

Pass it On: New Viral Horror in *It Follows* and *Unfriended*

ABSTRACT

Very much like comedy, horror derives to a large extent from repetition. Whether in the form of serial killings, eerie twins or consistent jump scares, horror cinema firmly relies on the dread that replication (and its anticipation) produces on the spectator. In slasher movies, the threat posed by the murderer increases as his/her ominous presence gets more recurrent, fear escalating as the menace finally seems to lurk everywhere. Films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Alien*, *The Brood*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Village of the Damned* or the zombie subgenre as a whole place reproduction and mimesis as the central sites of horror in an explicit way, while other horror movies use repetition as a way of expressing the re-enactment of a character's traumatic experience. There is a viral component to horror that is conveyed in aural, visual, narrative and intertextual terms, and which is paralleled by the industry's strong tendency to serialize the most iconic and profitable horror films.

This viral element becomes a suitable self-reflexive tool which films often use in order to reflect on the nature of cinema itself. In this paper, I intend to call attention to the relevance this trope has acquired in recent films and television series, to which I will refer here as "new viral horror". *Ringu* and its U.S. remake, *The Ring*, *Black Mirror*, *It Follows* and *Unfriended* are some examples of the self-reflexive use of this device both in visual and narrative terms. By focusing in particular on the last two, I will argue that these cultural products provide a commentary on the new digital and technological landscapes in which cinema navigates and with which it merges. *It Follows* places horror in the invisibility of a venereal disease that literally produces hallucinatory "virtual" monsters,

whereas *Unfriended* is told entirely by means of a computer screen through which a ghost manifests herself. Both films articulate the anxieties of the new changing technologies through their invisible, viral menaces, epitomizing the gaseous quality of the cyberspace. This paper ultimately aims at demonstrating how these recent texts adopt and adapt the conventions of the horror genre to a new scenario where replication and intermediality take centre stage.

Keywords: horror cinema, viral horror, digital spaces, *It Follows*, *Unfriended*.

SHORT BIO

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