

Intra-Diegetic Cameras as Cinematic Actor Assemblages in Found Footage Horror Cinema

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Abstract:

This article proposes a reconceptualization of the term “actor” within motion pictures and presents the argument that “acting” is a matter of distributed agency performed by heterogeneous assemblages. What constitutes an actor is what I will label as a “cinematic actor assemblage,” a term that comprises what is commonly known as human actors as well as material entities that play an active part in motion picture images. The use of intra-diegetic cameras in contemporary found footage horror films constitutes a particular case of such cinematic actor assemblages. Through a dynamic relational performance, cameras here take on roles as active agents with the potential to affect other elements within the images as well as the films’ audiences. In found footage horror the assemblage mode of operation creates suspense, since the vulnerability of the camera threatens the viewer’s access to the depicted events. While human characters and individual entities making up the camera assemblage are disposable, the recording is not. Found footage horror crucially hinges upon the survival of the footage. I will further suggest that these films allow filmmakers to experiment with the acting capabilities of intra-diegetic cameras.

Keywords: Assemblages; Found footage horror; Actor; Camera; Deleuze and Guattari; Latour.

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No one is left alive. Only the footage remains, and only the footage can tell what have happened. This is the fundamental premise of found footage horror, a mode of cinema where a film's footage is presented as a found object documenting the horrific demise of its human characters (Benson-Allott, 2013; Grant, 2013; Heller-Nicholas, 2014; Reyes, 2015). For instance, *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), the film spearheading the contemporary found footage horror trend, is entirely comprised of audio-visual recordings presented as the discovered remains of a documentary film. The plot also reveals that the crew members have since been reported lost. The only source of information about their whereabouts is the found footage supposedly recorded by the two cameras the crew brought along on their production trip. As I will suggest in this article, the cameras here not only operate as simple recording devices, but they become actors, partaking in the events and engaging with the film's audiences.

By presenting (audio)visible signs as indicators of the images' mediated status, found footage horror works against the methods of traditional cinema. It does not offer a "window onto the world" where the modes of production are made invisible. Unlike "traditional" cinema, the presence of cameras and other recording devices are made apparent within the diegetic universe. The films can hence be associated with documentary style, characterized by the explicit spatiotemporal co-existence of recording technology and recorded events. Several of the found footage films make overt claims towards presenting true-to-life recordings, or deliberately leave the authenticity of the depicted universe unresolved. These claims towards truth-value are organizing principles of found footage horror, providing viewers with access to footage allegedly documenting real events (Benson-Allott, 2013; McRobert, 2015; Raimondo, 2014). As should be clear, the authenticity of found footage horror is deceptive, the footage is specifically produced for the film in question. The inauthentic nature of the film is common knowledge for today's audiences and the found footage horror "is now understood less as an indicator of authenticity and more as a specific film style" (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 4). This emphasis on style is further analysed by Xavier Aldana Reyes, who emphasises the stylistic possibilities and limitations of this framing technique, and convincingly argues that found footage horror is not a subgenre as such, but "needs to be understood as framing or narrative technique marking the product at a stylistic, but not a thematic, level" (Reyes 2015, p. 124).

This stylistic framing is remarkably rigid and, perhaps more than any other contemporary cinematic trend, found footage horror illustrates the

creative powers of working within a constrained format. As argued by David Bordwell (2012), found (or “discovered,” to use Bordwell’s preferred term) footage horror is a formal experiment, whereby filmmakers push towards stylistic innovations through working within self-imposed limitations. Given the rigid constraints of the found footage format, and the very low budgets common to these productions, the films’ style becomes their main source of attraction and their key mode for generating audience suspense and terror.

The style’s most central characteristic is the explicit foregrounding of the diegetic camera’s presence (Benson-Allott, 2013, p. 180; Grant, 2013, p. 154; Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 23; Raimondo, 2014; Reyes 2015; 2016). By the term “intra-diegetic cameras,” I refer to cameras that appear both as a recording source of the imagery and as a physical presence within the diegetic universe depicted by this same imagery. In this regard, cameras are not just passive observers but become key participants in the films’ diegesis. Xavier Reyes identifies the camera in found footage horror as a character in the film. He sees this as a limitation that poses challenges in terms of justifying the role of the camera in the narrative (Reyes 2016, p. 155). Recognizing a theoretical potential in Reyes’ observation, I emphasise how the intra-diegetic camera’s role as a character of the film becomes a creative outlet for cinematic experimentation that points towards the potentials of exploring modes of distributed agency through the medium of film. As I argue, the cameras become the most central characters in found footage horror, structuring the narrative and taking part in the events unfolding onscreen.

Intra-diegetic cameras operate as actors, both in terms of performing a role as “real” recording devices and in terms of affecting other entities within the films as well as the films’ audiences. This active role of intra-diegetic cameras highlights the dual focus of this article, since I make an argument about the role and function of intra-diegetic cameras in contemporary found footage horror cinema, as well as a more general theoretical argument about how (audio)visual elements in motion pictures can function as actors. I start with the latter of these arguments, where I seek to reconceptualise the term “actor” within motion pictures and claim that “acting” is a matter of distributed agency performed by heterogeneous assemblages. What constitutes an actor is what I label as a “cinematic actor assemblage,” a term that comprises human actors as well as material entities that play an active part in motion picture images. I then present intra-diegetic cameras as a particular example of such cinematic actor assemblages, designating the camera as an active agent with the potential to affect other elements within the images as well as the films’ audiences. I suggest that the found footage horror sub-genre is

a playing field for filmmakers to experiment with the acting capabilities of intra-diegetic cameras.

Cinematic Actor Assemblages

The camera is one of several elements taking on acting-parts in a film. Characters as diverse as vampires, horses, houses, cars, body parts, or humans, all act through a distribution of agency where the entity that appears on the screen is produced and performed through relational processes. Acting unfolds in-between: in-between the actor and his or her character; in-between the various actors; in-between the actors and the camera, as well as other technical equipment; in-between human agents and other elements of *mise-en-scène*; and so on. Instead of individual performances, I propose the term “actor assemblages” to designate this constellation of social and material factors that perform an act (Rødje, 2015). Cinematic actor assemblages comprise the various factors, processes and relations constituting the performance of a role or an audio-visual element in a motion picture. Films are interlocking and connecting universes of such assemblages, where what appears on screen is a collective and relational performance. Actor assemblages affect other constituent parts and processes within the unfolding cinematic images, and also connect with and affect the audiences of these images.

Cinematic actor assemblages are fundamentally relational, both in terms of their composition and in terms of their mode of operation towards other assemblages. These two relational aspects are themselves interrelated; the relations constituting an image have impact upon how the image may instigate change through its relations to other assemblages. The assemblage concept stresses the dynamic composition of cinematic images, where each of the heterogeneous and contingent elements of an image enable potentials to affect other elements. In this perspective, an actor assemblage is defined by what it does and facilitates.

The concept of assemblages is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Assemblages, according to Deleuze and Guattari, comprise variables of content and variables of expression; as such, assemblages have a material, machinic, composition that is inseparable from its expressive potentials of enunciation (1987, pp. 88, 504). Assemblages act through relations between bodies (material composites of actions and passions), and through the movements of these bodies, as well as the interrelationships between bodies and movements. These relations of bodies and movements are expressive; they cannot be traced back to any one individual point of origin but the process is always collective and dynamic.

Assemblages are what Alfred N. Whitehead (1978, p. 18) calls actual entities or actual occasions – in each instant the assemblage becomes something new and different. The entity that performs is thus an outcome of shifting processes and relations. For Whitehead, “each actual entity is conceived as an act of experience arising out of data” (1978, p. 40). The actual entity is “a process of ‘feeling’ the many data” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 40). By feeling Whitehead refers to a prehension of an item in the universe that makes a positive contribution to the internal constitution of a subject (1978, p. 41). In other words, an actual entity feels other actual entities that are the constituent parts of its own constitution.

Actual entities may constitute human subjects but also other living, and non-living entities. In Whitehead’s ontology, prehension, or feeling, is not exclusive to living organisms. Hence Whitehead’s claim that “apart from the experience of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness” (1978, p. 167). By subject, Whitehead here refers to any actual entity, animate or inanimate. By experience, he addresses how prehensions of other entities constitute any entity. In other words, the world is comprised of entities defined through their relations to other entities. As these sets of relations change, so does the constitution of each affected entity. Everything is a process, as each actual entity always becomes something new from one moment to the next, since it is constantly prehending new sets of other entities. Since nothing exists in isolation, each entity has the potential to affect other entities. Anything that can be experienced, and thus affect the constitution of other entities, is acting.

This relational conceptualization ties in with the actor-network position of Bruno Latour, who understands all action as dislocated by definition (2005, p. 46). For Latour, the characteristics and capacities of a thing or a phenomenon are explained through its trails, its networks of connections, of various strengths, to other things or phenomena. All characteristics and capabilities of an entity are relational network effects. Latour holds that this is true for any material entity, for human subjects and immobile objects alike. An entity takes on qualities through the network of relations it is entangled within, and it is only through this network that effects can be produced. Since Latour rejects inherent qualities, there are no a priori differences between humans and non-humans, as both have the capacity to join networks that produce effects. Any such differences are themselves relational effects. Actions and phenomena are distributed events, which cannot be traced back to any one source or cause.

The actor assemblage concept enables a mapping of the (audio)visual elements’ operations across a number of different images and motion pictures, performing different roles. This does not mean that one and the

same assemblage appears in different images. As a matter of distributed agency, acting unfolds spatially between an entity and its surroundings, as well as temporally between one state and the next. Any actor transforms, and is itself transformed. The actor assemblage, as any actual entity or occasion, is always performed anew. Yet it retains some characteristics that enable us to ascribe it an identity and trace it across different images. Human characters, set designs, soundtracks, or stylistic devices like colour or lightening all constitute potential actor assemblages, or parts thereof. In principle, any element of an image may operate as an actor assemblage, if it has the potential to make a difference.

If the capacity to make a difference is what characterizes an actor in a film, two questions then become at what level and in which context will these differences be relevant and perceptible? We need to specify the parameters of the changes that occur. As, in principle, any entity in a motion picture constitutes an actor assemblage this can easily lead to endless descriptions of entities and relations. The task thus becomes to identify, follow and map out those actor assemblages that form some pattern of agency that acts in a consistent way and that makes a discernible difference to a motion picture and its audience. My focus on the camera as an actor assemblage in found footage horror is thus motivated by a belief that the camera assemblages are integral to the unique mode of operation and audience address of these films, as it is clear in the analysis that follows.

To summarize this section, the material composition of an actor assemblage affects its expressive capacities, and as this composition always transforms, these expressive capacities are never uniform and stabilized. The actor assemblage has to be created anew for each image, each film, and each process of perception. Its effects and potentials are enacted through the relations by which it is assembled and through which it enters relations with other entities and formations. The assemblages can act as human figures or as non-human entities, or as composites of human and non-human elements; they can constitute specific physical entities or more abstract formations; they can appear as individuals or as collectives. The possibilities are unlimited. Actor assemblages leave traces for empirical scrutiny, while at the same time enable ever-new performative variations.

In this respect, a camera assemblage analysis does not adhere to a distinction between form and content, but maps out how context, formal qualities of the image, and audio-visual content intersect and interact in performing these assemblages. I approach found footage horror as films that establish rigid formal parameters and explore how the camera here performs as an actor assemblage.

Establishing the Act

The intra-diegetic cameras of found footage cinema serve as a link between the (found) footage and the depicted universe. It is thus important to establish the connection between the images and a camera-specific mode of production. Relational factors play an important role in this regard. Within the image frame, as well as through the soundtrack, the camera is assembled through its interactions with other socio-material entities. Similarly, the imagery itself introduces medium-specific traces that indicate the relations to specific recording technologies. Hence, the camera assemblage is performed through dynamic interrelationships, where formal qualities act together with depicted and audible elements of the imagery, as well as with the information provided through the film's narrative and non-diegetic statements.

The camera covers a range of acting styles in terms of how it operates and how it relates to its surroundings. For instance, a handheld, shaky camera performs very differently from a static surveillance camera. As recognized by David Bordwell, the *Paranormal Activity* series illustrate this, using both techniques (Bordwell, 2012). A handheld camera foregrounds the physical presence and vulnerability of the camera, which is an active participant in the unfolding events. A static surveillance camera, on the other hand, remains passive and remote from the events depicted. It maintains its status as an actor, but more like a mute, distant witness.

For the most part, intra-diegetic cameras perform as off-screen actors. As an optical recording device, the camera is in front of what is seen on the screen, and can only be made visible in special circumstances, for example through mirrors or other reflecting materials or by the use of multiple intra-diegetic cameras where one camera can be captured by another. Such techniques for making the camera visibly present are common in found footage cinema, although most often the presence of the camera is made evident while remaining unseen. The camera can for instance be established as an off-screen actor if the camera operator makes comments about the recorded events or engages in conversations with the people being photographed. Alternatively, the characters being filmed can directly address the camera and/or the photographer. The presence of the camera can also be established through encounters with material objects or conditions. Bumps and shakes due to physical contact with other objects are for instance noticeable, and so is exposure to rain, wind and other weather conditions. Furthermore, its physical movements can indicate the camera's presence, as when handheld, or lack of movement, as when mounted in a static position. The mediated status of the imagery can

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also be indicated by more medium-specific characteristics of the imagery itself. Lens-flares, cracked screens, on-screen textual or symbolic information referring to the recording technology (battery-meter, timer, rec-signal) or the playback mechanism (freeze frame, fast forward, rewind, blur) are all common elements in these films. The presence of the camera can be determined by context. For instance, many found footage films include introductory textual statements indicating the found and supposedly authentic status of the footage, thus installing a spatiotemporal connection between the camera(s) and the depicted events within the diegetic universe of the film.

Characteristic for found footage cinema, the performative role of the camera assemblage is established at the very outset of the film. For instance, *The Blair Witch Project* opens with a white on black display of the film's title, followed by a textual statement:

In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary.

A year later their footage was found.

This introductory statement proves the supposedly "found" nature of the footage. The text is the only moment of the film, until the end titles, that does not belong to this "found" footage. The statement places what we are about to see in a documentary domain, that is, a universe where recorded events co-exist with the equipment used to make these recordings.

When the found footage imagery starts, several clues are given regarding its mediated status. The out of focus and shaky images indicate the relation to a (handheld) camera. The persons operating the camera make themselves present by talking and commenting upon what's being filmed, and the people being filmed are addressing the camera and engaging in conversations with the camera operator. An additional camera is introduced and by intercutting footage of the cameras filming each other, both cameras are visibly established as distinct actor assemblages. Furthermore, by using cameras of different media formats, in this case a video camera and 16 mm camera shooting on black-and-white film, the medium-specific status of the imagery from each of the cameras is emphasised.

Similar establishing techniques can be found in the more recent upsurge of found footage horror. Like *The Blair Witch Project*, *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2009) also opens with an introductory text, only this time it is not the authenticity of the footage itself that is

underscored, but rather the authentic status of the characters and events of the film:

Paramount Pictures would like to thank the families of Micah Sloat & Katie Featherston and the San Diego Police Department.

Micah Sloat (Micah Sloat) and Katie Featherston (Katie Featherston), soon to be revealed as the main characters of the film, are introduced as real people here, whose authenticity is placed on equal terms with the San Diego Police Department.

Next follows shaky, slightly out of focus, images, before we see a mirror shot of a man with a camera, thus establishing the identity of the camera and its operator. This is followed by more somewhat unsteady footage, including a glimpse of the camera operator's hand as he opens a door and steps outside. An on-screen text then indicates the time and date of the footage before the camera operator engages in a conversation with a woman arriving in a car. The woman comments on the camera, mentioning its "giant ass" size and that it "has a bright light". Then, having entered the house, she exchanges a kiss with the camera operator.

Her comments explain the relatively high quality of the film's images, as compared to *The Blair Witch Project*. The more professional camera explains the higher definition image quality and steadier camera movements, while its external light source deals better with poor lighting conditions. When the woman and the camera operator exchange a kiss, the identity of the person behind the camera is again revealed.

Three interrelated aspects that together constitute fundamental elements of the camera actor assemblage are established in both opening scenes: first, contextual information is given about the supposedly authentic nature of the imagery. This makes evident the spatiotemporal co-existence of recording equipment with filmed events, or in other words, that the camera and the imagery belong to the same diegetic universe. Next, the mediated status of the imagery is made explicit. That is, the connection to specific recording technologies is made evident through the formal qualities of the images, as when the footage is blurry and shaky. Finally, the imagery is connected to specific cameras and people operating these cameras. The various factors comprising the camera as the mechanism recording the depicted events are made evident when the camera and its operator can be seen and heard. Hence, the assemblage mode of production is established as a process where dynamic interrelations generate the images. Together, these three aspects point to: (1) How the camera shares a spatiotemporal co-existence with its referents: the filmed events (the camera-referent assemblage). (2) The mediated status of the images and how these images are connected to

specific technologies of recording and/or playback (the camera-image assemblage). (3) And, finally, how the camera itself is performed through relational factors (the camera as a recording-assemblage).

These aspects highlight the indexicality of the image as it is presented to the viewer. I am here referring to indexicality as an effect, that is, as a promise of spatiotemporal co-existence between recording technology and recorded event, regardless of the source of the recording. In other words, this indexicality effect does not depend upon the imagery actually being recorded by the intra-diegetic cameras presented. With reference to the instantaneity of the index in the case of the digital image – its ability to stand as a witness to a temporal event – Markos Hadjioannou argues that “the importance of the index is structured not on the specificity of the technology but on the relation with the spectator, whose role is that of witnessing” (2012, p. 172). His argument is equally valid for explaining the indexical logic of found footage cinema. What matters is not the way of recording but how the imagery relates to a spectator that is thereby positioned as a witness to the depicted events. The camera acts as a witnessing device. Indexicality, as defined above, is not merely a matter of material traces between recorded objects and recording technology, but a case of constructing the semblance of such material traces. The audience is presented with a universe where intra-diegetic cameras and presented footage coexist.

I should stress that this is not a question of realism. The co-existence of recording technology and imagery within a given universe is important, but the authentic state of this universe is irrelevant. Found footage cinema’s indexicality is effective regardless of the factual or fictional status of the diegetic universe. Hence, the revelation that the footage of *The Blair Witch Project* is not of an authentic or documentary nature does not diminish the indexical link between this footage and the intra-diegetic cameras; rather, it transposes this indexical relation towards a diegetic universe. The audience is a witness through the camera.

Reassembling the Actor and the Camera as Sole Survivor

A found footage horror plot convention is the tragic destiny of all of the films’ central human characters, including the camera operators (Benson-Allott, 2013, p. 168). As indicated by the opening textual statements from *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity*, the main characters’ imminent death is often evident to the viewers already at the outset of the film. The camera is granted status as a reliable witness to these events (Grant, 2013, p. 169). The remaining questions are *how* these deaths will be captured by the camera and how they will be presented to the viewer. While the human characters will perish, the camera, or at

least the recording, must live on, in order to make the footage available for the viewers. Some footage must survive in order to be found.

Again, *The Blair Witch Project* is here the exemplary case. The film comes to an end as the two remaining members of the film crew, Heather (Heather Donahue) and Mike (Michael C. Williams), hear the cries of their lost friend, Josh (Joshua Leonard), in the middle of the night. With both cameras running, they trace the cries to the ruins of an abandoned house. They enter and explore the building, guided only by the lights of the cameras. Frantically seeking Josh, Mike runs into the basement where he is knocked over off-camera. His camcorder drops, filming only a close-up of the ground. Heather, operating the film camera, can be heard sobbing as she follows him down into the basement. Her camera captures Mike standing in a corner, facing the wall, before Heather herself is knocked over. The camera rolls to the ground, still running while displaying a flickering image as the film ends abruptly. No definite answers are given about the destiny of the film crew but as we can see, both cameras are left still operating. As the audience can recall from the film's opening titles, the cameras will later be found while the film crew have vanished.

The role of the camera as surviving witness is among the most characteristic traits of found footage horror. This can be seen even more clearly in a later film such as *Tape 407* (Dale Fabrigar and Everette Wallin, 2012). The film follows the survivors of an airplane crash at a secret military base, where unidentified violent creatures hunt them down and kill them. In the end, the two final survivors, teenage girls Trish (Abigail Schrader) and Jessie (Samantha Lester), escape and stop a car on a nearby road. The male car driver (Jude Gerard Prest) offers his help and invites them into his car. He then suddenly shoots them both dead, appearing to be a government agent set out to silence any secret military experiment witnesses. He approaches the camera on the ground. As he picks it up, a monster attacks and kills him. His blood splatters the camera lens and the film ends.

Even for a horror film, the main characters' abrupt deaths may seem unusual. However, within the found footage framework, it makes sense. After their deaths, the teenage girls are out of the frame and the audience attention is directed elsewhere. This underscores the disposable status of human characters within found footage horror. The human characters die, but the camera lives on so that the recording can continue and the story can come to its conclusion.

Similarly, the big budget found footage disaster movie *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), presents the camera, or more accurately the recording, as the survivor of an alien attack on Manhattan. As explained

by the film's introductory texts, the found footage is here an SD card from a "camera retrieved at incident site 'US-447' area formerly known as Central Park," now in possession of the U.S. Department of Defense. The movie is presented as the unedited recording on the SD card. Edits are in-camera, and the footage is interspersed with older recordings on the card made prior to the night of the alien attack.

Towards the end of the film, the three main human protagonists, camera operator Hud (T. J. Miller), Rob (Michael Stahl-David), and Beth (Odette Yustman) are taken on board a military helicopter, fleeing the disaster. However, the alien monster lunges at the helicopter, causing it to crash. Surviving the crash, they rise from the helicopter ruins and try to run away. The camera is left on the ground, still operating. Hud then suddenly remembers the camera and returns to grab it, when the alien suddenly strikes and kills him. Next, the monster attacks the camera before dropping it to the ground, besides the lifeless body of Hud. On auto-focus, the camera automatically shifts the focal point back-and-forth between Hud's face and the grass. Rob and Beth run to their friend, grab the camera and the recording stops. The camera is switched back on as Rob and Beth flee and seek refuge under a small bridge in Central Park. Exhausted, they drop to the ground while outside explosions can be heard as the military subjects the area to heavy bombardment in an attempt to kill the alien monster. Presumably realizing that they have run out of options, Rob holds the camera up towards his face and delivers his final testimony, directed to whoever finds the footage. He then directs the camera towards Beth's face, who provides her sobbing testimony. Suddenly, the bridge is hit by a bomb and Rob and Beth disappear from the frame while their voices are still audible as the camera is buried under the rubble. They declare their love for each other before the recording comes to a sudden halt and the remaining seconds of the tape is filled with old footage documenting a happy date between Rob and Beth prior to the disaster. As with the other films discussed above, no humans are left alive to tell their story, but it is entirely captured here on an SD card.

The camera has to be constantly reassembled in order to keep operating and to provide viewers with access to the depicted events. This is obvious in the Spanish found footage films *[REC]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007) and *[REC 2]* (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2009), which both follow a TV crew trapped inside an apartment building where a virus is turning those infected into rabid monsters. In a dramatic scene in *[REC 2]*, a violent fight erupts in a hallway when the recording camera runs low on power. The battery meter in the top right corner of the image has run empty and turned red. As the batteries are dying, the sound becomes mumbled. The camera then turns toward a person in the end of

the hallway, out of focus. The battery meter starts blinking as the person comes closer. The image zooms in and finally manages to establish a focused shot; we can recognize the TV reporter (Manuela Velasco) who went missing at the end the first [REC] film. The image quality rapidly deteriorates and just before the batteries run flat, we see that she is holding a TV camera in her hands. The screen goes black before the image reappears from the point of view of the new camera. The recording continues as another camera joins the assemblage.

In this scene, the continuation of audience access to the diegetic universe is granted through a reassembling of the recording through the introduction of a new camera. The recording continues, despite the breakdown of any individual part of this actor assemblage. Found footage films spends little time on demonstrating camera brand names, technical details and specifications. The individual camera is never a central stand-alone actor. Rather, the emphasis is on the act of recording, which grants access and (audio)visibility to the diegetic events. Technical details and specifications are bit-parts in a performative process that grants access and visibility. Indeed, this performance is rarely elegant, but rather strenuous and frenetic. As in the example above, the recording process is often on the brink of collapsing. Batteries run flat, lenses crack, cameras are knocked over, lighting conditions are terrible, sound is garbled or missing, and camera operators tend to end up dead or injured. These are trademarks of found footage horror. The continued operation of the cameras is a vulnerable activity and much attention is devoted to the replacement or restitution of broken or missing parts of the camera actor assemblages. Also the human characters become necessary bit-players that help the camera remain functional. As illustrated by the above example from *Cloverfield*, numerous films include scenes where camera operators are immobilized or disposed of, only for the camera to be picked up by another character that stands in line to join the camera assemblage. Tellingly, found footage horror films typically end as the final human characters die and the camera is left behind, still operating but devoid of human co-actors that enable its full mobilization and active engagement with its surroundings. The recording survives, despite the death of any individual parts making up the camera assemblage, enabling the footage to be found and eventually granting audience access.

No single part is hence essential to the assemblage securing the survival of the recording. This is a point brought even further in the found footage eco-disaster film *The Bay* (Barry Levinson, 2012). The film is presented as a collage of audio-visual recordings assembled by a news reporter to document the ecological disaster terminating the population of a small Maryland coastal town. The film includes footage from numerous media

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sources, including television footage, camcorder and cellphone recordings, web cams, and surveillance tapes. The assemblage here is not any individual camera but dispersed across a myriad of different devices, which all by themselves comprise a sub-set of an actor assemblage. The process of recording, rather than any single camera, is the central performative role. This does not diminish the camera's actor function but underscores its fundamentally distributed mode of agency.

The Camera as Weapon

While cameras initially tend to support the human characters, the roles are often challenged or even reversed by the end of the film. As Alexandra Heller-Nicholas explains with regards to the relation between the camera and its human operator, Micah, in *Paranormal Activity*:

He may need the camera, but it does not need him. By the end of the film, the camera shifts from working *for* him as a tool propagating his self-image as alpha-male, to working *against* him, becoming a witness not only to his failures as a partner, but ultimately to his murder. Micah employs technology as an instrument of control, but it retaliates against him and literally becomes a witness to—and a weapon in—his death (2014, p. 138, emphasis in original).

A struggle between the camera and its human operator can be detected here, whereby the camera liberates itself from being a tool under human control. As the camera demonstrates its agency, the human characters become even more vulnerable and volatile.

An explicit example of this can be found in the segment *Phase I Clinical Trials*, from the found footage anthology film *V/H/S/2* (Simon Barrett, Jason Eisener, Gareth Evans, Gregg Hale, Eduardo Sánchez, Timo Tjahjanto and Adam Wingard, 2013). In this segment, a camera is implemented as an eye prosthesis to a young man (Adam Wingard) who has suffered loss of his right eye in a car accident. The entire segment is viewed from the eye cam, and the film starts as the camera looks straight at the surgeon (John T. Woods) completing the procedure of inserting the prosthesis. Mirror shots reveal the visual appearance of the man, with the digital eye cam in place of his eye. In this case, the eye cam presents a subjective point-of-view. However, the segment soon introduces tensions between the agency of the camera and the agency of the human character. Upon returning home, he starts experiencing strange visions. He is haunted by ghosts, visible only through the implanted eye cam. Each time a ghost occurs, the image turns static and noisy: the ghosts' presence disturbs the image signal.

As explained in the film segment, the ghosts had already been there, prior to the presence of the camera, but its introduction makes their appearance visible for the man. Furthermore, once their presence is known, they start interfering with his life. What is particularly noteworthy is the feedback mechanism that occurs between the ghosts and the camera. It is the eye cam that makes these ghostly figures transparent, but at the same time the appearance of the ghosts interrupts and disturbs the image that the eye cam delivers. The film presents a transparency-noise loop: the ghosts' transparency disturbs the very image that makes them visible. The more the ghosts become transparent, the noisier is the image.

The noise further disturbs the man, intensifying the conflict between him and the undead spirits. Eventually he grabs a razor and cuts the camera from his eye socket. The camera continues filming, capturing the sight of the man with blood running down his face. However, the ghosts are still visible to the camera as they close in on the man. One of the ghosts grabs the camera and proceeds to attack the man, killing him by shoving the eye cam down his throat. The camera still operates as it enters his mouth, presenting a frenetically glitchy view from inside his body, before the film segment comes to a sudden end.

The camera is the only source of the visual footage in this segment and as such the single point of connection between audience and diegesis. At the outset, the camera is entangled with the body of the main character, so the audience is presented with a subjective point-of-view, seeing exactly what the character sees. When the camera is removed from the eye socket, it presents a different, disembodied perspective, before it finally presents a view from within the body. More importantly, the camera introduces a tension between the human character and the vision that the camera offers him. The camera is a source of vision, but also a source of torment. The camera-body assemblage turns dysfunctional and the camera is detached from the body, only to enter a new assemblage with the ghostly figure. The camera becomes a lethal weapon and attacks its former host. The reassemblage of the camera secures its continuation while at the same time emphasising the disposability of its human co-actor.

Acting the Part

I suggest that intra-diegetic cameras operate as actor assemblages. This is clear within found footage horror films, where cameras perform the most central acting part. The cameras are the sole survivors that enable the story to be told and grant access to the horrors depicted. The cameras furthermore affect other entities within the films' diegesis. Rather than a passive recording device, the cameras become key participants that influence the narrative and the interactions between characters.

Intra-Diegetic Cameras in Found Footage Horror Cinema

For this to happen, the camera has to be properly introduced and situated within a film's diegesis and in relation to the film's other key actors. As we have seen, much emphasis is put on establishing the camera as an actor in the opening scenes of found footage films. Links have to be created between camera and filmed events, between camera and image, and in-between the various entities that together perform the camera actor assemblage.

As an assemblage, the camera performs as a dynamic relational entity made up of multiple relations to other entities. This assemblage mode of operation creates suspense, since the vulnerability of the camera threatens to sever the viewer's access to the filmed events. While the human characters and the individual entities making up the camera assemblage are disposable, the footage is not. The survival of the recording is the imperative upon which found footage horror is based. If the recording comes to a halt, audience access to the diegetic universe is severed. As cameras are smashed, lenses are broken, batteries run empty, and camera operators are killed, solutions must be found for the recording to continue. Hence, the cameras have to be constantly reassembled for the recording to keep running. In this sense, found footage horror establishes a camera-actor that takes the centre stage and orchestrates the supporting cast.

In these films, cameras not only observe, but are fundamental characters that enact dangers and engage audiences. Found footage horror offers an experimental playground for filmmakers to explore the acting potentials of intra-diegetic cameras. The camera can act as instigator and collaborator to the events that it at the same time records and mediates.

This actor role of the camera is relevant to a wider domain of intra-diegetic cameras, beyond found footage horror. When a camera is made present in an image, it will take on a performative role, both in relation to other elements within the image and towards the viewer. This role is never an individual performance but will be contingent on innumerable other entities and practices that together, in various constellations, enact the part of a camera. In this sense, a central topic of these films (as with a far wider domain of horror films) is the dependency of human agency on a multitude of other factors and the hubris of supposing an autonomous position of self-determination. The films illustrate and perform a more general argument about agency, in line with my above theoretical discussion.

When cinema is introduced by the words "Lights, Camera, Action" these do not constitute separate elements, but are in practice always entangled, intertwined in the acting assemblage through which the magic of cinema is performed. In a most explicit manner, found

footage horror demonstrates how cinema's performativity is always distributed and collective.

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