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Death and the Diagonal Display:
Cinema's Planned Obsolescence in the Screen-Captured Image

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Pedro Noel Doreste

The recent proliferation of screen-captured films, or films that purport to be recordings of a personal computer desktop or are otherwise comprised of a graphical user interface mise-en-scène, can be understood as a radical attempt at remediating new media through the old. These post-cinematic films, *Unfriended* (Gabriadze, 2015) chief among them, do not neatly conform to previously-established ontological understandings of either media. The film eschews or replaces traditional cinematic techniques in favor of the logic of computer media. Conversely, screen-capture severs the interactive component in human-computer interaction reconfiguring users as passive spectators. Despite its equally unaligned relationship of *Unfriended* to the ontological markers of each media, there is still a pervasive sense of realism, imbued throughout the experience of watching *Unfriended,* perhaps indicating that screen-captured films' claim to authenticity is more dependent on a phenomenological realism than an ontological one. Screen-captured films signal an inevitable, yet seemingly-incompatible intersection following digital cinema and the personal computer's dual rise to cultural ubiquity. The computer interface, when made cinematic, loses its functionality but maintains its appearance as a digital artifact or document of online networking moments on social media and software applications—a trace of interface that is not our own, yet appeals to personal experience.

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Death and the Diagonal Display is written in the loving memory of my brilliant and gentle brother, Armando Doreste, who passed in October 2012. One of my largest regrets is failing to take a screenshot of his last words to me: a text that read, "Don't worry about me. I need to get some rest." It pains me that I can only offer a clumsy paraphrasing. To my little brother Alexis, I can only hope to be half the big brother that Armando was to me.

Table of Contents

Computers will die. They're dying in their present form. They're just about dead as distinct units. A box and a screen, keyboard. They're melting into the texture of everyday life… Even the word 'computer' sounds backward and dumb.

-Cosmopolis (David Cronenberg, 2012)

Not long after the meteoric rise of social media to their current state of omnipresence, popular film, scrambling to contain "new" media that threatens to displace it, has taken upon itself to document the utopian achievement of these new online networking platforms. Films such as *The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010) and *Cosmopolis* (2012, David Cronenberg)—the former tracing the early history of *Facebook* and its now-iconic founder and the latter a grim representation of human-computer interdependence—are a testament to film's fascination with the position of these platforms in everyday life, as well as the increasing computerization of the human experience. While social media and other online networking platforms such as Skype or e-mail tend to be represented cinematically from a distinctly human perspective, with computer media as a backdrop or object with which they interact or refer to, few films have tried to capture the essence of humans existing in an online networked environment. That is to say that, cinematic renditions of human-computer interaction have yet to privilege the user profile and the interface over its human operators and their own physical surroundings. Although the computer has often been a target of remediation by other forms of audiovisual media, the computer screen has rarely been allowed the opportunity to look inward.

In 2015, Universal Pictures released the independently-produced horror film, *Unfriended*, directed by Levan Gabriadze. The film's most striking feature is its plot which develops entirely within the frame of a Macbook computer, utilizing various software

applications, websites, and other features of the graphical user interface (GUI, for short). While the film has been alternately dismissed as a gimmick[1] or held up as an example of innovative filmmaking in a genre whose films hardly ever draw such a compliment[2], the technique of capturing a computer screen wholesale and remediating its images through film is inarguably a novel phenomenon of digital cinema, as evidenced by a slew of films from this point to be referred to as *screen-captured films*—films that purport to be recordings of a personal computer interface or are otherwise comprised of a graphical user interface mise-en-scène. To date, the horror genre [3]has unsurprisingly been the first to exploit the conceit in films such as *The Sick Thing that Happened to Emily When She Was Younger* (from the horror anthology *V/H/S*, Joe Swanberg, 2012), *The Den* (Zachary Donohue, 2013), *Open Windows* (Nacho Vigalondo, 2014), and, most recently, *Unfriended* (originally titled *Cybernatural*). Outside the genre, a 2013 short drama entitled *Noah* was praised for its ingenious use of the technique and, more recently, a *Modern Family* episode which is set on its matriarch's iPad screen debuted in early 2015.[4] The cycle, if it can even be called that at this point, points to a liminal ontological state between old and new media, between the film and computer screen. Screen-captured films signal an inevitable intersection following digital cinema and the personal computer's dual rise to cultural ubiquity.

Speaking on *Unfriended's* permanence (or lack thereof), director Levan Gabriadze remarks, "Everything dates in this world; computers do too. This will be a testament of this

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1 Dujsik, Mark. "Unfriended." Roger Ebert. 17 April 2015. Web. 13 March 2016.
2 Dowd, A.A. "Unfriended ingeniously commits to its laptop horror gimmick." *A.V. Club*. 16 April 2015. Web. 7 April 2016.
3 The films origins in horror are Specifically in found footage fiction through a tenuous association with screen-captured films. Found footage fiction is primarily a narrative conceit, while screen-captured films usually begin in media res and rarely attempt to explain themselves.
4 Debruge, Peter. "Film Review: 'Unfriended.'" Variety. 3 August 2014. Web.13 March 2016.

year; it will be attached to this period."[5] Clearly, Gabriadze understood the evolving nature of interfacing with computers when he made a film whose resulting effect is documenting the fleeting online networking moments that transpire on a daily basis. In this regard, his film stands alone in providing an accurate, even mundane portrait of HCI in 2015, though attempts to capture virtual realities have been a shared fascination in commercial cinema ever since computer media's infancy. Films such as *Hackers* (Iain Soffley, 1995)*, ExistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999), *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Sisters, 1999)*,* and *Swordfish* (Dominic Sena, 2001) feature speculative renditions of HCI, mostly achieved through the process of characters either becoming or blending into computers or instantaneously processing thousands of lines of code as if the users themselves were computing machines. Though some films from this era—particularly Norah Ephron's painfully dated romantic comedy *You've Got Mail* (1998)—make use of brief moments when familiar GUI's fully fill in the frame, none were inclined to adopt the GUI-mise-en-scène for a full, feature-length film. *Unfriended* audacious use of the screen-capture instead provides an objective representation of the computer screen or of interface proper. In 2015, screen-captured films could make a wager that would not have been possible in the late 1990s: the cinematic screen-capture figures interactive media as a known quantity.

A film such as *Unfriended* is only possible given the personal computer's relative contemporary domesticity at a time when the language of new media has effectively established itself as the lingua franca of the neoliberal world. As Steven Shaviro writes in *Post Cinematic Affect*, "new digital technologies have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience" (Shaviro 2), with many of these experiences

[5] Smith, Nigel M. "How the Team Behind 'Unfriended' Pulled Off the Most Ingenious Horror Film in Years." Indiewire. 24 April 2015. Web. 12 March 2016.

transpiring in virtual, networked environments. For many a computer user, social interactions, labor, product consumption, and entertainment have made their way into the computer screen, to the point where the physical equivalences of these activities have been relegated to obsolescence. In social media, minutes turn into hours devoted to crafting and maintaining an online "persona",[6] to accumulating a rolodex of "friends," to decorating virtual environments to one's taste, etc. It was only a matter of time until a film came along that reflected the shared experience of extending oneself into the computer screen on a daily basis and for extended periods of time. In documenting this new shared reality, *Unfriended* is the first film of its post-cinematic kind to capture "what it feels like to live in the early twenty-first century" (Shaviro 2). Both Steven Shaviro and Levan Gabriadze agree that in *Unfriended* is a sign of the times, which begs the following question: Exactly what *type* of sign is it?

Fourteen years after Lev Manovich proclaimed that cinema has lost its status as an indexical art, *Unfriended*'s blunt and immediately recognizable reproduction of the OS-X Mavericks display can still conjure up memories of HCI in even its most computer-illiterate or skeptical spectators. In other words, when consumer operating systems become a near-universal language, does the computer screen need to be interactive to serve an index of interface? By encouraing reconsiderations of the relationship between indexicality and interactivity, the screen-captured film continues the long lineage of films marking the death of cinema through its displacement by digital technologies. Whereas many film theorists

[6] I strain to use the term "persona" when discussing online avatars, but I employ it here in the service of signaling how these networked processes have replaced slivers of the human experience. The term is inaccurate because the mongrel digital avatars (profiles) typically constructed and performed in social media and elsewhere on the Internet are equal parts the way one wishes to be perceived and an exaggerated account of what the user perceives to be his or her own virtues. In this way, I believe digital avatars are, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have claimed, merely "a lens through which to redefine our bodies and minds themselves" (Hardt, Negri). The common Facebook profile is less a spitting image of its creator than it is spitballing until a preferred online identity is reached.

such as David Rodowick have lamented that film has been replaced by the computer, this new wave of films has it so that they are being replaced by *a* computer and the formal elements of that typify that medium, such as the relative lack of depth and dynamism when compared to film and the eradication of shots and edits altogether. Conversely, though they carry the affect and mimic the appearance of computer media, these films reconfigure the computer user as passive spectator and similarly force revisions of what one assumes is interface. The purpose of the screen-captured conceit becomes not to create the illusion of interactivity, but to call attention to its lack. In other words, the interface, when made cinematic, loses its functionality but maintains its appearance as a digital object or document—a trace of interface that is not our own, yet appeals to personal experience. At a time when many films which have been entirely digitally-composited have seen challenges to their claim to ontological authenticity, *Unfriended* is a time capsule of contemporary, commonplace human-computer interactions on online networking platforms that are, by their very definition, in a state of continuous perishing.[7] By extension, the cinematic screen-capture can be said to be indexical of the digital itself, collapsing the distinction between real and digital into a flat, familiar, and ephemeral space—the veritable 'back end' of digital filmmaking, one which "simultaneously represents and masks the workings of the computer's code" (Friedberg 225). This signals that the index in digital cinema may be tied more to experience than physical referent, which is to say that screen-captured films strive for a phenomenological realism as opposed to an ontological one. Buried within screen-captured films is the sense of loss associated with being cut off from interactive media or

[7] The many software applications and websites Blaire uses have already been revised and replaced by newer versions. More often than not, a computer user does not see the same webpage from one day to the next. Instead, developers are continuously rolling out updates to their products and designers are constantly tweaking interfaces to the point where the appearance of a particular website may change drastically not only from one day to the next, but also change hour-to-hour.

from the online interactions of minutes, hours, days, and years past. In the process, they may be the most substantive recent contribution to cinema's ongoing discourse on its own death. In the screen-captured image, cinema finds a new purpose as unwitting documentarian in the passing of another media form, and may be evidence that film may not the one urgently in need of preservation.

Not Cinematic/Still Cinema

Computer media, though born from a cinematic metaphor, [8]do not naturally conform to narrative cinematic forms. In *Unfriended*, though one of its most evident features (and complaints) is that it is not 'cinematic' enough, the computer screen undergoes many contortions in order to represent a narrative that is, at its foundation, a generic horror plot. The film is shown from the "perspective" of high school student Blaire Lily[9] (Shelley Hennig) or, rather, her Macbook display. A year after her long-time frenemy, Laura Barnes (Heather Sossaman), commits suicide, a group Skype session goes awry when the conversation keeps being interrupted by an unknown participant, which is revealed to be none other than the ghost of Laura Barnes. Back from the dead but confined to inhabiting networked devices, such as the diegetic laptops, smartphones, and wireless printers, her ghost terrorizes the teenagers, picking them off one by one and gradually revealing each of their roles in the cyberbullying scandal that culminated in her suicide and consequent haunting. The film then embarks on its technophobic premise or, as Jeffrey Sconce writes in

[8] Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*.

[9] Though not a point-of-view shot, the story is ostensibly told through Blaire's perspective since the mise-en-scène contains all her interactions with the computer screen. However, the spectator's line of sight is not necessarily human, as the contours of the laptop screen are not included within the frame.

his book *Haunted Media*, an "occult discourse that proliferates around emerging computer technologies" (Sconce 202), a discourse to which the horror genre has repeatedly made contributions. Doing for the social media interface what *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) did for handheld cameras and *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983) did for the VHS tape, *Unfriended* is a snapshot of present anxieties stemming from the need to stay alive (or current) within online environments. As Manohla Dargis writes, somewhat acerbically, in *The New York Times,* the *Unfriended* functions as a generational selfie.[10]

While the film purports to be a commentary on bullying and online harassment, portraying social media platforms as a double-edged sword as many critics have noted[11], it only achieves this on the most superficial levels. Although *Unfriended* does not deviate from generic conventions in terms of narrative, its attempt to redefine what is commonly accepted as 'cinematic' stems from its reimagining of filmmaking techniques and shot composition. Utterly lacking in cuts, the film is essentially one long, unscored, eighty-minute take[12] in which the 'camera'—a GoPro during the production of the Skype images, but a webcam in the diegesis—remains fixed to the laptop lid facing the user-protagonist, Blaire. Aside from its outside-the-box production history, traditional concepts associated with narrative filmmaking appear to be largely missing in the film. Though found footage fiction, the subgenre critics have incorrectly associated with the film, has often claimed to resist filmmaking convention, its defiance of cinematic practice has never been as radical (not since

[10] Dargis, Manohla. "'Unfriended,' in the Scariest Ways You Can Think Of." *The New York Times.* 16 April 2015. Web. 14 March 2016.
[11] Murphy, Mekado. "In Unfriended, Horror Unfolds on a Desktop Screen." *The New York Times.* 8 April 2015. Web. 13 March 2015.
[12] At a WonderCon 2015 panel, screenwriter Nelson Greaves made the improbable claim that the film was shot in a single eighty-minute take. In an interview with the production crew, Germaine Lussier writes, "The cast said shooting this way let them stay in the moment and keep energy up. Plus, since they were shooting a movie that takes place on a computer, they were able to walk off screen at times, use their phone to text, and they'd get direction via instant messages sent from the director. There didn't need to be a lot of continuity because the characters are all on a computer screen and things could cut around." Lussier, Germain. "'Unfriended' Was Filmed by Shooting the Entire Movie in One Take." *SlashFilm.* 7 April 2015. Web. 13 March 2016.

The Blair Witch Project, at least) as in the screen-captured film. Cinematic conventions such as shots, edits, depth, and movement do not apply or, at the very least, avoid easy identification and remain concealed under the logic of computing. Camera movement and deep staging are minimal or, more accurately, minimized and relegated to occupying small portions of screen space, not unlike the experience of windowed multitasking. In mimicking the aesthetics of the computer interface, screen-captured films appear to lose some of their cinematic markers altogether. Upon closer inspection, however, *Unfriended* seems to combine the oppositional techniques of montage and mise-en-scène to construct an experience that is simultaneously unlike watching a movie or using a computer. When shown on a movie screen, the picture is too unlike film; when on a computer display, it falls short of interactive media.

The first few seconds of *Unfriended*, to the attentive viewer, foreshadow the sinister role that digital technologies will assume later in the film. As the familiar brass section of the Universal Studios title sequence begins to blare, the viewer expects the word "UNIVERSAL" to smoothly come to a halt horizontally across the illuminated globe of the production company's logo. However, as one waits for the sounds and images to coalesce into the famous emblem, something strange happens: the words jump and glitch, becoming distorted and blurred, the audio track takes of a mechanical, menacing tone. Similarly, the visuals blur until the picture is rendered indiscernible; the once-glowing Earth is effectively swallowed by the abyss of space. The pixelated image adopts a strange rhythm, one that resembles a heartbeat. The effect is that the spectator believes their copy of the film to be damaged if watching it on their computer or mobile device, or they may chalk it up to technical difficulties in the projection room. Regardless of the reason, the title card

immediately raises suspicion and does not readily remind viewer of watching a film.[13] The opening seems to be predictive of its likely most popular exhibition platform, the personal computer with its many blemishes.[14] It proposes an iconic and often overlooked moment of the filmwatching experience and turns it into something uncanny, yet this inaugural glitch serves as the first sign of film's intention to force the two media into each other.

Lagging streams and otherwise distorted visuals are common in *Unfriended*, embodying Laura Mulvey's idea of the technological uncanny, or "the sense of uncertainty and disorientation which has always accompanied a new technology that is not fully understood" (Mulvey 27). In this case, the misunderstood technology in question is the cinematic remediation of the computer screen. For the victims as well as the viewer, glitches and lag are a necessary fact of online video communication. The difference, at least initially, is that the diegetic computer users are largely unfazed by the interruptions, yet the spectator is forced to notice the distortions as extraneous to the experience of watching a film. They are often dismissed as minor hiccups in the conversation, but for the audience, timely distortion of the video feed can also provide an impressionistic view of the violence unfolding onscreen. For example, although Laura's ghost embarks on a six-person killing spree, her presence in the victims' houses is announced by the sporadic interruptions of the video stream. The quality of the streams is lowered, the windows blur to black momentarily, loading icons pop up, and the audio adopts a staccato cadence. The pixilation often embalms

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[13] Except, of course, the opening of the first *Friday the 13th* in which the film's logo shatters the screen. As Caetlin Benson-Allot notes, shattering would have had a distanciating effect on theatrical audiences, as cinema screens were made of white vinyl, not glass. Just like *Unfriended* aimed to be consumed on computer screens, *Friday the 13th* aimed for home video.

[14] The filmmakers seem to at least be partially aware that this would be the film's main appeal to younger audiences. Granted, the theatrical distribution deal and the financial considerations it entailed forced the film to be released in theaters, director of photography Adam Sidman said the production often asked itself if *Unfriended* "is a movie that comes out in theaters [or] or is it a film that's really meant to live on your computer desktop." He would then suggest that the experience of watching the film on a computer screen is radically different than a theatrical experience, trippy even. Mulcahey, Matt. "How to Fake a Movie that Takes Place Entirely on a Laptop: DP/Producer Adam Sidman on *Unfriended*." *Filmmaker Magazine*. 13 Aug 2015. Web. 15 December 2015.

the characters for a few seconds in the time it takes for newer pixels to repopulate the chat windows, giving these characters a momentary ghostly appearance. Similarly, these interruptions obfuscate the many death scenes, denying both the audience and the characters a veritable cause of death, yet they gradually teach both parties to heed even the most minor fault in the computer, for fear that it might portend the unwanted presence of a murderous supernatural entity. As Caetlin Benson-Allot writes of the 'incompetent, indecorous' cinematography that is typically employed in found footage filmmaking, to which the screen-captured film bears a faint aesthetic resemblance, "It allows the filmmaking to become so amateurish that the spectator suspects this footage was never intended for public exhibition" (Benson-Allot 180). In this instance, emulating the lag and artifacting of Internet video, rather than serving as an evolution of the shoddy camerawork of its horror film predecessor, eventually trains the spectator to fear the mundane as the fatal consequences of neglecting the glitching and pixilation pile up for the victims. This cinematic incorporation of common computer imperfections mimics the daily frustrations that plague the spectator's own personal engagement with digital screens, whether it is lag during an online multiplayer match or a YouTube video that simply will not load, yet as passive spectators they are dispossessed of the ability to troubleshoot. It brings these unfortunate temporary malfunctions of the computer to the cinema, where interrupted views of the image are universally unwelcome, warning viewers that motion blur caused by lag is working against them just as much as it is working against the diegetic victims. For some viewers, this effect remains with them long after they exit the theater or close the laptop lid.

Although the distorted visuals occasionally disrupt the film's single take of the continuous graphical user interface as visual theme (or the GUI mise-en-scène), the film remains a strangely static piece of audiovisual media for the majority of its run time. Camera

movement would seem to be an indispensable technique of the cinematic long take[15], yet *Unfriended* seems content to let the camera idle on blank spaces or otherwise expendable scenery. Elements within the frame display certain forms of dynamism, but the frame itself remains fixed. The screen instead challenges the viewers to pick and choose the objects of their attention while simultaneously distracting them with competing audiovisual elements. In a sense, the role of the spectator is realigned to coincide with his or her own prior knowledge of user-computer interplay and the way pixels shift to produce new images, though the shift rarely affects the entirety of the screen. Kinetically, there exists a contrast between the still spaces, Blaire's navigation of the computer screen with her cursor, the various windows being scrolled through, and the video elements of Skype chats and YouTube or LiveLeak videos, the latter of which naturally feature camera movement in its most amateurish manifestations. Many visual elements at the forepart of the display are also stationary at times despite their privileged position in the frame, ostensibly to afford the spectator an opportunity to read and process their content. In the case of a paranormal message board Blaire visits after she begins to suspect that a haunting is at hand, her frenzied clicks, drags, and drops disrupt the prior stillness of desktop. The resulting image is not kinetically uniform, but instead varies in motion and activity. The choppiness of the aforementioned glitches accentuates the uneven image. As Laura Mulvey writes in *Death 24x a Second* on the ability to pause film with the advent of video, the "hint of stillness within movement sometimes enhances and sometimes threatens" (Mulvey 67), but in *Unfriended*, the end result is two-fold: the hint of movement within stillness simultaneously achieves both

[15] Although with regards to digital cinema, there are varying approaches to the single-take film. Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002) was shot in HD video in one ninety-nine-minute take, Alejandro Iñárritu won Best Picture in 2015 for his own single-take film, *Birdman* (2014), although he took liberties with the concept by including "invisible" edits facilitated by lighting and camera movement. *Unfriended* features no such pretense.

effects as plot unfolds and the suspense reaches a crescendo. The customary stillness of the computer screen is replaced by unnerving contrast between blown up Skype windows and the indecisive hovering of Blaire's cursor as she clicks for her life.

The stillness, of course, is facilitated by the film's adherence to the structure of interactive media, which abandons cinematic cuts and transitions in favor of spatial montage, a term coined by Lev Manovich to describe "a number of images, potentially of different sizes and proportions, appearing on the screen at the same time" (Manovich 322). Though Manovich cautions that this type of montage is not editing proper, the filmmaker is tasked with developing a logic that determines the order in which the images should be understood. In *Unfriended*, Gabriadze organizes the various windows in the mold of human-computer interaction, complete with its scattershot focus of attention and unprompted scanning of the frame.[16] *Unfriended* is far from the first film to render an approximation of spatial montage, of which split-screen films such as *Time Code* (Mike Figgis, 2000) make extensive use. However, the screen-captured film features overlapping frames within frames that quite literally adopt the look of computer media. Steven Shaviro writes that the film *Southland Tales* (Richard Kelly, 2007) and its post-cinematic composition are a sort of simulation of a graphical user interface, which he describes as a type of 'mosaic' that necessarily involves active spectatorship,

> *Southland Tales* repeatedly emulates the computer screen and the television news screen, in which multiple windows compete for attention. In such conditions, my eyes no longer 'know' where to look. The media experiencer can no longer be

[16] Other screen-captured films such as *Noah* or *Open Windows* forgo the objectivity of the static computer frame and instead make use of a technique reminiscent of panning and scanning that attempts to mimic the movement of a computer user's eye in the act of interface. In this way, these film's guide the spectator's attention by externalizing mental processes much like traditional films shot in the first-person do.

> figured as a "spectator," standing apart from and overlooking a homogeneous visual field. Rather, he or she must parse multiple, windowed image sources as rhythmic patterns and as information fields. (Shaviro 79)

However, while Shaviro is describing a film that is figuratively emulating the processes and experience of using a computer, *Unfriended* represents interfacing with computer media literally while also incorporating the same type of active spectatorship. The resulting experience is one that parallels interactions with computers in actuality, and even mimics the sort of highly distracted activity of, for example, writing a paper on Word while an open Facebook tab lurks in the background with the sound on, leaving the unfocused writer liable to responding to the 'pop' of a new message. However akin to using a computer in reality, a cinematic adaptation of the electronic screen deprives the spectator of the customary agency a user is typically afforded. Granted, agency in human-computer interface is often an arbitrary idea; Internet users' online endeavors are seldom planned, rarely end where they start, and do not easily conform to a linear trajectory, thus necessitating spatial montage in the sense that users need multi-windowed virtual environments to explore their diverging delta of browsing impulses. This arbitrary nature of Internet browsing is adequately captured in *Unfriended* and facilitated through spatial montage. One may choose to follow Blaire's cursor, obsessing over her twitchy control of the mouse. One could also focus on her poorly spelled, nervously typed, and ultimately unsent Facebook messages or strain to make out the various jokes, remarks, bargains, insults, and commands Blair's friends hurl at each other on the minimized video chat window. One could even squint to figure out what or whom exactly is being depicted in the picture icon in the top-right corner of the desktop next to the trash bin. Meanwhile, Blair's friends bicker on the still-running Skype application looming behind her iMessage conversation with her boyfriend, a YouTube or

Facebook video plays while Blair is browsing the results of a recent Google search, or Spotify may suddenly start up Connie Conway's "How You Lie, Lie, Lie" mid-chorus. Typical reactions to horror tropes such as hoping a horror film character would not open a particular door are replaced by wishing Blaire would hover her mouse to the opposite end of the frame and click elsewhere. There is a wealth of clickable options being relayed, but as film spectator, your hand is more likely to be hovering over a bucket of popcorn than a mousepad. The combination of these audiovisual elements, or "cinematic sequences are intermixed with a sensory-overload barrage of lo-fi footage, Internet… news feeds, commercials [or banner ads], and simulated CGI environments" (Shaviro 68), point to a blending of editing and elements of mise-en-scène. In traditional cinema, the sensory overload that Shaviro is referring to is achieved through montage or a physical saturation of the mise-en-scène, the clashing of shots and the derivation of meaning from contrast. However, *Unfriended's* compositional logic instead becomes paratactic, favoring brief moments of intelligibility instead of conventional film syntax. As a computer user, Blaire visits many spaces, but dwells on few. Although windows are minimized, dragged offscreen, and pushed to the background, the viewer gets a sense that a return to the hidden tabs and windows is a mere eventuality, but one must first make the split-second decision on which window to parse through before it is moves out of sight.

The film, then, in neglecting its cinematic responsibility to guide the spectating eye by saturating the screen with artifacts, ascribes each constituent of the mise-en-scène equal importance. In the process, it invokes Bazinian notions of the virtues of mise-en-scène over montage, espousing the former's bestowal of personal choice while deriding the latent unnaturalism of cutting a strip of film—to Bazin these were a slice of reality and considered sacrosanct. Yet much of the 'choice' Bazin alludes to is dependent on a three-dimensional

exploration of cinematic space. It is no secret that much of Bazin's admiration for Italian cinema of the 1940s stemmed from its directors borrowing and, to a degree, perfecting the technique of deep focus popularized by Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Bazin wrote of these films' ability to efficiently capture spatial density by assigning different planes of action equal sharpness, thinking of the scene as a layered, parallelepiped space whose planes are all equally susceptible to be scrutinized by the unguided eye. However, while both *Unfriended* and the films discussed by the French critic are similar due to their restraint in privileging one plane of the scene over another, cinema has historically achieved this effect through a depth of field and kinetic dynamism which screen-captured films most certainly do not possess. In the flattened, 2D space of the computer interface, the spectator has to rifle through windows for which he or she is not provided with any hierarchical organization. Whereas in other films the spectator typically follows figures and movements along the depth and dimensions of the composition, *Unfriended*'s mise-en-scène is always flat and mostly static, preserving only enough motion to qualify it as moving image and surely not reminiscent of three-dimensional geometry. In its attempt to undo the metaphor from which it was born, computer media struggle to regain its cinematic form.

Nostalgia and the Bound Computer Screen

Though prior entries to the screen-captured film cycle may likewise be characterized as possessing a depthless, static, uncut, interruptible, and unguided composition, film cannot redefine its art form by merely mimicking another. What sets *Unfriended* apart from other screen-captured films is its faithfulness to its form. *The Den* or *Open Windows* share the same problem, as they lack *Unfriended's* medium-specificity. The other films begin with a vague

attempt to establish the computer interface as setting, but later abandon it in favor of retreading familiar found footage territory, and otherwise entirely neglect representing interface as an act. They purport to be "desktop films"—on and about the Internet and digital networking technologies—yet take shortcuts along the way that ultimately render the very technology they try to replicate unrecognizable. For example, in the *V/H/S* short, the interface is vaguely Mac OS, barely-there save for some lazily-titled folders and a trash bin. In *The Den,* one can make out somewhat familiar, yet nameless webcam application and social media stand-ins being used, but the liberties the filmmaker takes in embellishing these images render them parodic and ineffective. The interface in *Open Windows* is almost on par with holographic, 3D-rendered GUIs in science fiction films in that they frequently resort to contrived, technobabble-laden explanations on how the technologies in question operate. This has the effect of placing the speculative science fiction interface too far away from the spectator's own experience to achieve its intended uncanny effect. Yet screen-captured film spectators' exposure to their diegetic counterparts is deemphasized—literally minimized—by software. It is as if spectators are encouraged to identify with the non-human aspects of the graphical user interface, such as the software that is often used to hide humans from the frame and the social media platforms that function, to use Marshall McLuhan's ideas on embodiment, as extensions of the characters themselves. At the risk of suggesting a posthuman reading of the film, audience identification with the human characters is deliberately discouraged by the film through their unflattering character development, as popular critics have pointed out. Instead, a viewer's sympathy corresponds with the second most identifiable aspect of the mise-en-scène: the computer interface and the spectators own recollections of being a user. It is only through the recognition of the interface that a screen-captured film can generate any sense of involvement. Thus, the longing for interactivity first

has to be established at the surface level of appearance before a phenomenological approximation is attempted.

Why must interface *seem* real? The answer is two-pronged. The first is due to screen-captured films' object-oriented ontology—*Unfriended's* no doubt being aided by its familiar, name-brand websites, software applications, and operating system interfaces—where "the images on a screen are just as real, and just as efficacious, as the objects from which those images are supposedly derived" (Shaviro 74). By exchanging the camera for a laptop as the primary capture apparatus, the frame or computer device becomes as important as the image, achieving a realism that runs counter to classical forms of cinema through its representation of the improvisatory nature of human-computer interaction. In the process of becoming cinema, however, the new media interface being represented also undergoes a series of radical transformations, not least of which is the obvious loss of one of its ontological foundations: interactivity.[17] The screen-captured film, positioning itself in this intermediate state, results in a skeptical film viewing experience of the interface-turned-cinema, yet simultaneously constitutes an uncanny phenomenological dismemberment when the computer loses its ability to receive input and the user is reimagined as spectator. Alexander Galloway characterizes the act of interface as a process of translation or "an 'agitation' or generative friction between different formats" (Galloway 31). One can only imagine spectator's disenchantment when they realize, a few minutes into the film, that this particular interface has already been translated for them.

[17] Again, interactivity is a topic of great debate within media studies. Manovich doesn't believe interactivity to be a defining quality of new media. Instead, he believes in interactive structures— the belief that "all media place cognitive and physical demands on the viewer" (Manovich 56). This definition of interactivity is not useful for the purpose of this argument.

Typical reactions to the film are of boredom, of feeling ripped off, as if viewers could have gotten comparable entertainment from the comfort of their homes as proper users.[18] The GUI mise-en-scène initially registers as too mundane to entertain, in both senses of the word; it does not inspire pleasure and simultaneously does not warrant engagement due to its very ordinariness. In the first sense, audiences may be understandably skeptical that they can derive amusement from a film that unfolds within a device many of them have sitting on their desks back home and ostensibly attempted to escape when the decision was made to watch the film in a theatre, so this group would have trouble taking the screen-capture conceit seriously as spectators. It can also have a similar effect when spectators attempt to watch a film on their computer device, only to then see a film that takes place within one. Secondly, viewers may consider the film's formal concept a reflection of the filmmaker's lack of effort, since 'all it takes' is recording a computer screen. In both cases, in calls attention to the devices within which the images are housed and the very displeasure indicates the efficacy of the screen-captured display. The implication is that it is nearly impossible for an audience member to consume the film without calling into mind recollections of human-computer interaction with Apple computers specifically or with personal computers more broadly. Much of this association is due to the film's successful product placement[19], which can range from imperceptible to strategic to egregious, yet are deployed as occasional reference points for the user-turned-spectator. On licensing onscreen interfaces, Joceline Andersen writes, "By acknowledging an experience that is common to many filmgoers, the consumer applications lend plausibility to the action onscreen, situating

[18] An account of an *Unfriended* screening in Burma: The showing was attended by only about ten people, sporadically distributed across the room. The film, however, was lacking in subtitles, so it became the responsibility of the few English-speakers in the audience to translate the film for the rest of them. Needless to say, it was loud. In this case, the interface was in need of a literal translation.

[19] "How the Unfriended Movie Is Changing Product Placement." *The LC Studio.* 8 July 2015. Web. 14 March 2016.

it in a space that is validated as commonplace" (Andersen 82). Including brands such as Facebook, YouTube, Apple, Spotify, etc. could easily seem a cheap way to target audiences—it is one of the central criticisms of the film—but when producing a film set of a computer screen, is there a better way to engage with audiences than to hit them where they live?

While its representation of quotidian online environments encourage a sense of familiarity, they do not fully subtend an illusion of interactivity. It is easy to be skeptical of this particular assessment of screen-captured films. While *Unfriended* certainly adopts many recognizable elements of computer interface, popular reviewers must think their audiences particularly thick if they believe them capable of suspending their disbelief long and strongly enough to confuse the passive experience of watching of film with the act of actively interfacing with computer media. As Andersen notes, "the GUI as represented in film need only provide the likeness of interaction without any of the structural underpinnings" (Andersen 78). However, therein lies the instant, most poignant impact of a screen-captured film like *Unfriended,* as opposed to previous cinematic remediations of computers; it *does* instill, if only for a brief second or so, an eerie sense of familiarity with the diegetic interface. More so than mere recognition of the screen, it points to a sense of entitlement that audiences of *Unfriended* seem to have, as if a computer interface can only exist if it is readily available for use. The fact that an interface cannot be interacted with—that the word itself can only be understood in its noun form—frustrates the film spectator. It is not an illusion that *Unfriended* is putting forth, it is purposely leaving its spectators dispossessed by reminding them of their status as former computer users. In other words, a properly-executed screen-captured film, one with all the visual landmarks and distinguishable user behaviors, engenders nostalgia for one's own interface.

For all the debate surrounding the film's conceit, the deprivation of interactivity figures as one of the foremost innovations of *Unfriended*'s remediation of the computer screen. It denies its users the basis of human-computer interaction: input. The film's indication of this lack of agency is not only disempowering in a dystopian, science fiction understanding of the phrase, it may also be exacerbated by the relative proximity of one's body to potentially interactive screens when watching the computer on a personal device. Watching a movie like *Unfriended* and having the actionable surface of a laptop trackpad a couple of inches from your body may simulate the feeling of amputees watching to scratch a phantom itch. In this manner, input deprivation may constitute a sort of phenomenological dismemberment where interface goes from being object/action to solely object, placing spectators in a familiar, uncomfortably cinematic position with regards to the image. The role of spectator here, however, is unexpected and ultimately unwelcomed by a large contingent of spectators, the majority of whom, paradoxically, are willing to watch films on their computers but would not sit through watching a computer on film.

While there are no immediate remedies for the sort of user phenomenological incongruity that may accompany watching a screen-captured film, the discussion on the deprivation of interactivity raises other questions on how the film maintains an audience engaged with such limited formal resources. Surely, audiences do not register spatial montage as montage proper, as windowing or shifting tabs cannot possibly compete with the unbridled spectacle of fast-paced, post-continuity editing run rampant in commercial cinema. If it did, computer users would not take to movie theaters or streaming platforms to watch a so-called "screen-captured film." Though gratuitous sex and violence surely plays a part in keeping horror film spectators involved, *Unfriended* rightly takes advantage of the cinematic medium by including text in its audiovisual bombardment. Screen-captured films such as *The*

Den or even the *V/H/S* short, which similarly tries to emulate the Mac OS graphical user interface, abide by more pictorial means of representation, gouging the computer screen of its usual wealth of textual elements. What was left of these entries in the cycle, prior to *Unfriended*, were films whose screen-capture conceit deliberately functioned as gimmicks, there to pique an interest but not necessarily distract from the film itself, which would be more in line with how users interface with computer media. However, *Unfriended* understands that human-computer interaction is unquestionably an endeavor prone to frequent distractions and populates its frame accordingly. Although the film has limited formal resources with regards to cinema, its use of spatial montage incorporates the rich textuality present in every level of interface—it incorporates chat operations from Facebook, Gmail, Skype, and iMessage. Actual networked media communication is strictly regimented in this manner. Audio is rarely divorced from the visual. Images, in turn, are rarely divorced from text.[20]

Thus, text becomes central in the film, but not exclusively through maintaining a central position within the film's composition. As previously mentioned, pertinent snippets of chat conversations, social media posts, message board threads, and e-mails are left in the margins of the frame, nominally assigned less importance due to their position 'in the background' and being challenged by competing windows. However, one must keep in mind that depth hardly figures into the hierarchy of priority in *Unfriended*. In its place, film information is distributed wholesale, leaving bits of the narrative to be parsed by the spectator's individual sensory preference. For example, early in the film, one could have

[20] Photographic "screen-caps," as they are colloquially referred to, are often taken for the purpose of their sharing textual elements. For example, texts received may be subject to screenshots when the recipient intends to share them with a third party of save them for posterity. In this sense, a screen-captured image (of the still variety) has an intrinsic relationship with modes of captioning textual discourse.

intuited Blaire's affair by noticing Blaire's history of late-night Skype and Facebook chat conversations with Adam Sewell (Will Peltz), one of which ends with an all-caps appeal from Blaire to Adam. It can be either the beginnings of a reprimand or an effusive greeting, but regardless of Blaire's intention, it is an informal and particularly personal address to a close friend. In the same frame, before Laura's ghost begins terrorizing the teenagers, it seems she may have tried contacting her best friend before resorting to violence, since Blaire's 'Other' folder[21] on her Facebook page contains a single unread message, yet the film never addresses this glaring notification, though Blaire in other instances quickly opens and responds to social media notifications elsewhere. True or not, these sort of interpretations are the kind produced when a film denies its viewers interaction, yet offers its viewers the textual richness to invite open interpretation. The ancillary literature within the film's interface is so vast that the film could even be compared to an epistolary novel. Through reading the film's footnotes and piecing together the events leading up to the plot, *Unfriended* bestows its viewers a slight participatory component of spectatorship in lieu of true human-computer interaction, not through parsing multiple planes of action as mentioned earlier, but through sacrificing aspects of plot in favor of momentary detours to less inhabited, but revealing corners of the frame. The resulting experience of wandering away from Blaire's cursor is not unlike Laura Mark's concept of *haptic visuality,* in which "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch" (Marks 162). 'Touch', here, is a term deployed with some caution, since there is no direct input on the part of the spectator that would trigger the cursor to click on and infringe upon these potential conversations. Instead, the spectator's address of the eye functions as a sort of invisible cursor, one that ultimately remains unplugged. The diegetic cursor is elsewhere, yet the viewer's attention does not necessarily remain attached to it.

[21] Now called 'Message Requests', the 'Other' folder was used to store messages from people outside your friends list.

Granted, this is only a partial offer of interactivity as defined by Manovich, not interface proper; it is merely an opportunity to recoup some of the agency stolen from the spectator earlier in the film. As such, the embodied experience of watching *Unfriended* lies somewhere in between the aforementioned phenomenological severing and the semi-interactive act of reading the film.

An Alien Trace

Both cinema and computer media have seen challenges to their ontological claims to authenticity since the advent of digital technologies. In the preceding discussion of *Unfriended,* the screen-captured film was found to be unevenly aligned (or equally unaligned) with formal, historical, and embodied conceptions of either cinema spectatorship or human-computer interaction. Instead, the screen-captured film's ontological status can be found unfixed in a liminal state between the two media, possessing aesthetic and practical qualities of both, but avoiding classification. However, much of the burden of the computer's indexical quality—its truth claim—has been unjustly placed on its status as an interactive medium. The interface index, which is present in the screen-captured film, is not contingent on a dynamic of input or output and would seem impervious to the requirement of interactivity as ontological qualifier. The screen-captured image is indexical of the interface effect. It simultaneously and quite self-reflexively can be understood to be indexical of the digital itself.

Media theorists such as Philip Rosen and Seung-Hoon Jeong in his book *Cinematic Interfaces* have been quick to dismiss digital indexicality as an oxymoron. Rosen, in particular,

singles out his concept of *practically infinite manipulability*—the ability of the digital image (as opposed to cinema or photography) to arrange its pixels in endless combinations—as one of the digital ideals differentiating computer media from prior audiovisual forms. Practically infinite manipulability is dependent on a second digital ideal of interactivity. In producing a digital index, he believes the two to be concomitant:

> Interactivity in imaging is achieved when the spectator's actions, which participate in manipulating the image, are perceivable in the image. This makes the image an indexical representation of the action of its spectator. Ideally, this would not be an indexical trace, for representation would occur instantaneously (or nearly so) with the spectator's actions. (Rosen 343-344)

The resulting pixelated image, he argues, cannot be indexical of human-computer interaction *unless* it is simultaneously the object of practically infinite manipulability. In other words, the digital index requires immediate, direct interaction from its user in order to substantiate its truth claim. At the time of his writing, it is understandable why Rosen would believe that an index of HCI was dependent on temporal and performative considerations. However, while he puts forth the possibility of the computer image as an index, his claim presupposes that HCI is a one-way directive originating from the human operator. Given this assumption, his description of indexicality in interactive media would appear to be more in line with an iconic representation. It is not a trace that points to the action, it *is* analogous to the action being performed. Furthermore (and through no fault of his own since *Change Mummified* predates major arguments in interface theory), though his claim concerning HCI indexes addresses the causal relations that satisfy C.S. Peirce's 'real connection,' he fails to address the indexicality of interface as an *effect*. Rosen's version of the digital index seems to

be another instance where visual and functional considerations of interface take precedence over the process through which interface comes into being. That is to say, if interface is a meeting point[22] between two formats, here figured in the user and the computer, then Rosen's HCI index does not go far enough. It leaves unanswered three coterminous questions. The first, Rosen forcefully contends that user input marks the computer screen, but does it leave an indexical trace of interface? Second, if HCI results in an image that is infinitely manipulable by an operator, does the sign need to point to that specific operator to maintain its claim to authenticity? Following that line of thought, can a second operator—or in the case of screen-captured films specifically, a spectator—experience another's trace of input as their own?

In his book about fetishized and ritualized online spectacle, mostly addressing multi-user domains (such as *Second Life*) or 'round-the-clock webcam sites, Ken Hillis acknowledges the digital trace of spectating others' online interactions. He writes, "the networked and networking trace, in the form of an image, never fully comes under human control even as it seems to carry a trace of the human with it" (Hillis 121). In fact, his idea of a *networked trace* that points to interface without necessitating an immediate operator or direct input would seem to answer the first two questions posed in the previous paragraph. Here, the lineage of the trace is divorced from its human origin, yet still conjures up an imagined, ancestral human operator. Instead, as participant-observers of computer media, "the individual experiences herself or himself as part of a broader mediasphere" (Hillis 121). This is reminiscent of the argument proposed earlier, that spectators of the screen-captured image are able to identify with the indexical interface in a manner which transcends a discussion of

[22] David Rodowick writes that interface "turns out to be more of a bridging concept than a mark of distinctiveness" between analog and digital media, making an early observation about interface that would later be fully articulated by Alexander Galloway in *The Interface Effect*.

original operator or origin of interaction. In fact, the intersubjective spectator understands the screen-capture as transcendent of media itself. At a moment's notice, the screen-captured image can be a product of the computer in its native state, a product of cinema if in motion, or a product of photography if stilled; what it fails to transcend is its status as an index of the interface mechanism.

In an interview with the *New York Times*, *Unfriended* producer Timur Bekmambetov thinks of the screen-captured film as a window into the mental processes of its diegetic characters. "If I see your screen, I see your soul," he says, but what he probably does not imagine is that, within online networked environments, these displaced 'souls'—traces of interface—look a lot alike and the possibility exists that another's trace may be virtually identical to that of the spectator. Seung-Hoon Jeong resists the dichotomy of indexical versus digital, seeing the cinematic interface shift its focus from "the relationship between object and image to that between image and subject—namely from ontology to spectatorship" (Jeong 200). Jeong believes that the digital index's responsibility is no longer to designate, but to signifiy "an immersion into indicated objects or events phenomenologically" (Jeong 201), which is to say that the indexical quality of a given screen-captured image is dependent on the embodied experience of its spectator and no longer on its causal relationship to the image-maker. Deviating from Blaire's choices, one can recognize familiar behaviors as she navigates the frame. Obviating the content of the software, social media, and online video that Blaire interacts with, the form in which they are encased also remains immanently familiar. The screen-captured film, as if in spirit but not in truth, carries with it an alien trace indexical of a universal mode of interface.

Retrograde Convergence, Death by Incompatibility

Years before Levan Gabriadze decided to attempt his screen-captured film in the digital era, death was already intrinsically tied to the cinematic experience. From its very infancy, film was preoccupied with the onscreen death when mock executions and electrocuted elephants startled early twentieth century audiences, familiarizing them with an act most would have never experienced until it came time to confront their own demise. However, as André Bazin notes, as the development of cinema was interrupted by more satisfying technology and the art found itself within a field of competing image-based media, it gradually evolved into a self-reflexive medium. Cinema's gaze turned to its own mortality. Jean-Luc Godard experimented with capturing television screens in *Numéro Deux* (1975), in which he intermittently filmed actors standing next to their own image displayed within television monitors or simply the blown-up televised images themselves. Justifying his project, Godard asserted that cinema was the matrix for all other screen art, but chose not to memorialize cinema in nostalgic terms. Instead, he devised a way for 'new' media to incorporate cinema, but, being the resilient medium that it is, his experiment unsurprisingly morphed into a film. Drawing from Godard's project, one can delineate the trajectory of the recent wave of screen-captured films as having followed a similar arc. What was essentially a gimmick being employed by independent, cash-strapped filmmakers was soon adopted by Hollywood producers and directors and eventually became an illustration of film's versatility as a medium. As the film landscape changes to accommodate new technologies, so does its content adapt to new audiovisual manifestations of death, including cinema's own upon the arrival of infringing digital technologies.

The early discourse on the rise of digital cinema frequently adopted a rhetoric straight out of ancient epic. The displacement of cinema as indexical art by its digital successor is often presented as an inevitable war from which photographically-based film would never recover. At the other end of the battlefield would stand the digital enjoying in the spoils of war in the form of convergence, a mass tribute of existing analog media now all equally subjects to the digital regime. Lev Manovich led the charge by speaking of the practice of digitization in mythical terms. He writes, "In a technological remake of the Oedipal complex, a son murders his father. The iconic code of cinema is discarded in favor of the more efficient binary one. Cinema becomes a slave to the computer" (Manovich 25). Shortly thereafter, Philip Rosen similarly characterizes cinema as a victim of digital technologies in his early account of digital cinema's history. On the digital ideal of convergence, he claims that "In its practices of incorporation that make it incorporeal, the digital manifests an imperializing historiography of conquest, imposed by the winner—itself" (Rosen 324). Like all myth, however, the digital's epic conquest of film may have been overstated. Like all regimes, the totalizing force of the digital was met with resistance, and cinema held its position within striking distance of the computer's rampart.

The recent proliferation of screen-captured cinema, led by 2015's *Unfriended,* can be understood as a decree to reverse the trend of computer media consolidating existing forms of audiovisual media after the digital turn. These films assert that computer media does not stand alone as mass remediator deep into the digital era. Retrograde convergence is film attempting the same sort of mimcry the digital imposed on it during the last few decades, showing that while the manifestations of digital images are practically infinite, film remains plastic. Narrative cinema is a medium that can be molded to support endless audiovisual representation, much like the technology which came after. Thus, it can be said that cinema,

in the process of being subsumed into the computer in a film such as *Unfriended*, has stubbornly refused to lie in its own casket and has decided to envelop it instead. In the process, cinema reminds the spectator that although it has been periodically displaced or permanently replaced by the digital, it has not managed to lose its place among the indexical arts.

If the computer evolved from film, it is no surprise then that cinema would somehow try to recapture what it lost to the computer. What is revealed, however, is that in the act of consolidating the interface and rendering it cinematic, is just how much computer media stands to lose. Screen-captured film constitutes a sort of cinematic doubling of death, of loss. Specifically, computer media and the idea of human-computer interaction suffer a death by incompatibility, in which the computer is absorbed by a medium that cannot support its foundational ontological qualifier. Interactivity is a necessary casualty of retrograde convergence, in that there only remain faint traces where an interactive medium once existed. In addition to this loss, the screen-captured film also documents the digital ephemera of contemporary interface that are so often taken for granted given the domestication of computer media. To adequately measure what is lost, one must consider in the words of Roland Barthes the photograph as a metaphor for a passing tweet, a Facebook wall post, or a MySpace status update to flesh out the affective parallels:

> The only way I can transform the Photograph is into refuse: either the drawer or the wastebasket. Not only does it commonly have the fate of paper (perishable), but even if it is attached to more lasting supports, it is still mortal: like a living organism, it is born on the level of the sprouting silver grains, it flourishes a moment, then

> ages... Attacked by light, by humidity, it fades, weakens, vanishes; there is nothing left to do but throw it away (Barthes 93)

There is a mistaken understanding that the Internet is the ultimate preserver, when in actuality, sharing one's thoughts, impulses, opinions, and emotions into the void of online networking environments is nothing more than computer-mediated destruction of intellectual property. One need not look further than *Unfriended* as evidence of this incompatibility made palpable in the screen-capture, or of interface become refuse. Though the film is scarcely two-years-old, many of the aesthetic features of the captured interface have been long rendered obsolete by continuous refreshes, updates, and redesigns. Enough of that interface has changed for segments of the film to register as camp a mere six months removed from its theatrical release. In fact, even its home video release has been plagued by incompatibility, as the film is virtually unreadable—not in the sense that it cannot be read by the media player, but due to the DVD's lower resolution display obscuring the film's many textual elements. As a cultural artifact, *Unfriended*'s negotiations of death within its diegesis, at the level of interface, in its material format, or as an illegible piece of media for future spectators momentarily manage to distract from cinema's ongoing discourse with its own death, and mark the computer as a medium that suffers continuous perishing in the present. In return, screen-captured cinema affords the old to serve as the partial savior of the new—not as conqueror, but as time capsule. As conveyed in this writing's epigraph, the computer would seem to sorely need it.

Anne Friedberg ends her historiography of the virtual window by claiming that "'New' media imply the ever-obsolescence of the 'old'" (Friedberg 239). Screen-captured films affirm that, despite film's rudimentary status as the original moving image, the planned

obsolescence of cinema is implicit in its plasticity. Though it has closed itself off to many of the functional innovations of computer media, the screen-captured image can continue to mimic its digital captors through its practically infinite mutability, resulting in an image where even death itself cannot escape its own mortal capture within the diagonal display.

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