The Infinite Nature of *Scream* (1996)

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<u>Abstract</u>

The horror-comedy slasher film *Scream* (1996) has been placed by scholars like Steffen Hantke into the conclusion of the horror film development in the 20th century. This thesis attempts to reformulate that role and focuses on the postmodern and technological aspects of *Scream* in order to bring a more complete understanding of its impact on the contemporary horror genre. As such, the thesis utilizes a textual analysis of two key scenes from the film, with regard to its surface aspects, as formulated by Best and Marcus. Furthermore, a reparative reading of the film's queer themes is offered, to substantiate the analysis. Overall, the thesis argues for an expanded understanding of the film – the analyzed scenes show not only a product of past horror movements of the 20th century, but also the creation and development of new methods of fear-making, associated with contemporary media logics. As such, the film's themes of violence in media and its focus on grief place it firmly at the beginning of future horror movements, such as 'elevated horror,' or even 'computer screen film.' It's aspects of self-reflexivity and meta-intertextuality contribute to its intense effect on audiences and push the boundaries of the slasher to their limits. Throughout the thesis, a comparison of *Scream* to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* is sustained, particularly in relation to Linda Williams' writing on the subject. As such, the thesis argues for a joint classification of the two films, as they both utilize similar techniques of audience interaction, which both shattered and revitalized the horror genre. As such, the thesis endorses further scholarship on the *Scream* franchise, for a deeper understanding of the film's role in contemporary movements.

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Tongues of fire and blood stretched over the bluish black fjord. My friends went on walking, while I lagged behind, shivering with fear. Then I heard the enormous, infinite scream of nature.

- Edvard Munch on *The Scream*, Nice, 1892.

Introduction: The *Scream* of It All

The title of this 1996 comedy-horror film and the expressionist painting that inspired its killer's iconic mask both represent the same intense vocalization of emotion, a sonorous cry that penetrates genres, cultures, and movements – the Scream. *Scream* was directed by Wes Craven and released in 1996 to critical and commercial acclaim, subverting the overly familiar slasher formula and focusing on themes of grief, violence, and terror in the age of digital communication and media consumption. The film follows Sidney Prescott and several other characters as they try to uncover the identity of the masked spree killer, labeled 'Ghostface,' who is terrorizing their small town of Woodsboro. Through its self-awareness and intertextual referencing, relevant to film connoisseurs and casual viewers alike, *Scream* establishes a meta-narrative that allows its characters to discuss and disparage various conventions and clichés of film, particularly horror. It makes a sweeping critique of mediatized violence, while simultaneously indulging the viewers in its morbid spectacle.

In the larger film landscape, I'd argue that *Scream* occupies a similar position to Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 classic *Psycho*, disregarding many traditional conventions of filmmaking in favor of its own clear perspective, creating a unique effect. From the self-conscious elements that are present in both films, to the various techniques they use to destabilize the viewer, *Psycho* and *Scream* offer many analytical similarities, and have both transcended and re-defined their genres and the film landscape of their times.

Coming to the cinema screens right around the 100-th anniversary of film as a medium, *Scream* has often been seen as a concluding arc of the late 20th century horror, summarizing its developments. Emerging alongside approaches and concepts such as 'The End of History,' and 'The Decay of Cinema,' which will be discussed further in more detail, *Scream* embodies the precepted finality of these historical and cultural movements. However, like *Psycho* has been re-examined over the years, it is necessary to offer *Scream* a similar treatment, as its impact on the horror genre and culture at large has become acutely evident with time. Its influence has an afterlife in horror cinema movements such as 'elevated horror,' and in discourses surrounding the developments in communications technology and the loss of privacy associated with that, among other things. It achieves these things through self-referentiality and its postmodern approach to fear-making. Furthermore, the technological motif plays a large role in the film, with the telephone positioned in a revolutionary way that avoids cliché and manages to capture and predict the tangled relationship between technology and violence that unfolds in the 21st century. A quintessentially cinephilic and self-aware text, *Scream* offers commentary on the emerging viewing habits of the 1990s, but also on the social and cultural impact of horror cinema. It therefore participates not only in the concluding arc of 20th century horror and cinema, but also opens a new one, filled with new anxieties and fears, which beg analysis.

Therefore, the thesis will be answering the following research question: <u>How do *Scream's* (1996) postmodern and technological elements shape its position within the horror landscape?</u>

The thesis will challenge the understanding of *Scream* as placed in the final act of horror developments of the 20th century and focus on recognizing it as a transitional film that builds on decades of horror film history to anticipate a number of cultural anxieties and media logics of the 21st century. To do so, I will focus on the elements of postmodernism in the film, to illustrate how it transcends, but also fully incorporates into certain boundaries of film conventions, particularly those of horror film. Furthermore, I will focus on the aspect of technologization and the relationship between connective technology like the telephone, and violence. The thesis will undertake an analysis of two key scenes of the film – the opening scene, due to its self-contained nature and its enormous cultural impact, and the ending scene (approx. the last 14 minutes of the film), in which the motivations and morals of *Scream* become most evident. The thesis will utilize a textual analysis, based on the writing on surface versus symptomatic reading by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Stephen Best & Sharon Marcus, particularly focusing on reparative, surface level analysis.

It will be important also to refer to Linda Williams' writing on Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960.) As a semi-precursor to the slasher craze of the 1970's and 80's, the film is postmodern, according to Williams, particularly due to its re-invention of viewing habits in the United States, and the re-calibration of audience expectations, a feat that I'd argue *Scream* achieves as well.[1] Her text further emphasizes *Psycho's* return to the cinema of attractions, an early way of viewing cinema that focused on the spectacle, and Williams argues that *Psycho* somewhat features that "rollercoaster sensibility," referring to its goal of offering a thrilling, surprising, and, as such, joyful experience.[2] Such a perspective will also frame *Scream,* positioning it in a transitional period within horror cinema, where audiences' expectations were subverted and the film experience emphasized the thrill and the spectacle of the slasher. To further explore Williams' perspective and understand the postmodern, self-referential, and technological aspects in the research question, a theoretical framework of scholars and concepts will be developed below.

PART 1 – Scream in Context

Postmodernism and *Scream*

To describe and understand how *Scream* fits into the discourse of postmodernism at the time of its production, it is necessary to look to Fredric Jameson, who described the term's connection to the systems of late capitalism just a few years before the release of *Scream*. For him, postmodernism relates to another wave of the politico-economic "expansion of capitalism around the globe," a process

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[1] Linda Williams, "Gender, Reception, and the Postmodern," in *Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: A Casebook*, ed. Robert P. Kolker (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004), 170.
[2] Williams, "Gender, Reception, and the Postmodern," 172.

in which fields like architecture, art, and film participate.[3] The term itself refers to the oft-contradictory, transformative notion that rejects historicity, believing that from the end of 'grand narratives' spawn "empirical, chaotic, and heterogenous" new movements.[4] In the broadest terms, it is the "decentering of that formerly centered," the focus on re-structuring the existing networks of power, or at least changing their socio-cultural perception.[5]

Writing specifically about horror cinema in the months preceding *Scream's* release, Isabel Pinedo contributes several characteristics of postmodern horror to Jameson's perspective. Such films often feature a "violent disruption of the everyday world" and a "violation of boundaries," according to her view, both characteristics vividly applicable to *Scream.*[6] The aspect of violence in postmodernism is specifically focused on the "spectacle of the ruined body," exhibited in *Scream* for example in its utilization of single-shot tableaux after each murder that flatly depict the spectacle of each victim's murdered corpse.[7] When describing postmodernism in horror, Pinedo outlines its "unnatural, deviant" qualities, often related to a "monstrous" creature or other type of grotesque being.[8] *Scream* counters Pinedo's conception of monstrosity but the killers are nevertheless exhibited as "unnatural, deviant" beings in a more realistic fashion, in the vein of *Scream's* true-to-life approach to its horror. The deviance emerges from the killers' psychosis and obsession with horror films, which influences them to kill. With Pinedo, a postmodern horror film, as does the larger movement of postmodernism, goes away with the established conventions and boundaries of morality and acceptability, presenting a world, where "institutions fall into question," and the idea of a "universal […] subject," which is untouchable or infallible, collapses.[9] Therefore, in a postmodern horror film, it feels like nothing and nobody is safe from the terror, and any stable network becomes doubted. It will therefore be necessary to observe in more detail how these aspects apply to *Scream* and to what effect, further in the analysis.

Adding to the above, the postmodern horror film features "generic hybridity-" the "blending of signs, codes, and conventions," associated with both horror and comedy, as Valerie Wee writes.[10] Jameson adds that postmodern objects and texts tend to present a certain "flatness, depthlessness," and focus on superficial aesthetics.[11] *Scream* can be seen as both rejecting and accepting the latter notion by presenting itself as simply another addition to the overdone slasher subgenre, while concurrently

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[3] Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1992), 49.
[4] Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 1.
[5] Jameson, 15.
[6] Isabel Pinedo, "Recreational Terror: Postmodern Elements in Contemporary Horror Film," *Journal of Film and Video* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 20.
[7] Pinedo, "Recreational Terror," 21.
[8] Pinedo, 21.
[9] Pinedo, 18.
[10] Valerie Wee, "The Scream Trilogy, "Hyperpostmodernism," and the Late-Nineties Teen Slasher Film," *Journal of Film and Video* 57, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 46.
[11] Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 9.

offering inter-subtextual commentary on that genre and the contemporary American society. For such qualities, Valerie Wee calls it a hyper-postmodern text, as in her view it transcends boundaries of classic postmodernism.[12] She emphasizes the franchise's understanding of its audience, offering horror viewers the same "cynical, knowing perspective," that they implore when engaging with by-the-numbers slashers.[13] Another important element of the film's postmodernism is its utilization of pastiche – "the imitation of a peculiar or unique idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask" as Jameson refers to it, akin to the mask the killer wears in the film to disguise his identity.[14] Pastiche in *Scream* plays out through its references and homages to traditional horror tropes, as well as its meta-textual references to the construction of horror films, featuring lines such as "Please don't kill me Mr. Ghostface, I wanna be in the sequel!"[15] The film simultaneously places the viewer in close proximity to the events of the film, but also at a distance – the characters are extremely self-aware about the rules of the film that they are in, however they are also hidden behind a layer of pastiche that frames them as amalgamations of classic horror film characters.

Kendall Phillips describes this blending of film and reality in *Scream* as a "postmodern pleasure," where the audiences are able to project themselves onto the characters with their various levels of film knowledge, and therefore survivability.[16] He further outlines this aspect of *Scream* as a "reality bleeding motif," where the film's narrative seems to expand into the audience's reality via methods such as mise-en-abyme – the reveal of the film's staging and framing.[17] For example, featuring a scene where a character is watching a horror film, and repeatedly exclaims "Look behind you" to the film's protagonist, as the killer prepares to attack them from behind, unseen. These aspects emphasize *Scream's* formal properties, revealing its own construction as a horror film, in a metatextual way. They address audiences in a previously unseen manner, working in a hyper-self-aware space and specifically framing horror audiences, its own audiences, as potential victims.

When making arguments or outlining developments, scholars tend to create narratives that place films in certain timelines and within developmental arcs. Like Steffen Hantke who, summarizing a variety of scholarly perspectives on the subject, places *Scream* at "the end of horror film history."[18] He implies that its self-referentiality locates it at a firm conclusion of the genre's developments – asking the reader: how does the genre continue once you've over-satirized it? *Scream* further embodies the

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[12] Wee, "The Scream Trilogy," 46.

[13] Wee, 49.

[14] Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 17.

[15] *Scream*, directed by Wes Craven. (1996; Dimension Films), Film (01:06:18).

[16] Kendall R. Phillips, "Craven's Gothic Form: Nightmares, Screams, and Monsters," in *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter, and the Modern Horror Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 90.

[17] Phillips, "Craven's Gothic Form," 90.

[18] Steffen Hantke, "Academic Film Criticism, the Rhetoric of Crisis, and the Current State of American Horror Cinema: Thoughts on Canonicity and Academic Anxiety," *College Literature* 34, no. 4 (2007): 194, doi:10.1353/lit.2007.0045.

postmodern model as outlined by Jameson and Wee by using pastiche to pay homage to classical horror films, most commonly 1978's *Halloween*, depicting horror film history in a respectful manner, rather than one of parody. This once again reiterates *Scream's* contradictory duality – it manages to blend two opposite conceptions together - moments where horror tropes are ridiculed are distinct from those, where they are respected and fulfilled. Therefore, *Scream* itself deals with horror in an unflinching manner, however somewhat forcing future filmmakers to stray away from the tropes it satirizes.

Scream and *Psycho*

As mentioned above, *Scream*'s role in the horror cinema landscape of the 1990's can be heavily compared to that of *Psycho* in the 1960's. As film scholar Linda Williams writes, *Psycho* was successful due to its "intensification of certain forms of visuality," through postmodern means.[19] This particularly refers to Alfred Hitchcock's insistence on not allowing walking in mid-film, as was common at the time, forcing people to wait for screenings and to view the film in its entirety, an unusual circumstance for the US. He further issued an early version of a 'spoiler warning,' asking people to refrain from revealing the film's events to others, therefore keeping a certain mystique around it. The film was particularly revolutionary in the way that the main character was killed, graphically, half-way through, in a surprise for audiences that lead to unpredictability and destabilization for the rest of the film. For this reason, Williams likens *Psycho* to early cinema of attractions, as after the surprising thrill of the murder scene, the audiences are left in anticipation, pleasant or otherwise, of the next attack.[20] She further generalizes the "obvious bisexuality" of slasher killers, particularly *Psycho's* Norman Bates, who dresses up as his own dead mother to commit the crimes.[21] Overall, a number of her arguments relate closely to *Scream,* and will be described in further detail in the analysis section.

Scream in History

At the time of *Scream's* release, the consensus among some scholars formulated the late 90's as concluding, finalizing years of horror film, particularly slashers, whose stories lacked originality, became more predictable and repetitive. It was agreed that the 'golden years' have passed, and what remained was a desolate landscape with few occasional moments of significance. Such an idea was iterated in the same time period by some academics in the field of history as well, for example with political scientist Francis Fukuyama's notion of "the End of History." His view sees "modern liberalism" as the final stage of political-economic development, based on the collapse of power structures that held alternative views.[22] Fukuyama also describes the supposed transformation of several nation states into "post-history," where internal and international conflicts are resolved, leading therefore to

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[19] Williams, "Gender, Reception, and the Postmodern," 170.
[20] Williams, "Gender, Reception, and the Postmodern," 196.
[21] Williams, "Gender, Reception, and the Postmodern," 179.
[22] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 8.

generally uneventful, peaceful years of living.[23] Seemingly, after the tumultuous, yet rapid developments in politics, culture, technology, etc, over the 20th century, its conclusion in the 1990's seemed comparatively unexciting to scholars, in history and media alike. Writer Susan Sontag, for example, introduces a particular development in film-viewing, months before the release of *Scream* in 1996. Her idea of the "Decay of Cinema" lies in another transformation, that of how films are watched – the proliferation of home viewing takes people out of the cinema and leads to the decline of cinephilia and film appreciation.[24] In a scholarly tendency outlined by Hantke, Sontag narrativizes the 100 years of cinema history, writing that home viewing and the valuing of profit over artistic expression have created this decline in 1995-96, at the supposed end of cinema's life cycle.[25] Therefore, it becomes clear that at the time of *Scream's* production the notion of finalization, the end, the conclusion, often pessimistic (the decay) is a common one, particularly within media studies and horror film studies. In an act of narrativization, scholars and historians have commonly argued for a concluding arc in several layers of society, which *Scream* happens to be a part of. However, Jameson offers a counterargument to the negative view of postmodernism as a movement to end all movements. He rather views it as "an explosion: a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm."[26] As such, even beyond *Scream's* continuation into a successful multimedia franchise, this expansion of culture can be seen in the long-running parody film series *Scary Movie,* a micro-trend in horror cinema for neo-slashers, and the general role of the film in the reinvigoration of horror in the early 2000s. Rather than calling it a horror film to end all horror films, its more accurate to place it in the middle of a transitional period that horror experienced at the time, leading to new developments in the late 2000s and early 2010s, up to today's trends like elevated horror, which *Scream's* descendants get to pastiche.

Methodology: *Scream* on the Surface

Questions of meaning and the search for that meaning in the depths of texts are contrasted by the postmodern aspects of "superficiality" and "depthlessness," as described by Jameson above. Like texts themselves, the methods of critique are also approached with a revisionist lens around the time of *Scream's* release. Scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Stephen Best & Sharon Marcus, propose new perspectives on literary criticism and analysis, which can be applied also to the film.

Writing about queer readings of texts just a few months after the release of *Scream,* Sedgwick opposes Jameson's perspective on critique and analysis, and suggests a separation from the traditional

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[23] Fukuyama, "The End of History?," 18.
[24] Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema (Published 1996)," The New York Times - Breaking News, US News, World News and Videos, last modified February 25, 1996, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/25/magazine/the-decay-of-cinema.html.
[25] Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema."
[26] Jameson, 48.

'deconstructive' mode that she frames as a negative, "paranoid" method.[27] This deconstructive mode that she disagrees with is hermeneutics of suspicion, which refers to the method of analysis emerging from philosophy into literary and cultural studies, that aims to uncover "less visible and less flattering truths" within texts, referring to under-the-surface networks of meaning.[28] More specifically, this type of critique yields inquiry into overarching movements, "cultural frameworks," and "underlying schema" within texts, with a reflection on "paradigms and perspectives" that frame them.[29] This paranoid critique is largely "problematizing," focusing on "oversights, omissions, contradictions," and often positions the analyst in opposition to the text.[30] This confrontational, negative aspect of hermeneutics of suspicion has several critics, including Rita Felski and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, with the latter proposing a method of "reparative reading," which is unifying and culture-focused, bringing together aspects of positive affect, rather than a negative one.[31] This approach allows for interpretation and analysis to become more positive processes, particularly in queer theory about which Sedgwick writes, so that rather than dismantling the text for meaning, it is viewed more carefully and openly. Particularly with film, this relates to working alongside the text, rather than in opposition to it, finding elements and motifs that bring together context, form, and meaning, and going beyond a traditional textual analysis. The reparative method is particularly applicable to *Scream,* which playfully engages with its audience, genre conventions, and the different modes of its own reception, lending itself more to a poignant, unifying analysis.

In addition, Best and Marcus also suggest a withdrawal from methods of reading that look for the "hidden, repressed, deep," in the era of immediacy and overabundance of text and content.[32] They argue against these perspectives, labeled by Fredric Jameson as "symptomatic reading," and make a point that the surface of a text can "contain its own hermeneutics," implying that meaning isn't extracted from a text by a critic, but ever-present within it.[33] It is their perspective to propose an explorative analysis of a text's own surface, which already contains the needed elements for analysis and its own interpretation. Such a reading, which they refer to as "surface reading," emerges from literary studies, and deals with "what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts," something that the scholar should learn to observe rather than "see through."[34] They don't argue for the superiority of such a reading, but rather for the completeness that it offers to the text, something that cannot be

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[27] Eve K. Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 125.
[28] Rita Felski, "Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *M/C Journal* 15, no. 1 (2011). doi:10.5204/mcj.431.
[29] Felski, "Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion."
[30] Felski.
[31] Sedgwick and Frank, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," 146.
[32] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 2, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1.
[33] Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 8.
[34] Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 9.

achieved with just a symptomatic reading. This type of textual analysis lends itself particularly well to *Scream,* where surface and depth conflate and interconnect, and would provide a more complete understanding of the film's text, also accounting for the cultural context and genre conventions. Both Sedgwick's and Best & Marcus' approaches will be useful in formulating my own perspective on *Scream,* subverting the traditional methods of symptomatic reading and deconstruction, offering a previously unexplored layer of analysis. The combination of their approaches will formulate the methodology of this thesis, with specific analysis concerning the 'surface' aspects of the film: plot and narrative, genre conventions, character development, cinematic techniques. These will most evidently represent and justify the postmodern and self-reflexive elements in the film, and will help analyze the technological motifs, in order to conceptualize the film's position in the landscape of horror cinema. Sedgwick's perspective will shadow this analysis, offering a holistic perspective that takes different interpretations, as well as cultural, contextual, and thematic elements into account and observes the text with a positive, unifying point of view. Emerging at around the same time as *Scream* itself, these two approaches are able to participate in a dynamic conversation with the film because they mirror its radical innovativity and its revisionist approach to traditional methods of operation.

More specifically, the analysis will utilize two modes of reading that Best and Marcus propose:

- A focus on the "practice of critical description," operating under the assumption that theoretical aspects of the "form, structure, meaning" of the text are already evident within them, and that "depth is continuous with surface." [35] This type of reading is relevant to *Scream's* blending of surface and depth and will be particularly useful in its analysis.
- A focus on the "location of patterns that exist within […] texts," which contributes to understanding large scale changes and movements within genres and texts through "breaking down texts…into their components."[36] To make larger statements on the horror genre through *Scream,* the focus on these elements will be useful, and will help structure the analysis.

With such an approach in mind, the thesis will analyze two fragments of *Scream* – the opening scene lasting from 00:00:19 to 00:12:55 and the closing scene, from Billy's reveal as one of the killers at 01:30:26 to the closing credits at 01:43:56. As mentioned above, these two scenes are crucial to understanding *Scream* as a whole: the opening scene is a standalone, sophisticated introduction to the film's explicit postmodernism, and the closing scene illustrates most vividly the film's themes and provides a resolution to the film. With the theoretical and methodological framework established, it will be necessary to proceed with the analysis, as follows.

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[35] Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 11.
[36] Best and Marcus, 11.

PART 2 – The Opening Scene

The Build-Up – "Hello?"

A non-diegetic scream is played over the opening titles, but it's the sound of the telephone ringing that sets off *Scream's* narrative. Casey Becker is played by Drew Barrymore in this almost entirely self-contained opening scene, which perfectly illustrates the film's tone and narrative depth. Casey is getting ready to watch a film at home and is making popcorn when she receives a phone call from her future killer. Immediately two subtextual motifs stand out that link specifically to the film's historical position. Firstly, a phone call, particularly via a cell phone or a mobile phone, is an omen of death in *Scream*, a negative presence that is able to reach its victim wherever and whenever. With mobile phones becoming more wide-spread and affordable in the 1990s, the anxieties about the novel gadget getting into the wrong hands are a recurring motif in *Scream*.[37] Particularly with a mobile phone the physical location of a threat becomes unknown and untraceable, as the killer doesn't need a payphone or a landline to reach his victim. In this case, the mobility of the telephone allows it to accompany Casey all the way from the beginning of the scene to her gruesome murder, further emphasizing the technologization and interconnectedness of the new generation of film viewers.

Secondly, as in Sontag's essay, Casey Becker is an active participator in the "decay of cinema-" she is preparing to view a film in her home, which is a common dispositif arrangement for the time. These historical parallels are established in the first 30 seconds of the film, showing Casey as a member of the new generation of film viewers, bringing violence into her home via the telephone and the television. Her eventual gruesome death at the hands of a film fanatic, can be viewed as retribution, an attempt to push back against this transformation and a message to modern film viewers on the value of traditional film – home viewing is dangerous!

Like the killer himself, the viewer rather jarringly appears inside Casey's living room from the film's first moments – it starts with a phone ringing over a black screen, cuts to the visual of that phone, and then shows Casey pick it up with a "Hello?" There isn't an establishing shot of the outside of the house to introduce the location until 30 seconds later, after she hangs up on her tormentor for the second time, with the audience already beginning to suspect the caller's sinister intentions. Starting inside, the film moves outwardly, creating a sense of voyeurism on behalf of the viewer, as we are first introduced to Casey's character, and only then shown the outside of her home. The intrusion of the film itself into Casey's space emphasizes *Scream's* theme of the dismantling of privacy on the cusp of the 21st century, subconsciously reminding the viewer of the ease with which boundaries can be violated – a strongly postmodern notion, intertwined with the film's technological motif.

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[37] Katie Rees, "A Brief History of the World's First Cell Phones," MUO, last modified November 15, 2022, https://www.makeuseof.com/first-cell-phones-history/.

Hearing the crackling of popcorn on the other end of the line, the caller probes Casey into casually revealing she's about to watch "some scary movie" on video in her home.[38] When asked about her favorite scary movie, Casey responds "um… *Halloween,"* describing it as "the one with the guy in the white masks, who walks around and stalks babysitters."[39] The casual in-text mention of another classic horror franchise was almost unheard of in horror at the time, transforming intertextual referencing from being "subtle and covert," as traditionally done, into an "overt, discursive act*"* within the explicit text of the film itself.[40] This immediately communicates to the viewers that *Scream* exists on the same level of reality to them, as it features familiar and relevant cultural media artifacts and discusses them uninhibitedly. It is also a meta-reference to *Scream's* own "guy in the white mask," emphasizing the film's self-consciousness, and its position in front of an audience, making the viewers somewhat aware of themselves. In the same exchange, *Scream* communicates to a more cinephilic audience with its reference to *The Nightmare on Elm Street*, of which Wes Craven directed the first installment, with Casey saying to her interlocutor that "the first one was [scary], but the rest sucked."[41] This creates the "postmodern pleasure" that Phillips describes, where audiences are able to interact with the film in a way that challenges their own knowledge about the horror genre. It also expands *Scream's* potential audience, targeting horror-adjacent viewers, who would be familiar with Craven's previous work. Furthermore, saying "the rest sucked" and therefore offering criticism of another horror film franchise awards *Scream* the confidence and a point of view that the audiences can latch on to, making it clear that it will build on an ironic, somewhat humorous perspective. Although intertextual references are hardly a new phenomenon in media or literature, they are strongly radicalized and more pervasive in postmodernism, particularly within *Scream*, which takes these aspects to their most extreme level.

Still playful, the exchange turns chilling when the caller asks for Casey's name, justifying the question with the phrase "I want to know who I'm looking at."[42] This interaction makes Casey uneasy, as it transforms their anonymous, distant relationship into a proximal and potentially physical one. It highlights once again the film's motif of the use of technology for evil, subverting the assumption that a telephone call must be a proximally distant event. It also reframes the telephone's commonly neutral position as it becomes a hand-held device, showing it as a force used to assault and torment, in a postmodern manner. The dynamic in the conversation between Casey and the killer also shifts – after toying with him somewhat, believing that hanging up would make his persistence cease, Casey is re-framed as a submissive element, suddenly aware of his true intentions and his physical presence somewhere around her home. The film now shows her as powerless – getting rid of the harasser will

[38] *Scream*, directed by Wes Craven. (1996; Dimension Films), Film (00:01:43).
[39] *Scream,* (00:01:59)*.*
[40] Valerie Wee, "The Scream Trilogy," 47.
[41] *Scream,* (00:02:17)*.*
[42] *Scream,* (00:02:34).

take more than just hanging up on him. With that, *Scream* formulates an anxiety in the viewer – behind every ephemeral voice on the phone is a real, physical presence, which could be anywhere and could mean you harm.

The Chase – "Who's There?!"

As the scene progresses and the caller's violent intentions are revealed, Casey frantically runs around the house locking all the doors. The killer keeps pestering her with calls, and she is now nearly hysterical, threatening him with calling the police. He responds with a deeply postmodern "they'd never make it in time."[43] Firstly, this moment frames the phone as a potential lifeline for Casey – it could be used to harass, but also to call for help. However, those networks of safety collapse with the killer's remark, noting that the police, long-established in horror as a source of protection, would simply not get there fast enough. Whereas usually the victim in horror is simply unable to call for help, by way of having no service, or the severing of the telephone line, *Scream* subverts that cliché subtly but effectively, with nothing preventing Casey from reaching help, but something stopping the help from reaching her. This scene once again places importance on physical versus technological proximity, where on a technological level, Casey would be able to reach the police, but their physical distance would prevent her salvation. The interplay between physical and digital presence is continued throughout the film and becomes evident several times throughout this scene. It is another example of the film's postmodernism – reframing the role of the police in the technological landscape of the late 90's and subverting the audience's perception of their power to stop violence, as Pinedo outlines.[44]

From now the scene begins to jump between technological distance and physical proximity to create suspense, as the killer's antics start to move further and further into Casey's physical space, invading her home. For example, when the doorbell suddenly rings, startling her, and she shouts, "Who's there?" the killer proceeds to immediately call her to give a warning to "never say 'who's there,'" sending her into hysterics.[45] In this moment, the film also exhibits postmodernism in its unprecedented, active reference to itself. The jumping between the physical sense of danger and a psychological one is intense for both Casey and the viewer, as it becomes unclear whether to prepare for verbal assault ("[I want] to see what your insides look like") or for the visuality of violence.[46] The speed with which the events unfold gives audiences no time to prepare, as an unexpected attack could occur from anywhere, at any time, creating tension.

As the tension keeps rising, Casey threatens the killer once again in an effort to repel the attack, claiming that her boyfriend is on his way to protect her. Jumping from an institutional source of

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[43] *Scream,* (00:04:10)*.*
[44] Isabel Pinedo, "Recreational Terror," 23.
[45] *Scream,* (00:04:37).
[46] *Scream,* (00:04:17).

salvation – the police, to the personal one – Casey's boyfriend Steve, *Scream* once again subverts the dynamics of horror in a postmodern way, now aiming to destabilize the viewer's faith in any help whatsoever. When it is revealed that the killer has her boyfriend captured and tied up, the last remnants of her mental defense, as well as the viewers', collapses and both are left in a state of complete unpredictability through these postmodern methods. The refutation by the film of any sources of help to Casey, even the basic notions like safety institutions, or her boyfriend's brute force, confirms its postmodern position and the film begins to play by its own rules, suggesting that in the modern world violence is inescapable.

So far, the violence has mostly been implied, seen through vicious phrases and threats the killer uses to harass Casey, however with the sight of Steve tied up on the patio, the situation transcends definitively into the physical realm. The way the scene unfolds emphasizes the relationship between violence and technology – the danger seems distant while Casey is talking on the phone, and only becomes acutely present when her boyfriend becomes corporeally involved. Even then, for the duration of her deadly horror trivia game with the killer, she is separated from Steve by the glass doors of the patio. The network of physical-technological boundaries between the three characters portrays an interesting dynamic. While Casey is in the same physical space as Steve, she is unable to help or communicate with him because his mouth is tied and there's a door between them. However, the killer, still unseen at this point, is able to direct her actions and terrify her solely via the technological connection they have fostered over the telephone. This is once again an example of a character being helpless, despite being in physical proximity to salvation, and the theme follows Casey throughout the scene, emphasized by the presence of the phone for its whole duration. It serves as another reminder of the sharp reality of violence, despite its seeming evanescence in the media and through technology. This represents an earlier iteration of the timeless moral panic among older generations that link violence in media like films and videogames to violence in real life. In a dramatically ironic manner, Casey, who was prepared to engage with violence through the viewing of a horror film is forced to experience it first-hand by becoming a victim of a real-life killer. The audiences observing this situation are accustomed to existing on a discerned, distant layer of reality from horror, but find that *Scream* places its characters on that same level of reality, and therefore engage with the events at a much closer narrative proximity, which is strongly affective.

The Murder – "Aaah!"
Fully transcending the boundary of corporeality and making himself physically known, the killer crashes a chair through the patio doors that previously separated him from Casey. As he chases her through the house, she escapes into the backyard, where he catches up with her and eventually attacks her. At this point, the networks and interrelations between Casey and the killer fade into the background – *Scream* presents the simplest, classic configuration of victim and attacker that the essence of horror

cinema boils down to. The moment of the fatal stab is shown in a relatively long take – two figures running towards the camera in a medium shot, and the killer, grabbing Casey's mouth to hush her scream, stabs her. The scene plays out in a slightly slowed frame rate, and the viewers are left to only watch as the knife impales Casey's chest. As a postmodern film, *Scream* had the opportunity to implement heavily stylized giallo-inspired shots of violence but opts for a soberingly realistic portrayal. This choice fits well with the tone that *Scream* is going for, and once again restricts Casey in her desire to communicate – her exclamation is blocked by the killer. The stabbing occurs just as Casey's parents are arriving home, and heart-wrenchingly, they are unaware of the brutality occurring just meters away. As her parents approach the house, she attempts to scream out, but cannot due to the injury inflicted on her throat by the killer. Casey's voice is literally taken away from her, and she cannot call for help, despite holding a device for instantaneous communication, one that was also used to brutally torment her minutes earlier. Here, the telephone reverts to its rather neutral role, where it's portrayed as a silent witness to the events. This scene shows that *Scream* represents a reality where violence and innocence coexist – moments of casual suburbia (like Casey's parents chatting about watering the flowers) are intertwined with Casey's violent demise – with the film emphasizing the anxiety of ever-present, ever-reaching, unstoppable violence.

Figure 1: Casey post-stab (00:11:07)

When utilizing Best and Marcus' technique of analysis, the scene of the stabbing portrays a single interaction between a masked killer and a fleeing young woman, and *Scream* understands the simple tragedy of the situation. The score, for example, shifts from the tension-building string motif to a somber choral melody as Casey stumbles over to the porch, watching her parents go inside the house, oblivious. The frame is also tilted in a dramatic Dutch angle, not featured previously in the scene, showing, in the most basic sense, the destabilization and the collapse of rationality and safety. The tragedy of suppressed communication in the age of overabundance of technological means to connect is quite a disruptive, postmodern notion, and *Scream* uses visual and auditory techniques to comment on this idea.

Scream continues to play with the motifs of technological versus vocal communication in this scene as well, with Casey still clutching the phone as the killer repeatedly stabs her on the front porch. This way, upon discovering the carnage inside and attempting to call the police, her parents hear her raspy dying breaths through the landline. Once again, the idea of helplessness in physical proximity comes into focus, as despite being in the same house, Casey and her parents are unable to communicate, with the latter forced to helplessly tolerate their daughter's fate. Like Casey's parents, the viewer also becomes a technological witness to this violence via the film itself, also incapable of intervening. At its end, the scene's emotional focus shifts towards the parents, with Casey's fate now unclear until their discovery of her mutilated body hung up by the rope of the tire swing, with her mother's pained scream ringing out as the screen cuts to black.

The postmodernism of this scene once again lies in the perceived safety of technologization, and the disruption of those perceptions through the reformulation of the phone's role. Throughout the scene, the film offers a dynamic interplay of the physical and digital connections between the characters that shift as it plays out. The digital connections are often more impactful than physical ones – the killer's digital threats are effective, despite Casey's perceived physical safety in her home. Therefore, *Scream* presents an early understanding of digital technology's occasional superiority to physicality and reality, zooming into the growing influence of mobile telecommunication and its horror-adjacent consequences. The postmodernism is also seen in how *Scream* renders all sources of help as completely help*less*, from the police to Casey's boyfriend, from her parents to even herself – by the end of the scene, not just her life, but her voice and her perception of normalcy and safety are taken away, as well as the audience's. This relates to Pinedo's formulation that postmodern horror rebukes the stability of institutions and safety networks. Being portrayed by Drew Barrymore, the film takes this notion a step further, in a meta-textual way – the viewers simply don't expect the actress of her caliber to be killed off in such a gruesome manner, so dramatically early in the film. Through the marketing material Barrymore was heavily implied to have a large, if not the main role, suggesting the film purposefully mislead the audiences to such effect. This also mirrors the way that Linda Williams describes the success of *Psycho* in shocking its audiences, as in both films the assumed female protagonist is killed in the first part of the film to subvert expectations and to surprise, building anxious anticipation for the kills that follow. As in *Psycho,* the purpose of this essentially postmodern opening scene is to destabilize whole networks of safety that casual audiences have arrived at the theatre with, leaving them startled, unable to predict what *Scream* will do next.

PART 3 – The Third Act

"It's a Scream, baby!"

The third act of the film somewhat mirrors the opening scene, bringing back the same technological motifs, but also offering a resolution to the film's main narrative. Sidney, the film's protagonist has just found out that the killer stalking her and killing those around her is actually two individuals – her boyfriend Billy, and her friend Stu. They also reveal that they were behind the violent murder of Sidney's mother a year prior, and the complicated feelings of grief that Sidney harbors and suppresses over the course of the film come to the surface. The scene plays out as they deliver their motives to Sidney, as she attempts to outsmart them and survive.

Figure 2: Stu (1:33:20)

As Valerie Wee writes above, a postmodern horror film utilizes genre-blending techniques, most commonly by introducing comedic elements, and this scene unfolds in that exact manner. Throughout the film, Ghostface exemplifies many hallmarks of slapstick comedy – falling and tripping, being punched and hit – and the reveal of Stu as one of the killers personifies these previously anonymous aspects. Stu is played by Mathew Lillard, who delivers offbeat, comedic lines and uses clownesque facial expressions. He is used to offset Billy's dramatic intensity, relieving the tension that is created in the scene through his elevated performance. This is important, as his character stays persistently comedic throughout, even in the most explicit and violent moments, therefore contributing to a strong blend of horror and comedy, in a postmodern way.

Similar postmodern techniques to the opening scene are seen in the way that sources of aid are taken away from Sidney one after another. First, as Billy reveals himself as the killer by acquiring a gun and shooting Randy, Sidney runs into Stu, asking for his help. When he pulls out the voice-changer used by the killer throughout the film, it becomes clear that he too is one of the killers, which explains how Billy was able to stage his death earlier. Like *Psycho,* which also played a guessing game with its audiences on the identity of its killer, *Scream* subverts the expected conventions and offers an

unexpected solution to the "Whodunnit" aspect of the slasher experience, revealing two individuals behind the carnage. Furthermore, the audiences, not expecting two killers, formulate an anxiety about false identity and trust, due to Stu's role of the comic relief not excluding him from being a vicious killer. Thus, Sidney is left on her own to fend against two violent horror fans. Her father, mentioned as a suspect multiple times throughout the film, is revealed to be tied up, with Billy and Stu planning to pin the murders on him, and to wound themselves to avoid suspicion. The source of help from her father has therefore also been subdued. In another self-aware moment, the reporter Gale Weathers, one of the film's prominent supporting characters, who was last seen crashing the news van into a tree and presumed dead, finds the gun and surprises the killers. "I've got an ending for you" – she says, relaying her intention of foiling the killers' plan and saving the day.[47] This is unexpected for audiences, who once again find themselves on the same level of awareness as the characters, in this case Billy and Stu, not expecting Gale to rescue Sidney. They are, however, misdirected once again, as Gale is unable to undo the safety catch of the gun and is knocked unconscious. This gives Sidney time to escape though, and the segment that follows subverts the expected sequence of events previously laid out by the film – the killers themselves now receive a phone call.

Here, the phone participates in a similar positional network as in the opening scene of the film, only the power dynamics have shifted. The two killers, wounded by their own hands, are left disoriented as Sidney calls them on the phone, now herself unseen. She tells them that she has already called the police, outplaying Billy and Stu and condemning them to be caught regardless of the outcome. Shifting from victim to orchestrator, Sidney now uses the phone as a tool for retribution and justice, replaying the same dynamic situation that Billy and Stu used on Casey – they are in the same physical space, but helpless, with Sidney now in control. As Billy furiously searches the house, a figure in a Ghostface costume jumps out at him from the closet, stabbing him in the chest with an umbrella, and reveals itself to be Sidney, *Scream's* final girl. The film's victim now utilizes the benefits of anonymity and technological connectedness for her own gain, embracing the killers' methods to outsmart them and survive.

Another notable aspect is the presentation of Billy and Stu's duo. They are often framed tightly together, in physical proximity, offset by Sidney's submissive energy (as in Figure 3). On a narratively subconscious level, the duplicity of Billy's character is revealed to Sidney and the audiences, who are now completely unsure of his true characterization. Further in the scene, the pair are stabbing each other in an effort to avert suspicion, a physically intimate penetrative episode. Reminiscent of Linda Williams' comment about the "obvious bisexuality" of slasher killers and combined with the open homosexuality of *Scream's* writer Kevin Williamson, a homosexual subtextual reading emerges.

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[47] *Scream,* (01:36:57).

However, as Sedgwick argues, it is necessary to remove the paranoia from the analysis, and view the object in a careful, reparative sense. Thus, the pair never expresses visible attraction, and the explicit homosexuality of any characters is never dealt with in the film. In a postmodern, subversive text such as *Scream,* such homosexual subtext could have been more explicit, if intended, despite major studio involvement. Once we add Best and Marcus' perspective, the knives just become knives, and such a reading disappears. It is relevant to refer to Billy and Stu's dominating masculinity, even formally through their domination of the screen space over Sidney, as seen in Figure 3, but overall, *Scream's* surface aspects do not present such a reading.

Figure 3: Billy and Stu (1:31:57)

In the last few minutes of the film, there emerges most clearly the "rollercoaster sensibility," which Linda Williams describes for *Psycho.*[48] As Sidney engages in her final battle with the killers - first attacked by Stu, and later once again by Billy, the audience is placed on a rollercoaster track, and in an extension of Williams' metaphor, blindfolded, unaware where the track is heading. Trained by the body of the film to expect subversions and surprises at every turn, it is unclear to them whether its conclusion will have Sidney survive or be killed in the last moment, despite calling the police. After Sidney attacks Billy from the closet, incapacitating him, an enraged Stu runs at her from the kitchen. Defeating him by dropping a television playing *Halloween* onto his head, Sidney assumes safety, but the upcoming series of thrills play out so closely together that they become both terrifying and comical, and in such a way even more thrilling, calling back to Williams' analogy to the cinema of attractions, and Phillips' postmodern pleasures. First, Sidney is surprised (as are the audiences via a musical sting) when Randy, one of the survivors, suddenly awakes, grabbing her. Interrupting that, Billy punches Randy (another sting), and begins to choke Sidney. As he is about to stab her, the dramatic music is cut short as a gunshot rings out – the re-re-awakened Gale has shot Billy – and the film depicts his death in a traditionally prolonged sequence, until he is motionless. The survivors get together and examine

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[48] Williams, "Gender, Reception, and the Postmodern," 172.

him, as Randy warns Sidney: in a horror film, the killer would come back to life for "one last scare."[49] When Billy suddenly does (another musical sting), Sidney shoots him in the head, responding with "Not in my movie."[50] In this moment, she asserts her position as the victorious final girl, claiming the whole film to herself, and the audiences are content with this, assuming that the self-labeled "last scare" is just that. However, with a crash and the accompanying screams, Sidney's father suddenly breaks out of the closet, still tied up, offering the true final, yet benign scare of the film, pulling the rug from under the audience once again. Thus, in this final scene, *Scream* takes the thrilling aspects of *Psycho* that Williams describes and pushes them to their extreme, almost absurd limit, which, combined with the film's self-awareness, causes an elevated level of thrill and enjoyment.

Building on a vast library of horror endings, *Scream* still offers an unexpected one. Traditionally, a horror film's sole survivor is the final girl, with rare occasions of nobody surviving – an attempt to subvert expectations. In *Scream,* not only does the final girl Sidney survive, but so does an unexpectedly large set of characters – Gale the reporter, Randy the film nerd, Dewey the policeman, and Sidney's father Neil. In a landscape of horror films with a variety of endings, with main characters dying or surviving, such an ending, where a number of characters not only survive, but also achieve retribution on the killers is unexpected, and subversive. The grim implication however is that in contemporary society, where violence has the technological ability to proliferate in virtually any physical space, killers such as Billy and Stu, teenage horror film fans, are closer to one than one thinks. The news report that closes out the film is eerily general, talking of "…the mass killing that has terrified this peaceful community," as the camera pans from the police and ambulance sirens towards the sunrise.[51] *Scream's* messaging and imagery have only become more relevant with the long-established discourse of dissemination of violence in contemporary media. It is reminiscent of the modern cycle of violence that has become overly repetitive and, as such, familiar. Its commentary on the closeness of that violence to everyday life, to the extent that horror film conventions start to bleed into reality, rings truer today, and *Scream* has largely defined the anxieties of the new generation of filmgoers. Postmodernism here also offers rich characterization to Sidney, who, despite feeling powerful grief for her mother, witnessing deaths of her friends, and facing betrayal and helplessness via postmodern means, is able to emerge victorious from the film's events, using the film's explicit violence to deal with her unexpressed trauma. Thus, while paying homage to classic horror conventions via pastiche and intertextual referencing, *Scream* also looks forward in hyper-awareness of the early seeds of cultural fears that plague society today, undoubtedly settling itself within a transitional period in horror cinema and culture at large.

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[49] *Scream,* (01:42:30).
[50] *Scream,* (01:42:37).
[51] *Scream,* (01:43:25).

Conclusion – It's All One Great Big Movie

In conclusion, it becomes clear how *Scream*'s influence permeates throughout culture and attitudes in the early 21st century. Its ironic and self-aware tone reflects the cultural notions of finality, shown in theory like Fukuyama's "The End of History," and Sontag's "Decay of Cinema." The film understands its unique position where everything seems "post-" or subsequent to certain commonly agreed 'golden years,' and uses that to frame its point-of-view. Narratively, its characters are cinephilia-infused and hyper-aware, seemingly understanding of their existence within a horror film, with only a direct address preventing the collapse of the fourth wall. Furthermore, the way that the film's narrative deals with the emotional side of horror victims is also innovative, showing the consequences of death in the final minutes of the opening scene, and in Sidney's continued battle with grief over the death of her mother and friends throughout the film. Contextually, *Scream* offers viewers a thrill ride, akin to that of cinema of attractions, as Linda Williams describes it, understanding its audience and bringing the events of the film to a level of realism rarely seen in horror before – through intertextual referencing and self-aware meta-textual commentary sprinkled throughout, often for comedic effect. Because the film understands its construction and makes the viewers aware of this, they start to feel like the film is one step ahead, and that causes an elevated sense of unpredictability.

The above aspects contribute strongly to the postmodernism of the film, and Valerie Wee's characterization of *Scream* as hyper-postmodern is relevant here, as the film takes these elements to the extreme level. Through various means, it takes away networks of safety that both the characters and the viewers have established, continuously surprising them, and using the postmodern notion of timelessness to execute traditional horror scares and thrills, or to provide commentary on them.

The way that technology is depicted in the film, where networks of character interrelations and power dynamics are built extensively around it, is also revolutionary – the mobile telephone is used as a source of terror, voyeurism, and tragedy. Questions of privacy and the dispersion of violence through technological means are raised by *Scream,* interrogating the idea of instantaneous, transportable communication devices in a homicidal society of the pre-21st century.

The technological and postmodern elements of *Scream* therefore position it firmly within the finalizing times of the late 90's, existing on the cusp of new technological developments and societal changes, which call for different levels and types of horror. As a product of its time, the film is rigidly rooted in historicity, offering postmodern homage to classic horror, and acknowledging via its script that it succeeds from greatness. However, it also looks confidently forward, creating new fears and anxieties, which have not yet been reflected in society and culture at the time. The discourse and themes particular to *Scream* are eerily reminiscent of that around gun violence and everyday brutality captured on video and spread over social media. It paints a portrait of a violent, digitized generation in that way that becomes timeless, as each consequent generation is equally affected by this

technologization. As mentioned above, it is therefore most accurate to place *Scream* in a transitional window between the arc of classic horror, which it closes out as Hantke agrees, and the new, self-aware, boundary-pushing visceral and ironic meta-horror that it inspires. At its most primal form, *Scream* is about a killer and a victim, and the film is unafraid to exhibit the gruesome but gratifying spectacle of abject cruelty, beyond all of its subtextual and intertextual layers. Ultimately, *Scream's* terrifying timelessness makes one want to do just as the title says.

On reflection, the approach of Sedgwick and Best & Marcus was highly useful for the analysis and the answering of the research question. It was necessary to move beyond the subtextual and examine plainly the themes, visual elements, and narrative structures within *Scream*. However, it was also necessary to remain close to the larger cultural and social currents, beyond the more concentrated approaches of other critical movements. As mentioned by Jameson and Pinedo, the postmodern often deals with things that are on the surface, and therefore a surface reading was most applicable to its analysis. Furthermore, the common queer interpretation of the killers in *Scream* played into Sedgwick's notion of paranoid reading, and therefore needed to be approached reparatively. In general, rather than deconstructing a text like *Scream* for meaning, a reparative reading combined with a surface level analysis proved most comprehensive and relevant in re-positioning the film due to its inclusion of a broad variety of aspects, beyond the film's form, that construct its meaning. In closing, the text of *Scream* offers many promises for future analysis, which could only be briefly mentioned here due to relevance, relating for example to Sidney's ownership of her narrative and the feminism associated with that. Furthermore, the continued exploration of the film's self-referential and technological themes could be attempted with further films in the series, which is, at the time of writing, still ongoing.

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