# 'Scream into your phone': Second screen horror and controlled interactivity

Alexander Svensson & Dan Hassoun,
Indiana University, Bloomington, USA

**Abstract:**
Recent years have witnessed a growth in cinematic second screen technologies, many of them linked to horror films. Drawing upon companion apps for the horror films *App* and *Sadako 3D 2*, this article considers discourses around horror spectatorship, new media distraction, and audience engagement. Specifically, horror second screens reveal and challenge cultural assumptions about what engaged spectatorship can or should be. By removing audience control through rigid synchronization between screens, these apps would seem to contradict the promise of second screens as technologies that enhance or transcend spectatorial norms. At the same time, the apps' emphasis on invasion and disruption of spectatorial space also links them to the larger history of horror cinema, with its predilections towards gimmickry and unique sensory experiences. Ultimately, horror apps encourage us to consider how viewing practices – indeed, interactivity itself – always rely upon some degree of disciplinary practice.

**Keywords:** apps, attention, companion apps, discipline, engagement, experience, gimmick, home video, horror, second screens

## Introduction
The beginning of the twenty-first century's second decade has witnessed an explosion of industry interest in so-called connected viewing and second screen technologies. These apps (i.e., programs downloaded to mobile devices for specific purposes) attempt to synchronize simultaneous content between viewers' television and phones or iPads (Lee and Andrejevic 2014). The majority of this hype and discussion has circulated around television companion apps, typically intended to draw migratory TV audiences back to live, real-time broadcasts (see Hassoun 2012; Holt and Sanson 2014; Hunting 2014; Strover 2012; Tryon 2013, 126-129; Vanderhoef and Petruska 2014). Tellingly, one 2014 column by the executive director

of the 2nd Screen Society wrote of second screens as 'typically' a television phenomenon, where 'consumers would engage in relevant content on a second device while simultaneously watching something on the first screen' (Finley 2014, 4).

This near-exclusive concentration on television has largely neglected cinematic second screens. While not nearly as ubiquitous as TV apps, a number of cinema apps have also arisen to sync film screens with mobile content. In 2008 and 2009, respectively, Warner Bros. released special features for Blu-ray releases of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight*, allowing purchasers to view the movies simultaneously with friends and post comments to Facebook, as well as unlocking streaming access to one-time-only live commentaries from directors Zack Snyder and Christopher Nolan (DiOrio 2009; McBride 2008). Disney probably was the most ambitious on this front, providing downloadable iPad apps to accompany Blu-rays like *TRON: Legacy* (2010), *John Carter* (2012), and *Bambi* (1942), in addition to developing in-theater viewing apps for limited 2011 re-issues of *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) (Stedman 2013).

Beyond the Warner and Disney initiatives, however, the most notable attempts to link cinema with second screens have occurred around the horror genre. These apps, accompanying home releases of the Dutch film *App* (2013) and the Japanese chiller *Sadako 3D 2* (2013), attempt to create enhanced and immersive experiences by synchronizing the user's mobile screens with the home TV set playing the movie. *App*'s 'Iris' and *Sadako*'s 'Sadako' apps blur boundaries between cinematic and spectatorial space by imagining the user's mobile device as infected by the same malevolent spirits plaguing the characters in the films onscreen. More than mere vehicles for the delivery of trivia, games, or other paratextual information (like most second screens have been), the apps position themselves as central (if still secondary) features of the texts themselves, expanding the diegetic world across simultaneous devices in purportedly more 'interactive' ways. These apps' links to horror are not merely incidental. The *App* and *Sadako* applications actually emerge from a longer lineage of horror films themed around the invasion of home space and promoted through technological novelties. At the same time, as entities that literally 'invade' and disrupt users' personal screens, the apps also point to longstanding tensions in debates around audience attention, engagement, and control within cinema experiences.

Examining the apps for *App* and *Sadako 3D 2* within a longer lineage of attempts to control cinematic attention at the theater and in the home, we consider why second screen initiatives have so frequently wedded themselves to the horror genre (with its extensive history of gimmicks and spectatorial violations). We combine discourse analysis of these films' marketing with our own participatory and experiential accounts of using the apps ourselves. In so doing, we compare the discursive construction of these apps as somehow 'breaking the rules of cinema' against the material realities of their use. We conclude that these apps ultimately (a) encourage physical and haptic boundary-breaking, but at the same time (b) maintain a strict control over the flow of content between primary and second screens, preserving some of the more normative features of unidirectional cinematic attention. Rather than adapting to existing arrangements and behaviors within the home,

second screen apps instead require users *to adapt to them* through certain pre-programmed synchronizations between devices. In the case of horror films, these programs may, paradoxically, try to create 'interactive' and 'engaging' experiences precisely by *removing* user control from the viewing experience.

## Positioning Cinematic Attention

Second screens draw attention to cinema spectatorship as a material activity unfolding in space, with bodies and screens enclosed among a multitude of other objects and activities. Beyond issues of how audiences comprehend or read specific texts, there is an entire other social and experiential quality of spectatorial activity (Arnold 1990, 44), a variety of everyday and banal 'behaviors, actions, moods, and intentions' that go into the act of sitting down to watch a movie (Acland 2003, 57). Charles Acland notes that such practices are frequently the targets of industry attempts to channel the unpredictability of audiences into more comprehendible discourses of behavior. The questions for scholars thus become:

> What are the discursive parameters within which the film industry imagines cinema audiences and their routine actions? What are the related implications for the structures in which the practice of cinemagoing occurs and is recognizable as distinct from other forms of audiovisual engagement? (2003, 62)

Generally speaking, the discursive parameters of proper film viewing have been imagined around the theater or theater-like spaces. According to most simplified understandings of theatergoing, spectators sit in silent and rapt attention to the screen before them, their primary choice being their ability to 'look or not look at what the projector offers' (Ross 2013, 446; see also Casetti 2011, 3; Ellis 1992, 24). These accounts often treat this unidirectional attention as if it is affectively overwhelming: spectators are assumed to be more serious, contemplative, and immersed by virtue of the fact that their eyes are 'glued' to the screen.

Although the history of theatergoing in fact reveals a wide variety of behaviors linked to different viewing contexts (Boyle 2009; Staiger 2000), most discourses and discussions about moviegoing (be they popular, industry, or academic) still treat film viewing as a practice of 'rapt contemplation' rather than 'disruptive' talking, moving, or (increasingly in the new media environment) mobile phone use (Tryon 2009, 78). Outside this controlled theater environment, film attention is frequently problematized as more fractured. As Catherine Fowler and Paola Voci (2011) argue, film viewing within the home 'is deemed to be subject to interruptions, and distractions, in competition with other media, non-linear, and therefore no longer a properly temporal object.' Here, 'our attention is not narrowed onto one screen,' but rather 'is engaged and then dis-engaged in an instant' as it becomes dispersed among other screens in the environment.

Media scholars note how many home viewing technologies attempt to shape and reorient this perceived frenzy of gazes and glances. This is especially the case for one of the most important precursors of second screen initiatives: the DVD supplement. Although DVD extra features have declined in popularity and promotional emphasis since the 1990s and early 2000s (Dean 2007), they began as (and to some extent still remain) prominent strategies for media companies to present attractions to home viewers in ways that still channel their attentions back to the primary film text. Barbara Klinger argues that behind-the-scenes extras try to cultivate a hyper-attentive mode of spectatorship built from the 'accumulation and dissemination of the smallest details' of production information, which viewers then bring back to (re)watchings of the film (2006, 63). Pat Brereton makes a similar point that DVDs intertexts and paratexts encourage viewers to 'manipulate a film's narrative, with multiple options and commentaries' (2007, 115), features all presenting audiences with a greater perception of agency and control over the main film. Such supplements, however, may imply that 'the audience has much more control than they in reality have' (Brown 2007, 174). For as much as DVDs fashion a viewing subjectivity of connoisseurship and deepened knowledge for (presumed repeat) viewers, they usually do so to steer audiences back toward a more traditionally linear viewing of the featured movie. Though the DVD viewer is said to be able to 'control time and marshal outside events to suit her schedule,' such media rarely 'change the type of powers accorded the video subject' (Benson-Allott 2013, 206-207).

Despite their multiscreen connotations, most cinematic second screens have preserved (indeed, intensified) this push for linear, concentrative viewing, along with assumptions that one's emotional attachment to the text relies upon one's close attention to it. For instance, Disney's official Second Screen applications, while touted as 'revolutionary movie watching experiences,' nonetheless emphasize that the new technology would not 'overshadow' the television screen playing the film (Morris 2011). Indeed, one Warner executive explained that the central challenge of the second screen was how to ensure that the viewer's glances were coordinated such that neither screen actually distracted from the other: most synced second screens were unpleasant because they offered a 'conflicted experience. The movie and the iPad were always in conflict with each other. It was "up down up down up down. I don't know where to look"' (Rome 2012). One of Warner's solutions, an app released for Blu-rays of *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011 ), actually promoted itself as making the iPad tablet the primary screen, allowing users to navigate a menu that would occasionally prompt video content on the television screen (**Figure 1**). In this way, the iPad acted as the main source of content and site of engagement, with the television taking on an almost ancillary status.

All of these cinematic second screens, like most DVD special features, are largely framed as immersive, yet unintrusive *supplements* to the home viewing experience, offering increased textual knowledge for an audience of imagined repeat viewers or fans. They exist as ancillary add-ons to the primary film rather than 'essential tools for its comprehension' (Hassoun 2016, 107), often syncing screenplay pages, trivia games, or production history

annotations to the primary screen as the movie plays. Like many check-in apps for live television programming (but frequently lacking the kinds of social networking tools featured in such apps), these cinematic second screens work to tame and control the response of its viewers, pushing them toward predetermined types of content and services (Lee and Andrejevic 2014, 45). As Kyra Hunting explains, these mechanisms largely exist as:

> an extension of industry logic, where goals for connected viewing are often to increase viewership of a television program as it airs live or to increase sales of DVDs. Here, the newer interactive media experience is often produced largely to try to encourage older media consumption patterns that are on the decline. (2014, 27)
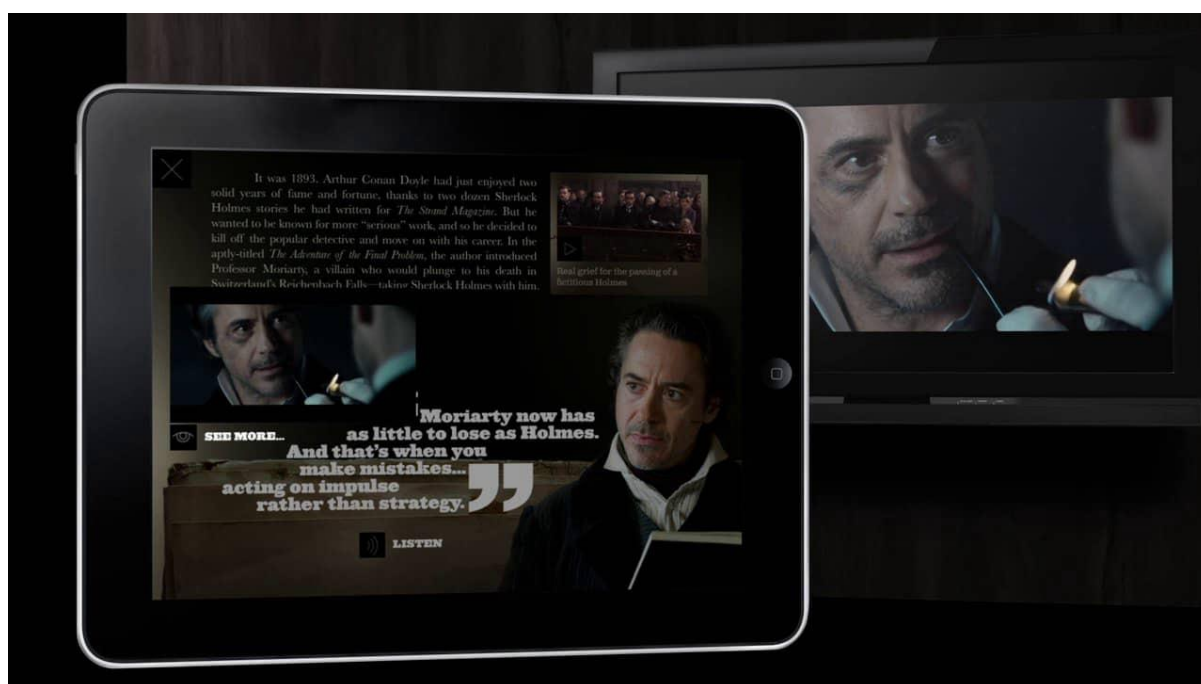


**Figure 1:** App-based special features for *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* configured the iPad as "primary" screen

Much like the attentive modes of spectatorship imagined around the movie theater, second screen apps retain a sense of the television screen as the primary point for engagement and focus, one that will continue to play unabated and unaltered regardless of what is occurring on the mobile screen.

Apps designed for horror films have occupied a somewhat unique place within this field of second screen technologies. Unlike television check-ins or the Warner and Disney initiatives (detailed above), horror has largely abandoned the use of second screens to deepen extra-textual knowledge or provide DVD-like supplements, aiming instead to incorporate apps directly into the film's diegetic experiences and augment their narrative affect. However, even as they move away from being purely supplementary add-ons, horror apps still maintain the second screen's attempts to discipline and mold the attentional-

emotional configurations of their audiences. In this sense, they continue a long-standing heritage of promotions, gimmickry, and sensation associated with the horror genre.

## Horror & Marketing

Much like the onscreen frights they sell, marketing campaigns for horror movies are often predicated on the gimmicky, the experiential, and the sensorial. Instead of relying heavily on star recognition or narrative intrigue, many horror-based campaigns emphasize atmospherics, new screen technologies, and the audience's imagined physical reactions (screaming, jumping, etc.) as primary selling points. As Kevin Heffernan (2004, 10) notes, horror films are often sites of 'struggle between two kinds of filmmaking: the self-effacing classical norms of a cinema of narrative integration,' and the 'wilder, more primitive "cinema of attractions"', which 'draws attention to the act of display, often revealing forbidden, shocking, or astonishing spectacle'.

Advertisements for horror films often work to amplify this carnivalesque sense of spectacle and attraction, and the marketing campaigns for *App* and *Sadako 3D 2* apps are no exception. The tenth film in the expansive *Ring* franchise, *Sadako 3D 2* details the continued hauntings of its titular character, the ghost of a murdered little girl with the ability to access media technology to terrorize and kill her victims. The marketing for *Sadako* reveled in its status not just as a work of techno-horror, but as a film based primarily on cheap scares and outlandish promotional stunts. One such ad for the film's home video release (posted to YouTube on December 11, 2013 by Kadokawa Pictures) declared that the app featured 'a total of more than 30 different tricks, gadgets, contrivances, and mechanisms!' In doing so, such marketing tactics for *Sadako* place the film in a long lineage of genre pictures that have relied on such ploys.

William Castle's cheapo chillers of the 1950s and 60s were forerunners of such gimmick-based advertising; the trailer for *Macabre* (1958) claimed that 'the life of everyone in the theater will be insured by Lloyd's of London for $1,000 against death-by-fright,' while promos for *The House on Haunted Hill* (1959) promised that those in attendance would see 'the first picture ever shown with the amazing, new, Emergo!' – a 'technology' developed by Castle consisting of pulleys that sent plastic skeletons flying over the audience at specific times throughout the film (Derry 2009, 27-28). Emphasizing a similar visceral reaction, one trailer for *Haunted Hill* prided itself as the 'Shiver and Shake … Quiver and Quake Picture of the Year!' This interest in sensory experience by way of new cinematic technologies could further be found in horror's exploitation of 'expansive presentational modes,' such as 'Cinemascope, 3-D, Cinerama, stereophonic sound, and even the short-lived process called Smell-o-Vision' (Skal 1993, 259). While these initiatives perhaps saw their heyday in the post-war era with films like *House of Wax* (1953) and *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), the 1980s saw a renewed interest in the gimmick of the third dimension. Throughout the decade, genre titans like Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger found themselves being viewed through paper anaglyph glasses, popping out of the screen to engage audiences **(Figure 2)**.

**Figure 2:** "Emergo" as cinematic technology directly engaging the audience

More recently, Blumhouse Productions, home of the *Paranormal Activity*, *Insidious*, and *The Purge* franchises, updated Castle's gimmickry with massive marketing campaigns that included audience-reaction trailers (Swanson 2015), online motion posters, and Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) like *The Purge*: *Breakout*. For the 2015 release of *Insidious: Chapter 3*, Blumhouse's marketing team crafted a virtual reality-based haunted house called 'Into the Further 4D Experience,' which utilized Oculus Rift VR technology in an attempt to amplify immersion and fright. Interestingly, the simulated experience was a roving one, and was constructed within massive mobile trailers in several major US cities (Hanley 2015). In this way, the *Insidious* '4D' experience doubled as touring roadshow, a carnivalesque gimmick in its own right (**Figure 3**).

The usage of the term '4D' is noteworthy here, as it is central to the marketing of *Sadako* and its mobile app for both theatrical and home exhibition. The lure of supposedly revolutionary and unique 'Suma4D' technology (developed by Japanese web and mobile
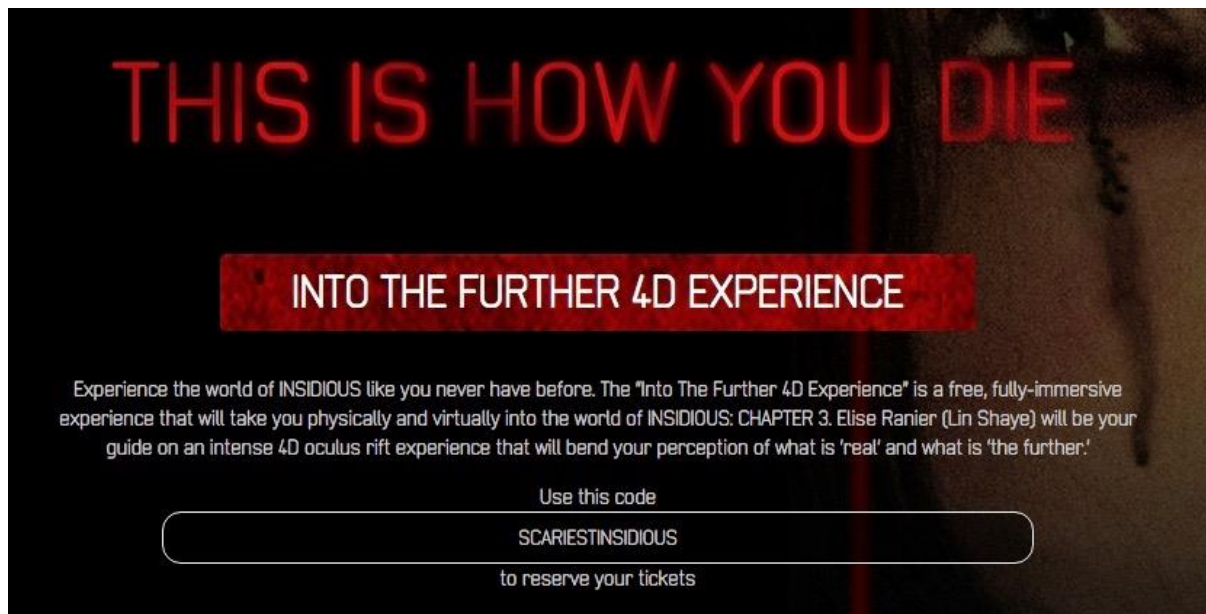
**Figure 3:** New promotional horror gimmicks working with virtual reality (Blumhouse's *Insidious Chapter 3* 'Into the Further 4D Experience')

app design company Kayac) was plastered across the film's official website, posters, trailers, press kit web videos, and home video packaging (**Figure 4**). A portmanteau of the Japanese pronunciation of 'smartphone ('sumafo') and '4D' (a 3D movie experience augmented by other sensory features like scents, motion seats, additional lighting, and atmospheric effects), the Suma4D technology intended to provide the user an immersive, fright-filled mobile experience (or, as Kayac states on their official website, '360-degree fear') ('Sadako3D2 Suma 4d' n.d.). For the 3D viewer, Sadako becomes a 4D experience through the addition of the mobile application's visual, aural and physical components beyond the theatrical screen; for the 2D viewer, the Suma4D technology becomes an even more crucial component for the producers and marketers of the film by attempting to reproduce the theatrical 3D/4D experience within the home space. The promotions for the technology clearly marked the purchase of the DVD/Blu-ray and accompanying app as steps toward a distinct and engaging home viewing 'event.'

The official *Sadako 3D 2* website features a commercial for the home video release of the film that functions as an instructional video for syncing and properly using the mobile app, as well as a visualization of the app's imagined audience. Featuring three smartphone-clutching females gathered in a living room to watch their new *Sadako* DVD, the ad presents an ideal audience that is young, active, technologically savvy, and filled with nervous anticipation for the frights to come. It also significantly depicts a group of friends engaging with the app, rather than a solo user; this works to recreate, in miniature, something along the lines of a theatrical crowd (indeed, the app's occasional bursts of sound, light, and image seem particularly suited for a darkened auditorium). It also works to reinforce the tradition of the horror film as youth socialization ritual, with the challenge of being scared in a group

**Figure 4:** Marketing for *Sadako 3D 2*'s 'Suma4D' technology promises new types of audience engagement across multiple screens

setting and 'surviving' the experience as a rite of passage, method of social lubrication, and a way of laughing – however nervously – amongst a group of friends (**Figure 5**).

This focus on youth and the absence of older viewers also harkens back to William Castle's horror pictures of the 1950s and 60s, where the courting of the burgeoning teen market and a 'deliberate alienation' of adults was key to the success of new horror films (Heffernan 2004, 67-69). In the case of *Sadako*, the usage and importance of the TV screen is not being directly challenged or subverted, nor is there a call to leave the home; rather, the everyday uses of mobile technology are being re-routed and co-opted to provide a purportedly 'new' brand of in-home entertainment that attempts to sell young viewers on the idea of having unique experiences in familiar places. The supposedly 'distracting' traits of mobile technology, especially while in a social setting (staring at the screen instead of engaging face-to-face with peers, playing games, taking pictures of every moment) are diminished by the control exerted by the *Sadako* application and the fictional demonic

**Figure 5:** Commercial for home video release of *Sadako 3D 2*

virus 'infecting' the phone. Instead of challenging the primary screen, the commercial shows the mobile device as fully integrated into the total experience of home spectatorship, transforming the acts of socializing and DVD-viewing into a memorable social event.

The instructional ad concludes with Sadako bursting out of the home entertainment unit and stalking about the house. A physical manifestation of the promise of the Suma4D technology, Sadako's appearance within the space of the home is an exaggeration of what the makers of the mobile app aim to offer: an immersive, corporeal experience enabling the user to engage a film with a heightened sense of intimacy and immediate physical danger. This moment of techno-haunting confirms Ndalianis' (2012, 163) assertion that one of horror's most potent properties is its ability to 'affect the sensorium in such a way that it perceptually collapses the boundaries between reality and fiction,' and in doing so continues the genre's representation of home technologies as gateways to the threatening and the unknown. More so, Sadako's sudden appearance in the instructional advertisement works to confirm the boundary-crossing reach of marketing and media technologies within the space of the home.

While the campaign for *Sadako 3D 2* included various trailers, instructional videos, webpages, and product tie-ins (from novelizations to fast food menu items), the promotional build-up for *App* relied on a minimal amount of trailers, posters, and press junkets at film festivals and tech expos, all bolstered by word-of-mouth across social media and horror blog channels. Though far more limited in concept and scope, the marketing campaign for *App* nonetheless functioned as a method for the filmmakers and advertisers to imagine, create, and train a desired audience for their second screen initiatives. The narrative of *App* was specifically written for the inclusion of a 'threatening' second screen

character: the film tells the story of Anna (Hannah Hoekstra), a young psychology student terrorized by Iris, a sentient mobile application (resembling the all-seeing 'eye' of HAL 9000 from *2001: A Space Odyssey*) that mysteriously appears on her smartphone and proceeds to torment her and her friends.

Though Amsterdam-based production company 2CFilm played a large part in promoting this narrative as exciting, inventive and scary beyond its second screen connections, a good majority of *App*'s marketing campaign appears to have been conducted by the two companies that developed its accompanying mobile technology: Service2Media and Civolution. Based on the same Civolution 'SyncNow' digital watermarking technology (known as Automatic Content Recognition) used for apps like Shazam (Mitchell 2013), developers touted the Iris app as a revolutionary and necessary technology. Rather than just a throwaway supplemental feature (the trailer for the film warns us: 'It's not just an app…It's terror in the palm of your hand'), the app supposedly possessed transformative properties integral to the experience of the feature film.

That said, nearly all of *App's* promotional materials constructed it as a strictly cinematic experience. Save for a few minor textual alterations on posters, social media accounts, and the official Dutch website alerting potential viewers to a October 2013 home video and streaming release date, *App* was specifically tailored for theatrical exhibition, with home spectatorship existing as an assumed afterlife. Within these discourses, the home becomes a space to transplant the 'one-of-a-kind' second screen experience provided by *App* and Iris. In turn, the theatrical second screen experience is assumed to be replicated, at least in part, on home video. In other words, the promotions worked to graft assumptions and practices of theatrical attention onto the experience of home spectatorship and second screen engagement. In so doing, they suggest the promise of what second screen experiences are imagined to be (even if they do not fully deliver on those promises).

For example, in a conference talk posted to Civolution's official YouTube page in October 2013, *App* director Bobby Boermans discussed creative challenges his production team faced while creating the Iris app and selling the concept to distributors, exhibitors, and, audiences. Of the many points discussed, two are notable in their relation to spectatorial attention and discipline: 'How not to be distracted, but rather be more involved,' and 'How to tackle the conventional thinking of the cinema chains,' which Boermans describes as a general apprehension on the part of theater owners about encouraging phone usage within the theater. Both of these challenges point to an assumption that mobile screens are inherently distracting, that modern audiences need to be disciplined and conditioned so as not to use their second screens in 'improper' ways, and that cinematic second screen technology ran the risk of creating distractions and confusion unto itself. If such problems were solvable within the space of the theater (which Boermans claims was achieved through a system of visual cues and aural alerts between the two screens), then the logic of the filmmakers and marketers seems to argue that challenges would also be resolved within the space of the home. To assume, however, that the solution to audience distraction is built into the technology, and will therefore translate to any

exhibition context or platform, is to ignore the varying possibilities of attentiveness, mobility, and disinterest across different viewing sites.

## Experiencing Horror on the Second Screen

The sensorial features of the horror film are crucial for these second screen initiatives. The pleasures of horror cinema (with their frequent predication toward the physiological and the experiential) seem especially suitable for the purportedly interactive qualities of these additional screens. Affective displays of fright, tension, nervousness and uncertainty are the markers of horror's success and gratification; engaging with cinematic horror entails throwing corporeal discipline to the wayside, shrugging off expected performances of passivity, bodily stillness, and ocular attentiveness. The horror spectator, whether in the theatrical setting or the home, is encouraged to scream, convulse, recoil, and cackle; the particularly unnerved spectator may even shield or completely shut their eyes (Williams 2000). As Steffan Hantke asserts, '[we] are supposed to experience [horror] as a loud, crass, and almost instinctual sensation, rather than as a gray sense of dread...Horror, here, means bodily exertion: to shudder, to sweat, to squirm in our seats' (Hantke 2002, 2). Furthermore, Hantke (2004, viii) argues, 'horror is one of the rare genres that are defined not primarily by period or formal idiosyncrasies, but by the effect they produce in the audience... They all aim at the bodily response of the audience.'

### *The Pleasures of Invasion*

This focus on bodily sensation and multiple modes of spectatorial experience gels quite nicely with the proposed attributes and benefits of second screen technologies, such as haptic engagement, deepened immersion, decreased passivity, and (particularly within the home) increased mobility. As Angela Ndalianis (2012, 19) reminds us, 'the contemporary horror film has insistently demanded of its spectator a multisensory response to the world it conjures onscreen,' and the applications for *App* and *Sadako 3D 2* follow this tradition. With depictions of sentient mobile phones and computers, *App* and *Sadako* continue horror's relationship with what Jeffrey Sconce calls 'haunted media' – depictions of technology gone awry, opening up portals for contact with paranormal entities (Sconce 2000, 11). In techno-horrific tales such as *Poltergeist* (1982), *Videodrome* (1983), *TerrorVision* (1986)*, Ringu* (1998), and *Unfriended* (2015), media technologies act as gateways to residents of both the spectral beyond and the dark corners of the earthly realm (Jackson 2013, 34). As a node within the vast *Ringu* franchise of sequels, remakes and novelizations, *Sadako 3D 2* functions as a more direct connection to these concepts of ghostly hauntings and media technologies as portals. *App,* meanwhile, presents its Iris app as a piece of demonic software, a riff on a now standard horror formula that shifts media technology from mere accomplice to main villain.

As Ndalianis puts it, '[the] horror film is about crossing boundaries' (Ndalianis 2012, 15). In the processes of downloading and syncing the applications to the movies, audiences are imagined as blurring the boundaries between cinematic and spectatorial space, willfully

inviting the viral villains into their homes and 'becoming' part of the films' fictional universes. In doing so, the *App* and *Sadako* apps attempt to shatter the user's sense of privacy and security over their own devices (see Atkinson 2014, 87-91).

### *Haptic Engagements and Attentional Direction*

Rather than merely showing the ways mobile devices can haunt their users at home via traditional single-screen representation, the second screen apps allow spectators to imagine themselves as users (and prospective victims) within the world of the film. Users physically 'take part' in the horror onscreen by downloading the apps to their own phones and granting them permission to alter the bodily, affective experiences of watching the movie. Weaving narrative elements and jump-inducing scare tactics between the primary screen (in this instance, a television) and the mobile device, *App* occasionally prompted us to tap, prod, and swipe at our touch screens. The *Sadako* app worked in a similar manner, urging us to repeatedly and forcefully press buttons, answer phone calls, reposition the device for image-capturing purposes, and vigorously rub the screen in order to reveal creepy images (**Figure 6**). As planned and desired spectator actions designed to give the feeling of interaction with and immersion in the space of the screen(s), these tactile qualities align with Ndalianis' (2012, 5) argument that sight 'is intertwined with touch and to see is to also become immersed in the site of the film space.'

Touch is a fundamental aspect of any second screen experience, and the horror apps certainly mobilize touch to allow users to imagine themselves as part of the film experience. However, such mobilization and narrative integration is far more present with *App* than *Sadako*; when Iris demands our attention, we are often presented with text, images, and video that mirror the visual information displayed on characters' mobile devices within the diegetic space, whereas *Sadako*'s app often delivers visual and aural information that presents a more broad vision of the haunted world onscreen, rather than a direct reflection of the diegesis.
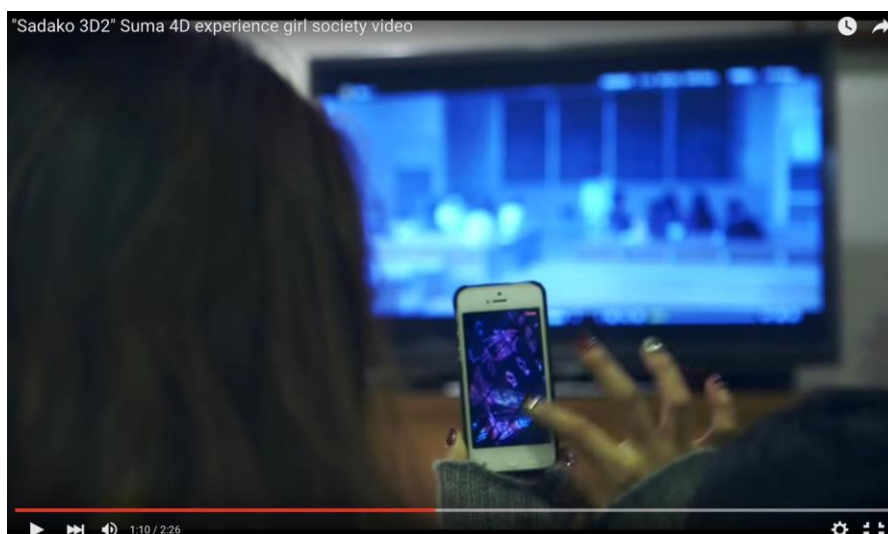


**Figure 6:** Commercial for home video release of *Sadako 3D 2* emphasizes the tactile benefits of the app

In *App*, the spectator becomes entangled with the voyeuristic impulses of the demonic app, being encouraged to watch attentively and (in some instances) helplessly as Iris wreaks havoc. At several moments throughout the film, we are invited to look along with Iris as it spies on characters during intimate moments of sleep, undress, and sexual activity (**Figure 7**).



**Figure 7:** The Iris app spying on Anna, presenting the user with an alternate, voyeuristic point of view

In one crucial scene, Anna's college professor (humiliated and driven to madness by the invasive app's revelation of a homosexual liaison with a student) commits suicide before a crowd of smartphone wielding bystanders. During the scene, shaky footage of the fatal moment appeared on our second screen as if we were actually there. Boundaries were not only crossed by positioning our mobile device as a mirror to the app-infected phones of the film, but also by displaying visual and narrative information not seen on the primary screen, such as alternate angles (the *Sadako* app features similar instances where the second screen presents alternate perspectives on the scene).

Occasionally, the *Sadako* app will elicit direct user participation, like rubbing the screen, pushing specified buttons, or 'answering' a simulated phone call. For instance, in one scene depicting a subway wreck, the app prompted us to scream directly into our phones in order to make the device start flashing uncontrollably. Following the wreck, the second screen receives SMS 'breaking news reports' that flood the screen with the names of the deceased (**Figure 8**). Over the course of the film, a red countdown screen regularly appears, which both (a) tracks the increasing spread of the demonic Sadako virus within the diegesis, and (b) disciplines us (the users) to look down at our mobile device whenever a sound cue blared. When the characters' phones ring, we are also urged to pick up our own and listen in on their conversations (augmented by audio that is available only on the

second screen). In another seemingly privacy-breaching moment of synchronization, the app appeared to 'delete' all of the data from our phone during the Sadako virus' climatic



**Figure 8:** *Sadako* app presenting rolling list of deceased character names from previous scene

attack: the app presents a text warning ('Data Deletion - Deleting Photographs'), accompanied with a stream of images of our actual photo albums sucked to the bottom corner into simulated oblivion.

While these moments are novel attempts at simultaneity and immersion, they are still outside the scope of the immediate narrative witnessed on the primary screen. Rather than using the tactile, sensory properties of the second screen technology to place us firmly within the physical and emotional headspace of primary characters or settings (as with *App*), *Sadako*'s app provides more general sense of its titular demon's creeping spread across a range of screens and platforms. Though this is surely a form of spectral boundary-crossing associated with horror, the Suma4D technology mainly functions as a system of warnings, alerts, and titillating sensory mobilization. Indeed, both *App* and *Sadako*'s emphasis on incessant stimulation and fluctuating modes of bodily comportment echoes scholarly

understandings of horror spectatorship as an unstable, fragmented, and perhaps even distracted experience. When the *Sadako* app commands you to scream 'louder' into your phone's microphone to activate a strobe flash effect, or to 'stare back at your smartphone' in order to take a series of disorienting self-portraits, the second screen technology could potentially create a unique viewing experience that privileges distraction and unruly behavior (**Figure 9**). However, the apps' disciplinary mechanisms ultimately supersede such behaviors. In doing so, the *App* and *Sadako* apps not only reaffirm the TV as primary screen and focal point of the home theater, but also map theatrical space onto the space of the home, connecting it to more dominant (cinematic) understandings and practices of supposedly 'proper' spectator disposition and attentiveness.



**Figure 9:** Alert message from the *Sadako* app: "While pushing the button, face your smartphone and scream for help!"

These are always, crucially, *directed* actions, each having their own pre-established moment during the film's running time; there was no choice we ourselves could make that would alter anything on either the primary or secondary screen, no button we could press or option we could select that would change the course of the narrative or flow of the application. There is no room for input or manipulation, no sense that users truly are players within the diegetic space of the film. Though in many ways second screen applications like the one for *Sadako* bring the home video experience into video game territory, these instances of gamification and role-playing are minor, pushing Sadako's reign of techno-terror only so far.

## *Lost Control*

At the same time, these ostensible limitations also reinforce the horror genre's emphasis on control and its threatened absence. As Rouse argues, horror media is 'almost always about a power imbalance of some kind, where the forces of evil are vastly more powerful than those of the hero' (2009, 23). This struggle for power within horror 'can be intensified by the appearance of control and then its loss' (Taylor 2009, 49). Horror is a genre marked by possession, abduction, corporeal decay, and death. Though it is the onscreen subjects who are literally killed and harmed, the viewer is also enmeshed in this particular control dynamic; consider the push and pull between attraction and revulsion and the acquiescence to fear, shock, and unease that readily inform the experience of horror cinema. This dynamic is also quite disciplinary, a method of folding the potential 'interruptive' activities of the phone user into the flow of the narrative. Of course, audiences must first willingly download the app and buy the film in order to use the technology, but once it is activated, it proceeds as if outside of their control.

Comparing this crucial element of horror to the logics and mechanisms of gameplay further complicates how we consider both control and immersion, especially in terms of the user. To be clear, the *App* and *Sadako* mobile apps are *not* video games. However, their promotional and diegetic emphasis on immersion and interactivity situate them as media initiatives structured with the possibilities of gameplay in mind. It is therefore instructive to briefly consider the linkage between horror cinema, its gamification, and the genre's recent affinity towards second screen technologies.

Video games and horror are typically caught up in a dialectic between the expected user control of the former and the eerily pleasurable loss of it in the latter. McCrea points out that '[a]gency and control well up from the player's history of mastering games, while powerlessness and the monstrous apparitions of horror look to chip away at their confidence' (2009, 220). While this tension can effectively reproduce the cinematic experience of horror, it also presents limitations to interactivity; using survival horror games as an example, Kirkland suggests that:

> in the area of interactive digital entertainment a desire remains for users' control to be compromised by a narrative experience which leads the player

down a dark and twisty, yet fundamentality linear, path. Survival horror play entails a narrative contract between player and game-text. In exchange for channeling their interactive energies along the defined route, the game promises the player this pathway to produce an experience which is thrilling, exhilarating and terrifying in varying pleasurable and un-pleasurable measures. (2009, 76)

This experience of horror gameplay is similar to the design of the horror apps. There is a narrative pleasure in conceding to the fiction that these are apps as possessed, demonized technologies, despite the promise of interactivity. In keeping with the fictive rules of the genre, the apps function as presences that can never be fully exorcised: one can never fully control them, but 'must accede' to their demands (Jackson 2013, 34).

Case in point, hours after finishing *Sadako 3D 2*, at midnight in our time zone, we received a disturbing phone call from 'Sadako' herself (**Figure 10**). In this moment, the app tested the limits of our control in ways beyond those experienced during the actual film. It does not matter if the film and app are synced, nor does it matter if you have the app actively running on your mobile device; Sadako can still reach you, leaving open the
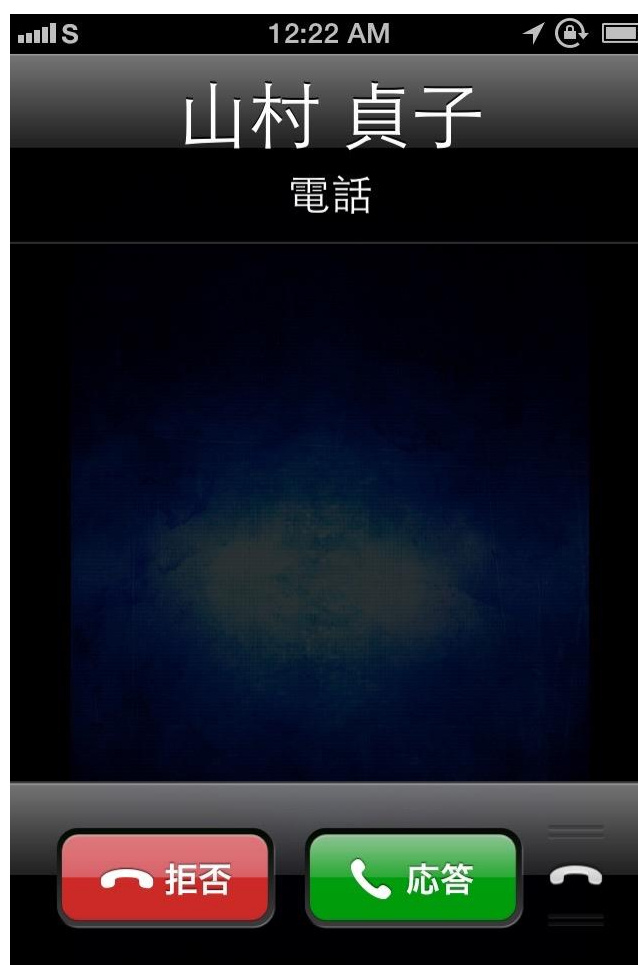


**Figure 10:** Several hours after the film's completion, the *Sadako* app creepily contacts the user by surprise

possibility not just for more fictional ghostly encounters, but for more content to be pushed to your mobile device by the filmmakers and their respective advertising partners. Of course, *App* and *Sadako* viewers are not dealing with any literal ghosts or techno-hauntings (even if we understand the idea of non-stop, unsolicited marketing as horrifying), but they do possess very little control over the actual flow and function of the apps and its synchronizations. In a sense, we were forced to conform to the experience of the app, rather than the app conforming to the material viewing context.

## Conclusion

Writing critically of Warner Bros' official companion apps to *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Inception* (2010), Caetlin Benson-Allott argues that most cinematic applications have been marked by a particular kind of 'impoverishment':

> [E]ven though the app editions do allow users to tap, stroke, and otherwise physically fiddle with films in a new way, these touch-screen interactions do not expand relationships to the stories or characters. The touch-screen feels like a more personal interface than a remote control, but it still only allows users to navigate preprogrammed options and experiences...We try to tap the windows onto our filmic worlds, but the windows never really open, reminding us that no matter how intensely we feel the movies, they feel nothing for us. (2011, 11)

These modes of 'uncaring' second screen viewing are in one sense a reflection of current technological limitations; it is worth noting that connected viewing apps for pre-recorded television series have met similar criticisms about lack of 'flexibility' (Spangler 2014; Wallenstein 2012). More than just a case of hardware, however, the current limitations of the second screen are very much based in lingering cultural understandings and practices of concentrative cinema spectatorship. Existing apps encourage viewers to receive a stream of content over which they have no or negligible ability to manipulate.

The cases of *App* and *Sadako 3D 2* both conform to and challenge the contours of how we often understand cinematic interactivity. On the one hand, they appear to reassert the traditional conception of film viewing as a directed and captive activity over which the spectator has no control. After all, it would be difficult for an app to seem truly interactive when it structures its content in such decidedly pre-determined ways. On the other hand, in removing the user's control over the direction and flow of the app – in making the app something about which the user must accept and conform – *App* and *Sadako* also continue a longer lineage of horror as a genre whose pleasures and frights rely on sacrificing one's control and certainty. Horror is a near-ritualistic play between revulsion and attraction; to willingly engage with the genre is to enter into a unique contract with its creators – one where affective responses of terror are traded for arousal, even at the cost of extreme corporeal and emotional disturbance. With this in mind, *App* and *Sadako* point toward

horror's constant play with and disruption of the lines between human and nonhuman, pleasure and pain, fun and fright, and attention and distraction (Prince 2004, 2). That disruption can only go so far, however, as *synchronization* becomes key to the functionality of these second screen technologies.

In this way, *App* and *Sadako* reveal certain cultural assumptions about what engaged spectatorship can or should be, and, perhaps, what its necessary limitations are. This is true even if second screen technologies are ultimately deemed 'failures,' like so many other spectatorial gimmicks and experiments throughout cinema history. Neither insignificant novelties nor visions of the future, second screen technologies are glimpses into an ongoing 'media laboratory' of screen engagements, where producers and audiences are always testing, negotiating, and forming different models of viewing sociality (Groening 2014, 168). Second screen cinema has yet to move beyond long-standing practices of linearity and programmatic content flows; depending on our expectations of engagement and interactivity, perhaps they do not need to. Rather than editorializing second screens as not being properly interactive enough, horror apps encourage us to consider how viewing practices – indeed, interactivity itself – always rely upon some degree of disciplinary practice.

## Biographical notes:

Alexander Svensson is a PhD student and instructor in Indiana University, Bloomington's Department of Communication and Culture, where he researches the intersections between horror and promotional culture. His work examines recent experiential marketing gimmicks for horror content – often linked to digital networks – that configure shock as affective capital.  Contact: alexswan@umail.iu.edu.

Dan Hassoun is a PhD student in Communication & Culture at Indiana University. His work on media distraction, multitasking, and self-control has appeared in *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, Television & New Media, New Media & Society*, and *Cinema Journal*. Contact: dhassoun@umail.iu.edu.

## References:

Acland, Charles, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Arnold, Robert, 'Film Space/Audience Space: Notes Toward a Theory of Spectatorship', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 25, 1990, pp. 44-52.

Atkinson, Sarah, *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Benson-Allott, Caetlin, 'Cinema's New Appendages', *Film Quarterly*, 64 (4), 2011, pp. 10-11.

Benson-Allott, Caetlin, *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013.

Bereton, Pat, 'The Consumption and Use of DVDs and Their Add-Ons', *Convergence*, 13 (2), 2007, pp. 115-117.

Boyle, Karen, 'Attractions and Distractions: Mums, Babies, and Early Cinemagoing', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 6 (2), 2009, [WWW document] URL http://www.participations.org/Volume%206/Issue%202/special/boyle.htm#_ednref2 [visited 19/08/15].

Brown, Tom, 'The DVD of Attractions?: *The Lion King* and the Digital Theme Park', *Convergence*, 13 (2), 2007, pp. 169-183.

Casetti, Francesco, 'Back to the Motherland: The Film Theatre in the Postmedia Age', *Screen*, 52 (1), 2011, pp. 1-12.

Dean, Peter, 'DVDs: Add-Ons or Bygones?' *Convergence*, 13 (2), 2007, pp. 119-128.

Derry, Charles, *Dark Dreams 2.0: A Psychological History of the Horror Film From the 1950s         to the 21st Century*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.

DiOrio, Carl, 'Warners Teams with Facebook for "Watchmen"', *Hollywood Reporter*, 10 May 2009. URL http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/warners-teams-facebook-watchmen-83660 [visited 09/07/15]

Ellis, John, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, London: Routledge, 1992.

Finley, Guy, 'It's All Second Screen...', *Second Screen Journal*, 1, 2014, pp. 4, 70, [WWW document] URL http://ccf53dbfc1ae49464d27-29889b863e22516556050c4cf436b210.r40.cf1.rackcdn.com/S3-Journal-High-Res.pdf [visited 15/11/14].

Fowler, Catherine & Voci, Paola, 'Brief Encounters: Theorizing Screen Attachments Outside the Movie Theater', *Screening the Past*, 32, 2011, [WWW document] URL http://www.screeningthepast.com/2011/11/brief-encounters-theorizing-screen-attachments-outside-the-movie-theatre [visited 01/10/14].

Groening, Stephen, *Cinema Beyond Territory: Inflight Entertainment and Atmospheres of Globalisation,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Hanley, Ken W., 'Event Report: "Insidious: Chapter 3" Into the Further 4D Experience', *Fangoria.com*, 23 April 2015. URL http://www.fangoria.com/new/event-report-insidious-chapter-3-into-the-further-4d-experience [visited 01/08/15].

Hantke, Steffan, 'Shudder as We Think: Reflections on Horror and/or Criticism', *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 17, 2002, pp. 1-9.

Hantke, Steffan, 'Introduction: Horror Film and the Apparatus of Cinema', in Steffan Hantke (ed.), *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004, pp. vii-xiii.

Hassoun, Dan, 'Tracing Attentions: Toward an Analysis of Simultaneous Media Use', *Television & New Media*, 15 (4), 2014, pp. 271-288.

Hassoun, Dan, 'Engaging Distractions: Regulating Second-Screen Use in the Theater', *Cinema Journal*, 55 (2), 2016, pp. 89-111.

Heffernan, Kevin, *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business*, *1953-1968*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

Holt, Jennifer & Sanson, Kevin (eds.), *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, & Sharing Media in the Digital Era*, London: Routledge, 2014.

Hunting, Kyra, 'Disney Jr. Appisodes and the "Merged Screen" Viewing Experience', *Spectator*, 34 (2), 2014, pp. 25-32.

Jackson, Kimberly, *Technology, Monstrosity, and Reproduction in Twenty-First Century Horror*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Johnston, Keith M., *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.

Kirkland, Ewan, 'Shock, Horror: First-Person Gaming, Horror, and the Art of Ludic Manipulation', in Bernard Perron (ed.), *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009, pp. 62-78.

Klinger, Barbara, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.

Lee, Hye Jin & Andrejevic, Mark, 'Second-Screen Theory', in Jennifer Holt & Kevin Sanson (eds.), *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, & Sharing Media in the Digital Age*, New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 40-61.

McBride, Sarah, 'The Way We'll Watch', *Wall Street Journal*, 8 December 2008. URL http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122833913230576869 [visited 17/06/15].

McCrea, Christian, 'Gaming's Hauntology: Dead Media in *Dead Rising*, *Siren*, and *Michigan: Report from Hell*', in Bernard Perron (ed.), *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009, pp. 220-237.

Mitchell, Robert, 'Don't Turn Off Your Phone During This Horror Pic', *Variety.com*, 11 March 2013. URL http://variety.com/2013/digital/news/chillers-interactive-app-etite-1200006516 [visited 17/06/15].

Morris, Chris, 'Multitasking with Tron: Legacy', *Variety.com*, 5 April 2011. URL http://variety.com/2011/digital/news/multitasking-with-tron-legacy-31863 [visited 17/06/15].

Ndalianis, Angela, *The Horror Sensorium: Media and the Senses*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2012.

Prince, Stephen, *The Horror Film*, Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Rome, Emily, 'DVD Viewing for the Multitasking Movie Junkie: "Sherlock Holmes 2" App  Syncs to Blu-ray Disc', *Entertainment Weekly*, 11 June 2012. URL http://www.ew.com/article/2012/06/11/sherlock-holmes-2-movie-app-blu-ray [visited 16/08/15].

Ross, Miriam, 'Interstitial Film Viewing: Community Exhibition in the Twenty-First Century', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 27 (3), 2013, pp. 446-457.

Rouse III, Richard, 'Match Made in Hell: The Inevitable Success of the Horror Genre in Video Games', in Bernard Perron (ed.), *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009, pp. 15-25.

'Sadako3D2 Suma 4D', *Kayac.com*. URL http://www.kayac.com/en/service/client/1194 [visited 24/08/15].

Sconce, Jeffrey, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Skal, David J., *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1993.

Spangler, Todd, 'TV Viewers Aren't Thrilled with Second-Screen Synchronized Content, Study Finds', *Variety*, 9 January 2014. URL http://variety.com/2014/digital/news/tv-viewers-arent-thrilled-with-second- screen-synchronized-content-study-finds-1201040757 [visited 19/08/15].

Staiger, Janet, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Stedman, Alex, 'Disney Invites Kids to Bring iPads to Theaters for "The Little Mermaid" Re-Release', *Variety,* 11 September 2013. URL http://variety.com/2013/digital/news/disney-invites-kids-to-bring-ipads-to-theaters-for-the-little-mermaid-re-release-1200608309 [visited 15/11/14].

Strover, Sharon, 'The Future of Television?' *Flow*, 15 (8), 2012, [WWW document] URL http://flowtv.org/2012/03/the-future-of-television [visited 01/10/14].

Swanson, Alexander, 'Audience Reaction Movie Trailers and the *Paranormal Activity* Franchise', *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 18, 2015, [WWW document] URL http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/611/501 [visited 20/08/15].

Taylor, Laurie N., 'Gothic Bloodlines in Survival Horror Gaming', in Bernard Perron (ed.), *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009, pp. 46-61.

Tryon, Chuck, *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence*, Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Tryon, Chuck, *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies*, Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013.

Vanderhoef, John & Petruska, Karen, 'TV That Watches You: Data Collection and the Connected Living Room', *Spectator*, 34 (2), 2014, pp. 33-42.

Wallenstein, Andrew, 'Second Thoughts on the Second Screen at ABC', *Variety*, 13 June 2012. URL http://variety.com/2012/tv/news/second-thoughts-on-the-second- screen-at-abc-9300 [visited 01/10/15].

Williams, Linda, 'Discipline and Fun: *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema', in Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 351-378.