multimedia platforms and networks, and have the potential to overwhelm our mental and social

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[43] Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art and Text* 34 (1989): 118.
[44] *Ibid.*, 119.

lives. FF horror films reference this shift in the collective reception of trauma by appropriating the representational modes through which contemporary disasters are routinely captured and transmitted, such as personal cameras, mobile phones and social media. The thesis demonstrates how the subgenre creates a new aesthetic to evoke the collective shock and terror contemporary societies are experiencing. The FF horror aesthetic perpetually reinforces the premise that a cataclysm has already happened, and all that we as viewers can do is to pick through the rubble in search of answers. FF horror's appropriation of these modes reconfigures the camera as an instrument of death, lifting the human subject out of life and into representation, into the objectifying gaze of pity and caution. It reflects a fatalistic gaze that, as the camera's lens increasingly devours and regurgitates every aspect of our life, threatens to cast each of us as the star of some future FF film.

The subgenre's power lies in its ability to evoke a unique aesthetic depiction of trauma, simultaneously confronting the viewer with the moment of frenzy and the knowledge of an inescapable conclusion. This inescapability is embodied in the past tense of the word "found." Developing a theory of this aesthetic through close textual analysis has filmic and philosophical implications. In contrast to the classical definition of aesthetic, which concerns beauty, flow, symmetry and harmony,[45] FF horror films exemplify an aesthetic embedded in disharmony, rupture, incomprehension, and frenzy. This unique aesthetic, termed by this thesis as a trauma aesthetic, is relevant to academic and public discussions and examinations of traumatic events – how they are perceived, communicated and ultimately processed by individuals and cultures. The trauma aesthetic identified in FF horror

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[45] F. E. Sparshott, "Basic Film Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 5, no.2 (1971): 11-13.

films has the potential to inform new codes of language to articulate trauma where established language denies it.

FF horror offers a unique and innovative insight into psychological and collective trauma. As one of the dominant and most recent trends of horror cinema, it responds to and expresses the collective experience of contemporary disasters and atrocities, as well as the collective legacy of historical disasters and atrocities.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter one, "Buried Tapes," reviews the current literature relevant to FF horror films and defines it as a subgenre of horror cinema. The chapter also reviews the trauma theory of Caruth, Herman and others, as well as the horror film theory of Lowenstein, Blake and Elm et al. The second half of the chapter outlines the conceptual framework that the thesis uses to analyse the film texts. The framework demonstrates how the premise of FF horror, usually the discovery of a lost or buried video recording, can be read to symbolise the belated recovery of a traumatic experience. Meanwhile, the raw footage that constitutes the FF horror aesthetic produces a frightening, overwhelming experience for the characters and audience that reflects the lived experience of trauma. Finally, the framework outlines how recurring images and motifs of FF horror films are unified by their representation of individual and collective trauma.

Chapter two, "Into the Woods," defines Remote FF horror, and examines three notable films within the category – *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek*. These films depict characters who venture into remote American forests in search of legendary monsters: respectively, the Blair Witch (an allusion to the Salem Witch Trials), the Jersey Devil and Bigfoot. The chapter identifies in these films a

suspicion of official accounts of the past, and a curiosity towards the forbidden or unknown aspects of history. It argues that the technological interrogation of folklore functions as a bridge between dominant accounts of the past and the actual raw, lived experience of the past. The chapter further argues that the characters' interest in folkloric narrative, and the cultivation of the viewers' interest through paratexts, demonstrates growing public awareness of historical trauma, and connects that public inquiry to nationality. The chapter determines that the films' depictions of folkloric monsters alludes to traumatic events and experiences in American history, such as rural isolation, religious violence, and the displacement of indigenous peoples, which continues to impact the present.

Chapter three, "Out of the Rubble," defines the second category of the subgenre – Urban FF horror films. These films depict the sudden emergence of a monster in the familiar,[46] public spaces of the city. The quintessential example of Urban FF horror is *Cloverfield*, which features a large monster attacking New York City and depicts panicked crowds amidst urban destruction. The other films examined are *REC*, *REC 2* (Balagueró and Plaza 2009), *The Bay* and *Pandemic*, which depict zombie outbreaks in different cities. These films evoke the horror of contemporary terrorist attacks and environmental disasters, as well as the new technological modes through which the trauma is vicariously transmitted to the public. The films also depict the state's and mass media's attempts to mediate the traumatic event into an account that suits their agenda, while silencing the perspectives of victims in order to sustain that narrative. The chapter argues that FF horror does not necessarily offer a counterview of events, but an ambiguous, unprocessed view of events.

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[46] That is, familiar to urban and suburban audiences.

Chapter four, "Always Watching," examines the third category of the subgenre – Domestic FF horror. These films depict a threatening presence gradually invading a home and possessing its occupants. The most famous example of this category is *Paranormal Activity*, in which a young couple suspect their house is haunted and set up a video camera to record their bedroom while they are sleeping. The chapter also examines *Lake Mungo*, which is about a family dealing with the death of their daughter and her possible spiritual presence in their house. The diegetic camera serves an ambiguous function in that it is initially used to document or understand the monster's activities, but gradually augments the monster's power or reveals itself as the source of the monstrosity. These films are distinguished from those of previous chapters by the fact that they do not evoke a single traumatic event but rather prolonged, repetitive torment. The chapter thus argues that the films simulate the experience of complex PTSD, as well as, given their settings, domestic abuse.

Chapter five, "The Monster's Gaze," examines the fourth and most confronting category of the subgenre – Perpetrator FF horror. The films in this chapter are among the most violent and sadistic examples of FF horror, as they depict the world through the eyes of plunderers (*Cannibal Holocaust*), serial killers (*Man Bites Dog*), violent criminals (*Gang Tapes*), and mass shooters (*Zero Day*). The chapter links these films to a less-developed area of trauma research called perpetrator trauma, which attempts to understand the behaviour and treat the suffering of those who inflict traumatic experiences. The chapter demonstrates how the films position the psychological suffering of the characters as a result of their violent actions. By demonstrating how the characters' behaviour is influenced by social and political forces in the films, the chapter also implicates their respective societies in the consequences and experience of perpetrator trauma.

CHAPTER ONE: BURIED TAPES
The Belated Experience of Found Footage Horror

FF horror films present the audience with a single daunting premise: a video tape has been discovered in the aftermath of a frightening or destructive event, and it contains an audio-visual record of that event. The form and content of this footage evokes the concept of a repressed experience, which, after a period of dormancy, re-emerges into the present. This chapter examines the relationship between FF horror and psychological trauma, and establishes the conceptual framework that will be utilised throughout the thesis. The first part of the chapter defines FF horror as a subgenre and reviews relevant scholarship. The chapter then explores psychological trauma theory, particularly the research of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. It follows with a review of recent literature that conceptualises a relationship between horror films and trauma theory, with a view towards expanding this literature to incorporate FF horror films. The second half of the chapter outlines the ways in which FF horror films conceptualise the premise of psychological trauma, express experiences of trauma through their aesthetic, and incorporate trauma into the themes of the films.

Tracing the Origins of Found Footage Horror

A FF horror film is any film that aims to frighten its audience, and which is presented as being recorded entirely or predominantly by devices and characters that occupy the world of the film. FF horror films utlilise an aesthetic device that is unique to fictional narrative films – the diegetic camera. Zachary Ingle defines diegetic cinematography as "a camera within the diegesis, acknowledged by the characters,

which is quite different from the typical subjective camera."[47] Most FF horror films portray their content as being composed of raw, unedited footage, which is presented to the viewer in the form that it was purportedly discovered. The cameras used to film FF horror are typically consumer-grade quality and the camerawork is portrayed as being executed by characters that are untrained in cinematography. This gives the footage a distinctly amateurish quality that critics and scholars have described as "realistic."[48] Indeed, amateur production values, such as poor camerawork, lighting, sound, and acting are key elements to achieving the constructed authenticity of FF films, as they provide a stark contrast to the slick, glossy, meticulously composed aesthetic of Hollywood films. According to Heller-Nicholas, the production values of FF films imbue the images with a sense of immediacy and immersion.[49] For several FF horror films, innovative marketing has been employed to reinforce this "realistic" aesthetic, framing the films as though they were genuine recordings of horrific events. Similarly, many FF horror films begin with a caption informing the audience that the footage they are about to view is real. For example, *Paranormal Activity* opens with the caption: "Paramount Pictures would like to thank the families of Micah Sloat & Katie Featherston and the San Diego Police Department." These combined attempts to blur the boundaries of fact and fiction form a crucial component of the FF horror subgenre that aids in its objectives to shock, disturb and scare.

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[47] Zachary Ingle, "George A. Romero's *Diary of the Dead* and the Rise of the Diegetic Camera in Recent Horror Films," *La Sapienza*, accessed July 17, 2018, http://host.uniroma3.it/riviste/Ol3Media/archivio_files/Ol3Media%2009%20Horror.pdf.

[48] Aldana Reyes, "Reel Evil," 123.

[49] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, "From *War of the Worlds* to *Unfriended*: Found Footage Horror for Beginners." *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, last modified April 30, 2015, https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/finalcut/the-threat-of-the-real:-found-footage-horror-for-beginners/6433852.

Claudio Vescia Zanini cites audience reactions to *Blair Witch* and *Paranormal Activity* as evidence of the unique effect of FF horror films. For example, during advance screenings of these films, some viewers fled the theatre in fear; they later told entertainment reporters that the "look and feel" of the films was "too real," as well as expressing confusion and concern for the wellbeing of the characters.[50] The film distributors incorporated this audience reaction footage into the films' marketing campaigns. The veracity of the films was also hotly debated in online forums, both at their time of release and afterwards.[51] Zanini observes that the formal style of *Blair Witch* and *Paranormal Activity* differed from conventional horror productions, and yet still felt eerily familiar to many viewers.[52] This is because their style of filmmaking was reminiscent of amateur home videos, featuring long takes and handheld shots from the point-of-view (POV) of the protagonist. Moreover, the increased availability of consumer-grade video cameras in the *early* 2000s and their ubiquity in mobile phones from the *late* 2000s ensured that viewers of FF horror were not only familiar with watching amateur video recordings, but also with producing them. Heller-Nicholas agrees with Zanini, arguing that the formal style of FF horror films signifies reality, and that its content ruptures the traditional artifice of the frame in order to become intuitively threatening to the viewer. Thus, the subgenre positions the polish and professionalism of studio films as artificial, while linking degradation and decay to authenticity.[53]

While critics and scholars often credit *Blair Witch* as the first fully recognisable instance of FF horror,[54] several significant precedents can be identified throughout

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[50] Zanini "Found Footage and Gothic Conventions," 199-200.
[51] Margrit Schreier, "'Please Help Me: All I Want to Know Is: Is it Real or Not?': How Recipients View the Reality Status of *The Blair Witch Project*," *Poetics Today* 25, no.2 (2004): 319-320.
[52] Zanini, "Found Footage and Gothic Conventions," 200-201.
[53] Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films*, 8.
[54] *Ibid.*, 4.

the 19th and 20th centuries. One example, cited by both Zanini and Neil McRobert, is the epistolary novel. Unlike conventional fiction, epistolary novels were presented to readers as a collage of apparently legitimate sources, such as diary and phonographic entries, letters, newspaper articles, and ship logs. This epistolary structure contributed to an "aura of credibility," imbuing the texts with a journalistic or archaeological impression.[55] Like FF horror films, epistolary novels were often portrayed to the reader as being discovered after the fact and containing truthful material, despite being fictitious. The style was particularly popular in Gothic literature, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and H.P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926). Along with their forms, McRobert observes, Gothic horror and FF horror have thematic similarities. Both types of texts are characterised by a quest for the truth behind a sinister experience, and present their narratives as deriving from discovered content that has allegedly not been moderated or mediated. Additionally, they both involve characters who are ensnared and deceived by a potentially supernatural entity, and seek to use technology—or the tools of modernity—to interrogate the entity. [56] Zanini adds that, while both Gothic literature and FF horror films contain in-the-moment accounts, they are framed as being told in hindsight, with the manuscripts/footage having been discovered by characters in the present, or indeed, by the reader/viewer themselves.[57] McRobert observes that the novel *Dracula* reflects on the technological processes of the Victorian era, with objects like the stenograph and typewriter serving not merely as props, but as the instruments that produce the text

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[55] Zanini, "Found Footage and Gothic Conventions," 198.
[56] Neil McRobert, "It's Only a Movie: Found Footage, Trauma and the Gothic Document," (paper presented at the *International Gothic Biannual Conference*, University of Surrey, Surrey, U.K., 2013), 6-7.
[57] Zanini, "Found Footage and Gothic Conventions," 199.

we are reading.[58] Likewise, the camera in FF horror films exists within the world of

the story, and is significant in how the characters and the viewers interpret events.

The stories are rendered frightening by their connection to the real world, as the

diegetic camera inhabits both our reality and the nightmare reality of the story. The

19th century reader and the 21st century viewer both approach these tales of

monsters from a point of rational scepticism, only to have those assumptions

ruptured by strange and supernatural encounters.

Another potential precursor to FF horror films, suggested by Sarolta Mezei, is

"post-mortem" photography. This was a popular practice in Europe and America

during the 19th century. It involved photographing recently deceased people in poses

that made them appear lifelike. Family members of the departed would often

commission post-mortem photographs as part of the grieving process, and served to

give closure by providing one final image of their loved one.[59] Mezei argues that by

placing the dead bodies into lifelike situations—dressing them up, posing them at a

dining table or a writing desk—the photo evokes a ghostly phenomenon, denying

death and reanimating the corpse. Consequently, she interprets the discovered reels

and tapes that constitute FF horror as being similarly haunted by images and

impressions of death.[60] Most, if not all, characters in FF horror die by the end of the

film. Indeed, the very fact that we are watching the footage outside of their presence

implies that tragedy has already befallen them. Thus, death informs every moment of

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[58] Neil McRobert, "'This is a Wonderful Machine, but it is cruelly true': Narrative Mediation and Gothic Uncertainty in Dracula," *Academia*, last accessed January 16, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/7646639/Its_Only_a_Movie_Found_footage_Trauma_and_the_Gothic_Document.
[59] Barbara Norfleet, *Looking at Death* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1993), 9-10.
[60] Sarolta Mezei, Sarolta. "Found Footage Horror #1: The Dead Rising: Aspects of Spectrality in the Vicious Brothers' *Grave Encounters*," *Bright Lights Film Journal*, last modified May 14, 2014, https://brightlightsfilm.com/found-footage-films-dead-rising-aspects-spectrality-vicious-brothers-grave-encounters/#.X8cW7bNS8aE.

FF horror, and the subgenre can be read as capturing the dying process.[61] Mezei references the film *Grave Encounters* (The Vicious Brothers 2011) to demonstrate this reading. It depicts a documentary crew investigating an abandoned mental hospital that is infamous for its maltreatment of patients and rumoured to be haunted. The crew soon discovers, however, that the timers on their camera equipment have become erratic, that the food they brought with them is crawling with worms as though it is months old, and that when they try to flee, they find the main entrance replaced by another corridor. The characters are trapped, and time seems to have ceased, as though they were in another plane of existence, as though they were in a photograph. Metatextually, Mezei observes that the characters are lifted "out of life and into representation," drifting spectral-like between the physical site of an abandoned hospital and a horror film about an abandoned hospital.[62] Mezei limits her analysis to one film, but this comparison to post-mortem photography is applicable to all FF horror films.

Heller-Nicholas catalogues a series of other precursors to the FF horror film, particularly its ambiguous and unnerving truth claims. Firstly, she cites 19th century journalistic hoaxes propagated by the British and American press, such as reports of life on the moon (1835);[63] a mass escape at the New York Zoo (1874);[64] a Wildman terrorising rural Connecticut (1895);[65] and a business contract to demolish the Great Wall of China (1899).[66] These stories were widely circulated and reprinted, and in many cases, readers accepted their contents as fact. For example, the 19th century astronomer John Herschel recalls being repeatedly frustrated by people asking

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[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] Richard Adams Lock, "Great Astronomical Discoveries Lately Made," *New-York Sun*, Aug 25, 1835.
[64] Thomas Connery, "Awful Calamnity," *New York Herald*, November 9, 1874.
[65] "Built Like a Horse!" *The North Adams Daily Transcript*, August 23, 1895.
[66] Charles Warner, "Great Chinese Wall Doomed!" *Fort Wayne Evening Sentinel*, July 8, 1899.

questions about the lunar civilisations described by *The Sun* newspaper.[67] Secondly, Heller-Nicholas cites Orson Welles' infamous 1938 radio production of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Welles' deft replication of the newscaster style led many casual listeners to misinterpret the play as reporting an actual foreign or extra-terrestrial invasion, causing "panic, confusion and mass hysteria."[68] Thirdly, Heller-Nicholas references road safety films produced in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. These films were shown in public schools and driver training classes, and blended re-enactments of poor driving practices with actual crash footage. She notes that many viewers were upset by the sharp contrast between the poor acting and writing of the re-enactments, and the gruesome imagery of lifeless crash victims.[69] These examples demonstrate mass media's sporadic but sustained history of blurring fact with fiction. They also demonstrate the way frightening content potentially becomes more frightening when delivered through a credible or trusted format.

One final precursor to FF horror that Heller-Nicholas cites is the series of urban legends that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s around the existence of "snuff films." According to David Kerekes and David Slater, "snuff" was an underground genre of video tapes rumoured to depict real-life murders and suicides, and which was "supposedly circulated amongst a jaded few for the purpose of entertainment."[70] The legend prompted an FBI investigation. However, authorities never unearthed anything that met the definition of a genuine snuff film.[71] Nevertheless, several films

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[67] Kevin Young, "Moon Shot: Race, a Hoax, and the Birth of Fake News," *The New Yorker,* October 21, 2017.
[68] Heller-Nicholas, "From War of the Worlds."
[69] Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films,* 30.
[70] David Kerekes and David Slater, *Killing for Culture: An Illustrated History of Death Film from Mondo to Snuff* (Brighton: Creation Books, 1994), 24.
[71] Some filmed records of murders and executions were shown to exist, but in those cases, the death was not specifically staged for financial gain or entertainment, and therefore did not meet Keres' and Slater's definition of snuff.

were produced and marketed to capitalise on the legend. Examples include *Mondo Cane* (Jacopetti, Cavara and Prosperi 1962) and *Cannibal Holocaust* from Italy, the *Guinea Pig* (Ogura 1985) series from Japan, and the *Faces of Death* (Schwartz 1978) series from the U.S. These films combined filmed records of genuine violence, such as car accidents, failed stunts, animal cruelty, and public executions, with staged footage of more extreme violence, such as torture, sexual assault and murder. The realism of the genuine footage, and the documentary style used to frame the staged footage, convinced many viewers of the films' overall authenticity.[72] This perception resulted in Italian authorities charging the director of *Cannibal Holocaust* with the murder of his actors. In a similar instance, the American actor Charlie Sheen submitted a copy of the second *Guinea Pig* film to American authorities, believing it depicted a real murder. In both cases, authorities compelled the respective filmmakers to prove their innocence by demonstrating the special effects used to simulate the violence within the films.[73] Although the framing narrative of *Cannibal Holocaust* features non-diegetic cinematography, a significant portion of the film's running time depicts *diegetic* footage of a documentary crew becoming lost and hunted in the forest. According to Heller-Nicholas, this makes it the first horror film to utilise the FF premise and aesthetic.[74] Its stylistic and narrative resemblance to *Blair Witch* suggests it was a direct inspiration for that film.

In order to define FF horror films, it is necessary to address a different use of the term "found footage" in film history, and understand how contemporary FF horror relates to, and can be differentiated from, this earlier practice. Collage film is a style of film that emerged out of the surrealist art movement of the 1930s, and involved

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[72] Nicolo Gallio, "Til (Faces of) Death Do Us Part," *Cine-Excess*, last modified September 3, 2013, https://www.cine-excess.co.uk/til-faces-of-death-do-us-part.html.
[73] Gallio, "Til (Faces of) Death."
[74] Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films,* 32-33.

the use of various film clips as "found objects" that are juxtaposed against one another.[75] According to Frank Beaver, these film clips were produced for other purposes, such as news coverage, documentaries and narrative films, before being appropriated by the collage filmmaker; therefore, the clips were known as "found footage," echoing the surrealist art practice of appropriating everyday objects and exhibiting them as art, such as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917).[76] In 1936, Joseph Cornell made the collage film *Rose Hobart* by re-editing clips from the 1931 adventure film *East of Borneo* (George Melford 1931), along with documentary film clips, transforming the original meaning of the footage through experimental juxtaposition. Other surrealist collage films were produced in the 1920s and 1930s by filmmakers Adrian Brunel, Henri Storck and André Breton, in the 1950s by Bruce Conner, and in the 1970s by Woody Allen.[77] However, not all collage films were avant-garde; some were simply documentaries that used discovered archival footage as the subject or background to educational or non-fictional commentary, such as Ken Burns' *The Civil War* (1990) and *Baseball* (1994).[78]

The main difference between the "found footage" used in collage films and the content of FF horror films is that the former was recorded for one purpose (often documentary), and then appropriated by someone else for another purpose. The found footage in FF horror films, by contrast, is only *presented* as non-fictional material recorded for another purpose, but is in fact staged and used for precisely the reason for which it was recorded – a narrative horror film. Another difference is that collage films make their manufactured origins explicit, drawing attention to their

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[75] Frank Eugene Beaver, *Dictionary of Film Terms: The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 46.
[76] *Ibid.*, 46.
[77] William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), 14.
[78] *Ibid.*, 14.

use of editing and attempting to transform non-fictional source material into surrealist fantasy. FF horror films attempt the opposite, portraying their footage as unmediated and their supernatural narratives as credible. Finally, the use of the word "found" differs between the two film types: in the preceding category it refers to an experimental art practice that exists outside of filmmaking, while in the contemporary category, "found" pertains to the plot of the film.

Despite these distinctions and contradictions, Roger Luckhurst argues that FF horror carries on aspects of the collage film, by combining "avant-garde traditions" with "overtly mainstream pop culture genres," such as horror and science fiction.[79] Both film types blur the boundaries between text, filmmaker, character and spectator, while also challenging the perceived credibility of nonfiction and the perceived incredibility of fiction. Moreover, collage films, like their Dadaist and surrealist precursors, dispute the pretext that art should be beautiful or harmonious. Marcel Duchamp, the creator of the *Fountain*, argued that art's preoccupation with beauty distracted artists and the public from grasping fundamental truths, or from addressing serious social and political issues. Consequently, he and other Dadaist and surrealist artists contributed to the creation of an "anti-aesthetic," producing works which were nonsensical, disturbing, or which attacked the very definition of art.[80] This thesis concurs with Luckhurst's assessment, demonstrating how FF horror films break formalist traditions in order to politicise the film art form, therefore continuing the purpose of the post-World War I avant-garde movement. The thesis also demonstrates how FF horror filmmakers produce images that disrupt traditional

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[79] Roger Luckhurst, "Found Footage Science Fiction: Five Films by Craig Baldwin, Jonathan Weiss, Werner Herzog and Patrick Keiller," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 1, no.2 (2008): 193.
[80] Benjamin Truitt, "Anti-Aesthetic: Definition & Art," *Study*, accessed 16 January, 2020, https://study.com/academy/lesson/anti-aesthetic-definition-art.html.

film aesthetics, and produce an aesthetic experience which evokes and simulates psychological trauma.

Defining the Found Footage Horror Subgenre

The combination of fictional narratives and diegetic cinematography distinguishes FF horror films from most other films. It also disrupts the two fundamental categories of film as outlined by Alan Williams – narrative and documentary.[81] While many narrative films are fictional, some are based on or inspired by true events or real people. However, almost all narrative films are shot non-diegetically. That is, the shots and scenes of narratives films are recorded by a camera that exists outside the constructed world of the film and outside the knowledge of its characters.[82] The footage that constitutes conventional narrative films, for the most part, has no known source within the film. According to Peter Turner, this cinematographic relationship has remained consistent since the silent era, and this presumption of non-diegetic cinematography is reflected in narrative film theory and the generic expectations of the audience.[83] There are incidental exceptions to this rule, especially in films about the film industry or films in which photography or video recording are central components of the plot. For example, a narrative film, such as *Singin' in the Rain* (Kelly and Donen 1952), may depict a character being recorded by a camera, and then represent that recording using the entire frame of the film. However, such moments do not constitute significant segments of narrative films' running time. If they did, such a film could be a FF hybrid, as in the case of *Cannibal Holocaust*. There are also examples where a character in a fictional narrative film may

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[81] Alan Williams, "Is Radical Genre Criticism Possible?" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, no.2 (1984): 121.
[82] Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routldge, 2000), 102.
[83] Turner, *Found Footage Horror Films*, 54.

acknowledge or address the audience, such as musicals or satirical comedies, thereby breaking the "fourth wall" that constitutes the screen, and by extension, breaking the illusion of the film's fictional world.[84] However, such moments are typically brief, and fail to incorporate the camera as a temporary object, let alone a permanent object, in the diegetic world of the film.

Traditionally, films in which the footage *does* have a known and visible source within the diegesis are not labelled narrative films, but documentaries. Unlike most narrative films, documentary content is presented and accepted as non-fictional, as a record of people, places and things that exist within the *real world*, rather than a fictional world constructed for the film.[85] Inseparable from that claim to reality is the acknowledgement—by the documentary filmmaker, the subjects that he or she may be interviewing, and the audience—that what we are watching was recorded by a diegetic camera. There are ongoing debates in film theory about the documentary filmmaker's capacity to misinterpret, alter or manipulate what they record, as well as the context in which they present it. However, contemporary debate continues to adhere to documentarian John Grierson's view that the primary purpose of documentaries is to inform and educate.[86]

The classification of the narrative film camera as non-diegetic, and documentary film camera as diegetic, was firmly established and largely adhered to by filmmakers for most of film history. Susan Hayward's compendium *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000) includes an entry on "diegesis" that cites no scholarship on the topic of diegetic or non-diegetic cameras. Instead, most of the theory focuses on film sound, with Hayward distinguishing between sound that does

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[84] Elizabeth Bell, *Theories of Performance* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 37.
[85] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 102-103.
[86] Peter Morris, "Re-thinking Grierson: The Ideology of John Grierson," *History on/and/in Film* (Perth: History & Film Association of Australia, 1987), 20.

have a source within the film world, such as dialogue from a character or ambient

noise, and sound with no natural source within the film world, such as a voice-over

signaling a character's thoughts or music added by the editor to signal mood.[87] This

lack of reference to the diegetic camera reinforces the rarity and implicit

unfeasibility—at least in mainstream 20th century film theory—of a film that combines

fictional narrative with diegetic cinematography. Nevertheless, *Cannibal Holocaust*

combined the two elements in 1980, making it one of the first films to do so. Director

Ruggero Deodato's blending of graphic violence with documentary aesthetics

resulted in a criminal trial and the banning of the film in several countries, including

its country of origin. Furthermore, critics labelled *Cannibal Holocaust* a sleazy and

artless exploitation film, and it was therefore largely ignored by academia at the time

of its release.[88] *Man Bites Dog* combined these elements again in 1992, and

received a warmer reception from critics. Nevertheless, this film was still banned in

two countries and received an NC-17 in the U.S., which prevented it from being

screened in the majority of North American theatres.[89] These are the only significant

FF horror films[90] to be released prior to *Blair Witch* and *The Last Broadcast*, with the

only other examples being barely-seen amateur films, such as *UFO Abduction*

*(*Alioto 1989), or films from other genres, such as the war film *84C MoPic* (Duncan

1989) and the drama *Forgotten Silver* (Jackson and Botes 1995).

Notably, there is another film subgenre that combines narrative fiction with

diegetic cinematography, and which also predates FF: mockumentaries, sometimes

called pseudo-documentaries, are a type of film or television show that depicts

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[87] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 84
[88] Gallio, "Til (Faces of) Death."
[89] Chris Gentilviso, "20 Years of NC-17 Ratings," *Time*, last modified October 5, 2010, http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2023441,00.html.
[90] That is, significant in terms of box office revenue generated.

fictional events, but in the form of a documentary.[91] Early mockumentary films include *A Hard Day's Night* (Lester 1964), which purports to depict several days in the lives of The Beatles, and *This is Spinal Tap* (Reiner 1984), which follows a fictional heavy metal band on tour. Director Rob Reiner popularised the term in the mid-1980s in interviews promoting *This Is Spinal Tap*.[92] The cult British television series, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) also used the mockumentary format in several of its sketches. The format later became popular in television sitcoms of the early 21st century, first with *The Office* (2001-2003) and its international offshoots, which then popular award-winning shows such as *Summer Heights High* (2007), *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015) and *Modern Family* (2009-2020).[93] The key difference between FF films and mockumentaries is that the diegetic content of FF films is presented as being unedited, while the latter presents its footage as having undergone post-production treatment, such as editing and the addition of non-diegetic music and voice-over. In his examination of FF horror, McRobert notes that mockumentaries are also more explicit in their imitation of documentary codes and conventions; their use of interviews and narration signals a level of context, reflection and a formal stability, which FF horror films generally lack.[94] To clarify, mockumentaries typically seem like they were recorded and produced by a professional filmmaker, while FF films are made to appear as though they were recorded by an amateur filmmaker and have undergone little to no alteration. Moreover, FF films are structured in such a way as to locate the viewer

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[91] Jason Middleton, *Documentary's Awkward Turn: Cringe Comedy and Media Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 18.
[92] Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, *Faking it: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 120-121.
[93] Middleton, *Documentary's Awkward Turn*, 49.
[94] McRobert, "It's Only a Movie," 3.

primarily within the immediate materialisation of the event and the subjectivity of the person experiencing it.

Another important distinction between mockumentary and FF is the particular genres into which critics typically group the respective films. Heller-Nicholas puts it simply: mockumentaries tend to be comedies and FF films tend to be horror.[95] That is, most films that use the mockumentary format primarily aim to amuse the viewer, while most films that use the FF format primarily aim to frighten the viewer. The vast majority of mockumentaries[96] are primarily comedic.[97] The same correlation is true regarding FF films and the horror genre. There are non-horror FF films: McRobert points out that there are examples of crime films (*End of Watch*, Ayer 2012), war films (*Redacted*, De Palma 2007),[98] science-fiction films (*Europa Report*, Cordero 2013), superhero films (*Chronicle*, Trank 2012), and comedies (*Project X*) that adopt the FF format.[99] However, of the 800 films catalogued in the Found Footage Critic website, only 34 do not carry a "horror" keyword tag. This figure represents a mere 4.25% of the entire database.

This thesis argues that FF horror films constitute a subgenre of horror. Conversely, Xavier Aldana Reyes[100] and David Bordwell[101] claim that FF should only be categorised as a "framing technique"[102] that can be applied to any genre of film.

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[95] Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films*, 72-73.
[96] Most Popular Mockumentary Movies, *Internet Movie Database*, accessed January 18, 2020, https://www.imdb.com/search/keyword/?keywords=mockumentary.
[97] There are, however, exceptions to this trend; for example, acclaimed director Peter Watkins has produced several non-comedic mockumentaries, such as *The War Game* (1965), a film that depicts the possible effects of nuclear war on England, and which received critical praise (it won the Academy Award for Best Documentary) and censorship (it was banned from broadcast for its graphic imagery).
[98] Stuart Marshall Bender argues that *Redacted* utilises low-quality imagery in order to re-enact a real-world atrocity. While the film does not meet the definition of a FF horror film, and is therefore outside the scope of this thesis, it is a notable example of a filmmaker using the FF aesthetic to represent a traumatic event. Bender, *Legacies of the Degraded Image* (New York: Springer, 2017).
[99] McRobert, "It's Only a Movie," 4.
[100] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 150.
[101] Bordwell, "Return to Paranormalcy."
[102] *Ibid.*

While I agree with the second part of this statement, and have listed several examples of this application above, the fact that the vast majority of FF films are either horror or horror hybrids demonstrates that there is clearly a popular and prominent subgenre of horror films that utilise this framing technique. Aldana Reyes argues that the technique marks FF films at a "stylistic, but not a thematic, level" and that FF films vary too greatly in tone, purpose and theme to constitute a subgenre.[103] However, a variation in theme does not preclude two or more films from being grouped into the same subgenre (even Bordwell agrees with this),[104] as subgenre is determined by a range of factors. Furthermore, FF horror films do in fact contain recurring themes and conventions, most importantly in their depiction of the structure and experience of psychological trauma. Aldana Reyes may be including non-horror FF films in his argument, suggesting that because *Project X* primarily attempts to amuse and excite the audience, and *Paranormal Activity* attempts to unnerve and frighten the audience, then they are too tonally dissimilar to be considered part of the same subgenre. However, this thesis explicitly excludes *Project X* from its definition of the FF horror subgenre.

In order to determine how FF functions as a subgenre of horror, it is first necessary to outline the key characteristics and conventions of the horror genre. Horror is one of the oldest forms of art and narrative, and horror has been a popular genre of cinema from the silent era[105] to the current era.[106] Horror films are designed to captivate and entertain the viewer with frightening images, sensations and ideas.

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[103] Aldana Reyes, "Reel Evil," 124

[104] "Any theme may appear in any genre." David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 147.

[105] For example, in 1896 the film pioneer Georges Méliès directed *The House of the Devil*, a short silent film that introduced several iconic horror images, such as a haunted castle, transforming bats, moving skeletons, and the first cinematic incarnation of the Devil.

[106] The 2017 film *Get Out* (Peele) earned 255.4 million at the box office and was nominated for four Academy Awards.

According to Rick Worland, they are traditionally set in secluded locations, such as old houses or castles, as well as cabins, farms, prisons, basements, tunnels, tombs, graveyards, ships, and forests.[107] These settings serve to imbue the protagonist, and by extension the viewer, with a sense of alienation and vulnerability. After establishing its setting, the horror narrative will introduce a set of characters, along with a frightening antagonist that seeks to harm or harass them. Horror film antagonists often take the form of supernatural beings, such as ghosts, demons, witches, zombies, aliens, mutants, vampires, and werewolves.[108] However, they also take human forms, such as stalkers, serial killers, cannibals, and creepy children.[109] Most of the characters in a horror film are killed or seriously injured, and many horror films, especially since the replacement of the Motion Picture Production Code with a ratings system, feature scenes of graphic violence.[110] The horror antagonist, or monster, is depicted as powerful, relentless and unreasonable.[111] While its presence is continually conveyed throughout the film, it often remains hidden, or only partially visible, until the film's climax.[112]

Aesthetically, horror films tend to be characterised by low-key lighting, dark colours and harsh weather conditions. These visual elements emphasise the mystery and danger of the narrative.[113] Horror films also utilise a range of camera conventions, including extreme close-ups on characters' faces to accentuate their anxiety and isolation; tracking shots that evoke the sensation of being followed; dramatic, restrictive or tilted angles that generate a sense of disorientation; and POV

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[107] Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 73.
[108] *Ibid.*, 74.
[109] *Ibid.*, 76-77.
[110] Donald Clarke, "Re-release of '*I Spit on Your Grave*' Banned by Film Body," *The Irish Times*, last modified September 21, 2010, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/re-release-of-i-spit-on-your-grave-banned-by-film-body-1.653261.
[111] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 42-43.
[112] *Ibid.*, 97-99.
[113] Worland, *The Horror Film*, 80.

shots from the perspectives of the protagonist and antagonist as they search for one another.[114] Wheeler Winston Dixon observes that, while sound design varies throughout the history of the genre, most horror films attempt to unnerve the viewer through a juxtaposition of low frequency sounds, such as thunder or animal growls, and high frequency sounds, such as a creaking door hinge or a screaming woman.[115] This juxtaposition can also be produced through the film's musical score. Another effective horror technique is the insertion of sounds that are discordant with the film's *mise-en-scène*; for example, the sound of a child laughing in the context of an abandoned mental asylum.[116] Pam Cook describes horror films as being characterised by particular themes. Some frame their narratives as existential encounters between good and evil, society and nature, or humans and disasters. Other horror films focus on the inner psychological conflicts of their characters, revolving around themes of insanity, depression, dissociation, interpersonal abuse, envy, lust, revenge, suicide, and the fear of death.[117]

In "Elements of Aversion," Elizabeth Barrette offers an evolutionary psychological explanation for the appeal of horror narratives. She argues that, in the historical periods after the creation of social systems and governments,

> [Humanity] began to feel restless, to feel something missing: the excitement of living on the edge, the tension between hunter and hunted. So we told each other stories through the long, dark nights. When the fires burned low, we did our best to scare the daylights out of each other. The rush of adrenaline feels good. Our hearts pound, our breath quickens, and we can imagine ourselves on the edge. Yet we also appreciate the insightful aspects of horror. Sometimes a story intends to shock and disgust, but the best horror intends to rattle our cages and shake us out of

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[114] *Ibid.*, 82.
[115] Wheeler Winston Dixon, *A History of Horror* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 20-21.
[116] *Ibid.*, 22.
[117] Pam Cook, "Science Fiction and Horror," in *The Cinema Book*, 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 350-352.

our complacency. It makes us think, forces us to confront ideas we might rather ignore, and challenges preconceptions of all kinds.[118]

To understand the effect that horror films have on the viewer, it is important to distinguish between the psychological concepts of horror and terror. On one hand, terror is a feeling of dread or anticipation that takes place *before* a frightening event occurs. On the other hand, horror is a feeling of shock or revulsion *after* a frightening event occurs. Some artists believed that the cultivation of terror was a noble pursuit, because it gave human beings access to the "sublime"—an aesthetic quality that purportedly imparts a feeling of overwhelming and immeasurable awe.[119] Gothic author Anne Radcliffe described terror as that which "expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life," whereas she described horror as that which "freezes and nearly annihilates them."[120]

Robin Wood argues that horror dramatizes the "return of the repressed."[121] He links this return to Freud's theory of the "uncanny," which refers to something simultaneously familiar and alien,[122] and to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, which is the revulsion one feels when confronted with a collapse in the distinction between personhood and objects.[123] In horror films, the monster personifies images, emotions, forces and ideas that have been excluded from society, but which re-emerge in order to defy and threaten society.[124] The primary repressive force in society, according to Freud, is the patriarchal family unit, which establishes and

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[118] Elizabeth Barrette, "Elements of Aversion: What Makes Horror Horrifying," *Creatio ex Nihilio* 1 (1997): 10-11.

[119] Monroe C. Beardsley, "History of Aesthetics," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 27.

[120] Anne Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 16, no.1 (1826): 149.

[121] Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 117.

[122] For example, inanimate representations of humans, such as puppets, dolls, mannequins, prosthetic limbs and androids.

[123] For example, when confronted with severed limbs, open wounds, rotting flesh, bodily waste, and corpses.

[124] Wood, "The American Horror Film," 112-115.

enforces gender norms, relations and hierarchies, as well as regulates and restricts sexual, emotional and creative expressions. Freud argues that because society is "built on monogamy and family, there will always be an enormous surplus of sexual energy that will have to be repressed," and that "what is repressed will always strive to return."[125] Accordingly, Woods observes, horror films frame the family as a prominent source of monstrosity. Familial ideals of sharing meals, cleanliness, comfort, and affection are transformed through films such as *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960), *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski 1968) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974) into abject scenes of cannibalism, bodily waste and destruction, spiritual and demonic possession, malicious offspring, and incest.[126] Despite the disturbing form and nature of the monster, the viewer is often fascinated by it. Woods speculates that the source of this fascination is that the monster reflects a part of the viewer—the part that has been repressed by society—and that it plays out our unconscious desire to "smash the norms that oppress us."[127] Likewise, Linda Williams observes that horror films often depict an affinity between female characters and the monster, which suggests a shared acknowledgement of their similarly marginalised status in the patriarchal order. She argues that, while the female perception of the monster "shares the male fear of the monsters freakishness, [it] also recognises the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference."[128] In her review of Woods' criticism, Pam Cook summarises horror cinema as "progressive and apocalyptic," in that it challenges "the highly specific world of patriarchal capitalism," and dramatises "the release of repressed energies

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[125] *Ibid.*, 123.
[126] *Ibid.*, 127.
[127] *Ibid.*, 122.
[128] Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed Barry Keith Grant (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996), 17-23.

and the destruction of social norms which demand that repression in the first place."[129]

FF horror films are consistent with Barry Keith Grant's observation that each film genre is associated with particular "conventions, iconography, settings, narratives, characters and actors."[130] For example, the generic setting of a horror film might be a dark forest, a cemetery, or an old mansion or castle, while generic iconography might include lightning storms, rattling chains or creaking doors. Likewise, the generic emotional response that horror films aim to elicit from audiences is fear, with more specific types of fear—such as unease, suspense, shock, and disgust—being prompted through specific techniques and *mise-en-scène*.[131] Grant argues that genre is determined by "institutional discourses," such as how a film is produced and marketed, as well as the expectations and reception of the audience.[132] According to Hayward, these discourses are also informed by cultural and political factors, which effect what particular narratives and themes resonate with filmmakers and viewers.[133] She adds that Hollywood studios tended to favour genre films in the first half of the 20th century, because they were dependably popular products and could be made easily using the same actors, crews, sets, props, and costumes.[134]

However, Steve Neale also points out that in genre, difference is just as important as repetition. That is, a film must be similar enough to other films in order to be recognised as part of a genre, but it must also subvert conventions and

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[129] Cook, "Science Fiction and Horror," 360.
[130] Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 2.
[131] Worland, *The Horror Film*, 3-4.
[132] Grant, *Film Genre*, 6.
[133] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 186-188.
[134] *Ibid.*, 182-184.

stereotypes enough to be considered original.[135] A successful film needs to satisfy the emotional and intellectual expectations of its audience, while also fulfilling these expectations in innovative and surprising ways.[136] Hayward observes that this dichotomy makes genres paradoxically "conservative and innovative" – they abide by an established artistic template, but then transform that template in response to changes in culture, economics and artistic taste.[137] If a film genre does not change, it is likely to lose relevancy and the interest of viewers. Christian Metz observes that throughout film history, popular genres have tended to go through four successive phases of development. These are: the "experimental" phase, which introduces the genre conventions; the "classic" phase, when those conventions peak in popularity; the "parody" phase, when the conventions grow clichéd or viewers tire of them, and films mock or exaggerate the conventions for comedic effect; and the "deconstruction" phase, which adds, alters or re-assesses conventions, and develops hybrid- or sub-genres.[138] Metz and Neale both refer to subgenre as a "subordinate" category of genre.[139] Neale argues that subgenres emerge after gradual variations to a genre produce a specific subgroup of texts.[140] For example, if Hollywood produces enough action films about characters surviving natural disasters, then the subgenre of "disaster films" emerges. Two genres may also combine attributes in order to form a single subgenre, which then becomes subordinate to both genres.[141] Examples of hybrid genres include the "romantic comedy" or the "space opera." Subgenres still serve the same audience expectations

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[135] Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 7-8.
[136] *Ibid.,* 21.
[137] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 182.
[138] Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1974), 150-156.
[139] *Ibid.*, 137.
[140] Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 7
[141] *Ibid.*, 8-9.

as their overarching genre and may share many of the same conventions, but each subgenre will also contain conventions specific and attributable to it.

Horror films can be examined in the context of Metz's theory of genre phases. Early horror films tended to be adaptations of European folklore and Gothic literature. For example, there were silent adaptions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, as well as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson 1886), *The Black Cat* (Poe 1843) and *The Divine Comedy* (Alighieri 1472), as well as the Jewish legend of the Golem and the German legend of Faust. These represent the "experimental" stage of the horror genre, as filmmakers adapted many of the narrative and thematic conventions of oral and literary horror into a visual medium, while also establishing cinematic horror conventions. Examples of this experimental originality include the image of the vampire ascending the staircase in *Nosferatu* (Mernau 1921), and the electrical resurrection of the creature in *Frankenstein* (Whale 1931); neither of these scenes were described in the original novels, but now constitute iconic depictions of those monsters.[142] The 1930s signalled the first "classic" phase of the genre, with Universal Studios producing sound adaptations of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *The Invisible Man* (Wells 1897), as well as entirely original screenplays such as *The Mummy* (Freund 1932) and *The Wolf Man* (Waggner 1941). These films were commercially and critically successful, establishing the horror genre among mainstream cinema audiences. However, by the late 1940s the Universal Monster films were becoming increasingly repetitive, with each film receiving sequels, remakes and crossover films. Additionally, the tone of the films became increasingly light-hearted and would often feature cameos from

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[142] James B. Twitchell, "Frankenstein and the Anatomy of Horror," *The Georgia Review* 37, no.1 (1983): 58.

the comedy duo Abbott and Costello. This transition represents the first "parody" phase of the horror genre.

Finally, the "deconstruction" phase of horror cinema occurred throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with the emergence of various horror subgenres. These included "doomsday" films, such as *War of the Worlds* (Haskin 1953), *Godzilla* (Honda 1954), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel 1956), and *The Blob* (Yeaworth 1958), which depicted humanity being confronted by alien invaders, rampaging monsters and deadly mutations.[143] These films combined horror with science fiction, in order to address contemporary social anxieties regarding the geopolitical and technology dangers of the Cold War.[144] Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* popularised the psychological horror film, as well as arguably inventing the "slasher" subgenre.[145] The film was unique for its complex depiction of the killer's psyche, and for raising concepts such as the Oedipus complex, voyeurism and dissociative identity disorder.[146] George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) established the modern zombie film, re-defining the Haitian legend of undead servants into the popular cinematic incarnation of a mindless flesh-eating plague monster.[147] A fourth horror subgenre emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the form of the "demonic possession" film; notable entries include *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973) and *The Omen* (Donner 1976), all of which feature occult themes and depict children becoming possessed by demonic influences.[148] The repeal of the Motion Picture Production Code in 1968 also influenced horror films during this era, allowing filmmakers to

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[143] Pam Cook, "Science Fiction and Horror," 350.
[144] *Ibid.*, 352.
[145] Charles Derry, *Dark Dreams: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1977): 69.
[146] *Ibid.*, 69.
[147] David Flint, *Zombie Holocaust: How the Living Dead Devoured Pop Culture* (London: Plexus Publishing, 2009), 12.
[148] Pam Cook, "Science Fiction and Horror," 360.

become increasingly graphic in their depictions of violence and malice.[149] These individual subgenres of horror underwent their own subsequent phases of experimentation, classicism, parody and deconstruction. For instance, if *Psycho* was the first example of a slasher film, then *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978) would exemplify the classic slasher film, and *Scream* (Craven 1996) would exemplify the parodic slasher film.

As outlined, the FF horror subgenre developed from a variety of diverse and arcane sources, including epistolary fiction, post-mortem photography, media hoaxes, urban legends, avant-garde cinema, and mockumentaries. *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Man Bites Dog* were the first recognisable instances of the FF subgenre; they introduced the formal premise and aesthetic, and contain many of the key conventions, thus representing the experimental phase. The classic phase of FF horror began with *Blair Witch*, a sleeper hit which grossed nearly $250 million worldwide on a modest budget of $60,000, making it one of the most successful independent films and horror films of all time.[150] FF horror entered a dormant phase in the first half of the 2000s, before finally resurfacing at the box office in 2008 with *Cloverfield*, which grossed $170 million worldwide, and in 2009 with *Paranormal Activity*, which grossed $193 million and spawned a long running media franchise. FF horror reached the peak of its popularity in 2012, with the release of *The Devil Inside* (Bell), *The Bay*, *Paranormal Activity 4* (Joost and Schulman), *Grave Encounters 2* (The Vicious Brothers), and *V/H/S* (Wingard et al.), generating a combined box office total of $250 million.[151]

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[149] Kayleigh Donaldson, "Hays Code and Video Nasties: A Brief History of Censorship in Horror," *SYFY WIRE*, last modified August 28, 2019, https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/the-hays-code-and-video-nasties-a-brief-history-of-censorship-in-horror.
[150] Schreier, "Please Help Me," 310.
[151] "General Keyword: Found Footage," *Box Office Mojo*, accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/genre/sg1793061121/?ref_=bo_gs_table_185.

However, 2012 also marked the beginning of the subgenre's commercial and critical decline. For example, although it topped the box office during opening weekend, ticket purchases for *The Devil Inside* fell drastically in its second week, after the film had garnered poor reception from critics and audiences. The sixth *Paranormal Activity* film, The *Ghost Dimension* (Plotkin 2015), was the lowest grossing instalment and marked the final entry in the franchise.[152] When Paramount Pictures announced that a new FF version of *Friday the 13th* was in production, the studio received an overwhelmingly negative fan backlash, prompting them to cancel the project.[153] In the early 2010s, a series of print and online articles were published lamenting the oversaturation and waning quality of FF horror, or deriding the entire cycle as a shallow marketing gimmick.[154] Despite films such as *Willow Creek* (2013) and *Creep* (Brice 2014) receiving critical acclaim, FF horror became gradually less prominent at the box office and increasingly criticised by critics and viewers. In 2013, the horror comedy *A Haunted House* (Tiddes 2013) was released, a film that explicitly parodies the *Paranormal Activity* franchise. Writer and producer Marlon Wayans (who also produced the *Scary Movie* series), stated that he wanted to create a funny depiction of how African-American characters would respond if they were in a FF horror film, a subgenre usually dominated by white characters.[155] Another parody, *Found Footage 3D* (Henkel)*,* was released in 2016, and depicts a group of amateur filmmakers attempting to make their own FF horror film. According to the director Kim Henkel, *Found Footage 3D* was inspired by the metatextual and

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[152] Although, a seventh entry is scheduled for 2021.
[153] Michael Nordine, "The 'Friday the 13th' Reboot Was Almost a Found-Footage Movie," *IndieWire*, last modified October 26, 2016, https://www.indiewire.com/2016/10/friday-the-13th-reboot-found-footage-1201740702/.
[154] David Braga, "10 Reasons Why the Found Footage Film Genre Sucks," *WhatCulture*, last modified October 16, 2012, https://whatculture.com/film/10-reasons-why-the-found-footage-film-genre-sucks.
[155] Jonathan Hailey, "Marlon Wayans: 'A Haunted House' Is Better Than Those Other Bulls**t Parodies!" *iPower 92-1 and 104-1*, last modified January 11, 2013, https://ipowerrichmond.com/2242603/marlon-wayans-a-haunted-house-is-better-than-those-other-bullst-parodies-exclusive/.

self-reflexive structure of *Scream*, which shows characters within a horror film, but who are also fans of horror and familiar with the conventions of the genre.[156] These developments signal the "parody" phase of the subgenre. Nevertheless, in 2015, the FF horror film *Unfriended* (Gabriadze) was released. Rather than being recorded by a character's portable personal camera, the film presents its footage as being recorded by a series of webcams, and as taking place entirely inside a computer interface. While the film meets the definition of a FF horror film, its unique premise and aesthetic, as well as its massive box-office success, signals the subgenre's capacity to change over time.

According to established film theory, a genre or subgenre must contain recurring conventions, which aim to elicit a particular emotional response from the viewer.[157] FF horror depicts, as Peter Turner puts it, "dark and disturbing subject matter" with the aim of eliciting "fear, terror, dread, and shock."[158] Yet, we must ask, what are the conventions that are specific to FF horror? What distinguishes it from other types of horror films? Firstly, FF horror presents its subject matter in a unique way. The camera does not merely serve as a framework for the narrative, but functions as a prop within the world of the film and has an effect on its characters. Secondly, the FF horror narrative is structured in a way that is unique among horror films. Often, an opening caption will allude to some kind of tragedy or disaster, and imply that the footage that we are about to watch has emerged from that event and may elucidate what occurred.[159] Thus, FF horror films function like feature-length flashback sequences, beginning in an ambivalent present before cutting immediately

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[156] Brad Miska, "'Found Footage 3D' To Begin Shooting This May," *Bloody Disgusting*, last modified January 8, 2014, https://bloody-disgusting.com/news/3272062/found-footage-3d-to-begin-shooting-this-may/.
[157] Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 54.
[158] Turner, *Found Footage Horror Films*, 5.
[159] For example, *Blair Witch*, *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity* all open with foreboding captions.

to the past. Thirdly, the monsters in FF horror films are primarily hidden or

unrecorded by the camera. This sets FF apart from most other horror films,

especially contemporary examples such as the zombie film, wherein the non-diegetic

camera fetishises the monster's appearance and physiology. Fourthly, the

protagonist in a FF horror film usually dies at the end of the film. Again, this stands in

direct contrast to most other horror films, even exceptionally violent subgenres such

as slashers.[160] This narrative convention imbues the FF horror subgenre with a

distinctly fatalistic tone and suggests a nihilistic worldview. As this thesis will

demonstrate, these unique narrative and formal conventions of FF horror films all

allude to the trauma-laden subtext of the subgenre.

These conventions will be examined in more detail during the second half of

this chapter, as the conceptual framework is outlined. The next two sections provide

an overview of relevant literature about trauma theory.

Defining Psychological Trauma

Trauma theory refers to a wide field of research that crosses multiple disciplines,

including natural and social sciences, law, and the humanities. Established in the

1990s, the field of "trauma studies" emerged alongside and often intersected with

contemporary psychological trauma theory. Cathy Caruth, one of its proponents,

attempted to explore the impact of trauma in literature and society.[161] Her work

challenges the widespread supposition that trauma is un-representable, arguing that

written and artistic expression can offer a more diverse and imaginative perspective

than a clinical understanding of trauma, and that the effects of trauma can and have

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[160] Slasher films, according to Carol J. Clover, still adhere to the so-called "final girl" rule. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 39.
[161] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3-12.

been successfully depicted in literature and art. Two of the central concerns that define literary trauma studies are "the representation of trauma" and "the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities."[162]

This thesis contributes to the humanities field by applying trauma theory to cinema. The conceptual framework used in this thesis draws from the work of Caruth, as well as clinician Judith Herman, who contributed to understanding the different causes and phases of PTSD. According to Herman, psychological trauma occurs when a person is exposed to a "sudden, unexpected, and overwhelming" emotional blow.[163] In contrast with the bodily, observable injuries sustained from physical trauma, psychological trauma involves imperceptible psychological injuries, in which an emotional blow is "incorporated into [a person's] mind."[164] The victim's brain is unable to cope with an experience and thus forms an unstable cognitive gap. Those effected by psychological trauma are unable to "modulate their feeling," are constantly "jumpy and on edge," and may be haunted by disturbing thoughts, sensations or dreams.[165]

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders first officially recognised psychological trauma as a stress disorder in its third edition (*DSM-III*), published in 1980. The most recent edition states that someone who witnesses or is subjected to a distressing event—such as a physical assault, a mechanical accident, a medical emergency, a natural disaster, or the loss of a loved one—may develop PTSD.[166] When a person undergoes a *series* of traumatising events, which recur

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[162] Nasrullah Mambrol, "Trauma Studies," *Literary Theory and Criticism*, last modified December 19, 2018, https://literariness.org/2018/12/19/trauma-studies/.
[163] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 34.
[164] *Ibid.*, 8.
[165] Sandra L. Bloom, "Trauma Theory Abbreviated." *Community Works* 1 (1999): 2.
[166] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, (Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 424-425.

over the course of days, weeks, years, or even decades, they may develop a related condition, called complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD). Complex trauma is frequently diagnosed in victims of domestic abuse, school or workplace bullying, harassment, kidnapping, or imprisonment.[167] While C-PTSD is not currently recognised by the *DSM*, it is cited and treated by a significant and growing number of mental health professionals.[168]

The theory of psychological trauma emerged in three stages throughout the 20th century. Firstly, in 1890, the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot categorised "traumatic hysteria" as a disorder caused by a physical blow that triggers paralysis in the victim; however, he contended that this paralysis was typically delayed by an "incubation" period, and would not manifest until years after the inciting incident.[169] Charcot's student, Sigmund Freud, examined traumatic hysteria throughout his career, and gave several varying accounts. Jean Laplanche summarises Freud's understanding of trauma as: "An event in the subject's life, defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization."[170] The second theoretical development occurred during World War I (1914-1918), when hundreds of soldiers from the British Expeditionary Force began reporting strange medical symptoms after combat, such as amnesia, headaches, hypersensitivity to noise, dizziness, and tremors.[171] While these symptoms resembled the effects of physical

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[167] Alexandra Cook, Joseph Spinazzola Julian Ford, Cheryl Lanktree, Margaret Blaustein, Marylene Cloitre, Ruth DeRosa, Rebecca Hubbard, Richard Kagan, Joan Liautaud, Karen Mallah, Erna Olafson, and Bessel van der Kolk, "Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents," *Psychiatric Annals* 35, no.5 (2005): 390-391.
[168] Herman, Judith Lewis. "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome in Survivors of Prolonged and Repeated Trauma." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 5, no.3 (1992): 377-378.
[169] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967), 465-469.
[170] *Ibid.*, 469.
[171] Edgar Jones, Nicola T. Fear and Simon Wessely, "Shell Shock and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury: A Historical Review," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no.11 (2007): 1641-1645.

brain injury, many of those who reported the symptoms showed no signs of head wounds. British psychologists, such as Dr Charles Myers, coined the term "shell shock" to denote the condition of soldiers suffering from "nervous and mental shock."[172] In extreme cases, "shell shocked" soldiers were rendered mute or paralysed, and developed the "thousand-yard stare," a term used to describe the blank, unfocused expression of soldiers who had become mentally detached by and from the horrors of war.[173] During World War II and afterwards, the diagnosis of "shell shock" was replaced by "combat stress reaction" and "battle neurosis." In the 1970s, the term "post-traumatic stress disorder" came into usage, in large part due to the diagnoses of veterans of the Vietnam War.[174]

The third theoretical development came during the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when feminists organised private discussion groups in order to understand and address the persecution of women in the home. These second-wave feminists helped expose the systemic trauma experienced by women from spousal and parental abuse, and oppressive domestic labour regimes.[175] Herman criticised early psychoanalysts, men such as Freud, who had listened to female accounts of being assaulted by fathers and husbands, but for the most part, had dismissed their patients' testimonies as hysteria, delusion and subconscious desire.[176] Feminist activists and academics, among whom Herman counted herself, *did* believe these testimonies, and their surveys revealed that potentially one in four women had been raped during their lives and one in three

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[172] A.D. McLeod, "Shell shock, Gordon Holmes and the Great War," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 97, no.2 (2004): 86.
[173] *Ibid.,*87.
[174] Ulrich Frommberger, Jörg Angenendt and Mathias Berger, "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – A Diagnostic and Therapeutic Challenge," *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International* 111, no.5 (2014): 59-65.
[175] Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" (paper presented at the *First National Conference of Stewardesses for Women's Rights*, New York, March, 1973), 145.
[176] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery,* 9.

sexually abused in childhood.[177] They publicised the psychological and social impact

of this trauma, and successfully advocated for changes to the law; for example, in

the U.S., they lobbied state legislators to redefine rape from a sexual act to a violent

crime. They also help re-contextualise rape as a method for controlling women,

theorising a link between political oppression and domestic oppression.[178] Herman

observes that the comparable treatment of war veterans and battered wives, for

psychological injuries, highlighted the common symptoms between the two

groups.[179] Psychologists formed the view that, despite being used to diagnose

patients from completely different circumstances, the terms "hysteria" and "shell

shock" were in fact describing the same affliction.[180] Whether it was men suffering in

foreign wars or women suffering in abusive households, it was found that the ways in

which these individuals had processed the experiences had wounded their psyches

and altered their behaviour in observably similar ways. They were traumatised.

Academic analysis of trauma intensified in the 1990s, after the publication of

several important works, including Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma,*

Narrative and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995)*,* and Herman's *Trauma and*

Recovery. One of Caruth's key contributions was her observation that psychological

trauma is not defined by the event that caused it, but rather by the mind's belated

response to that event. According to Caruth, different people will respond differently

to a potentially traumatic event, and their coping faculties will be based on a range of

temperamental and environmental factors.[181] She writes that the distinction for

trauma victims is that the event is "not assimilated or experienced wholly at the time,"

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[177] *Ibid.*, 20.
[178] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), 401.
[179] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 32.
[180] *Ibid.*, 21.
[181] Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 4.

but "only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it."[182] The first challenge a trauma victim faces, Caruth writes, is that they often cannot even recall the inciting incident. While the frightening sensations produced by the event are still present, full memory or knowledge of the event is absent.[183] There are several theories for why this occurs: the victim has unconsciously repressed the experience; they are consciously suppressing it; they recall the event but do not recognise it as something that happened to them.[184] Regardless of how their mind has been damaged, the victim is left with a gap in their personal history, which is now occupied by an unknown or unresolved experience.[185]

Concerning this re-possession process, Sandra Bloom observes that the victim is plagued by intense, un-attributable emotions – the "visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinaesthetic images, physical sensations, and strong feelings" that were imprinted by the incident.[186] Because the event that caused these emotions remains unresolved, the emotional response persists. Long after the event has concluded and the victim is safe, their mind continually communicates to their body that it is still in danger.[187] Caruth compares psychological trauma to a wound, citing the original Greek meaning of the word—the Ancient Greek word "τραῦμα" translates to "wound," "damage," or "hurt." Specifically, she writes that trauma is "the story of the wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality of truth that is not otherwise available."[188] This analogy is helpful in understanding psychological trauma, as current literature links trauma with both the rupture caused by an event and the mental gap that this event leaves behind. Moreover, trauma, like

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[182] *Ibid.*, 5.
[183] *Ibid.*, 152.
[184] *Ibid.*, 151-153.
[185] *Ibid.*, 151.
[186] Bloom, "Trauma Theory Abbreviated," 6.
[187] Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 10.
[188] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

all untended wounds, is likely to fester and spread. According to the *DSM*, it "disrupts the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception" and expresses itself through nightmares, flashbacks, hallucinations, and other neuroses which cryptically harken back to the inciting incident.[189]

Trauma is a paradoxical relation between the destruction and survival of the mind, which protects itself and harms itself at the same time. Caruth insists that we must recognise the "incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience," as well as the incomprehensibility of human survival.[190] The victim's perception of survival is a central component of psychological trauma, because their experience involves the risk of death, and an inexplicable continuation of life, which confuses and perplexes the mind. Caruth compares the risk of psychological trauma to the risk of physical trauma: just as the body protects its organs by asserting a spatial boundary between inside and outside, the barrier of consciousness is made up of sensations and knowledge that protects the mind by placing sensation in an ordered experience of time.[191] Thus, what causes trauma is a shock that breaks the mind's process of knowledge and its experience of time. This is analogous to a physical shock that pierces through the body's spatial boundaries and punctures an organ. Caruth maintains that the breach in the mind is not caused *merely* by an overabundance of stimuli, but by *fright*; that is, "the lack of preparedness to take in a stimuli that comes too quickly."[192] To reiterate, it is not the threat to life that causes trauma, but the body realising this threat a moment too late. Because the threat was not experienced in time, it is not fully known, and so the mind keeps reaching back to that moment in an effort to know.

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[189] *DSM-5*, 490.
[190] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 58.
[191] *Ibid.*, 37.
[192] *Ibid.*, 62.

Dreams are one of the ways in which the traumatised mind may return to the traumatic event, and therefore one of the few ways that the victim may become aware of the source of their trauma. These trauma dreams perplexed early psychologists, such as Freud, because unlike regular dreams, they could not be characterised as wish fulfilments or unconscious projections; rather, they were more like literal re-enactments of the past, imposed against the will of the one they inhabit.[193] Where psychologists diagnose most forms of neurosis[194] as the avoidance of displeasure or conflict, trauma dreams and trauma flashbacks demonstrate the absolute inability to avoid an unpleasant event that has not been given psychic meaning. Simply put, trauma is when "the outside has gone inside without any mediation," and therefore remains alien and alarming to its unwilling host.[195] Freud interprets dreams as a psychic endeavour to "master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis."[196] Because the trauma survivor does not know the threat of death as it occurred, their mind is compelled to confront it again and again, as a survival instinct. This cycle reduces the victim's life to, as Caruth puts it, "a repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to [their] own life." This continuous failure to grasp the moment they missed creates "an endless testimony to the impossibility of living."[197]

Herman observes that her trauma patients lived with a continuous and intense sense of fear. She defines PTSD by the precence of three key symptoms –

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[193] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Vienna: International Psycho-Analytical, 1922): 201-202.
[194] Notably, the term "neurosis" was eliminated from the DSM in 1980, when the editors decided to only provide descriptions of behaviours, rather than descriptions of hidden psychological mechanisms; however, the disorders formerly grouped within the category of neuroses, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and phobias, remain in current edition of the manual.
[195] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 59.
[196] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 32.
[197] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 62.

hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction.[198] Hyperarousal is a state of permanent alertness. A person in this state may startle easily, react irritably, sleep poorly, exhibit explosive rage, or indulge in self-destructive or risk-seeking behaviour.[199] Psychologists concur that this state of alertness is induced during a traumatic incident in which the person felt threatened or attacked. When humans and animals are in danger, their sympathetic nervous systems discharge chemicals, preparing the organism to fight or flee the threat. In cases of psychological trauma, the mind continues to arouse the body to respond to a threat that is no longer present. This traumatic response can be aroused by sensory triggers—such as particular sounds, colours, odours, tastes, movements, vibrations, temperatures, words and images— that remind the mind and body of the traumatic event.[200] As an example of hyperarousal, Herman notes that her patients would avoid certain situations or places, without knowing why.[201] In clinical studies, soldiers diagnosed with PTSD have been exposed to combat sound effects, and doctors have observed elevating heartbeats and emotional distress.[202]

The second symptom Herman cites, intrusion, is when a person relives the event as though it were continuously recurring in the present. Intrusion constitutes an abnormal form of memory unexpectedly breaking into consciousness, causing flashbacks while awake and nightmares while asleep.[203] The victim is reminded of their traumatic experience, sometimes by seemingly innocuous moments, which transport their mind into the past and make safe environments seem dangerous. Herman describes such mental intrusions as being encoded in vivid sensations

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[198] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 25.
[199] *Ibid.*, 25-26.
[200] *Ibid.*, 126.
[201] *Ibid.*, 30.
[202] *Ibid.*, 26.
[203] *Ibid.*, 28.

rather than articulable context.[204] She refers to this encoding as a "death imprint" – an experience crystallised by impressions rather than knowledge.[205] Whereas hyperarousal brings the traumatising event into the victim's present, intrusion brings the victim back into the traumatising past.

The third symptom, constriction, is the state of numbness, powerlessness or mental surrender that the trauma victim suffers. Traditionally, it was thought that the cognitive response to danger consisted of only two options – fight or flight. However, psychologists identified a third response – tonic immobility, which refers to when the body freezes and the mind disconnects.[206] Tonic immobility is often the natural bodily response when someone is physically unable to overcome or escape a painful or frightening situation. Herman observes that some individuals, when threatened, freeze into a catatonic emotional state and remain that way even after the threat has passed.[207] It is the result of someone being so terrified that they have an out-of-body experience, where they observe the traumatic experience as though it was happening in a fantasy, a dream, or to someone else. The traumatised mind then struggles to reintegrate with the body.[208] Herman recounts descriptions of patients who express a pervasive sense of being detached from reality, of observing themselves from a great distance, and of merely "going through the motions" of their lives.[209] Many describe a sense of shame that part of their "humanity" has died, or guilt at having survived an event that they cannot comprehend. Others are left feeling "utterly abandoned," belonging "more to the dead than to the living."[210] Intrusion and constriction are contradictory responses, tilting the victim between a

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[204] *Ibid.*, 29.
[205] *Ibid.*, 27.
[206] *Ibid.*, 31.
[207] *Ibid.*, 31.
[208] *Ibid.*, 31-32.
[209] *Ibid.*, 35.
[210] *Ibid.*, 37.

sense of fragmentation and isolation. Neither response allows the mind to integrate the event, and thus, from the victim's perspective, the struggle simply signifies a futile attempt to find balance.

Herman describes the structure of trauma as dialectical – a term used to describe how people and societies bounce back and forth between opposing ideas. According to Herman, when a person is traumatised, they oscillate between various binaries, including the will to deny versus the will to proclaim; feeling numb versus reliving the event; living in the past versus living in the present; feeling outside of themselves versus feeling too deep within themselves.[211] The traumatised person is not able to commit to any of these positions, but instead lives in a state of flux between them.[212] Herman observes that because traumatic experiences are incongruous with the established systems of thought and memory, the victim's personal history and internal flow of time becomes disrupted.[213] Past emotions continually intrude upon the present, and present thoughts compulsively search the past. Herman concludes that because trauma victims are unable to fully comprehend the past or inhabit the present, they cannot anticipate or imagine a future.[214] The ultimate goal of all trauma healing is to synthesise the person who experienced the trauma with the person who exists in the present. This process involves taking what is fragmented—their memories, thoughts, emotions and dreams, their internal and external comprehension of the world—and bringing them into a whole.[215]

Trying to contain the paradoxes of trauma within a single person creates cognitive dissonance and emotional confusion. Peter Levine recounts interactions with patients who have described themselves as "balls of contradictions," and their

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[211] *Ibid.*, 35-36.
[212] *Ibid.*, 36.
[213] *Ibid.*, 27.
[214] *Ibid.*, 34
[215] *Ibid.*, 152-153.

attempts to articulate their experiences as making "a crypt of language."[216] That is, even when they become aware that they have been traumatised, they find it incredibly difficult to put their experience and condition into words. After all, one cannot attach language to something that one does not understand, and one cannot understand something without a language to decipher or translate. Given this impasse, Herman argues that all trauma narratives are allegorical or metaphorical, and that victims must use "borrowed terms" to describe something unspeakable and unknowable.[217]

In order to render a traumatic experience into language or create a new language to describe it, the traumatised person needs someone else with whom they can communicate. As Herman puts it, they need someone who "bears witness to the survivor's testimony, giving it social as well as personal meaning."[218] Together, the victim and the witness must try to reconstruct history and synthesise the contradictory ideas pulling at the individual's mind.

Defining Collective Trauma

Understanding types of collective trauma forms a basis for analysing FF horror films in relation to historical and social events. Collective trauma is a term used to refer to the way that large or recurring events can cause psychological harm to a group of people. In *Trauma Culture*, E. Ann Kaplan explores the artistic, literary and cinematic forms often used to express the impact of trauma on individuals and their cultural contexts. She writes that trauma can be experienced directly and indirectly,

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[216] Peter A. Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* (Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 113-114.
[217] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 79.
[218] *Ibid.*, 158.

accumulating, perpetuating and transforming between people.[219] Collective trauma

can vary in scale, from a small group of people being traumatised by a car crash to

an entire country being traumatised by a civil war. Historically significant examples of

collective trauma include: the colonisation of Indigenous Americans, Africans and

Australians; the practice of slavery in the U.S.; the battles and bombings of World

Wars I and II; the Holocaust; the Vietnam War; and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[220] The

massive and destructive impact of such events can result in collective trauma.

However, collective trauma can also be caused when private traumatic events affect

a large proportion of the population. For example, while child sexual abuse often only

involves a perpetrator and a victim, the crime is so widespread that many people will

have experienced a similar traumatising event and will exhibit similar symptoms.[221]

The recurrence of this specific crime reflects and shapes the society in which it takes

place, and therefore represents a collective trauma.

Theorists refer to several related categories of collective trauma. These

include transgenerational trauma, historical trauma and national trauma.

Transgenerational trauma relates to the theory that psychological trauma can be

transferred between generations of families and societies.[222] That is, untreated

trauma victims raise their children while exhibiting symptoms of trauma, such as

volatile mood swings, emotional detachment, substance abuse, self-harm, and

various trauma-specific neuroses. This destructive behaviour—which in itself may be

traumatising—is potentially internalised by the child, who then re-enacts the

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[219] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 1-24.

[220] John A Updegraff, Roxane Cohen Silver and E. Alison Holman, "Searching for and Finding Meaning in Collective Trauma: Results from a National Longitudinal Study of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no.3 (2008): 709-722.

[221] Asa Don Brown, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Childhood," *The Family and Marriage Counselling Directory*, last modified 2009, http://family-marriage-counseling.com/mentalhealth/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-childhood.htm.

[222] Linda O'Neill, Tina Fraser, Andrew Kitchenham, and Verna McDonald, "Hidden Burdens: A Review of Intergenerational, Historical and Complex Trauma, Implications for Indigenous Families," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 11, no. 2 (2016): 173-186.

behaviour for their own children. Transgenerational trauma was first recognised in the children of Holocaust survivors. In 1966, Canadian psychologists began to observe a large volume of second-generation Holocaust survivors seeking mental help in clinics.[223] Since then, transgenerational trauma has also been documented in descendants of slaves, indigenous peoples, refugees, war veterans, and many other groups.[224]

Historical trauma is a term for instances of transgenerational trauma caused by a significant or widespread historical event, such as war, genocide, colonisation, systematic oppression, mass migration, or natural disaster.[225] Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a Native American social worker, defines historical trauma as: "Cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma."[226] When discussing historical trauma, researchers emphasise the widespread nature of the inciting event, the large number of people suffering as a result of it, the collective nature of their trauma, and the malicious intent of those who inflicted or are inflicting the trauma.[227] Historical trauma may also be reinforced by external factors, such as legalised and socially-endorsed discrimination; for example, discrimination against the descendants of slaves or dispossessed indigenous peoples. Such discrimination may be informed by historical trauma, and be maintained or ignored by the descendants of

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[223] Pierre Fossion, Mari-Carmen Rejas, Laurent Servais, Isy Pelc, and Siegi Hirsch, "Family Approach with Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 57, no.4 (2003): 519-527.
[224] Michelle Sotero, "A Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma: Implications for Public Health Practice and Research," *Journal of Health Disparities Research* 1, no.1 (2006): 94.
[225] *Ibid.*, 93-108
[226] Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and its Relationship to Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration." *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 35, no.1 (2003): 7.
[227] Sotero, "A Conceptual Model," 99.

perpetrators.[228] Forms of racism—such as assaults, abusive language, segregation, or microaggression—may traumatise; they may also act as triggers reminding individuals of a foundational historical trauma that occurred before they were even born, but which has come to define their identity as *victim*.[229] Understanding and addressing historical trauma is far more complex than individual trauma, as the burden of suffering and the burden of blame is shared between many people, and can also affect others vicariously as the suffering accrues. According to Ron Eyernan, historical trauma can result in "a greater loss of identity and meaning, which in turn may affect subsequent generations until the trauma is ingrained into society."[230] A comparative study of the effects of trauma on the children of Holocaust survivors and Native American peoples concluded that, despite stemming from different events, each community manifests their trauma in comparable ways.[231]

National trauma is a form of collective trauma that encompasses an entire country or nation. Just as individual trauma shatters fundamental assumptions that an individual has about themselves and their environment, national trauma can shatter established conceptions of national identity.[232] National trauma can manifest in volatile political and cultural transformations, a disruption of social life, and a widespread sense of anxiety or pessimism amongst a citizen body. Wars are the most significant cause of national trauma, as their execution and outcomes dramatically affect the workings of national institutions and the lives of its citizens. The psychological horrors experienced by soldiers and civilians during a war, and

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[228] M. S. Abrams, "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: Recent Contributions from the Literature of Family Systems Approaches to Treatment," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 53, no.2 (1999): 225-231.

[229] Maria Yellow Horse, "The Historical Trauma Response," 35.

[230] Ron Eyernan, "The Past in the Present Culture and the Transmission of Memory," *Acta Sociologica* 47, no.2 (2004): 160.

[231] Yellow Horse Brave Heart, "Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the Historical Trauma of the Lakota," *Tulane Studies in Social Welfare* 21, no.22 (2000): 245-266.

[232] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 4.

the destruction of homes, towns, factories, and economies, may contribute to collective trauma.[233] National trauma is often invoked to describe states that have suffered defeat in war, because that defeat is so shocking or inconceivable, that it wounds the citizen's perception of their nation's identity, history and values. For example, after World War I, many German people struggled to accept that they had been conquered, and a myth emerged that their "glorious victory" had been "betrayed" by Jewish and Marxist conspirators on the home front.[234] Such myths were in turn used as a justification for the subjugation and genocide of Jewish citizens, and other ethnic and political minorities, as well as the invasion of neighbouring states. After their defeat in World War II, reactions in Germany ranged from "national guilt" to collective ignorance and denial of the Holocaust.[235] Rehabilitating trauma victims becomes extremely difficult when those traumas have been ingrained into the daily life and discourse of an entire nation.

When considering collective trauma, it is important to address the roles of the perpetrator and bystander. Many instances of psychological trauma involve the victim being violated or abused by another person, often someone who is in a position of trust or authority. Herman identifies anyone who witnesses or learns of such an event as a "bystander," and observes that they are forced to take sides between the victim and the perpetrator.[236] Historically, Herman writes, society has tended to take the side of the perpetrator, since the perpetrator asks that we "do nothing" and appeals to the "universal desire not to see, hear or spread evil."[237] In

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[233] *Ibid.*, 6-7.
[234] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Picador, 2003), 48.
[235] Laura Bowie, "The Impact of World War Two on the Individual and Collective Memory of Germany and its Citizens," *Newcastle University ePrints*, last modified June 4, 2013, https://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/file_store/production/190379/9CB25733-8D07-42EF-B30A-930C9975ABCD.pdf.
[236] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 4.
[237] *Ibid.*, 4.

contrast, the victim asks the bystander to "share the burden of pain," demanding

action, engagement and remembrance. [238] The bystander may find it upsetting to

reflect on the circumstances that produced a particular trauma, such as violence,

abuse and war, instead preferring to forget it.[239] Herman decries this collective denial

or repression of trauma as a "veil of oblivion drawn over pain."[240]

In her clinical research, Herman observes that the perpetrator does everything

they can to convince the victim and the bystander to forget what happened.[241] Their

first line of defence is to encase the traumatising event in secrecy and silence.

Without words or an active listener, the victim cannot describe what is happening or

what they are going through. The perpetrator may try to convince them that the event

did not happen, or that even if it did, no one will believe them. Consequently, the

victim may interpret the traumatic memory as something irrational and which must be

kept secret. Because of the habitual social impulse to deny, ignore or admonish

trauma victims, individuals are forced to choose between expressing their suffering

or remaining in connection with others.[242] Herman observes that victims struggle to

trust others, and to sustain or form relationships, and that this in turn deepens their

isolation. [243] The next strategy a perpetrator may employ to promote forgetting is to

attack the credibility of the victim, labelling them as a liar, delusional or mentally

unstable. The fact that psychological trauma does produce forms of mental instability

further instils a sense of shame and self-doubt in the victim.[244] Finally, if the victim

cannot be silenced or discredited, the perpetrator may attempt to rationalise their

actions: they may argue that they were unfairly provoked; were simply following

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[238] *Ibid.*, 4.
[239] *Ibid.*, 4.
[240] *Ibid.*, 4.
[241] *Ibid.*, 4.
[242] *Ibid.*, 5.
[243] *Ibid.*, 5.
[244] *Ibid.*, 6.

orders; were not in their right mind; or that the victim provoked them, deserved it, or even secretly desired it.[245] Such rationalisations shift blame away from the perpetrator to the victim, but also away from broader systemic dysfunctions that society may prefer not to address or interrogate. Again, the impulse to forget, ignore or deny remains more attractive than the impulse to believe the victim and act. This introduces the upsetting ethical dilemma of accepting the perpetrator's position, and blaming or demonising the victim. While the theory of collective trauma demonstrates how people can be collectively victimised, Herman's research about how society can disempower victims and empower perpetrators also implicates society in the perpetuation of psychological trauma.

The next section reviews how cultural works, particularly films, have the capacity to foster reflection on individual and collective trauma.

Cinematic Representations of Trauma

Influenced by Caruth's examination of trauma through literature, researchers in the 21st century applied trauma theory to cinema. In her book *Trauma Cinema*, Janet Walker analyses a range of films that depict traumatic subject matter, such as the Holocaust and incest.[246] Her examples range from narrative films, such as *King's Row* (Wood 1942) and *Sybil* (Petrie 1976), to experimental documentaries, such as *Mr. Death* (Morris 1999) and *Just, Melvin* (Whitney 2000). Walker examines these films as representing trauma in their documentation and aesthetic styles. For example, she identifies within the films instances of narrative gaps and audio-visual aberrations, which she reads as signs of psychic abjection.[247] Examined as a group, these films provide commentary on the social and political challenges of addressing

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[245] *Ibid.*, 6.
[246] Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 9.
[247] *Ibid.*, 11.

psychological trauma, particularly in the way trauma affects memory. Walker writes: "memory cannot be reduced to empirical evidence, but must be understood as abstract; exaggeration shows that the event was momentous in the mind."[248] According to Kaplan, Walker's theories about the cinematic representation of memory, particularly repressed or dissociated memory, gave rise to a branch of trauma studies called "trauma cinema studies."[249] While the experiences that produce trauma in individuals are very real, Walker regards trauma cinema as explicitly non-realist:

> Like traumatic memories that feature vivid bodily and visual sensation over 'verbal narrative and context,' these films are characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, nonsynchronous sound, repetition, rapid editing and strange angles… they approach the past through an unusual mixture of emotional affect, metonymic symbolism and cinematic flashbacks.[250]

The thematic foci of *Trauma Cinema* on the Holocaust and incest appears to invoke two incomparable events; the former is a socio-political, public, nationally and historically specific event, while the latter is a familial, private, universal, and timeless event. However, as Walker points out, both types of traumatic events depend on a sense of secrecy and suppression; both depend on the active or passive collusion of society.[251] Moreover, as Herman observed in the 1980s, the victims of separate and drastically different traumatic events resemble one another in their symptoms. Film, Walker argues, is unique in its ability to represent trauma symptoms, along with the testimonies of victims. As will be demonstrated, FF horror films can be understood in this context.

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[248] Janet Walker, "Trauma Cinema: False Memories and True Experience," *Screen* 42, no.2 (2001): 213.
[249] E. Ann Kaplan, "Global Trauma and Public Feelings: Viewing Images of Catastrophe," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 11, no.1 (2008): 5.
[250] Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, 8.
[251] *Ibid.*, xx.

In *Trauma Culture*, Kaplan examines representations of trauma in 20th century texts, from books such as Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Marguerite Duras' *War: A Memoir* (1986) and Sarah Kofman's *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (1996), to films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries* (1989). She argues that these works serve as "translations of catastrophe," that have otherwise eluded expression or comprehension.[252] They also demonstrate how collective trauma can be transported across national boundaries through words and images, and be echoed in the traumatic expressions of other nations. These expressions are vital to addressing traumatic experiences, because without a plurality of testimonies and witnesses, collective trauma would be managed and repressed by institutional forces.[253] Kaplan concludes with an analysis of 9/11, which she describes as a "supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital [and analogue] technologies," the dissemination and representation of which produced a new cultural relationship between America on the one hand and a range of domestic and foreign entities on the other.[254] American politicians attempted to address this trauma with repeated calls for national unity. However, this renewal of patriotic pride led to several events, such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which proved damaging for both the U.S. and many other parts of the world, the psychological, social and political effects of which continue to be grappled with today.[255] As Kaplan demonstrates, books and films serve as a way of indirectly processing these traumatic events and their effects.

In *Killer Images* (2013), documentary filmmakers Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer catalogue a range of examples in which cinematic depictions of

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252 Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 22.
253 *Ibid.*, 1.
254 *Ibid.*, 2.
255 *Ibid.*, 9.

violence have been "implicated in the imagination and actions of perpetrators and survivors" of historical violence.[256] Some of the more extreme examples include: officers in the Liberian Civil War screening violent films to desensitise child soldiers; rebels in the Sierra Leone Civil War screening *Rambo* films to boost soldier morale; members of the Indonesian genocide death squads dressing up as their favourite characters from American gangster films and re-enacting scenes with their victims; and guards in Guantanamo Bay emulating the torture techniques of Jack Bauer from the television series *24*.[257] Conversely, when the 1978 American miniseries *Holocaust* was first broadcast in Germany, a record-breaking 15 million households tuned in to watch it (roughly 50% of the West German population at the time).[258] Jeffrey C. Alexander recounts that the screening led to an outpouring of public anguish, and was the first time the Nazi genocide had received widespread meaningful attention in the country of its origin. Panels of historians appeared on German television after each episode in order to field questions. They were quickly bombarded by thousands of telephone calls from Germans born after World War II, who were incredulous that such crimes had been allowed to occur and outraged that this was the first time they had learned of them.[259] The resulting shift in public opinion halted the burgeoning Hitler revival movement and quelled "long-standing partisan demands for 'balance' in the presentation of the Jewish mass murder."[260] It was the first time terms like the "final solution" and "holocaust" entered German academic discourse, and led German legislators to remove the statute of limitations

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[256] Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer, *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2013), 1.
[257] *Ibid.*, 2-4.
[258] Jeffrey C. Alexander "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Crime to Trauma Drama." *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004), 230.
[259] *Ibid.,* 234.
[260] *Ibid.*, 234.

on Nazis who had participated in what were now defined as crimes against humanity.[261] These examples, provided by Brink, Oppenheimer and Alexander, demonstrate how the dialogue between cinematic images and traumatic events can have momentous social and political consequences.

Media researchers, such as Adam Lowenstein and Linnie Blake, have argued that the horror film genre is unique in its ability to depict experiences of individual and collective trauma. In *Shocking Representations* (2005), Lowenstein examines a range of culturally diverse horror films in relation to social conflicts that haunted their respective countries of origin. He argues that horror films are often considered disreputable not because they are poorly made but because they dig up social trauma, while more acclaimed genres and directors reinforce nationalistic narratives and attempt to "smooth over the cracks" of history.[262] He notes that horror is rarely labelled middle-brow, because, whether it is regarded as trashy or transcendent, it always assaults the status quo.[263] In his textual analyses of films, Lowenstein shows how particular horror directors challenge comforting historical narratives upheld in post-war France, England, Japan and the U.S. For example, in Britain, World War II challenged the country to overcome its rigid class systems and incorporate marginalised peoples for the sake of a unified front; whereas *Peeping Tom* (Powell 1960) brought viewers uncomfortably close to the "disreputable" classes.[264] In Japan, the country took refuge in seeing itself as an innocent victim of the war, while *Godzilla* portrayed the country as not only a victim, but also aggressor and provoker of disaster.[265] In the U.S., the perception that defeat in Vietnam was caused by counter-war protesters was unsettled by the horror film *Last House on the Left*

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[261] *Ibid.*, 235.
[262] Lowenstein, *Shocking Representations*, 159.
[263] *Ibid.*, 128-129.
[264] *Ibid.*, 20.
[265] *Ibid.*, 82.

(Craven 1972), which showed how easily Americans could project their violent tendencies onto other social groups in an effort to deny responsibility.[266] Lowenstein is critical of prior scholarship on cinematic depictions of trauma, regarding it as overly binary, concerned only with whether trauma representation is accurate or inaccurate, realist or modernist, healthy or unhealthy.[267] He believes that preoccupations with accurate depictions of events robs art, literature and film of their ability to engage substantially with trauma.[268] Citing Walter Benjamin, Lowenstein contends that artistic allegory is valuable because it re-evaluates the past, and "blasts open the continuum of history."[269] Horror films can achieve this rupture, first by depicting the terror and pain of trauma, and then by implicating the viewer in the facilitation of that pain.

Linnie Blake generally concurs with Lowenstein's assessment, observing that horror films allow audiences to re-engage with the "traumatic legacy of the past" and re-evaluate how they identify as citizens of a nation.[270] In *The Wounds of Nations* (2012), she argues that the process of nation-building is itself traumatic—to those the state seeks to include, exclude, assimilate, and subjugate—and that the establishment of a continuous national history and identity necessitates a "binding up [of] wounds."[271] Like Lowenstein, Blake demonstrates how horror films endeavour to "re-open' national wounds that have been suppressed, overlooked or only superficially addressed."[272] She divides *The Wounds of Nations* into four parts, with each section addressing the cinematic representation of a different national trauma. Part one examines allusions to World War II in German and Japanese horror films,

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[266] *Ibid.*, 103-104.
[267] *Ibid.*, 13.
[268] *Ibid.*,19.
[269] *Ibid.*, 21.
[270] Blake, *Wounds of Nations*, 3.
[271] *Ibid.*, 8.
[272] *Ibid.*, 9.

such as *Nekromantik* (Buttgereit 1987), *Onibaba* (Shindo 1964) and *Ringu* (Nakata 1998).[273] Part two examines how the Vietnam War is referenced in the films of American horror director George A. Romero.[274] Part three examines the significance of American "hillbilly horror" films during the 1970s and 1980s, and their resurgence after 9/11.[275] Finally, part four examines the popular resurgence of horror cinema in Britain, interpreting films such as *Dog Soldiers* (Marshall 2002), *28 Days Later* (Boyle 2002) and *Shaun of the Dead* (Wright 2004) as grappling with the legacy of Thatcherism and offering a new model of British masculine subjectivity.[276] Blake contends that these horror films offer minority perspectives that challenge the legitimacy and morality of nationhood, and frame nations as both an indefinite source of trauma and an obstacle to recovery. Consequently, their visions of national decay are both frightening and liberating to viewers who find themselves stifled by the homogenous narratives and perspectives of politics and mass media.[277] In a chapter in the 2015 essay collection *Digital Horror* (2005), Blake and Mary Ainslie write that horror does not flinch from or skirt the borders of trauma. Instead, the genre works through traumatic feelings and sensations, often in expressly repulsive ways. According to them, horror is the ideal framework for exploring trauma because it is the most "self-consciously disturbed and disturbing" of all film forms.[278] Chapter two of this thesis draws directly on Blake's analysis of hillbilly horror.

In *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema* (2014), Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek, and Julia B. Kohne examine European, American and Middle-Eastern films that depict

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[273] *Ibid.*, 19.
[274] *Ibid.*, 71.
[275] *Ibid.*, 123.
[276] *Ibid.*, 155.
[277] *Ibid.*, 187.
[278] Linnie Blake and Mary Ainslie, "Digital Witnessing and Trauma Testimony in *Ghost Game*: Cambodian Genocide, Digital Horror and the Nationalism of New Thai Cinema," in *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage,* ed. Xavier Aldana Reyes and Linnie Blake (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 71.

historical trauma resulting from extreme violence. They investigate a range of films, including thrillers set against the backdrop of historical events, such as *Cache* (Haneke 2005) and *The Ghost Writer* (Polanski 2010), and horror films that incorporate historical events into their narratives, such as *Blood Creek* (Schumacher 2008) and *Ratline* (Stanze 2011).[279] Their analysis aims to determine how the film medium visualises the psychologically shattering experiences of violence and its traumatic encoding on individuals and collectives. Similar to Lowenstein and Blake, they argue that film is capable of visualising trauma because it can effectively depict "irregularities and anachronisms," and "transport images [that have been] repressed or denied by the social body."[280] Traumatic memory, they observe, is encoded in sensory stimuli, such as smell, taste, touch, sound, and image, all of which can be translated into film in the form of dialogue, music, performances, camera angles and range, lighting, juxtaposition of figure and landscape, and use of space.[281] In particular, they identify the close-up as a transformation of the face and its relation to space and time; the close-up signifies the subjective experience of time standing still as the mind attempts to process something.[282]

Elm et al. argue that various countries—having been "impregnated" by traumatic experiences in recent history—have expressed national trauma through cinema. This expression is demonstrated in narrative films depicting actual events, as well as films featuring more allegorical and abstract allusions.[283] They note that, while some films that address national trauma refrain from depicting the event itself, reinforcing its unspeakable status, the films endeavour to capture the mood and

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[279] Elm et al., *Horrors of Trauma in Cinema,* 15-17.
[280] *Ibid.*, 9.
[281] *Ibid.*, 2.
[282] *Ibid.*, 8-9.
[283] *Ibid.*, 3.

conditions of the post-traumatised nation. [284] Elm et al. calls film a "prosthetic memory," serving as "an apt medium to vicariously experience global catastrophic events."[285] In trying to explain the phenomenon of depicting and viewing violence on film, they invoke the Medusa myth – the Ancient Greek story in which a heroic warrior slays a hideous monster by reflecting her own image using a shield. They cite the well-established assertion that cinema acts as a mirror to society, but add that horror films act as mirrors for the physical and psychological violence that occurs within and because of society.[286] Thus, like Medusa and the shield, horror films petrify the viewer with their own reflection. The experience of national trauma pervades all narrative genres, but none more so than horror cinema, where the "unspeakable" can be expressed through frightening, disgusting and shocking imagery, describing trauma in its own vocabulary.[287] Their analysis suggests that the horror genre is a valuable tool in understanding collective trauma, because horror films succeed by frightening people, and what frightens people most will transform from decade to decade, and is inextricably linked with social and political influences.

Lowenstein, Blake and Elm et al. do not devote any attention or scholarship to FF horror films. These works were published prior to or alongside the FF horror resurgence of the late 2000s and early 2010s. Nevertheless, their research demonstrates that the period in which FF horror films proliferated paralleled a growing cultural awareness among horror filmmakers and theorists of historical trauma and its insidious influence on contemporary societies. The remainder of this chapter demonstrates how FF horror films represent trauma, and in ways that are specific and unique to the subgenre.

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[284] *Ibid.*, 12.
[285] *Ibid.*, 12.
[286] *Ibid.*, 1-2.
[287] *Ibid.*, 19.

Trauma as the Premise of Found Footage Horror Films

The narrative premise of FF horror films shares an affinity with the theoretical structure of psychological trauma. That is, the films allude to a shocking, disturbing or destructive event that occurred in the past, the contents of which remain unknown. The unveiling of this event through the narrative in the form of discovered footage can be seen to symbolise the traumatised mind as it continually returns to or relives a particular event in an effort to comprehend it.

All narratives begin with a premise, and most can be expressed very simply, usually in a sentence or two. The premise of *Blair Witch* is displayed in its opening caption: "In October of 1994 three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland, while shooting a documentary. A year later their footage was found." The other films examined in this thesis all have similar premises. They are outlined below in the order in which the thesis examines them:

- *The Last Broadcast:* After several members of a paranormal-focused TV show are discovered murdered in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, a documentarian examines the raw footage of their final episode in order to learn what transpired.

- *Willow Creek:* A young couple attempt to make a documentary about the legendary Bigfoot and venture into the Six Rivers National Forest in search of it.

- *Cloverfield:* In a New York apartment, a young man videotapes a going away party for his best friend, but the festivities are interrupted when a gigantic creature attacks the city. The opening caption of the film informs the viewer that the raw footage they are watching is property of the U.S. defence force.

- *REC*: A news reporter and cameraman follow fire fighters responding to an emergency call inside a Barcelona apartment building. When they arrive, the group discover that some of the tenants are infected with a bizarre and deadly virus.

- *REC 2*: After the outbreak of a virus in a Barcelona apartment building, a SWAT team escorts a medical officer inside to treat survivors and determine what has occurred.

- *The Bay:* The Independence Day celebrations of a seaside town are interrupted when the townspeople start becoming violently ill, resulting in mass panic and chaos.

- *Pandemic:* In the aftermath of a worldwide pandemic, a doctor joins a rescue team travelling into the ruins of Los Angeles to search for survivors.

- *Paranormal Activity:* A young couple fear that their house is haunted and set up surveillance cameras to discern what is happening. The opening caption of the film informs the viewer that the raw footage we are watching is police evidence.

- *Lake Mungo:* A couple believes that the ghost of their late teenage daughter is haunting their house and has their son set up surveillance cameras to learn the truth.

- *Cannibal Holocaust:* An anthropology professor tracks a documentary crew that went missing in the Amazon Jungle. He discovers their corpses and their camera, and watches the footage to learn what happened to them.

- *Man Bites Dog:* A documentary crew records the daily life of a Belgian serial killer.

- *Gang Tapes:* A teenage boy receives a stolen video camera and uses it to record his daily life as part of a violent street gang in Los Angeles.

- *Zero Day:* Two high school boys record themselves plotting a mass shooting at their school. The raw footage is presented to the viewer as a posthumous manifesto that the boys have bequeathed to various media outlets.

In these 14 examples, the found footage is presented as being discovered in the wild, dug up out of the ruins of disaster, or otherwise produced from concealment. The concealed aspect of the footage can be read as symbolising a segment of the past that has been severed from the psyche or denied to conscious memory.

In the narrative structures of the films, the raw footage functions as a flashback device. Flashback is a term shared by film theory and psychology. According to Maureen Turim, a film flashback is an image or segment that "intervenes within the present flow of film narrative" to represent an anterior occurrence.[288] That is, a narrative device used by the filmmaker to show an earlier moment or event in a character's life, thereby revealing new information or adding new meaning to the overall narrative. Turim observes that film flashbacks tend to be framed as subjective, as though the viewer is being given access to the internal thoughts of a character as they remember something from the past.[289] This has traditionally been achieved through a particular filmmaking convention: the camera frames or zooms in on a single character's face, their expression typically contemplative or distracted, and then a gradual fade or dissolve forms a transition to the memory scene. Films often distinguish a flashback from the diegetic present through juxtaposing set design, the character's appearance, or by softening or

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[288] Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.
[289] *Ibid.*, 3.

desaturating the image.[290] Turim notes that flashbacks do not necessarily depict a past event objectively, but rather what a character perceives as having happened.[291] Some films show divergent versions of the same event through flashbacks of different characters; *Rashomon* (Kurosawa 1950) is a famous example of this use of contradictory flashbacks. Hayward adds that flashback in film can "serve nationalistic purposes," whereby a previous era is idealised or mythologised; conversely, the filmmaker can also use flashbacks to interrogate nostalgia and to question "certain social values" that we attribute to the past.[292]

In his examination of World War II films, Joshua Hirsch distinguishes between the depiction of "narrative memories" and "posttraumatic flashbacks." He observes that narrative memory in film is characterised by its coherence, wholeness and voluntary recollection.[293] That is, characters intend to recall such memories and the content of the flashback is comprehendible to the character and viewer, implying a healthy psychological chronology. In contrast, posttraumatic flashbacks, such as those depicted in *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Resnais 1959) and *The Pawnbroker* (Lumet 1964), are characterised as "fragmented," "uncontrollable," and "uninvited."[294] Hirsch describes such flashbacks as seizing the characters in sudden, disorienting bursts, and reflecting Pierre Janet's and Sigmund Freud's descriptions of traumatic memories as being "split off from normal consciousness [and] returning in pathological forms."[295]

Thus, flashbacks in film are an aesthetic attempt to represent the psychological experience of a sudden recollection of a past event. The *DSM* states

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[290] *Ibid.*, 10.
[291] *Ibid.*, 22.
[292] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 159.
[293] Joshua Francis Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 21.
[294] *Ibid.*, 21.
[295] *Ibid.*, 22.

that flashbacks are typically triggered by something that the individual encounters in the present.[296] Caruth distinguishes traumatic flashbacks by their intensity, which often makes it difficult for the victim to fully recognise the experience as a memory.[297] Rather, victims psychologically "relive" the experience as though it was happening in real time.[298] Additionally, where other types of flashbacks may recall memories that produce positive emotions, such as happiness, excitement or relaxation, traumatic memories universally produce negative emotions, such as terror and revulsion.[299]

FF horror films are characterised by their extensive use of narrative flashback, which is unusual as a central defining feature of a genre or subgenre. They present the contents of the found footage as having occurred in the past, and then being rediscovered and re-assembled in the present. FF horror films may establish this present timeframe through an opening caption, as in *Blair Witch*, *Paranormal Activity* and *Cloverfield*, which describes the origins of the footage and positions the viewer as witness to these past events. They may also establish this present[300] in the form of a framing narrative, as in *Cannibal Holocaust*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Lake Mungo*, each of which includes a frame story about characters investigating the footage. By the 2010s, FF horror films were so abundant and their premise so firmly established as a film subgenre, that some films forego framing information. Hence, *Willow Creek* does not include a textual or metatextual introduction to the footage; it merely starts with the characters addressing a diegetic camera and the viewer recognises that this is a FF film.

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[296] *DSM-5*, 427.
[297] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 8.
[298] *Ibid.*, 11.
[299] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 26-27.
[300] Or, at least, a more recent past.

The FF horror premise alters the viewer's perception of time and tenses. Specifically, FF horror films portray their content as *having occurred* rather than *occurring*. The subgenre communicates to the viewer that the horrific event documented by the footage has already happened, and therefore, the characters cannot avert it or survive it. The bygone or past tense framework of FF horror is also signalled through its diegetic form. The fact that characters in FF films interact with and respond to the camera locates the device within the world of the film, and therefore subjects the device to the passing of time. Knowing this, the viewer must reason that the footage that the camera records or has recorded is of something that has already happened. In contrast, the non-diegetic camera featured in conventional fictional films exists outside the space and temporality of the film world, and thus can portray narrative events as though they are occurring in the present tense. The diegetic camera in FF films is always associated with depicting the past.

The "re-experienced" past in FF horror films evokes a traumatic flashback. Firstly, the form and content of these films is characterised by frightening sensations and emotions, as the next section demonstrates. Secondly, the past event is central to the narrative, occupying the majority or entirety of the film. This can be read to signify the influence that a flashback has on a trauma victim, disconnecting them from the present, and returning their entire consciousness and cognition to a past event. FF horror films locate so much of their diegesis in the past that the viewer may occasionally mistake it for the present, forgetting that the premise of the subgenre determines the horrific event to be bygone and immutable. This tension deliberately obscures the film's portrayal of memory and time from both the character's perspective—that is, the character witnessing and experiencing the event—and the viewer's perspective. This distorting of time states through the film's

narrative echoes the trauma victim's own internal struggle to reconcile past and present. Thirdly, the way that FF horror portrays the past event serves to blur the boundary between reality and fantasy. That is, the subgenre uses documentary conventions and unique marketing strategies to give the viewer the impression that they are witnessing reality, while at the same time incorporating explicitly fantastical and supernatural horrors, such as witches, monsters, ghosts, zombies, and demons.

The FF horror flashback differs from classical narrative in its absence of a present subject. That is, in a conventional narrative film, such as *Casablanca* (Curtiz 1942), flashbacks tend to be portrayed as taking place in a character's head, with both the recollection of the memory and the memory itself being depicted from their perspective. The raw footage that constitutes a flashback in FF horror films can be interpreted as subjective, in that it takes place from the perspective of the character operating the camera, with the cinematography representing their cognitive experience and sensorial interaction with the world. However, this character often does not exist in the present; rather it is a completely different character, or even the viewer, who is literally watching the footage and, thus, vicariously experiencing this flashback. The traumatic experience still exists, as camera footage, but the one who recorded it is dead or missing. This absence can be read to symbolise the precence of psychological and collective trauma, with the experience having been detached from the mind of its immediate victim and only belatedly discovered.

Trauma as the Aesthetic of Found Footage Horror Films

The aesthetic style of FF horror films evokes the terror and confusion of the traumatised mind. The films achieve this by combining nightmarish imagery with improvised performances and POV diegetic camerawork. This produces an aesthetic

that conveys an overwhelmed subjectivity and an incomprehensible threat. While FF horror films appropriate documentary codes to heighten the realism of the horror, these codes are used to convey fictitious narratives. The FF horror aesthetic combines and subverts elements of realism, surrealism and documentary, resulting in a unique set of symbols and meanings.

In a broad philosophical sense, the study of aesthetics deals with the nature, creation and appreciation of art and beauty. It examines how and why certain natural, artificial or conceptual characteristics provide certain emotional experiences for spectators.[301] In film theory, aesthetics is used to frame inquiries about how the form and content of films combine to create meaning for the viewer.[302] Central to this process is a film's *mise-en-scène*—how elements such as sets, performers, costumes, props, and lighting are arranged within the frame and presented to the viewer. According to F. E. Sparshott, film form and film content are inextricably linked, with form guiding the viewer's perception or expectations of the contents.[303]

FF horror films have a unique aesthetic. They often feature poor-quality cinematography, which has been recorded—or portrayed as being recorded—by the performers. Additionally, many FF horror films employ non-professional actors who improvise their lines and actions, and by extension, direct the diegetic camera. For example, while producing *Blair Witch*, filmmakers Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez created a fictional mythology for the Blair Witch, and wrote a broad outline for how they wanted the film's plot to develop. However, they left it entirely up to the three actors to interpret and develop their characters, interact with each other, react

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[301] "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified October, 17, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/.
[302] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 239-240.
[303] Sparshott, "Basic Film Aesthetics," 11-34.

to situations, and operate their recording equipment.[304] Additionally, Myrick and Sánchez heightened the realism of the performances by having the actors' actually hike and sleep in the woods for the duration of the production, gradually reducing their sleep and food rations, and staging unrehearsed supernatural hauntings during the night. The entire film was shot on location, mostly in the Seneca Creek State Park, but also in existing structures, such as the town of Burkittsville and historic Griggs House.[305] Scenes were mostly lit using natural light, but the film's visual style was also influenced by the fact that the performers used diegetic torches and camera lights. The main actor and cameraperson, Heather Donohue, had never operated a camera before filming and was only given two days of training.[306] These conditions produced the unrehearsed and crude quality of the film's cinematography, and reinforced the premise that the audience is viewing footage recorded by an amateur videographer. This amateur aesthetic, in turn, heightens the impact of the film, and immerses the viewer in the horrific circumstances of the characters. Commentators used this film's aesthetic to identify a new subgenre, found footage, which was subsequently deemed to also include earlier films, such as *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Man Bites Dog*.

Psychoanalytic film theorists, such as Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey, argue that the viewer identifies emotionally with the gaze of camera.[307] By constructing the elements of a film to reflect the perspective of a primary character, the filmmaker encourages the viewer to sympathise with that character and perceive the world and

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[304] Scott Meslow, "*The Blair Witch Project*: An Oral history," *The Week*, last modified January 15, 2015, https://theweek.com/articles/531471/blair-witch-project-oral-history.
[305] *Ibid.*
[306] *Ibid.*
[307] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 2-3.

other characters from their perspective.[308] Films have traditionally fostered this

identification through editing; for example, a POV sequence presents a shot of a

character glancing at something out of frame, and then cuts to a shot of what they

are glancing at. The actor's performance combines with the juxtaposition of shots to

communicate the character's thoughts and feelings to the audience. [309] According to

Noël Carroll, "the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the

emotions of characters."[310]

     Film critics have accused horror films—particularly the slasher films popular in

1970s and 1980s—of encouraging the viewer to identify with the killer, and to take

pleasure in his stalking and tormenting of other people, especially women.[311] In *Men

Women and Chain Saws* (1992), Carol J. Clover refers to this POV as "predatory

gazing"; for example, in John Carpenter's *Halloween*, she describes how "we adopt

the vision of an entity that stalks a house, peers in windows, enters and goes to the

kitchen for a carving knife, then proceeds up stairs, opens a door, and stabs a young

woman to death."[312] Slasher films typically signal the killer's POV by showing the

camera frame waver and tremble, and by overlaying the film's audio with urgent

heartbeats or heavy breathing.[313] Stephen Koche accuses slasher filmmakers of

exploiting sadistic and misogynistic fantasies of male audiences, and argues that the

subgenre is not merely "vile," but also "dangerous."[314]

     However, Clover disputes the sense of mastery that critics attribute to the

killer's POV, observing that the killer's gaze is often "cloudy" and "punctuated by

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[308] Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 4.
[309] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no.3 (1975): 6-18.
[310] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 17.
[311] J.A. Kerswell, *The Slasher Movie Book* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 13-15.
[312] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 235.
[313] *Ibid.*, 240
[314] Stephen Koch," Fashions in Pornography," *Harper's Magazine* (1974), https://harpers.org/tag/the-texas-chain-saw-massacre-motion-picture-1974/.

dizzying swishpans," thus undermining the omnipotence that male viewers allegedly fetishize.[315] While she agrees that the killer's POV is gendered as male, she interprets his acts of watching and stabbing women not as expressions of power, but as manifestations of his sexual anxiety and inadequacy.[316] Finally, Clover points out that slasher films also contain POV shots from the killer's main victim, who is female. Towards the end of a slasher film, the perspective usually switches entirely to this "final girl" as she evades and confronts the killer. That is, "we are in the closet with her, watching with her eyes the knife blade stab through the door."[317] Clover argues that this transition produces a radical shift of allegiance: the male audience, having initially been enthralled by the spectacle of the male killer's stalkings and slayings, is re-oriented to the victim's POV, with whom they experience simultaneous terror and righteous anger towards the killer.[318] William Schoell concurs with this assessment, stating:

> Social critics make much of the fact that male audience members cheer on the misogynous misfits in these movies… [However] they don't realize that these same men cheer on (with renewed enthusiasm, in fact) the heroines… as they blow away the killer with a shotgun or get him between the eyes with a machete. All of these men are said to be identifying with the maniac, but they enjoy his death throes the most of all, and applaud the heroine with admiration.[319]

Clover concludes that the misogyny and sadism of horror films has been overstated, and that "horror is far more victim-identified than the standard view would have it."[320] Indeed, where the majority of narrative films encourage female viewers to identify with a male protagonist, slasher films, a supposedly male-dominated subgenre, encourage the opposite. Notably, the majority of FF horror films—including the films

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[315] Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 187.
[316] *Ibid.*, 186.
[317] *Ibid.*, 45.
[318] *Ibid.*, 45.
[319] William Shoell, *Stay Out of the Shower: 25 Years of Shocker Films, Beginning With "Psycho"* (New York: Dembner Books, 1985), 55.
[320] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 8.

addressed in this thesis—depict the victim's perspective, which is also often female. The exception to this is Perpetrator FF horror films, all of which take place from a male perpetrator's perspective. This exclusive identification with the killer potentially renews critical accusations of sadism and misogyny against horror films. However, like Clover, I argue that FF horror produces something more complex and challenging than simple wish fulfilment.

Despite being influenced by earlier horror films, FF horror films radically disrupt the established codes of aesthetic identification. This is primarily achieved through their use of a single diegetic camera, which often records continuous, unedited footage. Rather than the filmmaker constructing aesthetic links between the viewer, the protagonist, and the film world, FF horror films present us with a simulation of the literal POV of a character within the film. Potentially, this may result in the viewer identifying more acutely with the FF horror protagonist than the conventional film protagonist, since our access to the film is limited entirely or substantially to their vision, mobility and survival. Our gaze is aligned with the FF horror protagonist for the entirety or majority of the film. Our ability to see and hear the world is subject to their ability to see and hear it. The form, contents and running time of the film are directly dependent upon the continued existence of the character. The filmmaker creates conditions in which we are not merely watching and may sympathise with a character in a film, but are actually embodying a character in a film. In *Blair Witch*, the protagonist Heather is rarely seen within the frame, yet our perspective is continually aligned with hers. Compared to conventional films, this aesthetic is a closer representation of actual cognition, wherein we never see our own face, except in reflections and recordings. Thus, our identification with the FF character is not just symbolic, but verges on the literal. There is no diegetic world or

film without them. What they see, we see. Where they go, we go. What they fear, we fear.

The emphasis on POV in FF excludes instances of ironic tensions common to horror cinema. For example, many slasher films, including *Psycho*, *Halloween* and *Scream*, and haunted house films, such as *The Shining* (Kubrick 1980) and *The Amityville Horror* (Rosenberg 1979), feature shots of the monster in proximity to a character, but without that character's knowledge. The tension, therefore, lies in the viewer being aware of a danger of which the character is oblivious. In contrast, a POV shot ensures that we have as much visual knowledge as the character. Prior knowledge of these horror film conventions may implant in the viewer a suspicion that the monster is ever-present or in proximity to the character; here, however, we are conditioned to feel just as vulnerable as the character. Not all FF horror films are shot exclusively from a character's POV. For example, *Paranormal Activity* features tripod-mounted cameras and *The Bay* features camera phones and webcams, all of which operate independently of the characters. Even *Blair Witch*, in which Heather records most of the footage, occasionally features footage from a secondary camera, through which Heather herself appears on screen. These third-person perspectives allow for instances of dramatic tension that are typical of horror films in general. The distinction, however, is that in FF films this dramatic tension is also experienced by the characters, particularly in the *Paranormal Activity* series, as they review their proximity to the monster, but only realise their danger in retrospect.

The FF horror aesthetic evokes Herman's three defining symptoms of psychological trauma: hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction. Because the characters are operating the camera, their emotional and physical response is conveyed through the movements of the frame. For example, in *Willow Creek*, upon

hearing a strange sound, the protagonist Jim pans the camera across the woods in search of the sound's source; the viewer, who shares the character's POV, likely also searches the frame along with him. This signifies a heightened alertness experienced by the character and shared by the viewer. When Jim or his girlfriend are frightened or threatened, they may start shaking the camera or fleeing the situation, all of which contributes to a frantic and disorienting aesthetic. Again, because we share their POV, we may also experience a feeling of panic, both in response to the threat and in response to the character's response. There have been instances in which the FF aesthetic has translated into feelings of actual motion sickness; for example, during screenings of *Blair Witch*, *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity*, many viewers complained of feeling nauseated and some viewers even vomited or fainted in the theatre.[321] Ironically, frantic and disorienting cinematography serves to obscure and mystify, rather than elucidate, the monster in the films. This suggests a tendency for the camera in FF horror films to elicit a hyperaroused state of perception. The ambivalent relationship between event and reception, as depicted throughout the subgenre, symbolises the contradictory structure of trauma, wherein the mind is constantly alerted by a threat that it cannot comprehend or recall.

The trauma symptom of intrusion is also simulated through the premise of FF horror. For example, in *Lake Mungo*, the characters are haunted by the ghost of a deceased family member, who seems to manifest in home video recordings in order to communicate the circumstances that led to her death. The footage symbolises a flashback or nightmare intruding upon the present, and returning the subject to a traumatic experience of the past. Furthermore, intrusion is also symbolised in the

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[321] Turner, *Found Footage Horror Films,* 45-46.

technical distortions and degraded quality of the footage. This is distinct from the chaotic style of recording described above; rather, it refers to the way that the recording equipment, and by extension its operator, are harassed, assaulted and damaged. For example, when a character in one of the films is fleeing from a threat, the image blurs and pixelates, and the sound may become garbled. Such intrusions affect the actual form of the film, rather than merely its content, and thus symbolise the traumatic experience's impact on the subject's cognition. These distortions also evoke Caruth's allusion to trauma as "the wound that cries out."[322] Just as the characters fail to document the monster, the technical distortions reinforce a sense of absence. They symbolise the piercing impact of psychological trauma and the unstable cognitive gap left behind. They represent an experience that the subject failed to encode and which they can no longer access. Nevertheless, these distortions, like the frantic cinematography, serve as the character's closest interaction with the monster. They are the wounds that linger from a past experience. These moments of technological failure encourage the viewer to become more alert to what they are seeing, more determined to locate the source of these interruptions, the shocking truth buried in the grain of film and pixels of video.

The supernatural aspect of the FF horror antagonist evokes the propensity for nightmares and hallucinations to intrude upon the trauma victim's mind. The actual threat or antagonist in FF horror films is often portrayed or described as monstrous. For example, the characters in *Blair Witch* are afraid that a witch from local legend is stalking them. However, they are unable to document this entity on film, and therefore, unable to comprehend it. The film offers no clear explanation for the presence of the monsters in the diegesis. In the case of *Blair Witch* and other films,

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[322] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

such as *The Last Broadcast*, it is possible that the monster may be a figment of personal or social imagination, and that the characters have projected their terror onto a fantastical entity. If we examine FF horror as a depiction of psychological trauma, and the raw footage that constitutes the films as a flashback, then the monsters can be seen as sublimations of the traumatic experience rather than actual perpetrators of the trauma. That is, the monster serves as the nightmarish symbol— the embodiment of terrifying emotions and sensations—of an event that is inaccessible or lost to the conscious mind.

The trauma symptom of constriction is conveyed during instances in which the protagonist is detached from, or loses control of, the camera. This includes instances when a camera falls to the ground, usually because the character operating it has been assaulted or killed. This moment occurs at the end of *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Man Bites Dog*, and it is confronting for the viewer, because it detaches us from the POV with which we have become identified. Thus, we are symbolically dissociated from the constructed consciousness of the film and left in a state of tonic immobility. The fact that this immobility is usually caused by an act of violence or death reinforces the link between the intensity of the event and its impact on the mind.

An alternate depiction of constriction can be found in *Paranormal Activity* and *Lake Mungo*, wherein the characters station a camera to monitor their house during the night. These recordings allow the characters to view themselves from a position outside their own bodies. Upon reviewing the footage each morning, they are confronted with evidence of their own unconscious behaviour and evidence of an unknown entity manipulating their bodies and environment. Their inability to intervene against this intrusion and their belated recognition of danger render them powerless. These scenes evoke psychological fracture in response to trauma: just as

the camera is separated from the subject, so too is the mind dissociated from the body. This can be seen to symbolise consciousness diverting into parallel streams in order to escape the impact and presence of the traumatic experience. The immobilisation of the diegetic camera in FF horror recalls Herman's description of constriction: the psychological and physical threat becomes so overwhelming that both confrontation and escape seem impossible, and so the character's POV is aesthetically reconstituted into states of "frozen watchfulness."[323] Moreover, these out-of-body scenes potentially reflect our own emotional response to the pre-determined events of the footage we are watching. Thus, the films symbolise a dissociative experience for both the characters and the viewer.

The avant-garde influences behind FF horror, as observed by Luckhurst, connect the subgenre's unique aesthetic to the broader artistic tradition of trauma representation. The Dadaist and surrealist artists of the early 20th century were deeply affected by Freud's theories of the unconscious and self-destructive mechanisms that plague the human psyche.[324] They responded by producing works of art that eschewed the conventional creative preoccupation with beauty, and instead explored the arcane and frightening aspects of human experience, including what was then called "traumatic hysteria."[325] They wished to move beyond the pleasure and death drives identified by Freud. According to art historian Margaret Iversen, André Breton's "surrealist understanding of trauma, contributed to his formulation of the key concepts of 'objective chance,' the 'encounter' and the found

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[323] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 72.
[324] For example, as described in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and "The Uncanny." Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Journal for the Application of Psychoanalysis to the Humanities* 5 (1919): 297-324.
[325] Margaret Iversen, "The Aesthetics of Trauma," *Kultuuriteaduste ja Kunstide Doktorikool*, last modified September 22, 2014, https://ktkdk.edu.ee/events/event/the-aesthetics-of-trauma/.

object"; for example, as depicted in his 1937 poetry collection *Mad Love*.[326] Jacques

Lacan later cited Breton's work in his reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure*

Principle (1992), demonstrating the capacity for art to inform psychological research,

and vice versa.[327] Consequently, we can see how the same cohort of artists that

inspired collage films and originated the concept of "found footage" were also

influenced by early trauma theory, and were determined to deconstruct and subvert

established aesthetics in order to represent, among other things, traumatic

experience. Likewise, this thesis aims to contribute to trauma theory by examining

how it is artistically and culturally represented in this recent horror subgenre.

FF horror films portray a contrast between visual chaos as the character is

assaulted, followed by sudden visual immobility or expiration as the camera is

detached. This contrast aestheticises the frightening oscillation between

hyperarousal and constriction that is experienced by the traumatised mind. The

viewer is encouraged to identify with the POV of a character whom they know is

doomed (according to the premise of the subgenre). This identification places the

viewer in a precarious and unstable position: a subjectivity torn between the past and

the present, unable to occupy either. The raw footage depicts the final moments of a

character's life, its running time essentially serving as a death clock. The fatalistic

framing of FF horror characters resembles descriptions of some of Herman's

patients. She recalls victims of trauma referring to themselves as "living ghosts,"

because they felt incomplete, neither dead nor alive, out of time and out of place.[328]

This is an apt description, as it reflects the way the trauma victim's thoughts are

continually haunted and possessed, forced to relive and re-enact something that

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[326] *Ibid.*

[327] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 268.

[328] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 38.

they do not understand. The trauma victim struggles to perceive a future for themselves, trapped in an eternal loop between present and past. Likewise, the future tense is absent in FF horror films, with character and viewer trapped in the same psychological tomb.

Trauma as the Recurring Theme of Found Footage Horror Films

The central thematic concern of FF horror films is trauma. It manifests in a number of distinct narrative categories of the subgenre, as examined in subsequent chapters. Ultimately, however, it relates the aesthetic construction of individual trauma to the trauma as experienced on a collective scale. When we examine theme, we examine an element of narrative that is distinct from premise, plot, setting, style, and character (although these elements may be used to convey the theme). Theme may be expressed directly by the characters or the author, or it may be expressed indirectly through narrative construction.[329] The repetition of particular phrases or images may unite disparate elements of a story into a single idea.[330] FF horror films are not explicitly about psychological or collective trauma, in the sense that none of the filmmakers, or characters within the films, explicitly refers to the concept of trauma. However, all of the FF horror films examined in this thesis contain themes relating to trauma, and all of the films can be united under this shared thematic concern. This further reinforces the argument that FF horror films constitute a subgenre.

The exposure or uncovering of a frightening experience from the past constitutes the overarching theme of FF horror. However, the subgenre can be divided into four subordinate themes, which constitute the categories of film

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[329] Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 258.
[330] *Ibid.*, 258.

examined in this thesis. These categories are: Remote, Urban, Domestic, and Perpetrator. Remote FF horror refers to films such as *Blair Witch* and *Willow Creek*, in which characters venture into foreign spaces in search of legendary monsters. These monsters signify specific historical traumas, which the characters inadvertently come into contact with, and end up re-enacting throughout the film. Implicit throughout the subgenre, this thesis argues, is the suggestion that traumatic events of the past persistently impact future generations of society and nationality.

Urban FF horror refers to films such as *Cloverfield* and *REC*, in which the lives of city-dwelling characters are interrupted by the sudden emergence of a destructive monster. In contrast to the previous category, this monster signifies contemporary traumatic events, particularly post-9/11 disasters. The subtext of this category of films is that the mass violence and natural disasters of the 21st century directly and vicariously affect people.

Domestic FF horror refers to films such as *Paranormal Activity* and *Lake Mungo*, in which a monstrous entity gradually invades the character's homes and lives. Here, the monster signifies a recurring traumatic experience, rather than a single event. The subtext of this category of films is that home can be a site of systemic suffering, and that one's family and friends can be complicit in that suffering.

Finally, Perpetrator FF horror refers to films such as *Man Bites Dog* and *Zero Day*, in which characters commit traumatic assaults against other people. Here, the viewer's perspective is aligned with the perpetrator—identified in the previous three categories as a monster—rather than the victim. The subtext of this category of films is that perpetrators are not monsters, but people, who are capable of being

traumatised by what they do, and whose behaviour, however immoral, is shaped by society. Society must therefore take responsibility for them.

This opening chapter has established a historical and academic context for understanding FF horror films and how they function as a subgenre of the horror genre. The chapter also established the conceptual framework of the thesis, which outlines how the premise, aesthetic and themes of FF horror relate to the theory of psychological trauma. Where the aesthetic demonstrates the subjective experience of trauma, the themes locate that experience within a social context. Thus, the relationship between aesthetic and theme constitutes the relationship between the individual and the collective. As stated, the question of the thesis is, how do FF horror films depict the relationship between individual trauma and collective trauma? The remaining four chapters of the thesis will apply this framework to a range of important and influential FF horror films, in order to answer this question.

CHAPTER TWO: INTO THE WOODS
American Historical Trauma in *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek*

This chapter examines three FF horror films—*The Blair Witch Project*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek*—each of which depict ill-fated ventures into the American wilderness. All three films feature characters investigating American folklore and attempting to record a documentary about a legendary monster; respectively, these are the legends of the Blair Witch (an allusion to the Salem Witch Trials), the Jersey Devil and Big Foot. I argue that the films' portrayal of these monsters signifies unresolved historical traumas that continue to influence contemporary American society. In seeking out these monsters, the characters demonstrate scepticism of official historical accounts and a curiosity towards forbidding folkloric perspectives. I suggest that in these films the characters' interactions with the monsters constitute a recovery and re-enactment of historical trauma.

I begin with a definition of Remote FF horror films, the category that comprises the films examined here, along with a synopsis of each film. I also review academic literature on folklore, historical trauma and the figure of the monster, and the ways in which the makers of *Blair Witch* incorporated folklore and folk discourse into the marketing of their film. This leads to an examination of how *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek* depict the American wilderness as a site of trauma, as well as depicting how characters undergo traumatic experiences that echo particular historical traumas. I present several interpretations, such as the monsters signifying the religious paranoia and social isolation of early European

settlers, the dehumanisation of indigenous peoples, and the various atrocities that resulted from the colonisation of North America.

Defining Remote Found Footage Horror Films

This chapter focuses on a particular category of the subgenre, termed "Remote FF horror" films. Textually, these films contain similar narrative elements and similar uses of settings. They each depict characters seeking out legendary monsters in a remote or foreign location. I will begin by summarising their plots and then identifying their shared characteristics.

Set in 1994, *Blair Witch* depicts the final days of three film students—Heather Donahue, Michael C. Williams and Joshua Leonard—who travel to rural Maryland in order to make a documentary about the legend of the Blair Witch. After visiting and recording a remote landmark from the legend, the group becomes lost and are forced to camp out in the woods for several nights. During this time, they are menaced by an unseen assailant, whom they come to suspect is the spirit of the Blair Witch. Josh eventually goes missing, and Heather and Mike discover an abandoned shack. Heather follows Josh's screams into the shack's basement, where she finds Mike immobilised. The film ends with Heather being struck by an unseen presence and her camera falling to the ground.

The Last Broadcast follows documentary filmmaker David Leigh as he investigates the mysterious murder of two hosts of a paranormal-based public-access television show. The victims, Steven Avkast and Locus Wheeler, were found butchered in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, having attempted to record an episode about the legendary Jersey Devil. David hires data retrieval expert Shelly Monarch to examine the mangled footage in the victim's cameras. She finds a blurred image of

the real killer, and after months of pain-staking digital reconstruction, is able to determine his identity: David Leigh. Before she can alert anyone, however, David breaks into her house and suffocates her with a piece of plastic sheeting. He then drives out to the Pine Barrens, dumps her in a clearing, and begins narrating the next segment of his documentary.

Willow Creek depicts Jim, a believer in Bigfoot, and his sceptical girlfriend Kelly, as they travel deep into the Six Rivers National Forest in Northern California to record a documentary about the legendary monster. The couple visit the nearby town of Willow Creek, where Jim interviews several locals, some of whom recite ballads and recount fanciful tales, while others earnestly warn him not to go into the woods. Next, they begin making their way to Bluff Creek, the site of the infamous 1967 Patterson-Gimlin footage. During their first night in the woods, the couple are woken by threatening growls and intrusions from outside their tent. Terrified, they resolve to leave the forest the next day, but on their way back to the car, they become lost and are chased by a large unseen creature. The creature catches them after nightfall, they drop their camera, and we hear Jim being killed while Kelly flees screaming.

These films share several important characteristics. They are set primarily in American forests. The characters who record the footage are outsiders to these forests, with their cameras depicting a gradual transition from urban and suburban spaces, to rural spaces, to wilderness. The common purpose of the characters' journeys is to investigate and record a documentary or news story about a folkloric monster that is native to that forest. In each film, all or most of the characters become lost in the forest, are hunted by an unknown entity, and either disappear or are killed. Many other FF horror films utilise these elements. In fact, *Cannibal*

Holocaust, which predates *Blair Witch* and *The Last Broadcast* by almost 20 years, depicts a documentary crew venturing into the Amazon jungle to document a legendary tribe of cannibals. Other examples of Remote FF horror include *Trollhunter* (Øvredal 2010), which depicts a documentary crew investigating the existence of trolls in rural Norway, and *Creep*, which depicts a videographer assigned to record an eccentric client who lives in a secluded American log cabin.

While many Remote FF horror films take place in forest settings, the definition used in this thesis stipulates merely that the film's setting is remote or foreign to the characters. Thus, *Grave Encounters*, about a television crew shooting an episode in an old, abandoned psychiatric hospital; *The Tunnel* (Ledesma 2011), about a news crew covering a hostile creature in the tunnels beneath the city of Sydney; and *The Borderlands* (Goldner 2013), about three priests sent by the Vatican to investigate a mediaeval church in rural England, also fall into this category. Other notable[331] Remote FF horror films include *Incident at Loch Ness* (Bailey 2004), *Eyes in the Dark* (Anderson 2010), *Apollo 18* (López-Gallego 2011), *As Above So Below* (Dowdle 2014), *La Cueva* (Montero 2014), and *Wekufe* (Attridge 2016), all of which occur in settings alien to the main characters.

Furthermore, the Remote FF horror films referenced above focus on a particular folktale regarding a legendary monster, which is native to the films' setting. These folktales may originate from genuine historical folklore or they may be inventions of the filmmakers, but in either case, they are elaborated in detail throughout the films, and the characters' fascination with the monster is what leads them to their deaths. While the films examined here take place in the U.S., the same features occur in FF horror films from across the globe.

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[331] That is, commercially successful or critically acclaimed.

Folklorism, Monsters and Historical Trauma

Along with these textual similarities, there is a unified subtext to Remote FF horror films – they depict a relationship between the recurrence and performance of folklore, and the recurrence and performance of historical trauma. That is, they demonstrate how historical trauma is a form of folklore, which has been sublimated into, and articulated through, monsters.

Folklore refers to the traditional arts, beliefs and customs of a particular culture or group of people. Folklore can be transmitted verbally, through stories or songs; behaviourally, through gestures and dances; or ritualistically, through regular gatherings or celebrations.[332] Folklore can also take the form of created objects, such as clothing, pottery, toys, food, and architecture.[333] The social group, or folk, that produces and expresses a body of lore, can range from a single family to an entire nation. People can and have developed unique traditions and belief systems based on their shared location, occupation, ethnicity, religion, class, or interests.[334] Folklore may overlap between different groups, and individuals will likely interact with several bodies of lore. A key characteristic of folklore, is that it is often not formally taught, but rather is transmitted informally through social interactions. This transmission is just as essential as the form and content of folklore.[335]

Folkloristics, the study of folklore, developed in the 19th century and distinguished itself as an academic discipline by the 1950s. Originally, folklorists focused primarily on rural peasants or indigenous peoples, with their stated goal being to document antiquated and vanishing traditions. However, their definition of

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[332] Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 2.
[333] *Ibid.*, 2.
[334] Alan Dundes, "The Devolutionary Premise in Folklore Theory," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 6, no.1 (1969): 5.
[335] Richard Bauman, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 84, no.331 (1971): 31-41.

folk gradually expanded to include people from all sorts of contexts and backgrounds, and by the 1960s folklorists agreed that folklore was observable in all aspects of contemporary life.[336] As Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones point out, regardless of whether we live in the city or the country, we all tell stories, take part in rituals, and use figurative language.[337] Along with archiving records and materials, folklorists endeavour to understand the significance of folklore – what it means or meant to groups of people and the insights it provides about that group of people.

Folkloric accounts of society provide a contrast to historical accounts. In *Living Folklore* (2011), Richard Dorson claims that folkloristics developed in response to historians' preoccupation with the "elite and successful" members of humanity. In comparison, "folklorists study how everyday people communicate with one another."[338] According to Jan Harold Brunvand, folklore is "the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture," which is ingrained in the objects, rituals, habits, and vocabulary of a particular community.[339] A key problem with history, claim folklorists, is that it relies too heavily on written sources, when in reality most people throughout time expressed their cultures through oral and creative traditions. Because of this, historical accounts are likely to neglect non-written accounts of the past and to marginalise cultures composed of non-written modes of expression. Despite its stated goal of providing a comprehensive and objective representation of the past, historical research is subject to various biases, such as recorded sources being weighted more heavily towards one social group over another, as well as the

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[336] Alan Dundes, "Folkloristics in the Twenty-First Century (AFS Invited Presidential Plenary Address, 2004)," *Journal of American Folklore* 118, no.470 (2005): 387.
[337] Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones*, Folkloristics: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 4.
[338] Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions* (Loga: Utah State University, 2011): 2-3.
[339] Sims and Stephens, *Living Folklore*, 11.

national or ideological commitments of the historian interpreting the sources.[340] In

some senses, folklore is more prone to bias and inaccuracy than history, since it

relies solely on one social group's perspective, yet folklorists argue that this also

makes it more democratic, since that perspective may incorporate many different

voices of a community, and is not subsumed or diluted by the accounts of more

dominant social groups.[341] According to Henry Glassie, folkloristics has "chastened"

academic history, demanding that historians not just consider the secular, temporal,

revolutionary, and powerful perspectives, but also the sacred, spatial, constant, and

powerless perspectives.[342]

There is little direct research on the relationship between folklore and

historical trauma. However, given that trauma is experienced individually and

collectively, and can be transmitted vicariously between members and generations of

a community, we can reasonably deduce that some dimensions of the experiences

and consequences of traumatic events are transmitted through folklore. In his study

of Native American historical trauma, Joseph Gone argues that historical trauma is

best understood as an "entrenched… folk discourse."[343] He explains that, in social

groups that have suffered a collective traumatic event, the distressing psychological

impact of that event can affect their stories, customs, verbal and behavioural

expressions to such an extent that it becomes an indelible and potentially self-

destructive part of their culture.[344] In many respects, social groups—such as

indigenous peoples, refugees, war veterans and their families, the descendants of

Holocaust and genocide survivors—become defined, internally and externally, by

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[340] *Ibid.*, 13.
[341] Dundes, "The Devolutionary Premise," 16-17.
[342] Henry Glassie, "Folklore and History," *Minnesota History* (1987): 188-192.
[343] Joseph Gone, "A Community-based Treatment for Native American Historical Trauma: Prospects for Evidence-based Practice," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 77, no.4 (2009): 752.
[344] *Ibid.*, 758-759.

trauma.[345] Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski explore how

psychological trauma can transmit across generations through folk practices such as

storytelling, artwork and cultural behaviours. These combine with more general

social mechanisms, such as "inadequate parenting, lateral violence, acting out of

abuse," and psychological mechanisms, such as the alteration of "memory

processes" and the engendering of "hereditary predispositions towards PTSD."[346]

Consequently, trauma shapes a social group's culture, preserving the effects and

experience of the inciting trauma, and most likely perpetuating new instances of

trauma. As such, folklore is an effective transmitter of trauma, since, like

psychological trauma, it is largely unconscious and imperceptible to those

participating in it. The alleged failure of historians to incorporate folklore into their

understanding of past and contemporary societies elides the role of trauma and its

continuous impact on the present.

Monsters are a significant element of traditional folklore. Typically, their

appearance frightens and their "powers of destruction" threaten the social and moral

order of human society.[347] Monsters appear as strange, grotesque and threatening

characters in traditional stories and songs from all over the world, and their

behaviour often reflects the values and fears of different social groups. Well-known

examples include ghosts, demons, witches, vampires, werewolves, zombies,

dragons, and krakens, which all originate in ancient or mediaeval mythology, have

dozens of regional variations, and are still popular figures of contemporary culture

(including the films examined in this thesis).[348] Their figurative function in folklore is

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[345] Fossion et al., "Family Approach with Grandchildren," 525-526.
[346] Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski, *Historical Trauma and Aboriginal Healing* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2004), 76.
[347] Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.
[348] *Ibid.*, 6.

suggested by the word itself, which is derived from the Latin term for "warning" or "instructing."[349] Though, it should be noted that monster lore pre-dates the written word. In *Monster Culture*, Jeffrey Cohen theorises that particular cultures can be read *through* the monsters that those cultures engender. According to him, the monster's body is a "cultural body," an entity born at a "metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place."[350] In folklore, the monster is cast in the role of the "dialectical other," that which is different or abnormal to people, and which must be avoided or defeated.[351] In this respect, the monster simultaneously serves the culture by guarding and reinforcing its borders, and undermines the culture by inspiring fantasies of escaping and crossing those borders. Cohen's theory demonstrates how the study of folklore can provide insights into society that history may overlook. The monsters in traditional and indeed contemporary folklore may not literally exist. However, people have believed and continue to believe that they exist, and act accordingly. Therefore, the monster is real in its material and cultural impact.

I assert that folkloric monsters stand for collective trauma, serving as a reminder of past suffering and a harbinger or catalyst for future suffering. Throughout history, different societies have described other social groups, such as enemy nations and ethnic minorities, using monstrous terminology. During the Crusades, the French clergy caricatured Muslims as inhuman "demons."[352] Numerous European populations regarded Jews as an alien culture and blamed them for the

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[349] Natalie Lawrence, "What is a Monster?" *University of Cambridge*, last modified September 7, 2015, https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/what-is-a-monster.
[350] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.
[351] *Ibid.*, 7.
[352] *Ibid.,* 8.

spread of disease.[353] In North America, proponents of "manifest destiny" justified the displacement and genocide of Indigenous Americans by portraying them as "unredeemable savages." Likewise, proponents of slavery and segregation reinforced the subjugation of African-Americans by portraying them in art, literature and performance as violent or pitiable ape-like creatures.[354] Nineteenth century Australian newspapers published graphics depicting Chinese and Mongolian people as humanoid octopi spreading immoral vices and strangling white people; such perceptions formed part of a broader racist ideology prevalent throughout Western nations known as the "Yellow Peril," which was used to restrict immigration from East Asia and to imprison or deport Chinese migrants.[355] During the Bosnian War, Serbian militiamen and TV stations circulated the false claim that Bosnian Muslim defenders were feeding children to zoo animals.[356] These examples demonstrate Cohen's contention that monsters are culturally specific, and grow out of collective fears. In several instances, a monster becomes the symbol of collective trauma—such as plague, war or mass hunger—that people cannot otherwise explain. However, the monster also provides a discursive and narrative means for society to displace its guilt for brutalising or wanting to brutalise another person or group of people. In *The Cultural Construction of Monsters*, Abigail Elizabeth Comber concludes that "the monster's very existence… represents either the very worst that culture either could become if it let itself, or more often, what that culture has become and denies."[357] This displaced sense of cultural guilt and denial—of what

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[353] "Why the Jews? – Black Death," *The Holocaust Center of the United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh*, accessed February 18, 2020, http://www.holocaustcenterpgh.net/2-3.html.
[354] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 10.
[355] Guy Hansen, "A Perspective from *The Bulletin*," *National Library of Australia*, last updated May 10, 2019, https://www.nla.gov.au/stories/blog/exhibitions/2019/05/10/australia-for-the-white-man.
[356] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 8.
[357] Abigail Elizabeth Comber, *The Cultural Construction of Monsters: 'The Prioress's Tale' and Song of Roland in Analysis and Instruction* (PhD diss., Ball State University, 2012), 25.

has happened or what might happen again—further links the folkloric monster to trauma.

Another aspect of folklore that links to historical trauma is Pierre Nora's theory of *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, or "sites of memory." This refers to any place or object that is vested with the "memorial heritage" of a community.[358] Such sites may be associated with collective memories of peace, joy and prosperity, or with conflict, suffering and fear.[359] In America, the following places constitute such sites of trauma: Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, where hundreds of Lakota women and children were massacred by U.S. Army soldiers;[360] Camp Sumpter in Georgia, a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp, where thousands of Union soldiers died and were buried in mass graves;[361] and the former World Trade Centre in New York, where thousands of civilian office workers were killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[362] These sites are historically significant, but are also important generators of folk memory and discourse. Nora's theory articulates how, contrary to the historical conception of past as a series of temporally fixed events, memorial sites indicate how the past can continue to inhabit the present, circulating between people across time.[363] When, as trauma theorists have observed, memory connects to physical, tangible locations, it can resurface in clarity and intensity upon returning to that location. Thus, we can conceptualise particular spaces as actually containing cultural memory, which a visitor, even one who was not present for the actual event, may interact with upon entering. According to Nora, attending to collective memories

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[358] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-8.
[359] *Ibid.*, 10.
[360] "Wounded Knee Massacre," *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, accessed June 6, 2019, http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.war.056.
[361] "Camp Sumter / Andersonville Prison," *U.S. National Park Service*, last modified October 31, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/ande/learn/historyculture/camp_sumter.htm.
[362] "September 11 Attacks," *HISTORY*, last modified October 16, 2020, https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/9-11-attacks.
[363] Nora, *Between Memory and History*, 16.

allows for a democratisation of historical accounts.[364] By focusing solely on different folk perspectives of different sites, rather than historical surveys and critiques, we access lived experiences of the past, not as narrative and knowledge, but as feeling, sensation and place.

Having presented the link between folklore and historical trauma, I will examine how this link is expressed through *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek*. These films depict characters fascinated by particular folk legends, who attempt to investigate those legends, and undergo a traumatic and fatal experience as a result. In the next section, I investigate how the paratexts of *Blair Witch* utilise folk discourses in order to augment the textual narrative. I then examine how these films portray the American wilderness and American folkloric monsters, and their connections to various historical traumas.

The Use of Folk Discourses in Found Footage Horror Marketing

The release of *Blair Witch* featured a ground-breaking marketing campaign that augmented the folkloric content of the film itself. According to journalist Bernard Weinraub, *Blair Witch* is the first widely released film promoted primarily via the Internet.[365]

The distributer Artisan Entertainment maintained the film's premise of being a factual document, and published accompanying material online and offline in support of that claim. For example, the studio published "missing persons" posters in magazines and newspapers (see figure 2.1), and had them displayed in shopping centres and theatre lobbies; the posters depicted the main characters faces, and directed people to the official website where they could "provide information" or

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[364] *Ibid.*, 18.
[365] Bernard Weinraub, "'*Blair Witch*' Proclaimed First Internet Movie," *Chicago Tribune*, last modified August 17, 1999, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1999-08-17-9908170065-story.html.

"learn more."[366] Anyone who visited the website would find a range of artefacts that seemingly verified the legitimacy of the posters. These included alleged police reports detailing the disappearance of the characters and the discovery of their equipment, as well as photographs of their personal belongings; maps of Burkittsville and the Black Hills charting their movements; photocopied pages from an old book about the Blair Witch legend; and "newsreel-style" interviews with Burkittsville locals recounting the event.[367] To maintain the illusion, the producers arranged for the actors to edit their own IMDb profiles in order to list their status as "missing, presumed dead."[368]
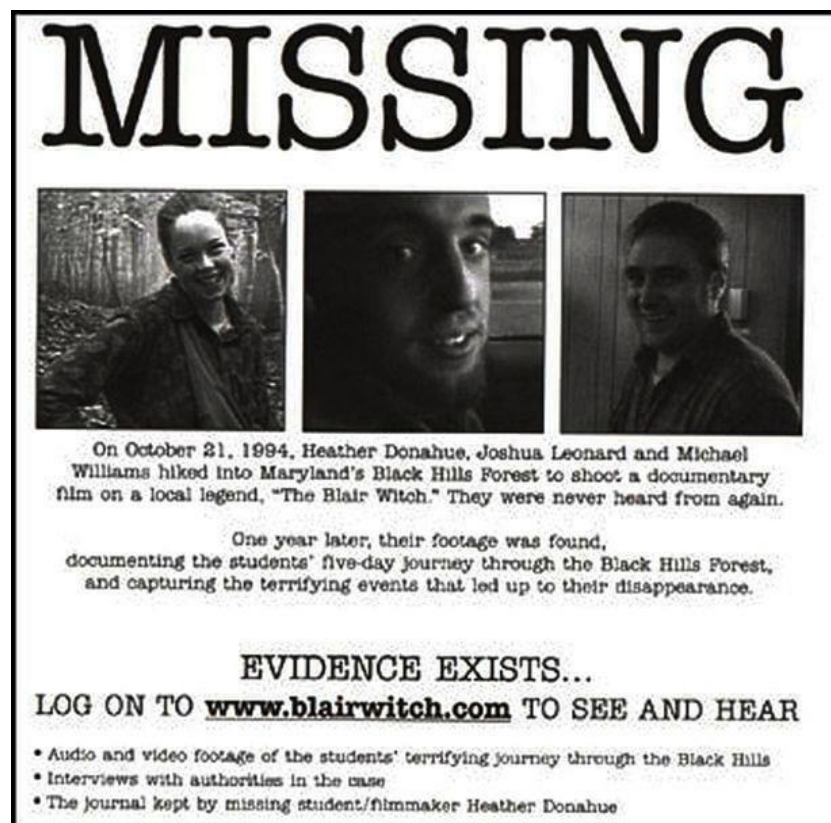
Figure 2.1 An example of the "missing persons"-style adverts circulated by Artisan Entertainment to promote *The Blair Witch Project*.

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[366] Charles Lyons, "'Blair' Timeline," *Daily Variety*, September 8, 1999, 2.

[367] "The Aftermath," *The Blair Witch Project*, accessed March 8, 2019, https://www.blairwitch.com/project/main.html.

[368] Rebecca Hawkes, "Why did the world think *The Blair Witch Project* really happened?" *The Daily Telegraph*, last modified January 9, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2016/07/25/why-did-the-world-think-the-blair-witch-project-really-happened/.

Finally, Artisan Entertainment commissioned a "true crime"-styled pseudo-documentary about the disappearance of the characters, called *The Curse of the Blair Witch* (Myrick and Sánchez 1999), which broadcast on television all over the world prior to the film's release. These efforts sparked significant public interest, as well as online and offline debates, over whether the film was a genuine documentary or a work of fiction.[369]

These strategies were very effective, helping the *Blair Witch* become one of the highest-grossing horror films and the most profitable independent film until that point. J. P. Telotte attributes this success to the campaign's ability to target tech-savvy young people, especially college students, to generate word-of-mouth interest, and to harness the [then untested] participatory and viral utilities of the internet.[370] Artisan Entertainment capitalised on consumer curiosity and reactions towards the film, by recording audience members' pre- and post-viewing testimonials, and incorporating their responses into new advertisements. Telotte praises the ingenuity and artistic ambition of the campaign, stating that the continuous cultivation of authenticity in both the film and its marketing, as well as the exploitation of people's authentic emotional responses to the film, enhanced both the narrative and its frightening effect.[371] By utilising the participatory medium of the internet, the filmmakers and producers of *Blair Witch* combined a fabricated colonial folk legend, the Blair Witch, and a fabricated contemporary folk legend, the vanished film crew, with the burgeoning folk discourses of the Information Age.[372] Other successful FF

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[369] J. P. Telotte, "*The Blair Witch Project*: Film and the Internet," *Film Quarterly* 54, no.3 (2001): 33.
[370] *Ibid.*, 34
[371] *Ibid.*, 37.
[372] The "Information Age" refers to the historical period, starting from the mid-20th century, in which national and global economies transitioned from traditional industries to information technology. It is characterized by the widespread adoption of computers and the internet in homes and workplaces (also called: Computer Age; Digital Age; New Media Age).

horror films, such as *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity*, would later emulate this strategy.

In a survey conducted by Magrit Schreier, which reviewed the initial online discussion of *Blair Witch*, it was revealed that 40% of user queries concentrated on whether the footage of the film, or the events it depicted, was "real or not."[373] Schrieger observes that this uncertainty usually stemmed from how the film had mixed a seemingly supernatural narrative with a realistic *mise-en-scène* and documentary-like presentation.[374] Telotte supports this reading, noting that the unglamorous quality of the alleged evidence depicted on the film's website, and the relative normality of the characters depicted in the photographs and posters, distanced viewers' perception away from Hollywood fantasy and situated them a world very similar to their own.[375] The black and white stills featured in the *Curse of the Blair Witch* show the characters' cameras and film canisters encrusted with dirt, giving them the appearance of crime exhibits, which most viewers would be familiar with from police procedural dramas and true crime documentaries, further reinforcing the perception of realism. Moreover, by presenting these alleged artefacts as genuine, and inviting people to investigate and speculate over them, Artisan Entertainment allowed viewers to participate in the construction and cultivation of the Blair Witch folklore. Schreier's survey demonstrates that people were engaging with the film's fabricated legend through folkloric discourse: they were asking and answering questions, collating elements, assessing authenticity, and debating among themselves over the potential meanings. That people were transmitting the story of the Blair Witch, as though it might be true, fulfils the definition of an urban legend; it therefore represents one of the first examples of folklore that originated on

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[373] Schreier, "Please Help Me," 321.
[374] *Ibid.*, 315.
[375] Telotte, "Film and the Internet," 35.

the internet. The majority of this occured in the months surrounding the film's release, but there is evidence that the discourse lasted for years afterwards, in different forms and variations. For example, fans created artwork and fan fiction inspired by the film, and even as late as 2007, internet users were still posting the question: "Is *The Blair Witch Project* real?"[376]

The proliferation of the Blair Witch legend reflects two broader online folk practices: the cataloguing and speculation of traditional folklore and urban legends, especially those related to the existence of supernatural beings, and the production of internet folktales, or fakelore, for entertainment. Folklore related to monsters, spirits and aliens developed over centuries, and has been amplified by the internet. The internet serves as a place in which to catalogue various accounts and alleged documentation of legendary beings, as well as a forum in which to examine and share new accounts and evidence. An entire school of pseudoscience, known as cryptozoology, formed in the mid-20th century with the aim of proving the existence of folkloric monsters, such as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster.[377] Today, users primarily study and teach cryptozoology online, via websites such as *The International Fortean Organisation*[378] and *Kosmopoisk*.[379] Likewise, there is a vast network of ghost hunters and ufologists co-ordinating with each other over the web in an effort to prove the existence of ghosts and extra-terrestrial beings.[380] The primary evidence presented by cryptozoologists consists of photographs and videos of supposed supernatural encounters. Ghost hunters also present sound recordings of

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[376] "*Blair Witch Project* - Real or Fake?" *Whirlpool Forums*, last modified March 5, 2007, https://forums.whirlpool.net.au/archive/696417.

[377] Peter J. Dendle, "Cryptozoology in the Medieval and Modern Worlds," *Folklore* 117, no.2 (2006), 191-192.

[378] *The International Fortean Organisation*, accessed December 1, 2019, http://forteans.com.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/.

[379] *Kosmopoisk*, accessed December 1, 2019, https://kosmopoisk.org/.

[380] Ivan T. Sanderson, "An Introduction to Ufology," *Fantastic Universe*, February, 1957, 27-34.

haunted places, based on their belief that spirits are invisible to the human eye. After

users acquire this *evidence*, they upload it to the internet, where it is circulated online

between various cryptozoology and ghost hunting forums, and then either

incorporated into the broader folkloric discourses of the community, or rejected.[381]

Thus, as *Blair Witch* depicts in both its text and paratexts, technology serves an

important function in the documentation and perpetuation of traditional folklore.

Alongside, and often intersecting with the online discourse of traditional

folklore and urban legends, is the production of internet folktales. Folktales are

distinct from legends, in the sense that the former is usually understood to be

fictitious, while the latter is understood to be potentially or partially true. Thus, the

production and transmission of online folktales is primarily an expression of

communal creativity and entertainment. The most popular form of online folktales is

known as "Creepypasta": horror-centric stories and images that are "copied and

pasted" around the internet.[382] Creepypasta folktales are intended to scare people,

and usually involve stories about murder, possession and otherworldly occurrences.

Notable Creepypasta stories include "Slender Man," "Ben Drowned," "Jeff the Kill,"

and "Ted the Caver."[383] Sometimes Creepypastas involve supernatural beings

haunting people through the medium of technology, thereby implicating virtual

spaces and online participants into the narrative.[384] The popularity of Creepypasta

further demonstrates society's fear and fascination towards monsters, and, as Cohen

argued, the ability of monsters to embody the collective fears of a particular time and

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[381] Peter J. Dendle, "Conclusion: Monsters and the Twenty-first Century: The Preternatural in an Age of Scientific Consensus," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Abington: Routledge, 2013), 301.
[382] Marisa C. Grippo, "Internet Ghosts," in *Ghosts in Popular Culture and Legend*, ed. June Michele Pulliam (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2016), 174-176.
[383] Darcie Nadel, "A Brief History of Creepypasta," *TurboFuture*, last modified January 29, 2020, https://turbofuture.com/internet/A-Brief-History-of-Creepypasta.
[384] Grippo, "Internet Ghosts," 176.

place. Like traditional folklore, it often proves difficult for archivists to determine the origin of a creepypasta story, as it typically evolves, changes and merges with other Creepypastas as it travels between users.[385] While users initially understand Creepypasta stories to be manufactured, the more the stories proliferate, the higher the chance is that they are believed by a user to be true, and thereby become internet legends in their own right. A famous example of a Creepypasta story blurring the lines between fiction and reality occurred in 2014, when two schoolgirls stabbed their friend on what they claimed were the orders of the Slender Man.[386] FF horror films, such as *Blair Witch,* function in a similar fashion to creepypasta. They signify realism in their text and in many cases in their paratexts. It is easy to imagine someone watching *Blair Witch* without background knowledge, or even to imagine them watching an online fragment of the film or its marketing campaign, and being convinced of its authenticity. *Blair Witch* helped induct traditional folklore and urban legends into the Information Age, and served as one of the first examples of Creepypasta. Notably, the Slender Man folktale was adapted into its own FF horror web series, entitled *Marble Hornets* (2009-2014).

If we accept the theory that these supernatural beings do not literally exist, but are projections of cultural fears and signifiers of collective trauma, then the intensifying fascination with folkloric monsters during the Information Age assumes a special significance. *Blair Witch* demonstrates this fascination on two levels: the investigation carried out by the characters within the film and the investigation carried out by viewers. Indeed, the film's marketing cleverly aligns the viewer's perspective with that of the characters'. Like Heather Donahue, the film's target audience are young adults from middle-class suburban backgrounds, living at the

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[385] Nadel, "A Brief History of Creepypasta."
[386] Jessica Roy, "Behind Creepypasta, the Internet Community That Allegedly Spread a Killer Meme," *Time*, last modified June 3, 2014, https://time.com/2818192/creepypasta-copypasta-slender-man/.

turn of the century and whose lives and worldviews are heavily shaped by technology and mass media.[387] Also like Heather, young viewers may be sceptical of official accounts of history and wish to venture into shrouded, forbidding places in search of the truth. *Blair Witch* and *The Last Broadcast* were released less than a decade after the emergence of trauma theory as an academic field, which was established in the early 1990s literature of Caruth, Herman and others. This context is notable because it means that these were among the first horror films to be made in the context of a world where psychological and historical trauma theory were more widely known and being absorbed into popular culture. According to Sally J. Morgan, academic revelations about the traumatic effects of colonisation on indigenous peoples provided a backdrop for public discourse and policy in the latter half of the 20th century.[388] These revelations also contributed to young white Americans becoming increasingly uneasy about the privileged position they held as American citizens and problematised their relationship with its history and landscape.

I argue that the desire to document and confront folkloric monsters, as depicted in Remote FF horror and internet folklore in general, signals a compulsion to confront historical traumas. Historical trauma, theorists contend, cannot be properly articulated, because it has been denied by the individual and collective mind. Therefore, its frightening sensations and revelations are sublimated into monsters. Like historical trauma, the monster continually haunts the conscious and unconscious memory of society and the nation. *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek* all depict the search for a folkloric monster, and, as the remainder of this chapter will explain, the horror of meeting these monsters evokes a reliving of traumatic events and experiences from America's past.

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[387] Telotte, "Film and the Internet," 38.
[388] Sally J. Morgan, "Heritage Noir: Truth, History, and Colonial Anxiety in *The Blair Witch Project*," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7, no.2 (2001): 144.

Depicting the American Wilderness as a Site of Trauma

The films examined in this chapter take place in American forests, and depict them as sites of traumatic memory. *Blair Witch* is set in the Black Hills Regional Park of Maryland. *The Last Broadcast* is set in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. *Willow Creek* is set in the Six Rivers National Forest of Northern California.

During the colonisation of North America, the landscape and wilderness were a source of enduring dread for European settlers. Prior to their migration, the Pilgrims were located primarily in urban areas, thus making America alien in both distance and appearance. Additionally, Morgan points out that during the 17th century, Europe was undergoing "a new and very potent… fear of witches and magic," which the Pilgrims brought with them and projected onto the immense forests of the New World.[389] Central to the Puritan fear of the American wilderness, claims Keith Thomas, was the perception that it existed outside and beyond the power of Christendom.[390] Thus, they believed it was their holy imperative to tame the American wilderness in the name of the church. However, many settlers and their descendants continued to perceive this wilderness as the domain of indigenous hostility, Pagan and occult rituals, and natural anarchy, all beyond the reach and protection of God.[391]

The Pilgrims expressed fears—in oral and written accounts—that those who dwelt within or near the forest risked infection or corruption by wicked energies. For example, John Smith, the leader of the Virginia Colony, often reported finding forest-dwelling settlements abandoned with no signs of violence, and had to work hard to convince settlers to remain in place. He recounted that villagers often complained

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[389] *Ibid.*, 146.
[390] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century England* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 164.
[391] *Ibid.*, 165.

that the forests emitted a disease that affected not the body, but the mind.[392] The

following century, in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), the settler Crèvecoeur

describes the surrounding woods as "polluting" the minds of his neighbours,

rendering them "ferocious, gloomy and unsocial," and replacing their ploughs with

guns for fear of what its twisted branches might contain.[393] In an existential and

spiritual sense, the forest was frequently cast as the enemy of Christian settlers, and

therefore it was also cast as the habitat of numerous monsters; these included

various witches, such as the Bell Witch, as well as the Jersey Devil, Bigfoot, the

Mothman, the Chupacarba, and the Wendigo.[394] These monsters served as cautions

between community members against being seduced or destroyed by wicked

influences, as well as arguments for taming the indigenous landscape and

population through strict virtues, work ethic and if need be, force.[395] The religious

anxieties of the early colonial settlements ultimately produced traumatic events such

as the Salem Witch Trials, in which more than 200 people were accused of

practicing witchcraft, 19 of whom were executed by hanging.

While the underlying folklore of *Blair Witch* is fabricated, it was clearly inspired

by traumatic elements of colonial history. Heather begins the project by interviewing

residents of Burkittsville about the Blair Witch legend, and pieces together the story

of Elly Kedward, a resident of the former town of Blair, who was convicted of

practicing witchcraft in 1785, and punished by being beaten and bound to a tree in

the Black Hills forest. This legend echoes traumatic colonial folk memory by

reinforcing the forest as a place of banishment, with the *godless woman* purportedly

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[392] Morgan, "Heritage Noir," 145.
[393] J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 1782 (London: Penguin Books, 1982). 51.
[394] Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, "American Monsters," in *A Companion to American Gothic* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 42.
[395] *Ibid.*, 44.

being removed from the *god-fearing community* and returned to the wicked place

beyond Christendom. Heather also learns that after Elly Kedward's execution, her

accusers and half the town's children disappeared, prompting the remaining

residents of Blair to abandon the settlement. The current town of Burkittsville, where

Heather conducts the interviews, was not established for another four decades. This

mass exodus echoes John Smith's accounts of finding abandoned townships

throughout the Virginia colony. The story of Blair and its real-life counterparts

suggests two frightening possibilities in the audience's mind for why the exodus

occurred. Firstly, that the wilderness *does* contain supernatural energies and

monsters, which twist its inhabitants into a state of violent panic; or, secondly, that

the isolated and paranoid inhabitants misinterpret the alien, hostile qualities of the

wilderness as a force of evil, which in turns provokes them into violent panic. Both

readings are troubling, but *Blair Witch* augments the terror further by never giving the

viewer a clear answer.

While the folklore featured in *Blair Witch* was mostly invented, *The Last*

Broadcast utilises genuine American folklore in its narrative. The New Jersey Pine

Barrens has been the site of many strange and frightening stories. Contemporary

publications, such as the magazine *Weird NJ*, chronicle colonial legends such as the

Jersey Devil, which is the subject of *The Last Broadcast*, as well as other

supernatural beings, such as the ghosts of the sailor "Captain Kidd," the widowed

"Golden Haired Girl," and the lynched "Black Doctor."[396] The folkloric invocations of

devils and wicked spirits reinforce the settlers' religious paranoia and their perception

of the wilderness as a "godless" place that Christians should avoid and those

deemed *wicked* should be banished. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Pine

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[396] "Bizarre Beasts," *Weird N.J.*, accessed March 3, 2020, https://weirdnj.com/category/stories/bizarre-beasts/.

Barrens retained a frightening reputation as the haunt of gangs and brigands, as well as a place of exile for runaway slaves, deserting soldiers, Native Americans, poor farmers, and hermits.[397] In contemporary times, the Jersey Devil folklore is celebrated by locals for adding Gothic character to the region as part of their local identity and tourism industry. The horror stories that developed around the Pine Barrens stand in contrast with the more romantic, patriotic mythos of cowboys and the Frontier.[398]

In *The Last Broadcast*, Steven and Locus' enter the forest in an effort to confront the mysteries behind the folklore it has inspired. Like many of the historical figures that inhabited the forest, the TV hosts identify as misfits. They, and the team they assemble, which includes a paranormal sound engineer and a psychic, do not conform to the ideological norms of contemporary American society. Their cable show exhibits a distrust of official state narratives and dominant historical accounts. The characters' marginalised perspective is underscored by the low ratings of their show and the threat of cancellation. The name of the show, "*Fact or Fiction*," alludes to their scepticism towards dominant frameworks, as well as a predisposition towards the folkloric subversion of dominant frameworks. The unfortunate subtext of the film is that Steven and Locus, like the many other people who suffered and died in the Pine Barrens, have been rejected by society and are also banished to the woods, where they meet a gruesome end. Thus, rather than solving the mystery of the Jersey Devil, they simply become another harrowing episode in the legend. The recurring link between legendary monster and human suffering, in *The Last*

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[397] Brian Regal and Frank J. Esposito, *The Secret History of the Jersey Devil: How Quakers, Hucksters, and Benjamin Franklin Created a Monster* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 10-12.
[398] *Ibid.*, 23.

Broadcast, codes the forest as a place of historical trauma, which inhabitants cannot resolve but instead must continually re-enact.

Like the early settlers and colonists, the characters in *Blair Witch* and *The Last Broadcast* experience the American wilderness as a source of fear and pain. Just as the Pilgrims underwent a dramatic migration from urban Europe to wild America both films depicts a subjective transition from the safe, familiar, rational spaces of civilisation—suggested by shots inside private homes and TV stations, inside cars on roads, at supermarkets, and in motel rooms—and into the murky, immense, unfamiliar embrace of the woods. This spatial transition also suggests a temporal shift, as though the characters are travelling back in time, both psychologically and socially. In her analysis of *Blair Witch,* Morgan notes that, because Heather and her crew are descended from Europe, they perceive American history and geography in European terms. Thus, the film "plays on shared [post-]colonial anxieties" regarding a landscape that remains "irredeemably foreign and hostile even 200 years after its settlement."[399] After spending their first night in the forest, Heather declares, "it is very hard to get lost in America, and it is even harder to stay lost." This echoes a cultural belief that the early settlers were successful in their campaign to "tame" and "civilise" the country. However, her preconception crumbles when the group lose their map, their compass malfunctions, and they find themselves trekking in circles for days, all while being harassed and hunted by an unseen assailant. David Banash observes that these failures present "a world immune to technological representation."[400] Likewise, the characters' cameras are unable to capture—and thus, contain or frame—whatever is stalking them. The

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[399] Morgan, "Heritage Noir," 145.
[400] David Banash, "*The Blair Witch Project*: Technology, Repression, and the Evisceration of Mimesis," *Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004): 113.

viewer is only able to deduce the assailant's presence through the frantic jolting of the camera in response to a perceived attack. Because we have been conditioned to equate technology with "power and control over the world,"[401] its failure has cataclysmic implications, which are dramatised through the panic of the characters. The longer they remain lost, the more frightened Heather, Josh and Mike grow, blaming each other, acting irrationally (including one character throwing the map into a creek), and becoming convinced that the assailant is actually the Blair Witch. Their inability to find their way back to civilisation, suggests a literal dislocation in time. The characters' physical and emotional states imply they have been transported back to colonial America, and are reliving the traumatic memories contained within the forest, left there by settlers who were psychologically damaged by the isolation and hostility of the wilderness, and would project monstrous silhouettes onto its mass of twisted branches and the cold night air within. Moreover, their technological failures do not merely suggest an inability to comprehend the wilderness, but also symbolise a failure to comprehend the traumatic legacy of American settlement.

Throughout *Blair Witch*, the clash between dominant, nationalistic accounts of American history, and distressing folkloric accounts, is symbolised through the two different cameras used to record the footage. Throughout the film, Josh operates a 16mm black-and-white film camera, attached to a separate sound recorder, which is the device used to film the actual segments of the intended documentary. Additionally, Heather operates a consumer-grade colour video camera, which serves as an informal video journal for the crew and a way to document the progress of the project. The film camera footage features more heavily at the beginning of the film, and depicts shots of Heather reciting the legend of the Blair Witch at various

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[401] Banash, "Technology, Repression," 115.

locations around Burkittsville and the Black Hills, as well as conducting interviews with local residents. The shots produced by the film camera are characterised by their black-and-white palette, higher resolution, and stable framing of subjects. In contrast, the shots produced by the video camera are characterised by their colour palette, lower and sometimes pixelated resolution, and shaky, wandering framing. The characters use both instruments in order to investigate events of the past. However, the divergent forms and content of each camera suggest that there are multiple perspectives of the past and divergent methods for interpreting them. That is, the film camera constitutes the controlled, planned, scripted, and authorised segments of the documentary, and thus represents the established historical account of the Blair Witch legend. In comparison, the footage of the video camera is less formal, depicting the characters conversing with locals and inhabiting the settings where the alleged executions, massacres, kidnappings, possessions, and witchcraft took place. They interact with the knowledge and symbols of the legend, but in an unplanned, informal manner. For example, the crew comes across a grouping of stone piles, and attempts to recall a folktale about stone piles that one of the locals relayed them, speculating over potential meanings and connections to the Blair Witch legend. The video camera thus represents the more informal folkloric account of the Blair Witch.

Heather's inexplicable desire to continue recording, even after the group has become lost, signifies her need to impose narrative and meaning onto the world. While her incessant filming infuriates Mike and Josh, at one stage, after Josh picks up the film camera and begins recording Heather, he admits: "I know why you like this camera so much. It's like a filter reality. You can imagine things aren't quite the way that they are." Symbolically, this "filter" is a microcosm of the filter that

contemporary American society uses to perceive the founding and development of the nation. Historically, the narrative of the success and benevolence of the Pilgrim colonies is given a strong focus in authorised and dominant accounts of the past, while the incidents of religious violence and hysteria, and the massacring and enslaving of indigenous peoples, are habitually filtered out. Josh's line reproaches both Heather and the viewer, for relying on abstract academic accounts and technological representations of the world. *Blair Witch* demonstrates the dangers of historical filtering, because it blinds people to disturbing realities and underlying problems of society and culture. The video camera footage represents the Blair Witch legend as a traumatic encounter; it does not depict a controlled and comprehensible account, but an account characterised by loss of control and ungrasped knowledge. The fact that it is seemingly transmitted to the viewer via an informal and illicit manner reinforces the concept that trauma is a folk discourse, marginalised from historical accounts, but sustained through social interactions and social memory.

The forest setting of *The Last Broadcast*, and the brutal violence that occurs within that setting, are recorded by a multitude of disparate devices. The found footage in question includes the unaired footage of the *Fact or Fiction* episode, behind-the-scenes footage never intended to be aired, conversations carried out between crew and viewers via ham radio and internet relay chat, and a phone call to the police made by the sole survivor Jim. The documentarian David, and by extension the viewer he is addressing, engage in a process of assembling and interpreting the records. This process reveals a folkloric account of the event, which diverges from the official state and media narrative of Jim being responsible for the murders.

The fractured nature of these records reflects the disorienting visual depiction of the Pine Barrens and the disorienting psychological experience of what occurs within it. Like *Blair Witch*, the camera in *The Last Broadcast* spends a significant amount of time scanning the forest for a monster. This premise reframes the snow-capped foliage as possessing a deathly, impenetrable quality, as though the branches were monstrous claws reaching towards the characters and viewers. As the camera light dances across the trees in search of the Jersey Devil, the twigs flash brightly while the blackness behind them thickens. If we conceive of the camera frame and light as symbolising the characters' minds as they search the forest for answers to past mysteries, then the deepening darkness of this footage reinforces both the dreadful things that lurk on the edges of psychological, historical and cultural memory, as well as the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of reconciling or understanding those things.

Another element that *The Last Broadcast* shares with *Blair Witch* is that its setting seems to affect and degrade the characters' mental states. In particular, the self-described psychic Jim becomes increasingly erratic and hostile towards the crew. He shoves one of them for mocking him, sequesters himself to his tent, and eventually abandons the group altogether. His panicked and paranoid departure once again evokes John Smith's accounts of pilgrim exoduses from forest-bordering settlements. Whether or not the audience is meant to accept Jim's claim as being a psychic, the film subtextually frames his breakdown as the result of his unique susceptibility to the lineage of traumatic experiences the forest has hosted. That is, the cultural memories of death and suffering contained within the Pine Barrens—produced and transmitted by the indigenous, enslaved, isolated and marginalised victims of American colonisation—may have expressed themselves through him.

Such a reading affirms the theory that collective memory and collective trauma functions in the form of a folk discourse. *The Last Broadcast* depicts the speech and gestures that transmit the legend of the Jersey Devil as ultimately shaping thought, mood and behaviour, until it takes the form of an ambiguous but ultimately violent and distressing experience for the victims. This experience may symbolise the underlying truth that underscores and inspires the legend of the Pine Barrens monster.

Willow Creek takes place in the Six Rivers National Park in California, and once again reframes monster folklore—in this case the legend of Bigfoot—as an allegory for residual collective trauma embedded in perceptions of the nation's vast and arcane wilderness. The film follows Jim and Kelly, a couple from the city travelling to Bluff Creek, the site where the most famous Bigfoot encounter originates. *Willow Creek* is notable for focusing on a legend in which the alleged evidence is also a form of found footage – the 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film, shot in Bluff Creek. This film depicts an immense, fur-covered humanoid creature, striding on two legs across a clearing, before vanishing into the trees. The footage was shot on a 16mm film camera and lasts for about sixty seconds, most of which are shaky before the frame stabilises at the end.[402] The Patterson-Gimlin film is regarded by the cryptozoologist community as a critical piece of Bigfoot evidence and has been widely viewed in general American culture. Many accused Patterson and Gimlin of perpetrating a hoax; however, Patterson maintained until his death that, "the creature on the film was real."[403] Jim tells Kelly that the footage inspired his fascination in Bigfoot as a child, and that he has always dreamed of finding a new piece of evidence, such as hair, footprints, or even a new sighting. Essentially, Jim seeks to

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[402] Roger Patterson and Robert Gimlin, dir., *Patterson-Gimlin Film* (1967).
[403] Michael McLeod, "Mountain Devils," in *Anatomy of a Beast: Obsession and Myth on the Trail of Bigfoot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 80.

re-enact Patterson's and Gimlin's encounter. As with *Blair Witch* and *The Last Broadcast*, this suggests the compulsion to address an unknown and frightening moment of cultural memory.

Willow Creek combines monster folklore with elements of another American horror subgenre, known as "hillbilly horror" or "hicksploitation." Hillbilly horror films typically depict city-dwelling characters travelling to remote country areas, where they find themselves trapped and menaced by deranged locals, whom they must escape or defeat.[404] Notable examples of the subgenre include *Deliverance* (Boorman 1972)*, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes* (Craven 1977) and *Southern Comfort* (Hill 1981). These films exploit urban and suburban perceptions of rural folk as being insular, hostile, unhealthy, and incestuous, and portray frightening images of slaughter, sexual assault and cannibalism. Linnie Blake observes that, as the American population became urbanised throughout the 20th century, cinema increasingly reconfigured rural spaces as foreign sites, or rather, as sites that represent a past vision of America, alternatively romantic and forbidding in their aura.[405] This is reflected in hillbilly horror through the use of geographic markers in slurs such as "*hill*billy," "*backwoods*man," and "*deep river* man," reinforcing the generational association of the forest as a source of corruption, brutality and suffering, within the collective American psyche.

Similar to the previous two films, *Willow Creek* depicts a gradual transition from a cartoonish, suburban notion of Bigfoot towards something more arcane and traumatic at the core of the legend. The closer Jim and Kelly get to the location of the Patterson-Gimlin shooting site, the more frightening the film becomes. Laura Clifford describes *Willow Creek* as "half kitschy American road trip, half straight chiller," and

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[404] Blake, *Wounds of Nations*, 128.
[405] *Ibid.*, 129-130.

interprets the film as a "warning that we should beware the embrace of cultish legends as entertainment."[406] Upon arriving at *Willow Creek*, the couple delight at the vulgar artwork of the township, such as the smiling wooden Bigfoot statue welcoming tourists and the jaunty songs recited by eccentric locals. They notice a large painted mural of Bigfoot helping to clear the forest and raise the town's buildings, and joke how the creature is probably just a disgruntled labourer. This iconography, along with the film's light tone, suggests Bigfoot is no longer a source of fear, and has been safely integrated into the town's identity and economy. However, several interactions reframe the forest as a dangerous place, and allude to past traumas committed there. For example, during one of the interviews, a local man cautions them against venturing beyond the town borders, warning them about the "strange folk" who live there, such as drug-growers and survivalists, who are unfriendly to tourists. The same man recounts an instance in which he was walking his dog through the forest, when suddenly the animal grew frightened and bolted, only to be found hours later torn in half. Later, the couple notice a flyer for a missing person on the wall of the diner, and mistake it as part of the town's Bigfoot branding, prompting Kelly to give a mock pose for her own missing person flyer. Given that the film ends with Jim being killed by an unseen creature, and with Kelly possibly being kidnapped by the creature as its forced mate, this mock pose takes on an additional layer of disturbing irony. Metatextually, this scene also alludes to the fatalistic premise of FF horror films; that is, the footage in these films provides a record of the last images of a missing or deceased person, serving a similar function to a missing person poster or an obituary. Next, while making fun of the wooden Bigfoot statue, a passer-by scolds them, asserting, "It's not a joke, you know. You shouldn't go out there." These

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[406] Laura Clifford, "*Willow Creek* on Blu-ray," *Reeling Reviews*, last modified September 1, 2014, https://www.reelingreviews.com/reviews/willow-creek-on-blu-ray/.

moments subvert the couple's superficial perception of American wilderness and folklore. Their perception of the country as a receptacle for tourists to extract entertainment and experiences is evidently false.

The couple's final warning comes at the forest rim, where a large, hairy man blocks their vehicle. The man tells Jim that Bluff Creek, the site of the Patterson-Gimlin film, has been flooded and is no longer accessible. When Jim expresses his intention to travel there anyway, the man becomes aggressive: he pokes Jim in the chest, yells at Kelly to cease her filming, and demands they turn around and return to town. Intimidated, Jim reverses their vehicle, hoping to find another way into the forest, whereupon the man begins to throw rocks after them. He appears to be one of the "strange folk" about whom they were warned. Within the context of the film, the encounter marks a shift from implicit to explicit hostility at the couple's attempt to enter the forest. It also recasts their role: they are now trespassers into a space they neither understand, nor respect, and which has prohibited them.

Thematically, this prohibition points to the film's ambiguous relation to historical trauma. The man's angry assertion that "there's nothing out there" is ambiguous. It may imply simply that the monster does not exist. Therefore, the subtext of his statement reads: whatever traumatic event or experience that Bigfoot represents was fabricated or imagined. Alternatively, he may mean that the monster did exist, but no longer does; therefore, the traumatic event it represents is so far removed that it can no longer be accessed. Finally, he may mean that the monster still exists, but that it is too dangerous to confront, and by extension, too dangerous to confront the trauma it represents. Given the brutal ending of *Willow Creek*, the third interpretation appears correct. The continued existence of the monster within the film suggests the persistent presence of a traumatic experience. Confronting

Bigfoot does not result in a deeper understanding or reconciliation of the colonial suffering that produced the monster, but rather a gruesome repetition of that physical and psychological assault.

Having explored the relationship between setting and historical trauma, the next section will examine how folkloric monsters symbolise historical trauma and how this past trauma is re-transmitted through the characters.

The Traumatic Symbolism of the Folkloric Monster

Throughout *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek*, characters are menaced and ultimately killed by something that they never lay their eyes or their camera lens upon. This absence evokes a recurring trauma: an eerie and threatening absence within the psyche, which manifests through the nightmares of individuals and the horror stories of societies. In FF horror, the monster is rarely directly presented, but rather is revealed through the reactions of the characters, and the way that their reactions shape the cinematography of the films. Thus, the films demonstrate an aesthetic and thematic relationship between the monster, a cultural form symbolising some kind of residual collective trauma, and the individual who is experiencing their own version of that trauma.

The monsters depicted in these three films were inspired by or based on genuine American folklore. The directors and writers of *Blair Witch*, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, have cited the Salem Witch trials as inspiration for the faux legend depicted in their film.[407] These trials in colonial Massachusetts from 1692 to 1693 resulted in 14 women and five men being hanged, one man being pressed to

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[407] Lyons, "'Blair' Timeline," 1.

death for refusing to plead, and five people dying in jail.[408] The cause of the trials has

been the subject of extensive historical and sociological debate.[409] Gretchen A.

Adams describes it as one of the nation's most notorious cases of mass hysteria,

brought about by a mix of religious extremism, social isolation, various family and

community feuds, and the mental and spiritual distress of attempting to survive in the

wilderness.[410] James E. Kences theorises that collective trauma caused by recent

indigenous attacks may have also played a significant role. He points out that

several of the main accusers and confessors during the trials were survivors of King

Philip's War, also known as the "First Indian War," fought between the indigenous

and colonial inhabitants of New England.[411] The violence they witnessed and

experienced during raids on their settlements may have contributed to a climate of

acute fear, panic and distrust. Consequently, people may have observed the

symptoms of PTSD, such as intense mood swings, in neighbours, friends, family,

and even themselves, and mistook them for evidence of witchcraft or dark magic.

John Demos offers another interpretation of the Salem Witch trials, which also

attributes the event to the influence of collective trauma. He suggests that the

accusations of witchcraft stemmed from community conflict, particularly between

younger and older women, produced by the repressive conditions of Puritan society.

Many individuals found it difficult to handle their feelings of resentment and

aggression towards those who restricted their behaviour or held power over them.[412]

Demos explains that witch-hunts provided an outlet for aggressive impulses that

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[408] Emerson W. A. Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). 3.
[409] John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 11.
[410] Gretchen A. Adams, *The Spectre of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 11-12.
[411] James E. Kences, "Some Unexplored Relationships of Essex County Witchcraft to the Indian Wars of 1675 and 1689," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 120, no.3 (1984): 179-180.
[412] Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 401.

settlers were otherwise forbidden to express.[413] When people in Puritanical cultures experienced feelings of aggression, rather than recognising them as internal psychological distress caused by social conditions, they would attribute them to the sinister and supernatural actions of others, usually those upon whom the aggressive feelings were directed.

These interpretations demonstrate how traumatic events shape and are understood through folklore. In this historical example, the witch became the figure upon whom the mental suffering of witnessed violence, religious repression and interpersonal conflict was projected. The internal distress these experiences caused could not be named, and so they were given another form. The Pilgrim's folklore of bewitchment or supernatural possession demonstrates their attempts to comprehend how and why they might be harmed or disobeyed by their own minds. In "American Monsters," Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock calls the Salem witch hunts a "foundational American trauma" and argues that, because of the influence of fundamentalist Christianity in the colonisation and development of the U.S., witches "possess a special hold on the American imagination."[414] Along with being shaped by colonial folklore, the Salem witch trials in turn formed part of subsequent national folklore: the term "witch-hunt" was and is used in Western political rhetoric and popular culture to caution people against the dangers of public punishments and mob rule.[415]

The legend of the Blair Witch was inspired by several elements of the Salem witch trials: Blair is described as an isolated, religious, colonial-era settlement, living in the shadow of the forest, and with a history of indigenous raids. The vicious

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[413] *Ibid.*, 403.

[414] Weinstock, "American Monsters," 42-43.

[415] One notable example is the hearings conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s to identify communists, which was labelled by detractors as a "communist witch-hunt." Notably, Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible*, which dramatizes the events of the Salem witch trials, was written as a metaphor for the hearings. Adams, *The Spectre of Salem,* 13-15.

punishment meted out against Kedward by her neighbours resembles the use of torture against real-life suspects of witchcraft. Historically, witch suspects were brutalised and humiliated as a means of coercing a confession of heresy or information about other acts of heresy.[416] That the Blair Witch never appears in the film poses the question of whether the characters are *actually* being threatened by another entity, or whether they are undergoing mental breakdowns induced by the fear of the woods. Their constant bickering and blaming—most of which is directed at Heather for getting them lost, but also at Josh for not understanding how their equipment works, and Mike for losing their map—evokes a similar tension that contributed to the Salem witch trials.

Indeed, the characters exhibit a range of intense emotions that reveal the internal trauma they are each experiencing. They interpret the cause of these emotions, namely becoming lost in the woods and the discovery of strange and threatening artefacts, as a result of the Blair Witch's influence. At various points, they become enraged at one another and by their situation, while at other points they become so exhausted and despondent that they simply collapse in the grass or stare vacantly into the distance. One night, they hear strange sounds and their tent begins to move as if prodded by outside hands, and they respond by fleeing wildly into the forest and hiding in the bushes until dawn. Another morning, Heather discovers a bundle of sticks outside their tent: as she approaches it, the camera frame is shaking and her breathing it quick and shallow, suggesting her mounting terror. After she opens it to reveal Josh's bloody shirt and what looks like his tongue, she drops the camera and begins to hyperventilate, stuttering the phrase "we're okay" repeatedly. The jarring shift between looking through Heather's gaze as she opens the bundle

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[416] Baker, *A Storm of Witchcraft,* 4.

and the still perspective of the fallen camera outside her perspective, gives the aesthetic impression that Heather was so overwhelmed by what the bundle contained that her psyche has disconnected from the experience. This reading is further emphasised by the severed tongue contained within the bundle, which signifies Heather's inability to articulate her trauma.

In her final address to camera, Heather is able to admit that they will die and that she is responsible, summarising her fear with the line: "I'm scared to open my eyes and I'm scared to close them." It is an eloquent digest of the overwhelming experience of psychological trauma, the torturous state between knowing and not knowing, between overstimulation and numbness. Thematically, the line also gestures towards the difficulty of confronting and accepting the collective traumas found within America. Her assertion that it is "hard to get lost in America," proves untrue, precisely because the history, culture and identity that she has been taught to identify as American is revealed to be a sanitised and self-serving account. Josh and Mike immediately underscore this revelation, when they begin to sing the American national anthem in loud, sarcastic voices; the aspiring, assertive lyrics are rendered hollow as they echo through the vast, indifferent expanse of trees. One of the incidents that the Burkittsville locals attribute to the Blair Witch—the Massacre at Coffin Rock—evokes the gruesome cost demanded by the American colonial project. The alleged massacre occurred in the 19th century, when a child went missing in the forest and the search party was later found dead and mutilated, their limbs bound together to form a bridge, with no clue available as to who perpetrated the crime. As a folkloric symbol, this human bridge represents the aspirational link between the old world of mediaeval Europe, and the "New World," savagely caricatured by the Blair Witch's hands. Far from embodying the romanticism of the national anthem, the Blair

Witch legend describes a bridge fashioned from the flesh and bones of early settlers, their names forgotten, and their bodies hacked and reshaped like lumber from the forest that frightened them. Notably, Kedward was executed in 1785, which, as Morgan points out, places it shortly after the War of Independence, thus marking it as a wholly *American* crime,[417] and linking the traumatic event and its aftermath to the founding of the nation.

In the previous section, I outlined a reading of *Blair Witch* in which the characters are reliving the psychological distress of the Pilgrims attempting to survive the American wilderness. An alternate reading is that the characters are reliving the banishment, torture and execution of Elly Kedward herself. In her research, Heather learns how the Blair residents beat Kedward with stones until her joints broke, tied her to a tree in the woods so that her limps would stretch out, and let her die of her wounds, starvation and exposure to the elements. The characters undergo a similar experience: becoming lost in the woods, cut off from family and society, and threatened with a slow, agonising death. They encounter artefacts and phenomena that evoke Kedward's execution, such as piles of rocks that resemble cairns outside their tent, and figures made of sticks hanging from trees, resembling Kedward's own hanging body. They also hear loud cracking sounds at night, resembling breaking branches or bones, as well as sounds of what they percieve are children's laughter on the wind, conjuring up the memory of Kedward's alleged victims. These encounters suggest that Kedward's traumatic experience is embedded in the landscape, or that the characters—having been impregnated by the legend of the Blair Witch—project these details onto the landscape. This reading rests on the likely premise that Kedward was never a witch, but—like those accused

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[417] Morgan, "Heritage Noir," 141.

during the Salem Witch trials—a victim of superstition and mass hysteria. Consequently, we can surmise that the legend developed by subsequent generations of Burkittsville residents was partially formed out of sense of collective guilt, and an attempt to make sense of the ruptures of violence and mental illness that have plagued the region ever since. Josh symbolically rebukes the hypocrisy and latent cruelty of Puritan ideology and American religious nationalism when—upon hiking for an entire day only to arrive at their old campsite—he screams to the sky: "Fuck you god!" The line reflects the characters' existential angst, but may also embody Kedward's disenchantment with the religion she had potentially served her entire life, until her fellow devotees used it to destroy her. If we read *Blair Witch* as aligning its characters' and viewers' perspective with the traumatic sensations and memories of Kedward, we can infer that the Blair Witch was an imagined figure upon whom the perpetrators and their descendants—that is, the locals Heather interviews at the start of the film—blamed for their own aggressive thoughts and actions. It recasts the people of Burkittsville, and by extension the Pilgrims, as the true monsters of the narrative.

Like *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* features a monster from American colonial and Christian folklore – the Jersey Devil. The original legend, which dates back to the early 18th century, describes a small dragon-like creature rumoured to haunt the Pine Barrens. The supposed origin of the monster was a New Jersey resident named Jane Leeds, who was the mother of 12 children, and upon falling pregnant again, cursed her unborn 13th child. Mrs Leeds went into labour on a stormy night in 1735, giving birth to what she described as a "hideous monster," who slew her midwife, before flying up the chimney and into the surrounding forest.[418] In

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[418] Regal and Esposito, *History of the Jersey Devil,* 25.

the century that followed, various accounts by local residents, indigenous tribes and civil war soldiers refer to encounters with the creature, describing it as a small biped with red eyes, a goat's head, bat-like wings, cloven hooves, and a forked tail. In some versions, Mrs Leeds is a witch and the child's father is the Devil himself. In others, local clergymen attempt to exorcise the creature from the Pine Barrens.[419] Similar to the Blair Witch legend, the disappearance of local children was often attributed to the Jersey Devil. These religious overtones and demonic allusions again demonstrate the influence of Christian paranoia in the colonial conception of the American wilderness.

Just as widespread psychological distress may have inspired the Salem witch trials, the legend of the Jersey Devil gestures towards traumatic events that occurred during the colonisation of America. For example, in *The Last Broadcast* we learn that the monster emits a high-pitched "blood-curdling" scream, suggesting suffering. This description echoes Caruth's description of trauma, as "the wound that cries out." Given the longevity of the legend, it would seem these eerie cries have sent figurative and literal shivers down the spines of generations of Pine Barrens residents. The folkloric explanation for this cry signify the danger of the forest and the wordless anguish of those within it, caught somewhere between human, animal, element and history. It is difficult to determine precisely what the Jersey Devil means in American culture. As referenced above, various gangs and robbers patrolled the Pine Barrens, preying on travellers. The forest also served as a home for the "dregs of society," such as poor farmers, fugitives, poachers, runaway slaves, and deserting soldiers.[420] Thus, the Devil, and its chilling screams, may represent the persecution and alienation of people within the forest. Based on the wartime sources of the

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[419] *Ibid.*, 27.
[420] *Ibid.*, 28.

legend, the Jersey Devil may signify the chaos inflicted upon citizens during wartime. Coversely, indigenous sources of the legend frame the Devil as a stand-in for the violence forced upon the original custodians of the land by settlers.

Leslie Fiedler observed that colonial American literature and folklore characterised Indigenous Americans as "projection[s] of natural evil and the id… [they were] treated essentially as animals, living extensions of the threat of the wilderness."[421] This characterisation was used to justify their oppression. To European settlers, indigenous people were held up as proof of the land's godlessness, its power to un-civilise; and therefore, like the land, it was the coloniser's responsibility to conquer and tame them.[422] The fact that the Jersey Devil haunts the Pine Barrens, a former indigenous territory containing sacred sites, may be a manifestation of the settlers' simultaneous fear of indigenous people and their guilt over the crimes committed by them. The traditional description of the creature evokes this ambiguous and ambivalent symbolism. In *The Last Broadcast*, David describes the Jersey Devil as having a "kangaroo-like" shape: a goat's head, bat-like wings, horns, claws, hooves, and tail. He presents the viewer with several artistic renderings of the creature, but each sketch is so different from the next that it may as well depict a completely different animal. Unlike the Blair Witch, which is a more coherent, archetypical depiction from European folklore that has been transplanted into an American context, the Jersey Devil is a uniquely American legend: its corporeal disjunction is an eerie reflection of the colonial process. That is, the creature's conception, like America, is referred to as unnatural and potentially profane. Its form, perhaps in contrast to European nations, is incomplete: a patchwork of disparate, contradictory features. If the grand narrative of the New

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[421] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Laurel, 1969), 160.
[422] *Ibid.*, 161.

World began with Pilgrims braving the wild to erect their ideal Christian civilisation—the so-called "shining city upon a hill"[423]—then the Jersey Devil is the misshapen, sinister, screeching doppelganger to that narrative, continuously creeping between the remaining trees beyond the cities.

Steven and Locus in *The Last Broadcast* are compelled to answer this legendary screech, and enter the Pine Barrens to document the Jersey Devil on video. This journey results in their brutal murders at the hands, or claws, of an unknown assailant. Their posthumous footage provides no evidence of anything supernatural, nor any direct evidence of who perpetrated the attack. Initially, the viewer is led to believe that the lone survivor Jim is the culprit, but by shedding doubt on his guilt, *The Last Broadcast* denies the audience a clear answer. This absence figuratively invites folkloric monsters, such as the Jersey Devil, to fill the void until a more rational suspect can take its place. Thus, the film posits that the supernatural is the natural signifier of the arcane and unresolved spaces of social memory, and monsters the ideal occupants of sites that have a history of traumatic events.

The Last Broadcast depicts how technology, rather than illuminating and clarifying the mysteries of the past, actually facilitates and contributes to monster folklore. The legend of the Jersey Devil is effectively perpetuated for a new generation: the tech-savvy hosts learn about it via an anonymous online message and then communicate their investigation via video cameras and satellites. Furthermore, during the attack on Steven and Locus, the damaged cameras distort their recorded screams in such a way that their pitch is heightened and their tone elongated, to the point where their dying utterances resemble the Jersey Devil's call.

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[423] This phrase, originally appearing in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount," was quoted by Puritan John Winthrop in 1630 to describe the Massachusetts Bay Colony; the phrase has been frequently re-quoted by modern U.S. politicians, such as John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama, to refer to America's role as a "beacon of hope" to the rest of the world. Fiedler, *Love and Death,* 259.

This synchronicity reinforces the idea that the Jersey Devil, like the Blair Witch, embodies both the victims and perpetrators of historical trauma. David suggests that through Steven and Locus' television show, the Jersey Devil has been able to migrate to the Information Age, claiming that the monster is "reborn on the internet, a demon captured on IRC logs, mangled video, whispers in the dark." This folkloric transition, depicted in film, and reflected in the online culture of cryptozoology and creepypasta, suggests that online spaces, like the physical spaces of the American wilderness, might also serve as sites of cultural memory and collective trauma. That is, historical trauma might be transmitted between people via the internet. Furthermore, traumatic experiences may occur in virtual spaces, and the memories and effects of those experiences may persist in those spaces. Given that *The Last Broadcast* was released in 1998, before the widespread adoption of the internet, this is a prescient insight. In the two decades since the film's release, there is ample evidence that the internet has developed its own folk history and certainly its own monsters, such as the Slender Man.[424]

Blair Witch and *The Last Broadcast* both end with powerful scenes of traumatic dissociation. In *Blair Witch*, Heather and Mike hear Josh pleading to them from the darkness. As viewers, we know that this is impossible, as we have seen Heather unwrapping Josh's severed tongue that morning. The pair discovers an old shack, which appears to be the same building where the hermit Rustin Parr lived and slew his child victims. This development also seems impossible, as we are informed at the beginning of the film that Parr's house was torn down after his trial. While Josh's voice sounds as though it is coming from the attic, it then switches to the basement, and Heather and Mike are separated from one another in the confusion

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[424] Roy, "Behind Creepypasta."

and panic. Because Mike is holding the video camera, the footage from Heather's camera depicts imagery but no sound, which means that the further or closer she gets to Mike, the softer or louder her screams become. This leads to an uncanny and disorienting final shot in which Mike has been incapacitated by an unknown assailant, and the viewer watches Heather's footage as she searches the house, her hysterical screams distant, before growing louder as she closes in on Mike's fallen camera. Aesthetically, this gives the impression that Heather, initially chasing the anguished screams of Josh, is now trying to locate her own anguished screams. Thus, the scene at the shack depicts a series of disconnections that signify the psychological dissociations experienced by the characters: Josh's voice is separated from his body; the demolished building has been displaced from past into present (or perhaps the characters have been displaced from present into past); Heather and Mike become visually separated from one another; and Heather's voice becomes separated from her body. Finally, the last moment of the film depicts Mike standing in the corner of the room, facing away from Heather (see figure 2.2), before she is struck by something unknown and the film ends. Textually, Mike's refusal to look echoes the accounts of Rustin Parr killing his victims in pairs, and forcing one of the children to face the corner because he "couldn't stand to feel their eyes on him." Mike is essentially re-living the trauma of a child who died in that room 70 years prior. Subtextually, Mike's posture symbolises his psyche's inability to experience the trauma occurring to him, and his inability to witness the trauma occurring to Heather. The fact that the characters travel downstairs, beneath the surface of the landscape, serves as an apt metaphor for accessing the hidden and subterranean elements of psychological and social structures. The characters' trauma, like the trauma of many people throughout Burkittsville history, including Elly Kedward, has not been

witnessed, and thus can only be expressed in the form of the Blair Witch. Like

historical trauma, the witch cannot be directly articulated or documented, yet it is

ever-present, haunting one generation after the next.
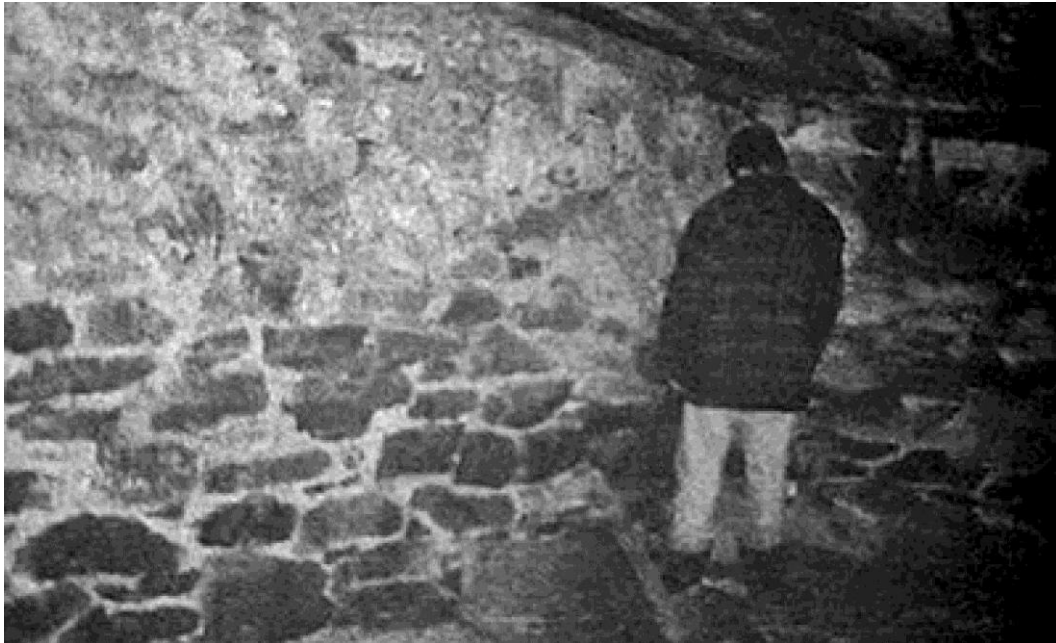
Figure 2.2 The final shot of *The Blair Witch Project* depicts Mike standing in the corner of a basement, while Heather screams for help.

Where *Blair Witch* ends with a scene of traumatic blindness, *The Last Broadcast*

ends with a scene of traumatic muteness. During the course of his documentary,

David hires a video specialist named Shelly to reconstruct the footage from Steven

and Locus' unaired episode, in the hopes that she will be able to reveal the face of

their killer. In a shocking twist, however, the face she reveals is that of David's. His

crime exposed, David attacks her by suffocating her with a sheet of plastic (see

figure 2.3). This murder, like the ending of *Blair Witch*, suggests a character being

forced to relive the traumatic suffering of another, and unable to apprehend or testify

to their own suffering. The scene is horrifying in both its unexpected textual and

unexpected metatextual violence. While the film had until this point been a sober,

contemplative investigation of an urban legend and unsolved crime, this scene

figuratively assaults the audience with an image of the film's director murdering the

film's editor. From the viewer's perspective, it is as though, upon seeing the killer, David burst out of the digital representation of Shelly's monitor and into raw sensory assault.

Figure 2.3 *The Last Broadcast* ends with David killing his video specialist Shelly.

This eruption embodies the intensity of traumatic intrusion; that is, the moment when a past experience bursts into the present, or when the mind abruptly pulls consciousness back into a past moment. The moment is also chillingly intimate: the attacker and victim gaze into each other's unblinking eyes, Shelly's pupils frozen amidst her writhing face, her mouth open against plastic in a long, silent scream. Similar to the ending of *Blair Witch*, the climax suggests disconnection: Shelly's scream is separated from her body, existing only in the audio of footage she had been editing moments before, existing only in the forest. Figuratively, scream is the same as the mysterious screams issuing from the Pine Barrens, eternally attributed to the Jersey Devil. The tragic irony of the scene is that Shelly's stated aspiration for the documentary was to "giv[e] voices to the dead… [to] ghosts caught on the video." Yet, the very voice she longed to restore to the victims of the Jersey Devil is *robbed* from her. *The Last Broadcast* ends with David burying Shelly's corpse in the Pine

Barrens. Like the characters in *Blair Witch* who vanished in the basement of a shack, Shelly's revelations about past suffering, and her own personal suffering, are banished within and beneath the soil of the American wilderness. The viewer is left with a final impression that she will remain there indefinitely, along with uncounted corpses from centuries gone by, with apparently only the legend of the Jersey Devil to recall their presence and pain.

  Willow Creek depicts the hunt for another American folk monster, known as Bigfoot or Sasquatch. The creature appears in indigenous and settler oral stories dating back to the 19th century, in which it is described as a large, hairy, bipedal ape-like creature who lives in the forests of the Pacific Northwest, and who leaves enormous footprints in the soil.[425] Robert Walls catalogues accounts that claim that the creature attacks, kidnaps and eats humans. The people of the Lummi indigenous nation call the creature "Ts'emekwes," and fear it so greatly that they do not speak its name, for fear of summoning it.[426] According to Janet and Colin Bord, there have been over 1000 alleged sightings of Bigfoot during the 19th and 20th centuries. The most well-known sighting occurred in 1967 at Bluff Creek, recorded in the Patterson-Gimlin film, which is the focus of *Willow Creek*.[427] Nevertheless, the majority of scientists have discounted the existence of such as creature, citing the lack of verifiable evidence, and considering sightings to be a combination of hoaxes and misidentifications of other animals. Walls attributes the Bigfoot legend to concerns relating to the American people's relationship to the environment: the effect settlers

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[425] Robert E. Walls, "'Bigfoot' in Brunvand," *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 158-159.

[426] Stacy M. Rasmus, "Repatriating Words: Local Knowledge in a Global Context," *American Indian Quarterly* 26, no.2 (2002): 300.

[427] Colin Bord and Janet Bord, *The Bigfoot Casebook* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1982), 5-6.

have on the wilderness, and the effect the wilderness had on settlers and continues to have on their descendants.[428]

Willow Creek offers several related interpretations for Bigfoot. For example, the mural that Jim and Kelly observe depicts the creature helping clear the forest in order for the town to be built. Underlying this image is an ambiguous message about the cost of American civilisation, including the exploitation of America's natural and human resources, and the brutal effects that the ideology of "manifest destiny" had on various peoples. The term "manifest destiny" was coined in the 1845, and refers to the widely held belief that European settlers were destined to expand across North America. This term and belief was used to justify numerous imperialist projects, such as the American Indian Wars[429] and the Mexican-American War.[430] *Willow Creek* depicts various iconography of Bigfoot cheerfully promoting the town, and then contrasts it with ominous warnings by locals against entering the forest, and the frightening attacks that Jim and Kelly experience while camping. This juxtaposition frames Bigfoot as a vengeful agent of pre-colonial America, or as representative of the persecuted, forgotten peoples, such as indigenous people displaced by "manifest destiny," or the slave, rural and immigrant populace, who helped build America, but who were largely excluded from its triumphs and plenitude.

Another reading, which was introduced in the previous section, is that *Willow Creek* depicts Bigfoot as an allegory for the American backwoodsman. In her analysis of the hillbilly horror subgenre, Blake observes that, where American settlers and frontier communities were historically idealised as honest, hard-working,

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[428] Walls, "'Bigfoot' in Brunvand," 160.

[429] Adolf Hitler repurposed the term when justifying Germany's invasion of neighbouring countries, claiming that the natives of Poland and Russia should be looked upon as "redskins." "Lebensraum," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed March 13, 2020, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lebensraum.

[430] Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 120.

god-fearing folk, the backwoodsmen emerged as early as the 18th century as a stereotype who embodied the darker side of pastoral living.[431] For example, in *Letters from an American Farmer*, the settler Crèvecoeur identifies the backwoodsman as serving the antithesis of a rural American utopia—instead of faithfully tending and taming the land in the name of Christendom, the backwoodsman embraced the "dark irrationality" of the wilderness by living an existence of drunkenness, idleness and hostility.[432] Blake argues that cinema and television have also perpetuated this stereotype, using variations such as "hillbillies" or "rednecks," depicting the American countryside as a strange, foreign place and its inhabitants as everything from cheerful but ignorant oddities, to genetically deficient predators. The backwoodsman's otherness is communicated through recurring images of mangy hair, wild eyes, hollow cheeks, and rotten teeth, as though to express a personhood that is fundamentally diseased.[433] Still darker interpretations have equated the backwoodsman with rapacious sexuality, most famously in the film *Deliverance*, in which a group of men from Atlanta take a weekend trip to the Georgia wilds, only for one of the men set upon and brutally raped by a pair of snarling, toothless locals.

Blake argues that part of the reason behind the demonisation of backwoodsmen is because these individuals take frontier freedom to its natural extreme and therefore exemplify the potentially sinister outcomes of the American liberal project. That is, they demonstrate the freedom to reject the state, including its values, morals, and authority, and choose to live independently and self-reliantly.[434] Whether he was forced out of his community or departed voluntarily, the

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[431] Blake, *The Wounds of Nations*, 129.
[432] Crèvecœur, *Letters from an American Farmer,* 155.
[433] Blake, *The Wounds of Nations*, 129-130.
[434] *Ibid.*, 131.

backwoodsman has symbolically claimed the American wilderness as a home beyond the reach of government and church. Thus, the state regards him as chaotic, deviant and violent.[435] This stereotype is in many respects a continuation or variation of the colonial Christian fear of the wilderness as a spiritually corrupting force. However, the backwoodsman poses a more contemporary threat, because he subverts American nationalistic ideals, such as its oft-repeated nickname "land of the free."[436] The backwoodsman is in many ways less regulated by society than urban Americans and thus more free, and yet the expression of his freedom is often depicted in cinema as frightening and repulsive. Conversely, he is more neglected by society, being the inhabitant of some of the poorest, least healthy, least educated, and most drug-affected areas of the country, such as the Appalachian Mountains. His existence, figuratively and literally, emphasises the disunity of the nation, demonstrating that there are many citizens, especial in rural communities, who have been forgotten or banished by the modern world, or who have explicitly rejected it.

Several variations of the backwoodsman are referenced throughout *Willow Creek*. Jim and Kelly meet residents of the town who they regard as eccentric and amusing, and whom they secretly mock. The more sinister variation of the stereotype appears when the couple are driving into the forest, only to be confronted by a large hairy man who abuses them and demands that they leave. The film subtly aligns this character with the creature depicted in the Patterson-Gimlin film: the man, like the supposed Bigfoot, offers Kelly's camera a disdainful glance as he strides back into the forest.

Finally, Bigfoot himself is depicted as sharing traits with the figure of the backwoodsman, with both figures living in the wilderness and assuming an identity

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[435] *Ibid.*, 130.
[436] The phrase derives from the U.S. National Anthem, "Star-Spangled Banner," written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key.

somewhere between human and animal, civilisation and savagery. Jim's perception, like that of many urban Americans, regards Bigfoot with a mixture of fascination and fear. Moreover, like hillbilly horror films, *Willow Creek* links its monster with acts of sexual violence, implying that the woman from the missing person flyer has been kidnapped by Bigfoot as a "forest bride," and thus positioning Kelly as another potential victim.

The climactic sequence of *Willow Creek*—a 20-minute unbroken shot inside the couple's tent during their first night in the woods (see figure 2.4)—once again signifies the American wilderness as a site of traumatic memory and the Bigfoot monster as an embodiment of that trauma. The initially tender tone of the scene is interrupted by ominous sounds emanating from outside the tent.

Figure 2.4 In *Willow Creek*, Jim and Kelly spend a frightening first night in the woods.

At first, these sounds are faint, and include crunching leaves and long animalistic vocalisations, but soon the sounds grow louder, and the couple grows tense. Framed by the Bigfoot legend, these disparate sounds of the wild are assembled by the character's and viewer's minds into a single menacing presence. The film generates horror from the interplay between the cryptic soundscape beyond the tissue-thin canvas and the couple's body language. Like the viewer, their attention is strained.

Their expressions convey worry as the sound escalates and relaxation as it subsides. They whisper to one another in an attempt to comprehend the meaning of the situation unfolding beyond their field of view. Given that the viewer is restricted to the same field of vision and sound, and that we are essentially trapped inside the tent with Jim and Kelly, these performances mirror our own attempts to process the event. The scene evokes the traumatic symptom of hyperarousal: the growing perception that something dangerous is occurring, and the heightening of one's senses in response to that threat. At a certain point, the tent walls, which have remained static for 20 minutes, are suddenly interrupted by thrown projectiles and a single grasping limb. The image of the tent canvas stretching menacingly towards the couple, as they scream and weep, suggests the traumatic symptom of intrusion. It is as though a traumatic event is piercing the psyche of the characters, the same way a physical trauma might pierce their flesh. Finally, the third symptom of trauma, numbness, is suggested in Kelly's response to the attack: she looks away from the protruding limb, and buries her face in Jim's arms. This action suggests that she cannot process what is happening, and rather than fight or flee, she dissociates. Because she cannot physically escape the tent, she escapes into the tent, into the darkness of Jim's embrace and her own closed eyelids, into a deeper part of her own mind.

Like *Blair Witch* and *The Last Broadcast*, the characters in *Willow Creek* are never actually able to document the monster with their camera. The trauma of the encounter is located in absence: the diegetic camera is unable to frame what is tormenting or threatening it. The sensorial rush of terror that assaults the characters and viewer originates from a wholly inconceivable source. This particular encounter links Bigfoot with some sinister element, action or figure within the American

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wilderness, or rather, in the characters' relationship to that wilderness. Indeed, the fact that the creature throws stones at the tent echoes the angry backwoodsman throwing stones at the couple's car to scare them away. The allusive meaning behind the violent encounter in the tent conjures the broader possible traumas that underlie the formation of America, which Jim and Kelly have potentially enountered through their journey into the forest. The scene signifies that, contrary to its depictions in the town, the folkloric monster known as Bigfoot has neither been tamed nor extinguished. It is not a relic of the past, relegated to songs, statues and murals. *Willow Creek* depicts Bigfoot's capacity to claw its way back into the present. Thus, whatever meaning or memories people have invested in the legend—such as the traumatic events associated with colonisation; the neglect and demonisation of its rural regions; or the continuous fracturing and polarisation of its people—continue to haunt the nation.

That concludes this chapter about the depiction of American historical trauma in three Remote FF horror films. As the analysis has demonstrated, *Blair Witch*, *The Last Broadcast* and *Willow Creek* depict the American wilderness as a site of trauma, and use folkloric monsters as symbols of particular traumatic experiences that stem from colonisation. The films suggest that the reason Americans continually retell legends of witches, the Jersey Devil and Bigfoot, is because they undermine and deviate from dominant accounts of American history, and therefore gesture towards an unreconciled aspect—or to use Caruth's analogy, an untended wound— of national culture. The film's use diegetic cameras to simulate the traumatic experiences of the characters, and then aesthetically and thematically link those experiences with a reliving of traumatic events associated with those spaces. Given that each of the characters meets a sudden, gruesome death, the films offer little

hope that historical traumas can be resolved. Far from making sense of the monsters they seek, the characters only manage to become another cautionary episode in the broader folklore. Modern technology fails to document or rationalise the monsters, and instead perpetuates their existence for another generation and gives them new life in the virtual sphere. Nevertheless, the films acknowledge that a traumatic event has occurred. Remote FF horror shifts beyond dominant, abstract, macroscopic, or idealistic accounts of the past, and depicts individual, sensorial, and emotional suffering, as a lived and relived experience. It exposes contemporary viewers to horrifying perspectives of the past that are difficult to ignore.

CHAPTER THREE: OUT OF THE RUBBLE
Post-9/11 Global Trauma in *Cloverfield*, *REC*, *Pandemic,* and *The Bay*

This chapter examines five FF horror films—*Cloverfield, REC, REC 2, Pandemic,* and *The Bay*—each of which depict people being attacked within an urban setting. In contrast with the films examined in the previous chapter, these films do not involve characters seeking out a monster in a foreign site; instead, the monsters emerge in each film, suddenly and disastrously, within the familiar spaces of the city. The monsters in question range from a gargantuan reptile, to zombies, to small parasitic organisms. The chapter argues that the portrayal of these entities evokes the public's experience of traumatic events of the 21st century, such as terrorist attacks and ecological disasters. That is, the films convey the vicarious spread of traumatic images through global information networks, and the attempts of the state to mediate those images to suit a preferred narrative. Rather than representing the rediscovery of historical traumas, as the films of the previous chapter did, these films centre on society's relationship with recent and ongoing traumatic events.

I begin with a definition of Urban FF horror films, the category that comprises the films examined here, along with a synopsis of each film and comparisons to other horror subgenres. I also outline literature concerning the global transmission of psychological trauma through mass media. In particular, I focus on the "culture of trauma," a term E. Anne Kaplan uses to characterise the collective traumatic experiences of the 21st century. The chapter demonstrates how Urban FF horror films express this contemporary culture of trauma by sublimating the collective experiences of events such as 9/11 and the War on Terror through monsters,

especially the zombie. It further argues that the films mirror reality in their depictions of the state's attempts to control and repress collective trauma, which in turn, the films suggest, conceals the cause of trauma and perpetuates future trauma.

Defining Urban Found Footage Horror Films

This chapter focuses on a particular category of the subgenre, termed "Urban FF horror" films. These films contain similar narrative elements and similar uses of settings. They each depict characters in an urban setting, such as an apartment building or city streets, confronted by monsters that proceed to attack them and destroy the surrounding environment. First, I will summarise the plots of the five films examined in this chapter and identify their shared characteristics. In order to further understand the cinematic influences on FF horror, I will also compare the films to earlier horror subgenres of monster movies and zombie films.

Cloverfield begins in a Manhattan apartment, where a group of people are attending a celebration for Rob, who is moving to Japan to start a new job. Rob's best friend Hud is filming farewell messages from all of the party attendees, when suddenly an earthquake and a city-wide power outage interrupts the festivities. Panicked, the partygoers and thousands of other New Yorkers attempt to flee Manhattan across the Brooklyn Bridge. However, the bridge is destroyed by the tail of a massive, unseen creature, killing dozens of people. While sheltering in a store, Rob and Hud watch news footage of the National Guard fighting with an gigantic beast and a series of smaller "parasite" creatures. Rob receives an anguished phone call from his ex-girlfriend Beth, who has become trapped in debris; he resolves to travel across town to save her. The characters make their way through the subway to avoid the street-level carnage, free Beth, and are rescued by a military helicopter.

However, the creature swipes the helicopter out of the sky, killing Hud. Rob and Beth shelter under a bridge, while the creature battles the National Guard, and are eventually crushed from above, ending the footage.

REC depicts a reporter named Angela Vidal and her cameraman Pablo recording a documentary TV show about the night shift of a Barcelona fire station.[437] They follow the firefighters on an emergency call to an old woman's apartment, but upon arrival, the woman becomes aggressive and attacks one of the men, biting his neck. As they carry the injured man downstairs, they find the other residents have gathered in the lobby, and that the police and military have sealed off the building. The injured firefighter then becomes aggressive and attempts to attack the group, but they manage to lock him in a room. A health inspector enters the building and informs them that there has been a virus outbreak, which causes similar symptoms to rabies. The virus spreads quickly between the residents and firefighters, leading to more violence, and eventually Angela and Pablo are forced to take refuge in the penthouse at the top of the stairs. Once inside, they are confronted by Tristana, a teenage girl and the source of the outbreak. Tristana eats Pablo and drags Angela away.

REC 2 takes place during the events of *REC*, but from the perspective of a team of special police (with inbuilt helmet cameras) and a group of local teenagers (with a personal camcorder), who enter the building after it has been quarantined. The police are quickly overwhelmed by infected people and get separated from one another. The surviving officers come across three trespassing teenagers and rescue them from an infected attack. While attempting to track down Tristana, the source of the infection, they run into Angela. While she initially agrees to help them, she

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[437] In promotional material, *REC* is stylised as *[•REC]*, which is short for "record."

eventually shoots them all, and then imitates one of their voices to escape the building. The film ends with extended footage from the previous film, which shows Tristana dragging Angela and transmitting a worm-like organism into the reporter's mouth.

Pandemic follows Lauren Chase, a doctor from New York who has travelled to Los Angeles in order to help find survivors of a worldwide plague that produces violent behaviour in victims. She is met by a military official, who introduces her to a team of sweepers, including Gunner, Denise and Wheeler. Her mission is to provide medical assistance on their mission into Los Angeles to rescue plague survivors rumoured to be hiding in a school. Everyone on the team is wearing a protective suit with video cameras built into the helmet. They arrive at the school, only to find that all of the survivors are dead. Some of the infected bodies wake up and charge the team, and everyone except Gunner escapes through the windows. While hiding in an abandoned store, Dr Chase confesses to Denise that she is not really a doctor: her name is Rebecca Thomas and she only came to the facility to find her daughter Meghan, who has been hiding in the family home since the pandemic began. Wheeler hotwires an ambulance and manages to drive them to Rebecca's house; they recue Meghan, but discover that she has been bitten by an infected person. They make it back to the facility and find it surrounded by infected people. Guards are firing on the horde, and mistake Rebecca for an infected, shooting her multiple times; however, she witnesses Meghan passing safely through the gates.

The Bay depicts a deadly outbreak that occurred in the town of Claridge, Maryland. Donna, a former reporter and native of the town, explains how two marine researchers detected high levels of toxicity in Chesepeake Bay, but when they attempted to alert the mayor, he refused to take action for fear that it would create a

panic. Donna then shares news footage she recorded of the town's Independence Day festival, which depicts multiple people breaking out in strange rashes, while others vomit and collapse. Other discovered footage shows parallel incidents occurring around the town, such as dash cam footage of two police officers discovering a family covered in rashes and begging to die, and mobile phone footage of teenagers swimming by the pier, only to be dragged to their deaths by an unknown entity. At the local hospital, the emergency room is overwhelmed by patients, with security camera footage showing people dying in the halls, and video conference calls to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) failing to trace the origins of the virus. In the present, Donna addresses her computer webcam and reveals that the Claridge survivors were quarantined for five days, and that the outbreak and resulting mass deaths were covered up by the government.

These films share several important characteristics. Four of the films are set in large cities—New York, Barcelona and Los Angeles—while the other is set in a small fictional city—Claridge. The characters who record the footage are residents of these cities and are familiar with the settings. This premise contrasts with the previous category of FF horror, in which characters travel from a familiar space to a foreign space. In this category, the familiar space becomes unfamiliar through the appearance of a monstrous interloper, and then through the physical destruction and social chaos that these monsters engender. Urban FF horror can be distinguished from Remote and Domestic FF in that the characters do not actively seek out a monster – the recording premise in these films is more banal. For example, in *Cloverfield*, Hud is initially recording a party when the monster appears; in *REC*, Angela is recording a television documentary about firefighters, when she happens upon a zombie-infested apartment building; and in *The Bay*, Donna is recording a

news story about her town's Independence Day festivities when the outbreak begins. Thus, the documenting of the monster is usually depicted as inadvertent in Urban FF horror films, as the characters are otherwise engaged in their regular lives. This frames the emergence of the monster as more surprising and shocking. The monster's emergence is less surprising in *Pandemic*, as Dr Chase/Rebecca is warned about the infected beforehand; however, the purpose of the mission is to rescue survivors, not to document the infected, and the scenes in which they appear are still sudden and frightening. One thing that Urban FF horror films do share with Remote FF horror films is that the monster kills most, if not all, of the main characters in each film. The one exception to this rule is Donna in *The Bay*, who is one of the few residents of her town left alive. Other notable Urban FF horror films include *Noroi: The Curse* (Shiraishi 2005), *Diary of the Dead* (Romero 2007), *Quarantine* (Dowdle 2008), *Occult* (Shiraishi 2009), *Followed* (Anderson 2015), and *Followed* (Le 2020), as well as segments in the *V/H/S* series.

Urban FF horror films share elements with three earlier horror subgenres: the doomsday film, the monster movie and the zombie film. Doomsday films depict the collapse of human civilisation as a result of disastrous circumstances, such as nuclear war, environmental ruin, deadly pandemic, or attack by extra-terrestrial, subterranean or mutated lifeforms. Doomsday films often combine science fiction and horror narrative conventions, portraying the efforts of characters to prevent or survive apocalypse.[438] This subgenre was popular in America in the 1950s, exemplified in films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise 1951), *War of the Worlds*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Arnold 1954) and *The Blob*. A related subgenre, the monster movie (or "creature feature"), depicts characters being

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[438] Derry, *Dark Dreams*, 46.

confronted by an antagonistic and often abnormally large monster.[439] Examples of monster movies are *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack 1933) adaptations, and the *Godzilla*, *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975) and *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993) franchises. In these films, the monster plays the role of the antagonist, but its destructive actions are often attributed by characters to the mistakes or misdeeds of humanity, such as an experiment gone wrong or the destruction of habitat.[440] Therefore, humanity, sometimes even the protagonist, is shown as partially to blame for the destruction, and the monster is occasionally portrayed as sympathetic. Monster movies are a type of doomsday film, as the monster's rampage often threatens humanity with extinction.

The zombie film is also related to the doomsday film, in this case depicting society being attacked by re-animated human corpses or diseased human beings. Zombies in cinema are typically portrayed as mindless and cannibalistic, and attack their human prey in slow-moving hordes. When a living or uninfected human has been bitten by a zombie, they are often shown to transform into a zombie and join the horde.[441] The term zombie derives from Haitian folklore, and originally described human corpses that had been resurrected by dark magic in order to serve as someone's personal slave. This traditional version of the zombie is portrayed in the 1932 film *White Zombie* (Halperin 1932), along with other films from the 1930s and 1940s.[442] The contemporary version of the zombie—one who serves nothing except the impulse to devour human flesh—was invented by George A. Romero in his 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, and propagated in a string of sequels, as well as Sam

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[439] Stephen Jones, *The Illustrated Dinosaur Movie Guide* (London: Titan Books, 1993), 24-25.
[440] *Ibid.*, 27.
[441] Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960s* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 559.
[442] *Ibid.*, 161-162.

Rami's *The Evil Dead* (1981) and Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* (1985).[443] The

number of zombie films declined in the late 1980s and 1990s, but re-emerged in the

2000s with the critically and commercially successful *28 Days Later*, which lead to a

remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero 1979), horror comedies *Shaun of the Dead*

and *Zombieland* (Fleischer 2009), and adaptations of *The Walking Dead* graphic

novel series (Kirkman 2003-2019) and the *Resident Evil* video game series (Capcom

1996 onwards).[444] In *28 Days Later*, Danny Boyle further modified the nature of the

zombie, depicting them as faster, stronger and more vicious than Romero's

incarnation, and attributing their transformation to viral infection, rather than magic or

supernatural forces. According to Kim Paffenroth, zombies in film frequently expose

the vulnerability of human civilisation and the misanthropy of human beings,

reconfiguring everyday people as grotesque and self-destructive; she argues that

zombies, more than any other monster, are "fully and literally apocalyptic… they

signal the end of the world as we have known it."[445]

    All five films examined in this chapter are FF horror versions of the doomsday

film: four show the beginning of an apocalypse as destructive monsters plunge

society into chaos, while the fifth film, *Pandemic*, shows a post-apocalyptic society in

which most of humanity has been killed and its cities lie in ruins. *Cloverfield* portrays

a giant monster, similar to Godzilla, destroying a city. *REC, Pandemic* and *The Bay*

all feature fast-moving, infection-based zombies wreaking mass havoc, and therefore

contribute to the 2000s revival of the zombie. The films further alter the nature of the

zombie by presenting infected humans as capable of speech: at various points in

REC, *Pandemic* and *The Bay*, the infected beg for their lives or taunt their victims.

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[443] *Ibid.*, 165.
[444] Josh Levin, "Dead Run: How did movie zombies get so fast?" *Slate*, last modified March 24, 2004, https://slate.com/culture/2004/03/how-did-movie-zombies-get-so-fast.html.
[445] Kim Paffenroth, *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero's Visions of Hell on Earth* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 22.

According to Aldana Reyes, the *REC* films are "an important part of the [21st century] zombie canon."[446] While they did not invent the fast-running, virus-animated zombie, they did help establish it, and as one of the most successful Spanish horror films of all time, popularised this version of the zombie among European and Spanish-speaking audiences.

Unlike previous giant monster and zombie films, these films do not present an overarching perspective of the event. That is, they do not show the perspectives of people outside the event. Rather, the plots are limited to the perspective of the primary victims during the event: in *Cloverfield* and *REC,* the viewer sees a recording from single video cameras, while in *REC 2* and *Pandemic*, the viewer sees headset recordings from a close group of people. Furthermore, unlike conventional giant monster and zombie films, Urban FF horror films do not depict the perspectives of people trying to defeat the monsters or solve the crisis. Instead, they primarily depict the perspectives of the general public, who possess no comprehension of the monster's nature or motives, and who are merely trying to survive the crisis.[447] This narrative perspective contrasts with the *Godzilla* films, which, while including civilian perspectives, mostly follow the politicians, soldiers and scientists as they work together to find a solution. Urban FF horror does not concentrate on this effort, and what little it does show of the state's attempts to combat the monster is harmful to the protagonists and ultimately ends in failure.

Indeed, Urban FF horror films differ from prior doomsday films in their sceptical attitude towards the state. These five films portray American and European governments as authoritarian and partially responsible for the destruction caused by

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[446] Xavier Aldana Reyes, "The *[REC]* Films: Affective Possibilities and Stylistic Limitations of Found Footage Horror," in *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage,* ed. Xavier Aldana Reyes and Linnie Blake (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 151.
[447] *REC 2* features a partial exception to this convention.

the monster. For example, at the end of *Cloverfield,* it is implied that the military

bombs, and not the monster, are what cause Robb's and Beth's deaths. In *REC*,

when the characters attempt to escape the building, their exit is blocked by

government officials and armed forces. In *The Bay*, when the government is warned

about the biohazardous conditions of the water, they censor the report and later

censor coverage of the outbreak. Rather than portraying the domestic state as

generally benevolent and beneficial to the public, as prior doomsday films tend to

reinforce, Urban FF horror portrays the state as a different kind of antagonist, one

that harms the protagonists in ways that correspond to and augment the carnage of

the monster. This creates a feeling of genuine doom, as the characters are denied

any escape from a deadly fate. Previous doomsday films, such as *Invasion of the*

Body Snatchers and *The War of the Worlds*, reinstate societal normalcy by the final

scene, depicting the protagonists as surviving or triumphing, and the monster as

being defeated or slain. In contrast, the films examined in this chapter mainly end

with the protagonists being killed and the monsters living on. Instead of portraying

disaster averted, Urban FF horror leaves the viewer to conclude that, in the absence

of effective governance, the monsters will become the new custodians of the city.

The Vicarious Transmission of Trauma via Mass Media

Crucial to understanding the relationship between FF horror and trauma theory is

examining the period in which the subgenre grew to mainstream prominence.

Although film critics and theorists generally cite the release of *Blair Witch* as the year

FF horror was formally established (1999), it was not until the mid- to late 2000s that

examples of the subgenre became popular and plentiful. In this context, many Urban

FF horror films can be seen as products and reflections of the collective traumatic

experiences of the 2000s, especially the shocking events of 9/11, as well as the increased rate and threat of terrorist attacks, the emergence of the terrorist as an intangible and chaotic global enemy, the commencement of new foreign military conflicts, and environmental degeneration and disasters.

On the morning of 11 September 2001, al-Quaeda terrorists hijacked four passenger airliners, and crashed two into the North and South towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City, causing almost 3,000 fatalities and over 25,000 injuries.[448] In response to the attacks, the U.S. government launched an international campaign called the "war on terror": it included major military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and the Philippines, as well as increased domestic powers to control borders and transportation centres, monitor citizens, deport non-citizens, and detain and torture terrorist suspects.[449] Despite U.S. President Barack Obama's declaration that the war on terror had ended during his administration, many of the global conflicts and human rights violations initiated during the campaign persist to the present day.[450] The term "post-9/11" denotes the intense and lasting impact of the event on global societies and cultures.

E. Ann Kaplan argues that the intense focus on global terrorism in the early 21st century, and the continuous coverage of acts of terrorism, counter-terrorism, and foreign and domestic conflicts and catastrophes, has created a "culture of trauma."[451] She links this culture to the influence of the mass media, particularly the proliferation of 24-hour national and international news stations, which became, and

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[448] The 9/11 Commission Report speculates that al-Qaeda probably intended to crash the fourth plane into the Capitol or the White House, but that the hijackers were thwarted by the captive passengers. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2004), 14.
[449] "A Timeline of the U.S.-Led War on Terror," *HISTORY*, last modified May 5, 2020, https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/war-on-terror-timeline.
[450] *Ibid.*
[451] Kaplan, "Global Trauma," 3.

continue to become, increasingly adept at broadcasting disasters as they occur and replaying their images continuously throughout the world. She also attributes this culture to the proliferation of the internet and social media, combined with the increased ability of civilians to record and distribute video content, including raw depictions of traumatic events.[452] According to Kaplan, 9/11 constitutes:

> [T]he supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital technologies (Internet, cell phone) as well as by television and radio, and responded to in a myriad of ways depending on peoples' national and local contexts.[453]

Kaplan mostly attributes the collective transmission of trauma in the 21st century to two conditions: advances in technology have increased the scope and speed at which images can spread; and institutional forces, such as governments, corporations, religious organisations, and terrorist groups, can enlist the power of traumatic images to direct public perception and behaviour.[454]

The 9/11 attacks were the first major disaster to be transmitted through this 21st century global mass media and online network. But many other traumatic events followed and were transmitted in a similar manner, including the Bali, Madrid and London bombings, the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the BP oil spill, the London and Ferguson riots, the Haiti Earthquake, the Fukushima meltdown, the Arab Spring uprisings, and dozens of mass shootings perpetrated in the U.S. and elsewhere. Notably, it was ordinary people, rather than journalists, who produced many of photographs, audio and video recordings, and live correspondences of these events. This is a result of increased access to consumer-grade videorecording devices, and telephonic or online distribution platforms. Indeed, amateur recordings constitute many of the earliest records of these events, as they were made by people

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[452] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 11-13.
[453] *Ibid.*, 2
[454] *Ibid.*, 24-25.

who were already at the location when the event occurred, as opposed to news crews who sought out the event as it was in progress or after it had occurred. In many cases, these amateur recordings were produced by individuals who were harmed or killed by the event, making the creators direct victims rather than merely observers. For example, during 9/11, dozens of victims trapped inside the collapsing World Trade Centre left recorded phone messages to their loved ones describing their final moments.[455] In another example, during the Orlando Nightclub shooting, several victims hid in the bathroom and recorded or texted messages to family members using their mobile phones; they were later found dead.[456] Some traumatic events, such as the Christchurch mosque shooting, were recorded and broadcast to social media by the perpetrators.[457] Kevin J. Wetmore concurs with Kaplan's assessment that contemporary mass media has helped produce a culture of trauma, further adding that the increased capacity of ordinary people to document disasters and horrific experiences as they occur has in turn resulted in amateur recordings being increasingly associated with horror.[458]

Kaplan argues that throughout the 2000s, images of disaster and death saturated mass media. While she concedes that newspapers, radio and television have always prioritised tragedy and horror, she maintains that, "the media was not as central to people's daily lives as it is today: now images of trauma bombard us

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[455] Will Worley, "9/11: Recordings of Dramatic Phone Calls Reveal True Horror of World Trade Center Terror Attacks," *Independent*, Last Modified September 11, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/9-11-phone-calls-recordings-audio-world-trade-center-attack-terror-emotional-september-a8530601.html.

[456] Michael E. Miller, "'He's coming … I'm gonna die': Heartbreaking Final Texts from Orlando Victim to his Mom," *The Washington Post*, last modified June 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/06/13/hes-coming-im-gonna-die-heartbreaking-final-texts-from-orlando-victim-to-his-mom/.

[457] Hywel Griffith, "Christchurch Shootings: Mosque Attacker Charged with Terrorism," *BBC News*, last modified May 21, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48346786.

[458] Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror*, 57-58.

daily."[459] To illustrate this phenomenon she randomly selects an issue of the *New York Times* (12 October, 2005) and describes the pages of suffering she observes within, including news and images of mass killings in Iraq and Guatemala, an earthquake in Pakistan, ongoing famine in Africa, and flooding and mass displacement in New Orleans.[460] Along with identifying an excess of traumatic representations, Kaplan adds that, since 9/11, "new digital technologies, especially the internet, make global communication of catastrophe instantaneous," and that "viewing traumatic events has become a worrying national preoccupation."[461]

The primary trauma victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks were the thousands of people directly involved in the event, such as injured and fleeing civilians and responding emergency workers, as well as the families and friends of those who were killed in the World Trade Centre or hijacked aircrafts. However, Kaplan points out that many people who were not directly involved in the event were also susceptible to, and have exhibited symptoms of, psychological trauma.[462] She observes this phenomenon within herself, noting that though she was not directly involved in 9/11, she found the media coverage deeply distressing, and began to visualise buildings around her collapsing and experienced panic attacks while taking public transport.[463]

This distress constitutes what Caruth and Herman label "vicarious"[464] or "secondary"[465] trauma, where a person sympathises or identifies with a trauma victim, and in turn experiences symptoms of PTSD, such as mood swings, fear, social withdrawal, intrusive thoughts, and a general disruption in their sense of

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[459] Kaplan, "Global Trauma," 3.
[460] *Ibid.*, 16.
[461] *Ibid.*, 4.
[462] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 21.
[463] *Ibid.*, 5.
[464] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 106.
[465] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 37.

self.[466] Theoretically, the primary victims of 9/11 may transmit their traumatic experience in several ways: they may verbalise the traumatic experience to others; they may exhibit symptoms of PTSD to others; and their physical and psychic injuries may trigger latent traumatic experiences in those with whom they engage.[467] Vicarious trauma is particularly common among medical and mental health workers, who frequently deal with trauma victims. According to a study conducted by Joseph A. Boscarino, Richard E. Adams and Charles R. Figley, health workers who cared for 9/11 victims showed high rates of secondary trauma.[468] However, Herman found that trauma can also be transmitted psychologically to people with a close personal relationship to the victim, such as their partners, children, friends, and colleagues.[469] Vicarious trauma is the mechanism through which collective trauma occurs: that is, trauma spreads throughout a group of people, such as a family, community or nation, or occurs within many individuals, and persists from one generation to the next.

One of the primary inquiries of Kaplan's research is how media representations of violence and disaster may transmit traumatic experiences and contribute to collective trauma. According to the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, "images can affect cognition and emotions in powerful ways, and this includes images of events not directly experienced but transmitted via the news media."[470] In 2017, Pam Ramsden conducted a survey about the effects on the general population of distressing images, such as wounded or dying people being

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[466] *Ibid.*, 25-34.
[467] Joseph A. Boscarino, Richard E. Adams and Charles R. Figley, "Secondary Trauma Issues for Psychiatrists," *The Psychiatric Times* 27, no.11 (2010): 24-26.
[468] *Ibid.*, 27.
[469] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 99-100.
[470] Gavin Rees, "Handling Traumatic Imagery: Developing a Standard Operating Procedure," *Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma*, last modified April 4, 2017, https://dartcenter.org/resources/handling-traumatic-imagery-developing-standard-operating-procedure.

carried on stretchers and grief-stricken relatives searching for loved ones. She conducted four clinical studies and found that 20% of participants were "significantly affected by media events" and that "these individuals scored high on clinical measures of PTSD even though none of the individuals had previous trauma and were not present at the traumatic events and had only watched them on social media."[471] Thus, Ramsden concurs with Kaplan that there is a distinct difference between traditional news media and the use of social media to transmit video content on the internet, in that the latter "has enabled violent stories and graphic images to be watched by the public in [instantaneous and] unedited horrific detail."[472]

According to Yuval Neria and Gregory M Sullivan, the majority of people who undergo a traumatic experience—either directly or vicariously—and who exhibit symptoms of PTSD are able to recover over time without the need for clinical intervention. However, increased coverage of traumatic events may introduce new difficulties in peoples' ability to recover.[473] If, for example, people are traumatised by direct or indirect contact with a particular event, and that event or similar events are continually depicted in mass and social media, then this constant exposure may delay the natural recovery process or exacerbate PTSD symptoms. This may in turn increase the likelihood of collective trauma. According to a 2013 study from the scientific journal *PNAS*, "media exposure [of a traumatic event] keeps the acute stressor active and alive in one's mind," and this repeated exposure "may contribute

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[471] Pam Ramsden, "Vicarious Trauma, PTSD and Social media: Does Watching Graphic Videos Cause Trauma?" (paper presented at the *3rd International Conference on Depression, Anxiety and Stress Management*, University of Bradford, London, U.K., 2017).
[472] *Ibid.*
[473] Yuval Neria and Gegory M Sullivan, "Understanding the Mental Health Effects of Indirect Exposure to Mass Trauma Through the Media," *JAMA* 306, no.12 (2011): 1374-1375.

to the development of trauma-related disorders by prolonging or exacerbating acute trauma-related symptoms."[474]

Kaplan concludes that the events of 9/11 and intense media coverage of them had a traumatic effect on the people of the U.S.: partly through the destruction, suffering and panic the event caused, and partly because the event shattered the sense of invulnerability that was a central component of the collective American identity.[475] This collective trauma manifested through, and was harnessed by, political, social and technological forces in order to launch the War on Terror, which in turn traumatised people and nations throughout the world.[476] This contemporary and international culture of trauma, she concludes, is reflected through various cultural forms, foremost among them being cinema.

The capacity for images to traumatise viewers is not the subject of this thesis. This thesis, and particularly this chapter, is concerned with how FF horror films depict and dramatise the vicarious transmission of trauma between direct victims and indirect bystanders. Moreover, the thesis questions how these films depict the ways individuals and institutions respond to traumatic events in the 21st century. The remainder of this chapter will examine how five Urban FF horror films echo or allude to 21st century traumatic events, especially 9/11; how they depict the vicarious and transnational circulation of contemporary traumatic experiences; and how they depict the treatment and proliferation of collective traumatic experiences by the state.

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[474] E. Alison Holman, Dana Rose Garfin and Roxane Cohen Silver, "Media's Role in Broadcasting Acute Stress Following the Boston Marathon Bombings," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no.1 (2014): 95.
[475] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 9-10.
[476] *Ibid.*, 43.

Post-9/11 Symbolism in Found Footage Horror

All five FF horror films examined in this chapter were released after 9/11 and in the midst of Kaplan's "culture of trauma." They evoke the events of 9/11 in their depictions of ruptured urban spaces and large panicked crowds. They also evoke 9/11 through their common aesthetic, which often resembles the immediate, shaky coverage of that terroristic attack. The events shown in the found footage of these films are recorded by characters caught in and threatened by those events; this footage portrays a frantic, confused and overwhelmed subjectivity, which signifies both the experiences of direct trauma victims, as well as psychic impact of the broader national and international collective as it vicariously experiences the event. On the release of *Cloverfield*, several film critics, including Roger Ebert, noted its "unmistakable" allusions to 9/11.[477] Specifically, the film is set in New York City and depicts a violent, destructive and—in the moment—inscrutable attack from without. Within the diegesis, Hud's video camera records collapsing buildings, shattering glass, pillars of smoke, screaming and fleeing crowds, deserted streets, and a haze of ash coating the wreckage. The destination of the characters' trek through the city, Beth's apartment, is located in a damaged skyscraper that is revealed to be leaning precariously against a second skyscraper. Wetmore argues that this is another clear 9/11 allusion, pointing out that the image bears an unmistakable resemblance to the Twin Towers as they were collapsing before a horrified audience of people on the streets and at home.[478]

REC and *REC* 2 also call to mind many of the images and incidents of 9/11 by depicting reporters, emergency responders and local residents becoming trapped in a city apartment tower and violently killed. The film's depiction of the fire station and

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[477] Roger Ebert, "Forget *I Am Legend*. If that big lizard has its way, we're all legends," *Chicago Sun-Times*, last modified January 17, 2008, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/cloverfield-2008.
[478] Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror*, 52.

its workers responding to the emergency echoes the widely-reported news stories of hundreds of New York firefighters who fought the blazes, evacuated office-workers, and perished during the 2001 disaster. The confusion of *REC's* characters, and their struggle to visually and psychologically comprehend what is occurred around them, is especially indicative of the collective trauma experienced during 9/11. The characters' distress is communicated through both their performances and the increasingly agitated, unfocused diegetic camerawork by Pablo, the SWAT officers and the group of local teenagers. The films' emphasis on entrapment is highly suggestive of the perspectives of victims of 9/11 who were trapped within the collapsing Twin Towers or the hijacked airliners, as opposed to *Cloverfield's* emphasis on the city streets, suggestive of the perspectives of those on the ground or at a distance. Notably, the *REC* films are set in Madrid, rather than New York, and so their textual connection to 9/11 is less explicit. Madrid, however, did suffer a significant terrorist attack in 2004 on the city's commuter train system; it was the deadliest terrorist incident in Spanish history, and, as with 9/11, the terrorist cell al-Qaeda claimed responsibility.[479] Thus, the *REC* films subsume the collective trauma of both 9/11 and the Madrid bombings and implant the fear that these inscrutable, unpredictable, nightmarish events could recur. This transnational dread of traumatic recurrence demonstrates the global scope of Kaplan's diagnosis.

Pandemic differs from the films above, in that it depicts a society in the aftermath of a traumatic disaster, rather than in its midst. It contains allusions to 9/11 and to conflicts that were instigated in response to 9/11, such as the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. While the film is set in Los Angeles, Rebecca has travelled from New York and refers to the east coast city as being "completely lost." Moreover, the

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[479] "In Depth: Madrid Train Attacks," *BBC News*,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/europe/2004/madrid_train_attacks/default.stm.

depiction of Los Angeles' streets as deserted and covered in shredded paper, and its buildings leaning against one another, echoes the apocalyptic imagery of 9/11. Likewise, the film depicts buildings covered with scores of missing person flyers, an image which recalls the similar scores of flyers put up around New York appealing for information about loved ones who were uncontactable after the attacks.[480] However, from the perspective of Western audiences, the ruinous Los Angles depicted in *Pandemic* also echoes the destruction caused by the U.S. to foreign cities. For example, when the team first arrive in the city, Rebecca peers through the grates of the armoured bus and sees scorched and burning skyscrapers in the distance (see figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 In *Pandemic*, Rebecca looks out at the ruined Los Angeles skyline.

The scene resembles the video coverage produced by the hundreds of journalists embedded with Coalition forces during the 2003 Invasion of Iraq.[481] In *Pandemic*, the settings of cratered highways, empty streets strewn with rubble and smashed cars, and a perpetually burning skyline more closely resemble the post-battle city of Baghdad than contemporary Los Angeles. Thus, in the narrative, the team enters a warzone that is coded as foreign—according to the way foreign spaces are depicted by mass media—but which is actually local. The presence of famous downtown Los

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[480] Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror,* 36.
[481] For example, the photographic and written coverage provided by Michael Kelly for *The Atlantic* magazine; Kelly was the first journalist to die during the 2003 invasion.

Angeles locations, such as Skid Row, gives the imagery an eerily familiar quality. The shaky camerawork and ongoing commentary provided by the armed members of the team reinforces this allusion to contemporary war journalism. This contrast of familiarity and unfamiliarity produces two different readings, both of which evoke Kaplan's aforementioned anecdote of imagining falling buildings as she walked the streets. The first reading is that the collective trauma of 9/11 has reconfigured American cities as sites of trauma, in which occupants and bystanders are continually haunted by the horrific events that occurred in New York City, and haunted by what may reoccur at any moment. Thus, American cities have been rendered unfamiliar, indeed foreign, in the post-9/11 world. The second reading is that the films suggest Americans are haunted by the destruction waged against foreign cities on their behalf and in response to 9/11, and have projected their guilt about the trauma of foreign people onto familiar urban spaces.

The Bay differs slightly in setting and theme from the above films and frames a different aspect of 21st century trauma. The film is set in a township rather than a major city and alludes to the traumatic impact of environmental disasters, rather than terrorism or war. Writer and director Barry Levinson seems to draw inspiration from contemporary natural disasters that have affected the U.S., depicting a bay becoming infested with unknown parasitic organisms and a deadly outbreak in the nearby town of Claridge. Specifically, the film's narrative alludes to water-based catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina and the BP Oil Spill, signifying both the suffering inflicted on humans, animals and the environment due to those events, as well as the complacency and complicity of state officials in facilitating the disaster. For example, engineering reports on the 2005 hurricane that struck New Orleans found that most of the death and damage was caused by flaws in the city's flood

protection systems; the state and national government were also widely criticised for their delayed and disorganised response to the disaster.[482] Similarly, a government report found that the 2010 oil spill that devastated the Gulf of Mexico was caused by an inadequate safety system and a series of cost-cutting decisions on the part of British Petroleum.[483] *The Bay* depicts governmental amorality, for instance, when scientists alert the mayor to the high levels of toxicity in the town's bay and he dismisses their concerns, fearing that publicising their findings might cause a panic and negatively affect the town's farming, fishing and tourism industries. In one scene, the mayor even holds up a glass of desalinated seawater and drinks it in front of a crowd, declaring it "the best darn water I've ever tasted." The scene foreshadows real-life instances during the 2015 Flint water crisis, in which Mayor Dayne Walling and President Barack Obama drank Flint tap water on television, attempting to dispel residents' well-founded fears about the water supply.[484] In *The Bay*, scenes at the Claridge local hospital show ER doctor Jack Abrams becoming overwhelmed by the amount of patients and the intensity of their symptoms, and frustrated with the CDC's inability to trace the origins of the disease or co-ordinate an effective response to the emergency. The CDC's failure results in thousands of infected Claridge residents dying, including Dr Abrams, and thus echoes the similarly deadly cost of the U.S. government's disorganised response to Hurricane Katrina.

Donna speculates that the parasites may have been produced by waste run-off from the town's chicken factory, further linking the supposedly *natural* disaster to human actions. The monsters in *The Bay* can thus be read to represent not merely

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[482] "Hurricane Katrina," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified September 23, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Hurricane-Katrina.
[483] Richard Pallardy, "Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified November 2, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Deepwater-Horizon-oil-spill.
[484] Obviously, this scene in *The Bay* is not a direct allusion, since the film was released three years before the Flint water crisis, but is rather a broader depiction of state complicity in disasters.

domestic disasters, but the global trauma of climate change. Similar to the

government's treatment of the parasites in the film, many real-world state and

corporate spokespeople continue to deny the existence of human-induced climate

change, because addressing it would disrupt the economic and social status quo.[485]

According to the scientific community, this denial and refusal to mitigate the effects

of climate change has produced, and will continue to produce, dramatic and

destructive weather events.[486] These events will in turn result in collective death,

devastation, displacement, and widespread psychological trauma. *The Bay* depicts

the personal perspectives on this environmental, and increasingly global, disaster.

The film is made up of scientific video reports of the bay, news coverage of the

outbreak, police dash cam footage of mental breakdowns, hospital video

correspondence of the diseased and dying, and various other correspondence

between residents caught amidst the chaos. *The Bay* presents individual traumatic

experiences of a local environmental disaster, while also linking those experiences

and demonstrating how they contribute to a macroscopic environmental disaster.

Despite their difference in setting and narrative, Urban FF horror films share

an important aesthetic quality with Remote FF Footage films: the monster is often

concealed or remains unseen by the characters. Indeed, in his analysis of

Cloverfield's style, Daniel North characterises the film as "a paranoid space of

obstructed vision and partial knowledge."[487] As argued in the previous chapter, this

threatening absence signifies the individual and social inability to comprehend a

traumatic experience. The events in the films examined in this chapter are on a

grander visual scale and have a contemporary thematic focus. They imbue symbolic

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[485] Liisa Antilla, "Climate of Scepticism: US Newspaper Coverage of the Science of Climate Change," *Global Environmental Change* 15, no.4 (2005): 338-340.
[486] *Ibid.*, 338-352.
[487] Daniel North, "Evidence of Things Not Quite Seen: *Cloverfield's* Obstructed Space," *Film & History* 40, no.1 (2010): 84.

trauma with global dimensions that are absent from the regional and historical focus

of the films in the previous chapter. North's assessment of *Cloverfield* can be seen

as applicable throughout the film. During the initial interruption to the party, Hud's

camerawork switches from a relatively stable and formal interview style, to being

highly jittery and unfocused. He scans the cityscape for the source of the commotion

while his voice can be heard asking other partygoers if they see anything. We

observe the camera frame darting wildly between buildings as Hud attempts to film a

figure that he describes as "something huge," before finally focusing on the Statue of

Liberty's face, inexplicably lined with what appear to be claw marks (see figure 3.2).

The sense of confusion is amplified as partygoers repeatedly shriek the questions:

"What is going on? Why is this happening? What was that thing? Is it the terrorists

again?" This final question explicitly links the attack to a collective sense of post-9/11

dread.

Figure 3.2 *Cloverfield* depicts Manhattan locals marvelling at the decapitated head of the Statue of Liberty.

Initially, Hud and his friends gravitate towards television as their source of

information and understanding about what is occuring, but discover that the news

organisations are just as ignorant as the general public, offering only vague

speculation and poor quality coverage. This failure of news sources indicates how political and media institutions can be just as uncomprehending as individuals. This lack of information is reinforced throughout the film by the fact that only fragments of the monster are glimpsed, such as a scaled torso moving between buildings, a massive tail thrashing around in the harbour, and finally, enormous teeth gnashing at the camera. In her analysis of the film, Emanuelle Wessels points out that the monster's body is also depicted as fluid and amorphous, moving quickly, spanning a large area, and refusing to be contained in one place long enough to be understood.[488] While many horror films prior to the FF horror subgenre, such as *Jaws* or *Alien* (Scott 1979), assume an understated approach to the presence of the monster, the active, character-driven gaze of Hud's camera amplifies that sense of psychic ambiguity, and reinforces the subgenre's motif of an ungraspable, fragmented experience.

Cloverfield's aesthetic signifies the incomprehensible sensations of the traumatic experience. That is, the film does not depict the monster in its entirety, only disembodied parts of it. Only the aftermath of the monster's presence are depicted: the physical destruction, pain and horror its fleeting presence engenders. This depiction corresponds with Caruth's description of trauma as a psychic fixation on the moment that was missed, and the uncertain connection between that "unclaimed experience" and the moments that followed.[489] The Statue of Liberty's decapitated head also signifies a sense of sudden defragmentation, which reflects both the character's and global societies' broader relationship to 9/11. If the monster represents the traumatic event of 9/11, then the statue's head represents the collective psychological experience of that event, particularly the collective American

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[488] Wessels, "'Where were You," 78.
[489] Cathy Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 3.

experience of the event. The image suggests that the world has suddenly

transformed into something unrecognisable, which is indeed how many trauma

victims describe their reality in the aftermath of a traumatic event.[490] However, this is

not necessarily because the world has changed, but rather that the individual or

collective psyche has been disrupted or shattered in some intense manner. Just as

the monster in *Cloverfield* is depicted as disembodied and ungraspable, so too is the

American collective psyche presented as unable to grasp what has occured, as

psychologically decapitated. This collective trauma can be attributed to the horror,

suffering and destruction witnessed as a result of the event. In this context, the

Statue of Liberty carries significant symbolic weight, being ideologically and

historically connected to the identity of New York City and the U.S. Therefore, its

destruction in the film gestures towards a traumatic experience that has resulted

from an assault on the American identity; namely, an assault on the citizenries'

sense of safety, strength and freedom. In her dissertation on "New Horror" cinema,

Naja Later argues that before 9/11, America thought of itself as untouchable and

unchallengeable, the last national superpower. However, this self-conception was

suddenly and violently disproven during the 2001 attacks. 9/11 demonstrated that

America was indeed touchable, that its people and territory were vulnerable to attack

and devastating injury.[491] Just as the *Cloverfield* monster is depicted as largely un-

documentable by the camera, Later argues that politicians and the media

characterised the site of Ground Zero in New York as a space of absence and

negation.[492] Symbolically, where once there was stability and continuity—in the

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[490] For an extended discussion of how individual and collective perceptions of physical landscapes are altered by traumatic events, see Maria Tumarkin's *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Melbourne: Melbourne Publishing, 2005).
[491] Naja Later, *Something to Scream At: New Horror, Terror Culture, and Screen Realities* (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2015), 10-13.
[492] *Ibid.*, 27-28.

impressive Twin Towers of the New York skyline—suddenly there is a gaping

physical and psychological wound, made by a then unknown and unknowable

aggressor. By showing another famous and national landmark being destroyed,

Cloverfield implicitly references the destruction of the Twin Towers, with both

structures presented to viewers as being scarred and toppled by an indecipherable

monstrous force.

The monsters in the *REC* films and *Pandemic* are also characterised by a

threatening incomprehensibility. They are barely visible in the films, usually being

glimpsed down long, shadowed hallways, through holes in walls or jarred windows

(see figure 3.3) or using night vision lenses. Often only part of the monster is

recorded, such as a limb grasping or teeth gnashing towards the camera. By

contrast, however, the zombies' presence is continually communicated to the

audience through the shaky and frantic coverage of their attacks and the splatters of

blood and gore that the camera observes in their wake.

Figure 3.3 In *REC*, Pablo glimpses an infected resident through the window of the
building's warehouse.

Within the films' 9/11-inspired setting and imagery, the zombies can be read as

indicative of the nebulous threat of contemporary terrorism: that is, an unknown

attacker that strikes innocent people suddenly from seclusion, before vanishing or being repelled. As is common in contemporary zombie films, *REC* and *Pandemic* depict everyone as being in danger of contracting and transmitting the zombie virus. Consequently, the zombies often wear "sympathetic faces," including friends of the characters' and even children.[493] For example, in *REC*, a young girl becomes infected and attacks her mother. The zombies in these films therefore rupture the boundaries between innocent and aggressor, transforming from one to other without warning. The characters' ongoing fear of who might be infected, or fear of becoming infected, echoes the widespread paranoia cultivated during the War on Terror: that terrorists may be anywhere, living amongst us, hiding behind the eyes of people we interact with and even care about, and that they could transform at any moment.

The *REC* and *Pandemic* zombies are similar to the *Cloverfield* monster in their insatiable appetite for destruction, free of motive or meaning. Like early 21st century media depictions of global terrorism, the monsters in Urban FF horror are portrayed as amoral: they cannot be understood or reasoned with, and their weaknesses are indiscernible amidst what North describes as "the confusion of communication breakdown."[494] Central to the traumatic shock of 9/11 was how unexpected it was. In contrast with the geopolitical stand-offs and proxy wars of the Cold War, the 9/11 attacks were, from a civilian's perspective, wholly random, unexpected, and unprovoked. As Steen Christiansen notes, there was no war in progress between the U.S. and a foreign power, and the attack was not only cruel, but seemingly irrational, in that it focused on civilians and non-military targets.[495]

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[493] Shelagh M. Rowan-Legg, "Don't Miss a Bloody Thing: *[REC]* and the Spanish Adaptation of Found Footage Horror," *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas* 10, no.2 (2013): 221.
[494] North, "Evidence of Things," 90.
[495] Steen Ledet Christiansen, "Ideological Fission: *Cloverfield* and Terrorism," in *Our Monstrous (S)kin: Blurring the Boundaries Between Monsters and Humanity,* ed. Sorcha Ní Fhlainn (Oxford, Inter-Disciplinary Press: 2010): 200-201.

The *REC* films convey this sense of traumatised bewilderment through a variety of motifs. For example, the characters trapped in the apartment are unable to converse with the environmental agents outside. They are deliberately kept ignorant of the truth of the biohazardous threat with which they share the building. At several points, the characters attempt to interact or reason with the zombies, but they elicit no response except aggressive screeches and gnashing of teeth. The building's vertical space and coiling staircase also make it difficult to comprehend what is happening, as their frame of visual knowledge is always limited to one segment of the building at a time. Nevertheless, strange sounds and cries of anguish issuing from other floors signal the constantly shifting situation around them. This not only confuses the characters, it also makes it very difficult for them to think or plan clearly. The reporters are only able to cover what is immediately in front of them—fragments of the event—and remain completely ignorant of the event's causes or context. Likewise, the reporters are also compelled by their own mission to produce a sensationalistic news story. Thus, in the early stages of the film they exhibit a ghoulish excitement as the disaster unfolds and are so eager to capture something dramatic and raw that they hinder and intrude upon the firefighters' attempts to rescue people. This behaviour impairs their capacity and objectivity to document the truth, which further obscures the event. The confused and frantic representation of the event by Angela and Pablo produces a sense of psychic fragmentation, as though the characters and viewers are unable to comprehend what is occurring and thus unable to perceive beyond the traumatic experience. Their entrapment within the apartment symbolises their entrapment within an all-consuming and incomprehensible event. The overwhelming effect simulates the characters' feelings of hypervigilance, demonstrated in their frantic flights up and down the stairs of the

apartment, and numbness, demonstrated in their inability to arrive anywhere, resolve anything, or escape the building. Like the victims and witnesses of 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks, such as the Madrid Bombings, Angela and Pablo are continuously trapped in a state of fear, psychologically impaled by the horror of the incident that did occur and bracing against the threat of the same incident occurring again, at any moment.

As stated earlier, Urban FF horror films differ from prior doomsday and monster films. Narratively, the films examined here do not depict the struggle to defeat the monster or monsters. Primarily, they are *not* told from the perspective of soldiers on the frontline, scientists in a laboratory, or politicians in a war room. They portray what might have been the viewpoint of one of the tiny figures darting beneath Godzilla's or King Kong's feet. To extend North's assessment of *Cloverfield*, Urban FF horror films emphasise the "confusion, degradation and disorientation of disaster"[496] and provide a stark contrast with the birds-eyed spectacles and fetishisation of destruction in pre-9/11 disaster films. The films achieve these aesthetic qualities through what Glen Donnar describes as "adherence to the restricted perspective of the amateur hand-held camera."[497] In Urban FF horror films, this perspective explicitly evokes the modes through which 9/11 and subsequent disasters were, are and will continue to be represented.

In these films, the interplay between the diegetic cameraperson and the images they record echoes the immediate media coverage during the events of 9/11. The 2001 terrorist attacks were significant in the history of mass media, Neil McRobert argues, because the disaster was broadcast in real time. In contrast with

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[496] North, "Evidence of Things," 86.
[497] Glen Donnar, *Terrified Men, Monstrous Masculinities: Representing & Recuperating American Masculinities in Contemporary Hollywood "Terror Threat" Films* (PhD diss., RMIT University, 2013), 156.

coverage of past disasters and wars, during 9/11 there was virtually no difference between what the broadcasters knew and what viewers knew.[498] Likewise, all characters in Urban FF horror films are rendered observers, and the dreadful events unfold before their eyes with little reflection or comprehension. All that they can do, and all that the viewer watching another broadcasted disaster can do, is point and watch.

The Global Spread of Trauma in the Post-9/11 World

Along with invoking the horrific images and experiences of 21st century disasters, Urban FF horror films also depict the ways that the psychological impact of those events was transmitted. Because of the technologically and globally interconnected nature and structure of 21st century societies, the imagery of 9/11 extended beyond a single place, spreading through the world in a matter of minutes, and beyond a single day, being continually replayed for years. The combination of the events of 9/11 and contemporary mass media networks significantly contributed to what Kaplan calls a culture of trauma, in which traumatic events gradually pervaded the communicative instruments and interfaces that society has come to rely upon.[499] All of the films examined in this chapter depict infection as a metaphor for this vicarious spread of trauma.

The *REC* films, *Pandemic* and *The Bay* all present variations of the zombie. As mentioned, these zombies are not the lumbering corpses from Romero's *Dead* series, but instead are shown to be swift and aggressive. These "fast zombies"[500] are a type that was established in 21st century cinema, first in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, and later in a series of FF horror films, such as the films examined in this

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[498] McRobert, "Mimesis of Media," 144.
[499] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 15.
[500] Flint, *Zombie Holocaust*, 140.

chapter. Notably, the source of zombification in 21st century horror films is not portrayed as something magical or the supernatural, but rather as a biological disease.[501] This bloodborne virus seems to affect living and dead humans and sends its hosts into fits of extreme uncontrollable rage. The distinct traits of this contemporary version of the zombie signify two key aspects of collective trauma in the 21st century: firstly, the images of traumatic events spreading rapidly through the globalised media environment; and secondly, the manner in which trauma spreads resembles a virus, infecting those who interact with distressing images and using them to re-transmit it to others. The revival of zombies and the zombie apocalypse in Urban FF horror films suggests a growing nihilism in 21st century societies, to which the dissemination of traumatic images undoubtedly contributes. David Flint underscores this link between the zombie and collective nihilism when he argues that, "while other monsters have faded, the zombie seems as relevant as ever—perhaps even more so, given the increasingly uncertain world we live in… an apocalypse is at the back of everyone's mind."[502]

While *Cloverfield* does not feature human zombies, its antagonist secretes a host of vicious insect-like offspring, which are shown to infect people with deadly venom. When travelling through the subway, the central characters are attacked by these creatures, and Marlene is bitten. She later complains of feeling ill, and after being taken to a hospice, Hud witnesses her silhouette thrashing in pain inside a surgery tent. She dies in a horrific geyser of blood that splashes everyone around her, presumably with the same deadly venom. This is another example of infection serving as a metaphor for vicarious trauma. Until this point, the film had shown Hud

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[501] In *28 Days Later*, "rage virus" refers to the disease that transforms people into fast-moving hostile cannibals. While this term does not feature in other films, the symptoms it refers to have become commonplace in subsequent zombie films.

[502] Flint, *Zombie Holocaust*, 154.

developing an emotional bond with Marlene and he is clearly distressed by the sight of her pain and suffering. Upon her death, Hud's distress is communicated through his becoming completely still and letting the camera fall from his eye to his waist, as though he is immobilised by shock. The death itself occurs behind a white sheet, and is presented only as a shadow, as though to suggest the event is too traumatic for Hud and the non-diegetic viewer to process. Nevertheless, the splattering blood of her demise makes a dramatic red smear that exits the tent, suggesting that while the event itself is concealed, the impact of the event expands outwards. Symbolically, this conveys that her traumatic pain and death spreads beyond the experience of Marlene herself and affects those around her and those who witness her demise. The shot depicts Hud being psychologically infected by her death at the same time as the medical staff are physically infected. The fact that this psychological infection occurs through the camera lens is significant, as it suggests that the viewer may also be threatened by the vicarious spread of traumatic experiences.

The contamination of water is the central danger depicted in *The Bay*, and this theme relates to vicarious trauma in two key ways. Firstly, the various contemporary events that the film alludes to, such as Hurricane Katrina, the BP Oil Spill, and U.S. water supply crises, are all water-based disasters. Despite being a vital substance for all living things, and an important site of sustenance, trade, recreation, and spiritual fulfilment for millions of Americans, the film frames water as a central element of 21st century collective American trauma. Secondly, water serves as the literal and figurative element that connects people throughout a town, a country and the world. *The Bay* conceptually parallels the circulation of water and the circulation of information and images. This reading is evident in the opening scenes of the film, which depict Donna's coverage of the town's Independence Day celebrations; the

scene continually cuts between Donna reporting to the camera and shots of residents frolicking in sprinklers and pools. At one point, children blow bubbles that pop on the lens. This shot suggests that the contamination of Claridge's water supply by a deadly parasite serves as an apt metaphor for the contamination of communication networks by traumatic experiences. Just as the townsfolk ingest those parasites through swimming, bathing, drinking and eating, so does the collective psyche ingest traumatic experiences through the endless torrents of broadcast television and the internet.

Beyond their use of metaphors of infection, the films also depict the technological transmission of trauma within their narratives. The events of *The Bay* are portrayed through manifold recording devices and perspectives, including text and video correspondence between friends, colleagues and family members. The characters' blind panic and tearful testimonials to one another evoke similar audio messages and camera footage uncovered in the wake of U.S. disasters in the 21st century, from 9/11 to the Orlando nightclub massacre. In one interaction in *The Bay*, a girlfriend phones her boyfriend and weeps as she shows him the strange rashes on her skin. Her emotional distress transmits to him via the phone's microphone, video camera and digital transmitter, and he begins to weep as well. In another scene in *The Bay*, police investigate a domestic disturbance and discover a house full of infected people who attack the officers and plead to be killed. The incident is recorded on the officers' hip radios and from a distance by their car dash cam. Other police hear the attack on their car radios and travel to the house to assist, only to have the terrified officer inside flee the house with gun in hand, shooting them and then himself (see figure 3.4). This scene shows the ways in which the trauma of some people, in this case the family of those infected, can vicariously traumatise

others, in this case the police. This spread is shown in the film to be facilitated by the

communicative technology of the police radio. Similar to Marlena's death scene in

Cloverfield, the deaths of the family in *The Bay* occur unseen inside the house,

symbolically uncomprehended; however, the vicarious trauma of the police officer is

captured by the dash cam. The trauma is then re-transmitted a second time to the

surviving officers in the cars and dozens of others listening on their radios, who have

just witnessed several of their colleagues die of murder and suicide.

Figure 3.4 In *The Bay*, a police officer responds to an infected family and is so
disturbed by the experience that he shoots himself.

The suffering that the initial police officer records within the house includes one

woman screaming that something is "eating" them from within, while the officer

himself shrieks that something is "coming out" of her. This description of physical

trauma and biological contagion can also be seen to describe the psychological

trauma that contaminates the officer and his colleagues listening to the disturbing

event. Furthermore, the immobility of the dash cam, as the responding officer exits

the car and is murdered, reflects the frozen horror of the psyche being overwhelmed

by a traumatic experience. This reading is reinforced as the film cuts to an internal

camera, showing the remaining passenger staring in stunned silence. This

passenger, like the non-diegetic viewer, can be seen to embody the collective mediated observance of dozens of traumatic events in the 21st century, which we are continuously bombarded with, but are unable to prevent, intervene or undo.

The *REC* films also depict traumatic experiences as being transmitted between characters via communication technology. For example, in *REC* 2, a member of the SWAT team becomes surrounded by zombies and is forced to barricade himself inside a bathroom. He is so distressed by the attack, and so disturbed by the screams of his colleagues and screeches of the other zombies through his headset, that he puts his gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger to make it stop. Because he watches himself in the bathroom mirror as he does it, this traumatic image is transmitted to the other members of the SWAT team via their shoulder cameras. The audio of the gunshot is also transmitted, echoing the impact of the suicide: that is, each of his colleagues hears the explosion in their own earpiece, just as the actual bullet passes through the victim's same ear and into his brain. Thus, the SWAT officers suffering is dispersed into the senses of his colleagues, the trauma magnified by their familiarity with him and identification with his fear.

In another instance, a resident of the building is bitten by a zombie, infecting him with the virus. Rather than endangering the rest of the group, he climbs placidly onto a stair railing and plunges to the ground floor (see figure 3.5). Later, a firefighter is attacked by an infected human and falls over the bannister in the struggle, plunging to his death. These images of suicide and defenestration echo images of the falling victims of 9/11 – those who were on the upper floors of the World Trade Centre when the planes hit, and rather than burn to death, decided to jump from their windows. An estimated 200 people jumped or fell to their deaths on 9/11. Their grim

and hopeless gestures were photographed and recorded with cameras, and broadcast to thousands of news stations and published in thousands of newspapers, exposing the suffering of those individuals to millions of people all over the world. The narrative and diegesis of *REC 2* depicts a microcosm of such vicarious trauma, showing the way that traumatic nihilism can spread between people who are not in physical proximity but technological proximity.

Figure 3.5 In *REC 2*, a resident is bitten by a zombie and commits suicide by jumping down the apartment's staircase.

Pandemic features a similar scene of traumatic violence captured by a headset camera and transmitted to the other characters' headsets. Towards the end of the film, a gang of infected people ambush the navigator Denise. Her helmet camera records the attackers tearing open her stomach and eating her entrails as she screams into the microphone. The helmet is eventually knocked from her head, where it continues to film her thrashing and then going limp. The separation of Denise' helmet camera from her body, during the apex of the attack, suggests a psychological dissociation from the traumatic event being experienced, by both Denise and her comrades. Upon viewing Denise's death on her own headset, Rebecca becomes enraged and proceeds to shoot all three attackers as they beg for

their lives. She then becomes silent and is unable to talk about the incident or Denise's death. Her dramatic mood swing from intense anger to detached calmness suggests that Rebecca herself is traumatised. Significantly, she was not physically present at the traumatic event, but witnesses it only through her headset. As when the SWAT officers view their colleagues' suicide, Rebecca is shown to have empathised with Denise—as a woman, as a mother, as a fellow survivor—and thus Denise's traumatic experience in that moment becomes her own.

More broadly, the use of first-person perspective in FF horror aligns the viewer's subjectivity with the characters. We are able to identify with their shock, dread and suffering because we can imagine expressing similar emotions and taking similar action if we were living through the event. Moreover, with the ubiquity of camera phone technology and social media, we can increasingly imagine that one day we might record a benign moment in our lives and have that moment interrupted by sudden horror. If we were to die while filming a terrorist attack or natural disaster, our recordings might remain, as it has for many victims of the 21st century, as found footage. We may identify with the characters of Urban FF horror because we may fear that we may one day be the protagonist of a FF horror film.

Urban FF horror films offer different insights into trauma theory than Remote FF horror films. The films in the previous chapter allude to past events and transgenerational trauma. The found footage is portrayed as having been found in a remote or foreign location, decaying with age. The films examined in this chapter, however, allude to contemporary disasters and conflicts, and events that have occurred within and directly affect the current generation. Accordingly, in Urban FF films the footage is portrayed as having been found in the immediate aftermath of a disaster that has yet to conclude. The two categories' contrasting treatment of

collective trauma reveals different ways in which traumatic events are dealt with. Kaplan observes that, during the 20th century and earlier, traumatic events or their traumatic effects tended to be ignored or repressed by the dominant culture, before being expressed through cultural texts of succeeding generations. This was partly due to the fact that psychological trauma was not identified or treated by the psychology community until the late 20th century, but also partly because the reach and volume of media was far less advanced than it is today.[503] Comparably, PTSD and vicarious trauma are more comprehensively discussed and understood within contemporary society, and thus local and global traumatic events can be addressed more immediately in academia, society and culture. Unfortunately, the traumatic events of the 21st century are, in the words of McRobert, "broadcast in real time,"[504] thus making the speed and spread of trauma far more difficult to resolve. Where Remote FF horror films depict the ongoing social and psychological legacy of past traumas, Urban FF horror films present the experience, transmission and impact of recent and emerging traumas.

The Management of Collective Trauma by the State

The incorporation of public and populous spaces distinguishes Urban FF horror films from other categories of the subgenre, in that they directly depict the actions of state officials in responding to a disaster. In contrast with earlier doomsday films, wherein representatives of the state typically help resolve the crisis, Urban FF horror films portray the state as universally malicious, and tend to depict authority figures as endeavouring to silence or control the traumatic experiences and testimonies of victims in order to propagate an authorised narrative. Far from lionising and

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[503] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 32.
[504] McRobert, "Mimesis of Media," 144.

identifying with political, scientific and military institutions, these films focus on the perspectives of civilians, and illustrate how they are victimised by both an invading monstrosity and an oppressive, indifferent domestic regime.

This dual antagonism reflects the political climate of the post-9/11 U.S. The collective sense of vulnerability and bewilderment that 9/11 engendered in American society resulted in an almost immediate attempt to re-establish American identity and relegate the event to history, where it could no longer pose any harm. Donnar observes in the ensuing political and cultural discourse an attempt to "re-masculinise" America and emphasise a strong, united front – not merely to discourage the nation's enemies, but for the perceived wellbeing of its own citizens.[505] These nationalistic gestures manifested through displays of military might, the cultivation of a good-versus-evil geopolitical paradigm,[506] and declarations of war against nations and terrorist organisations.[507] Consistent with this increasingly militaristic society, New York scholar Diane Taylor observes a concerted effort on the part of the government and media to control and censor media content relating to the 9/11 attacks. In the years after its destruction, the former World Trade Centre site was strictly supervised and only designated photographs, taken by professionals, were allowed to circulate. According to Taylor, only "the permitted images, the permissible stories" could be distributed, and accounts that did not cohere with a culture of patriotic adulation were marginalised.[508] Many of the most shocking images of the attacks, such as the "falling man," were not reprinted or

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[505] Donnar, *Terrified Men, Monstrous Masculinities*, 43.
[506] For example, in the months and years following 9/11, U.S. President George Bush frequently used the term "axis of evil" to refer to the countries of Iran, Iraq and North Korea, and vowed to "rid the world of evil-doers." Andrew Glass, "President Bush Cites 'Axis of Evil,'" *POLITICO*, last modified January 29, 2002, https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/29/bush-axis-of-evil-2002-1127725.
[507] "War on Terror," *HISTORY*.
[508] Diane Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 241.

rebroadcast.[509] This decision was partially out of respect for victims and in an effort to prevent collective distress, but partially an attempt to prevent the demoralisation of the American population.[510] However, not everyone agreed with this act of censorship, with journalist Tom Junod defending the publication of the falling man on the basis that it signified "our most intimate connection to the horror of that day."[511] Urban FF horror films allegorically restore these images of death and destruction, along with the feelings of overwhelming horror they inspired in the spectator. Moreover, the films present critical views of the state's attempts to control representations of the event in accordance with their own interests—to cover up the conditions, causes and effects of 21st century traumas—rather than bear witness to them and address them.

Cloverfield subverts the nationalistic messaging imposed upon 9/11 in a number of ways. Rob's self-stated mission to trek through the crumbling city to rescue Beth represents a traditional heroic story in which the white American male attempts to rescue the white American female victim from a foreign invader. According to Donnar, Hud has the role of the hero's bumbling sidekick, who, in the midst of the carnage, seeks out Rob as a symbol of decisive and intrepid masculinity.[512] North calls the film a parody of a generic Hollywood "romantic rescue narrative."[513] On the periphery of this heroic central plot, Hud records the political and media responses to the attack. For example, while he watches live news coverage of the monster on a store television, a caption reads "New York Under

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[509] Melissa Whitworth, "9/11: 'Jumpers' from the World Trade Center Still Provoke Impassioned Debate," *Telegraph*, last modified September 3, 2011, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/september-11-attacks/8737671/911-Jumpers-from-the-World-Trade-Center-still-provoke-impassioned-debate.html.

[510] *Ibid.*

[511] Tom Junod, "The Falling Man: An Unforgettable Story," *Esquire*, last modified September 9, 2016, https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/.

[512] Donnar, *Terrified Men, Monstrous Masculinities*, 133-134.

[513] North, "Evidence of Things," 91.

Attack." This caption echoes actual news headlines the day after 9/11, which included "America Under Attack" and "America at War."[514] This allusion in *Cloverfield* reflects the warlike narrative imposed upon 9/11, which was in turn used to justify increased national security, border protection, surveillance programs, limitations on freedom of speech, and ultimately declarations of war.[515] Correspondingly, in their interactions with the National Guard, Hud observes soldiers detaining and quarantining civilians, and planning a large-scale assault on the monster. The order that Rob and the National Guard attempt to restore is symbolised in the opening and closing footage of the film, and in various brief segments, in which Rob and Beth are shown enjoying a peaceful and romantic day together at Coney Island. This footage represents the supposedly idyllic, pre-disaster (perhaps pre-9/11) world that the monster has interrupted—literally, in the form of its attack on the city, and aesthetically, in the form of the attack footage overwriting the romantic footage.

However, both the idyllic pre-disaster narrative and the heroic disaster narrative prove to be disingenuous. Hud's record of the party suggests that the pre-disaster world was far from perfect: it includes Jason's and Lily's constant bickering; Rob and Beth exchanging insults in the hallway; Rob expressing regret about his decision of move to Japan; and Rob's excessive, self-pitying alcohol consumption. It is, as Donnar describes, a dense fabric of interpersonal conflicts.[516] Similarly, the closing footage of the film, of Rob and Beth kissing on the Coney Island Ferris Wheel reveals an object falling behind them into the bay, suggesting the monster's initial arrival in New York. This revelation also subverts the imposed narrative of an idyllic past, as it suggests that the monster has co-existed with the characters for a protracted period prior to its disastrous emergence. This suggestion is also

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[514] Wessels, "'Where were You," 74.
[515] Later, *Something to Scream At,* 69-71.
[516] Donnar, *Terrified Men, Monstrous Masculinities*, 146.

presented in *The Bay*, with the parasites revealed to have infested the coast long before the outbreak occurs. In *Cloverfield*, Rob's attempts to restore the pre-disaster world echo Kaplan's assertion that individuals have a more positive identification with their pre-trauma self than their present self.[517] However, as Steffen Hantke asserts, "the moment of trauma renders this world inaccessible; it erects a strict chronology that is only reversible by way of nostalgia, which provides the lens through which all actual flaws of this world are retrospectively erased."[518] Rob's ultimate failure to rescue Beth can be considered to affirm this assessment of the traumatised individual.

At one stage in *Cloverfield*, Hud speculates that the monster may have been the product of a government experiment "gone wrong," subverting Rob's and perhaps the viewer's assumption that the monster is foreign or that its actions are unjustified. Hud's paranoia echoes the growing public distrust of the U.S government in the months and years following 9/11, as well as repeated accusations in news media and online that the White House had been aware of a potential attack and failed to act accordingly,[519] or even worse, was complicit in the attacks.[520] Hud's implication of government responsibility for the attack in *Cloverfield* can also be seen to gesture towards some the horrors of America's past and present foreign policy—another experiment that has arguably "gone wrong"—and thus serves as a warning that the trauma visited upon foreign civilians will inevitably be visited upon domestic civilians. In this context, the monster can be read to symbolise two parallel consequences of American interventionism – the retaliation of someone or

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[517] Kaplan, "Global Trauma," 61.
[518] Steffen Hantke, "The Return of the Giant Creature: *Cloverfield* and Political Opposition to the War on Terror," *Extrapolition* 51, no.2 (2010): 251.
[519] Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror*, 73.
[520] This theory is posited in the discredited but widely-viewed documentary *Loose Change: An American Coup* (Avery 2009).

something victimised by the U.S. and the externalised violence of the U.S. turned inwards or against itself. Unlike previous doomsday films, *Cloverfield* does not end with Rob and Beth escaping New York City or the National Guard defeating the monster. It ends with military forces carpet bombing Midtown, generating mass casualties and destruction, and killing Rob and Beth. The monster, however, lives on and can be heard roaring as the footage ends. The film's ending hints at a new authoritarian status quo with a message indicating that the footage is now classified as government property and that Central Park has been renamed "US-447." This detail echoes the government's and media's renaming of the World Trade Centre to "Ground Zero" in 2001.[521] Thus, *Cloverfield* portrays the state as provoking or being complicit in the traumatic event, and of censoring or "classifying" the lived experiences and final testimonies of its victims.

The *REC* films also depict the state's attempts to impose an authorised narrative over the disaster and silence conflicting viewpoints. The premise in the first film, of a current affairs reporter covering firefighters on a routine emergency call which turns cataclysmic, bears a striking similarity to James Hanlon's *9/11,* a 2002 documentary that was planned to be about a New York City firehouse and which happened to be recorded on 11 September, 2001. The post-production of Hanlon's documentary has been criticised for attempting to narrativise and politicise, rather than observe, the events of 9/11. For example, Steph Craps argues that the documentary tries to master trauma by "rendering it legible in terms of existing cultural conventions" – recoding the events from an overwhelming confrontation to "ideologically charged notions of heroism and community."[522] The documentary was

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[521] Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller, *Horror After 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 7-8.
[522] Steph Craps, "Conjuring Trauma: The Naudet Brothers' 9/11 Documentary," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 37, no.2 (2007): 185.

originally intended to follow a rookie firefighter during his first few weeks in the

firehouse and frames the emergency response to the World Trade Centre attacks as

his "coming-of-age story," including use of slow motion, uplifting music, and cloying

voice-over about "rising to the challenge."[523] Graphic images of the dead and dying

were excised from the final version of the film, and while this decision might have

been a gesture of good taste and respect for the victims, Craps criticises the

filmmakers for sanitising the footage for popular consumption, and for demonstrating

a double standard in comparison to America's graphic, "in your face" news coverage

of third-world disasters.[524] The most damning critique of the then mainstream U.S.

account of 9/11 came from philosopher Slavoj Zizek. He argued that the American

political and media establishment twisted 9/11 into a hopeful, heroic narrative, which

betrays the victim's pain and creates a simplistic good-versus-evil stance that was

ultimately used as a moral justification for violent, wide-scale retaliation.[525] Hanlon's

9/11 exemplifies the American government's narrative, as it aligns America with the

rookie firefighter as embodying a foundational innocence being confronted by, but

overcoming, a foreign evil. Contemporary Hollywood films, such as *World Trade

Centre* (Stone 2006) and *United 93* (Greengrass 2006), also conformed to this

nationalistic narrative. In a significant departure from this paradigm, this chapter has

shown how Urban FF horror films deliberately subvert nationalistic tropes by alluding

to the death, gore and open wounds of 9/11 and working through the collective

experiences of shock, bewilderment and nihilism in response to the attacks.

The *REC* films portray government agents as facilitating the characters'

trauma by trapping them inside the building. Zizek's critiqued the dominant U.S.

government as "betray[ing] the victims" of 9/11 by exploiting their suffering for

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[523] *Ibid.*, 185.
[524] *Ibid.*, 187.
[525] Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso Books, 2002), 32.

political ends; likewise, by quarantining the building, the state in *REC* and *REC 2* smothers the victim's screams and conceals their wounds from public view, ensuring that only an authorised narrative survives. In his analysis of *REC*, Aldana Reyes observes that Angela's insistences that Pablo continue recording "seem to signal that the images become a form of record or document through which to challenge the official version of events as reported by the authorities."[526] The *REC* films eschew the hopeful, coming-of-age sentiments expressed by Hanlon's *9/11*, by presenting the responding firefighters and police officers as overwhelmed, confused, unsure, and mentally vulnerable. In *REC 2*, a fireman is driven close to insanity by the horror of the situation, and upon realising he is trapped, resorts to verbally abusing the other building occupants. In another scene in *REC 2*, a SWAT agent becomes trapped and commits suicide. *The Bay* also depicts a policeman taking his own life after encountering a family massacred by parasites. These characterisations do not diminish the heroism of the actual emergency workers who responded to 9/11, but do give voice to the intense trauma they experienced – trauma that did not necessarily fit the state narrative of a strong and unified American front.

The *REC* films subvert the contemporary geopolitical narrative of the U.S. and Europe as innocent global actors whose victimisation authorises unlimited aggression. Firstly, the films code the antagonists as being both victims and perpetrators: that is, the zombies are each infected through an unprovoked and irrational attack, but once infected become the perpetrators of identical attacks. Secondly, the protagonist Angela is depicted as being eager for a disaster to occur so that she can document an exciting segment for her program, which undermines her and Pablo's roles as innocent bystanders. Thirdly, as the zombie threat rises, the

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[526] Aldana Reyes, "The *[REC]* Films," 152.

other residents of the apartment demonstrate paranoid and xenophobic attitudes towards one another, with some blaming the outbreak on a Chinese family whose apartment they accuse of always smelling of "raw fish." This overt antagonism undermines the residents' status as victims of an unprovoked disaster or attack. Lastly, the infection of the protagonist challenges the presumed innocence of Western subjectivity, as well as the justifications of U.S. and European interventions in foreign affairs and conflicts. Indeed, *REC 2* ends with the revelation that Angela has become the new *prime zombie* and that the monster is merely pretending to be a news reporter in order to escape the building and unleash a plague upon the world. The fact that the prime zombie takes the guise of a frightened white woman further reinforces the metaphor of Western intervention as a cruel, destructive entity posing as an innocent victim.

In *Pandemic*, the state exploits a traumatic global disaster in order to establish a violent and oppressive regime. The depiction of this regime can be read as an allusion to several of the policies established by the U.S. during its War on Terror. Roya Jabarouti and ManiMangai Mani write that the collective trauma caused by 9/11 was so profound that many Americans were convinced that terrorists and suspected terrorists were disqualified from possessing essential human rights, and sowed the belief that fellow Muslim-American citizens were dangerous and untrustworthy.[527] The images and testimonies of 9/11 were framed by the U.S. government as a justification for the establishment of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Indeed, the early scenes of *Pandemic* are suggestive of a detention centre, depicting infected humans sleeping, pacing and writhing inside cells. The general who sends Rebecca on her mission even makes reference to a research wing where

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[527] Roya Jabarouti and ManiMangai Mani, "From a Post-Traumatic Culture toward the Cultural Trauma of Post-9/11," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 5, no.1 (2014): 159.

experiments are being carried out on human subjects in hopes of finding a cure, which echoes the Central Intelligence Agency's "advanced interrogation techniques," a torture program conducted by U.S. defence agents against detained terrorist suspects.[528] When Rebecca witnesses soldiers executing infected people, the general sympathises with her horror, but retorts that "we're not proud of it" but "that's the way it is [now]." Notably, the creatures in *Pandemic* are never actually referred to as zombies and are presented as being capable of planning and speech. This makes their slayings at the hands of military, and later the protagonists, morally questionable. This moral ambiguity is highlighted in a scene where an infected man begs for his life before Rebecca shoots him.

The infected humans do not represent global terrorists so much as the way that foreign people have been framed through the prism of 9/11 – as senseless, remorseless hordes of monsters fixated on America's destruction. In Rebecca's mind, the trauma of losing her husband and possibly her daughter justifies the murder of infected people. This, combined with the general's insistence that infected people are instinctually murderous and cannot be reasoned with or redeemed, echoes the harsh binary agenda of America's War on Terror. That is, in the early 21st century, the U.S. government promoted the viewpoint that domestic citizens and allied nations should honour the victims of 9/11 by committing to an indefinite global war against terrorism, and anyone who challenged this viewpoint was dishonouring the victims of 9/11 and siding with the terrorists. The hidden danger of supporting this position is that by ratifying the oppression of foreigners and fellow citizens by your government, you also ratify your own oppression. *Pandemic* dramatises this danger when, at the end of the film, soldiers mistake Rebecca for an infected person

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[528] Jeannette L. Nolen, "Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp," Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified March 13, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Guantanamo-Bay-detention-camp.

attacking the base and automatically kill her. Thus, the film suggests, as do

Cloverfield and *REC*, that characters who respond to their own psychological trauma

through retaliatory violence simply contribute to an ever-repeating cycle of collective

trauma.

In *The Bay*, the local government and national governments are depicted as

respectively causing and covering up the disaster that wipes out the people of

Claridge. The film's plot never confirms exactly what produces the parasites, but

implies that it is steroid-laced faecal runoff from local chicken farms. However,

characters also speculate that the crisis may be the result of the government testing

biological weapons, radiations leaks from the local nuclear plant, and terrorists

poisoning the food supply. The diversity of speculation is indicative of the ambiguous

nature of the sociological and ecological threats facing contemporary American and

global societies. It is perhaps so ambiguous that it is easy for politicians and mass

media to deflect the public's attention from impending problems, and for the public to

accept these deflections. This tendency is reflected in *The Bay*, when the town's

mayor rejects scientific warnings and declares the bay is safe, mostly because,

according to Donna's narration, it would have been politically and economically

inconvenient to declare it otherwise. This act of censorship by the local government

is a microcosm of the censorship carried out by the national government in the wake

of the outbreak and mass death. Donna describes how all recorded accounts of the

disaster were confiscated by the state and the victims of the event have never been

allowed to describe their experiences of what occurred. Similar to the mayor's refusal

to declare the bay dangerous, the motivation for the national government to cover up

the disaster seems to stem from a desire to uphold a narrative of order and stability.

The tension between the accounts of the state and experiences of the trauma victims

is symbolised in the bay itself – the surface appears peaceful, and people have a natural expectation and desire that it will remain that way. However, beneath the surface, the film depicts danger and anguish, which only grows the more it and its causes are denied.

In *The Bay*, and indeed all of these films, attempts by the state to control public perceptions of events depicts present examples of the suppression of historical trauma. Tellingly, the main event that the mayor does not want interrupted is the town's Independence Day festival. The rituals performed by Claridge's locals during the festival serve the town's and country's social and economic interests. They cultivate the perception of a continuous, benevolent and successful narrative of American civilisation, from its glorious founding to its present prosperity. The festivities also actively resist the intrusions of distressing past revelations, such as the collective trauma experienced during and because of the America's founding, as well as distressing present revelations, such as the imminent social or environmental crises threatening America's foundations. Donna's recollections of Claridge echo the idyllic pre-disaster world recalled by Rob in *Cloverfield*: she describes the harbour as the place where "I had my first crab dinner, my first summer kiss." The footage of the festival appears—like the surface of the infested bay—peaceful; it shows a sunny day, sparkling water, and a marina bustling with happy families playing, dancing, spending, and feasting on local produce. These opening scenes are scored by a playlist of classic American songs, broadcast by a cheerful DJ. Just as Donna and Rob sentimentalise the pre-disaster world, the town and its local government are imposing a nostalgic perception of the history of the nation. The scenes also suggest collective complacency and ignorance, highlighted by contrast with the unearthed oceanographic reports, which detect that the placid beauty of the bay conceals an

198

ecological nightmare "unfolding beneath its surface." The emerging parasites once again evoke Caruth's metaphor of trauma as an unseen and untreated wound: when they are ignored, the creatures are shown to fester and spread below the bay—the source of Claridge's fare and trade—and then eventually beneath the flesh of its citizens. The parasites swell to a sudden bursting point, transforming—or perhaps recalling—America's commemoration into an orgy of screaming, viscera and death. The trauma experienced by Donna stems not merely from experiencing the outbreak, but the fact that the experience has been denied by society and deliberately erased by the government to whom she once proudly paid allegiance.

Urban FF horror films do not merely evoke the collective psychological trauma of 9/11, but also the collective psychological trauma of the victims of American violence and intervention. Along with evoking the framing of the terrorist threat, the *Cloverfield* monster evokes the American military-industrial complex itself, and in particular, how it is experienced from the perspective of its third-world, radically outmatched targets. It is an *imperial* American monster – reckless, engorged and collapsing under its own weight, finally exposed to and turned against the domestic citizens who allowed it to be unleashed on their behalf. Meanwhile, the infected humans in *REC*, *Pandemic* and *The Bay* evoke the dehumanised foreign civilian, whose dehumanisation gradually contaminates the domestic citizen, rationalising regimental exploitation, oppression and aggression being directed against everyone, including films' audiences.

This chapter has demonstrated that *Cloverfield*, *REC*, *REC* 2, *Pandemic*, and *The Bay* signify the collective psychological trauma of 9/11 and post-9/11 disasters. Each film alludes to recent traumatic events through their content, which depicts urban destruction and panicked crowds, and their form, which communicates

through found footage the lived experience of this panic and bewilderment. The films also denote the vicarious spread of individual traumatic experiences through mass media and the production of a unique and pervasive global culture of trauma. This traumatic transmission is personified by a new incarnation of the zombie, a monster that Urban FF horror films helped re-introduce into 21st century cinema and culture. These films frame these traumatic experiences as being enabled and instigated by the state, which in turn attempts to control these experiences and censor victim testimonies. Like Remote FF horror, Urban FF horror films demonstrate scepticism of dominant socio-political narratives, in this case, narratives of more recent historical events. Rather than repressing and rationalising the shocking images and raw psychological distress of events such as 9/11, these films return to them.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that FF horror films represent the relationship between individual trauma and collective trauma across four distinct categories of the subgenre. While the films' themes and relationships to trauma theory varies between categories, the overarching relationship between individual and collective trauma in these films is consistently demonstrated throughout the thesis. The characters' handling of the diegetic camera conveys their subjective perception of the world, while the frantic cinematography that results from interactions with the monster signifies their traumatic response to the event. Likewise, the characters' performances, and their inability to document the monster, combine to produce a unique aesthetic. This aesthetic represents the traumatic experience from the perspective of the individual. Meanwhile, the narrative, setting and theme of each film link this aesthetic to social and cultural contexts, and, by extension, collective trauma. These instances of collective trauma, as the analysis has demonstrated, include national historical trauma, contemporary global trauma, systemic domestic trauma, and perpetrator trauma.

Along with examining the recollection of psychological trauma, the analysis has revealed another overarching theme of the subgenre: the state's role in repressing traumatic experiences. Each category addresses a different aspect of this theme. Remote FF horror films, with their focus on forbidden folklore and secluded sites, tend to signify the uncovering of historical traumas; specifically, in the case of the three films examined, collective traumas originating from the colonisation of America. The symbolic function of the wilderness and monster undermine the dominant celebratory narrative of America's settlement and founding, and reveal the suffering that this experience engendered among past inhabitants. Urban FF horror

films, with their focus on urban attacks and destruction, tend to signify a re-assessment of contemporary global traumatic events, such as 9/11, the War on Terror and natural disasters. The five films examined explicitly implicate the state in the disastrous events, as well as portraying officials' attempts to censor coverage of the event or silence the testimonies of victims. Thus, both categories depict how the state imposes an autocratic narrative onto past and present events. This imposition is dangerous, because, as with individual trauma, if collective trauma is repressed or unresolved, it will continue to fester and spread, harming the minds of the victim, as well as their family, friends, community, and ultimately, their nation. However, the films endeavour to pierce these imposed narratives of national righteousness, resilience and triumph, and instead return the viewer to the raw psychological distress of the traumatic event. This restoration suggests that society must confront and reclaim distressing events, in order to recover from them. Furthermore, the subversive perspectives of FF horror films can be read to challenge the state's attempts to perpetuate the cycle of trauma through continuous imperial domination and conquest, which the subgenre suggests is the primary source of collective trauma. Domestic FF horror films, with their focus on domestic fear and suffering, tend to signify continuous and generational cycles of domestic trauma. The two films examined demonstrate how the sexist and patriarchal norms of the public sphere also serve to oppress women in the private sphere, and in turn facilitate and perpetuate cycles of abuse. Finally, Perpetrator FF films depict the perspective of violent and sadistic individuals, and thus signify the process and effects of perpetrator trauma. This revelation unsettles the state's insistence that serial killers and mass murderers are inhuman aberrations of society, when ultimately their actions reflect the historical and imperial violence carried out by the state. The

identification of this overarching theme in FF horror films demonstrates the radically anti-imperialist subtext of the subgenre. The subversive, unauthorised gaze of the FF camera, as it records censored images, marginalised viewpoints, and secluded and concealed spaces, frames the subgenre as an accessible discursive mode for presenting opposing historical viewpoints and directly criticising repressive state and mass media power structures.

The thesis makes a significant contribution to FF horror literature. It expands upon the work of Heller-Nicholas, Zanini, Aldana Reyes, and McRobert in defining the subgenre. The thesis also expands upon the research of Blake, Lowenstein and Elm et al., who examined representations of psychological trauma in 20th century horror films. Accordingly, the thesis presents an original hypothesis and framework for analysing FF horror films by applying psychological trauma theory. In devising this framework, I drew upon the work of film theorists, such as the people cited above, as well as trauma theorists and clinicians, such as Caruth, Herman and Kaplan. The framework links horror film theory, genre theory, spectator theory, and psychological and collective trauma theory, in order to survey and produce an original analysis of 14 significant or acclaimed FF horror films. Unlike the aforementioned horror film scholars, whose work focuses primarily on the 20th century, this thesis focuses primarily on 21st century horror cinema. Furthermore, the analysis includes films that have yet to receive any substantial academic attention, such as *The Last Broadcast*, *Willow Creek*, *The Bay*, *Pandemic*, *Gang Tapes*, and *Zero Day*. The thesis also contributes to film theory literature by demonstrating that FF horror films, contrary to the arguments of some scholars and critics, meet the definition of a subgenre. Besides embodying a set of common conventions, and

developing or revising the conventions of previous horror subgenres, FF horror films are united by their consistent signification of psychological trauma.

The thesis also makes a significant contribution to understanding the structure, experience and social context of psychological trauma in films. The theory of trauma is still relatively young. It was not until 1980 that PTSD was officially recognised by the American Psychiatric Association and an entry was published in the *DSM*.[733] Meanwhile, C-PTSD has still not been included in the *DSM*. Consequently, understanding of psychological trauma is relatively limited. Obviously, psychology is the best-placed discipline to conduct research and produce theories on the disorder. However, film and film theory can also provide insights into representation of trauma. Given that *Blair Witch* was released in 1999, FF constitutes the first new type of horror film to be produced after the widespread publication and acceptance of trauma theory. This context helps explain why the subgenre continuously evokes different aspects of trauma theory, in ways that previous horror subgenres had only intermittently or superficially engaged. I assert that the subgenre was shaped, consciously or not, by a burgeoning awareness of the frightening impact and legacy of psychological trauma among filmmakers and viewers.

The task of describing and addressing trauma is an ongoing challenge for victims, psychologists, historians, lawyers, activists, and communities throughout the world and throughout time. Trauma is, by its very nature, unspeakable and ungraspable, and this nature allows it to fester and spread, until eventually individual psychic wounds become national wounds. Thus, texts such as FF horror films are valuable, because they render the traumatic experience artistically, invoking a

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[733] Ironically, this was also the year that *Cannibal Holocaust* was released.

sensorial language where spoken and written words have failed. FF horror films manage to describe trauma in indirect terms – through frightening sensations, disoriented subjectivities, and menacing absences. At its most effective, the FF horror aesthetic offers a complimentary, contrasting, and arguably more vivid and visceral impression of trauma than any article or book could achieve. That is to say, the subgenre provides unique insights into psychological trauma, as well as its nature and legacy, and therefore close textual analysis of FF horror films contributes knowledge to film theory, trauma theory and their potential connections.

Regarding further research into FF horror, this thesis demonstrates the way that various films address national and historical trauma. However, the thesis mostly confines its analysis to American films, with a few European films and an Australian film also included. This was necessary, given that the thesis intended to address the most significant and influential examples of the subgenre, most of which originate from the U.S. However, as the Found Footage Critic database shows, hundreds of FF horror films have been produced in countries throughout the world, including Japan, South Korea, India, Turkey, and Mexico. Applying the conceptual framework outlined in this thesis to these films may produce fresh insights into the collective traumas, and cultural expression of these traumas, for different countries and nationalities. For example, the Japanese filmmaker Kōji Shiraishi has produced several acclaimed FF horror films, and in a previously published article, I argue that his 2009 film *Occult* represents the legacy of residual suffering and guilt endemic to Japanese culture due to the events of World War II.[734]

It is difficult to predict the future of FF horror films. While the subgenre reached the peak of its popularity at the beginning of the 2010s, significant films

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[734] Duncan Hubber, "Exhuming the Past: Found-Footage Horror and National Wounds," *Frames Cinema Journal* 11 (2017), http://framescinemajournal.com/article/exhuming-the-past-found-footage-horror-and-national-wounds/.

were released before and after that point. The enormous number of titles catalogued by the Found Footage Critic database demonstrates the intense appeal of the subgenre, to filmmakers and viewers. Likewise, relatively low production costs, easy access to amateur recording technologies, and the raw and experimental style synonymous with the subgenre, have proved, and will continue to prove, very enticing to young and burgeoning visual artists. In 2018, the online streaming service POV Horror was launched; it specializes in offering and producing FF horror films.[735] Even as I write this conclusion, locked in my study during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new FF horror film entitled *Host* (Savage 2020) has just been released to universal critical praise.[736] It depicts a Zoom call between a group of friends, also quarantined, who perform a séance and inadvertently invite a vengeful spirit onto the call. Thus, regardless of whether the subgenre is popular at a particular point in time, it is firmly ingrained in horror fandom and production. Like the monster, zombie, ghost, demonic possession, and slasher subgenres, bold new versions of the FF horror film will continue to be envisioned and produced. Over the years and decades, new and powerful entries will be added to the subgenre. Like prior subgenres, FF horror touches upon something primal, indescribable and terrifying within people and societies. These films teach us that nothing is ever truly lost. Nothing—no technological recording, psychological experience or social memory—can remain buried forever. Eventually, all things are found.

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[735] "About," *POV Horror.*
[736] "*Host*," *Rotten Tomatoes*, accessed October 18, 2020, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/host_2020.

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