Horror Movies and Society Today
William Whittington
Assistant Chair of Cinema and Media Studies, School of Cinematic Arts

Abstract
The current political and social climate in both the United States and globally has created a sense of ongoing crisis and dread, fostering a sense of anxiety related to even the most mundane things in our lives from Facebook to mobile technology. It is no surprise then that horror as a genre has exploded in popularity and status during this period. Films such as The Purge, It Follows, Paranormal Activity and Pontypool have identified and amplified the terror of political inversion; sexual repression; and the power of various media like talk radio to incite mob-like behavior. Similarly, streaming and cable television services have created a host of new shows such as Black Mirror, The Walking Dead, and Westworld to extrapolate the potential catastrophes related to social media, AI and robotics as driven by the fundamentals of capitalism. This brief micro seminar will examine the emergence of the horror genre in film and television, specifically addressing various themes, conditions and aesthetic approaches, while also considering the function of genre to disrupt cultural norms and critique political institutions and social structures. Of particular interest will be how the genre uses of sound and image strategies to both describe and evoke cognitive dissonance. In this way, we will seek out the method in the madness of horror and this historical moment.

Faculty Biography
William Whittington is the Assistant Chair of Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, where he conducts research and teaches courses on film and television history, genre studies, film and Buddhism, audio and digital culture, adaptation, and gender and sexuality in media. Between 1993-1997, he served as the curator of the USC Warner Bros. Archives, assisting with research for various film restorations, documentaries, and books. He has also worked as an editor for Time Warner Trade Publishing and is currently the managing editor of Spectator, the USC Critical Studies Journal of Film and Television Criticism. His scholarly work includes articles and interviews on genre, sound design, new media and technology. He is the author of Sound Design and Science Fiction (University of Texas Press, 2007), co-editor of Spectatorship: Shifting Theories of Gender, Sexuality, and Media (University of Texas Press, 2017), and he is currently working on a new book entitled Sound Design and Horror.