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Old-Type Hauntings by New Ghosts? Word and Image in the “Cybernatural Horror” *Unfriended*

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Abstract

The “cybernatural” horror film *Unfriended* raises the problem of how computer technology and the internet affect interpersonal relations and their traditionally verbal basis. Reusing the classic pattern of the revenge supernatural narrative and structured as a horror plot as theorised by Noël Carroll, the film deploys the formula in the space of computer-assisted, visually-enhanced communication. The plot features a monster-type ghost of an adolescent woman who returns from the grave to seek bloody revenge on wrongdoers. This spectre digitally assaults, or cyber-bullies, her supposed friends for driving her to suicide (now termed “bullycide”) through the abuse of the social media. There are three things constitutive of the plot’s environment: language (both written and spoken) as a means of social interaction, digitally transmitted images (shown as constitutive of personal identity but at the same time an identity which is interpersonal, societal, shared), and the latest computer technology. The article examines the interplay between verbal communication in the environment of computer-generated, computer-mediated, and image-dominated reality. The goal is to define the type of reality the “cybernatural” plot posits and to make sense of the implied redefinitions of the natural and, as a consequence, of its extension into the supernatural.

Keywords: *horror, spectre, haunting, narrative and plot, cyber-bullying*