

Film final
William Gilmore
Found footage: Paranormal activity

The definition of found footage by Wikipedia is “ a plot device in pseudo-documentaries in which all or a substantial part of a fictional film is presented as if it were discovered film or video recordings”. For a very long time the horror genre was not doing as well as it should have been. every horror made in the early 2000’s were almost all slasher films like Freddy V Jason or very gory films like the SAW series. The horror genre, as well as the film business desperately needs something new to rejuvenate the genre and elevate the game. In walks Oren Peli, creator and director of Paranormal Activity. When he first moved to America, Oren was all alone and he would hear things in his house like floorboards creaking or the wind blowing something. While he would lay there and listen to the creeks around his house he thought to himself “what would happen if a couple recorded the happenings going on in their home for just a bit of laughs, but there actually turned out to be something demonic in the house”.

A year later Paranormal Activity was Finished and was picked up by paramount picture. The movie follows the found footage of a young couple, Katie and Micah. Katie believes that there is a ghost residing in their home little does she or her boyfriend know that the evil inside the house has been around her her entire life and will not stop until it gets what it wants. Paranormal activity is the first horror film in a long time that truly captivated everyone who watched it. In a time where slashers and gore films reign supreme, Paranormal activity brought back a true sense of fear not seen since the Blair Witch Project. Now in 2015, almost every single horror film out now is some sort of found footage horror. What separatesparanormal activity from the rest is the movies is it went back to the basics of fear. it utilizes the fear of the dark and the fear of sounds where they are not supposed to be getting you ready for a jump scare. Which by then you will be jumping out of your seat. Besides the cinematography that went into this film I will also look at the use of lighting such as night vision and the big light on top of Micah’s camera and The use sound and sometimes the lack of it. I hope that you leave this essay with a profound grasp on why people love this film franchise, but also understand that found footage is a part of the horror family for good.

In this film the cinematography is very simple, it is shot on a single camera used by the couple to capture the footage of a spirit in the house. This camera is very high in quality, to the point you can accurately see when the demon’s shadow is cast over the door in the bedroom. It is using a 35mm lens which is known in the camera world to be one of the more versatile camera lenses. This is an advantage to the actors who are using the camera because its very easy to rack focus on a 35 millimeter lens. The camera was a handheld so that lead to easy maneuverability and also makes it easier to pan and tilt. This is also an advantage of making a found footage horror film because the characters are not professional cameramen or directors, so the shot will not always be in perfect focus or too zoomed in. The director lets the actors take control of what this film was going to look like. One thing that stood out to me that during the scenes of the most conflict the camera is not being moved around. It is being put on a tripod every night by the character Micah, which means during some of the most nerve racking scenes in the film. Something else that makes this found footage film scary and nerve racking is the time lapse on the bottom right

of the screen. When the couple lays down for the night it usually takes some time before anything happens so the timestamp speeds up and creates a time lapse of the time we are not watching. This helps make this movie more suspenseful because when the time stamp slow down in real time, you know something supernatural is about to happen. This also shows how creepy it is when Katie is possessed and she stands at the foot of the bed and the time lapse goes on for two hours before she stops and walks downstairs. This is another example of how different things are in a found footage film. Using the time code makes your tensions run a bit higher as you wait for it to stop and see what happens.

Another cinematic aspect to look at in this film is the lighting. Since the film is being made as a found footage film, a lot of the lighting will be done naturally with the house lights and natural sun radiating through the house. When something demonic or other world is going on, it is usually at night when the characters are sleeping so they use the night vision on the camera to capture what is going on during the times they are asleep. The director used these times to play with shadows in the room. In one scene the demon actually can be seen walking past the door of the bedroom, but you can only see its shadow. Something that is also crucial about not having the lights on while you are shooting is that whenever we see light it immediately catches our eye. Sometimes when the demon is about to attack Katie or much he turns on a certain light on in the bathroom down the hall or the lights downstairs. This is to make his presence know to the viewer since the main antagonist is not a physical being but an entity. Another thing with lighting using only found footage is that the main source of light at night is from the top of the camera. Using this very bright light makes only a small bit of area bright and the rest of the frame pitch black. This gets the viewer anxious because they do not know if something will pop out and scare them. The lighting in this film is very crucial in this film as well as other films because the lack of light is scarier than having all the lights on. The fear of the unknown scares the viewer and gives them fears of what is out there in the dark.

The last thing I want to discuss in this film is the importance of sound and sometimes, lack thereof it. In this movie sound is the plays one of the most vital parts of this entire movie. it could be the sound of running footsteps down the hall while the couple sleeps, or the sound of glass breaking when the demon breaks the photo of Micah and Katie. One of the scariest parts of the film is how much silence there is. That's what makes this film scary for everyone. This is what I call anticipation scaring. This is when the director does not always use jump scares against you, but rather gives you more psychological terror than physical terror. It is what keeps us on the edge of our seat. In the last scene, Katie walks downstairs and screams for Micah he comes running down the stairs to help and then you hear him scream and then silence.

Then you hear footsteps coming up the stairs and they are heavy footsteps. Once the person gets to the top of the stairs, They stop. It's too dark to see who it is standing on the stairs and the worst part is: you sit there and wait a full 12 seconds as nothing happens then out of nowhere Micah gets hurled into the camera as it fall overs and Katie is standing there in the doorway, with blood all over her shirt that is probably Micah's. She goes over to the deceased body and looks it up and down before throwing herself at the camera with a demonic face. This is a scene that truly blows the minds of all viewers alike because it is so simple yet so terrifying. The seconds that pass by waiting for something to happen is the scariest because your mind is trying to trick into

seeing something. The viewer knows something will be coming, but they have no idea what or when. The fear of the unknown is what this movie is made of. Sound helps that by making the silent times in the film the most nerve wracking moments in the film.

Overall, this movie is what brought found footage horror back to the forefront. This film was made in seven days and it only had 4 characters. What makes it so different from the rest of the films in this genre is the simplicity in the scoring. The pitch black so you are afraid of what could be in front of you, a small creak turns into a demon screaming. The sound and lighting mixed with a viewer's paranoia are what put this film over the top. Paranormal Activity was made with only 15,000 dollars, but it made almost 193 million dollars for paramount studios. When I first saw this film I was 13 and I was so frightened watching it, I closed my eyes for almost the whole film. When I watched it this time for research I found myself, 7 years later still absolutely terrified of this movie. I call myself a horror buff and here I am, trembling where I was sitting. This movie has a power to scare people even if it is their second or even third time watching it. The reason it scares viewers so much is that it could be you or I on the screen or anyone for that matter. The director did not hold the camera, the characters did. This could be anyone holding the camera and that's what makes found footage horror so scary but yet so exciting. The idea that the creak in your floorboards when no one is home or the item you find somewhere other than where you put it, the fact that that could be the work of some otherworldly being is what terrifies people and that is why Paranormal activity made such a killing in the theatres.