



Miskatonic's Reality Horror course has wrapped up, and it was a stirring couple of weeks, as we examined the development of the horror mock-documentary, the various subgenres of this hybrid form of horror (found footage, gothic documentary, uncanny realism, reality TV, mondo films etc), and the types of issues they address—including archival anxiety and compulsive documentation, post-9/11 anxieties, personal security issues, self-reflexivity, "virtual" reality and voyeurism.

Although there were no formal writing assignments this time around, student Ariel Esteban Cayer was moved to write a review of THE LAST BROADCAST, one of the films discussed in class. Ariel's only 17 and already an ardent genre fanatic! We're in the thick of Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare's "The Monsters of Hammer Horror" course now—more on that soon!

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Analog Terror

By Ariel Esteban Cayer

THE LAST BROADCAST (1998)

D: Stefan Avalos & Lance Weiler

S: Stefan Avalos, Lance Weiler, David Beard

## Miskatonic University: "THE LAST BROADCAST"

Written by Kier-La Janisse

Friday, 12 November 2010 14:24

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Released a year before *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* and often overlooked because of it, *THE LAST BROADCAST* remains essential in the understanding of reality horror, be it found footage films or mockumentary.

Constructed as an investigative report which utilizes its own interviews and coverage as well as evidential “found” footage, the film tells the story of the “Fact of Fiction” murders that took place in the Pine Barrens after two public-access hosts ventured into the woods in search of the Jersey Devil. *BROADCAST* makes great use (both on a visual and narrative standpoint) of every kind of video material available and fuses its patchwork of creepy analog images and intriguing voice-over into an incredibly thrilling narrative. In fact, from its form and content, the viewer is immediately sucked in and the experience becomes more like something you’d live through good television than actual fiction film. The film (or should I say “documentary”) constantly builds up tension, captivates with hints and clues but also extends its purpose as to show us the raw power of media and its hold on its viewership, which in this case, is us. The images inform, reveal, mystify and create unease. We willingly submit to it and go as far as aiding it to attain its goal. As *BLAIR WITCH*, *PARANORMAL ACTIVITY* or *TRASH HUMBERS* would later confirm, much of the genre’s impact comes from the viewer’s participation. In the context of 1998, *THE LAST BROADCAST* comes off as great new way of crafting a horror thriller on the cheap, but also one that feels very much in tune with the late-’90s/early-’00s preoccupation with new forms of media.

Fascinating for its visual patterns—that seem logical in the context of the film but will later become benchmarks of the genre—and underlying themes, the film is also a double-edged sword. It’s a minor gripe, but the film unfortunately fails to explore its supernatural side, which may come as a surprise for people who expect a mythology-driven film or “investigation”. Also, although tremendously engaging for the greatest part of its duration, the film disappoints immensely with its ending, which is both an affront to the viewer, but also to the film’s brilliance to a certain extent. By taking a perfectly constructed exercise and turning it on its head, the filmmakers come off as untrusting of their audience. Whether they stuck to their initial idea or feared they couldn’t take their concept to its logical conclusion is unknown, but the result remains the same. On the flip side, it can be argued that with this abrupt form reversal, Stefan Avalos and Lance Weiler managed to pull the ultimate trick on their audience, while taking their commentary on the media’s relation to its viewer and creator to its natural conclusion. One can further hypothesize that *BLAIR WITCH* came from a desire of perfecting the formula proposed here—and show it without any restraints this time around.

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Ultimately, one of the reasons *The Last Broadcast* is so pleasing is it's undoubtedly a product of the '90s. From its intrinsic analog aesthetic to its relationship with technology—most of which is completely obsolete today—the film is a great document of the beginning of the new millennium and the wave of “homemade” horror it would bring.

{comments on}