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Book Review: Cecilia Sayad, *The Ghost in the Image: Technology and Reality in the Horror Genre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

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Cecilia Sayad's third monograph marks a scholarly departure from her prior work on authorship, reflecting a burgeoning interest in the overlap between reality and the horror genre: this book combines and develops arguments from her articles *Found-Footage Horror and the Frame's Undoing* (2016) and *Reality TV, Ghosts, and the Index* (2019). Taking a transmedial approach that utilises the study of participatory cinema, video games and online urban legends, alongside the analysis of found-footage horror film and spirit photography, Sayad explores the close relationship between the paranormal and the cultural manifestations that aim to prove (or disprove) its existence.
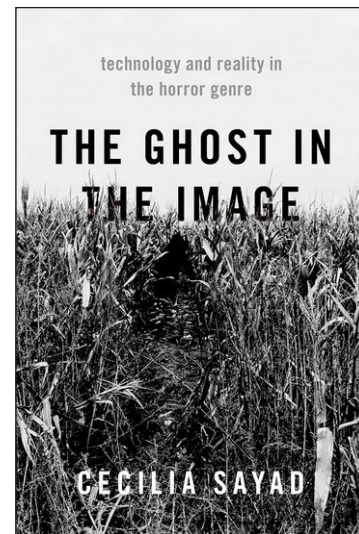
Although this book focuses on the horror genre, it takes an interdisciplinary approach to the genre's content, offering a unique historical overview of how technology has been employed across varying media forms as both a negotiator and an arbiter of reality. Sayad, admittedly, is not interested in the concept of reality as it relates to the metaphysical (p. 13), and instead uses a common sense understanding of reality as an uncontested objective truth. Reality, for Sayad, is based upon the concept of the *real-world* existing outside the subjectivity of human experience. Within this context technology is, then, perceived as a tool that mediates this objective/ subjective experience. This common-sense understanding of reality seems at odds with other aspects of the book, as Sayad spends the introductory chapter (pp.1–41) meticulously defining concepts, such as how her use of the term 'image' (pp. 8–14) is to be understood in the context of the book.

Chapter One of Sayad's book studies the connections between ghost-hunting reality television and spirit photography, exploring the materiality of paranormal evidentiary images. In Chapter Two, Sayad examines the fictional adaptations of both the Amityville and Enfield hauntings, contextualising these against the purported true historical accounts of the events. Drawing upon Sayad's prior scholarship on the topic, Chapter Three is concerned with the framing of the found-footage horror film. This framing is analysed in relation to its verisimilitude, with Sayad suggesting the subgenre's unique relationship to pro-filmic reality. Building on the study of found-footage horror film, Chapter Four explores the spatial and experiential modes of participatory cinema (via the entertainment company Secret Cinema) and video games (with particular focus on first-person, augmented reality, and virtual reality modes), situating these in historical conversation with B-movie gimmick marketing of the 1950s and 1960s, specifically

the work of William Castle. Sayad concludes the book by exploring the participatory nature of user-generated content on the internet, paying particular attention to the Slender Man legend and how its myth has sustained through its negotiation of online and offline worlds.

Whilst the book provides a useful, historically situated, introduction to reality as it relates to particular horror media forms, Sayad's lack of engagement with the concept of reality, results in critical oversight at points. One such example can be found in the third chapter 'Beyond the Frame: Found-footage horror and the uncontainable' (pp. 63–86). Here, Sayad describes the found-footage camera as providing a 'neutral' (pp. 79–80) perspective. The concept of neutrality, however, is not clearly defined to clarify this assertion. A key theme of the first half of the book is the concept of evidence, more specifically the fallibility of technology, yet the concept of technological neutrality and the supposed objectivity of the camera is, curiously, not interrogated and is instead deployed as fact.

Overall, although some of Sayad's analyses lack philosophical engagement with concepts such as reality and objectivity, the book successfully presents a wide-ranging historical overview of media (and transmedia) forms that concern both the horror genre, technology, and the concept of reality. Alongside study of the horror film, Sayad provides useful insights for adaptation studies, reception studies, and the study of new media more broadly.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

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