

KADİR HAS ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ



**A THREAT EXCEEDING THE DIEGETIC UNIVERSE:  
*THE LAST HORROR MOVIE***

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

OĞUZHAN DURSUN

NİSAN 2017



# YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

OĞUZHAN DURSUN

Sinema ve Televizyon Programı'nda Yüksek Lisans derecesi  
için gerekli kısmi şartların yerine getirilmesi amacıyla  
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“Ben, Oğuzhan Dursun, bu Yüksek Lisans Tezinde sunulan çalışmanın şahsıma ait olduğunu ve başka çalışmalardan yaptığım alıntıların kaynaklarını kurallara uygun biçimde tez içerisinde belirttiğimi onaylıyorum.”

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OĞUZHAN DURSUN



## ÖZET

### FİLM EVRENİNİ AŞAN BİR TEHDİT: SON KORKU FİLMİ

Oğuzhan Dursun

Sinema & Televizyon, Yüksek Lisans

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Nisan, 2017

Bu tez, işlediği cinayetlerin video kaydını alıp bu kayıtlarla kendi filmi çekmeye çalışan seri katil Max'in başkarakter olduğu *The Last Horror Movie* (Julian Richards, 2003) filmine odaklanıyor. Film, korku türüne ait başlıca konvansiyonlarını kullanmakla beraber "buluntu film" (*found footage*) biçimini de kullanıyor. Bu filmi benzerlerinden ayıran ve derinlikli bir incelemeye değer kılan ise "buluntu film" biçiminin farklı bir işlev üstlenerek kullanılmasında yatıyor.

Bu çalışma öncelikle *The Last Horror Movie* filminin detaylı bir biçimsel analizini yaparak filmi, korku türü ve "buluntu film" modu açısından değerlendirir. Tez, bu filmin, korku türünün özelliklerini ve bahsedilen modun stratejilerini nasıl kullandığını ve hangi açılardan bu kalıplardan farklılaştığını inceler. Bu bağlamda tez, filmin anlatı ve üslup özellikleriyle "buluntu film" modunu araçsallaştırarak nasıl ve ne amaçla korku konvansiyonlarını baltaladığını araştırır. Filmin ana karakteri seri katil Max'in işlediği cinayetleri göstermekten çekinmesi, karanlığı bir korku unsuru olarak kullanmayı reddetmesi ve korku sahnelerine müdahale ederek ve bu sahneleri keserek izleyiciye uzun uzun açıklamalar yapması detaylı olarak ele alınır. Film, tüm bunları "buluntu film" modunun gerçeklik iddiasına dayanarak yapar. Böylece tez, filmin bu tür stratejilerle, korku türünün alışlagelmiş konvansiyonlarını yıkarak aslında daha da gerçekçi ve inandırıcı bir korku efekti yarattığını iddia eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Korku, gerçeklik, şiddet, seri katil

## ABSTRACT

A THREAT EXCEEDING THE DIEGETIC UNIVERSE:

*THE LAST HORROR MOVIE*

Oğuzhan Dursun

Cinema & Television, Master

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This thesis focuses on the film - *The Last Horror Movie* (Julian Richards, 2003) - in which the protagonist is a serial killer who is recording his murders and trying to shoot his own movie. Additional to using a variety of conventions of the horror genre, the film includes “found footage” mode. What makes the film distinct from its counterparts and renders it worthy of deeper inquiry is that found footage form takes on a different function.

The thesis firstly makes a detailed formal analysis of *The Last Horror Movie* and evaluates the movie with respect to horror genre and found footage mode. The thesis analyzes how the movie uses the patterns of horror genre and found footage strategies, and with which aspects does the movie diverge from these conventions. The thesis investigates how and why the movie undermines horror codes and conventions by focusing on the narrative and narration aspects of the film and by instrumentalizing the found footage mode. In the film, the facts that the protagonist avoids demonstrating killings scenes, rejects to use darkness as an element of horror, interrupts all the horror scenes and gives exhaustive explanations to the audience are elaborated in great detail. The film does all these depending on the reality claim of the found footage mode. By demolishing the ordinary conventions of horror genre with these strategies, the film claims that it creates a horror effect which is more realistic and convincing.

Keywords: Horror, reality, violence, serial killer

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## List of Abbreviations

POV	Point Of View
VHS	Video Home System



## INTRODUCTION

The question of reality has always been a driving force of human thought and curiosity. The starting point for this thesis was my personal interest in the difference between the people's reactions when they are aware of the camera and that of when they are not. The research conducted at the Hawthorne Works circumstantially brings about the Hawthorne effect proving that people change their behavior when they are aware of being observed but the ethical questions stopped me from further research (Harvard Business School). Nevertheless I did not quit at once and searched for new dimensions, and in this process, I have found that reality TV shows have a very similar style in terms of recording people. The shows are popular and the characters are peeped by so-called candid surveillance cameras but these shows have a different relation to reality. Then I turned to film environment and found a field that handles the reality in a different way while I was watching found footage films.

I started to watch found footage films and did a research about their style. The presence of the camera in the diegetic world, the lack of non-diegetic sound and the reality claim all attracted me. I realized that academic sources on these films were not enough and there was not an agreement on what found footage is. That is why I chose to focus on this topic. While I was watching found footage films almost every day, I encountered a film that approaches reality discussion in an interesting and a quite critical way: *The Last Horror Movie* (Julian Richards, 2003). What makes me curious about it is actually how the story of this thesis comes up.

The film is distinct from its peers. It pushes us to adopt factual stance rather than fictive stance, and it shows us a different aspect of breaking the fourth wall. However, while trying to reveal the films' position, it is to be handled with great

attention and the research is to be narrowed down. The movie is labeled as a horror film but whether it utilizes found footage mode is vague, still I prefer not to focus on horror but found footage because of my research interests. Therefore, I narrowed down my work only to the related horror codes and conventions which are specifically utilized or ignored by the film.

Since found footage mode is highly related to a reality claim, to mention about the documentary modes is a must. However, this thesis includes only particular documentary modes such as observatory mode in relation to the film. Besides, all found footage films are not in our spectrum. Even if there are some current found footage films utilized in other genres, I prefer to focus only on the horror genre.

The main motivation of this work is about how and why *The Last Horror Movie* undermines horror conventions by employing found footage mode. A related question is what the film proposes us new instead. Besides, the key questions asked in this thesis are: in what ways the film engages with the found footage mode and how it handles the reality. To clarify the film's position clearly, the film is divided into shots to measure the ratio of certain characteristics. However, in this analysis, I exclude the film's first sequence because this scene which is presented as a cliché slasher film scene is a parody of horror films. There are 129 shots in the film. By benefiting from the analysis of shots, of the camerawork, sound and the use of lightening along with the analysis of the film's narrative, main questions are answered.

Chapter one lays out the theoretical background that is necessary to understand *The Last Horror Movie*'s structure. Since horror constitutes the main part of the discussion about where the film stands, this part investigates the codes and conventions of horror films. Then found footage mode and its conventions follow it.

In the last section of the first chapter, reality discussion and the question of verisimilitude in found footage horror films are examined. In this regard, realism of documentary style is discussed, as well as the juxtaposition of found footage mode and the observatory documentary mode is exposed. The discussion of snuff film and its depiction of reality are also mentioned.

It comes up that visual darkness is an important element of horror films, and “act of showing over the act of telling” is another one even if it does not pertain to the horror movies (Brophy 2000: 276). However, the most important feature of horror films is apparently the presence of a threat in the narrative. In this regard, the mood in which “normality is threatened by the Monster” constitutes the main part of the horror structure (Wood 1979: 14). While these monsters could be “impossible beings” as supernatural creatures (Langford 2005: 166), “human-monsters” who serve as threatening creatures also become a convention in time (Williams 2002: 167). In the narrative, these monsters create danger for other characters, and the reaction of characters “in the properly horrified way” is another symptom of horror movies (Bordwell and Thompson 2012: 340). The violence coming after the meeting moment of the monster and the victim is yet another indicator of horror films because of their conflict (Neale 1980: 16). Serial killer films, which include threat, human-monster and violence, are therefore evaluated under horror films. Horror filmmakers employ diegetic and non-diegetic sound to create suspense and fear (Cherry 2009: 68). Lighting codes are also utilized to create darkness, shadows and obscurity (Cherry 2009: 55). Camera movements and angles, in this regard, serve the same purpose to create shock, fear and revulsion that commonly include point-of-view camera shots and framing (Cherry 2009: 53). Lastly, editing, as an external body of horror films, is employed to create a horror atmosphere (Cherry 2009: 85).

The second dimension related to the form of *The Last Horror Movie* is found footage mode. In the found footage films, we often see raw cutting, elliptical narrative, grainy-shaky handheld camera, and precariously framed images that mimic the style of amateur filmmaking with a title card informing the viewer that film is a compilation of events shot by characters who are dead or disappeared (Sayad 2016: 44). These films try to constitute an “illusion that the found-footage has been found” (Sayad 2016: 52). That is why the absence of directorial imprint in found footage films is important. The camera for this reason is predominantly a handheld camera (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 25). In this mode, handheld cameras are mostly set by diegetic characters (Sayad 2016: 54). Because of this amateur aesthetic, the presence of the camera in the diegetic world and the appearance/image of the cameraman reflected on the mirror is expectable (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24). The shots taken with these shaky cameras are constantly “behaving hesitantly, tentatively” (Sayad 2016: 56). This unstable image quality and shaky shots strengthen the amateur aesthetic and “promote the idea of immediacy and the experience of being a ‘fly-on-the-wall’” (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 171). Off-screen space in this regard is important. The characters often leave the frame or appear immediately in the frame. As to sound usage, non-diegetic sound is not used in found footage films (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 25).

The reality claim is probably the most important characteristic of found footage films. The issues of “realism” and “reality” are often examined in contemporary found footage horror (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24). Found footage mode, in fact, takes its strength from its similarities to the documentary modes (especially observatory mode). The most dominant style imitated is the observational mode, which has the claim that the camera mostly shoots events as they really are

happening (Nichols 2001: 33). The found footage mode, in this regard is emphasizing the claim of truthful recording of reality (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 184). That is why some scholars see the found footage mode as part of the broader “mockumentary” tradition (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 184). However, found footage films do not mock the documentary modes, they only utilize it to make their stories seem real. In this way, the viewers are led to suppose that the movie is a documentary (Koshi 2013: 111). In fact, these films promote the sense of verisimilitude, and put forward that what the viewer have watched is composed of raw material, “unprocessed reality” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24). These films create a sense of authenticity by showing certain fragments of everyday life, and this situation creates “a sense of realism” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 30). The handheld camera and the low quality of image contribute to the “construction of amateurism” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 4). The rapid camera movements, dynamic frame borders, POV, and fly-on-the-wall style strengthen the “impression of actuality” (Cherry 2009: 90). As Wetmore argues, all of these bring about “the illusion that what we see is real”, and it is the ultimate aim of found footage films (Wetmore 2012: 78). While analyzing this aim, it is answered how and why found footage films push to adapt factual stance. The discussion of the reality claim of snuff film comes up here. It shows many similarities with the found footage horror films. In fact, these two approaches juxtapose and especially after 2000s hybrid products comes up such as *August Underground* trilogy (Fred Vogel, 2001-2007) that are snuff films employing found footage mode. First examples of the found footage horror films could be found in the 80s but it is *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) that made the concept popular and brought it into the mainstream. After YouTube revolution, and huge success of *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) found footage

mode was crowned. *The Last Horror Movie* is released between *post-Blair Witch* and *pre-Paranormal Activity* time span.

In Chapter two, formal and narrative characteristics of *The Last Horror Movie* are exposed. The heritage of found footage that has an important influence on the film is mentioned in the first section of this chapter. In the second part, it is demonstrated why we should see the movie as a horror film as we need to be sure of its position to understand the film's internal genre criticism in the last chapter. The third section of this chapter investigates the reasons why we should think that the film utilizes found footage mode.

The threat element that is the prominent feature of horror films appears in *The Last Horror Movie*. The main character, Max, is clearly posing a threat for the diegetic characters. He attacks the "normal life" and even goes beyond it and threatens us at the end of the film by breaking the fourth wall. Max also comes up as a human-monster because he is a serial killer. The violent acts of Max that could be seen in 24 shots out of 129 shots are another symptom of horror conventions. The formal structure of *The Last Horror Movie* gives us many clues for the verisimilitude of the film. For instance, the camera's rapid visual movement thanks to handy-cam usage and different camera angles, POV shots, fly-on-the-wall style and Dutch angles are utilized as in horror films. Creaking wooden house, sneaking human footsteps, breathing and screams that are associated with horror films are used in the film as well. These characteristics of *The Last Horror Movie* prove that it is clearly a horror movie.

*The Last Horror Movie* also utilizes found footage mode. It could be seen in terms of both the film's narrative and its narration style. In the film, the presence of the diegetic cameraman and the director Max show similarity with found footage



mode. The story is rationalized in this way. The filmmaking process therefore could be included in the narrative. The presence of the cameraman comes into sight in various ways. He could be seen when his image is reflected on the mirror, when he is pointed at by the secondary characters, when he eats, when he becomes a character for the interviews or when he takes action to change the storyline. Since the diegetic cameraman uses handy-cam, the camera often shakes and focusing problems occur. Therefore, in the film, the frame is mostly out of focus as in found footage films. Almost one fourth of the film shots are composed of out-of-focus parts. Low image quality due to the diegetic camera is also seen in the film. Natural lightening and the diegetic light sources are the vital elements of the film. The light source has a diegetic reason just like the sound. That is why we never hear non-diegetic sound in found footage films. These features which are seen in *The Last Horror Movie* are all used to serve to constitute an amateur aesthetics which is the basis of found footage films.

In Chapter three, the tricky part comes up because this chapter gives the account of the ways in which *The Last Horror Movie* undermines horror elements. The first section shows how the film executes to undermine horror elements with narrative structure and narration (camerawork, light and sound) by benefiting from the film's shots. The last section of the chapter questions why the film undermines horror codes and conventions. In the film, the omnipotent diegetic director Max constantly intervenes with the editorial structure of the film. He interrupts almost every scene and obstructs the story to flow in a linear direction. Max explains the previous and following shots to the non-diegetic audience and tries to teach us lessons, gives information about the diegetic incidents. We see scenes that he directly addresses the audience in 27 of 129 shots. He not only controls the editing structure

of the film as such, but also gives order to the cameraman from the off-screen space. The sound, in this respect, serves the same purpose. Max constantly governs the shots while they are taken in addition to his direct-address scenes. A research by Hoshino Koshi et al shows that editorial intervention leads to the “impression of artificiality” and undermines the reality claim of the film relying on the found footage codes (Koshi 2013: 116). The found footage mode, to remember, does not often emphasize editorial work (Aloi 2005: 197). Nevertheless, Max’s interventionist stance indirectly undermines horror conventions. His omnipotent direction weakens the consistency of the narrative. This does not serve to construct a powerful impression of reality.

He is also a character who mocks horror films in the narrative sense. The viewers are apparently deceived in some twist scenes, and horror conventions are mocked by utilizing suspense. Five scenes in the film are organized in this way. All of them are specifically executed to fool the viewer and mock the horror conventions. Furthermore, the film avoids showing violence that is the prominent symptom of horror movies (Neale 1980: 21). There are 24 shots out of 129 which do include violence. While 11 of them show/represent violence, 13 shots do not. In the shots showing violence, it is mostly forbidden to see the rest of the scene and a fast cut follows the violent act. The blood, in this respect, is hidden as well. There are only three scenes showing it for a few seconds but they never show clearly. Even the shots depicting violence do not show violence explicitly. Violence is shown in a short duration, and as soon as the violent act appears, the shot is cut rapidly. *The Last Horror Movie* is therefore a film, which rarely shows violent acts and indirectly undermines the horror elements. The scenes in which the darkness sets in are neither related to violence nor associated with horror. In total there are 21 shots including

darkness, 20 of which are placed in peaceful scenes. On the contrary, 22 shots depicting violence (out of 24) are taken on daylight. All of these elements contribute to undermine horror codes and conventions.

The first sequence of the film presents a slasher film cliché and Max presents his film as an antithesis to this convention. His approach towards horror, murder and people all support his diegetic film's stance. He shows how a murder scene, and generally a horror film should be. That is why the shooting technique, the characters, the color, the story and the content of the violence serve to prove this claim. Max shows us so-called real footage of murders which are "the real" horror at least by his definition (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 118). He executes the murders by breaking the fourth wall and talking directly to the viewer. According to him, the diegetic viewers and the non-diegetic audience of *The Last Horror Movie* are not different as they are both his potential victims. That is why he threatens us by looking directly into our eyes. The film in this regard pushes us to adopt factual stance rather than fictive stance. These two are about the audience's position for the film in the context of indexical bond. Max's threat is such a powerful one which "takes the found-footage gimmick to its zenith," according to David Ray Carter (2010: 313). The reason of blurring the lines between the diegetic viewers and non-diegetic ones is to show the real horror. That is why the protagonist mocks horror codes with his comments about horror and constantly violates the generic conventions. He therefore often emphasizes that his film is a different horror film. Therefore it is called *The Last Horror Movie*. The person who watches the film is a victim-to-be. Found footage's reality claim enables us to offer such an argument and the possibility of "what-ifs" strengthens his point (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 119). The possibility of actualization of

Max's diegetic threat for the non-diegetic viewers makes it different and pushes the boundaries of the reality.



# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 Horror in the Movies

Horror is an emotion which dates back to humanity's first appearance on earth. This powerful sense promotes fear or terror when human beings feel frightened (Jones 2005: X). It is related to the fear of death and the unknown, which emanates from the danger of uncontrollable power of nature (Jones 2005: 3). It has a dynamic nature and has reshaped itself with new perceptions and mentalities throughout history. According to Brigit Cherry, it really is "extremely flexible, and able to adapt easily to various periods of cultural change and differences across national boundaries" (2009: 11). We see that horror responds to historically and culturally specific anxieties (Grant 2010: 4). The fear of repressed animal desires, sexual difference, nuclear warfare and mass annihilation, lurking madness and violence hiding underneath the quotidian and bodily decay are all clues of this historical shift (Grant 2010: 1). In short, it originates from the perception of threat of a violent disaster which could take many forms in variable influence in various cultures (Rockett, 1988: 43).

The word "horror" comes from the Latin "*orur*," which describes "the physical sensation of bristling of one's hair standing on end." (Grant 2010: 3). Besides this physical sensation, the emotion itself is actually about inner feelings. In this regard, James B. Twitchell makes an ontological distinction between horror and terror: "the etiology of horror is always in dreams, while the basis of terror is in actuality" (Twitchell 1985: 14). Horror also has strong and long-established traditions in artistic words. People of literature, art and philosophy, quite aware of this emotion, have benefited from its nature to tell their stories and to produce their

artifacts. Literature, comic books, and the theatre utilized the horror sense for their own sake and many horror stories flourished in these fields (Cherry 2009: 13). Thanks to the horror tradition and pre-cinematic forms such as medieval woodcuts, Grand Guignol theatre and the Gothic novel, horror could easily find an open door to itself in films (Grant 2010: 2).

The history of horror cinema is as old as cinema's own history. *The Devil's Mansion* by Méliès was made in 1896 and it is accepted as the first vampire movie (Cherry 2009: 61). Horror films have continued to use horror's traditional conventions from that day by renewing itself with new fears. That is why the horror film has consistently been one of the most popular movies in film history, while other genres have cycled in and out of popularity (Grant 2010: 2). Surely some horror films could be popular at certain times as other films, for example the classic Gothic horrors were more prevalent in the 1930s, whereas slasher films were dominant in the 1980s (Cherry 2009: 7). However, this fluctuation does not prevent horror to appear in the movies, it reshapes itself in the new forms, and new generic innovations constantly strengthen it.

Horror-themed films influenced by the Expressionist style in the classic horror film have prevailed till today. The style's dense reliance on unknown, atmospheric *mise-en-scène* and visual distortion to create a sense of threat has still been contemporarily showing (Langford 2005: 162). On top of that, the arrival of sound enabled horror films to make use of this new field. Audiences were already familiar enough with the horror conventions long before the sound made the scene (Grant 2010: 2). Today, horror is presented mostly with technological opportunities such as special effects. According to Philip Brophy, for instance, there are two major areas that affect the modern horror film: the growth of special effects with cinematic

realism and sophisticated technology, and historical over-exposure of the genre's iconography, mechanics and effects (2000: 278) And horror filmmaker currently acts accordingly because he or she "knows that you've seen it before; it knows that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know" (Brophy 2000: 279). It is clear that horror, from the beginning till today, has secured a place for itself and horror films have stood the test of time.

### **1.1.1 Codes and Conventions of Horror Films**

Robert Stam asks about genre analysis: "Should genre analysis be descriptive or proscriptive?" (Stam 2000: 14). When we follow the descriptive genre analysis type, we could have some problems because, as Jancovich stated, what makes a film a horror film differs from one person to the other and the person who wants to reach an ultimate consistency may be in total disagreement with another's classification (Jancovich 2002b: 152). That is why, when we identify certain conventional features of horror genre, proscriptive aspect will be opted. Vast majority of horror films do follow some of the conventions (Cherry 2009: 30). Therefore, it is appropriate to find the characteristics commonly used in horror movies. Brophy argues that contemporary horror film is based on tension, fear, anxiety, sadism and masochism (2000: 279). While horror films may aim at these types of reactions, they could also "provide visions of a world where action may or may not have meaning, where a monster may or may not be sympathetic, where evil people may or may not win out in the end" (Freeland 2000: 274). By considering these basic elements, we could enumerate prominent conventions of horror films to find a common ground.

Darkness is an important element in horror films. Stephen Neale argues that in the horror film, "darkness is the edge between presence (that which it conceals) and

absence (that which it is)” (Neale 1980: 43). He also claims that darkness does neither quite belong to the narrative world nor it is simply a signifier (Neale 1980: 43). And the shadow, according to him, takes a similar role in horror films when the monster is about to attack or hides from the potential victims (Neale 1980: 43). In addition, dark and half hidden images, silhouettes, and “traditional gothic iconography with a bold use of colour” constitute most part of the contemporary horror imagery in the context of darkness (Grant 2010: 3). However, darkness is not only about hiding figures, it is also related with not showing directly. Interestingly enough, showing the terrifying subject is also important in horror films. For Bruce Kawin, “A good horror film takes you down into the depths and shows you something about the landscape” (2003: 324). Horror films, in this regard, not only tell the horror story in narrative sense, but also more importantly show it (Brophy 2000: 280). This “act of showing over the act of telling” makes the films horrifying (Brophy 2000: 276). Horror films intentionally prefer to show the violence acts, and refuse to cut away from them. Diffrient states, in this context, that they “turn the sight and site of death into a spectacularly graphic touchstone” (2004: 55). Even if some critics, like Freeland, oppose the graphic form that uses gore to demonstrate that evil exists, showing the monster is the dominant convention (2000: 215). Showing the horror act or subject takes us to what is to show, and the answer is the monster.

The monster is another important element of horror films, and the word monster has its etymological roots in the Latin *monstrare* which means to demonstrate, to show, to reveal. Thus the monster exists to de-monstrate (Langford 2005: 166). Robin Wood defines horror films as a collective nightmare, and in these movies “normality is threatened by the Monster” (Wood 1979: 14). The conflict



between normality and the monster constitutes the essential subject of the horror films (Wood 2002: 32). Horror films actually followed suit and took example of horror stories in literature. Horror stories are based on discoveries, and in their fictional order, “first the reader learns of the monster’s existence, then some characters do, then some more characters do, and so on; the drama of iterated disclosure—albeit to different parties—underwrites much horror fiction” (Jancovich 2002: 35). Horror stories are dramas proving the existence of the monster and revealing the origin, identity, purposes and powers of the monster (Jancovich 2002: 35). Monster’s role in horror is vital:

because it has at the center of it something which is given as in principle unknowable—something which, *ex hypothesi*, cannot, given the structure of our conceptual scheme, exist and that cannot have the properties it has. This is why, so often, the real drama in a horror story resides in establishing the existence of the monster and in disclosing its horrific properties. Once this is established, the monster, generally, has to be confronted, and the narrative is driven by the question of whether the creature can be destroyed (Jancovich 2002: 35).

Monsters are “impossible beings” physically, “they are created, not born” (Langford 2005: 166). That is why they arouse interest and constitute a dynamic curiosity (Jancovich 2002: 35). These scary creatures are “undead, neither alive nor dead, or unnatural—mutation, the result of bad science, or originating from a world beyond ours” (Grant 2010: 4). However, horror convention in the context of monsters has evolved as well. There were supernatural zombielike creatures and satanic cults in the movies before 60s, but Polanski and Romero redefined the monstrous, “thereby redefining the role of the hero and the victim as well – and situate horror in the everyday world” (Waller 2000: 258). In this regard, we should mention about Hitchcock’s Norman Bates which represented a new kind of movie monster. With Bates, the traditional supernatural monster of horror cinema turned

into an ordinary one (Williams 2002: 167). Andrew Tudor's classification of the evolution of horror monsters gives us sufficient data:

In prewar horror, threats mostly originated from outside (the individual or the community) and were more likely to be supernatural in origin. The postwar decade, the heyday of atomic mutations and alien invasion, also stressed external threats but shifted decisively towards the secular. (...) the genre's focus has shifted away from such 'external' threats towards the less well-defined ground of individual psychology and the paranormal rather than the supernatural (Tudor 1989).

The change of monster image from extraordinary to ordinary is an important shift for horror movies. This surely does not mean that horror movies prefer one to another and abandon the extraordinary completely. The horror narrative has still been constructed between the natural and the unnatural (or supernatural) (Cherry 2009: 30). But the monster now may be a human being. The horror is no longer bound to the dreadful monster and it does not have to be created with special effects (Crane 1994: 10). For example, the monster could be a psychologically disturbed individual as Norman Bates, while Dracula, Frankenstein, Nosferatu and similar supernatural monsters are clearly beyond human and have metaphysical features. Then why did horror movies start to show ordinary monsters instead of conventional supernatural ones? Langford states that these types of human-monsters are all the more terrifying because “they are not marked by the visible indications of different physical deformities, vast size, otherworldly appearance” (Langford 2005: 168). Daniel Shaw offered another term for this ordinary monster. He proposes “horrific human” which consists of human killers as Jigsaw of *Saw* (1997: 161). I prefer using the term “human-monster” to define monsters who are not supernatural.

As Stephen Neale indicates, violence comes to the forefront in both the horror film and the gangster film (1980: 16). However, the violence itself is not a determinant, its “conjunction with images and definitions of monstrosity” is the one

(Neale 1980: 21). The important point here is that this violence is not performed only by the monsters; victim-heroes who try to eliminate the intruder and restore the normality are also under this umbrella (Langford 2005: 164). Showing violent scenes is an important sign of contemporary horror films. Horror imagery, if we accept Morris Dickstein's statement, becomes "hard-core pornography of violence made possible by the virtual elimination of censorship" (1980: 33). Brigit Cherry says that most of the serial killer films, rape-revenge films and several slasher movies could be exemplified as "film with a human killer" (Cherry 2009: 161). "Slasher films" should be mentioned here because the term "slasher" became popular in the early 1980s to define a subgenre of horror films (Cherry 2009: 31). In these films, a killer "returns to the scene of his or her earlier crimes and kills a group of people one by one, before finally being killed by a female survivor" (Cherry 2009: 25). This killer, with few exceptions, is human and mostly male, and his victims are mostly beautiful, young, and sexually free women (Clover 2000: 294). Serial killer films which use violence a lot, differ a bit. To define a serial killer, we should know the difference between mass murder and serial killing. Serial murder is defined "as involving an offender associated with the killing of at least four victims, over a period greater than seventy-two hours" (Jenkins 1994: 23), and "cooling-off period" is an important part of the definition (Seltzer 2000: 98). Serial killer films contain the murders and violence act with this cooling-off period of the serial killer. *The Last Horror Movie* is also a serial killer film which has similar characteristics however detailed analysis of the film will be handled in the last chapter.

### 1.1.2 Analyzing the Narration of Horror Films

Narration, as an important element, constitutes meaning for films. Horror films use it to create a fearful atmosphere. They mostly use excessive forms of cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, editing and sound to arouse visceral sensations and to “horrify” the viewer (Powell 2005: 2). In horror films that are largely psychological or supernatural, the effect can be provided through suggestion, the use of lighting, sound effects and music (Cherry 2009: 80). It should be analyzed how these elements are used in horror films one by one. Horror filmmakers employ sound to create suspense and fear (Cherry 2009: 68). Sound in the films shows itself in both ways: Diegetic and non-diegetic. Human sounds such as heart beats and footsteps, breathing human voices, screams, door creaking, knives puncturing flesh are all utilized to create fearful atmosphere (Cherry 2009: 70). Music is also utilized to create sensations of tension, alarm and anxiety in the viewer; and horror film music can often be “discordant, pulsing with the rhythm of a heartbeat” (Cherry 2009: 69-70). Sound designer David Sonnenschein states that “Music using harmonic intervals in the range of the major second, minor second and diminished fifth can create moods of anticipation, anxiety and malevolence, respectively” (2001: 121). And for Neil Lerner, with his Ph.D. in Musicology from Duke University; repetitious drones, clashing dissonances, and stingers (those assaultive blasts that coincide with shock or revelation) are influential (2010: XI) This know-how could be interpreted as a proof that the horror could be provided with sound techniques as Sonnenschein and Lerner point out. The soundtrack, in this respect, is a powerful fulcrum for the horror image, insomuch that some viewers say that they are “more disturbed by the music of horror movies than the images and that they cover not their eyes but their ears in the

scary parts” (Clover 1992: 204). In addition to this natural sound and soundtracks, thanks to special effects, some types of artificial sound have been often produced for horror films. The sound of monsters, creatures of various kinds or supernatural events are frequently set out to create fear (Cherry 2009: 60). Discordant or unsettling sound effects could be used “to enhance feelings of suspense, moments of shock or general feelings of unease” (Cherry 2009: 55). Ironically, even the absence of sound could be used to create tension and anxiety, often contrasted with sudden loud noises (Cherry 2009: 70). It is clear that the diegetic and non-diegetic sound is a backbone for horror.

As stated before, lighting is an important part of the horror films like sound. Lighting codes are used in horror films to create darkness, shadows and obscurity (Cherry 2009: 55). When we try to analyze lighting, we should consider the effect of Expressionist aesthetic because it is still used in contemporary horror films to convey moments of horror or unease (Cherry 2009: 65). Expressionist filmmakers had developed “the use of the chiaroscuro style of lighting” that exploited extremes of light and shadow” (Cherry 2009: 62). For example, demonic Dr. Caligari’s face lighting from below and dark shadows around his eyes could still be seen or “pale faces of both victim and vampire loom out of darkened backgrounds” in *Nosferatu* (Cherry 2009: 63). Loss of vision of a character is frequently depicted in horror cinema, and it is implemented “often through use of darkness and shadows that hide things from sight as much as through vision itself” (Cherry 2009: 127). To sum up, light codes serve to create horror atmosphere and shadows, contrasts are utilized in this regard.

In addition to lighting, the camera usage is very important for horror atmosphere. Horror filmmakers use camera angles and movements to create shock,

fear and revulsion commonly include point-of-view camera shots and framing (Cherry 2009: 53). The camera's rapid visual movements, claustrophobic framing, sudden reaction shots serve to put emphasis on violent acts (Cherry 2009: 86). Since I focus on found-footage cinematography at the second chapter of this thesis, I will especially mention here about point-of-view shot (from now on POV). POV shots are one of the most important technical codes in horror cinema (Cherry 2009: 125). They create a very specific subjectivity where identification is constructed (Cherry 2009: 132). In this angle, the connection between the character and audience is implemented. Cherry in this regard states that

The point-of-view shot typically frames a victim as if the killer is watching them voyeuristically. Such shots are often shaky or employ a hand-held camera; they are also often framed by objects in the extreme foreground to suggest the killer is concealing themselves behind that object (Cherry 2009: 132).

POV shots help constructing a sense of threat to the character being looked at rather than objectifying them (Cherry 2009: 136). This set-up normally suggests the viewer's "identification and empathy with the victim being looked at" (Cherry 2009: 136). However, the opposite examples are possible as well. For instance, in *The Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1981), camera tilts are used to show the entity's point of view. Carol Clover argues that the identification changes from character to character (1992). Interestingly enough, even the absence of the killer on-screen strengthens this identification with the killer. Roger Ebert says in this context, "The more these movies make their killers into shadowy non-characters, the more the audience is directed to stand in the shoes of the killer" (1981: 56). Fly-on-the-wall style, as a similar approach, should be mentioned here because it gives an "impression of actuality, sending a message to the audience that events are close to or could be based on reality, and emphasizes the opening caption that indicates the film was

based on actual events” (Cherry 2009: 90). This “impression of actuality” is a vital for found footage cinematography which will be addressed later. Hitchcock’s dolly zoom (zoom-in and pull-back) technique is another subjective shot which shows the effect of depicting a moment of sudden shock (Cherry 2009: 66). We could see Dutch angle is utilized in horror movies. This style serves to convey disorientation or psychological unease, and shock or madness (Cherry 2009: 65). It serves to heighten moments of excessive emotion or psychological trauma as well as to create tension and dread (Cherry 2009: 67). All of these camera angles and movements are utilized to create horror atmosphere and they constitute an important part of horror films.

Editing is another technical tool which constitutes desirable emotions for horror movies. Maybe it is the most important part of horror films because they, in fact, have been using cuts to create modes of effect from the beginning (Cherry 2009: 85). For example, shock cut which is composed of extreme close-up with fast zoom-in and sound effects could show, as Diffrient states, a “visual articulation of violence” (2004: 55) or as Cherry states, shows “shots of adrenaline” (2009: 87). To sum up, shock cut is “an editing device designed to emulate the actual, physical experience of a moment of shock” (Cherry 2009: 85). Editing, as a whole, has vital significance for found footage cinematography as well. Since found footage filmmakers often use horror conventions, we should mention about found footage cinematography.

## **1.2 Found Footage Horror**

Since horror films adapt new approaches easily to present new scary atmospheres for their audiences. After found footage mode comes up, it began to be executed in horror movies firstly in early 1990s (Sayad 2016: 43). The style basically

is an imitation of found-footage documentaries (Sayad 2016: 43). It basically includes raw cutting, elliptical narrative, shaky handheld camera, and precariously framed images that mimic the style of amateur filmmaking with a title card which informs the viewer that film is a compilation of events shot by characters who are dead or disappeared (Sayad 2016: 44). These amateur filmmaking aesthetics still define contemporary found footage horror.

The discussion about labelling found footage filmmaking to coin the proper term has continued so far. I am not going to offer a new one but prefer one of them to cohere along the text. While David Bordwell prefers the term of “discovered footage”, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas sees found footage a subgenre of horror and therefore offers the term “found footage horror” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 14). However horror is not the only genre using found footage style and we see that the method was used by other genres as well (there are even comedy films using it). Then to which genre does this subgenre belong? There is no clear answer to this question. That is why, mode is a much proper term to be used as Sayad states (2016: 48). Bordwell’s description of mode as the “vehicle of delivery” is easily adaptable for found footage style because mode is a form which does not have to tell us about the story like genres (1989: 147). For this reason, I prefer to use “found footage mode” throughout the text. Additionally when I state “found footage horror” I mean the horror movies which utilize found footage mode.

### **1.2.1 Editing as a Tool for Authentic Style**

Editing is one of the prominent features of found footage mode. The authenticity claim of the mode is mostly indicated by means of editing. Most of the



found footage films start with a written prologue inserted at the beginning of the movie. This convention is not absolutely new for cinematic world. For example, at the beginning of *The Virgin Spring* (Ingmar Bergman, 1960) it is written "The events you are about to witness are true, names and locations have been changed to protect those individuals still living". However, in found footage mode this premise is used for a different purpose. Found footage films try to constitute an "illusion that the found-footage has been found" by the help of introductory statements (Sayad 2016: 52). These brief introductions most probably state that the found footage video is "received from an anonymous source" (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 35) and the footage was discovered sometime after the events of the film have happened (Meslow 2012). Another type of introductory title is used for increasing the tension, and it means that some authorities did not permit it to broadcast or, contrarily, the film is certified by them. For example, we see this title in *The Devil Inside* (William Brent Bell, 2012): "The Vatican does not authorize the recordings of Roman Catholic exorcisms. The Vatican did not endorse this film nor aid in its completion" Once this "faked footage" is presented as authentic, the film can start to tell its story (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 73). However, there is still one important question to answer. Heller and Nicholas ask incisively: If this found footage came from an anonymous source, "Who edited this footage together? How did they get it?" (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 155). The answer to this question is mostly ambiguous or sometimes it is written that a film production company supposedly undertakes the editing work. For example, *Head Case* (Anthony Spadaccini, 2007) has this type of opening statement: "The following film is edited from the home videos of serial killers Wayne&Andrea Montgomery. The footage is being presented in what is believed to be chronological order." This claim

is served to strengthen found footage films' authenticity status, and written prologues at the beginning of the movies are the first signs of this claim.

The absence of directorial imprint in found footage films are mostly presented as an important part of the film. These films are structured based on the claim "that the movie was filmed not by a traditional, omniscient director, but by a character that exists within the film's world" (Meslow 2012). Therefore, as a clever solution, cuts are mostly carried out by these films as if the battery of the handheld camera is low so the camera should be turned off for a while as in the last part of *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008). We are motivated to believe that the film is composed of the unedited footage shot by some ordinary people (Aloi 2005: 197). However, Peg Aloi gives us a clear clue to refute it. He gives the example of the directors of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, who "carefully cut the final 81-minute product down from over 100 hours of raw footage" (Aloi 2005: 197). Some of the films include another external footage apart from the one they currently are shooting. This could happen in two ways: intentionally and unintentionally. Unintentional one could only be seen by the audience for a few seconds. It is the one in which we see a short recording of irrelevant video from past years as if the film character records his diegetic shooting over the previous shots. They mostly are recorded as a home video, but could appear on the screen while the action is happening in the current diegetic time of the story. For instance, in *Cloverfield*, we see an irrelevant fragment of home video footage while the only survived character is talking to the camera. In the latter, it may be intentionally put by the diegetic universe's director. For example, both *The Devil Inside* and *Last Exorcism* begin with this way. They intercut some interview footage as a home video, archived TV news footage and photographs to tell their stories as if they are the diegetic editors of

the film. In fact, *The Devil Inside* relies heavily on these interviews which “intercut with Michael’s raw hand-held footage” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 161). To sum up, editing strategy of found footage horror is an important part of these films because the basic claim of authenticity could be provided in this way properly.

### **1.2.2 Camera and Sound Usage for Amateur Aesthetic**

While the editing emphasizes that the film is authentic footage, the camera serves the same aim. In found footage, the camera is predominantly a handheld camera (Sayad 2016: 45). The hand-held cinematography which especially was used in *verite* documentaries is a conventional feature of found footage films (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 25). What is more, the camera itself is part of the story (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 23). This type of camera work, according to Roscoe and Hight “serves to heighten the feeling of seeing the world unfold before our eyes” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 102). That is exactly why the diegetic handheld camera is used in *The Blair Witch Project* “as a weapon” to shoot the extraordinary events (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 88).

In found footage films, stationary cameras (Sayad 2016: 58), and surveillance cameras (security cameras, webcams, etc.) could be used as well (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 132). Borrowing Sayad’s definition “operatorless” for cameras which are either abandoned or dropped by characters in distress, I will prefer to use this term hereafter (Sayad 2016: 61). In this case, camera could be positioned in some places to shoot the event as in *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007). The camera is still part of the story but not held by the character. These tripod shots are relatively long duration (Sayad 2016: 58). This type of camera work, as Wetmore claims, further

enhances the illusion that what we see is real and, "shows how the image is everything. No one needs to be filming, the events are ultimately filmed themselves" (Sayad 2016: 63). For another approach, there is a variety of different surveillance camera types. The film could be shot completely with webcams as in *Unfriended* (Levan Gabriadze, 2014), with surveillance cameras as in *Series 7: The Contenders* (Daniel Minahan, 2001), with street surveillance cameras as in *The Tunnel* (Carlo Ledesma, 2011) or with a police car's cameras as in *End of Watch* (David Ayer, 2012).

Marjorie Garber has classified amateur filmmakers with two groups: Amateur professionals (someone who is practicing without a license by accredited institutions), professional amateurs (someone who glories in amateur status) (2000: 19-20). David Buckingham, Maria Pini and Rebekah Willett added these categories two more: enthusiasts (someone who invests in technology and creates artistic finished products), and everyday users (someone do not plan or edit his or her films with no accessories and relatively inexpensive technology) (2007: 190). Apparently found footage characters in the diegetic world are presented as if they are everyday users. Most of them are supposedly not shooting their diegetic footage to broadcast. The narrative events are mostly filmed by these characters for private reasons and the camera is set by them (Sayad 2016: 54). That is why we could see many self-reflexive scenes in which the camera appears on the mirrors in most of the films. Indeed, "self-reflexivity is a significant feature of found footage horror" (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24). In fact, diegetic appearance of filmmaking tools in these films means that the characters do not aim to make a professional movie (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 166). Most of the characters in found footage horror films are not supposed to know what will happen to them. This is exactly why "(a)ll home movies, it suggests,

can become horror movies” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 168). They all abruptly take place, at the moments the events are happening, and the “citizen-as-surveillance-operative” shoots it without noticing (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 181). To sum up, the diegetic character is presented as if they are ordinary users, and they do not want to shoot their home videos to make a directing debut.

Even if the image quality in static cameras is not unfavorable, handheld camera images are not in the same good quality. Since found footage camera is substantially shaky, the shots are mostly “behaving hesitantly, tentatively” (Sayad 2016: 56). This unstable image quality and shaky shots promote “the idea of immediacy and the experience of being a ‘fly-on-the-wall’” (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 171). This is one of the important characteristics of found footage films (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 23). The unstable camera mostly brings about an image out of focus. We see this blurring effect in almost all found footage films. When a character enters frame unexpectedly or the camera turns abruptly, blurred image comes up. For example, in *Paranormal Activity*, when Katie walks in front of the camera, Micah shoots her out of focus with his hesitant camera. When the character who holds the camera runs, this effect culminates and the frame changes constantly.

The primary function of the frame is normally to display selected elements in specific ways and choose what to show within the field (Sayad 2016: 56). The frame tries to isolate “the represented world from the surrounding reality” (Sayad 2016: 56). In fact, the psychoanalytical and semiotic approaches throughout 1970s evaluated the frame as limit and this idea has not lost its influence yet (Sayad 2016: 56). However, in found footage films, the events and characters which are positioned within the frame stretches the boundaries of it continually as if they want to remind the spectators the presence of off-screen space constantly. This sometimes happens

when a character or creature invades the field of the frame from off-screen or the main object of the frame disappears while the record is continuing. This method specifically is preferred in found footage mode because “the abrupt intrusion of figures from off-screen or the appearance of threatening elements on the corner of the image that horror films aim to startle and disturb the audience” (Sayad 2016: 55). In the first place, in these films, a subject could leave the field of the frame. For example, in *Paranormal Activity*, the bodies of the characters sometimes leave the frame and the viewer sees the empty room. This is not a scene which is rarely used in found footage mode (Sayad 2016: 55). Off-screen space indeed constitutes an important part of found footage films or as Sayad stated “beyond its visual field”; there is field to imagine in mind (2016: 58). On the other hand, handheld camera and the amateur aesthetic of found footage films enable the characters to “invade the frame in abrupt fashion” (Sayad 2016: 58). For example, in *Cloverfield*, some friends of the main character appear on the screen abruptly while the camera shoots other people at the goodbye party in the beginning of the film. This camera work and elastic frame’s elastic borders make it impossible “to circumvent the filmed events within the frame” because the real intention of it is to widen it (Sayad 2016: 56). And it also questions our perception about the centrality of framing and the boundaries setting the film apart from the larger world, “offering an alternative way of understanding the irruption of reality in horror films and trading content for style” (Sayad 2016: 49). Surely the mis-en-scene (frame) is not the only medium serving this aim, mis-en-shot (the camera work and shot angles) in found footage cinematography are also important to construct the film structure.

Handheld camera usage associated with point of view shots is a common element in found footage films (Koshi 2013: 111). Subjective-diegetic camera is one

of the striking features of these films and it shows first person POV (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 166). These POV shots which show the character's actions make reasonable the amateurish recording of the events. The camera shakes because the character is most probably scared or runs, the frame blurs because s/he is not a professional who shoots it for professional work. That is why we could see unstable shots maintained "by the shakiness of handheld shots, abrupt zooms, and swish pans that do not seamlessly rest on an object" (Sayad 2016: 55). In fact, "(t)he relationship between the movie camera and the psychology of the individual" shapes this image's quality (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 22). In found footage horror movies, this identification is therefore a fundamental part of the structure (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 23). Surely POV shots should be mentioned here for the central role in making this amateur aesthetic much more reasonable.

POV technique is often used in action and suspense scenes (Koshi 2013: 112). That is why it is a useful method for found footage horror. This type of shot enables the unfolding of the scene through the eyes of a character at the beginning of the movie (Koshi 2013: 111). It also increases the reality effect for the viewer because of shaky or out-of-focus camera shots which associate with POV shots (Koshi 2013: 112). Koshi states that most of the movies using the specialized filming technique of a subjective shot necessitate an explanatory scene at the beginning or end of the movie to make the story much more believable, but with POV shots this could be provided without any insertion or explanation (Koshi 2013: 112). In fact, in found footage films, the story could start abruptly and the viewer would find themselves immediately inside the story, and the character who holds the camera explains the event on the sly. While the camera appears freely in the scenes, non-diegetic sound (voice-over, external music or special sound effects) is not used.

Sound in found footage films is another important element that needs to be emphasized here. It could be claimed that non-diegetic sound is absent in almost all of the found footage films. When we talk about sound in found footage films we could see a “rougher soundtrack and absence of non-diegetic music” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 25). Diegetic sound in these films have mostly poor quality as image (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 8). This absence of non-diegetic sound and poor quality of diegetic sound are both related to found footage’s reality claim as the editing, camerawork, and frame.

### **1.3 Reality And Verisimilitude**

After the mid-90s, mass audience is familiar with the “reality culture” through which Eric Cazdyn refers to the conditions where reality TV, surveillance footage, and home movies distributed via the Internet (Cazdyn 2002). Discourses of cinema vérité and documentary realism have an important effect on this culture to flourish (Jones 2011: 1). Reality TV and their “freakshow” nature become a determinant phenomenon (Kilborn, 2003: 168). Where exactly the “real” stands becomes questionable, and the reality lost its position as an objective truth because, as Swartz states, faux reality has become the norm in pop culture (Swartz 2006: 318). The “reality culture” brings about a blurred line between off-screen reality and on-screen (mediated) reality (Jones 2011: 4). Found footage films and their reality claim were born in such an atmosphere. Since found footage mode is much concerned with reality claim which is supported with technical codes and narrative structure, we should focus on how found footage films implement it. Documentary mode, in this regard, is important to understand the reality claim of found footage films. We



therefore should firstly mention its codes shortly, and then, mockumentary (or many other similar terms used by different authors).

### **1.3.1 The Merge of Documentary and Found Footage Mode**

Even if documentary realism is interrogated, as Craig Hight and Jane Roscoe have argued, it has traditionally the claim of truth, and proper representation of the world as it actually is (2001: 6). As if the documentary filmmakers can be “capable of standing outside the social historical world” they are assumed to be more accurate in reflecting the reality (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 20). This thought or taken-for-granted stance makes the realism of documentary highly arguable. This filmmaking style has its own diversities. We should here mention Bill Nichols’ classification of documentary modes: the expository mode (“voice of god” dictates a basic thought, the participatory mode (a subject and the filmmaker interact by means of the interview), the performative mode (the filmmaker provokes the viewer with his/her subjective interpretation), reflexive mode (the film tries to present the nature of the reality by its own vehicle), the observational mode (the camera mostly shoots events as they really are) (Nichols 2001: 33).

Among these documentary modes, the observational one is used by found footage style. Found footage films which utilized the observational mode, according to Roscoe and Hight, emphasize the claim of truthful recording of reality by benefiting from documentary heritage (2001: 184). The observational mode relies on diegetically filmed hand-held and surveillance material like found footage mode therefore, found footage horror films can be considered part of the broader mockumentary tradition (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 184). As Heller-Nicholas claims,

*Paranormal Activity* mastermind Oren Peli realizes how powerful observational documentary's codes are and he uses them in a fictional film for this reason (2014: 121). Leaving documentary codes here, we should touch upon this mockumentary mode because found footage films are classified not under documentary mode, but mockumentary.

As found footage mode is a problematic term to negotiate on, discussion about its reliance on a staging technique is another troubled area. Found footage mode has really used documentary codes, but these types of films are not classified under the umbrella of documentary. Mockumentary is seen a much more suitable term to define the method found footage horror uses. According to Alexandra Juhasz, these types of films are examples of "fake documentary" (2006: 7). Christopher Robbins prefers to use the term "mock documentary" (2007: 162), while David Bordwell uses "pseudo-doc" (2012), and Gary D. Rhodes defines these movies as "documentaryesque" (2002). I do not think that the term which includes the word "mock" could be useful to define found footage movies because, as Roscoe and Hight claimed "Mock-documentary assumes a sophisticated viewer able to recognize and participate in the form's largely parodic agenda" and the viewer "both familiar with the codes and conventions of documentary and ready to accept their comedic treatment" (2001: 184). However, found footage movies do not mock the documentary modes or perform a parody, they only take advantage of it to display their stories. Even if Alexandra Heller-Nicholas argues that "horror mockumentary" is understood by the audiences as its own distinct category without considering comic elements, I will not be using this term (2014: 17). In Nichols' mind, the term mockumentary is synonymous with pseudo-documentary, he uses "or" conjunction to define related movies. (2001: 23). A similar approach could be seen in Tom

Zaniello's definition. When he defines "mock documentaries", he explains it as "pseudo-documentaries using professionals and non professional actors in scripted and semi-scripted action" (2011: 1). I believe the best definition to cover found footage mode belongs to Michael Zryd. By adopting his ideas, we could claim that fake documentary and pseudo-documentary are both conceptually defined as a mode using documentary techniques without mocking something (Zryd 2003: 53) That is why they are much more suitable terms for found footage mode. Since "fake documentary" is not so widespread as a term, I prefer using pseudo-documentary hereafter. Throughout the thesis I still use other related terms (especially mockumentary) at the times when quotations are concerned.

How and why do documentary and found footage mode merge? Found footage mode is not a mere combination of only horror and documentary modes, it has some features from both sides (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 16). Kevin J. Wetmore argues that, especially after 9/11, the relationship between documentary and reality television has naturalized "the incorporation of a documentary aesthetic in horror" (2012). As to how documentary realism manifests itself in horror movies, it is carried out basically with "technical imperfections" which is a striking feature of found footage mode (Rhodes 2002: 46). The primary case study of Cecilia Sayad is about found footage horror's documentary claim and style, the claim has such an importance (2016: 46). Therefore, we could state that found footage horror films are such movies "which make a partial or concerted effort to appropriate documentary codes and conventions to represent a fictional subject" (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 184). They often utilize pseudo-documentary staging techniques by which "the audience is led to believe that a created work of fiction is actually a documentary" (Koshi 2013: 111). In a related context, the notion of "proof" has an important place

in found footage films in regard to their relationship with documentary (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 20). It has many proofs for the claim that the found footage films strengthen their reality claim by benefiting from documentary codes and its heritage but they are actually sheer pseudo-documentaries. For example, *Head Case* (Anthony Spadaccini, 2007) takes advantage of documentary mode “to underscore the brutal reality of murder itself” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 125). *The Blair Witch Project* which brought the mode into mainstream is seen as a “mockumentary film” (Koshi 2013: 111).

This “mockumentary staging techniques” came to be widely used in the 2000s (Koshi 2013: 111). To go back to the reality claim of found footage films, they use titles in the beginning of the movie as we mentioned before “to validate their status as ‘real’ authorized audiovisual documents of recorded fact” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 21). *Cloverfield* followed suit by using similar methods. It is, for instance, presented under the premise that “it is recorded footage of an incident” (Koshi 2013: 112). Now we should mention about authenticity claim of found footage horror films.

### **1.3.2 Authenticity Claim of Found Footage Horror Films**

It is not rare that horror films have a claim of veracity of the events depicted; but in found footage horror films, this claim goes even further (Sayad 2016: 45). The most important point in the reality claim of this mode and similar styles is the “fictive stance” which reveals where the viewer stands before encountering a specific product (Ooijen 2011: 2). This stance is based on indexical bond which shows whether images have a referent to the historical real. Factual-fictive stance variation comes out in this way. Fictional film invites the viewer to fictive stance towards the

material by expecting an “aesthetical and entertainment-oriented appreciation” (Ooijen 2011: 13). When violence is a matter of debate, these categories sharpen their positions. In a psychological experiment on feelings of disgust, three clips which include various incidents of violence are shown to subjects. They have freedom to turn off whenever they want. The first clip includes a surgical operation showing the face removing from the skull, the second shows a restaurant in which a monkey was killed and its brain was eaten, the third one includes images of killing a cow in a slaughterhouse (1999). Through this research, Clark McCauley questions why most of the participants turned the tapes off while the viewers watch the movies showing violence like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) or similar ones (1999). For him, indexical bond of these clips makes them less attractive compared to fictional products. Noel Carroll also states that the viewer must be sure for the ontological status of horror movies as representational materials to appreciate properly (1990: 68). Fictive or factual stance comes up exactly right here and it is positioned at the center of approaches which have the claim to reality, and found footage films rely on the tension between the factual and fictional.

Found footage films position themselves closer to documentary mode rather than conventional fictional films which are accepted with their fictional nature. In fact, as Heller-Nicholas states, the concepts of “realism” and “reality” are frequently interrogated in contemporary found footage horror (2014: 24). We are familiar to the films which are presented as ‘inspired by’ real events, but found footage films have the claim that “they are supposed to constitute the audiovisual documentation of these events” (Sayad 2016: 45). What we see on the screen are not characters based on the story, they are presented as if real people who experienced it in the non-virtual world (Sayad 2016: 45). These films promote the sense of verisimilitude, and put

forward what the viewer has watched is composed of raw material, “unprocessed reality” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24). The films actually base their claims on the situation “that there is some independent state of affairs ‘out there’ that can be objectively verified” (Black 2002: 15). This “fragment of the real world” (Sayad 2016: 45) or “a genuine claim of authenticity or ‘realness’”(Heller-Nicholas 2014: 112), in this regard, differs found footage films from other fictional films.

On the other hand, today’s viewers actually are aware of the fact that these films present a “make-believe reality”, and therefore the mode is seen as a cinematic style, “not as markers of factuality” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 8). They do also know that the film is lying to them about depicting the “real” events as they occurred (Sayad 2016: 52). However, they accept this ‘pretending-to-be-real’ experience for cinematic pleasure (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 113). The point we should come is that found footage horror films present an authentic style rather than claims of authenticity itself (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 128). The viewers experience that the lines between fact and fiction is challenged and that their boundaries are pushed (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 4).

Once again, the important point here is not that the depicted events in found footage films are “real” or not, but the significant point is that the movie claims it or not. David Ray Carter states that fictional films which suggest that they are showing “reality” blurs the line between actual and fictional, thus become “hyperreal rather than purely fictional or authentic” (2010: 298). However, this “hyperreal” status of these films does really mean that "the illusion that what one is watching is real" is a quintessential part of these films (Wetmore 2012: 65). Found footage films, indeed, rely on creating a sense of authenticity by showing fragments of everyday life, and it creates “a sense of realism” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 30). These films’ “*may be ‘real’*”

status makes “the real-seeming film frame” much more valuable (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 8). The possibility of the events’ to be a fragment of the “real” is also tricky because, as Heller-Nicholas points out, “what-ifs” strengthen the claim of these films (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 7). Here we could dare to say that these “what-ifs” enabled a style and narrative “as-ifs”

The found footage horror films which playfully use the conventional codes present these “as-ifs” to heighten their verisimilitude. *The Blair Witch Project*, for example, constructs this authentic nature and the myth flourished (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 88). *Paranormal Activity* also deals with this “fantasy of the real”, and its success originates from this touch (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 132). In *Paranormal Activity*, thanks to the real location (director Oren Peli’s real home), improvised lines by actors, not-professional lighting and sound, and operatorless and handheld camera, the film “enhance(s) the illusion of authenticity required to corroborate the film’s documentary claim” (Sayad 2016: 51). Since the camera has the central position, we should go further in the context of reality claim of found footage horror films.

In classical Hollywood, the construction of realism is implemented via continuity editing which relies on invisible style and seamless and unnoticeable shots; however, in contrast, in found footage films the very presence and visibility of filmic apparatus supports the sense of verisimilitude (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24). Shaky handheld diegetic camera or surveillance feed are found footage film’s signature in this regard, and crucial for the construction of verisimilitude (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 3). Besides, the audience is familiar with hand-held digital video technology so the illusion that diegetic characters are similarly shooting the videos like them promotes the verisimilitude (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 8). Even if this is the

“construction of amateurism” rather than its actual status as amateur productions, the viewers are familiar with it (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 4). POV shots which bring about shaky shots, bad image quality or the sound of the cameraperson breathing becomes advantages for found footage films to make the movie highly realistic for the viewer (Koshi, 2013: 113).

In addition to handheld camera work, surveillance cameras also serve the same aim. According to Heller-Nicholas, surveillance footages constitute the verisimilitude of the film as well (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 131). Operatorless camera in this context is used as well in many found footage films such as *Paranormal Activity*. The shot taken by this operatorless camera is seen realistic because, as Wetmore argues, it brings the “the illusion that what we see is real.” (Wetmore 2012: 78). In the end, No one needs to be filming, the events are ultimately filmed themselves" (Wetmore 2012: 79). Sometimes, while the shot is continuing, camera work changes as in *Cloverfield*. For example, when the character who holds the camera, Hud, dies, the camera falls down to the ground. Handheld camera becomes operatorless, and we see the explosion, the character’s face and the grass on the ground. As Sayad claims, this is the illusion created by the found-footage horror because “the image, we are playfully led to believe, is not artificially staged; it is the unmediated record of reality in the making” (2016: 63).

Even if Koshi and his friends argue the opposite, found footage films use introductory titles and information to enhance the authenticity. *Paranormal Activity* starts with this intertitle: “Paramount Pictures would like to thank the families of Micah Sloat and Katie Featherstone and the San Diego Police Department.” It clearly shows that it is presented as an authentic documentation of a “real” event. Most found footage films use the same tactic. The mode’s very name, therefore, is



composed of “found” and “footage” so the filmic and extra-filmic merge naturally (Sayad 2016: 51). It is claimed that the footage is “found” thanks to diegetic camera work we could see in the same time. What makes this claim is believable comes from the “naturalization of non-professional footage” by means of modern technologies which could be used by the audiences (Hight 2008: 208). Using actor’s real names is related to this reality claim. In *Paranormal Activity*, the characters’ names are the same with their original names. Here we see various features of found footage mode to enhance its authentic claim in the eyes of the viewer. All of these characteristic features could be seen as kitsch aesthetic, but that is the case and beauty of found footage mode. Snuff film, as a sister approach, should be emphasized here due to its reality claim and violence which is an essential element of found footage horror films.

Snuff film is basically the film in which characters are killed and the murder event actually happens (Stine 1999: 1). The most prominent characteristic of snuff film is the reality claim (Jones 2016: 1). Snuff film depicts “graphically sexualised murder” and presents the act as if it actually happens. It does not aim to hide the violence, contrarily showing everything is the vital element. In this context, many scholars associate snuff film aesthetic with pornography (Tierney 2002: 52; Jones 2011: 3; Stine 1999: 1). Especially long take in snuff, “as a guarantor of reality”, serves a similar function as in pornography (Tierney 2002: 52). The primary concern of these two approaches in their hardcore sequences is for presentation, not for narrative (Tierney 2002: 53). Since showing the violent act come to the fore while narrative remains in the background in snuff film, some claim that this approach connotes cinema of attractions. Even if cinema of attractions mode disappears after 1907, its elements comes up in avant-garde film and other genres, especially in the

exploitation film in which “attractions was very much an organizing and unifying principle” (Schaefer 1999: 79). However, snuff film is not exactly pornography. For snuff film, the sex is not at the center and not usually graphic, the killing is the only point of interest (Tierney 2002: 53). This is the reason snuff film was meant to be received as horror (Jones 2011: 3). Violent acts appear as an important element of horror and snuff film shares some conventions with other horror subgenres in this matter. Mondo, gore, slasher, and torture porn films are more concerned with visual excess of depicting violence but snuff film has rather the central concern of realism (Tierney 2002: 49). Even if supposed torture porn films depicting “insane levels of festive violence” show similarity with snuff films, they differ in two basic points (Queenan, 2007: 16). Firstly, torture porn films “does not feature graphic sex acts in conjunction with death” as snuff films do (Jones 2011: 4). Secondly, torture porn films are clearly marked as fantasy and do not have reality claim while Snuff films do the opposite (Petley 2005: 174). That is why it could be said that the most important characteristic of snuff film is the realist form which shapes the formal structure and narrative of the film.

Single and long continuous take in snuff film is employed to convince its reality and this “Bazinian real-time requirement” implies that the violence is not based on special effect (Tierney 2002: 49). This banality of the snuff image serves to construct a sense of realism in the film (Tierney 2002: 51). In *Tesis* (Alejandro Amenábar, 1996), the character Bosco sets up the camera on a tripod to prepare his snuff mis-en-scene for the victim-to-be. Tierney points out that the employment of this kind of shot “stresses the homemade and no-budget nature of the snuff footage” and implies certain realism (2002: 51). This does not mean that all snuff films are shot with a steady camera which is positioned in a room, handheld camerawork is

also employed, and especially in the later examples of snuff films handheld camera are often used (Jones 2011: 6). The grainy picture, bad editing, lack of non-diegetic sound, less lighting which make the work seem an amateur work are important to highlight the formal structure (Kerekes and Slater 1998: 31). Steve Jones states, for example, in the first two films of *Amateur Porn Star Killer* (Shane Ryan, 2006-2008), it is preferred that an intentional degrading of image quality by using home video equipment for the sake of authenticity claim (2011: 6). The motivation of snuff film to adapt these formal structures is to gain an approval for its reality claim by means of amateur aesthetic.

Snuff film really tries to construct an “illusion of reality” with a convincing mode imitating “un-staged non-fiction conditions” (Grodal, 2002: 77). It relies on “textual resemblance to other images believed to be real,” and tries to convince us through its realism (Tierney 2002: 54). In the dichotomy of factual and fictive stance, snuff film pushes the viewer to adapt the former. The myth that real snuff is actually circulating strengthens its reality claim. Kenneth Gergen states that faux-snuff perpetuates a false truth which genuine snuff exists (2011: 109). It all started with Allan Shackleton who once distributed fake news about the struggle of a fictional Vincent Sheehan and retired attorney against his film *Snuff* (1975) with the help of an organization called Citizens for Decency. Articles and public critics condemning the unreleased film strengthened the film’s authenticity claim even if ironically nobody had seen it yet (Stine 1999: 4). Even if Mr. Shackleton did not explicitly assert that the events in the film were authentic but he implied a what-if probability (Stine 1999: 4). After a long time, he spilled the beans of the entire scam when he was interviewed in the late 1990s (Stine 1999: 4). The film is clearly fictional but people believed it in those days. However, the rumors continued to circulate till

today. As Stine states, “many people who have heard of, but have never seen, the movie Snuff insists that it does contain actual footage of human death and mutilation” (Stine 1999: 3). One of the famous ones is an actor. In 1991, Charlie Sheen supposedly reported to the police *Flower of Flesh and Blood* (Hino 1985) because he thought the film showed real murder scenes (McRoy 2008: 15). FBI and The Los Angeles Police Department conducted investigations about the indexical reference but could not find anything (Stine 1999: 6). Like pornography, snuff’s exclusion from conventional distribution networks enhances its realism and many films benefited from this atmosphere (Tierney 2002: 49). *The Last House on Dead End Street* (Roger Watkins, 1977), *Effects* (Dusty Nelson, 1980), *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980), *Video Violence* (Gary P. Cohen, 1987), *The Art of Dying* (Wings Hauser, 1991), *Midnight 2- Sex, Death and Videotape* (John A. Russo, 1993), *Mute Witness* (Anthony Waller, 1994), *Niku Daruma* (Tamakichi Anaru, 1998), and *8mm* (Joel Schumacher, 1999) all follow this heritage. Even if snuff film has the reality claim, what happened in front of the camera is completely fictional and no one has ever seen such a film and the best proof of the claimers are based on hearsay of “a friend of a friend” (Tierney 2002: 46; Stine 1999: 1). However, that is not the case because the notion “But what if it is real?” triggers the process (Stine 1999: 3). Jones collects some reviews from different sources about *August Underground* trilogy (Fred Vogel, 2001-2003-2007) which is a later example of snuff films and the dilemma of viewers could easily be understood.

“it seems VERY real (...) if you didn't know any better you'd think you were watching a snuff film. The violence and effects are very convincing, maybe too convincing?” (Lawrence Raffle) “it all seems so possible, so real” (Jon Condit); “that was the worst feeling of all; not knowing if what you're seeing is real or an effect”(Johnny Butane);“I'm sure that Fred Vogel is a nice enough fellow, and my logical mind tells me that he is simply a filmmaker, but [...] I mean, who knows, right? [T]he point is that Vogel and his cast and crew manage to build an atmosphere of bloody, filthy realism that is truly

palpable; so much so that the line between what is real and what isn't becomes irreparably blurred” (Matthew Hill), “This couldn't be real could it? After all, with 'Property of Absu Films' appearing onscreen, this must mean it isn't real, but rather, a very well orchestrated pseudo-Snuff film. (...) On the other hand though, if this were genuine snuff, wouldn't it be smart to make it seem 'staged' by placing a production companies name strategically throughout the film?” (Mayo, 2008) (Jones 2011: 11-15)

If we leave those who are piggy in the middle aside, some believe that real snuff may exist even if they have not encountered yet. The possibility and probability of the release of real snuff under the guise of snuff-fiction makes the myth much more real. The doubt of what-if is actually the central premise of faux-snuff (Jones 2011: 15). Thornton states mobile-video technology and the difficulties of policing cyberspace strengthen this what-if probability much more (Thornton, 2002: 187). It is clear that snuff films have an important place in the discussion of reality and found footage films are somewhere very near. Most of the characteristics of Snuff film are somehow related to found footage film as well.

After found footage cinematography shined out, snuff film aesthetic merge with this mode. There are many similar narration characteristics and it's difficult to say which influences which. It is not wrong to say these two approaches interpenetrate. We see some snuff films which benefited from found footage mode in early 2000s. *August Underground* (Fred Vogel, 2001), *August Underground's Mordum* (Fred Vogel et al, 2003), *Kill the Scream Queen* (Bill Zebub, 2004), *Amateur Porn Star Killer* (Shane Ryan, 2006), *S&Man* (J.T. Petty, 2006), *August Underground's Penance* (Fred Vogel, 2007), *Amateur Porn Star Killer 2* (Shane Ryan, 2008), *Amateur Porn Star Killer 3: The Final Chapter* (Shane Ryan, 2009) are the films both categorized as “found footage film” and “snuff film”. The main junction is not the style but the reality claim. There are undeniably important similarities and juxtapositions between two approaches. Erik van Ooijen makes an

analogy between *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *August Underground* (2001) and claim that both films try to give the audience the impression of authentic factual recordings (2011: 2). Similarly, at the end of *Amateur Porn Star Killer 2* an informative phrase appears on the screen: “This footage wasn’t discovered until June 2006”. While *Cannibal Holocaust*’s prologue proclaims the film’s authenticity, *Amateur Porn Star Killer* does the opposite; however, it is not the case. The main character and serial killer, Brandon, kills women and shoots every part of the action with his handycam. Jones states this camerawork as “killer-cam” (2016: 4). This killer-cam is one of the most important elements of found footage cinematography as well. Another killer-cam example can be seen in *August Underground* trilogy. Jones, in his next work, states,

“Snuff-style images wholly constitute the content of the August Underground films. My motivation for focusing on August Underground is that it achieves a level of found-footage authenticity that its predecessors do not (as I will demonstrate), meaning that it is the most "successful" attempt to emulate Snuff” (Jones 2011: 2)

The essential point is not the success of *August Underground* to emulate snuff by benefiting from found footage mode, but rather, the merge and convergence of these two approaches both of which have the reality claim. As stated before, these two approaches interpenetrate but the reality claim still constitutes the main part of the structure.

#### **1.4 Found Footage Horror Films**

It is not wrong to say that found footage horror films predate only in 1980s. They firstly came up with *Cannibal Holocaust* but *The Blair Witch Project* made the concept popular and brought it into the mainstream. After Youtube revolution,

*Paranormal Activity* crowned the mode, and afterwards it is accepted as a sui generis style by the audiences. I will shortly try to show the process.

Found footage films took examples of some predecessors for their style and narrative structure. Articles which sum the history of found footage films often mention *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980) as the starting point because it is a film based on found footage in the diegetic universe. The main characters follow the story of a lost documentary crew by using their footage materials which show that they were cannibalized by an Amazonian tribe. The film is clearly a fictional work (Sayad 2016: 51). Heller-Nicholas argues that contemporary found footage horror films are directly influenced by this film (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 34). However, this influence is not huge; contemporary found footage films, indeed, position themselves in a different place (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 8). Nevertheless, the importance of the film comes from its claims of found footage, but it is clearly “mock found footage of the tragic deaths of a TV crew shooting a film” (Sayad 2016: 44). *Man Bites Dog* (Rémy Belvaux, 1992), on the other hand, provides “the most direct link” till the mode is brought into mainstream (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 35). In the film, the main character is a serial killer and he asks the film crew to make his film while committing the murders. At the end, all characters including the serial killer dies, and it is implied that the camera records are found by other people. This short storyline is actually a sum of found footage films.

As mentioned before, there were found footage films before the year of 1999, but after this year, they gained importance. *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez) really popularized the concept (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 88), and brought the mode into mainstream (Sayad 2016: 44) Jane Roscoe interprets this as a voyage of “mock-documentary out of the arthouse into the mainstream” (2000).

After the phenomenal success of *The Blair Witch Project*, horror genre often utilized the mode and found footage mode juxtaposed with horror (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 4; Sayad 2016: 44). This close relationship between found footage and horror become almost a prerequisite for especially found footage films.

*The Blair Witch Project* is a pseudo-documentary which tells the story of 3 people who records mysterious events in the forest. Heller Nicholas proposes that this film could be understood “both a film about the making of a (fake) documentary and simultaneously a (fake) documentary” (2014: 19). As we mentioned before, found footage mode associates with the codes of observational documentary, and *The Blair Witch Project* appropriates its codes and conventions (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 117). We see the tools of found footage films in the film: shaky hand-held camera shots, immature image quality and sound, out of focus scenes, the narrative which includes the character that holds the camera and so on. The film was presented as if it is an amateur film, but the truth is reverse; it only employs amateur filmmaking aesthetics (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 97). As Myrick, one of the directors of the film, described this “method filmmaking” as follows:

”(T)here are no cameras shooting the actors; they are shooting it themselves, so the process of filmmaking is as much a character as the actors themselves, and that was what our goal was. It was not to make the actors aware of the filmmaking process around them, and then we just kind of dubbed it the method filmmaking approach” (McDowell 2001: 140)

Even if, as the director stated, the film is not an amateur work, it behaves like one, and this illusion is exactly what makes the found footage films “found footage”. The blockbuster film prepares a good atmosphere for future found footage films. In the period between *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), found footage horror and its codes and conventions were consolidated (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 4). Surveillance cameras, handheld cameras and webcams



were used by various found footage films in this process. For example, in *Series 7: The Contenders* (Daniel Minahan, 2001), two types of camera (surveillance and the cameras in the house) are used and the film narrates Big Brother house in a violent context. In *The Collingswood Story* (Michael Costanza, 2002), webcam and the handycam of the character are used. In *Alone with Her* (Eric Nicholas, 2006), we saw the handycam of the perverted character and the candid cams he hides in the girl's home. In *Long Pigs* (Nathan Hynes and Chris Power, 2007), two types of camera are used: One is the documentary crew's actual camera; the other is the static camera that is used for interviews. Similarly, in the Spanish film *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007), the only camera is ordered by a television reporter. The diegetic camera in found footage horror has such an importance. It sometimes even goes to hell along with the main character as in Japanese-made *Noroi* (Kôji Shiraishi, 2005). In all of these movies except *Series 7: The Contenders* we see observational documentary's codes in both styles and narrative structure. And it shows us "how thin the lines between observational documentary-inspired found footage and mockumentary elements appropriated from the codes and conventions of other documentary modes can be" (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 126).

When *Paranormal Activity* was released in 2007, found footage horror films by and large flourished. *Paranormal Activity* strengthened the position of found footage films a little more. Heller-Nicholas sees two watershed moments for found footage horror films; while *The Blair Witch Project* popularized the concept, *Paranormal Activity* set a higher standard in the context of "post-YouTube Renaissance" (2014: 201). For *Paranormal Activity*, the director used its own home as a set and the lines were almost improvised (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 129). In the film, as mentioned before, operatorless camera is used to record supernatural events

in addition to handheld camera. As to David Lyon, “surveillance concerns the mundane, ordinary, taken-for-granted world,” and the movie was successful to catch the secrets of everyday life thanks to surveillance cameras. (Lyon 2007: 11) This is actually the ultimate claim of found footage horror films. In “post-Paranormal Activity period of found footage horror,” we could easily claim that the mode is utilized by other genres as well such as *Chronicle* (Josh Trank, 2012) as a drama and science fiction; *Project X* (Nima Nourizadeh, 2012) as a comedy, and *End of Watch* (David Ayer, 2012) as crime and thriller (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 26) In this way, found footage mode has become a “readily identifiable filmmaking practice” for non-horror titles while it once was used almost only for horror movies (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 200)

As to *The Last Horror Movie* (Julian Richards, 2003), the main film this thesis focuses on, it is a bit different from other found footage horror films. Even if it remained relatively unheard of to broader audiences, it presents us plentiful fields to interpret for both found footage mode and horror itself (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 112). I basically claim that the movie undermines horror narratively and narrationwise by using found footage mode in the period of between *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity*. The usage of darkness and light, handheld camera, refusal to show policy, the main character Max’s first-person address to the viewer, off-screen space and frame usage, absence of non-diegetic sound, inserting pseudo footages into the film and critics of horror genre in *The Last Horror Movie* all contribute to this undermining effect. In the next chapter, I will try to analyze where the film stands, and in the third chapter I try to show how the movie differs.

## CHAPTER 2

*The Last Horror Movie* is influenced by some other films in terms of its narrative structure and narration characteristics. In the first part of this chapter, I try to show which prominent films influence *The Last Horror Movie*. In the second part, I discuss why we should evaluate the film as a found footage film. The third part discusses why it should be seen as a horror movie. These three parts present us a suitable background for the chapter three.

Since I will analyze the film by referring to specific scenes, I give them a number according to the linear flow of shots. As the director of *The Last Horror Movie* states as “every scene is shot in one shot”, this is a reasonable way to define scenes (Simpsons 2014). The first minutes of the film is a scene from a slasher movie; and it is a parody of slasher films, which is explained by the main character Max as a critique of horror genre. Therefore, I specifically exclude the sequence of a slasher film which could be seen in the beginning of *The Last Horror Movie* because I think that part is different from the main story. Except that sequence, there are 129 shots which narrate Max’s murder story. The shot numbers begins with Max’s first appearance till the last.<sup>1</sup>

While analyzing *The Last Horror Movie*, I will benefit from Rick Altman’s semantic/syntactic approach. Altman says semantic and syntactic of generic analysis are complementary and they should be combined, therefore he proposes a semantic/syntactic approach to genre study (1984: 11). Semantic elements which are the genre’s building blocks and structures into which they are arranged are tried to

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<sup>1</sup> The film’s shot flow could be seen in the appendix.

combine. I will employ semantic approach to be able to mention many similar films to connect them with *The Last Horror Movie* to understand where exactly it stands. Furthermore, syntactic relationship and horror vocabulary must be analyzed properly to emphasize the film. Since *The Last Horror Movie* is built over the syntax of the horror genre, I will list some characteristics to place the film into a specific position. This thesis is based on a specific film, therefore the latter approach naturally outweighs. Still, this does not mean that visual articulation and conventional general atmosphere will be ignored. After all, it is inevitable to encounter “the necessarily dual nature of any generic corpus” (Altman 1984: 12).

## **2.1 The Heritage Influencing *The Last Horror Movie***

The title of *The Last Horror Movie* gives us a clue where the film stands. Starting the name of a film with “The Last” is not a novelty, there are a lot of films in the movie history and they have a common ground. It basically means that they are the successor, follower of the predecessors and especially those which are about cinematic world are built over a heritage. We should here recall some found footage and horror films to understand why *The Last Horror Movie* is called in such a way. It recalls directly the cult movie *The Last Horror Film* (David Winters, 1982). Undeniable similarities exist between two films, and both of them are based on found footage-related narratives in their diegetic universe. However, *The Last Horror Film* is not a found footage film even if it has plenty of footage recorded by the main character Vinny. Still we see cinematic tools in the generic of the film, and it reminds us the filmmaking process. This is an important characteristic of found footage films as we discussed in the first chapter. In *The Last Horror Movie*, the story itself is

about filmmaking process as well. *The Last Horror Film* tells about the character Vinny who literally dreams about making a great movie with Jana Bates who is a famous film star in the diegetic universe. The storyline is similar with *The Last Horror Movie*'s main story. Max also tries to shoot a unique movie which would be different from other horror films. He specifically explains it to the victim in the 53th shot while she is about to die after being stabbed by Max, who says that: "We're making a film of this. We're trying to do something that hasn't been done before." We see Vinny and Max, the two diegetic filmmakers, while they are using cameras. Another important element is the title of the diegetic film within the film that we watch. In *The Last Horror Film*, we see the name of Vinny's video cassette: "The Last Horror Film". Max also shows us his video cassette named *The Last Horror Movie* which is brought by him to the video rental store for manhunt. The first sequence of *The Last Horror Film* is composed of a slasher film just like *The Last Horror Movie*. In both of the films, we see some scenes which involve talking about horror films. In *The Last Horror Film*, for example, some diegetic directors are invited to Cannes Film Festival to talk about how horror films make money. In *The Last Horror Movie*, Max also interprets horror films and criticizes them. The important point here is that both stories have lines commenting on horror films, and this self-reflexive point brings them closer to one another. Last but not least, two main characters are serial-killers and this is an important part of their stories. As could easily be seen, *The Last Horror Film* has a great influence on *The Last Horror Movie*.

*The Last Broadcast* (Stefan Avalos and Lance Weiler, 1998) is another related film which has a title beginning with "The Last". It tells the story of an investigation of the diegetic filmmaker David Leigh who tries to bring a murder of

TV crew to light. This film shows many similarities with *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999). As Sarah Higley draws parallels, both films are about a film crew going to the jungle to shoot a mystical creature, goes missing in the forest, and both of them rely on the discovery of found footage (Higley 2004: 88). However, while *The Blair Witch Project* is especially appropriating the conventions of observational documentary, *The Last Broadcast* is based on various documentary conventions including interviews, voice-over, presentation of visual evidence such as maps, newspaper clippings, crime scene photographs, courtroom transcripts and illustrations, animated infographics, and television news reports (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 117). Nevertheless, *The Last Broadcast* uses non-diegetic music, and is designed with fast editing which are not conventional features of found footage cinematography. Interestingly enough, even if *The Last Broadcast* was produced before *The Blair Witch Project*, it was not released until the latter became successful (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 116). The presence of the diegetic filmmakers in both films and the story based on footages could also be seen in *The Last Horror Movie*. However, *The Last Horror Movie* is closer to *The Blair Witch Project* rather than *The Last Broadcast* in terms of its use of documentary modes. *The Last Picture Show* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1971) and *The Last Movie* (Dennis Hopper, 1971) are also about diegetic filmmakers but they do not share similarities with our film. *The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010) which is clearly a found footage horror film, however, tells a story of an evangelical minister, Cotton Marcus, who does not believe in ghosts. He wants a film crew to shoot his last exorcism. In this diegetic filmmaking process we see found footage horror's conventions such as the usage of handy-cam, the absence of non-diegetic sound etc. That is why the film is quite similar to *The Last Horror Movie* in terms of its formal

style. However, the image quality of *The Last Exorcism* is much better than *The Last Horror Movie*. Both films have “The Last” word in their titles. Why? According to Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, these films emphasize that “film as a notion is potentially both finite and volatile” (2014: 115). In this context, they aim to comment about the filmmaking process by utilizing found footage horror elements because it presents for them a suitable environment such as the presence of the camera in the diegetic universe. However, while these films might highlight the finite nature of the film, they say something infinite as well. The Last Horror Film has the claim to be a film that has never been shot because it supposedly includes real death but this claim is limited to diegetic world. The Last Horror Movie, nevertheless, has the claim of showing the real death which is beyond diegetic world. To sum up, apparently, *The Last Horror Movie* took this title heritage and internal dynamics of these movies more or less, and shows very similar scenes while telling its own story.

*The Last Horror Movie* should be analyzed in its intertextuality with other serial-killer films as well. When we narrow down the scale to found footage films, *Man Bites Dog* (Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel and Benoît Poelvoorde; 1992) comes to the forefront. Both films are about serial killers, and both characters make a cameraman or film crew shoot themselves while committing the murders. The stories entail the filmmaking process but Max is much more omnipotent than Ben because he controls almost every step of his diegetic film. There are some narratively similar scenes in the two. For example, we see both killers in a family dinner but Max does not kill anybody while Ben kills one of his friends and family. There is a common character in both films: an elderly woman. But while Ben kills the woman, Max does not, because she is his grandmother. For these reasons, it is not wrong to say that *Man Bites Dog* have an important influence on *The Last Horror Movie*. The director

himself actually confesses it in an interview yet also indicates his own film's peculiarity:

“It's kind of doing what *Man Bites Dog* did but taking it a step further. *Man Bites Dog* was essentially about a film crew that makes a documentary about a serial killer and finds themselves getting involved in the process. They cross the line and the audience crosses it with them. With *The Last Horror Movie*, this is very much the serial killer one-on-one with the audience.” (Simpson 2014).

Heller-Nicholas makes a connection between *The Last Horror Movie* and other two films. According to her, *The Last Horror Movie* recalls the home invasion scene and the bathtub dismemberment sequence of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1986); and the scene in which Max, while he is shaving in front of an oval mirror is almost identical with the scene of Sadako's mother brushing her hair in *Ringu* (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 118). *The Last Horror Movie* benefits from this heritage of both found footage films and horror movies but what makes it different?

When we consider sound usage of found footage horror films, they almost exclusively do not use non-diegetic sound. Most of them are designed to shot like a home movie and the final product is supposedly not for the viewer. The diegetic characters explain or imply this. For example, Doug peeps and records of Amy all the time in *Alone With Her* (Eric Nicholas, 2006), he does not have an intention to distribute the footage. In *Exhibit A* (2007, Dom Rotheroe), the little girl, the brother and the father all shoot a home video for themselves. In *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), the main character shoots to immortalize a farewell party. *Trollhunter* (André Øvredal, 2010), *The Bucks County Massacre* (Jason Sherman, 2010), *Chronicle* (Josh Trank, 2012), *V/H/S* (Matt Bettinelli-Olpin et al, 2012) and *Afflicted* (Lee and Clif Prowse, 2013) all followed suit. Some films are shot to broadcast because they



are so called documentaries or TV programs: *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* (Scott Glosserman, 2006), *Man Bites Dog* (Rémy Belvaux et al, 1992) *Long Pigs* (Nathan Hynes and Chris Power, 2007), *Lake Mungo* (Joel Anderson, 2008), *Grave Encounters* (The Vicious Brothers, 2011). However, *The Last Horror Movie* is designed for non-diegetic viewer. Max's direct address to the audience is a vital difference. From the beginning to the end, he talks directly to non-diegetic viewers and explains his motivations. What we see on the screen is not sheerly a home movie footage, but Max's film which is prepared for us. He even goes beyond this filmmaker-viewer relationship and opens a new relationship between himself and us: serial killer-victim. We, according to this serial-killer filmmaker, are his victim-to-bes.

Found footage films rely on the idea of footage which is found. That is why we see many explanatory titles, intertitles in the beginning of the movies. For instance, it is claimed that the footage is real, and policeman comments on the footage by stating "The following footage, if real" in *Alien Abduction Incident in Lake County* (Dean Alioto, 1998). In *Inner Demons* (Seth Grossman, 2014), the viewers are informed that the footage was found. The Poughkeepsie Tapes is also presented in this way. In *Cloverfield*, there is "Property of U.S. Government, Do not Duplicate" statement or in *Trollhunter*, the footage supposedly is sent to Filmkameratene AS. All of the stories of these films give a conclusion at the end of the film. However, *The Last Horror Movie* does not tell a finite story as almost all found footage films do. That is why, the footage is not found, the film is presented as if it is supposedly put into video rental store directly by the serial killer Max. It is clearly said that his murder adventure will continue. The name of the movie is "The Last Horror Movie" because it will be the last film for us before being murdered by

him. In this context, the most similar equivalent is *Man Bites Dog* but Ben is not a threat for us, he was killed at the end of the film but Max lives and seriously threatens us. Most viewers realize that there are strict boundaries between the movie and real life experience (Prince, 2000, 18) and clearly fantasies of horror do not threaten the audience directly (Jones 2011: 12) because they surely are aware of “the difference between the screen and what is on the screen” (Eskjaer, 2002: 119). However, Max tries to violate these boundaries and clearly breaks the fourth wall. At the end of the movie, he looks directly to us and threatens us to kill. Even if his threat is sheer fantasy, it might have been much more realistic if the circumstances did not permit.

When *The Last Horror Movie* was released, there were some dramatic shifts in home entertainment devices. Why does it matter? The impact of the film was highly related to these unforeseen conditions.

“If the video cassette technology had maintained its position as it was, the film would have been in a different status. However, VHS which is a vital feature of the film began to be abandoned when the film was released, and the audiences had chance to see the film on DVD” (Walker 2011: 126).

Heller-Nicholas is in a similar position, and stated that the influence of the film on her is different from what the film predicted when she saw the film for the first time in the mid–2000s (2014: 119). And in another comment:

“With this new technology, people could not write on DVD’s like video cassettes, and this situation influences the impact of *The Last Horror Movie*. The director also realizes this situation and says: how would Max actually record over an existing DVD? You actually can’t do it. It just wouldn’t convince.” (Simpson 2014)

*The Last Horror Movie* is really based on the idea of exchange of VHS in video rental stores, and DVD technology undermines it.

About the camerawork of the diegetic filmmaking process, *The Last Horror Movie* shows many similarities with many found footage films. Handheld camera is used as in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Hollows Grove* (Craig Efros, 2014), *Inner Demons* (2014), *Beckoning the Butcher* (Dale Trott, 2014), *Wer* (William Brent Bell, 2013) and many others. Steady cam or operatorless camera is used as in *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *Noroi* (2005), *Alone with Her* (2006), *Diary of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 2007) and so forth. Diegetic cameraman shifts in *The Last Horror Movie* and we see a similar action in *Lake Mungo*, *The Bucks County Massacre* (2010), *Megan is Missing* (Michael Goi, 2011), *V/H/S* (2012), *Apocalyptic* (Glenn Triggs, 2014) and etc. What makes *The Last Horror Movie* different from these films is that Max directs his film for the non-diegetic viewer, us, but these films do not have this intention. Max shoots “for the movie” but others perform for immortalizing their family moments, adventures, entertainments etc.

To sum up, *The Last Horror Movie* takes example of the films whose titles begin with “The Last”. The movie shows similar characteristics with some other found footage films in respect to narrative structures and filmic conventions. The camera technique of *The Last Horror Movie* resembles other serial killer films as well. It especially shares several similar points with *The Last Horror Film* and *Man Bites Dog* in terms of their storylines, and with *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* in terms of the context of the serial-killer films. However, main character Max plays a different role in this film according to many other found footage diegetic filmmakers. His story is not limited to diegetic world; it is beyond that. The next section elaborates on the basic characteristics that make *The Last Horror Movie* a found footage film.

## 2.2 Why Is *The Last Horror Movie* A Found Footage Film?

*The Last Horror Movie* is produced in an atmosphere such as the post-*Blair Witch* and pre-*Paranormal Activity* period. It was produced in 2003, but could not be released until 2005. It was the time found footage style established itself as a specific mode, and many horror films utilized it for a while. Furthermore, in this epoch found footage horror consolidated its position consistently (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 120). Even if the found footage horror films of this period could not be successful enough especially with respect to commercial gain, they contributed to the “formal and narrative palate that would provide later found footage horror blockbusters with their essential elements” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 120). *The Last Horror Movie* is one of the films which uses found footage conventions and proposes new approaches in this period.

In *The Last Horror Movie*, Max Parry, a serial killer, hires a cameraman to follow him while killing people as the protagonist does the same in *Man Bites Dog*. Max has some motives to kill people even if he barely mentions his intention. He wants to make a movie about these murders. His diegetic horror film expands case by case after he adds new sequences which show Max’s new murders. After a murder, he leaves the revised version of his film into a video rental store. Whoever watches the film, he follows them to kill. After killing the new viewer, the diegetic viewer becomes a part of his movie. Shortly, the next viewer becomes his next victim, and the manhunt goes on for the sake of his film: *The Last Horror Movie*. He, as a diegetic director, personally directs all shots while the viewers are exposed to the killings and the cinematic apparatus.

### 2.2.1 The Camerawork and Off-Screen Space

The existence of a camera(man) is vital in found footage films. The question of how and why the cameraman appears on the scene is important. Here it can be easily claimed that each found footage story necessitates the diegetic camerawork, and that is why almost all events occur around the cameraman or he/she goes into it. There is no found footage film which does not give information or imply the ontological reason of the diegetic camera and the cameraman. For example, we know the cameraman Pablo must be there because TV reporter Ángela Vidal presents the news in *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007), Micah must record supernatural events with his handy-cam in *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), Judith must record daily life of her family in *Exhibit A* (Dom Rotheroe, 2007) or Clif must shoot every event which causes his friend Derek's transformation to werewolf in *Afflicted* (Derek Lee and Clif Prowse, 2013). The diegetic camera is a must, otherwise we could not hear anything about these –so to say- extraordinary events. *The Last Horror Movie* should be evaluated under this umbrella because it is also a film which necessitates the diegetic camera work.

In *The Last Horror Movie*, we see the diegetic camera thanks to Max. He, as a diegetic director, sometimes orders the cameraman what to shoot, and sometimes shoots himself with the same camera. In the first shot of the film, we see Max addressing directly to the audience in his room in a medium close-up. He explains his motivation to make this film. In the next shot, we see the cameraman who takes orders from Max and the existence of the cameraman in the diegetic universe is rationalized in this way. We then understand that both Max and the cameraman are

vital for the story. Therefore, the appearance of the camera on the frame seems logical as in other found footage films.

Although handheld camera is used in the film in almost all shots, the cameramen who shoot the scenes vary. Max personally uses it, his two cameramen use it, and Max's nephew uses it as well. The only unchanging parameter is the camera's presence. We see shots taken with this handy-cam in almost all scenes. For example, the camera is visible when Max kills a police officer, when he hides himself from the next victim in her house, when he takes some random shots in a bar or when he eats at the dinner table in his sister's home. Since handy-cams readily shake, we could easily identify their presence because of the frequent change of frames' borders. For instance, when Max runs after Bill to kill him in 106<sup>th</sup> shot, we see that this handy-cam densely shakes and the frame swiftly changes. This dynamism indirectly evokes that there is a camera shooting the scene, and this is actually the basic element of found footage cinematography. The issue of the presence of the diegetic camera brings about the presence of the cameraman in the diegetic universe, and it is another important feature of found footage films as it is the case in *The Last Horror Movie*.



Figure 3.1 Mirror reflection

In the second scene, as could be seen in Figure 3.1, we see the reflection of the cameraman who shoots Max with a handy-cam on the mirror. Max, in the frame, is shot from behind in a mid-shot. The camera follows Max with the same angle while he kills a person in the toilette. As a similar one which shows the cameraman in the frame, the 23th shot, Max shaves his beard in front of the mirror. The camera shoots with over-the-shoulder angle and medium close-up. We could see both Max's face and the cameraman's hand holding the camera on the mirror. The camera then makes a move and over-the-shoulder angle changes from right to left side. This time, in the mirror, we clearly see the cameraman's face and the camera while it is shooting. Mirrors really are one of the most appropriate objects to show the presence of the camera in many found footage films, and these films specifically use the mirrors as vehicles to depict the cameraman.



Figure 3.2 Wedding ceremony

In a similar example, in the 12nd shot, we see Max working. He is shot from his left side in a medium close-up while shooting the wedding ceremony because it is his regular job. However, this shot shows us that the principal camera is not the one which is used by Max in the ceremony. It is the one which points its lens to Max. In addition to the scenes in which the cameraman is visually seen, there are many scenes we could easily indicate the presence of the cameraman. For example, in the 7th shot, Max talks about the first murder he committed on the roof. The camera shoots him in medium close-up while he is talking. After a few seconds he says “So I walked right up to him and pushed him over,” then he turns his head to the camera and talks to the cameraman directly: “Do you just want to get a shot pointing down over the edge?” The camera makes a pan-left and tilt-down after this order. The important point here is that Max orders the cameraman what to do as a diegetic director, and we know, in this way, that there is a cameraman who conducts these shootings. That is how we are constantly reminded that a filmmaking process is going on.

*The Last Horror Movie* presents plentiful examples about the occurrence of the filmmaking activity. Secondary characters, in this regard, are important because



they point out the cameraman's presence as well. In 21th shot, Max orders a drink to the bartender Joe. We see Max on the right, bartender Joe on the left and an old man who sits far from them. The camera shoots them in a mid-shot. When the old man says, "Is he making a film?" the bartender looks at the camera but Max looks only at the old man then directs the cameraman to follow him. The serial killer asks the old man "Would you like to do an interview with us?", the man looks at the camera directly. In these types of shots in which Max does not look at the camera or we could not see the cameraman on the mirror, secondary characters point out that there is a filmmaking activity going on. As to the 33th shot, Max takes the meal to the dinner table with over-the-shoulder shot. The camera follows him to there with track-in, and then it settles in front of them. The camera size then turns to a medium shot. Petra, Max's ex-girlfriend asks "Well, isn't your friend going to join us?" by directly looking at the camera because the third "person" sitting on the table is the cameraman. Max refuses this by saying "He's not my friend. He's my assistant and he's here to help me make my film." When Petra gets surprised, the camera approaches to her by making a track-in and medium close-up. When she asks about what is the purpose of the film, the camera makes a pan-right as a reverse shot to show Max while he is answering. When she asks another question, the camera turns to her again. In the next shot, Max sees off Petra at the door of Max's house in a mid-shot. Petra goes away and says goodbye to the cameraman. As a last example, the 35th shot is a very interesting one. When Max talks about Petra while sitting on the chair in his room we see him in medium close-up. Since Max forbids the cameraman to eat while he is doing his job, he passes the dish to him to eat after Petra left. The camera tilts down, the cameraman's hand appears, takes the meat, and then makes a tilt-up to see Max. He congratulates his cameraman saying, "That was good work.

Well done!” The diegetic characters, as we could easily see, know that there is a cameraman. He even eats as an ordinary character of the diegetic universe. The question of Petra is significant in this regard because it shows the acceptance of the existence of the cameraman in the room. Looking at the camera(man) serves this aim.

The cameraman is present with his sound as well. For example, the 81th shot opens with a wide view showing two people playing football in the park. The eye level turns to high one when the camera makes a tilt-down move. We now see two women talking while sitting on the grass. As soon as one of the women realizes that the camera is shooting them, she offers wine by showing the bottle to the camera in a mid-shot. We hear the cameraman’s voice: “No, thanks.” Petra looks directly to the camera and we see her from a low angle. Petra asks her female friend, “What do you think he does when he’s not helping Max?” The other woman looks directly at the camera and orders him to come closer to her. The camera size changes from a high angle to an eye level by making a tilt-down and a track-in. In a medium close-up while looking directly at the camera, the woman asks, “So, what do you do when you’re not helping Max?” The camera comes closer to the woman a little more and Petra disappears on the image, and we see the close-up of other woman. At that time, we hear the off-screen voice of the cameraman: “You know. Things.” Petra interferes and the camera makes a pan-left: “What sort of things?” Now, Petra’s close-up is on the frame. Once again, we hear cameraman’s answer: “Bits and pieces. Nothing special.” When the other woman asks: “Well, I hope Max is paying you well for this.” And the camera makes a pan-right. Then we hear Petra’s voice from the off-screen space: “What’s his film about?” The camera turns to Petra by making a pan-left. At that time, Petra comes close to the camera’s objective and the image blurs. In

this type of shot in which the cameraman talks to other characters, the presence of the cameraman is emphasized and, in turn, it is certified that filmmaking activity is conducted. His presence is constantly reminded because this convention is the backbone for found footage cinematography. The cameraman is important as other characters of the diegetic universe. He maybe has much more significant role because its so-called duty enables the filmmaking activity so that we could watch.

In *The Last Horror Movie*, the presence of the cameraman goes beyond the conventional rules and this is the main difference of the film than other found footage serial killer-horror films. The cameraman takes action in *The Last Horror Movie*. In the 36th shot, we see a shot which is taped as if it is a candid cam. Firstly we see the frame in a wide shot, and then a woman appears. Whenever the camera catches the victim, it zooms in and makes a pan-right to follow her till her car. Until she reaches her car, the camera size is mid-shot. After getting into her car, Max waiting at the backseat takes the action and tries to bowstring the woman. At that time, the camera makes a track-in with crab-right move and shoots the action in front of the car in a medium close-up. The light in this shot is the depressing lights of the parking. We see the yellowish lights of the parking lot and the shadows of objects. The sound is acoustical. Interestingly enough, we see a TV static appearance which means the end of shot on the frame for a second. After two seconds the new shot continues from where the previous one stops. This time, we see the dead body and Max in medium close-up. He gets off and opens the front door to pick the woman up. The camera size turns to medium close-up. Max looks directly to the camera(man) and says "Do you want to give me a hand here?" The frame shakes and cameraman's answer is heard: "But I'm filming." While continuing the same shot size, Max shouts: "Just put the camera down and give me a hand." The frame blurs for a few

seconds because it moves far from the occurring action. The angle changes and it is now a Dutch angle. The camera zooms-out and the frame's size turns to a mid-long shot. After stabilizing the camera, the cameraman enters into the frame and we now see his full body. He goes to help Max to carry the victim's body. They carry it and put it to the car's trunk. The cameraman seems very disturbed and surprised. Max wakes him by shouting: "Come on, get the camera. Let's go." This time, the cameraman looks at the camera directly and when he closes the screen by approaching the lens, the shot ends. Many found footage horror films depict the cameramen via the mirrors but they rarely take an important role as in this film. *The Last Horror Movie* pushes the borders of found footage cinematography in this regard. It even goes beyond, and we see some scenes in which the cameraman is encouraged to do killings as the protagonist Max. The cameraman now takes a role to change the narrative.



Figure 3.3 Direct addressing to the audience

Max interviews with his cameraman and interrogates him to make him comprehend not only the difference, but also the similarity between being a camera-

holder and murderer. He shows the similarity of shooting action and killing by implying the close relationship between a gun and a camera. This makes the film much more layered and complex than other found footage horror films. The cameraman, an apprentice of the director, Max, is encouraged to kill people as the master wants. The apprentice, however, could not handle with the situation, and he could not kill. However, the important issue here is not about his wish to not to kill, but it is the situation that he becomes a probable killer as a camera-holder.

We see the cameraman from his reflection on the mirror, this is his ontological presence. Secondly, he is called upon by secondary characters with sound and look. Thirdly, he eats meals. Fourthly, he is interviewed as a diegetic character. Lastly, he is pushed to take action. The level of self-reflexive elements, as could be seen, increases step by step, and finally Max kills the cameraman. Although the degree of the presence of the cameraman differs in found footage horror films, the ontological appearance of the cameraman as a diegetic character is the mode's conventional feature as we see in *The Last Horror Movie*.

Lastly, *The Last Horror Movie* presents us another example in this regard. We see another type of shooting technique which implies the presence of the cameraman in *The Last Horror Movie*: Max's direct addressing to the audience. In these shots, we see Max looking directly onto the camera. He sometimes interprets the previous scene or comments on the next one. These shots are generally composed of medium close-ups with stabilized camera recording in Max's house. These types of shots constitute an illusion that Max stabilized the camera and shoots himself while he is alone. It indirectly means that there is a camera positioned right across Max, and he is both the director and the character of the diegetic film. This sorts of

shots as a documentary characteristic could be used in this film because found footage mode utilized it as a part of the film.



Figure 3.4 Out-of-focus image

In *The Last Horror Movie*, we see many blurring frames, and out-of-focus images as a conventional characteristic of found footage films. In the first shot, we firstly see the extreme close-up of Max out of focus on the frame (Figure 3.4). He bends forward to the objective of the camera. When he leans back, the frame size turns to a medium close-up and the blurring image becomes focused. It is important that the first shot of *The Last Horror Movie* begins with such an image. It gives us a clue about the film's narration style. This shot is taken with a stabilized camera. When it comes to handy-cam, we see this type of out-of-focus shots immensely. In the 9th shot, Max kills a policeman with his hammer. After the victim falls down, the camera makes a move with a track-in. The frame blurs and in a few seconds it is able to focus again. Among 129 shots of the film, almost one fourth of them include out-of-focus parts. This shows us that it is preferred on purpose and the out-of-focus

scenes constitute an important part of the film. Furthermore, it proves that *The Last Horror Movie* shows similarity in this regard with other found footage films.

Off-screen space is also highly important in the film as in other found footage horror films. It was recalled basically in two different angles: image and sound. The main action in that scene sometimes occurs while the camera shoots irrelevant objects. For example, in the 5th shot, Max both looks at the camera and the cameraman respectively. We could differentiate where exactly he looks from his eye movements. He looks at the eyes of the cameraman, therefore his look points at the off-screen space. As another example, the 58th shot begins with a frame which shows a man and woman who are chained in a mid-shot. A few seconds later, Max appearing from the off-screen space, walks between two of them. He stoops to the camera and says "We're gonna try a little experiment." In this shot, while Max's position is at an eye level, the victims sit at a lower level and the camera sees them from high angle. Then Max turns his back to the camera and points his left by saying "Just the man!" The camera tracks-in and pans-left together and we see the close-up of the man looking off-screen. We hear the creak of the man's chair, the scream of the woman, the voice of Max's stabbing and the wheeze of him. The woman dies but we could not see the action, meanwhile we see the close-up of the man. After she dies, Max's voice is heard: "Onto the woman." The camera then makes a sharp pan-right by shaking and blurring the image. After focusing the woman with a close-up, we hear screaming of the man, stabbing voice and breathing of Max. The protagonist hits the camera's objective by mistake and it shakes for two seconds. After the man dies, we hear Max's voice without seeing him: "Onto me." The camera makes a pan-left and track-out, then Max appears next to a light source which lightens his face sharply. In a close-up, he criticizes the audience to watch this scene. This shot is

highly important because we are stopped to see what is going on. While the action goes on, we see another image while the sound of action is clearly heard. In these examples, sound and image which come from off-screen remind us the presence of the place which could not be seen on the frame. *The Last Horror Movie* shows many examples reminding off-screen space and found footage mode which is utilized by the movie enabled a convenient environment for this. The amateur aesthetic supports to widen the frame or vice versa.

As an important example of found footage films, sometimes the camera falls down but continues to record while the action goes somewhere else. This strategy could also be seen in *The Last Horror Movie*. In the 75th shot, we see a candid shot. The shot begins with an image showing bushes of a tree in the dark with a mid-long shot. Then the camera moves by making a crab-right move. Now we see, in a mid-long shot, the groom flirting with his lover in his own wedding day. When they first appear on the frame, it is blurring but after focusing the camera, their bodies are seen clearly. However, the camera shakes continually and makes crab-right and crab-left moves to stabilize itself. We hear their talks and bush sounds which probably originate from cameraman's footsteps. There are some bushes which block a clear vision of them. While they are making love, we hear a patter and the two look at the camera. The male character says, "There's somebody in the bushes" and rushes towards the cameraman. The camera makes a pan-right and moves fast. The dynamic frame blurs. The man says "Who the fuck are you!" and kicks the cameraman, the camera falls by making pan-left and pan-right. A dark image appears for some seconds and the man kicks the cameraman. After the fight, the blurring image turns to a clear one with a long shot in Dutch angle. Then the groom's legs appears. The action in this shot occurs in off-screen space and we barely see anything except the



grass, and the reason for this, could be explained with narrative events such as the groom's seeing the cameraman who shoots them and comes to kick him. That is why the camera falls down but it continues to record.

As to the sound coming from off-screen, it could also be seen in found footage films and exemplified with some shots in *The Last Horror Movie*. Since the presence of the diegetic filmmakers constitutes the basis of most found footage films, it is not unexpected that we hear the sound of the cameraman from the off-screen space. When Max talks directly to us or his diegetic characters, this situation often comes up. In shot 83, Max secretly shoots his friends behind the bushes. We see firstly a wide shot of them lying down on the grass. Blurred image gets focused after two seconds, and Max's off-screen voice is heard: "Of course, I could kill them all now. It wouldn't be too difficult." When he says this, the camera makes a tilt-up and starts to shoot them from a high angle. There is another example in which the cameraman talks to the other diegetic characters behind the camera. In the 81th shot explained above, Petra and her friend ask about the intention of Max's film. The cameraman gives an evasive reply. The important point is that he talks to the other characters and his voice is heard from the off-screen space. *The Last Horror Movie*, in this sense, shows similarity with the other found footage films.

### **2.2.2 The Usage of Sound and Light for the Sake of Amateur Aesthetics**

Since found footage films have amateur aesthetics, use of light and sound are directly influenced by this mode's conventional features. We generally see a lack of professional light in found footage horror films as we mentioned in the first chapter.

The absence of light tools shapes the color and structure of *The Last Horror Movie* as well.

Natural light and diegetic light sources are the vital elements for the film. From the first shot to the last one, we could easily see some objects which are used to lighten the environment. In the first shot, for instance, when Max talks to the camera in a mid-shot, we see a lamp behind him. The light comes from behind and lightens the room. We are supposed to think that the only light source is the one we could clearly see on the frame. In the fifth shot, Max goes up to the roof to show us where he killed his first victim. The shot begins with Max's direct address to the audience in a mid-shot and he talks about his murder project in an elevator. In the meantime, the elevator goes up. The light in the elevator is its own light; we could see the light coming from the top illuminating Max's forehead. The light coming from the top is dominantly used in the film. That is why, a sparkle on the characters' foreheads appears constantly.

The light tools are not hidden; on the contrary, we should see them clearly such as lamps, candles, fluorescent or lamps of the camera. For example, there are candles in the 56<sup>th</sup> shot while Max and his friends dine in a mid-shot, and in the 102<sup>nd</sup> shot while Petra is roleplaying or in the 33<sup>rd</sup> shot while Petra interrogates Max about his film's aim, there are candles on the table. Besides that, there are some lamps used to lighten the mise-en-scene.



Figure 3.5 Light in the scene

The 58<sup>th</sup> shot which is taken in a mid-shot shows a man and woman who are chained to their chairs. A few seconds later, Max walks between the two. We see a lamp light the room from the top. After Max kills both of them, Max comes next to the lamp which lightens his left side sharply. As a similar technique, in the 87<sup>th</sup> shot, the apprentice (the cameraman) comes up as an interviewee and Max as a cameraman and the interviewer. We firstly see a dark silhouette of a man at the center of the frame in a mid-shot. At the background, there is a lamp and TV both of which are turned on. After two seconds, the camera's lamp is turned on. That time it reveals that the silhouette is the apprentice.

Apart from these artificial lights, we dominantly see daylight and natural light in the scenes. In the ninth shot, for example, we see a medium close-up of Max from a low angle in a street. When he silences us by pointing his finger, he approaches his next victim. In the meantime, sunlight is shining behind him. It shines and even closes the view for some time. In the 18<sup>th</sup> shot Max records his murderous act live. His extreme close-up appears on the screen. When he goes away from the camera to

right side of the victim, the frame gets focused, then a mid-shot which shows both of them appears in the frame. In the kitchen, there is no light source except the sunlight shining from behind.

Apart from the light, use of sound in the film is another element which contributes to the amateur aesthetics of the film. The absence of non-diegetic sound is one of most important features of found footage films, and *The Last Horror Movie* apparently followed the suit. First of all, we literally do not hear any non-diegetic sound from the beginning till the end of the film. The sound in *The Last Horror Movie* is only diegetic as in *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez), *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007), *Long Pigs* (Nathan Hynes and Chris Power, 2007), *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) and many others. Since the non-diegetic sound reminds the post-production process of the filmmaking and the existence of the director, it is avoided in these films. Music, soundtrack and special sound effects which are clearly the basic tools of horror films are, therefore, not present in found footage horror films as in *The Last Horror Movie*. However, in some scenes, music is heard but it already belongs to the diegetic universe. The 52nd shot shows that Max enters into the female victim's home to kill her. Max steps down the stairs slowly. At that time, some glasses' sound and music are heard from off-screen. Max sneaks into the room without making any voice but the camera keeps its position at the entrance of the room. For a few seconds, we only see Max in long shot but also hear woman's voice and music. The diegetic music played by the victim in this scene is important because it is the only music we hear throughout the film. The music has a diegetic explanation. We hear all other diegetic voices coming from Max, the victim and the cameraman. When they walk sneakingly, creaking voice of the wooden steps and screaming of the victim or their

breathing could be heard easily because all of them are diegetic. In *The Last Horror Movie*, no sound effects are used, but the diegetic sound is utilized to strengthen the amateur aesthetic.

Human voices of the diegetic universe also serve the same aim. The dialogues in *The Last Horror Movie* come up in two different ways. The first one occurs when the characters talk to each other, and second one takes place between the cameraman and other characters (mostly Max). The first one does not pertain to the found footage films, but the second one does and we often see it in *The Last Horror Movie*. The dialogues established between the cameraman and his collocutor could be evaluated in two ways. One is from the perspective of the collocutor, the other angle is from the cameraman's side.

Max often talks to the cameraman and orders him what to do. In the 53th shot, Max is about to kill a person in her apartment. We see the frame with a long shot. For some seconds Max and the victim breathe excessively, and Max shouts at the cameraman by saying: "What the fuck are you doing out there? Get in here." Sometimes the cameraman replies to the other characters as we mentioned above.

To summarize, *The Last Horror Movie* uses found footage mode in terms of narrative structure and narrationwise strategies. The first proof is the presence of the camera in the diegetic universe and the story which rationalizes it. The second one is the absence of non-diegetic sound in the film. Similarly, the third one is diegetic light sources and poor-unstable image quality. The fourth one is the awareness of off-screen space. The last one is out of focus frames. These features in *The Last Horror Movie* are all used to serve for constituting amateur aesthetics which is the basis of found footage films.

### 2.3 Why is *The Last Horror Movie* a Horror Film?

It should be important to determine whether *The Last Horror Movie* is a horror movie or not, because in the next chapter we will examine how the movie undermines horror elements and propose a new dimension to the horror genre. That is why, firstly, we should analyze movie's similar characteristics with horror codes and conventions.

Attacking on normal life by the monster is a prominent conventional code of horror plot (Bordwell and Thompson 2001: 103). Max, as a serial killer, murders many people and disturbs the order. It suits the conventions of horror stories as Jancovich stated as "first the reader learns of the monster's existence, then some characters do, then some more characters do, and so on" (Jancovich 2002: 35). We learn Max's capability before the diegetic characters in the film and we guess, to some degree, how he could murder them one by one.

The monster-normality conflict really constitutes the basic part of the horror (Wood 2002: 32). The sense of threat is at the center of horror plot. The monster in horror movies symbolizes the "threatening" element of the story, and the victims are threatened ones (Bordwell and Thompson 2001: 103). Being a monster without threatening is not enough to make a movie a horror film. That is exactly why *E.T.*, as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson state, is not a horror movie because "the monster does not threaten" (2001: 103). Tudor, in this regard, uses specifically "a monstrous threat" to combine two concepts in a phrase (1989: 81). Max in *The Last Horror Movie* is clearly a threatening human-monster who plans to take many lives, and we could therefore claim that the movie shows a big similarity with the horror

movies in this context. He constitutes a threatening element for the other characters (even for us) and he comes up with a power which may harm the normality.

In horror movies, as Stephen Neale points out, violence comes to the forefront (1980: 16). However, the violence is only the supporting stone of the horror movies, the real determinant is its “conjunction with images and definitions of monstrosity” (Neale 1980: 21). We see myriad of scenes depicting violent acts in *The Last Horror Movie*. For example, we watch the murderous action when Max kills a policeman in the street or when the protagonist stabs a woman by breaking into her house to kill her. The blood associated with violent act constituting another element of horror iconography could be seen in the film as well. When Max kills a couple in a room, we see the blood on them or when a victim is burnt by Max, the violent act with blood comes up. These examples prove that violence is essential to the film.

*The Last Horror Movie* is also a serial killer film which is a sub-category of horror genre. Max is clearly a serial killer who murders many people. Since he is a serial killer, the movie is naturally evaluated under serial killer films if we accept Brigit Cherry’s definition of “film with a human killer” (2009: 161). The element of violence in serial killer films is apparent in *The Last Horror Movie* as we mentioned above. In the first chapter, we discussed that “cooling-off period” makes a killer a serial killer. Max, in this regard, is clearly a serial killer because his “cooling-off period” (murdering at least 4 people over a period greater than seventy-two hours) proves that he is (Seltzer 2000: 98). This brings about that the film is a serial killer film, in turn, it should be evaluated under the horror genre from this perspective as well.



Figure 3.6 POV shot and following the victim

The camera's rapid visual movement which emphasizes violent acts is another conventional characteristic of horror movies (Cherry 2009: 86). In *The Last Horror Movie*, handy-cam is a very convenient tool that enables the rapid moves. The ninth shot in which Max kills the policeman, the camera movement is very fast. These types of camera movements are widely used in the film. POV shots are one of the most important technical codes in horror cinema (Cherry 2009: 125). Most of the shots of *The Last Horror Movie* are taken by a hand-held camera and the images are really shaky. As an example of it, in the 36th shot, we see a woman who goes to her car in a parking lot with a wide shot. As soon as the camera sees the victim, it zooms in and makes a pan-right to follow her till her car. When she reaches her car, the camera size is maintained as a mid-shot. In this shot, we see apparently the voyeuristic angle because the camera is very far from the action, and the potential victim sometimes disappears from the frame. Thanks to this type of shot, it helps to construct a sense of threat to the character who is being looked at. As a similar



camera angle, fly-on-the-wall style strengthens “impression of actuality” of the scene in horror movies. (Cherry 2009: 90) We see some shots taken by this style in *The Last Horror Movie* such as in shot 120, 121, 122, 124, 125 and 126. For example, in the 122th shot a man appears in a wide shot, and the image apparently is taken with a fly-on-the-wall style. He gets out from the video store, and the stabile camera makes a pan-left move as if an eye follows him to leftwards. Dutch angle is another camera angle which is used by horror films, and it is utilized to convey disorientation or psychological unease, and shock or madness (Cherry 2009: 65). Some shots in *The Last Horror Movie* could be good examples of this type of angle. In the scene when Max kills a woman in a parking lot, this angle is used. The mis-en-shot in *The Last Horror Movie* shows similarity with horror films.

Since found footage horror films do not use non-diegetic sound, there are not sound effects in *The Last Horror Movie*. On the other hand, there are a lot of diegetic sounds which provide necessary elements for a horror atmosphere. Iconographic characteristics such as creaking wooden house, knives puncturing flesh, human sounds such as heart beats, footsteps, breathing and screams are used to create the atmosphere (Cherry 2009: 70). For example, the 52nd shot mentioned above is important for the use of sound. In the shot, Max attacks a woman to kill in her kitchen, and the cameraman shoots them. In the first part of this shot, we witness actually an absence of sound. As Cherry states, the absence of sound could be used to create tension and anxiety, often contrasted with sudden loud noises or a cacophony of sounds (Cherry 2009: 70). It actually serves this aim in the 52nd shot. The silent scene strengthens the scene’s tension because we know that Max would kill the person who is not aware of what is happening. The only sound we hear are creaking wooden stairs and Max’s warning to the cameraman to be silent. The characters who

“react to it in the properly horrified way” are important symptoms of horror movies (Bordwell and Thompson 2001: 102). When the victim in the above-mentioned scene saw the cameraman and killer, she reacted to it by screaming. The scream of the women while being stabbed is a widespread characteristic of horror movies as well. Max and the victim’s breathing heavily is another element that enhances the horror atmosphere. All of these features employed in the film prove that *The Last Horror Movie* uses horror conventions in terms of its use of sound.

Last but not least, it could be said that *The Last Horror Movie* which utilizes found footage mode is also a horror film. Monster, an important element of horror films, appears in *The Last Horror Movie* as a human-monster who is Max. He constitutes the threatening element of the story and disarranges the normality by killing people. His violent acts are also a determinant for horror genre. The film is also a serial-killer film, evaluated under the horror genre. From the narration perspective, the camera’s rapid visual movement in *The Last Horror Movie* and the mis-en-shot (POV, fly-on-the-wall and Dutch angle) serves as in horror films more or less. Even if non-diegetic sound is avoided, the diegetic sound is used to create fear. All of these characteristics give us a substantial proof that *The Last Horror Movie* is clearly a horror movie. This part is not designed to discover America again, but it aims to build the framework of the film as a horror film. With the help of this background, it will properly be analyzed where the film stands in horror genre.

## CHAPTER 3

In the previous chapter we saw that *The Last Horror Movie* is a found footage film because it utilizes many conventional features of the mode. It also relies heavily on horror codes and conventions. Considering this film as a horror movie that employs found footage mode, we can question how and why it undermines horror conventions along the film. This chapter focuses on how the film executes conventions of horror. In this part we will examine the film in terms of editing style, narrative structure and narration characteristics.

### 3.1 How Does *The Last Horror Movie* Undermine Horror Elements?

#### 3.1.1 The Role of Editing

Editing, as mentioned before, is the prominent feature of horror films. It is vital to influence the viewer to show desirable reactions (Cherry 2009: 85). While horror films often use the continuity editing which contributes to the construction of realism by depending on an invisible style, seamless and unnoticeable shots; found footage horror films often violate the linear flow and show film apparatus specifically (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 24).

Found footage horror films conventionally rely on the idea that implies some people shot the film, and some other people found it and present us somehow. That is why many found footage films start with a premise that informs us of the authenticity of the film that we are about to watch. The “illusion that the found-footage has been found” is tried to be executed in this way as in *The Devil Inside* (William Brent Bell, 2012), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), *Fourth Kind* (Olatunde Osunsanmi, 2009)

and many more (Sayad 2016: 52). Sometimes we are presented a sentence like “You will see the contents of the tape in full, without editing” as in *Alien Abduction Incident in Lake County* (Dean Alioto, 1998). Sometimes editing process is revealed as in *Head Case* (Anthony Spadaccini, 2007) by stating that they never do intervene with the footage’s basic linear flow. Shortly, the authenticity claim of these found footage horror films could be provided in this way properly. *The Last Horror Movie* shows a great similarity in this manner.

There is no premise with intertitle at the beginning of *The Last Horror Movie*, however, after the parody sequence of horror genre, Max himself explains the premise of the film. We are informed that this film’s diegetic director would be Max, and we would watch his film till the end. Not only does he shoot the scenes or order the cameraman what to do, but he also edits the movie as an omnipotent director. In the first shot of the movie, we are enlightened when we realize Max’s editorial print after his explanation. After saying “The film you hired from the video store... I recorded over it. (...) I think you will find this much more interesting” Max cuts to another shot which shows a murder scene shot by him. Then after the short murder scene ends, he appears again on the frame and says “You're interested now, aren't you?” This is how we make sure that Max himself would control the editing work of the film. As protagonist and diegetic director, he presents us 5-dimensional editing works.

The first type of shots is composed of scenes which show his direct addressing to the audience while he sits on his room. In these shots the camera which is supposedly placed by Max shoots him with medium close up mostly. The second type shows some other victims’ murder scenes while the camera is stabilized by Max. The third type of shots is taken by the cameraman who is Max’s apprentice.

The fourth type is established by Max while he is working for shooting the wedding ceremony in which there is no violence and negative events. The fifth one is Max's family footages which are shot again without violence, but the camera is controlled by a random person. All of these shot types are supposedly organized for Max's diegetic film by him, and are presented us to watch. In this way, the film moves away from found footage conventions because the centrality of lack of editing is omitted in this film with the premise of a diegetic reason. Put in other words, this film includes many editing that is shown to the audience, and with this aspect, it diverts from found footage conventions. We know then there is an editor who organizes the shots, and the found footage mode does not often emphasize editorial work (Aloi 2005: 197). *The Last Horror Movie* in this regard violated the found footage codes and conventions, and apparently does the same for horror.

The main character Max continually prevents the story to flow. He explains the scenes which we are about to watch or already watched by cutting in. He obstructs to see a linear story, and tries to teach us lessons, shows us what the important point is, conveys us the true point. The first shot of the movie is a good example. He shows murder footage then cuts to him again and explains what it is. There is a considerable amount of these types of shots in *The Last Horror Movie*. In 27 of 129 shots, Max directly addresses the audiences, and he talks in many other shots from off-screen. For example, in the 76<sup>th</sup> shot, he explains why he showed the previous footage. I will try to interpret four shots by explaining in detail to show how he intervenes.

In the 75<sup>th</sup> shot, we see a so-called candid shot. The shot begins with an image which shows the bushes of a tree in the dark with a mid-long shot. We see, in a mid-long shot, the groom flirting with his lover in his wedding day. This is the shot

the groom attacks the cameraman. In the next shot, the close-up of Max appears in the frame. Max sits down and tries to explain why he made us watch the previous footage. There is a newspaper behind him. He turns his back, grabs the newspaper and opens it. He shows the camera the cover of the newspaper. The picture on the paper belongs to the groom. Max glides the newspaper leftward and we see the news headline that is written next to the picture: "Lives torn apart by horrific murder" The shot ends after Max says: "Wanna see what I did to him?" Then in the 77<sup>th</sup> shot, we firstly see the close-up of a gasoline can and the camera makes a track-out. We could not see Max's full body yet, his hands and half of his body appear on the frame. However, we see a shadow of a person on the wall. He is the groom, and the serial killer is about to burn him. At the end of this shot, Max appears on the left side of the frame, and the shadow on the right side in a medium close-up. Max looks off-screen and asks: "Are you ready?" then the shot ends with a cut to another shot of Max. This new shot shows his close-up when he talks to the viewer directly. Now he asks us: "Are you ready?" by changing his voice tone. The shot continues from the 77<sup>th</sup> shot's camera size and angle. Max throws the match to the man who is tied on a chair. The camera makes a pan-right while Max is bending over. The victim begins to catch fire and he screams in pain. As soon as the match reaches his body, the camera makes a zoom-in and the camera size becomes a medium close-up. Then in the 80<sup>th</sup> shot, the close-up of Max talking directly to the audience comes up. He closes the view of the camera and the frame blurs. One second later, the camera focuses clearly and we now see his extreme close-up. Max in these shots (from the 75<sup>th</sup> to the 78<sup>th</sup>) is constructed as an omnipotent character and the director of its movie. It is implied that shots comes up by the will of Max, and the diegetic story occurs only because the serial killer wills it. However, the intervention of the linear

flow as such apparently undermines the continuity editing, in turn, it harms the film's horror strategy. There are some researches that show that editorial print undermines the influence of horror.

Hoshino Koshi, Kim Daewoong and Kawasoe Yoshito conducted an experiment to analyze the image's power to scare the viewer in the context of pseudo-documentary staging techniques. They used the results to explain "which elements of a frightening depiction are specific to mockumentaries" (Koshi 2013: 113). The subjective evaluation experiment was conducted at Kyushu Sangyo University, and the participants were composed of 60 Japanese people (41 male, 19 female) between the age of 18 and 25 (Koshi 2013: 113). They were made to watch only one type of shot from three (Koshi 2013: 113). Shot A shows the raw footage captured by handheld camera (1 min), Shot B shows staged shots with background music (2 min and 4 sec), and Shot C is the same with Shot A with the film's premise inserted (2 min and 5 sec) (Koshi 2013: 113). After the experiment, the subjects answered the questionnaires and were asked to evaluate from one to five (Koshi 2013: 113). They determined the adjectives according to 29 students' usage of 119 adjectives which are associated with the depiction of horror movie scenes, and narrowed it down to 25 suitable evaluative terms (Koshi 2013: 114). In this way, they tried to investigate the effect and characteristics of each staging technique and "determine how the insertion of the film's premise and the use of a POV shot contribute to the staging of a mockumentary film" (Koshi 2013: 112-3). At the end of the experiment, they found out that Shot A's horror component and mystical component dominated, Shot B's entertainment and eerie component came to the fore (Koshi 2013: 114). In Shot A in which the film premise was not inserted, higher "significance was observed for the roughness and realism level factors" (Koshi 2013:

116). They found out that the “viewer’s impression can be altered through the insertion of the mockumentary film’s premise” (Koshi 2013: 116). Inserting the film’s premise, according to them, could bring about “a deterioration of realism” (Koshi 2013: 116), and “may give the viewer an impression of artificiality” (Koshi 2013: 116). On the other hand, based on these findings, reality-based POV shots in pseudo-documentaries provide “little, easy-to-see information, it is more effective when it comes to depicting frightening imagery” (Koshi 2013: 116). Finally, using pseudo-documentary staging techniques are “effective in depicting horror imagery to the viewer” (Koshi 2013: 116). That is why found footage mode prefers to use documentary codes in an amateur aesthetic.

Even if the experiment focus on the prologue which reminds filmmaking activity to the audience, we could widen the scale and interpret that external/editorial intervention could lead to “give the viewer an impression of artificiality” and harm the horror convention. It could be claimed, by considering the result, that the editorial intervention has an important undermining effect on the horror. Max’s persistent intervention to the flow of the story, in this respect, throws a spanner on the horror nature of the movie. Considering more than 1/5 shots are intervened in this way, and the rest is also controlled by the diegetic director, it could be asserted that editorial intervention of Max serves to undermine horror conventions in the film.

### **3.1.2 The Role of Narrative**

In *The Last Horror Movie*, the narrative structure and the diegetic incidents also undermine the horror elements for mocking with the codes and conventions of horror films. Even if twist scenes could be used for different aims in horror films, we



see some twist scenes which undermine the conventions in *The Last Horror Movie*. They imply that this type of horror is actually hollow in a sense. We see these deceptive moments at least in five scenes. All of them specifically are executed to fool the viewer and mock the horror conventions.

The first twist occurs in the 24<sup>th</sup> shot. The shot begins with a wide shot, and the frame shows a lot of students going home and one alone boy standing before a wall. The camera which focuses on other students changes its movement and makes a pan-right and zoom-in to shoot the alone kid. The size then becomes a long shot. In the next shot, a medium close-up of Max appears. The cameraman follows him in a mid-shot after he orders. Max convinces the kid to go with him, the camera makes a track-out and a pan-left. Two characters begin to walk away. The frame size changes from a mid-shot to a wide. Then the two disappear. We expect that Max would kill the child, but in the next shot it reveals that the alone kid is Max's own nephew, and it seems he takes him to his mom.

In the 48<sup>th</sup> shot, Max asks the cameraman (the apprentice in this context) when he will kill by himself because it is part of the project according to the master. The apprentice says he does not know. The very next shot which follows this dialogue is very relevant. Max and the apprentice ring an old lady's bell in the shot and the woman gets surprised after opening the door and seeing the camera right there. The camera size in this scene is a mid-shot. We are apparently being manipulated to think that Max gives a shot for the apprentice to do his first killing but, in the 50<sup>th</sup> shot, it comes up that the old lady is Max's grandmother.

Another example is from the 85<sup>th</sup> shot in which blurred image appears and the voice of Petra while suffocating is heard. After two seconds the image clears and extreme close-up of Petra's face appears. The camera zooms out and it is seen, in a

close-up, two hands drawing rope and trying to kill Petra. She is in the death agony and dies after some seconds. When she stops moving, the camera makes a zoom-out and the camera size becomes a mid-shot. Then the apprentice who stands behind Petra comes into sight. He directly looks at the camera. After a while, Petra wakes up and asks Max (not the camera): “How was that?” Max’s off-screen voice says, “Seemed OK to me.” Apparently this is another parody of a death scene. In these scenes, the film mocks the horror conventions as if some people are killed. In this way, the expectancy to see deaths at the end of these scenes is clearly frustrated. The number of these twists shows that it is beyond coincidence. They are apparently constructed for a specific reason. The basic explanation of this is, I think, to mock the horror conventions.

### **3.1.3 The Role of Formal Elements**

In the first chapter we saw that violence is one of the fundamental conventions of horror films, and the monster is the character that reveals it. In the second chapter, it is proved that *The Last Horror Movie* includes many scenes which show violent acts. This part aims to discuss the ways in which the film handles the incidents of violence.

Showing a violent act really constitutes a significant part of horror films. Since the violence itself is not enough per se without images and definitions of monstrosity, demonstrating the scene is significant (Neale 1980: 21). In other words, the importance of “act of showing over the act of telling” makes the films horrifying (Brophy 2000: 276). According to David Scott Diffrient, this is the “graphic touchstone” of horror films (2004: 55). Modern horror, as Morris Dickstein claims,

reaches even the level of “hard-core pornography of violence” (1980: 33). While the visibility of the violence has such an importance, what does hiding it mean? Not showing the violent act is somehow a deficiency for horror films according to these scholars mentioned above. The lack of display of violence then takes us to the reverse side, and enables us to claim that invisibility of violence hinders the horror elements. *The Last Horror Movie*, in this respect, is a film which rarely shows violent acts and indirectly undermines the horror elements.

There are substantially many scenes which include violence in *The Last Horror Movie* however the film is not so generous to depict them explicitly. If the scenes in which Max talks about violence are excluded, there are 24 shots which include violence out of 129 shot. While 11 of these 24 shots show the violence, 13 shots do not. Among the shots which lack the depiction of violence, 4 of them are only sheer threat and do not show the moment of attack, 2 of them are twists and the others hide the violent acts almost completely.

In the shots which depict violent act, it is remarkable that we are forbidden to see the rest of the scene and that we would face a fast cut immediately after the act comes up. The only action we clearly see is Max’s stabbing or hitting move to the victim. For example, in the ninth shot, Max kills the policeman but the action is never shown in the frame. Whenever the action ends, the dead body appears. In the 28<sup>th</sup> shot, the camera that is positioned under a table shoots another victim-to-be’s room from a low angle. The camera makes a tilt-up and a pan-right, the frame blurs. After focusing, Max is seen behind the door while hiding. The woman enters into the room and Max crowns her head with a pot. As soon as she falls down, the shot immediately ends. The rest is never shown. The 29<sup>th</sup> shot is a similar one. In the 79<sup>th</sup> shot, Max kills the groom he resented. He throws the match to the man who is tied on

a chair. As soon as the match reaches his body, the shot once again ends rapidly. These are sufficient examples which enable us to see how the shots immediately move away from the violence as soon as possible even if they depict the violent acts. The film is not generous to show blood either. Even if *The Last Horror Movie* is a serial killer film, there are only three violent scenes which show blood (Shot 18, 53 and 58), but they never come into sight while shedding. It is apparent that even the shots which show violent acts do not show violence clearly. The incidents of violence are shown in a short duration, and as soon as the violent act appears, the shot is cut rapidly.

The shots which do not depict the violence are naturally contributing to hide it indirectly. For example, in the 52<sup>th</sup> shot, Max and the cameraman hides themselves from the victim in her house. They secretly go to the saloon. The camera takes both Max and the victim in a long shot. Max attacks the woman by shutting her mouth up with his hand. The frame blurs for a few seconds. Max stabs the woman repeatedly and she falls down by screaming. The knife, the stomach of the woman, and the action is not shown clearly. Then we see TV static image which comes after some violent scenes as in this shot to cut the scene from the middle. In the next shot, the same scene is shown in a long shot. For some seconds Max and the victim breathe excessively, and Max orders the cameraman to shoot properly. The camera moves forward by making a track-in. The frame size turns from long shot to a medium close-up. The length of the shot is 85 seconds but the blood appears only for one second. For the rest, both the stabbing action and the blood are hidden. The moving knife comes from off-screen again and again throughout the scene but the place where it is stabbed is not shown. There are some other scenes in which the violent actions take place in the off-screen space.

Hiding the violence in some scenes is attributed to the diegetic reasons. For instance, in the 18th shot, we see a mid-shot which shows both Max and the victim who is tied hand and foot in the kitchen. The intended victim looks at the camera directly. The serial killer introduces him to us but does not look at the camera. When Max stands up to get the hammer for killing the victim his body could not be seen completely. At the very moment Max makes a move to attack the man who realizes that he is going to be killed. As soon as he gives a kick by screaming “No!” the camera falls down. The size turns from a horizontal position to a vertical one. Some blood drop appears on the screen and nothing comes into sight except Max’s foot. The action takes place in the off-screen space.

In some other scenes, Max specifically prefers not to show the act. For example, there are two victims (husband and wife) in the 58<sup>th</sup> shot. They are both chained, and the camera shows them in a mid-shot. Max walks between the two, and stoops to the camera. He orders the cameraman to shoot only the man while he is killing the woman. We see the close-up of the man who looks off-screen. The man’s chair creak, woman’s scream, Max’s stabbing voice and his wheeze are heard at that moment. After the woman dies, Max orders the cameraman to shoot the woman now. When we see the close-up of the dead woman, we now hear the man’s scream, stabbing voice and Max’s breathing. As soon as two of them are murdered, the killer criticizes the viewer’s voyeurism while the camera shoots him in a medium close-up. He says, “were you absolutely sure without a shadow of a doubt that you weren't craning a little to see? Hmm? Not even the teensiest bit?” The diegetic director, in this shot, clarifies explicitly that hiding the violent act is a choice. The same intention could be found in many scenes throughout the film. The 24 shots that include

violence either serve to hide the rough stuff completely or move away from it as soon as possible. When we consider the conventions of horror to demonstrate, *The Last Horror Movie*'s approach presents the reverse. That is why it could be claimed that the film obscures horror elements to reveal. Interestingly enough, there are some related scenes that clearly show every detail of the violent act. We see them transparently. However they are apparently fake violence as it is revealed at the end of the scenes. One of these twists appears in the 85<sup>th</sup> shot and 102<sup>th</sup> shot in which Petra is roleplaying. The film does offer to show violence transparently, but only if they are fake in the diegetic world. If not, it is not preferred to be depicted.

The usage of darkness, in this regard, serves the same aim from a different perspective. In the film, the darkness is not utilized to horrify because there is no murder scene in which darkness is an important part of the mis-en-scene except one scene. Whenever the protagonist kills someone, each of them occurs during daylight outside or in the room where the murder takes place is lightened clearly. Surely there are some scenes which include darkness in the film but they are neither related to violence nor associated with horror, they contrarily are mostly peaceful scenes. There are 21 shots that depict the darkness. 3 shots are taken in the front of Max's car while he is talking directly to us (Shot 39, 68, 69), 3 shots show the protagonist while watching footage of his family on a curtain (Shot 62, 63, 64). The rest are all taken in Max and his sister's house while they are dining, in the kitchen where Max is cooking or in the dining room where the family members are chatting with each other (Shot 32, 33, 34, 35, 55, 56, 65, 66, 95, 97, 98). It is not coincidence that the great part of scenes depicting darkness is peaceful scenes. The scenes showing the violence could be shot in dark but it is apparently not preferred. There are, quite the contrary, 22 shots depicting violent acts (out of 24) that are taken during daylight.

For example, in the 18th shot, when Max is about to kill a man in his house, the sunlight coming from the window is easily seen. As another example, in the 28<sup>th</sup> shot, the daylight is clearly seen when he kills a woman in her office. The darkness is clearly not utilized for an element of horror and suspense. On the contrary, it is used for only in peaceful scenes, and it shows that the film violates horror's darkness convention in this context.

Surely *The Last Horror Movie* has an atmosphere to strengthen horror, but the diegetic director usually does not let us see the scenes flowingly. He constantly intervenes with the cameraman by ordering commands as to what to shoot, sometimes infiltrates into the scene and often cut himself (because he is also the editor of the film) and explains the previous or next scenes. These voice interventions, I claim, obstruct the horror made to appear. When Max plans to kill two people in a basement in the 58<sup>th</sup> shot, he completely controls the scene and his voice cut the scene from the middle. Throughout this shot, he criticizes both the cameraman and the audience. Another example appears in the 53th shot. Max scolds the cameraman for his mistake. Max's anger continues while we hear the victim's death agony is going on: "Brilliant. You almost missed everything. Now, go down and get a good shot of her." The cameraman does whatever Max says. Max sometimes controls the camera and intervenes behind it as in the 89<sup>th</sup> shot. In this scene, the cameraman as an apprentice is ordered to kill a female victim as his master Max commands. The apprentice holds a stick to hit the woman. He both determines the rules and intervenes with the action with his omnipotent voice: "What are you fucking waiting for?" These kinds of interventions prevent the continuity of the shot flow. Even if the horror atmosphere is evoked, the intervention of Max harms the

process and when the linear story is broken, in turn, the horrifying impact is influenced negatively.



Figure 4.1 Directly addressing the audience

Max's direct address to the audience is another peculiarity of *The Last Horror Movie*. It is not an exaggeration to say that the most important part of the film is the scenes Max talks directly to the audience by breaking the fourth wall and gives a kind of lecture about the nature of killing and people's hypocrisy. From the beginning to the end, 14 shots out of 129 are taken in this way. The structure of these shots is not so different from each other even the camera size sometimes changes from a medium close-up to a close-up. Max frequently intervenes and comments on shots which follow his appearance or interprets the previous shots. In these shots he conducts monolog by targeting the audience. One of the best examples of this type of shot type appears in the 78<sup>th</sup> shot. As we mentioned above, there is this groom flirting with another lady and the cameraman shoots them secretly, then the groom



realizes and kicks the cameraman. In the 76<sup>th</sup> shot Max explains why he showed us the previous footage of flirting action, and we hear a recording voice of the camera at the beginning of the shot. Max sits down and tries to explain why he made us watch the previous footage. He says: “Wanna see what I did to him?” In the next shot, we see Max is about to burn the man. Max asks to the victim “Are you ready?” then cuts to another shot of him and repeats the question by targeting us. As could be seen in these shots, Max’s insistent voice intervention obstructs the flow of the story and his omnipotent direction breaks the consistency of the narrative. Whenever his voice is heard, it signals that the scene is broken and whenever it occurs, the atmosphere harms negatively. For this reason, it could be claimed that direct intervention of Max to the scenes undermines the continuity of the narrative and has naturally negative effect on horror to appear.

To sum up, *The Last Horror Movie* has many scenes in which horror codes and conventions are undermined. Firstly, the omnipotent diegetic director Max controls the editing work of his film which is the same film we watch. He intervenes with every scene and obstructs the narrative to flow free from all defects. Since the external intervention weakens the horror element to flourish as could be seen Koshi’s experiment, Max’s intervention is in the same boat. His voice intervention is another obstacle for the story in this regard. Furthermore, we are deceived in some twist scenes, and horror conventions are mocked by utilizing suspense. The violence which is the prominent element of horror movies is avoided to show. The darkness in this respect is used in peaceful scenes rather than the ones showing violence. For all of these reasons, it could be claimed that *The Last Horror Movie* undermines horror codes and conventions in the sense of narrative and narration. Then the vital question comes: Why?

### 3.2 Why *the Last Horror Movie* Undermines Horror Conventions?

We argued that how *The Last Horror Movie* undermines horror conventions by utilizing camera, light and sound codes but the question of “why” is more important than the method. When we have a look at the film structure as a whole, it comes to light as to why this horror movie relies on found footage and undermines horror’s codes and conventions. This part aims to clarify this subtle reason and tries to make sense of film elements in this regard.

As mentioned before, in the scenes of Max’s direct address to the audience, the diegetic director comments on the scenes and people before and after the diegetic incidents. He goes beyond this spectrum, and criticizes horror films. This self-reflexive approach could be observed from the beginning. The first sequence of the film symbolizes a slasher film cliché, and Max builds his film as an antithesis to it. In this part, his monologue style dominates and his interpretation about horror, murder and people come up.

In the first sequence, we see a woman with white dress cleaning the floor at the coffee shop, and the camera tilts up from her feet. Her phone rings. It is her child calling her because he is scared by a horror movie, and the woman says “You shouldn't be watching that by yourself. I told you it was scary.” Meanwhile, some cars draw near the coffee shop and their light shines from the window. After she hangs up the phone, she finds out that the backdoor is open. She turns off the lights. Darkness sets in, and soon the red light of the coffee shop shines on the woman’s face. A little later, the phone rings once again. The voice on the phone says nothing but sounds inapprehensible. As soon as she hangs up, she hears a glass broken. She is

scared to death, and the camera zooms in to her face. The next shot shows the moving lights. As soon as she walks towards there, the non-diegetic slow music becomes a dramatic/thriller sound to increase the tension. She then walks to the center of the coffee shop, she calls a person and says “Cut it out Kell. This isn’t funny.” She reaches the middle of the place, and finds a mask on the floor. The camera cuts to the close-up of the mask then it turns to the character’s close-up again. She smiles. When she bends down to get the mask, she disappears from the frame, and then we see the killer. The human-monster kills the woman when she stands. After this sequence ends, a TV static image appears for two seconds. Whenever this transition part ends, Max appears in the next shot and starts to criticize the sequence.

“Hello. I realize this isn't what you were expecting. Let me explain. The film you hired from the video store... I recorded over it. But don't go switching off. You didn't actually miss very much. The characterization was 2-dimensional and, well, the dialogue was, frankly, embarrassing. I think you will find this much more interesting.”

After saying that “I think you will find this much more interesting” we see a murder scene shot by Max. He shows us how a murder scene should be. In this shot, we see Max who is about to hit a man in the restroom. The cameraman who holds a handy-cam could also be seen on the mirror. The shot is taken in a medium shot, and the camera follows Max by making a track-in. Then Max kills the man by hitting him while we see him from high angle. After this shot ends, we see once again Max in his room just like the first shot. He says by smiling: “You're interested now, aren't you? Go on, admit it. Well, you hired a horror movie, didn't you? So, you wanted to see something scary, right? Don't worry. I'll explain. You'll understand everything, I promise.” In these three shots, Max criticizes characterization of a horror film and proposes a new style that is the opposite. That is what makes Max’s film different.

He apparently positions his film against this type of narrative. When we compare some other scenes in *The Last Horror Movie* with the first sequence, we realize that the shooting technique, the characters, the color, the story and the representation of the violence differ a lot. Max's diegetic film, as a whole, actually is a criticism of that type of horror. Besides, according to Max, his film is a last word for horror as he says in the 110<sup>th</sup> shot:

“As you'll be aware, I recorded this over a film called ‘*The Last Horror Movie*’ so in a sense it's the title of this movie. It's kind of an appropriate title, if you think about it which is why I picked it. I mean, I could say it's an appropriate title for this film because in its self-conscious subversion of horror movie conventions it's kind of a last word in horror.”

The horror films before his film, according to his perspective, is not good enough. Max apparently sets a higher standard in his film. That is why there are many scenes in which horror conventions are undermined one by one. Since the codes and conventions symbolize “embarrassing” tradition, they should be reversed. The style and narrative structure of the mainstream should be violated to show a proper one. That is why, instead of it, it is shown a so-called real footage of murder which is “the real” horror at least by his definition (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 118). He repeats his main claim and explains his motivation as to why he makes this film in some scenes. For instance, we see him when he tells his intention to the female target who is about to die in 53<sup>th</sup> shot.

“We're making a film of this. We're trying to do something that hasn't been done before. Well, I've never heard of it being done before. We're trying to make an intelligent movie about murder while actually doing the murders. Now, I know that doesn't help you and it doesn't justify what I've done but at least it's interesting. You see, that's the point, isn't it? See? To try to do something interesting. The problem is it looks like you can't do anything interesting unless you give people a shock and you can't give people a shock unless you do something really horrible.”

Max thinks that he makes a movie that is very different and “interesting” from all other horror movies. This film is such a movie “that hasn't been done before” so the authenticity of the film makes it stronger than all others. The structure of the film strengthens this claim because “murder while actually doing the murders” is being shot in “real time” and the camera records it as it happens. This reality and authenticity claim takes its strength from found footage mode which is utilized by *The Last Horror Movie*. Heller-Nicholas, in this regard, thinks that of all the found footage films she discusses in her book, this film “offers the most ingenious premise for its central material’s discovery” (2014: 118). It is supposedly such a film which is shot as live by the serial killer. That is the reason why it is so different. That is also why the film utilizes found footage mode to show the real horror because the amateur aesthetic of the mode and the verisimilitude of the narrative present a convincing atmosphere as we argued in the first chapter. *The Last Horror Movie* employs the illusion of reality by found footage mode and Max is aware of this strength.

However, the most important point is not limited to the found footage mode. The claim of the movie is beyond these diegetic limits. The implication instinctively brings about that the true horror is not happening in horror films, it appears in real life. In the movie, “Max claims his motive for interrupting this standard horror fare is to show us ‘real’ horror” (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 118). The director of the film, Julian Richards, also confesses that he tries to make a “meta-horror”. The following passage taken from an interview with him is significant:

“You know, what is it about horror films that we like, why do we go and see horror movies? We usually do it because it allows us to explore things second hand, without any threat to us. And I thought it would be interesting to break that wall, and actually come up with a film that is a threat to you, as you’re watching it. It’s sort of the ultimate in home invasion.” (Skovdal 2014)

The strength of the threat in this way could be more powerful, which is why the fourth wall is broken in the movie. This is the reason Max talks directly to us. This is the reason Max threatens us, non-diegetic viewers, to kill. This is the reason we are targeted as his next potential victims. We are, according to Max, is not different from the diegetic viewers who watch Max's film by renting it from the store. This is exactly the reason that the finale of *The Last Horror Movie*, according to David Ray Carter, "takes the found- footage gimmick to its zenith" (Carter 2010: 313). The film claims that the home invasion by the serial killer, as the director stated, is not limited to the diegetic world, it also covers the non-virtual world which we are live on. Max comes to this point step by step. Firstly he hunts the diegetic viewers then adds the new victims' footages to his film. The murder moments are instrumentalized in a sense. It could be seen, for example, in the 109<sup>th</sup> shot clearly. We see the medium-close up of Max who sits next to a TV and the television screen shows one of his previous murders which occurred in the 90<sup>th</sup> shot. Max stops the tape and stands up. The camera keeps its position and Max appears while holding a gun. He walks and the camera makes a pan-right to follow him who goes toward the victim who is tied with rope. In a medium close-up, the man appears on the right side of the frame and Max's half body on the left side. The man looks at Max from downside. Max sits down by pointing the gun to him. We see then both of them in a medium close-up. Max interrogates him and asks by looking off-screen: "Tell me, Neil, why exactly did you watch that film to the end?" Neil breathes heavily. Then the camera gets close to the character and the camera size becomes close-up of the two. Max continues: "Did you think it was real?" At that time, the camera makes a crab-right and a pan-left and we see extreme close-up of them. Max clarifies that all scenes which Neil watches are "real". Then the man becomes another murder victim

for Max's film. The narrative does not coincidentally include killing of the diegetic viewers. It is also related to us as viewers. That is why Max interrogates the victim whether he thinks the footages are real or not. The killer knows that the victim does not think they are real, but Max corrects him. The message is clear: If you watch Max's film, you will be killed. We are in the same position. Then Max talks directly to us and says we are in danger because we also watch his film:

“Maybe you want to ask me some questions. I'd be happy to try and answer them. Really. You probably just want to report me to the police, right? Well, obviously I can't let you do that. You understand that at least. I mean, if you're watching this film you've become very dangerous to me as I have to you. Our fortunes are inextricable tied. Clearly then, we're going to have to meet. Soon. Very soon if I've timed things right. You don't believe me, do you? You think this is some art house film that's meant to look like a home movie. You don't think this is the only copy of this film. You don't think I was waiting when you hired it from the video store or that I followed you home. Wonder where you are now. Are you standing by a window? Maybe I'm looking at you right now. Or maybe I'll get in just by knocking on the door. I've done that three times before if you can believe it. People just let you in, it's quite extraordinary. They all thought it was some sort of reality-TV stunt. Then again, maybe I'll have to break in. Maybe I've already broken in. Go on, don't believe me. That's good. It makes my job a lot easier. But it doesn't really matter whether you believe me or not. I've had a lot of practice at this. A lot more than you, I suspect. Whatever happens this is gonna be your last horror movie. I'll be seeing you.”

In this way, Max breaks the strict line between the diegetic viewer and the audience of *The Last Horror Movie*. The fictive stance is violated and the audience pushes to adopt factual stance. In a sense, he tries to show that the real horror is beyond horror films. That is why he vulgarizes horror codes and conventions by means of the first sequence and his comments about horror, murder etc. Therefore, he forbids us to see his film as an ordinary horror film. We should not, according to him, “think this is some art house film that's meant to look like a home movie.” It might be last thing we see in the world. That is why it is called *The Last Horror Movie*. The person who watches the film is a potential target. It is, according to the director Julian Richards, “the ultimate in home invasion” (Phillips 2009). It somehow

reminds us Susan Sontag's statement which suggests that "there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera" (1977: 7). In *The Last Horror Movie*, this aggression originating from the camera pushes the border apparently and reaches to the ultimate level. The possibility of Max's visit to our living places is the authentic feature of the movie. It is more than Norman Bates' last look. Bates looks directly at the non-diegetic viewer only at the end of film, however Max literally threatens us not only by looking into our eyes, but also verbalizes what to do to us as his potential victims by showing concrete murder examples which are "real". In this regard, the director Richards states, "audiences aren't that used to seeing that level of reality" (Young 2014). He says in another interview: "what if what was happening on the screen spilled out into real life, and suddenly there was a question mark as to whether what you were watching was fiction or reality" (Simpson 2014). The words "real" and "reality" which are specifically used by the director are important to emphasize here because what Max is trying to do or what the film proposes us is not different from this intention, and it brings us the real horror.

When we believe in Max's claim, the narrative takes on a new meaning. The character then apparently has the ability to jump from the diegetic universe to the non-diegetic world. If Max is able to visit us, then it means that the real horror occurs in our world where we live right now. I think the movie draws its strength from this touch, and the possibility of "what-ifs", as Heller-Nicholas states, such as Max's probable passage to our surrounding (Heller-Nicholas 2014: 119). Even if the movie is a fictional work, the claim of the diegetic character pushes the border so much and makes us think that the "real" threat is in our house.

Last but not least, we should highlight the character of Max in the diegetic universe because the ordinary nature of the protagonist is also emphasizing the



normality of the killing. Max is not just a sheer “human-monster,” he is also a character who loves his friends, cracks jokes with his family members, takes care of his nephew, works for his daily expenses by shooting wedding videos, comprehends the criticism about himself, cries for his mother and father, utters gentle compliments to his ex-girlfriend Petra, shows courtesy to his victim. If we ignore his murderous nature, he could easily be evaluated as a meritorious individual and a law-abiding citizen. However, what makes the narrative powerful is this juxtaposition of his extraordinary acts and ordinary appearance. In this regard, the director enunciates his intention to us by saying “what we hadn’t seen was the good-looking guy next door, middle class, educated, public school boy – everything you would expect a serial killer not to be” (Phillips 2009). The unexpected nature of this type of ordinary character makes the story much more horrifying. In this way, the identification of the viewer with Max gets easier. Found footage mode, in all these process, enables a suitable atmosphere.

To summarize, Max criticizes horror conventions and constructs his film by refuting them. Found footage mode is utilized because it has powerful tools for the reality claims. The amateur aesthetic of the mode makes *The Last Horror Movie* one of those films that compose of so-called real footages. In this way, the film as a horror film has a claim of presenting real horror rather than a theatrical one, and it happens in real life as we live in right now. In this regard, Max’s work goes for beyond the fictional universe, and it steadily touches our world. That is the very point of pushing us to adopt factual stance.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis is comprised of three chapters in which I examine *The Last Horror Movie* by Julian Richards (2003) and try to show the specific usage of found footage mode in relation to horror. The first chapter focuses on the concepts of horror, found footage, reality and verisimilitude. The second chapter demonstrates the horror conventions that are employed in *The Last Horror Movie*. In the same chapter, the ways the film uses found footage mode is elaborated. In the third chapter, the movie is analyzed deeply in its specific elaboration of horror and reality, provided by a distinct function of the found footage mode. This part makes a summary of the milestones that brought us to this conclusion. It is concluded that the movie as a horror film that employs found footage mode to undermine horror codes and conventions so that it could present the real horror.

I investigated the internal dynamics of *The Last Horror Movie* and tried to understand where it stood. I benefited from Altman's semantic/syntactic analysis. In order to understand where the movie positions itself in relation to horror conventions, I divided the movie into shots to measure the ratio of certain characteristics. There are 129 shots in which the protagonist Max is the key actor. The main question is how and why *The Last Horror Movie* undermines horror codes by employing its conventions. I answered this question by discussing the general characteristics of horror films and found footage films, and then discovering which of these are used in the film.

In the first chapter, we saw that the threat element along with the monster (supernatural or human) is vital for horror movies. The monsters threaten the normality, and horror stories rely on the struggle between the monster and the

potential targets. This conflict leads to violence. Diegetic and non-diegetic sound, in this manner, are used to create suspense and fear. Rapid camera movements, shock cut, POV serve the same aim. The darkness is significant, and lighting codes are organized to create horror atmosphere. However, showing the horror element is also important. In the second part, I clarified found footage conventions such as raw cutting, elliptical narrative, grainy-shaky handheld camera, and precariously framed images that mimic the style of amateur filmmaking with a title card which informs the viewer that film is a compilation of events shot by characters who are dead or disappeared (Sayad 2016: 44). It is implied that in found footage movies the footage is authentic, and it does not have any editorial print. Unstable image quality, shaky shots, dynamic frames along with the dominance of off-screen space, in this regard, contribute to amateur aesthetic of found footage cinematography. Lack of non-diegetic sound serves the same aim. Found footage films take their strength from this amateur aesthetic, and base their reality claim on it. In this context, they recall the documentary modes. That is why some people called found footage mode as pseudo-documentary or mockumentary. Eventually all of the elements are there to construct “the illusion that what we see is real” (Wetmore 2012: 78). Snuff film, as a sister approach, comes to a common ground with found footage films especially in reality discussion. Hybrid products come out of this relation.

In the second chapter, I argued how *The Last Horror Movie* utilizes found footage mode and horror genre conventions. The threat element, the human monster carried out by the serial killer Max, and the presence of violence in one fourth of all shots prove it. Besides, the camera’s rapid visual movements via handy-cam, camera angles such as fly-on-the-wall style, Dutch angle and surely POV are placed in the film. Creaking wooden house, sneaking human footsteps, breathing voices and

screams that are all associated with horror films are used in the film as well. The Last Horror Movie also benefits from found footage mode to construct its horror atmosphere. The presence of the diegetic handheld camera, the absence of non-diegetic sound and external light, the dominance of off-screen space, low image quality and out of focus frames are all conventions of found footage mode, and the movie clearly utilizes them.

In the last chapter, I revealed how and why *The Last Horror Movie* undermines horror conventions by employing found footage mode. The omnipotent diegetic director Max constantly intervenes with the editorial structure of the film and in this way he obstructs the narrative to flow continually. He also bosses the cameraman around the filmmaking activity. However, as Hoshino Koshi and his fellow researchers found that, this type of editorial intervention weakens the power of horror. Even found footage mode does not tolerate the interventions. The protagonist also mocks with horror films and horror conventions. There are at least five twist scenes which undermine the audience's horror and suspense expectancy. The violence, in this regard, is either depicted in a short duration or never shown. As a related point, the darkness that brings out the monster in horror movies does not serve the same aim in this film. In *The Last Horror Movie*, all the shots in which the dark setting is used are all peaceful ones, with only one exception. However, 22 out of 24 violent shots occur on daylight. The film apparently violates horror conventions in these contexts.

The protagonist criticizes horror genre by exemplifying a slasher film cliché, and proposes a new style instead. He tries to prove as to how a murder scene, and generally a horror film should be. He shows us a so-called real footage to depict what the real horror is. These murder footages constitute his diegetic film *The Last Horror*

*Movie*, and whoever watches the movie is expected to be the next victim. He does not differentiate the diegetic viewers and non-diegetic audience in this regard. That is why he clearly threatens us by breaking the fourth wall in his direct address scenes. This is the main difference of the film. Found footage mode's reality claim provides the film with "what-if" probabilities such as his visit to our non-virtual world. On the other hand, the protagonist is not a sheer murderer. In his environment, he seems a rather kind person, a good friend, a loving uncle, a gentleman, a good-looking middle-class man. This juxtaposition of his ordinary and extraordinary natures strengthens the claim.

My research shows how a fictional film pushes the boundaries of reality and establishes a bond with our non-virtual world and how it imposes us to adopt factual stance rather than fictive stance. In this regard, it proves also how found footage is a valuable vehicle to support this claim. In today's world where high technology vehicles enable us to shoot various videos and upload them easily, the question on the indexical reference of the image brings the reality discussion to a different ground. Even if these found footage films are known as fictional by the audience, the technology and zeitgeist enable them to be shot easily. What-if probability is within the bounds of possibility. In this context, to make a snuff film with found footage vehicles is not impossible and the rumors Deep Web has presented unlimited opportunities did not reveal out of the blue. Even if found footage mode constitutes an important part of reality debate, today we have deeper field to work on.

My biggest challenge was that the film literature is not so generous to present materials about found footage cinematography. Although this present work does not claim to fill the gap completely, it at least constitutes a work in the field by focusing on a film with a research that goes beyond a mere literature survey. I have to omit

found footage documentaries in this thesis even if they present a similar reality claim on related topics. This thesis focused on only one film by supporting the topic with other found footage horror films, however it lacks an indepth multiple film comparison. In this field, further research needs to be conducted. Especially semantic analysis of the film would be another work to search on. The field is untouched for those who want to study why these films which have reality claims are produced in certain themes in certain timespan, and “reality culture” could be a good start. Besides, some found footage films have their own background in their culture such as *The Tunnel* (Carlo Ledesma, 2011) for the Australians, *Trollhunter* (André Øvredal, 2010) for the Norwegians, *Dabbe: Cin Çarpması* (Hasan Karacadağ, 2013) for the Turkish people. These films could constitute a fertile ground for the research especially in the context of their cultural references.

Reality discussion apparently has often been questioned, and so it shall continue to be. Found footage films in this regard present a fertile field to spark new debates. The relation between found footage mode and reality claim could present interesting results if some researchers focus on the field. High technology devices and the Net have changed all dynamics of the global communication and the perception of reality has also influenced. This might be why Baudrillard states that everything becomes simulacra today.

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