FILM AND TELEPHONY: THE EVOLUTION OF CINEMATIC COMMUNICATION

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The effects mobile technologies have had on world culture are profound. The accessibility to interpersonal communication in nearly any environment has created a society driven by instantaneous access to information. For the purposes of this study, the cinema was used as a lens through which to view the effects of not only mobile technology, but also telephony as a whole. Sixteen films from three film genres (horror, gangster, and action/adventure) were examined to understand the effects that telephony has had on cinematic narrative. The films chosen, in the order discussed below, are When a Stranger Calls (1979), Scream (1996), When a Stranger Calls (2006), One Missed Call (2008) Scarface (1932), G-Men (1935), The Big Sleep (1946), Goodfellas (1990), The Departed (2006), Die Hard (1988), Die Hard 2 (1990), Die Hard with a Vengeance (1995), Speed (1994), The Bourne Identity (2002), The Bourne Supremacy (2004), and The Bourne Ultimatum (2007). Specific scenes from each case study were broken down to understand the variations in film narrative made possible through different communication media. Each genre is approached from a historical standpoint, with the earlier films in each category using older methods of communication (e.g., telegraph, telephone, walkie-talkie, and pager) and the latter examples relying heavily on the cell phone. This thesis examines the case studies from a genre and narrative theoretical standpoint, while also discussing cultural issues in conjunction with literature focused on the effects of innovations and mobile technology. This analysis explains the effects that telephony has had on the cinema. Telephony has been an essential component of film narrative going back to the silent era and it is imperative to understand how these two widely used forms of technology have evolved together.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mom and dad. Thank you for all of guidance, understanding, and support, without which this project would have never been possible. Words cannot express my appreciation.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The demand for information in today’s society has led to drastic changes in communication forms over the last 15 years. At the epicenter of the public desire for expedient communication and instant information is the mobile phone. Cellular phones are not very new, in fact they have been owned by individuals since the early 80’s. However, in the late 90’s a transformation in the availability of cell phones took place; they became affordable to people of all socioeconomic levels. As a result, they have become ubiquitous. The influx of cellular devices has changed the way people communicate so much so that many individuals no longer even bother having a landline connected to their house. Cell phones are as much a part of a person’s identity as the clothes they wear. They have become status symbols, social totems, security blankets, and portals to the vast amounts of information available through the Web. Computers perform some of the same functions, but with nowhere near the ease and mobility of their smaller hand held cousins.

The effects of the cell phone are not only wide-ranging in terms of the public sphere, but have infiltrated every aspect of popular culture at large. To further understand how the cell phone operates in terms of popular culture this thesis examines the cinema, using it as a framework to explore the possibilities that mobile technology has created in terms of storytelling. The complex communication scenarios that are now available to characters within the diegesis of a given film differ greatly from the time when only telephones were available for distance
communication. The communication channels that have opened up due to mobile technology allow confrontations and conversations to occur in settings that were unavailable until the cell phone became the central mode of communication in movie productions.

Several theoretical frameworks will be incorporated into this analysis. Chapter 2 will first review elements of genre theory and narrative theory to gain understanding of how these two areas of study have been used to categorize and structure motion pictures. Specifically Robert Altman’s (2008) break down of narrative structure is particularly pertinent as chapters 3, 4, and 5 all conclude using his theory. Altman categorizes book and film narratives into three categories: single-focus, dual-focus, and multi-focus. These three divisions not only clarify the relationships between the characters in each film, but also aid in explaining the effects of communication between each side of the conflict. The sections of chapter 2 that follow look at mobile communication from a cultural standpoint, explaining the impact cell phones have had on society. Rogers’ (1995) work with diffusion of innovations, along with other individuals who engaged this theory, explains the infiltration of the mobile technology into the public sphere. Lastly, the historical relationship between film and telephony is analyzed, explaining the influence that telecommunication has had on films reaching as far back as the silent era.

Although there is an abundance of research concerning the effects of telephony and mobile technology on culture, along with the convergence of these technologies, the specific effects of telephony on narrative within a communication medium has been virtually untapped. In this analysis, I will examine 16 films from three different movie genres in order to understand how mobile technology is being utilized for variations in the construction of narrative. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will all begin with films that were released before the widespread use of cellular technology. Landline telephones will be the subject of the horror and gangster films, while one
of the precursors to mobile phones, the walkie-talkie, will be analyzed in the first two action/adventure case studies. The first genre is horror and includes the films, *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), *Scream* (1996), *When a Stranger Calls* (2006), and *One Missed Call* (2008). The second is the gangster genre and examines *Scarface* (1932), *G-Men* (1935), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Goodfellas* (1990), and *The Departed* (2006). Lastly the action/adventure genre will be analyzed using the following movies, *Die Hard* (1988), *Die Hard 2* (1990), *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), *Speed* (1994), *The Bourne Identity* (2002), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007). Specific sequences from each movie will be broken down in an effort to explain how cell phone communication has changed the narrative progression of motion pictures. Furthermore, I will examine how narrative possibilities have not only become more numerous, but also how mobile technology has transformed the communication process upon which film narratives are based. The corridors of communication have opened to allow conversations to take place in virtually any location, inspiring filmmakers to construct innovative scenarios made largely possible through cellular technology.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

To clearly understand how mobile technology is changing how narrative functions in contemporary films, I will explore genre and narrative theory within film, the cultural effect that mobile communication has had on culture, and research concerning diffusion of innovations specific to cell phones and culture. I will end this chapter with the direct relationship between telephony and film over history. First, genre theory and its pivotal role in classifying film will be discussed. This section will highlight how genre theory became one of the primary tools for film critics and scholars to distinguish between groups of movies. I will then move to narrative theory and investigate how stories are constructed in the cinema, focusing on certain aspects that relate to this research project. The next section consists of literature directed at examining how mobile communication technology has changed the world in which we live. Closely related to the previous section, the literature on diffusion of innovations will define how mobile technology has so quickly and thoroughly infiltrated and affected society. All of these sections combine to explain why it is imperative that we understand how mobile technology is changing the way film narrative functions in the age of cellular phones. Most importantly, cell phones have allowed for the events of contemporary films to progress forward in ways that were unimaginable before their widespread use.
Genre Theory and Film

Film genres provide a basis for grouping films of the past and give today’s filmmakers a format that can be followed for the future. Each genre has its own identity, so when films are labeled as Westerns, romantic comedies, science fiction, etc., people already have an understanding of what the characters and storylines most likely consist of. Over time, genres change somewhat in order to align with the current cultural trends of an era. The changes do not take away from the integrity of a genre, however. They do not replace the basic structure, themes, and narrative content that formed the genre in the first place. Mobile technology has changed the way characters within film communicate and receive information, but has not changed the basic functions of film genres. The three genres used in this analysis horror, gangster, and action/adventure exemplify how films have changed over time in terms of diegetic communication without altering each genre’s format. Almost every genre uses telephony at length for the purposes of narrative cohesiveness, but these three genres provide specific examples of how the telephone and then the cell phone have the ability to drastically alter character interaction, passage of information, and narrative tempo.

There is an incessant desire for human beings to categorize the objects that occupy their surroundings. These categories provide understanding through organization and allow for individuals to analyze and comprehend the attributes that objects are comprised of faster and with greater certainty. Thus, as more and more films were produced over the years, critics began to recognize similarities and differences among certain groups of films. Andrew Tudor (1977) explains that films, “...have in common certain themes, certain typical actions, certain characteristic mannerisms…” (p. 17). Film genres are borne out of these conventions and allow for critics and audience members alike to categorize what it is they are watching through a
comparison of experiences with similar film content. As viewers become more familiar with the elements that make up a given film genre, a certain amount of pleasure can be extracted from the knowledge that one is watching a specific type of film (Buscombe, 1977). Film genres provide recurring visual, character, and narrative elements that provide comfort to the audience.

There has been some disagreement on how film genres should be defined and how to go about discovering the attributes that make up different genres. The Western was one of the first film genres to garner critical attention and create some disagreement on how to define the characteristics that demarcate its existence. Kitses (1969) defines the Western under four headings, “history,” “themes,” “archetypes,” and “icons,” each of which explains different elements that result in its creation. Buscombe (1977) understands the relation between all of the elements that Kitses alludes to, but notes that many of the defined themes and archetypes can also be seen in other film genres. That is, just because many Westerns exhibit these elements, does not mean they are exclusive only to the Western. For Buscombe, visual elements, although not the only components that make up a genre, are the most important features of a film placing it in a specific genre.

There are other problems with classifying films into specific genres. Many films borrow from conventions of several different genres, thus complicating their genre classification (Braudy & Cohen, 1999). For example, Some Like it Hot (1959) draws from the gangster, screwball comedy, and romantic comedy genres. It is necessary when placing a film into one genre or another to figure out which genre it most accurately represents. Although Some Like it Hot has elements of these three genres, it is mostly a romantic comedy and therefore belongs in that genre. Some Like it Hot is most prominently identified as a romantic comedy because its success is measured on the reaction of the audience through comedy (i.e., the laughter it perpetuates in
the viewers). It utilizes elements of the gangster genre (plot and setting) to create its comedic circumstances, which ultimately end in the romantic relationship between Sugar (Marilyn Monroe) and Joe (Tony Curtis). There is typically nothing comical about a gangster film besides the occasional joke or unusual circumstance.

Another problem with film genres is that they allow an easy escape for filmmakers when tackling a project. By relying on previously established conventions, directors and producers become complacent with a formula that has been rehashed repeatedly. Although many of these movies achieve financial success, they lack originality (Braudy, 1999). Instead of deviating from the preconditioned narrative and visual form that has been created within a specific genre, many filmmakers, and the studios they work for, prefer to continuously acquiesce to stories and plots that have shown box office profitability in the past. New productions of old storylines usually adjust the plot to refresh the story. The twists that these stories take are often trite and require minimal adjustments in conjunction with the original material. However, the most successful films find a way to present old formulas in way that reinvents a genre without completely deviating from it.

Although critics and theorists have difficulty figuring out how to define film genres and whether or not they benefit the evolution of the film industry from a creative standpoint, film genres continue to be a staple in the relationship between culture and cinema. Film genres evolve with cultural changes; the cultural issues and narrative elements that once made up a given film genre transform as society develops (Schatz, 1999). Furthermore, the conventions that exist within a genre are always present, but the cultural events that are happening at that particular moment may change the actual content of a film. Again, using the Western as an example, John Ford’s West was an idealized one. It consisted of both chivalry and debauchery
or as Kitses (1970) notes, civilization and the wilderness. Ford’s West was that of legend, rather than that of truth. He relied on a specific notion that the frontier was indeed wild and that brave and strong white pioneers settled the unruly natives through moral standing and power. The Native Americans are portrayed as savage and inhuman, not capable of living in a civilized white world. These films were created at a moment when the production code allowed only strictly restricted violence and sexual explicitness. Ford’s Westerns changed over the decades as America changed. His early Westerns are very different from his later work. As American cultural ideals changed, so did Ford’s films. Sex was taboo within the media, as was depicting graphic violence when Ford began making movies. Ford’s early Western’s aligned with the cultural ideals instituted within the government and through the media during that time. As these ideals changed, so did the Western.

Sam Peckinpah’s Westerns were produced at a crossroads in the American film industry. The production code was no longer a factor in filmmaking and visual representations of ultra violence and sexuality began running rampant through contemporary cinema. Without a governing body, filmmakers could explore the reality of violence and sexuality in much more detail without recourse and condemnation. Unlike Ford’s West, Peckinpah’s West glorified the seedy side of human nature. In perhaps his most famous work, The Wild Bunch (1969), the protagonists represent a socially deviant group of outlaws, bent on raising hell wherever their travels carry them. In contrast to the 1920’s and 30’s films of Ford, chivalry and valor are not thematic elements. This is the West of the depraved and heartless, where civilians are disposed of with the same unflinching brutality as those who the bullets are actually meant for. Film practices were changing because of the cultural battles and changes that were consuming America at this moment in history. Events such as the Vietnam War and the civil rights
movement had desensitized the American public through their constant play on television. Along with the surge in violence on television came the summer of love in 1969, soon followed by the sexual promiscuity associated with the 1970’s. As culture changes, so has the Western film.

The continued success of film genres can be attributed to their ability to conform to the cultural environment within which they currently reside. Grant (2007) notes, “For whether they are set in the past or in the future, on the mean streets of contemporary New York or long ago in a galaxy far away, genre movies are always about the time and place in which they are made” (p. 6). Film genres provide a stable and lasting platform for film writers, directors, and producers to create movies that appeal to the emotions of audiences no matter their age, class, race, or gender. Film theorists and critics are able to make sense of shifts in cultural trends through genres due to their long history and evolution. Although the stories that make up a given genre can become stagnant, repetitive, and lack originality, they also offer a basis for writers to appeal to established thematic conventions through the lens of their own cultural experiences. A genre, with the proper amount of ingenuity, can be revised and take the shape of new and exciting cinematic experience. Film genres are a lynchpin in defining culture because, “…they examine and affirm ‘Americanism’ with all its rampant conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities” (Schatz, 1999, p. 651). American culture is created in the same way it has been since at least the 20th century because technology is invented, celebrities become relevant or irrelevant, political parties legislate, corporations produce products, the musical landscape shifts, etc. However, the changes that occur within these longstanding cultural forms allows for new interpretations of film genres to become expressions of that particular day and age.

**Horror Genre**
Its critics have identified the horror film as a predominately un-artistic film genre that provides little substance and exists primarily for entertainment purposes (White, 1977). Horror films have historically not been taken very seriously, as is evidenced by their absence at award ceremonies and their traditionally poor critical reviews. Yet the horror film genre persists and consistently produces movies that achieve financial success. Like any other film genre, it crosses over the boundaries that separate itself and other movie categories. White asks the question, “Why, for example is a film such as Psycho generally labeled a work of horror and not a detective or crime thriller?” (p. 127). He answers his own question by adding because, “…it inspires fear and dread and therefore deserves to be called a horror film.” (p.127). Fear and dread are the cornerstones of any horror film. That edgy, uncomfortable feeling an audience member feels while viewing a film is a prerequisite when classifying it as part of the horror genre.

The structure of a horror film is different from a detective or crime thriller for several reasons; the first being lack of a logical cause for the events that are taking place (White, 1977). For example, The Silence of the Lambs (1991) unquestionably inspires fear and dread in the viewer, but also provides in-depth explanations as to why “Buffalo Bill” (Ted Levine) is committing such heinous murders. The actions of both Buffalo Bill and Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) are justified through their character development within the plot. Both of these men are insane and insane people often times wind up murderers, especially in the movies. Opposite of Silence of the Lambs, is a film such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974). In this film, a family of cannibals who slaughter their victims in gruesome and horrifying ways terrorizes a group of teenagers. The actions of the family are never justified, however. An explanation is never given for the family’s insatiable desire to kill and then devour the remains of
their victims. The fear of the unknown and unexplained gives *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* the fully realized horror, as White notes that crime and detective thrillers lack.

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to pin down what exactly the true definition of a horror film is. Film critics have been arguing since the 1970’s about which films are true horror pictures and which simply borrow some of elements that are common to the genre (Hutchings, 2004). One critic might identify a film such as *Alien* (1979) as a work of science fiction, because it deals with the human fears of the unknown future and uses an alien monster to represent these issues. On the other hand, another critic might identify the film as horror because the monster’s one and only goal is to harm other beings. The alien does this for no other reason than to reproduce and feed, causing anxiety and fear in the audience.

The expansive landscape of the horror genre allows for myriad interpretations of what actually defines a horror film. Subgenres of horror come, go, and are then recycled, which are revised to appeal to the cultural tastes of the current movie-going public. Somehow, each generation of horror fans is able to identify a horror film by viewing even a small section of theatrical trailer or by looking at a movie poster (Cherry, 2009). Sometimes the trailer or poster tells the viewer outright that this is a horror film and if you want to be scared, you need to see this picture. More than that though, the traits of the horror genre have been ingrained into movie culture so much so that all one needs is an icon, or more realistically a set of icons, (e.g., a monster, female victims, virginal final girl, nonsensical males, sexually active and minimally dressed young adults, etc.) of the genre to determine that a given film is indeed part of the horror genre. Again, these icons are not exclusive to horror, but horror films will most likely contain at least one of them.
Violence in a horror film is very different from violence in most other genres (Cherry, 2009). Violence being dispatched from the unknown (e.g., spirits, monsters, etc.) creates the narrative activity within a horror film. Violence in an action film such as *Die Hard* (1988) is the result of a police officer trying to overcome the obstacles provided by the terrorists. In order to establish law and order in Nakatomi Plaza, McClane (Bruce Willis) must violently subdue those who are willingly able to subject the hostages to harm. Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien* (1979), however, must accumulate the knowledge necessary to defeat the alien life form that has infested her ship. Until she can figure out how to accomplish this goal, her and her crew are living in a constant state of unrest and terror. McClane knows he can defeat his adversaries through force because they are human, but Ripley has no idea how to rid herself of the alien and fears that she does not have the capability to overcome its power.

**Gangster Genre**

Much like the horror genre, the gangster genre has been entertaining movie audiences for decades. The rise and eventual fall of the protagonists of this genre constitutes a masterplot that has been instilled in American lore since the urban expansion of the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The eventual failure of a gangster protagonist represents the failure of reconciling with an identity that he or she has yet to discover (Leitch, 2002). Gangsters either cannot or choose not to comply with the norms of legitimate society. They seek to find a new identity established out of anarchy and defiance, which can only lead to one of two things: confinement or death. The gangster story is one of, “…enterprise and success ending in precipitate failure” (Warshow, 1999, p. 654). The tendencies of a gangster are to improve his or her life at any cost, which dictates by any means necessary. The exact means of success (the various “rackets” a gangster may be involved with) are not always clear, but are implied.
Moreover, this insatiable desire to become powerful results in solitary confinement amongst not only the general public, but also those considered to be friends. A gangster dies at the end of a film because he or she has not given themselves any options. The way in which they fulfilled their destiny was a product of dishonesty and contempt for all things virtuous. This lack of decency and loveless cruelty can only result in disaster.

The setting of criminality in a gangster film requires a stagnant seediness that can only be found in the bowels of the inner city. The fast-paced, dirty, and dishonest confines of an urban environment provide a breeding ground for a gangster’s illegitimate endeavors. In this environment, the criminals, especially a methodical kingpin, are able to control their environment as any other professional would in a setting associated with his or her craft. The laws of government and those who seek to uphold those laws carry little weight with a Hollywood gangster. After all, rules are made to be broken. The city is a place of death and decay in the gangster film, as opposed to a place of hope and prosperity (McArthur, 1977). The dark and damp streets, which have numerous places to hide and escape, provide a perfect setting for the characters of gangster films to carry out their unlawful deeds. Just as the executive owns the day in the big city, the gangster owns the night, operating in the shadowy underworld of their urban stronghold.

Along with the setting of the city, other elements of iconography are particular to the gangster genre. The manner in which the characters are dressed is common across many gangster films. The rise of a gangster is symbolized through their clothes because the burgeoning gangster is typically dressed in street clothes worn by the common person, but as a gangster rises to wealth and prosperity, so does his propensity for fashionable attire (McArthur, 1977). The use of suits to project wealth and stature also serves other purposes in films that
borrow from the gangster genre, but are not exact interpretations. Larke-Walsh (2010) notes that in crime films such as *Heat* (1995) the suits represent professionalism within the group of criminals, verifying for the audience that they are watching men who take their job very seriously. These men are not hoodlums picking pockets; they are after huge scores, which require intelligence and careful planning. Moreover, the opposing group of police detectives wears suits as well, signifying their expertise within the crime prevention field. Whether a professional law enforcer or professional criminal, these characters want to be considered legitimately successful at their jobs and the proper attire exemplifies this.

The access to technology in the gangster film is also a necessity to both antagonists and protagonists (McArthur, 1977). The possession of the latest innovations in weapons, cars, telephones, etc. is crucial to the success of both the good and the bad. In *Scarface* (1932), Tony (Paul Muni) installs automated steel doors that can be closed over the windows and entranceways if his apartment comes under attack. In *Heat*, the bank robbing crew utilizes highly technical explosive devices to commit their crimes in the most efficient way possible. The battle for street supremacy is not only reliant on the demeanor and courage of the men who are fighting, but also on their proficiency in applying the most technically advanced instruments to do so.

In incorporating the use of such devices, the gangster film has come to embody the essence of violence in Hollywood. Some of the most gruesome depictions of brutality have come from gangster pictures, whether during the classical period or in contemporary films. The fall of the production code ushered in the current era of extreme violence, which is now a requirement in the gangster genre (Larke-Walsh, 2010). Perhaps most interesting is the use of archaic objects to bludgeon one’s enemies in a gangster film. Barbarity in this form commonly
occurs even now, during a period in history when the characters can easily obtain weapons that are more modern. The dramatic effect of slow tortuous violence is a necessity in gangster films to vilify the criminals in the eyes of the audience. In *Goodfellas* (1991), Jimmy (Robert De Niro) and Tommy (Joe Pesci) beat Billy Batts (Frank Vincent) mercilessly with their feet, fists, and a pistol instead of simply ending his life quickly by shooting him. Then later, Tommy proceeds to stab Batts with a kitchen knife when he realizes Batts is still alive in the trunk of the car, before finally shooting him several times. The savagery of these men and women is what drives these stories to their conclusions: the death or incarceration of the gangster or gangsters.

**Action/Adventure Genre**

The action/adventure film genre is not new to Hollywood; in fact, it is one of the oldest genres the film industry has to offer. Movies involving swashbucklers, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, and damsels in distress have been a part of the American film landscape since the silent era (Neale, 2004). As with any other genre, action/adventure films are the culmination of separate categories of movies, borrowing from other genres to form a new type of motion picture. The difficulty for action and adventure films is separating themselves from the genres from which they are derived. What is it that separates an action/adventure film from a war picture, police melodrama, or western?

Above all else, an action/adventure film highlights, as its name implies, the action (Donovan, 2010). The action sequences are not created to supplement the plot and dialogue, but rather the opposite. The action-oriented events are the main attraction and the resulting spectacle becomes the driving force behind an action/adventure films existence. Not only are these films centered on illustrations of explosions, car chases, and fights, but violent dramatizations of action. Action/adventure films are identified by how outlandish their explosions or death scenes
are. When people left the theatre in 1994 after seeing *Speed*, they were not talking about its excellent screenplay or character development; they were discussing one of many spectacularly violent or explosive sequences incorporated into the film. The violence in an action/adventure film is glorified and unrealistic. A police officer that single handily defeated a group of terrorists in a high-rise office building most likely never really existed, however the movie-going public enjoys watching Bruce Willis shoot his way out of Nakatomi plaza anyway.

In order to fulfill their violent on-screen destiny, these men and women of action/adventure films must defeat their opposition. Typically, an action/adventure film consists of one of two types of heroes; the first being a lone man or woman (Neale, 2004; Lichtenfeld, 2004). The second narrative form consists of a group of heroes, led by a singular man or woman, which overcomes some sort of catastrophe or opposition (Neale, 2004). The settings in which the heroes operate in are often restricted (Lichtenfeld, 2004). The battle to free themselves catalyzes the narrative. Whoever or whatever can control the defined space wins in the end and freedom is their prize. A restricted space may not be that strict in every sense of the word. The setting of an action film can be an entire city and it is the job of the protagonist to take back that city from those who wish to corrupt it. Furthermore, the space may not be restricted at all, allowing for a lone hero or group to travel to different locales throughout a film. The action/adventure genre has expansive parameters when it comes to setting, but in the end, the same goal is achieved: defeat the enemy, find the treasure, escape impossible surroundings, etc.

As mentioned earlier, the action/adventure genre relies on characters and archetypes from other more critically accepted genres, but relegates them to the background for the purposes of glorifying action. How do you separate an action/adventure film from a police melodrama? *The
French Connection (1971) and Dirty Harry (1971) both feature a cop who operates on the fringe of law enforcement. Both ‘Popeye’ Doyle (Gene Hackman) and Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) are morally ambiguous police officers, willing to bend every rule in order to defeat the perpetrators that infect their city. The French Connection, however, relies more on realistic interpretations of police work (Lichtenfeld, 2004). The pursuit of the drug smuggling criminals using realistic elements of police work (e.g., a long stakeout) provides the narrative momentum in The French Connection. Scenes of Doyle interacting with his partner Russo (Roy Scheider) are imperative moments in the film that rely on dialogue and character interaction through words and gestures. The protagonists and antagonists are well developed through the screenplay as well as the film’s action. Moreover, Doyle and Russo use planned and covert (smart) police work to track down the assailants. This is the type of police work that real-life cops utilize to solve crimes. Harry Callahan, on the other hand, overcomes his nemeses through power and violence. Why try to capture a criminal through sound police work, when you can just go blow them up? Callahan is a “shoot first and ask questions” later type of character, which is the basis for many characters in action/adventure films. Callahan is not interested in talking things over with his superiors and gaining permission for his operations; he is literally a man of action. Even when there are extensive sections of dialogue in Dirty Harry, the conversations seem superficial and comical. The exchange of words is not imperative to the outcome of Dirty Harry; the actions of the characters and action sequences of the plot are.

Narrative Theory and Film

The direction of theoretical analysis in conjunction with narrative theory according to Chatman (1978) asks a simple question, “What can we say about the way structures like narrative organize themselves?” (p. 19). This question sounds a bit oversimplified, but it implies
that there is not a strict set of rules to be followed when it comes to writing a cohesive piece of narrative. Instead, there is leeway for authors when writing a story. Furthermore, it is up to the theorist to figure out the different ways in which narratives function.

“Simply put, narrative is the representation of an event or series of events” (Abbott, 2002, p. 12). Although minimal, this definition of narrative is the launching point for more expansive and complicated discussions of narrative theory. How are these events portrayed within the diegetic world of film narrative? Structuralism is defined through narrative having two unified parts: first the story (content) and the individuals that operate within the stories structure (existents), secondly, the discourse or the exact way the story is told (Chatman, 1978). Formalist theory operates in a similar fashion, but chooses to separate narrative by using only two terms: first, \textit{fabula} related to story and second, \textit{sjuzet} related to discourse. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) also use “story” in their discussion of narrative, but use “plot” instead of “discourse” to elaborate on the aspect of a narrative that involves specific events and “added nondiegetic material” (p. 77). This additional nondiegetic material refers to elements such as music and the opening credits. These elements are added for dramatic or comedic effect and change the mood or tone of a film. This allows the audience to further understand the filmic world they are about to enter. Chatman, Abbot, and Bordwell and Thompson all distinguish the components that make up the content of a narrative and the way in which the narrative is actually presented in a text (e.g., book, film, painting, etc.). The story is the overarching telling of a series of events or the basis for the discourse to exist. The discourse, in turn, elaborates on the events that enabled the story to take place. It is important to understand that the story is understood via the discourse (Abbott, 2002). Without the discourse to elaborate on the events of a story, the story is difficult to understand and lacks narrative cohesiveness. Abbott further
elaborates that stories are “constructed” via the components that actually tell the story. He gives examples of how a story is mediated (e.g., literature is interpreted by the “style of writing,” etc. and film is interpreted by the director’s vision or the actor’s portrayal of the part) which allows the readers or viewers to construct their own meanings through the narratives. All authors, directors, and actors have their own way of presenting the information of a narrative to their audience and this can greatly affect the way in which people infer what is happening in the story.

In addition to story and discourse (plot), film narrative relies heavily on several other factors: cause and effect, time, and space (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Cause and effect is produced by the chain of events within a story and is the driving force behind a narrative’s momentum (e.g., earthquake, meteor, outbreak of disease, a battle between two sides, etc.), although characters can also provide a cause for events to take place. The ability of characters within a story to manipulate and guide the plot in a certain direction is achieved through their actions. One character’s action produces another character’s reaction and as a result, certain events transpire.

The second factor, time, is divided into three aspects by Bordwell and Thompson: temporal order, temporal duration, and temporal frequency (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, pp. 80-83). Order refers to how a story is chronologically put together. A straightforward story will proceed start to finish without flashback or flash-forward. The events of the story unfold in chronological order. With the insertion of a flashback or flash-forward, certain events being shown on screen will be occurring in the past or the future. Duration refers to the amount of time a film’s story actually consists of. The story of a character’s life may be long, but a film’s plot may only consist of a small segment of events that is occurring within that character’s life. Nick of Time (1995) is shown in real-time, that is, the film is 90 minutes long and the events of the
story occur in 90 minutes of Gene Watson’s life. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), however, tells the story of most of Benjamin Button’s life, which spans decades. Lastly, Bordwell and Thompson stress temporal frequency, or the how many times a story event occurs within the plot of a film. *Vantage Point* (2008) is the representation of one event seen through the eyes of multiple characters. The attempted assassination of the president in *Vantage Point* occurs only once in the story, but may recur multiple times in the plot. The event repeats over and over in the plot, but a different take on the event is shown from the perspectives of different characters. Thus, the frequency of the incident is once in the story and several times in the plot.

Bordwell and Thompson’s (2008) third factor, space, can involve both on-screen and off-screen locales. The screen space is the actual setting in which the characters are operating and events are occurring. Multiple locales can be used as screen space, as the events of the plot unfold in different locations. In addition, characters often need to communicate over long distances. Telephone conversations enable characters to converse while situated in different locations with each location being part of the screen space. Off-screen space requires the audience to use their imagination to create the events of the plot that are not actually shown onscreen. In *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), Mr. Darcy (Mathew Macfadyen) writes a letter describing the truth about the previous events that have occurred in the plot that facilitated Elizabeth’s (Keira Knightley) distaste of him. Because the events are not actually shown, but rather are read by Elizabeth, the audience must imagine the scenes as they may have unfolded using Mr. Darcy’s explanation.

Propp and Todorov analyzed narrative by defining the actual categories in which to place the majority of narratives that have been written. Lacey (2000) explains that Todorov uses eight “abstracts” to categorize, in general, the types of narratives that exist in literature (e.g., the quest,
redemption, journey to another world, the beast transformed by love, etc.), which also translate easily to film narrative as movies rely heavily on previously published stories for inspiration and adaptation. Propp divides narrative content into categories he calls “functions” and lists 31 that are consistently exhibited in numerous types of stories, although they are all not present in every narrative (see page p. 47 in Lacey for the full list.) Propp’s functions are much more specified than Todorov’s abstracts, but both serve as guidelines when initially trying to understand where narratives draw their storylines. They are a starting point for theorists when classifying, then analyzing literary, and film artifacts, which makes the process more efficient and organized.

An important element to both literature and film is the incorporation of masterplots into a narrative (Abbott 2002). Masterplots are easily manipulated stories that reflect the core beliefs of culture and therefore are relatable to the public in general. What is meant by easily manipulated is that a given masterplot can be retold many different times in many different ways and the reader or viewer can identify the premise and relate it to stories that have used the masterplot in the past. A common masterplot in American culture is that of a poor and dispossessed individual who rises out of poverty to become successful and influential. The film world has fixated many times on this premise. To use Stephen Jay Gould’s term (p. 43), “canonical story” as an easily accepted and transcribed cinematic text (e.g., Once Upon a Time in America (1984), Rocky (1976), Slumdog Millionaire (2008), Million Dollar Baby (2004), etc.). There are, of course, a plethora of masterplots that will not be talked about here. It is important to realize that narratives constantly borrow from previous works and well-known stories to manufacture their own identity.

Altman (2008) explores narrative from a new set of structural boundaries, which is rooted somewhat in the origins of narrative theory, but then departs into new directions. He divides
narrative into three different groups: (1) dual-Focus, (2) single-Focus, and (3) multi-focus. Dual-focus narratives are separated into two groups; dual-focus epic and dual-focus pastoral. Dual-focus epic is the depiction of two opposing forces and the other (e.g., Star Wars (1977-2005), Lord of the Rings (2001-2003), Reign of Fire (2002), etc defeats the subsequent dissolve of one of the forces as it.. Dual-focus pastoral operates with similar rules; however, the existents within the story seek to come together as opposed to remaining apart or defeating one another (e.g., Romeo and Juliet (1968), Cocktail (1988), Shrek (2001), etc.). Single-focus narratives are told from the perspective of the central protagonist and every event that occurs within the story is directly related to that person. The setting is viewed through the main character’s eyes and the other existents within the setting all react to the main protagonist. Every event within the discourse draws its movement from the predominant protagonist’s actions. This type of narrative is difficult to adapt to film due the constraints of the cinematic story-space. It is extremely challenging to develop a story, using film as the medium, which is told specifically through the eyes of the main character. Lastly, Multi-focus narratives are expressed through several different characters and may include several intersecting plots. Multi-focus narratives are also often times the combination of several single-focus or dual-focus approaches. The multi-focus narrative offers a sampling of different stories, which most often lay in conjunction with each other and offer, in Altman’s words, a “carnivalization” of the text (e.g., Timecode (2000), Intolerance (1916), Crash (2004) etc.). The existents actions might directly or indirectly affect each other or maybe not all, but the alternating story lines offer an alternative narrative progression as compared to more straightforward narratives.
Mobile Communication and Culture

In the past decade, the use of mobile technology has risen at an exponential rate due to the lowered cost of technology and the expansion of the calling areas, by providers, that offer services. Peter Leo (2006) reported that in 1996 34 million Americans had cell phones and that ten years later better than 203 million residents of the United States were connected wirelessly. Worldwide, the numbers are also quite staggering with an estimated 2 billion people using mobile devices, about one-third of the Earth’s population, in 2006. The statistics show that cell-phone use is not just a trend, but also a revolution in technological innovation and communication adaption. Mobile technology has created a global interface, allowing people to express ideas, alleviate social anxiety, and expedite communal initiatives with new found pace and enthusiasm. The changes in communication have also offered the public a means of interaction that extends across great distances with immediacy and relative ease, creating social circles that have no boundaries. Along with the newfound effortlessness of distance communication, the lack of interpersonal communication amongst people in public social settings has also increased. Recent literature has shown that instead of interacting with those in their immediate surroundings, people tend to use a mobile device to contact people outside their physical environment and immerse themselves in external social circles (de Souza e Silva, 2006). Initiating conversation simply for the sake of conversation is no longer important in public situations. Therefore, many individuals choose not to engage strangers in conversation that they will more than likely never come into contact with again.

The cell phone has created an alternate reality that exists within actual reality, which has had an indeterminate effect on those who regularly use mobile devices. The impact of cell phone culture is most prevalent in younger generations that have grown up in an environment that
necessitates the use of mobile technology. Children are growing up with the luxury of
disengaging when operating in public spaces; molding these venues into utilitarian settings that
no longer carry the same influence in terms of social contact (de Souza e Silva, 2006). They
learn early that the public domain can be a platform for private conversations or entertainment
via cellular devices and the allure of interacting with others in these spaces is somewhat
antiquated.

By responding primarily to those that contact them via cell phone, individuals relegate
themselves to an alternate space, or become “walking avatars” within their physical location.
Gergen (2002) also referred to this phenomenon as “absent presence.” People have now created
micro-social settings for themselves in relation to the contact list within their personal mobile
device (Geser, 2006). At the same time, these micro-social settings have allowed for individuals
to often times disregard the social conventions that have long been associated with civilized
society, making social interaction amongst their visible counter-parts secondary.

In Japan, the large-scale diffusion of mobile technology, which began in 1996, is known
as Keitei, which translates literally to cell phone (Dailut-Bul, 2007). The explosion of cell
phones in the 1990’s has been classified as fetishism in Japan with many of the nation’s citizens
adopting mobile devices as their dominant means of communication. The notion of play, or
asobi, became the main marketing tool amongst advertisers and in turn, the Japanese looked to
the cell phone to penetrate the tendency for social constraint that had permeated their culture.
Much like America, the Japanese, can now avoid interpersonal communication in public
situations and rely on the cell phone to deliver them to a more familiar, accessible, and
sustainable social domain.
Immersing one’s self in mobile technology has also led to the decline of communal relationships that exemplified a time when distance communication was either non-existent or used at a minimum. The neighborhood, as a social building block, has slowly declined since the introduction of telephone communication. The current situation calls for minimal interaction with neighbors, if desired, as most individuals can now immediately contact those within their mobile social circle (Wellman, 2001). The need to communicate with those that may be in close physical proximity has become a type of last resort, as the need to form relationships with new individuals becomes less consequential to social and cultural interaction. The neighborhood has now become a place for people to safely communicate within the confines of their homes, but not the prime place for physical social interaction. Interpersonal communication in neighborhood settings focuses on relationships from a distance as opposed to nearby proximity. The neighborhood, like the subway, airplane, or doctor’s office, is a place to use forms of communication that allow for individuals to ignore the social possibilities of their current setting and transport themselves to an alternate space of established relationships. Elements of social interaction and anxiety are not new in the public domain, but historically people were made to assimilate to their social environment via communication on a face-to-face level. The cell phone has allowed people to skip this step altogether and maintain existing social contact as opposed to forging new associations. The need for social gratification in public arenas is dissipating and the cell phone is one of the main factors of this trend.

A large impact of the cell phone has been the privatization of public spaces. Once a cell phone is dialed or answered, an individual has entered a private space, although they may be located in a public setting, not allowing others to communicate with them unless signaled (Puro, 2002). Puro notes that there are signifiers from cell phone users that let those in their physical
surroundings know they have entered a private space and no longer are available for open communication. These signifiers may be relocating to a more private space or lack of eye contact. While observing the interaction of individuals on a train, Murtagh (2002) noticed that the first reaction of a recipient of a call was to answer while looking away into a neutral line of sight. The action of looking away from those who are close by could be a result of knowingly breaking the rules of etiquette in public spaces. An individual may answer their phone understanding they are breaking these rules and choose to avoid eye contact in attempt to absolve themselves from glares of other passengers. The cell phone has led to a re-evaluation of social norms and revised the proper etiquette associated with operating in public spaces. Ironically, the people who enter private spaces in public situations do just the opposite by publicizing their private lives (Gordon, 2006; Katz, 1999). People may try to talk in subdued tones, but those within earshot can still hear their conversation. Cell phone users have appropriated communal spaces; they attempt to claim these spaces, although public, to carry out their private affairs (Fortunati, 2002). Where there was once control of telecommunication (e.g., the phone booth) because people could only communicate via telephone in particular assigned spaces, mobile technology has made all areas of the public domain available for private use.

Along with the reliance on the cell phone to alleviate the pressure of anonymous social interaction in public situations, comes the emotional attachment to the device itself (Vincent, 2006). People often describe powerful feelings (e.g., panic, thrill, anxiety, etc.) when talking about their cell phone. The cell phone has become an emotional crutch that is leaned upon in times of stress, boredom, or loneliness. The touch or sight of a person’s cell phone gives comfort and confidence, knowing that they can reach out and in turn be reached at any moment.
The loss of a cell phone can have detrimental effects on a person in regards to their social availability and standing. Green and Singleton (2002) interviewed young adults and asked them how their life would be without their cell phone. There is mention of incompleteness and despair if their cell phones were no longer available for use. This need for “perpetual contact” drives the individuals, especially younger ones, to attach themselves to cell phones in a way that would leave them socially helpless if their phone was lost or taken away. The lack of a cell phone may result in feelings of destitution; the fabric of their social being having been removed. Moreover, these individuals would be forced to either communicate with strangers or remain alone.

A study of cell phone use amongst Australian youth showed that belongingness and social identification were among the major factors deemed important in discussion of mobile technology (Walsh, White, & Young, 2008). Walsh et al found that the cell phones have allowed for younger adults that may suffer from self-esteem issues to feel more appreciated whenever they were contacted on their mobile device. This reinforcement of social acceptance had positive results on a subject’s psyche and views of them self in conjunction with their position in society.

Green and Singleton (2002) also discussed cell phone backlash (e.g., what happens if someone turns off their cell phone or leaves it at home). Sometimes people want to be left alone or would prefer not to talk. In order to accomplish this, one usually ignores their phone or turns it off. Constant cell phone communication can lead to stress in some individuals and they may opt for more privacy. This, however, can create misunderstandings and anger because those trying to communicate with you cannot. Feelings of social anxiety can then develop on the opposite end of the line within someone who is trying to contact you. When an individual is in a public situation and desires to hear or text a companion, but cannot, their comfort level in that
setting may begin to deteriorate. One of the subjects of the study referred to a statement that most people have heard before, which is “I have been trying to get a hold of you” (Green & Singleton, 2002, p. 514). This statement usually comes from a friend or family member that is upset that although they have been calling, no one has picked up. Their need to communicate was not immediately satisfied, allowing for anxiety and frustration to develop.

In discussion of the cell phone as something more than a communications tool Gordon (2006) notes the symbolic status and respect the can be gleaned from the use of a cell phone in public settings. The look of a cell phone draws not only the eyes of those surrounding its user, but also the owner them self. A cell phone is fondled and romanticized by its owner in a way that shows reverence for its social and communicative power. A cell phone gives an individual style and substance, which is purchased and not an inherent trait of their personality. The owner of a cell phone may lack style and substance internally and externally, but a stylistic choice made when purchasing a cell phone, at least at first glance, may have the power to void this person of some of their flaws. Walsh, White, and Young (2008) found that not having a cell phone would in some cases project a person negatively and block their immediate acceptation within a social group. In a sense, cell phones are seen as living appendages of their owner that blossom along with the individuals social standing (Green & Singleton, 2007). Green and Singleton also discovered through their focus groups that economic status could be deciphered from the make and model of a cell phone. An individual can be outcast from social situations simply because their cell phone is stylistically displeasing and out of date. All of these artificial traits would contradict, however, the basis for research in cell phones and social interaction. For the very reasons that people are purchasing cell phones as a means of expressing an aspect of their personality, they use the same device to deviate from the public space and the interpersonal
communication that it requires. If an individual purchases a cell phone to impress those in their surroundings, this would imply a need for feedback. Using mobile technology as it is intended, would not allow gratification of their motives for purchasing such a device.

Time, in association with cell phones and social interaction, plays an important role in the relegation of interpersonal communication in public spaces. Cell phones and more specifically personal digital assistants (PDAs) allow people to manage time in public spaces, which further eliminate instances where face-to-face communication may occur (Caporael & Xie, 2003). The social impact of the PDA and cell phone is not always desired because private time has been largely compressed and work time has been expanded. Certain occupations may require an employee to always have their mobile device active, so they can be reached at any time during the day. Green (2002) notes that time has become a commodity. The cell phone has become the chief regulator of time because time is longer wasted, and in a sense enjoyed, to the degree that it once was. Especially in the business world, time is now spent more effectively, with little interruption from non-productive activities. Specific, set aside moments of the day to relax have been constrained due to the intrusion of mobile communication. This in turn affects public space, which is no longer separated from private locales because of mobile communication (Fortunati, 2002). Again, social interaction between individuals in a physical setting takes a back seat to the immediacy and unavoidable power of mobile technology.

Diffusion of Innovations

Throughout history, improvements in communications have been a cornerstone for the development of any great civilization. Being able to communicate more efficiently, across considerable distances, and at a rapid rate, enable society to perform tasks intrinsic for stability and self-preservation. Therefore, being able to constantly improve on and adapt to technological
innovations, which are significant within any culture, is of the highest importance. If a society is to not only survive, but also leave a legacy of cultural superiority, using innovations to evolve and progress is essential. In order to achieve this preeminence within culture, innovations are created and then adopted or rejected, which can produce social change (Rogers, 1995). The diffusion of an idea or invention alters how a society operates from a functional standpoint as well as the way in which it is constructed. The structural make-up of a culture is modified with the inception of a new way of thinking or a tangible product. Those being affected by an innovation then react to its influence, positively or negatively, and begin to function differently as a result.

In today’s global communication system, every level of communication (e.g., individual, communal, familial, and global) is affected by how quickly and effortlessly new technologies are adopted in society (Katz, 1971). If a given nation is abundant with technological laggards as opposed to innovators, that nation will find it difficult to maintain a relationship with countries that are able to adopt innovations rapidly. In time, these lagging nations will succumb to these inefficiencies and will not progress at the speed required to keep pace with the rest of the world. The lagging nations can fall behind and become disconnected with modern culture. However, not all innovations have positive effects on culture and commerce. It is not only the job of the public to decide which innovations to adopt, but also to decipher between useful and impractical ideas and inventions.

Katz (1971) explains that innovations are not diffused on an individual level, but on a societal level, which allows technological developments to circulate quickly amongst all areas of society (e.g., socioeconomic, race, age, region, etc.). The theory of diffusion of innovations has provided a basis for research that is conducted to explore the spread of technology and ideas.
Furthermore, the acceptance of these new technologies and ideas relies on the people who use the devices and how these people utilize innovations socially. Communication is necessary, but people differ in preference in accordance with how they associate with the world that surrounds them. Many individuals, in any society, are stubborn and refuse to adopt new modes of communication even though the innovation may make their life easier. Even more critical than stubbornness is economics. Many individuals do not have the income to purchase innovations even though they can see the importance in it. In addition, it takes time for innovations to spread to outlying areas of the world. If people do not know about an innovation, it becomes difficult to buy into it. Acceptance of technology is necessary for individual as well as communal progress in this rapidly changing world. Even if an innovation is not yet prevalent within a community, it is the task of every facet of a society, from corporations and governments down to individuals, to make a decision on whether or not to adopt an innovation. These decisions can have serious consequences on the preservation or decay of a culture.

Diffusion of Innovations is a process that involves steps; each step heavily depends on the previous to allow a technology to permeate all levels of any communication network. Bohlen (1971) describes this process of adoption in five steps: “awareness,” “information,” “application,” “trial,” and “adoption.” An individual’s initial awareness of any innovation is also a demonstration of the individual’s ability to communicate and process information provided by an outlying source. Therefore, the source needs to be valid and trustworthy for a person to successfully accept the information necessary to make a proper personal evaluation of an innovation. The given information will allow the receiver to justify application of the innovation into daily life. If the innovation is not necessary or does not provide substantial improvement on situations for which it is meant, than it may be rejected and diffusion ceases to advance.
Evaluation and trial are closely linked, in that proper evaluation of a technological breakthrough is best performed through trial and error. An individual will not know the extent of an innovation’s usefulness unless it is operated and tested to examine all of its practical applications. After the innovation has been thoroughly investigated and processed, adoption takes place or the product/service is discarded. Importantly, it is at this stage of adoption that the new user will now pass along awareness and information to another potential adopter. This new person then has the capability to further diffuse the technology into society.

The diffusion of technology is essential for mass communication to exist and evolve in new and different segments of society and achieve new levels of prosperity. It is also imperative to examine any innovation not only for its immediate affects, but also for the ways in which it will continue to evolve and further change the dynamics of a culture. Rosenberg (1976) states that not only are the initial technological breakthroughs important, but also determine its movement from “…technological feasibility (invention) to commercial feasibility (innovation)…” (p. 193). Any invention that is intended to diffuse along the entire adoptive curve, from innovators to laggards, must be open to modification and enhancement. This will lead the technology or idea to become more accessible, affordable, and reliable to a larger number of potential adopters. A misunderstanding of an innovation can create a stopgap in the adoption of any technology. People do not enjoy feelings of ignorance, which innovations that are difficult to grasp and understand can create. To avoid these feelings, individuals may choose to reject unknown and intimidating innovations, which can inhibit the success of any invention. The compatibility and accessibility of an innovation will lead to a higher rate of adoption, moving a culture forward in a more expedient fashion.
The initial invention of a new technology or creation of an idea is never easily explained or replicated by one individual. It must be tested and re-tested by many different individuals in order for a solid explanation of its inner workings to be formed. The acceptance of an innovation by individuals searching for the true feasibility of an invention, gives those who only want to know if something operates well or not the confidence to invest in the product/service. When the DVD player was invented only a few people actually knew how it played a film from the disc, but their assurance as to the improvement in sound and picture over a VHS tape gave consumers a reason to go buy it. This allows the technology to be more widely understood and accepted. Midgley (1977) explains that innovators, in most cases, are likely to take the risks necessary for innovations to diffuse successfully. Innovators require less information and generally immediately test, instead of gathering data cautiously over time. The entire process rests on the shoulders of these early risk takers. Even though they may not necessarily understand the inner workings of the technology, they can see the value or lack thereof in what the innovation has to offer. The reward, for innovators and early adopters, far out-weighs the risk and therefore use of the new technology is justified. The innovation depends on these pioneering individuals to see the value, but then implement and demonstrate the value of an innovation to those not willing to so easily explore foreign ideas and technology.

The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) explores the ways in which individual attributes and social conditions can lead to expected behavioral patterns (Baron, Patterson, & Harris, 2006). The UTAUT (see Figure 1 of Baron, Patterson, & Harris, 2006, p. 115, for complete data) has been implemented to explore how employees of large organizations adapt to and use technology in the work place. Corporate social environments are some of the primary institutions to implement innovations on a large scale. The large-scale implementation
of an innovation typically occurs after success has been attributed to the innovation on a smaller scale. Corporations need to see positive results in an innovation before investing hefty sums into it. Once an innovation has been set into use in a corporation, the hope is that profits will increase due to the innovations proficiency. In the case of computers and mobile technology, faster communication is more productive and a higher rate of production leads to profits. By enabling employees to communicate at higher rates through innovation, time and distance become less of a factor. The workday is expanded due to the availability of employees through innovative communication devices. The capability of these new technologies allows the schedule of the average employee to synchronize with the demands of modern business.

Communication is a deeply involved and complicated process. It relies on, most of all, human understanding, which in the modern age means the use of innovative devices that effortlessly transmit messages and deliver information between individuals. Opposition to innovations, due to the inhibitions of human nature, often perpetuates lag in the acceptance of new technologies and ideas (Bohlen, 1971). There will always be resistance to new concepts, whether a mobile communication device or a new form of government, no matter how useful an innovation eventually proves to a society. Different factors can play into the diffusion of any innovation such as the economic climate, social constraints, or cultural differences. However, these obstructions can be overcome through the education and diligence of individuals, whether part of a corporation or testing team, willing to put forth the time and effort to convince others of the importance of a particular innovation.

Film and Telephony

The motion picture and the telephone have had a relationship ever since their induction into popular culture. Schatz (2008) explains that the historical timelines of both film and the
telephone share many common events; each has had a period of relative stability following their invention, followed by a period of great change, which they are both experiencing at this moment. As communication via the telephone has changed over time, so has cinematic communication. Telephonic innovations have allowed filmmakers to transform how the events of a narrative transpire. The telephone, in all its variations throughout film history, has given the characters within a given film the possibility of instant communication. The variations of character interaction have become endless because distance and location only have consequences if the screenwriter or director wants them to.

It seems that telephones were destined to become an integral part of the movie-going experience. Goodman and Simon’s (1997) documentary on the history of the telephone explains that from the birth of the film industry, phones and movies would forever share a common bond. Movies utilized the telephone to construct distance relationships, create drama, and explore different ways of building narratives through communication channels not available to the authors of classical novels. These two revolutionary technological innovations were both invented as the 19th century ended and formed a productive working relationship as the next century began.

The disintegration of space and time, which the telephone allowed for in film, radically changed how the events of a story could unfold (Gunning, 1991). The phone offered easily constructed solutions to complex problems that presented themselves within a film’s plot. Furthermore, a motion picture could gain momentum at an exhausting pace, allowing for the rising action and climax to present themselves in a smaller section of screen time. In contrast, novels written in the era before the telephone often-times had to utilize lengthy amounts of space to clarify how and why events took place. This is not to say that a novel was required to
expound upon events over hundreds of pages, but the author needed to provide a basis for the action that was taking place by noting the amount of time that had passed over the course of the events. Simply put, a letter takes a lot longer to reach its destination than a phone call does. The agony of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy’s relationship in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) could have been alleviated much quicker with a simple phone call to clear up any misunderstandings that had occurred. Instead, the reader must wait for them to run into each other at different intervals over the course of long period. This agony, of course, makes *Pride and Prejudice* the substantial piece of literature that it is. The absence of the telephone, however, illustrates the power it can have on the action that takes place within a story.

In his explanation of the effects of the telephone on early cinema, Gunning (1991) analyzes the technological influences it has in Griffith’s *The Lonely Villa* (1909). First, the telephone provides a platform for parallel editing. A phone conversation can link together action taking place in two different locations at the same time. As the husband becomes aware of the impending attack on his family while talking to his wife via telephone, the events of the climax are set into motion. Griffith utilizes parallel editing to simultaneously switch between the father rushing home to save his family and the mother and children attempting to fend off the intruders. Secondly, there is the actual breakdown of the technology itself within the discourse. As the husband is talking to his wife while their home is being invaded, the phone line is cut. The possibilities that telecommunication technology have created in distance communication have been eliminated with a simple cut of the line. The husband has no choice, but to try to reach his family before their demise. The telephone’s ability of immediate communication over a long distance becomes the catalyst for the suspense and drama of the concluding moments of the film.
The phone has simultaneously provided the information necessary for the husband to save his family and created fear, due to the disconnection between him and those he loves.

The telegraph was also used by Griffith in other films such as *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) and provides a similar effect as the telephone in conjunction with distance communication. Where the telegraph fails is in its ability to communicate between individuals directly, unless the characters communicating in a sequence are the actual operators of the telegraph. A telegram is sent to an office where the information is then relayed to the recipient it is meant for. The telephone cuts out the “middle man,” giving characters the ability to contact one another directly with very little lull in the transmission.

The telephone draws characters together and moves them apart in the cinema. It is a source of love, torment, deceit, and hate for Hollywood’s large catalogue of narratives (Stern & Gwathmey, 1994). The phone is a device of narrative momentum that can within only a few seconds change the course of events that make up a story. In particular, a seemingly endless amount of lies can be perpetuated by the telephone. From gangsters setting each other up for a hit, to a wife telling a husband that she is out with friends when she is really with another man, to a friend pretending to be your father to get you out of school, the phone is a transmitter best used for good, but all too often used for bad. Many different results of the effortless act of answering a telephone have been explored throughout the cinema’s history.

The film industry’s fondness for the telephone is perhaps best summed up in Christian Marclay’s short montage of phone conversations in his video *Telephones* (1995). The video lasts only seven and 1/2 minutes, but spans decades of motion pictures, utilizing clips from many different films to create one unified conversation. Marclay notes that nearly all films contain a phone conversation of some sort and therefore provide a framework for the fabrication of a
dialogue between different characters from many different eras. Although the purpose of his project is to juxtapose the aural and the visual to create an oddly familiar soundtrack of filmic exchange, it also provides an examination of the telephone’s infestation of the cinema. It would be difficult to produce a film with a modern narrative, that is, a story that takes place in the era of telecommunication, without at some point including a phone conversation. Marclay’s work highlights the reliance of motion pictures on the telephone and how telephony has become an irreplaceable component of film narratives and diegetic communication.
Chapter 3

Horror Film and Telephony

The horror film genre is one of the oldest and, as mentioned in the literature review, least respected in critical circles. Stories of horror stretch back centuries and with the dawn of Hollywood came some of the first franchised series of films (Hutchings, 2004). Monster movies such as Dracula (1931), Frankenstein (1931), The Mummy (1935), and The Werewolf of London (1935) were all produced from stories that had existed for many years. After these first films were released, sequels and offshoots were released quickly, for example The Bride of Frankenstein (1935) and Dracula’s Daughter (1936). These popular narratives within the horror genre continue even today to inspire films related to the original stories.

With the fall of the production code in the mid 60’s, Hollywood began to explore more explicitly violent plot lines and experiment with imagery that has become more gruesome with each passing year. Young adults became the primary victims of the psychos and murderers that have become so closely related to horror films over the last 50 years. Moreover, the evilness of the monster has frequently been internalized into someone who might be your next-door neighbor. Real monsters, of course, still have their place in the horror genre, but these monsters are seldom romanticized; they are strictly out for blood.

Along with new forms of monsters, came their innovative stalking techniques. Granted, there is a wide array of ways in which the protagonists of contemporary horror films fall victim to their pursuer. However, for the purposes of the analysis being conducted here, films were
selected for their use of telephony in the construction of the events within the narrative. Telephones and cell phones provide the platform for the killers to function. Without them, the plotlines would have to be assembled in a different way. In conjunction with the examination of the telephone, I will utilize Altman’s (2008) study of narrative to identify how the protagonists and antagonists function together. The use of the telephone and more recently mobile communication technology has allowed the two opposing sides to come into conflict in alternative ways from horror films that do not utilize distance communication media. The progression from rotary dial phone to cell phone and how new technology has changed the ability of the characters to function within the narrative will also be discussed.

Four case studies will be presented to identify the narrative and cultural implications that telephony has had on the horror genre. The case studies will be presented in chronological order, *When a Stranger Calls* (1979), *Scream* (1996), *When a Stranger Calls* (the 2006 remake), and *One Missed Call* (2008), in order to understand how the use of distance communication has allowed for events within the discourse of these movies to be manipulated.

*When a Stranger Calls* (1979)

A young girl being terrorized by a psychotic murderer is a popular plot point within the horror genre. The loneliness and vulnerability of a teenage girl, while left alone in a foreign environment, is a feeling experienced by many American women at some point in their lives. In addition, the telephone is frequently used to alleviate these feelings of separation and anxiety. Whitney (2006) notes that teenage girls’ fascination with films that highlight the use of the telephone draws from the fact that the telephone is this demographics’ most heavily utilized technological device. The telephone is a means to explore the world, when they cannot actually proceed outside.
Jill Johnson (Carol Kane) is a young, seemingly naïve, girl whose babysitting services have been acquired by the Mandrakis’ (Rutanyda Alda and Carmen Argenziano). Upon entrance to the Mandrakis’ house, Mrs. Mandrakis immediately gives the number where they can be reached in case of an emergency. The phone is presented as a means of safety and comfort; it is a savior rather than a burden. After the Mandrakis’ leave, the film cuts to Jill discussing her desire to go out with a boy from school and how she would like her friend to tell the boy to call her at the Mandrakis’ house. Although the conversation is not as explicit as similar dialogue from a film such as *Halloween* (1978), the dialogue revolves around teen sexuality and the yearning for attention from the opposite sex. In addition, a common theme in horror films is the punishment of those individuals who participate in sexual relations. The innocence of the conversation does not preclude punishment, however. Her request for the boy to call is one of harmlessness common to most girls and does associate her with sexual deviancy and lust.

The conversation ends and quiet settles in over the film. There is little non-diegetic music used to accompany the silence of the house. Instead, the sounds of the house are used to score the film. The film cuts between shots of the different rooms and features of the house. This adds to the suspense by highlighting the different spaces of the setting, which the killer may or may not occupy. The fact that the viewing audience knows that the film is centered on a young girl being terrorized will be discussed later. With the two children already in bed when Jill arrives, she proceeds to work on her homework, hoping that the aforementioned boy will call. The silence is broken with the startling ring of the telephone. The shrill and annoying noise of an old rotary-dial telephone’s bell is quite discomforting. The ring at this moment in the film is a sign of hope, with Jill thinking that the boy is on the other end of the line. Instead, the discourse takes a turn for the worse, as a mysterious voice asks Jill if she has recently checked on the children.
The telephone, in a few seconds, has changed from a source of hope and affirmation to the root of an unknown evil.

It is also important to note the framing of the telephone. The audience’s attention is forced upon the telephone from the outset of the film. Not only is it alluded to immediately within the dialogue, but it also is centrally framed from close up at a fairly regular rate (figures 3.1-3.4).

Figure 3.1-3.4 Telephone framed at center, in close-up

This occurs almost every time the blaring ring of the telephone is heard. There are moments of silence with nothing but the eerie echo of the house; then, a raucous interruption by the telephone ring startles not only Jill, but the viewer as well. With the constant central framing of the telephone and its intrusion into the tranquility of the house, the phone has become Jill’s nemesis.
The simple and terrifying conversation between Jill and the unknown predator continues in this fashion for some time. He asks her if she checked on the children and then hangs up leaving her without any real knowledge of whom she is dealing with. Being that this is a telephone and she is not restricted to only having a conversation with the antagonist, she calls the police to report the harassment. Herein lays a new problem, however. Just because she has been a subject to strange and ominous phone calls does not justify the police sending out a unit. A crime has not actually been committed as people are prank called with regularity. The police acknowledge the problem and tell Jill to call back if the problem persists, but they cannot do anything until there is a threat of real violence.

Jill remains trapped in a situation where she can do nothing but pray that the perpetrator stops calling. The device that usually holds so much promise for positive communication has become virtually her worst nightmare (figure 3.5). Only Jill is pictured on screen during the sequence. There is no way of knowing who, what, or how many killers she may be dealing with, which is the source of suspense within the narrative.

Figure 3.5 Jill struggling with the unknown voice.

The phone’s central location within the living room also creates a problem for Jill. This film was produced in the technological age before remote phones and way before mobile phones
were common for people to possess. The only phone for Jill to use, at least that the viewer is aware of, is located downstairs in the family room, preventing Jill from moving to far away from it. The killer keeps asking Jill if she has gone upstairs to check on the children. She, however, is unwilling to go upstairs for fear of being cut off from outside communication if she needs it. At one point, she begins to venture upstairs, but the phone begins to ring again and she goes back down to answer it. This occurs after she has again called the police to report that the disturbing calls have continued, culminating with the killer actually threatening violence. The police advise her to keep the man on the line as long as she can the next time he calls, so they can trace where the harassment is originating from. The availability of the trace is a testament to the age that the film was made in. Telecommunication technology has progressed to the extent that in 1979 the police are capable of tracing a domestic phone call and immediately figuring out the location of the subject. The capability of the phone trace becomes necessary to fulfill Jill’s dread of the unknown that is soon to come.

As with many horror films, *When a Stranger Calls* provides a twist, which leads to complete terror, leaving the audience satisfied that they have been successfully frightened. Jill is able to keep the killer on the line long enough for the police to trace the call, which would normally provide a sense of relief for the protagonist. In this instance, however, the complete opposite occurs. Through the trace, the police have learned that the killer has been calling from inside the house and the structure, which Jill has locked herself into, is actually where the monster dwells. Here the viewer also learns that there is another phone inside the house, which leaves one to wonder why she never went up to check on the children in the first place, but that is a topic of another discussion. If she had checked on the children right from the start, the events following the first phone call would have never happened because she would have been
massacred as well. The telephone has at the same time provided an element of safety for Jill and a catalyst for a new kind of torment for the killer. Why stalk a young girl from outside a house, when you can accomplish the same mission with greater proficiency from just upstairs. In the end, for Jill, the telephone has indeed saved her because the police were able to complete the call trace and warn her about the killer. Therefore, she was able to get out of the house in time, whereupon the police finally show up and arrest the perpetrator. It is important to note that this is only the beginning of the film. The events of the story follow the murderer Curt Duncan (Tony Beckley) as he escapes from an asylum seven years later and proceeds to be chased by retired officer John Clifford (Charles Durning). Duncan eventually winds up back at Jill’s own house, who is now a wife and mother to finish what he started.

*Scream* (1996)

The horror film took on many different forms through the 80’s and on into the 90’s. Of course there are at least one or two elements that make films such as *Alien* (1979) and its sequels or *The Thing* (1982) part of the horror genre, but these films are also deeply rooted in science fiction. Therefore, these movies are without many of the elements that made slasher cinema so popular in the 70’s. Enter *Scream* in 1996, which was directed by Wes Craven an innovator within the horror genre who is well known for his *Nightmare on Elm Street* series. *Scream* utilizes the common conventions of 70’s and 80’s horror films and turns them into parody. Randy (Jaime Kennedy) actually defines the “rules” of the horror genre at one point in the film; telling the audience what events should occur in a horror film and then actually do. The slasher films of the 70’s and 80’s no longer had the impact they once did on the viewer and therefore, certain aspects of this horror subgenre were changed to appeal to an entirely new generation of teenagers. Teenagers are specified at this point because this is the demographic that the studios...
target when releasing this type of horror film. For the writer, Kevin Williamson, and Craven the cell phone changed the way the killer was able to operate, which opened the door for a new kind of terror.

The opening of *Scream* focuses on Casey (Drew Barrymore), a popular high school girl who possesses the sexual potency that killers love to prey on in slasher films. The film immediately moves into a conversation between Casey and her stalker, which is conceived through a phone conversation. Casey and the killer’s initial conversation utilizes a traditional corded phone, not the older rotary dial phone, but still archaic by today’s standards. The phone is already ringing before the film cuts from the title card to an image of Casey (figures 3.6-3.7). Instantly a bell goes off, or should go off, in the head of the audience, as the phone will probably play major role in the upcoming events. The conversation ends with Casey concluding that the caller must have a wrong number, so she hangs up. The next conversation is even shorter via the corded phone where Casey tells the killer if he is looking for a female to talk to, “There are 900 numbers for that.”

Figure 3.6-3.7 First shot of *Scream* & Casey’s first conversation.

Casey’s assumption is that she is the target of a sexual pervert, which highlights the visual representation of her as the young schoolgirl fantasy. Casey goes about her business cooking popcorn, when the phone rings again. These phone calls have all occurred within seconds of each other. Here, however, she picks up a cordless phone (figure 3.8). Now she is able to move
about her surroundings, while still talking to her unknown harasser. She talks flirtatiously, seemingly not knowing her penchant for attracting the opposite sex through simple conversation. She does not know at this point that the person on the other end of the phone wants to murder her, but it is still not wise to lower your guard when talking to an unfamiliar voice. Casey begins moving about the house while talking to her new friend. Without warning, the audience is made aware of the danger that Casey is actually in. The dialogue proceeds with the killer trying to figure whom he or she is talking to.

Killer: “You never told me your name.”
Casey: “Why do you wanna know my name?”
Killer: “Cause I wanna know who I’m looking at.”

From the previous conversations, one might assume that the killer is in any number of settings because he or she has not actually been revealed yet. What is unexpected is that the killer is actually on the property creating a very real threat to Casey’s well being. Scream, having been released in 1996, was made a few years before the cell phone boom, which began in the early 2000’s. Therefore, the assumption that the killer was using a cell phone to terrorize Casey was not as easy of a leap to make in 1996, as it would be today. In fact, the use of a cell phone to perform the killer’s task in a film made in the present would be tired and overdone. In 1996, mobile technology was on the verge of changing personal communication forever and therefore a new and interesting way to manipulate the events of a film like Scream. Whitney (2006)
explains the power the cell phone gives to the killer, “…a medium whose mobility affords the killers new powers to confuse and torment their victims, and to avoid detection by authorities” (p. 125). The perpetrators in horror films are now able to move about their settings much more freely. Any control a victim once had over their environment has greatly diminished.

Casey threatens to call the police, but never actually does this. She instead runs about the house, after her boyfriend has been disemboweled, trying to escape her predator. Either the killer is extremely fast or there is something else amiss. At the end of the film the audience discovers that there are in fact two men dressed up as the ghost, enabling them to be basically everywhere all at once. Casey works her way outside and sees the headlights of her parent’s car coming down the street. She is attacked as she runs to the car and then stabbed, but is able to struggle free of the killer. Her first wound, however, prevents her from screaming loud enough for her parents to hear her. Her parents come inside the house to find it in a state of disarray and the popcorn on fire in the kitchen. Her mother goes to call the police, but instead hears Casey gasping for breath on the line. In all the commotion Casey never actually turned off the portable phone that she has been running around the house with, actually using it as a weapon at one point. Her mother can do nothing but listen, as her daughter is dragged off through the yard to meet her demise (figures 3.9-3.10).

Figure 3.9-3.10 Casey’s last conversation.
The cordless phone, although not considered an innovation by any means, still serves as a strong narrative device, creating dramatic tension where without its existence there would be none. Her mother can here Casey struggling for breath and has no idea that all she has to do is walk out into the back yard to catch the killers. Without Casey hanging onto the portable phone, this final tragic sequence would be difficult to achieve.

After Casey’s shocking death, the entire town is put on edge because the killers have not been caught. At this point, the audience is introduced to the cast of characters who will be involved in the rest of the film, including the featured protagonist Sidney (Neve Campbell). Sidney epitomizes the “final girl” of early slasher films because she is not sexually promiscuous, dresses conservative, has a non-flirtatious innocence, is smart, and strong-willed. Sidney is supposed to be the killer’s next victim, but she is able to escape their grasp due to the innovative technology she possesses.

Sidney is pursued just as Casey is. She is called repeatedly by phone, while the killers toy with her and set her up for her murder. She also talks to the killers via a portable phone, which again allows her to move freely about her house. She shows bravado by actually going out on to the front porch after one of the killers has made his location known. The portable phone allows her not only to remain mobile while avoiding her stalkers, but at the same time endangers her. Mobile communication provides a new element to the killer’s game because Sidney has enough courage to move outside leaving the safe confines of her house.
Figure 3.11 Sidney investigating her front porch.

She has moved from a setting controlled by her, to a setting controlled by the killers. One problem, the killers control virtually everything because they have a cell phone (figure 3.11).

Sidney is chased throughout the house, much like Casey, and is able to make her way up to her room. She picks up the receiver hoping to call the police, but instead finds that one of the other phones has been left off the hook. She will have to try to fight off her attacker or will she? Sidney has a computer in her room, which is quite a luxury for a teenage girl considering the price of computers in the mid 90’s. The presence of this technology allows Sidney to escape the grasp of her attacker. She has a program called Deaf Typer 2, which enables her to call the police via an internet connection (figures 3.12-3.13). When traditional technology breaks down, such as her landline telephone, innovations in telecommunication have provided a new method to contact the outside world. In her case, she types 911 and the computer contacts the police for her. She is able to communicate with the police, albeit through typing instead of talking, and thwart her impending attack. Sidney lives to fight another day and the narrative moves forward thanks to the advanced possibilities of internet communication.
The killer vanishes and Sidney is out of danger when suddenly her boyfriend Billy (Skeet Ulrich) pops in through the window. At this moment, he leans in to comfort Sidney and a cell phone drops to the floor (figure 3.14). This is the first appearance of a cell phone in the film and officially confirms how the killers have been able to terrorize their victims. Upon seeing the cell phone, Sidney discovers how the killers have been operating. She knows that they were able to watch her from a distance the whole time and she should have never really had a chance of surviving. Billy eventually wins back Sidney’s trust after the cell phone incident, even though she was right in thinking he is one of the killers. Billy’s cell phone has just brought the slasher film into the 21st century, although this is 1996, and created endless possibilities for the events of horror narratives to unfold. Since the killers can trap their victims by moving around outside while still maintaining a conversation, they have the advantage. Moreover, they are able to disguise their voice through a manipulation device, keeping their identity completely concealed.

Figure 3.14 The cell phone makes its first appearance.
In discussion of Casey’s death sequence, it was mentioned that the killer might be a he or a she. With the events of Sidney’s battle with killers and her realization that one of the killers is more than likely her boyfriend, the viewer learns that the killers are probably both males. When the voice of the killers is heard on the phone, it certainly is not the voice of Billy, and seems to have a strange mechanical quality to it. That is to say, it does not really sound like a real person, but rather a character in a cartoon. This is one of the greatest powers of the telephone in all of its variations; if one cannot see whom they are talking to, then it could be anybody. A voice inflection device, such as the one used in Scream, allows the killers to disguise themselves even to those they know. Not only that, as seen at the conclusion of the film when Sidney gains possession of the device and uses it while talking on the phone to the killers, it can make a female voice sound almost exactly like the male’s sounded. As Billy says, “Movies don’t create psychos, movies make psychos more creative.” In the case of Scream, the cell phone and the ability to manipulate one’s voice over the phone line have allowed just that to happen.

When a Stranger Calls (2006)

In the 2000’s very little original material was being written in terms of the horror film genre. Even the inventive material, such as Saw (2004) and Hostel (2005), gave way to a plethora of sequels playing on the same plot premises that made the originals so popular. Therefore, remaking When a Stranger Calls seemed a logical choice given the length of time that had passed since the original was released. The generational changes in American youth culture allowed filmmakers to produce a fresh version of aged material by incorporating current language, dress, and trends into an old story.

One of the first ways to appeal to the sensibilities of the current culture, especially in the horror genre, is to make a movie poster that engages the targeted audience (Cherry, 2009). In the
case of *When a Stranger Calls* both old and new, the movie poster along with the title accomplishes just that.

**Figure 3.15-3.16 Promotional posters for *When a Stranger Calls***

Each poster taps into its targeted demographic by focusing on the teenage girl’s lifeline to the outside world, the phone, a device that allows them to keep in touch with all that is important in their life and provides the all too important escape from their parents and other forms of authority. In these films, however, the device enables evil and bloodshed. The posters alert the interested viewer to just that. Jill (Carol Kane) in the 1979 version, staring wide-eyed over the rotary dial telephone in the foreground directly links her terror with the telephone. The poster leaves the onlooker wondering why Jill is so terrified of the telephone. The production company has done its job, in that the poster has inspired curiosity and encourages people to see the film.

In 2006, the era of cell phones had been thoroughly established, with everyone from senior citizens to children now carrying them. If a filmmaker wants to remake a film that is partially based around the telephone now, the cell phone has to come into play. Otherwise, the movie will have difficulty relating to the current audience. The remake of a *When a Stranger*
Calls does just that. The poster highlights an outstretched arm that is discolored signifying death, with the hand gripping a cell phone. So again, the phone is directly connected to morbidity. The most important feature of the poster is the cell phone itself, which is flipped open showing the screen. In 2006, almost every phone had a camera built into it and in some cases digital video recorders. The cell phone had become an innovation that allowed for multiple forms of media to be created within one device. On this particular poster, there is a picture of Jill (Camilla Belle) on the cell phone screen, on the ground with a painful, horrified look on her face. She is pictured trapped in the phone that is being held by the hand of what is most likely one of the killer’s victims. The ability of cell phones to take pictures has given this poster a completely new dimension of terror and appealed to the popular culture associated with this era. As with the poster from the 1979 version, the phone will clearly play an integral part in the film judging not only by the title, but also by the visual representation within the poster. It can be assumed then, that Jill in the 2006 version will undergo the same harassment that Jill in the 1979 version does, only via cell phone; or will she?

Within the first seven minutes of the film, Jill is seen in her high school hallway standing at her locker. She opens it and the first thing she pulls out is her cell phone. The cell phone has become the lifeline of the American teenager and is prefaced as that with Jill’s instinctual grab for hers as soon as she opens her locker. One of the most important features of the cell phone is the ability of the owner to personalize it in a way that exemplifies that particular individual (Gordon, 2006). Jill is seen pulling a small photo sticker of her and her friends off the cover of her cell phone, which could possibly signify the troubles that are occurring in her life (figure 3.17). From this simple gesture, the audience can infer that Jill is currently having issues with those that are closest to her. If the cell phone is representative of a person’s individuality, then
putting a photograph of yourself with your closest friends on the cover, or taking it off in Jill’s case, clearly identifies whom one aligns themselves with. Furthermore, putting a picture such as Figure 3.17 Photograph of Jill and her friends.

this on a cell phone, lets the public know information about your personal life; what it is that you most cherish.

From the removal of the photograph, the narrative establishes that prior events have occurred in this girl’s life that carry great weight. Shortly after this event, Jill tries to use her phone upon which she hears a recording that her service has been interrupted. At the time that this attempted phone call occurs, the interruption of her service seems inconsequential. This is, however, the catalyst for the discourse to move forward. A common problem amongst teens is talking too much on their phones and going over their minutes. This is precisely what happens to Jill and her parents punish her for one month with no phone and no car and she has to pay back the additional charges on the bill. The cell phone bill provides a reason for Jill to have to take the babysitting job in order to make money to pay her parents back. This also establishes that Jill no longer has an operating cell phone, which cuts off readily available communication with those she knows best, not to mention she is left without a car because her dad drops her off where she is babysitting.

Because Jill does not have a cell phone, the films progresses in a similar manner as the 1979 version. She is called by a mysterious voice, which at first does not say word, but instead
just breathes into the phone. She then talks to a friend about a boy, who she is currently breaking up with. This is all accomplished via a corded phone, although a digital one far removed from the mechanical rotary dial version from the original film. Much less alarming in the 2006 version is the ring of the phone. The old, noisy, and annoying ring of the rotary dial phone has been replaced by the more soothing tone of the digital phone. In terms of drama, the ring of the digital phone does not pack as much of a punch. In addition, the presence of a nondiegetic score takes away from the eerie noiseless suspense of the original.

At the same time Jill receives the phone calls from the unknown caller, she also receives calls from her friends who are at a party in the woods. The calls made from her friends via cell phone leads her to believe they are making all of the prank phone calls. Her attention, for a short time, is drawn away from the unknown intruder. The capability of her friends to call from the middle of the woods is something that would have never occurred in the 1979 version. The mobility of the cell phone has allowed for change, although slight, in the discourse of the narrative. She is being harassed from several locations at the same time. In fact, her friend, who she is currently at odds with, becomes involved in the game when she calls Jill from inside the house, from her own cell phone, to scare her. If Jill still had her own cell phone, the number of her friend would have popped up on caller ID and there would not be a surprise. A function of a cell phone is that it automatically displays the number of the incoming call. Moreover, a cell phone has the capability to show the contact name and other information if the number has already been saved in receiving phones memory. She, however, is contacted on the house phone and therefore has no idea who is calling.

Bobby (Brian Geraghty) finally calls Jill from the party in the woods where he informs her that one of his friends has prank called her at least once. At this moment, one of the most
widely scrutinized problems with mobile technology is presented. As Bobby is asking Cody (Escher Holloway) if he called Jill more than once the signal from the cell phone fades. Bobby prefaces this by saying that no one has been able to get a signal at the party. This has become a common problem for characters within film narratives especially movies in the horror genre. The cliché of the dropped call or lost signal has become a familiar narrative device in horror films to create isolation, which then creates suspense and horror (Richfofo, September 22, 2009). Jill, although separated from her friends in the woods due to the lack of cell phone reception, still has the landline in the house.

*When a Stranger Calls* (2006) truly separates itself from the original when Jill picks up the remote phone to answer Tiffany’s incoming call as opposed to the corded phone. Jill in the 1979 version was not afforded this luxury and instead was forced to stay centralized in the family room. After Bobby’s call is lost, the phone rings almost immediately and Jill chooses to go find the portable phone to check the caller ID. Tiffany’s name appears and Jill assumes all is safe to answer the phone, she instead finds that the mysterious voice now has possession of Tiffany’s cell phone. The killer now has more than one way of terrorizing Jill, while still in the same location. Jill hopes that the prank calls are simply coming from Cody, but she has no way to be sure. The ability of Jill to move as she talks at this point is both good and bad. She calls Rosa’s (Rosine Hatem), the housekeeper, phone and is able to listen and locate the source of the ring, while she walks through the house. She finds Rosa’s phone, but Rosa is nowhere to be found.

The narrative follows the same premise as it did in 1979, Jill calls the police, and they eventually tell her to keep the man on the phone, so they can trace the call (figure 3.18). This time the police mention using GPS (global positioning system) to trace the call if the killer is calling on a cell phone. Communication satellites have created a vast network of tracking
devices that are able to locate cell phones very quickly almost anywhere in the world. There is still a certain amount of time that Jill must keep her stalker on the line to accomplish this, however, just like Jill in the original. The trace produces the same result; the killer is already in the house.

Figure 3.18 Jill on the move.

After this information is given over the remote phone, the power is cut, therefore eliminating the use of the landline. At this moment, Jill is in a bathroom and another ring is heard even though the power has already been cut. It is the unmistakable sound of a digital cell phone ring. The suspense builds to discover whom the ring belongs to. Jill turns to find Tiffany looking ghostly pale, cell phone flipped opened so the blue LED screen highlights the contour of Tiffany’s face (figure 3.19). It has been confirmed now that Jill is in grave danger. The cell phone provides not only the soundtrack of Tiffany’s death, but also the visual connection as the light of the phone highlights her post-mortem facial expression.

Figure 3.19 Jill’s discovery of Tiffany.

When a Stranger Calls (2006) utilizes the opening events of the original film and stretches them out to comprise the entire narrative. Jill is terrorized by the killer for the length of
the film as opposed to just the beginning and end. The fact is Jill from the first film never actually fights the intruder; the police detective who is hunting the escaped convict eventually saves her life. The Jill of 2006, however, has a full-blown battle with the assailant before the police eventually show up and arrest him. The portable phone more than anything else is the medium that provides the narrative momentum for the plot to move forward. Jill is able to move easily about the house, which creates a tangible amount of tension because the audience does not know when or where the killer will finally attack. The greatest contribution of mobile technology to the picture is that Jill does not have access to it. The one exception is the introduction of Tiffany, whose cell phone adds suspense during two scenes (the killer calls from her cell phone and the eventual discovery of her body) and creates a higher level of anxiety in not only Jill, but the audience also. Her lack of a cell phone is the whole reason for her being put in a position to be the victim of the killer. By eliminating not only Jill’s the cell phone, but also the ability of her to contact others who have a cell phone, the dialogue is confined to the house and to her conversations with the police. In any case, whether or not a cell phone plays a large or small part in the communication aspect of a narrative set in the present, it must be thoroughly accounted for.

One Missed Call (2008)

The telephone and cell phone have played a pivotal role in the films that have already been discussed here, but they have been used as a linking device between the killer, the victims, and those individuals who seek to prevent the crimes from occurring. One Missed Call takes the cell phone and transforms the basic function of its existence, which is to communicate between individuals at a distance and uses this feature to attack the victims within the narrative.
The first victim of the film is viewed talking on her cell phone, which is no surprise considering this film was produced in 2008. This was a time when cell phones had become the most common communication channel. After Shelley (Meagan Good) is killed by the supernatural entity, which will be referred to as a spirit for this analysis, the viewer sees Shelley’s cell phone, which is scrolling through her address book on its own. The spirit uses the cell phone of its victims to discover new prey. The narrative progression of the rest of the film is solely based on which person from each victim’s cell phone will be attacked next.

After a close-up of Shelley’s cell phone scrolling through the numbers in her address book, the film cuts to a montage of anonymous individuals talking on their cell phones, while going about their daily lives (figures 3.20-3.22). The imagery serves as a cultural platform commenting on the current state of communication in society, in that, seemingly every person in the world owns a cell phone. Also, because everyone owns a cell phone, the possibilities for the spirit’s next victim are endless. Along with the visual, the soundtrack also appeals to the aural sensibilities of the audience by having the familiar sounds of a digital cell phone ring play over the soundtrack. Clearly, the filmmakers want to make no mistake in the fact that this film is centered on mobile communication.
When Shelley is murdered in the opening sequence there has not been any background information given on why she is killed. The focus on mobile technology has suggested to the viewer that the cell phone will play a pivotal role in the narrative, but not how. The film moves to a party where the main protagonist of the film is introduced along with the spirit’s next victim. Beth (Shannyn Sossamon) and Leann (Azura Skye) are talking, when Leann receives a phone call from Shelley. This should not be that alarming except that Shelley is already dead, which raises obvious questions. As her cell phone rings, Leann comments that the ring tone that is overheard is not hers. The ability of individuals to personalize their cell phones becomes an earmark of the spirit’s presence within the film. Suspicion arises when Leann hears a cell phone ring tone that is not hers while Shelley’s name pops up on the caller ID. Ring tones can be changed easily by any person, but in this case tampering with her phone is not prefaced and therefore one must assume that an outside, perhaps mysterious force is doing the manipulating.
Most interesting in this sequence is the new ring tone itself. It is whimsical, like a lullaby for a small child, which is disturbing in the context of the film. This ring tone becomes the sound of the spirit calling. In 2008, even phantoms have their own ring tone. The spirit has personalized itself just as any human being might do, leaving little question when the next victim has been chosen.

After the spirit calls and Leann does not answer her phone, it leaves a message. The message, however, is not from the spirit, but from future Leann. The message consists of a conversation she has before her own death, troubling to say the least, and more importantly, it is time stamped from the future. The message gives the day and time of her eventual death, which is unrealized until Beth discovers this later in the film. Before the expansive use of cell phones, the telephone with the help of caller ID and an answering machine may have been able to somehow produce a similar effect. However, the cell phone allows the discourse to flow at a more even and, importantly, rapid pace. Leann is contacted during a party, at a house that she does not live in. Moreover, the spirit used Shelley’s contact list and calls from her cell phone, which is the catalyst of the terror that victims later experience. The film progresses through all of these events in a quick and efficient way, which requires a minimal amount of screen time. Time and information are of the essence, the cell phone gives the spirit a means to kill efficiently while the narrative only utilizes a brief amount of time in conjunction with the diegetic lives of the characters.

Leann meets her demise while talking to Beth, which culminates with her saying the dialogue that she heard on the message left by the spirit. Beth finds Leann after she falls from a bridge with the cell phone in her hand. Leann is clearly dead, but Beth witnesses Leann dialing a number. The spirit is now scouring Leann’s phone to find its next victim (figures 3.23-3.24).
This is a departure from Shelley’s death because the spirit scrolled through her phone without the help of Shelley’s hand (Shelley drowned in a pond and was not holding her cell phone). Therefore, it is not necessary for Leann to be viewed dialing a number with her dead hand, but provides a dramatic and terrifying image, in that Beth is witnessing this happen. Beth now understands that there is higher power at work here. The coincidental murders are no longer just that and Beth must figure out not who, but what is murdering her friends.

Figure 3.23-3.24 Leann dialing after her demise.

Leann’s cell phone, at least as used in the film, apparently does not have video capability, which was not as common in 2008 as it is today. However, the technology did exist and is utilized in the case of Taylor (Ana Claudia Talancôn). Taylor not only is called by the spirit and left a message concerning her future death, but a video message at that. After Taylor is contacted, she downloads a video, which fades from an image of digital snow to show her in agonizing terror (figures 3.25-3.28). Again, the message is time stamped to let her know the day and time of her death. The filmmaker has intuitively highlighted the innovative assets of the modern cell phone by featuring a technologically advanced feature of the device. Taylor’s cell phone has not only allowed her to hear her own voice, as any mobile phone would, but she can also see herself at the point of her demise. The visual component of the cell phone has actualized Taylor’s terror.
Figure 3.25-3.28 Taylor downloads her death.

At this point in the film, Beth and Taylor have concluded that the killer possesses an otherworldly power and to the best of their knowledge, there is no way to prevent a death once it has been set into motion. Taylor, however, tries to trump the spirit by having an exorcist exorcise her phone. At this point, the film begins its slow decline into the ridiculous, but an interesting turn of events none-the-less. The cell phone, in this case Taylor’s, has become so powerful that religious fanaticism is necessary to overcome its hellacious possession (figures 3.29-3.30). The spirit thwarts the exorcism by momentarily cutting off the power to the set (the act is being tapped for a TV show), after which Taylor is found dead. Also, the spirit does not actually kill through the cell phone, but appears as a physical being. Therefore, the exorcism, in effect, would have never actually worked.
The film concludes with Beth eventually doing battle with the spirit, in which the spirit's mother, who is dead, saves her life. During the conclusion of the film, the spirit is not completely eliminated, but instead seeks refuge in the cell phone of the police detective Jack Andrews (Edward Burns) who has been helping Beth try to stay alive, as well as solve the case of the murders (figure 3.31). The film ends, predictably, with the spirit reaching out to more victims through the contact list of the now deceased detective. *One Missed Call* is reliant on the rampant use of the cell phone, which aligns with society's current communication practices. The story does exist with a similar plot by utilizing another form of technology, the television (e.g. *The Ring* [2002]). However, the public fascination with the cell phone creates an easily relatable premise for this story. Furthermore, the ending leaves room for the tale to continue in as many movie sequels as a production company feels necessary. As has already been established, there are enough cell phones in the world to provide limitless victims.
Horror, Narrative Form, and Telephony

The horror genre borrows from the three narrative forms single-focus, dual-focus, and multi-focus that Altman (2008) discusses. Single-focus is the most difficult to achieve in conjunction with filmmaking and two of the horror films that have been discussed here utilize some of the elements of single-focus narratives, but not in the strict sense. However, there are moments in each film where the events seem to be revolving directly around the main protagonist. In both versions of *When a Stranger Calls* Jill is the only character in conflict with unknown man on the other end of the phone. The audience does not see the man, however, and the narrative moves forward through the actions of her only. The telephone is the device that motivates her to move about the house, call the police, and check on the children. Her location within the diegetic space of the film is the only one given. The audience does not see the killer until she is made aware that the phone calls are coming from inside the house, leading in the original to his direct arrest and the newer version to a final confrontation.

For all four films, the dual-focus epic is the most appropriate category. In each case, there is a battle of good versus evil, with one side trying to overcome the other. The goal in a horror film is typically to kill the entity that is killing all of the protagonists, so instead of one side simply defeating the other, one side must eliminate the other. The conflict in each example
is initially instigated using some sort of phone, with One Missed Call utilizing the cell phone as the actual shelter or home base of the antagonist. The telephone and cell phone are the direct connection leading to a confrontation within each narrative. The mysterious conversations that take place in When a Stranger Calls and Scream build suspense and anxiety as prescribed by the conventions of the horror genre. Furthermore, the phone conversation sequences involving Casey and Sidney in Scream allow the killers to become even more formidable. The conflict in all four films necessitates communication via phone, so the opposing sides can confront each other, enabling the narrative to conclude with a victor.

Scream uses elements of multi-focus narrative most efficiently. The story centers around a group of high school kids who are being terrorized by the killer, although there is general focus on Sidney. The first two encounters with the killer are set up very similarly to When a Stranger Calls, in that, the story utilizes the telephone to initiate the contact between the victim and her stalker leading to her eventual death. As discussed before, each separate encounter utilizes elements of both single-focus and dual-focus epic to accomplish its action. In accordance with the conventions of the horror genre, many or at least a few must die before the battle between the final girl and the killer can take place. The final confrontation in Scream involves not only Sidney, but also several other characters. Therefore, elements of what Altman terms “carnivalization” are apparent throughout the narrative, in that a few of the characters that have been developed throughout the story are still alive and come together to eventually defeat the killer. This is not multi-focus as directly defined by Altman, but still incorporates some of its attributes.

In these case studies, the mobility of the victims that the cell phone facilitates has added a new dimension to the terror for the characters and in turn the audience. Jill in the original
version of *When as Stranger Calls* is basically stationary because she has to keep answering the rotary dial phone located in the living room. She does not want to leave the phone to check on the kids for fear of missing an incoming call. Her terror is based in not knowing what may exist upstairs. However, Jill in the remake can roam about with the portable phone, checking different rooms and going outside. In *One Missed Call* the capability of the cell phone’s internal memory and computer has given the spirit complete control over its victims from any location. In *Scream*, the two killers are able to act as one while Sidney and the audience never know there are actually two until the end of the film. Thus, the killers’ and victims’ cell-phone enabled mobility gives both sides the element of surprise.
Chapter 4

The Gangster Film and Telephony

As mentioned previously, if a gangster film offers anything, it will offer some kind of vicious and extreme act of violence at some point in the narrative (Larke-Walsh, 2010). Gangsters are not afraid to get their hands dirty, in fact, they typically enjoy it, and the act of killing for a gangster has become an integral part of each individual movie. It seems that coming up with a more brutal and interesting way of retiring a victim is typical of gangster films; filmmakers and writers like to keep the death sequences of their victims fresh and innovative. One item remains consistent in all gangster films and usually, at least at some point, provides the catalyst for the death of a character. The telephone is a means to set-up victims in gangster movies because distance conversations between friends and foes create an opportunity for betrayal and deceit. The phone allows for fabrications of the truth to become the optimal way of trapping and then disposing of one’s enemies. Obviously, the most useful attribute of the telephone is that one does not have to be in the same room with whomever they are talking to. Gangsters and law enforcement alike can utilize the phone to manipulate, instill fear, and eventually kill or capture their adversaries.

Technology has always played a pivotal role in the gangster film (e.g., cars, weapons, tracking equipment, etc.) (McArthur, 1977). In this case, the advancements in communication technology will be discussed to understand how both the protagonists and antagonists operate within specific film narratives. With the rise of mobile phones as a widespread and easily
accessible communication medium, the characters within gangster narratives have been able to interact with one another with more efficiency. In order to understand the evolution of gangster genre communication five films spanning from 1932 to 2006 will be analyzed. The first set of films is from the classical era of Hollywood: Scarface (1932), G-Men (1935), and The Big Sleep (1946). These three films represent some of the earliest gangster films and provide evidence for the use of the telephone as a critical narrative device. The next two films, although produced after 1990, transition from the telephone to the cell phone as the main communicative device. Goodfellas, although made in 1990, is set in the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s, and therefore is representative of telephone technology used during that period. The Departed (2006) will be analyzed at length to reveal how the cell phone has completely changed how telephony functions within contemporary gangster narratives. As with the horror genre, the chapter will conclude using Altman’s (2007) narrative categories to further understand how the conflict between the opposing sides of each film functions through telephony. Along with Altman’s theory of narrative, some other common traits concerning communication practices within the gangster genre will also be discussed.

Scarface (1932)

By 1932, the telephone had become commonplace in most public areas and private residences. The telephone was the future of commerce; the speed of business is only as fast as individuals can communicate. The telephone, of course, made it possible to communicate instantaneously, as opposed to the telegram or letter. In the realm of crime, whether on the side of the criminal or law enforcer, the telephone provided a prompt answer to crimes being committed, along with a way for gangsters to receive early warnings of impending danger.
The telephone provides the most basic functions of communication in Hollywood narratives (e.g., two lovers deciding where to rendezvous), along with more complex forms (e.g., two lovers hiding a relationship from their spouses). In terms of the gangster genre, the phone becomes a dangerous weapon. It provided a disguise or cloak for gangsters to hide behind. In order to carry out the devious deeds associated with criminality, deceit is necessary. *Scarface’s* (1932) narrative does not use the telephone as a core plot device, as do the other films that are part of this analysis. However, the phone is the impetus for one of the primary events within its discourse.

Adhering to the conventions of the gangster film genre, Antonio ‘Tony’ Camonte (Paul Muni) is a loathsome individual bent on crime, alienating himself from society through his heinous acts of violence. He is suspicious of all of those he encounters, especially his closest associates. Tony’s rise to power is in direct defiance of the man in charge of the gang he is affiliated with, John ‘Johnny’ Lovo (Osgood Perkins), and as their relationship deteriorates, suspicion of each other’s intentions begins to arise. Tony is a stronger, more corrupt criminal than Johnny and he exercises pure brutality when dealing with their enemies. He does not care about the borders defining each gang’s area of operation, as he wants it all for himself. This is confirmed by his obsession with the giant neon billboard outside his apartment, which reads, “The World is Yours.”

Towards the latter part of the film an attempted hit on Tony occurs. He is unsure of the figure behind the assault, but he is almost positive it is Johnny. At this point Tony has not only risen to be just as powerful as Johnny is, but he has also stolen Johnny’s girlfriend. An elaborate trap is set to find out for the last time if Johnny is out to take Tony’s life. Tony seeks shelter in the barbershop that he frequents where the proprietor, Pietro (Henry Armetta), works. Tony’s
most trusted friend, Guino (George Raft), arrives after Tony has alerted him of the attempt on his life. The three men come up with a scheme that would be nearly impossible without the aid of the telephone. Tony instructs Pietro to call Johnny at a specific time, saying that he is one of the men who tried to kill Tony, but the plan had failed (figure 4.1). Pietro is able to play the part of one of the hit men because Johnny has no idea who exactly went to murder Tony only that it was to be done. Therefore, the telephone provides a perfect disguise for their plan to work. Before Pietro calls Johnny, Tony and Guino arrive at Johnny’s office. They will be there when Pietro calls to see how Johnny reacts to the news. Tony alludes to this while still in the barbershop by saying, “If it was Johnny, he’ll stall won’t he?” Johnny does stall and tries to cover up his nervousness, but this is to no avail as Tony and Guino see right through his act. The plan works perfectly and Johnny meets his end, leaving Tony all of the power over the gang and Cesca (Ann Dvorak).

Figure 4.1 Johnny falling into Tony’s trap.

*Scarface* is not reliant at all on the telephone as a source of narrative progression. In order for the story to maintain its momentum towards the conclusion, Tony must figure out how to get rid of Johnny in a quick fashion that is justifiable. Tony is a ruthless gangster, but killing Johnny without confirming Johnny’s treachery would bring into question the importance of
Johnny as a major character. The desire for the audience to witness Tony outing Johnny for his double-cross must be fulfilled for the purposes of narrative cohesion. Johnny’s demise is cathartic not only for Tony, but for the viewer also. There are probably other, more complicated ways to set a trap for Johnny without the use of a telephone, but therein lays the usefulness of the phone. It provides an expedient solution to Tony’s problem without the fuss of using up an unnecessary amount of screen time. With one phone call, Johnny is swiftly eliminated and the narrative can turn its full attention to Tony and the events that lead to his ultimate demise.

‘G’ Men (1935)

Much like Scarface, ‘G’ Men does not center on communication involving the telephone until later in the film. In the final 30 minutes, however, the phone is instrumental in moving the action forward. As the pursuit of the main criminal, Collins (Barton MacLane), becomes more pressing, the phone becomes necessary to facilitate his capture. How is distance communication represented before the final 30 minutes then? First, the wire is used to transmit important information, literally spelling out events that have occurred in the discourse. It initially acts as an early mass e-mail or fax, sharing bits of data with multiple people at multiple locations. Instead of making a dozen phone calls, messages and news are sent and then received over a large area. This enables all groups of law enforcement to react at the same time. If they received information regarding the whereabouts of a wanted criminal at different intervals, his or her capture would be much more difficult. In crime fighting, information is currency and the faster the FBI and police can receive it the more valuable it is. Moreover, by letting the audience actually read the messages on the wire, vital information is being presented (figure 4.2).
without the use of character dialogue. The narrative can move forward efficiently without the interruption of unnecessary conversation.

Another instance when non-telephonic communication plays a crucial role in the narrative is when a telegram sent by McKay (William Harrigan) is delivered to ‘Brick’ Davis (James Cagney). McKay is traveling by train and chooses to send a message that is received by Davis prior to McKay’s arrival. McKay is an ex-gangster who paid for Davis’ education and is now retiring from the criminal life. Like the wire messages, the telegram is shown close up on the screen, enabling the viewer to read its contents. The message lets Davis know when and where to meet McKay (AKA, Joseph Lynch) as he passes through town. Today, if one were traveling by train, a cell phone would provide the same narrative effect. McKay could have called Davis while traveling on the train, which would have created the same event. The telegram is just as effective; however, in 1935 people had to allow enough time for these types of communications to arrive at the telegraph office and then be delivered to the receiver (figure 4.3). The telegram has to be sent early enough to allow Davis enough time to receive it and arrive at the planned meeting locale before McKay leaves. Davis has also had to balance his friendship with McKay and his professional career throughout the film. His superior is
suspicious of his loyalty to the FBI due to his criminal connection. The telegram allows for long distance privacy, much like a cell phone does, in that the message is meant only for Davis and it is more than likely no one else will read it. The telegram is actually a very early form of the text message. If McKay called Davis on the telephone, their conversation may be over heard or the phone might be tapped.

Figure 4.3 The telegram.

‘G’ Men progresses forward at a rather slow rate for about the first hour, but as Davis closes in on Collins, the telephone allows the events to occur in rapid succession, providing fast-paced action leading to the conclusion. The meeting on the train between Davis and Lynch concerns McKay’s retirement to a cabin in Wisconsin. This is vital information for Davis as he later learns that Collins has been located, hiding out in Wisconsin at Lynch’s lodge. Jean (Ann Dvorak), an old friend of Davis and now wife of Collins, gives up this information. Davis knows exactly where Collins is due to his previous encounter with McKay on the train. Davis orders another man to call the police in Wisconsin to arrange for transportation, so they can immediately proceed from the airfield after they land. Davis and his men arrive in Wisconsin, where a violent nighttime shootout occurs, killing McKay and others, while Collins escapes. McKay is being held hostage by Collins, is forced out the front door of the lodge first, and is
subsequently shot. The phone call to Wisconsin seamlessly sets up this sequence. Within seconds of screen time, the setting shifts from New York to Wisconsin, with the narrative remaining cohesive due to the ability of instantaneous communication across long distances via telephone. There is no pause in the action while the FBI is trying to contact law enforcement in Wisconsin.

The telephone plays its most important role in the narrative during the climax of the film. The sister of McCord (Robert Armstrong), Kaye (Margaret Lindsay), is captured by Collins, who informs the FBI of this and warns them to stop their pursuit or she will die. McCord is Davis’ boss who is suspicious of Davis’ loyalty. Kaye also has become Davis’ romantic counterpart, so both he and McCord have a stake in returning her home safely. Jean learns the whereabouts of Kaye and Collins and goes to inform Davis of their location (figures 4.4-4.5). Davis has been injured at this point and is laid up in a hospital bed, but is still able to function. Jean calls Davis from a nearby pay phone located in a sundries store just down the road from Collins’ hide out. Collins learns that Jean has gone to the store and his suspicion grows as to the intentions of Jean. Figure 4.4-4.5 Jean tipping off Davis

He finds Jean on the phone informing Davis of his locale and shoots her. The location of the phone provides the perfect setting for the brutal murder of Jean because it is located in a cramped
position offering no escape. Jean also has her back turned while talking to Davis and will not be able to see Collins approaching. The iconography of the public telephone booth is consistent with many classic films because private conversations often occurred in public locations. Jean could have hid while making the call if cell phones had existed in 1935. Mobile technology would have left her alive and still produced the death or capture of Collins. In addition, the confined space of the phone booth facilitates an extremely personal shot of Jean’s death (figure 4.6). The camera is in tight on the Jean while she is shot in the back by Collins, showing her expire from a close perspective.

Figure 4.6 Jean’s death in the phone booth.

Although Jean is unable to give the actual location of Collins before she is shot, the telephone still provides the information necessary for the final confrontation between the FBI and Collins to commence. Davis is able to contact the operator after he hears the gunshots on the other end of the line. The operator, in turn, is able to give the location of the phone that Jean called from (the notion of having an operator to pass along this information is an element of phone service that has been nonexistent for a long period time). Jean’s death is therefore not in vane, as Collins is eliminated and Kaye is saved. The telephone has not only provided the
narrative with a dramatic and heartfelt conclusion (Jean’s murder), but also allows for the redemption of Davis and McCord who save the day.

In ‘G’Men, the telephone becomes the medium through which the narrative can progress effectively, not dragging but creating an action oriented discourse. Each sequence can progress without having to pause for in-depth explanations and elaborate set-ups. The passing of information is intrinsic for both the FBI and the criminals to pursue and evade one another. The telephone’s capabilities were just being fully realized during this period in America and ‘G’Men capitalizes on its readily available functionality.

The Big Sleep (1946)

The Big Sleep relies heavily on the telephone to connect sequences together with simplicity; a short phone conversation leads into the next setting and event. Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) is a private detective who is extremely capable of doing his own investigative work. He is a strong and intelligent man who has a suspicious sixth sense, enabling him to manipulate different characters to glean information, while often bailing himself out of trouble. In Hollywood narratives, a private detective usually needs at least a couple of breaks or leads to solve the mystery they are involved in. In a scene toward the end of the film, Lash Canino (Bob Steele) is trying to get information on the whereabouts of a girl. Marlowe has snuck into the adjacent office unnoticed and is listening to the conversation in the next room. Jones (Elisha Cook, Jr.), the man being questioned, gives Canino the wrong address. In order to establish that false information has been passed, Marlowe uses the nearby telephone. After Canino leaves and Jones is poisoned, Marlowe calls the operator trying to figure out whether or not the address Jones gave is correct. In his typical manipulative way, Marlowe says he is from the police identification bureau and is looking for Agnes Lowzier (Sonia Darren). The front desk
of the apartment building informs Marlowe that there is no one living there by that name, which
leads him to conclude that Jones has given the bad guy the wrong address.Shortly after this
conversation, Agnes just happens to call, allowing for Marlowe and her to set up a meeting. The
phone has allowed Marlowe to use manipulation to figure out whether or not Agnes is in danger
and provided one of those lucky breaks, Agnes actually calls. Again, the ability to use the phone
to disguise one’s identity plays a role in providing pivotal information.
Marlowe relies on information being passed quickly between those he is working with in order to
conduct his investigation. He cooperates with the law, as well as the criminals, letting only the
information pass to each side that he deems necessary. Most of Marlowe’s conversations are
short, whether in person or on the telephone, and give him the necessary information for his next
move (figure 4.7). These abbreviated telephone dialogues also provide the narrative momentum
for the story to move forward quickly, keeping the plot fresh and exciting. More importantly,
these conversations provide the information for the audience to understand the interconnected
web of characters involved in the story. The Big Sleep is extremely confusing at certain points,
with characters being introduced, killed, or disappearing from the narrative constantly. The
telephone functions as a segue device; Marlowe tells the audience where he is going and who is
going to see while talking on the phone.
Figure 4.7 Marlowe awakens to a phone call.

The telephone establishes other narrative functions than just providing fluid segues. The romantic relationship between Marlowe and Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) materializes through a playful phone interaction. Vivian arrives at Marlowe’s office to discuss why exactly her father has hired him. She cannot get a straight answer out of him and decides to hinder his investigation by calling the police. Before she can talk to the officer who picks up the other end of the line, Marlowe takes the phone away from her. They proceed to play a flirtatious game while confusing the police officer (figure 4.8). Marlowe bewilders the officer by asking him why he called and informing him that this is not a police station. The police officer did not call them, they called him. The phone is the centerpiece of this romantic interlude and provides the catalyst for the love affair, which is confirmed by the conclusion of the film. This interaction, much like the entire investigation, is a game to Marlowe. Vivian even says after the phone dialogue ends, “You like playing games, don’t you?” To which Marlowe replies, “Mmm, hmm.” His game is one of profession, life, and love. He is able to manipulate his opponents, whether romantic or adversarial, into giving him the upper hand. In several instances, the phone provides him this luxury.
In order to gain the advantage in the final confrontation between himself and Eddie Mars (John Ridgely), the head of the criminal organization he has been up against, Marlowe slips back to one of Mars’ house that was the scene of a murder that occurred earlier in the film. He calls Mars from this location, but does not let on that he is already there (figure 4.9). Marlowe has just killed Mars right hand man and informs Mars that he wants to meet. Mars suggests a locale for the meeting, but Marlowe strings Mars along until Mars finally agrees to meet at Marlowe’s current location. Marlowe tells Mars that it will take him longer than it really will to get to the house, considering he is already there. The trap has been set; Mars thinks he will arrive first to ambush Marlowe, but it is the other way around. The telephone is solely responsible for Marlowe’s trick because Mars cannot trace the call because he does not have the capability. Moreover, this is the era before caller I.D, so the number Marlowe is calling from cannot be verified. There are perhaps other ways for Mars to figure out the number the call came from, but in his haste to confront Marlowe, Mars does not go to such lengths. Mars has no idea that he has been set-up and pays for his mistake with his life.
Figure 4.9 Marlowe setting his final trap.

*Goodfellas* (1990)

*Goodfellas* follows a completely different approach in terms of telephone use than the previously discussed gangster films. Instead of the phone providing a useful link to information for and connection of the protagonists, it is construed as a plague on the lives of those trying to conduct business. The film highlights, at several points, the fact that the phone is only to be used when necessary and even then in limited capacity. Although *Goodfellas* was produced in 1990, it takes place during the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s. During this period, phone taps were commonly used by law enforcement and therefore, criminals primarily used pay phones to contact their associates. Henry Hill (Ray Liotta), while voice-over narrating the beginning of the film, discusses Pauly’s (Paul Sorvino) absolute distrust of the telephone. Pauly uses Henry as a courier to run messages back and forth between characters he needs to communicate with and if a phone needs to be used, he moves to an outside line. By prefacing that the telephone is considered a hazard to the gangsters in *Goodfellas*, the film sets up the events that eventually lead to fall of the entire organization.

Even though the telephone is considered taboo amongst the characters in the film, it still provides critical pieces of information during pivotal points in the film. There are not many, but
a few constituent events center on the ability to communicate telephonically. Jimmy (Robert De Niro) and Henry are having issues with one of their affiliates. Morrie (Chuck Low) begins to berate Jimmy for pressuring him to pay money owed. Jimmy, aligning with the conventions of the gangster genre, is one of the more violently aggressive characters in the film and displays his dislike of Morrie’s comments by strangling him with a cord that appears to be the telephone connection to the wall (figure 4.10). Morrie has the phone in his hand while he is being choked and answers an incoming call, which turns out to be Karen (Lorainne Bracco), Henry’s girlfriend (figure 4.11). She calls him from a pay phone after being sexually assaulted by her neighbor. Henry picks Karen up at the pay phone, takes her home, and in brutal fashion, beats her neighbor across the face with a revolver. In this short sequence, Morrie is strangled by a phone cord, Karen is helped by a nearby pay phone, and her neighbor is beaten directly after the incident. The telephone is successful in perpetuating an array of emotional confrontations for the characters in the film. Morrie being strangled is projected as somewhat comedic, due to Henry laughing while Morrie is assaulted. The telephone is not necessary for this scene to occur, as Jimmy could have used any number of things to strangle Morrie, but it allows Karen’s tenuous phone call to transpire at a moment of levity in an otherwise grim film. Karen’s ability to locate a pay phone immediately after she has been accosted shifts the events of the narrative quickly in
the direction of Henry and Karen’s romantic relationship. Moreover, for the first time in the film the audience views Henry as a gangster, in that throughout the film he is portrayed as one of the more conscientious criminals. His aggressive and violent behavior in defense of Karen is one of the few times during the film he is actually seen committing such a vicious act. After shellacking the neighbor, Henry hands Karen the bloody gun and tells her to hide it. Instead, of being frightened by his actions, Karen is turned on and their courtship commences. Along with playing a role in one of the more comedic scenes of the film, the telephone is the catalyst for the romantic notions of violence in Goodfellas, a theme that is present in the gangster genre, especially those produced in the contemporary era. Henry is able to rescue his damsel in distress, while establishing himself as an unrelenting brute.

The story continues along in typical gangster genre fashion highlighting the rise and fall of its main existents. In this case, the story is based on true events of Henry Hill’s life in the mob much like Scarface was inspired by real-life gangster, Al Capone. The official beginning of the end for the protagonists occurs during what is supposed to be one of the most joyful days in the lives of Henry, Jimmy, and Tommy (Joe Pesci). Tommy is to become a “made man,” which means he is officially a member of the Cicero crime family and cannot be harmed in any way without serious repercussions. He is now untouchable amongst the ranks of the gangsters, and those men closest to him are afforded virtually the same rights. A tragic turn of events takes place, however, when the men who are supposed to be initiating him into the family murder Tommy. Jimmy, and in turn Henry, realizes this after contacting via pay phone one of the men who was involved in Tommy’s murder. Jimmy calls to find out how the ceremony went and gets the bad news (figure 4.12). Jimmy erupts in both anger and sadness at the news while still in the phone booth. Again, the phone is present at a moment when the events of Goodfellas take a
dramatic turn. The conversation could have occurred in a number of different ways, but Scorsese again chose to utilize distance communication made possible by the pay phone. Tommy was attending a very private ceremony, which Jimmy and Henry would never be allowed to go to. Jimmy being the good friend to Tommy that he is, wanted the news as quickly as possible after the ceremony had concluded. The quickest way, in terms of narrative time constraints and cohesion, for the conversation to occur as soon as Tommy’s initiation had ended is through a phone. The fact that Jimmy receives the terrible news via phone also creates a helpless situation. Tommy is already dead and Jimmy is left powerless, able to do nothing except take his anguish out on the handset. The phone is not necessary for the film to progress forward except for in times of great distress, which are all turning points of the film. After Tommy’s murder, both Henry and Jimmy begin to lose their edge as drugs consume Henry and Jimmy becomes extremely paranoid.

Figure 4.12 Jimmy upset after Tommy’s murder.

Henry becomes not only a drug addict, but also a drug smuggler. He begins to conduct business with people who are not in organized crime and do not understand the consequences of making subtle mistakes. Jimmy sums up the attitude a gangster should have in association with the telephone by telling Henry, “I’ve been telling you your whole life, don’t talk on the fuckin’
Henry tries to live by this rule, but does not pay careful enough attention and soon everybody involved in Cicero’s mob soon pays for his mistake.

Henry utilizes his babysitter, Lois (Welker White), to transport cocaine via airplane from one state to another in order to make transactions. During one of the final sequences of the film, the audience follows a day in the life of Henry, which turns out to be the most important day of his life. He realizes a helicopter is following him as he runs his errands around town. It could be a fluke that he keeps seeing it, but it is more than likely the police monitoring his actions. He goes to make a drug deal and calls the babysitter, who is at his house, to discuss their next move. He tells her not to use the house phone to make any calls concerning their business, but this is exactly what she does (figures 4.13-4.14). The police have bugged his phone lines and have the evidence to raid his house. He is arrested, along with the babysitter and the other people involved in his smuggling operation. He is forced to turn on Jimmy and Pauly in order to prevent himself from going to prison. After his betrayal, he goes into hiding with his family to avoid being murdered, as a hit has been put out for him. Seemingly, as quickly, in screen time, as Henry rose to wealth and prestige, he loses it all. Not because he was caught shooting a guy in the head or with a suitcase full of coke, but because Lois decided to use the telephone. The police had to build a case from months of surveillance, but in the end, using the phone in his house becomes his ultimate undoing. The telephone effectively provides the conclusion of the narrative by giving the police the information they need to convict Henry, Jimmy, and Pauly.
The Departed (2006)

*Goodfellas* covered an extensive time period, which ended in 1980, around the time cell phones first became available for purchase by consumers. That being said, it was produced in 1990, almost a decade before the cell phone boom, and therefore even if the story had been set in the present era cell phones probably would not have been utilized in the narrative. *The Departed* is set in present day, which virtually requires that cell phones be an integral part of distance communication between characters. Not only does *The Departed* use the cell phone for communication purposes, but also the entire narrative is based around the secrecy mobile technology provides and how quickly information can be passed between individuals due to its omnipresence.

*The Departed* begins with Colin Sullivan (Matt Damon) and Billy Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio) both graduating from the police academy at the same time, both at the top of their class. They have never met each other, however, and do not know each other’s background. Colin is actually working for Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson), the local mob boss who has put Colin through school to become a spy. Billy was a problem child whose past is in question due to his family ties, but has seemingly turned his life around to serve the greater good. His two bosses, Staff Sgt. Dignam (Mark Wahlberg) and Capt. Queenan (Martin Sheen) are skeptical of
his loyalty to law enforcement and tell him that the only way he is going to be able to work as a detective is to go undercover, utilizing his knowledge of the street. Billy is supposed to try to get as close to Costello as he can in order to retrieve enough evidence to make an arrest. Colin, meanwhile, is to tip off Costello when the police get to close so he can avoid arrest. The cell phone becomes the principal means of communication among all of the parties concerned and results in an elaborate cat-and-mouse game that ends in tragedy.

The privacy that a cell phone provides is invaluable to Colin while operating amongst his police colleagues both inside and outside of the precinct. The cell phone has become the primary means of communication for individuals all over the world and seeing someone regularly using one is commonplace. Only the individual who owns the number to which the device is connected will typically answer a cell phone. Answering someone else’s cell phone or even looking to see who is calling has become a serious invasion of privacy. Early on in the film, Colin is able to tip off Costello, addressing him as “Dad,” via cell phone, while nonchalantly walking down one of the main corridors of the precinct (figures 4.15-4.16). No one can listen in on his conversation because he is on a mobile phone, but more importantly, he is a trusted detective and not suspect of being a spy.

Figure 4.15-4.16 Colin talking to his “Dad” in the precinct.

The focus on the physical presence of the cell phone is also very apparent from the beginning of The Departed. In When a Stranger Calls (1979), the rotary dial phone is framed at
center and close-up consistently in the beginning of the film to draw attention to the importance of its presence. The filmmakers of *The Departed* use the same strategy often, when a character is using the cell phone. The low angle shot of Colin looking at his phone when it rings, signals to the viewer that the incoming call is something of importance (figure 4.15). Not only that, the digital screen that lights up emphasizes the technological age in which these characters are operating. The digitization of America is irreversible and its effect is felt every minute in the lives of the general public. The privatization of the public sphere is not only common in regular society, but business would not be able to function at the capacity it now does without the aid of mobile communication. Modern criminals such as Costello are no exception; their thirst for information is just as insatiable as legitimate corporations. The cell phone provides an alternative to many situations that seem impossible or out of reach.

Either Colin must be prepared to talk to the individuals in his professional career or those involved in his underworld criminal life at any moment. The cell phone affords him this luxury with minimal hassle. While investigating a crime scene, Colin steps away to call his girlfriend, Madolyn (Vera Farmiga), to set up a lunch date. Immediately after this conversation, he enters a pay phone booth, where he switches the SIM (subscriber identity module) card. A SIM card holds the personal information for the owner of a cell phone, such as contacts, pictures, the phone’s number, etc. The focus in this instance is placed on the phone number that a SIM card is associated with. Colin has two SIM cards, one for his legitimate life and one for his criminal life. Swapping the SIM card allows him to use the same cell phone to be both good and evil Colin because each is associated with a different phone number (figures 4.17-4.20). The same event in the narrative could occur in many different ways. Colin could walk around the corner to a store or restaurant to contact Costello or he could be viewed talking to him at a later point in
the film. In the interest of driving the plot forward in a pro-active manner, the SIM card switch provides suspense (Colin may be seen making the switch by a colleague), momentum (Colin and Costello have their conversation with no break in the action), and character development (Colin is very good at leading a double life). The setting in which Colin makes the switch is also important. He uses a pay phone booth, which in films set in the past such as *Goodfellas* is one of the focal points of gangster communication. The pay phone booth as a means of distance communication no longer provides meaningful functionality in the digital age of cinematic narratives. It can still serve a purpose because it provides the cover for Colin to make the SIM card switch. The pay phone booth is not necessary for the switch to occur, but provides an interesting juxtaposition between the analog and digital eras of criminal communication.

Figure 4.17-4.20 Colin making the SIM card switch.

Colin continues to display his proficiency at being both cop and gangster during a scene in which he pretends to be the lawyer of one of Costello’s men who has been captured. Fitzy (David O’Hara) refuses to talk to anyone until his lawyer arrives. Unfortunately, for him, he does not know what his lawyer looks will like. He has only been given a card and instructed to use it in case he is arrested. Damon knows this and instructs the other detectives he is working
with to turn off the camera, which is recording in another room. Turning off the camera provides cover for him as a cop because he is about to illegally question the detainee. It also provides cover for him as an informant because he instructs Fitzy to call the drug house that his associates are working at and warn them to get out. Damon has just told him that there will be a raid at the house, so they need to leave as quickly as possible. The cell phone plays a vital role in this interaction because after Fitzy makes the call, which is on a detective’s phone not his lawyer’s, the police now have the number of Mr. French (Ray Winstone), Costello’s second in command. Before going into the interrogation room, Colin is smart enough to grab the cell phone of his colleague. Otherwise, the call being made will be from a phone that Mr. French has the number for, Colin’s, which will pop-up on his caller ID. Fitzy has to believe that Colin is his lawyer, so Colin gets Mr. French’s number without suspicion from the other detectives. The trick only works with the availability of multiple cell phones. Mobile technology again provides the rapid transfer of crucial information in just a short portion of screen time.

While Colin is operating covertly within the police department, Billy is doing the same inside Costello’s organization. Billy has virtually no contact with those in law enforcement, in fact only two men know of his undercover assignment, Capt. Queenan and Staff Sgt. Dignam. Billy’s portal to both Costello and his superiors in the police department are his two cell phones (figure 4.21). The cell phone Billy uses to communicate with the police department is critical because it allows him to make phone calls in discrete locations. He can set up meetings with Queenan and Dignam without the fear of one of Costello’s men listening in. Using an undercover officer for one of the main characters in a film is not a new plot device, but they way in which mobile technology allows Billy to operate is completely different from someone like Donnie Brascoe/ Joe Pistone (Johnny Depp) in Donnie Brasco (1997). Like Goodfellas,
Donnie Brascoe was made in the 1990’s, but is set in the 1970’s. Phone calls have to be made in the right locations from pay phones for Donnie to interact with the FBI. The communication is minimal, therefore his superiors do not play a significant role within the narrative, and Donnie is left largely to his own devices. Billy, conversely, is in regular contact with his superiors throughout The Departed, and is reliant on them to make decisions that alter the course of events within the story.

Figure 4.21 Billy on his cell with Queenan.

Early mobile phones provided the most basic function of distance communication while on the move, talking in real time with someone else. Today’s cellular devices do much more than that; they allow users to use the Internet to check e-mail, get directions, entertain themselves, shop, etc. Perhaps the most important function, which seems simple now, is the text function. Instead of calling a friend or colleague, basic conversations, or complex ones depending on your texting prowess, can be carried out by typing a message instead of saying it. Texting is an instantaneous form of e-mail that can be delivered via a much smaller and portable device than a computer. Moreover, the receiver of the message is alerted as soon as the message is in the inbox. A proper e-mail account is not required to carry out the conversation. The Departed utilizes the texting function in a couple of different ways to construct complex events that require not only secrecy, but also strict silence.
In a scene that takes place about half way through the film, the police have been alerted to a deal for some microprocessors that is about to go down between Costello’s gang and another faction. Colin does not know about the raid until right before it is about to happen, but the cell phone allows for the possibility of a warning to be passed to Costello. While in the direct presence of Queenan, Colin calls Costello, again using the “Dad” alias, and informs him that the police have surveillance on the location. There is no reason for Queenan to suspect Colin is talking to anybody but his actual Dad. Soon after, Colin is informed that the FBI is also involved in the raid and they have the equipment to monitor all of the cell phone signals in the area. Colin hears this and subtly puts his cell phone in his pocket, opens it up, and blindly texts, “No phones” (figures 4.22-4.23). Costello receives the message and tells all of his cohorts to turn off their cell phones, so they can no longer be tracked. Colin is able to first warn Costello of impending danger by making a call to Costello and then also to thwart the FBI’s attempts of tracking all of the gangsters by sending a covert text. In addition, the officer in charge of setting up the surveillance does not put any cameras in the rear of the warehouse, allowing both gangs to slip out the back unnoticed. The entire scenario would be impossible without mobile technology and a little poor police work. Costello goes free and the narrative commences without any altercations due to the convenience of the cell phone.

Figure 4.22-4.23 Colin warning Costello through a blind text.
Later in the film, Billy tracks Costello to a pornographic movie theatre where Colin is waiting to rendezvous. Again, in this instance, Billy needs to remain in constant contact with Queenan in order to receive orders on the actions he should take. Costello is handing Colin information that will lead to Billy’s identity being discovered by Costello. For Billy, there is a good chance that Costello is meeting up with the mole in the police department. Not only would Colin’s arrest remove the leak from the police, but would also prevent Billy’s true identity from being found out by Costello.

Billy sets his cell phone on vibrate so he can communicate with Queenan while still in close proximity to Costello and Colin. In this scene, the cell phone is not imperative, but allows dramatic tension to be built up because Billy is just a few feet from two men who want to kill him (figures 4.24-4.26). Moreover, even though he is extremely close to Costello and Colin he is able to communicate without really making any noise at all. Cell phones not only have the power of portability, but the elaborate array of personal settings that can be applied to a mobile phone, such as the vibrate/silent feature, allows for this tension filled event to occur.

Figure 4.24-4.26 Billy tailing Costello in the theatre.
Costello and Colin go their separate ways and Billy is ordered to ID the suspect. Billy proceeds to follow Colin out of the back door of the theatre. A slow foot pursuit begins through Chinatown when Billy’s cell phone ring breaks the silence. Just as the analog ring of the rotary dial phone is used to suddenly startle the viewer, the cell phone provides the same effect here. The building tension is broken and Colin now knows that someone is following him. Billy’s cell phone provides him covert communication while in the movie theatre, but now has given his position away by accidently being set to regular ring. Ironically, the text that is sent tells Billy to make an arrest on the suspect, but that same text has blown his opportunity. The cell phone provides two functions that can change the outcome of the story: first, Billy has been given the order to make an arrest, which would prevent Colin from further botching the investigation into Costello and completely change the outcome of the narrative. Second, the ringing cell phone allows Colin to make an escape, continuing the story towards its conclusion and letting Colin know that the police are getting close to him. The fact that the main communication medium for all the characters in The Departed is the cell phone allows these events to occur. They cannot be considered constituent events because the scenes could be constructed in different ways that do not utilize the cell phone. Mobile technology has, however, given the filmmaker a more efficient way of constructing a cohesive narrative. If the cell phone is not showcased in films which are set in present day, the audience is left pondering the question of why? At that point, it must be built into the narrative that a cell phone cannot be used for various reasons, such as in horror films when the characters allude to their phones not getting a signal.

There is not an instance where one of the characters in The Departed does not actually have a signal, but the narrative device is used as an excuse anyway. Colin tells some of his men to follow Queenan to throw the department off his trail. They do so and he is tailed to an old
dilapidated building where he is meeting Billy. Within seconds, the cell phone is used to complete two conversations essential to narrative progression. Colin calls Costello to let him know that he thinks Queenan is meeting with his informant. The call is made from the privacy of Colin’s office with no one else around. Costello calls in the hit and orders his men to the building, including Billy who is, of course, already there. Fortunately, Billy has his cell phone with him and gets the warning of the impending attack from one of his associates, which allows him to escape. This also leads to Queenan being thrown out of a window, which leaves only one other person who knows of Billy’s existence, Sgt. Dignam. Later Billy is being questioned by Fitzy as to why they could not get a hold of him for the hit. He says that he was in a grocery store and had no signal. Then, when he left, he received the call and arrived as fast as possible. He did have a signal, but not having one is a plausible excuse, given that anyone who owns a mobile phone has had their signal disappear on him or her in places like a grocery store.

Queenan’s death is gruesome in nature as he falls to the pavement directly in front of Billy and blood splatters upwards all over Billy’s clothes. As with all gangster films, violence is necessary to convey the harshness of a life of crime and show the lack of humanity possessed by the antagonists. Just as the telephone is used to call in hits and set-up traps to create violence in films such as Scarface and The Big Sleep, the cell phone provides the same service in The Departed, but in a much more efficient manner. Ironically, the device that helps Costello bring so much pain to other individuals is the cause of his own demise.

At the film’s conclusion, a drug deal falls apart and the police destroy Costello’s gang. Costello runs into the recesses of the warehouse and calls Colin on his cell phone to figure out what has happened. Colin, however, realizing that Costello’s time is done and being associated with him will only spell disaster for his own well-being, decides to kill Costello. Colin holds up
his cell phone so Costello can hear it as they walk towards each other. Colin asks Costello if he is known by the FBI as an informant and Costello tells him no. Costello has in fact already been discovered to be an FBI snitch as this point. Colin insults Costello, whereupon Costello fires at Colin and Colin fires back ending Costello’s life. Costello has been holding his cell phone all this time and shortly after his death, the silence of the scene is broken by the ring tone of Costello’s phone (figures 4.27-4.28). It is his wife on the other end of the line, who is able to get the news of her husband’s death instantaneously after it has occurred. The device that ended so many other people’s lives is now reporting the death of its owner.

Figure 4.27-4.28 Costello’s last phone call.

*The Departed* is a testament to the usefulness of the cell phone in providing new and innovative ways of not only having characters within a narrative communicate, but also allowing for events to take place that were impossible before its invention. Many narratives can progress only as fast as their characters can interact. The cell phone provides the efficiency that these present day stories require. *The Departed* takes this attribute of mobile technology to the extreme, harnessing the capability of cell phones to acquire and transfer information.

**Gangsters, Narrative Form, and Telephony**

The primary narrative form that is utilized in the gangster genre is the dual-focus epic. The narrative in each of the discussed case studies follows the rise and fall of a gangster or gang and the different law factions that are trying to eliminate them. Each side plays a game of cat
and mouse with the other, trying to outwit their opponent. All of the stories end tragically with the death or arrest of the villain and in the case of *The Departed*, the death of virtually every major character. The narrative goal of each film is to tell a story in which a mob organization rises to power and then show its subsequent downfall. The audience arrives in all of these films *in medias res*; a gang is already established and in power when the story begins. However, *Scarface* and *‘G’ Men* chronicle the rise of Tony to the head of the crime syndicate and Brick becoming an FBI agent. The gangs are already established and made known at the beginning of each film, but the main character in each is shown from the start of their respective careers.

Unlike dual-focus epics that pit two sides of a conflict against each other in direct battle, gangster films often switch between each group, showing both sides trying to outsmart the other using information. McArthur (1977) explains that the control of technology is often vital to the success of both the good and bad guys in the gangster genre. The telephone is the most commonly used communication device to glean information from the opposition or pass intelligence between allies. *Scarface* utilizes the telephone very little compared to the other films in this analysis, but it provides information that leads to the demise of Tony’s arch nemesis. As the situation becomes dire in *‘G’ Men*, Brick must communicate quickly with other law agents to pass information. More importantly, the phone call made by Jean before she is murdered allows Brick to find and save Kay and results in the death of Collins. Marlowe is constantly on the phone in *The Big Sleep*, manipulating each side against the other and setting up scenarios that are advantageous only to him. The telephone or the lack there of, in *Goodfellas* is only mentioned early. However, it becomes critical in scenes of high tension, relaying important information between the characters for the purposes of narrative fluidity. The telephone is the enemy of Pauly, Henry, Nicky, and Jimmy. The FBI utilizes wire tapping to gather evidence
against these criminals, so avoiding phone conversations is critical to the survival of their gang. Eventually the phone is integral in the arrest of Henry, which leads to the downfall of the Cicero crime family. *The Departed* is undergirded by the cell phone. The narrative could not exist in its current form without mobile technology. The police, FBI, and their opposition play games through their mobile phones, constantly relaying information that is vital to the success of each operation.

In all of the examples presented within the gangster genre, either the telephone or cell phone is necessary to the outcome of the narrative. In order for one side to win, they must be more diligent in receiving, translating, and using information. The success of both the police and the gangs in gangster films is completely reliant on how fast intelligence can be communicated between characters. In the gangster genre, victory comes to the side that can most effectively learn of the others secrets and profit from them. Unfortunately, for Hollywood criminals, the victor is usually law enforcement.
Chapter 5

Action/Adventure Film and Telephony

The action/adventure genre is one of the most commercially successful and widely beloved categories of movies to grace the big screen. Every year studios put more money into their summer action blockbusters than any other films on their production schedules. These films typically require little intellectual effort on the part of the viewer, sometimes completely disregarding logical plot premises and other components such as character development and coherent dialogue. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Action/adventure films offer escape into alternative worlds where the good guy wins and always gets the girl, while blowing things up. The men and women of the action/adventure genre are strong, fast, good looking, and smart. These are all the traits that every man or woman would love to possess, but alas cannot. This is the gift of the action/adventure extravaganza; entertainment for the masses.

In order for action/adventure films to move at the intensified pace that has become mandatory for an increasingly impatient audience, the communication between characters and their movement between locations is always at a premium. When Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) needs to move a great distance in a short amount of time, the audience is shown a map tracing his journey from one location to another. Often these action/adventure films will spell out the current location of the protagonist in the corner of the screen so the viewer does not become confused. Most importantly, the characters in these films must have a reason to move from place to place. Filmmakers that create narratives that are set in the decades before mobile technology
and the Internet, such as those in the *Indiana Jones* franchise, must generate more innovative ways for the hero to collect data and proceed on his or her quest. Motion pictures that take place in the present, however, are afforded the luxury of the cell phone and the technology associated with it. Therefore, the story and its discourse can proceed at a pace to match the era in which today’s moviegoers live. The action is quicker and more exciting with each passing year, keeping the viewer entertained and wanting to come back for more.

The action/adventure genre is as old as Hollywood, but for the purposes of this analysis I will begin with films that were released just before the use of cell phones became common in the movie industry. The first three *Die Hard* movies provide examples of distance communication before and after the mobile phone became widely popular in America, having been produced in 1988, 1990, and then 1995, respectively. *Speed* (1994) provides an example of the ability of cell phones to completely alter the affect that distance communication, or lack thereof, can have on the narrative momentum of an action film. *Speed* also provides an interesting segue into the *Bourne* films, which are consumed with mobile communication and would not exist in their current form without the invention and proliferation of the cell phone. It should be noted that these three films will be discussed together with different sequences selected from each. Mobile technology is so rampant throughout the *Bourne* films that a limited number of scenes have been selected for analyzation. Furthermore, I have chosen to group the *Bourne* films together because they all use mobile technology in very much the same manner and therefore, do not require separate attention. Moreover, the story flows from one film to the other with little break in the action. That is, the three movies comprise one extended story and the narrative follows the same path from the first film to the third. The chapter will conclude using Altman’s theory of narrative while identifying overlying similarities between the case studies.
**Die Hard (1988)**

*Die Hard* spawned a new prototype for action/adventure films, one that has been mimicked many times over the years: A single man, in a confined space, using his professional talents to overcome some sort of terrorist organization through large-scale explosions and frequent violent acts. McClane’s (Bruce Willis) proximity to his enemy in *Die Hard* allows for constant interaction between the two opposing forces, which leads to a fast-moving and exciting narrative with little downtime. The audience is left in constant anxiety over whom the terrorists or McClane will kill next. In order to gain an advantage over his foe and the ability to listen in on their conversations, McClane eventually gets a hold of a walkie-talkie.

As mentioned before, *Die Hard* was produced in the era before widespread use of cellular devices infiltrated American society. The cell phone or car phone was a device primarily owned by the wealthy or governmental agencies. It was not common to see people talking on these devices as nonchalantly as it is today. Therefore, *Die Hard’s* narrative incorporates the next best thing to a cell phone to perform very similar communication functions. McClane uses the walkie-talkie not only to listen to his enemies, but also to talk to the police. The walkie-talkie allows him to give and get information that is necessary not only for his survival, but also the hostages. The major problem with the walkie-talkie is that it is a one-to-many communication device, not a private one-to-one. Consequently, the terrorists hear everything that he is saying also. Thus, it effectively works for and against each side of the conflict.

It is important to note that the early version of the cell phone does play a role in *Die Hard* that is pivotal in the progression of events at the beginning of the film. Hans Gruber (Alan Rickman) and his band of thieves infiltrate Nakatomi plaza disguised as terrorists fighting for a political cause. Later in the film, the viewer finds out that the entire reason for the hostage
situation is to break into the buildings safe and steal its valuables. Gruber enters Nakatomi plaza through the front door, takes out the minimal security staff, and locks down the entire building through its advanced security system. Now there is no way in or out without the keys to the system and eliminating the terrorist who controls them. The terrorists invade the Christmas party, in which Holly (Bonnie Bedalia), McClane’s wife, is involved. Holly works for Nakatomi Corporation, which is the entire reason McClane is in the building in the first place.

Just before the terrorists attack, McClane is viewed talking to Argyle (De’voreaux White), McClane’s limousine driver. Argyle is on the car phone and McClane is in Holly’s office. The fact that the limousine has a car phone again signifies the extravagance of the device. Only those that ride in a limousine regularly would need to have one (e.g., wealthy executives). The line goes dead and McClane immediately becomes suspicious. Gruber’s men burst into the Christmas party shortly after the phone conversation is cut short and McClane narrowly escapes through the ceiling tiles. His first intention is to somehow warn the authorities of the crisis occurring at Nakatomi plaza. He manages to make his way to the upper floors of the building, which are still under construction and he pulls the fire alarm. The alarm automatically alerts the fire department and the police to the problem. However, the terrorists have a contingency plan for this. They have linked the incoming calls to a mobile phone, which gives them access to all incoming and outgoing calls, but still leaves the hostages unable to use the building’s landlines. When the dispatcher calls to confirm the alarm, the terrorists are able to use a cell phone, disguise themselves as security officers for the building, and thereby call off the rescue response (figure 5.1). The cell phone is linked to the landline of Nakatomi plaza even though the phone line has been cut. The technologically advanced criminals are able to thwart the rescue attempt of the low-tech police officers using a mobile phone. The narrative can now commence along its
spectacularly violent path, as McClane realizes that he is alone, at least for the time being, in the battle against the perpetrators.

Figure 5.1 Terrorists calling off the fire alarm.

After killing one of Gruber’s henchmen, McClane is able to communicate with the police through the dead man’s walkie-talkie. He climbs to the roof of the Nakatomi building where he will most easily be able to transmit at a long range (figures 5.2-5.3). Much like a cell phone, McClane is able to instantaneously communicate with someone over a considerable distance. Unlike a cell phone, he can only call those individuals that have a long-range walkie-talkie and they must be tuned to the correct frequency to hear the message. Fortunately for McClane he is a police officer and therefore, knows the frequency that emergency services use. There is always someone receiving on the other end of the channel, so he knows he will be able to contact the authorities. Another problem with the walkie-talkie is that, as mentioned earlier, everyone else on the same frequency is able to hear his conversation. If the cell phone were a viable option in Die Hard’s narrative then his conversation with the police would be private, which would then give the impending rescue the element of surprise. Instead, Hans immediately jumps to the conclusion that the only place that McClane could possibly be transmitting a long-range message is the rooftop. In the same moment, the walkie-talkie has become the device that warns the police of the danger at Nakatomi, but more concerning for McClane, has announced his position to Gruber’s men.
The walkie-talkie also becomes McClane’s best tool while battling with the terrorists. The officer who finally shows up to investigate whether or not McClane’s pleas for help are legit, Sgt. Al Powell (Reginald Veljohnson), becomes McClane’s confidant during his struggle. A buddy relationship builds via the walkie-talkie between the two men, which gives McClane the opportunity to personalize himself to the audience, creating even more concern for his well-being. Moreover, McClane, knowing that his identity must remain concealed for the safety of Holly, goes by the handle of Roy. Gruber later discovers his identity, which not only puts Holly in grave danger, but his children also. The media have also been listening in to all the conversations between the terrorists, police, and McClane. When his identity is revealed, an unscrupulous reporter, Richard ‘Dick’ Thornberg (William Atherton), discovers the address of Holly’s residence and puts their children on TV. Although not a constituent event in terms of the Nakatomi crisis, McClane’s offspring have been given a face--further instilling the emotional notions of familial bonds that most moviegoers can easily identify with. It also leads to Holly subsequently punching Dick in the face during at the film’s conclusion.

The walkie-talkie serves as speakerphone allowing each side of the conflict to interact with one another. The speed at which the narrative must move forward to create the atmosphere of intense and constant conflict is produced in large part by the walkie-talkie. If the original Die Hard installment were reproduced today, the cell phone would have to be accounted for because
almost certainly every person at the Christmas party would have one. Making the walkie-talkie the central communication figure in *Die Hard* cleverly reconfigures the dynamics of operating in a confined space. The terrorists are able to move to different frequencies to communicate with each other privately and then back to another channel to speak to McClane and the police publically. The terrorists only give the police information that they want them to know, but McClane is able report his findings, which should remain confidential. The phone lines have been cut, but the police are still able to make decisions, although many are wrong and lead to disaster, due to the information being released from the different factions inside the building. The terrorists manipulate the police and FBI, while McClane manipulates the terrorists. Both scenarios are due in part to the accessibility of the walkie-talkie.

*Die Hard 2* (1990)

The walkie-talkie continues to thrive in *Die Hard 2* as one of the primary means of communication between the new terrorist faction and law enforcement. More importantly, however, are the advances in other common means of mobile communication that became increasingly popular between the release of *Die Hard* and *Die Hard 2*. In the first five minutes of the film McClane (Bruce Willis), who is at Dulles International Airport to pick up Holly (Bonnie Bedalia), is shown receiving a message via a pager (figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 McClane receiving a page.
The pager, which provided an affordable way for people to contact each other while away from their telephones before the mobile phone explosion, provides the initial information for *Die Hard* 2’s narrative to begin. In order to contact a pager the caller dials the pager’s number and then the caller is asked to input the number he or she is calling from. The number shows up on the pager, like caller ID, and the receiver knows to call that number back. Holly, who is currently airborne, contacts McClane through this method. There are two issues with the pager’s archaic technology. The first is if the incoming number is not familiar to the person receiving the page then the sender’s identity is most likely unknown. The second problem that arises is when the receiver has to return the call and cannot find or access a landline. McClane experiences both issues simultaneously due to Holly calling from a foreign number and the wait at the pay phones in the airport.

The character of John McClane carries the same attributes from the first installment of the *Die Hard* franchise by portraying a man who does care for or desire to participate in new technological trends. He is a simple, stubborn man who prefers to be left to his own devices to overcome his issues. He is immediately identified as such through his conversation with Holly. She is opposite of John; a modern businessperson, willing to use the technological innovations that are changing the way people and business operates. McClane does not realize that Holly is calling from an airplane and cannot figure out how they are speaking (figures 5.5-5.6). Holly says, “Honey it’s the 90’s, remember? Microchips, microwaves, faxes, air phones.” Moments later Holly is having a discussion with the woman sitting next to her on the plane:

   Older Woman: “Isn’t technology wonderful?"
   Holly: “My husband doesn’t think so.”
The conversation between John and Holly calls direct attention to the age in which *Die Hard 2* takes place. The technology governing how society interacts is changing rapidly, a premise that will be revisited often throughout *Die Hard 2*’s narrative.

Figure 5.5-5.6 Holly talking to John from her plane.

After ending his conversation with Holly, McClane goes to wait for her plane to land and sees some suspicious looking men sitting in the bar. McClane, being a cop with a sixth sense for trouble, follows the men into a restricted area. He proceeds to confront and then battle the two terrorists, ending one of their lives in typical gruesome fashion, while the other barely escapes. The airport police, led by Capt. Carmine Lorenzo (Dennis Franz), are mostly ignorant of the procedure for conducting proper police work, leaving McClane to conduct his own investigation. McClane fingerprints the man he killed and goes to a kiosk to make a fax. He is forced to use a fax to send his old friend from *Die Hard*, Sgt. Powell (Reginald Veljohnson), the prints, so the victim can be identified. The fax is crucial in the events that will transpire throughout the rest of the film because McClane learns that he is not dealing with common thieves, but highly trained mercenaries. Since McClane is not on good terms with Capt. Lorenzo, contacting Al, who is in Los Angeles, is the only way he can get the necessary information to understand who he is dealing with. Before the widespread availability of fax machines, this rapid exchange of data would not have been impossible. There would have been no way for the prints to arrive in Los Angeles under such a tight time constraint. Within minutes, McClane and the film audience
understand that there is a much more sinister faction at work in the airport, which will more than likely result in the death of many participants. From this point on in the narrative, the events of *Die Hard 2* transpire posthaste, exactly what an action/adventure film calls for.

The equipment that the terrorists, air traffic controllers, and police use throughout *Die Hard 2* is not only functionally important, but the visual attributes of the devices also represents each group and their ability to perform their tasks. The police use large, awkward walkie-talkies, while the terrorists use sleek, well-designed, digital ones. The terrorists carry weapons that cannot be detected on airport metal detectors because they are constructed out of porcelain, the police have standard side arms. The terrorist group’s equipment appears to be high-tech and expensive. They operate in a covert and professional manner, where the police seemingly never have control of any situation during the crisis. The terrorists are also able to set up a facility in a church just outside the airport’s property line, which can perform the same functions as the large air traffic control tower that the controllers use. The highly advanced equipment that the terrorists use allows them to tap into the tower’s electronics and completely control its operations. As a punishment for not obeying the orders of the terrorists, Col. Stuart (William Sadler) mimics the voice of the head of the air traffic control and transmits a message through the tower’s frequency. Stuart instructs one of the aircraft to land, but fabricates their altitude from one of his computers, so it reads that the aircraft is higher in the air than it actually is. This results in the large passenger plane crashing into the runway, killing all of the passengers on board. As in other film genres that have been previously discussed, the phone is able to conceal the identity of the sender and the pilots flying the aircraft have no other choice but to believe the voice is authentic. The terrorists’ advanced communication technology allows a particularly gruesome event to occur because of its ability to deceive.
Once the power of the terrorists is confirmed through the massacre of the innocent people aboard the downed plane, panic sets in as to how to take back control of the tower’s communication. McClane, Trudeau (Fred Dalton), and Barnes (Art Evans) must figure out a way to solve the situation. Barnes eventually uses the airport’s outer beacon (a marker for incoming aircraft when they are on approach) to transmit. It disguises their transmissions from the terrorists and allows for all of the aircraft stuck in a holding pattern to be made aware of the problem on the ground. Therefore, Col. Stuart can no longer manipulate any planes. This still leaves McClane the task of finding and defeating the terrorists before they can escape with Gen. Esperanza (Franco Nero), a foreign national being extradited to the Unites States to stand trial.

Barnes makes McClane aware of a nearby neighborhood where the terrorists may possibly have a base of operations and the two men go to investigate. They come upon the church where Col. Stuart is located and McClane goes in for a closer look. It is on McClane’s approach to the church that he is forced to “wake up and smell the 90’s,” as his admonished earlier.

McClane informs Barnes to be ready to use his cell phone, the only cell phone that is used by a character in the film, to call the Marine anti-terrorist unit that has been deployed to the airport. The cell phone’s appearance in *Die Hard 2* is infrequent, but is pivotal in the events leading to the climax of the film. As McClane quietly moves toward the church, his pager begins to beep (figures 5.7-5.10). The page is being sent from Holly, who is again using an air phone, much to McClane’s chagrin because the beeping noise has alerted a century to his position. The terrorist, who is eventually defeated with an icicle through the eye, attacks McClane. Meanwhile, Barnes is able to alert Capt. Lorenzo and the Marine unit as to location of the church. The entire scenario would be difficult to construct without the availability of mobile technology: if McClane does not own a pager than the guard would not be tipped off to his
presence. Furthermore, if the air phone is not available to Holly than the page would have never occurred in the first place. Most importantly, if Barnes does not have a cell phone the police and army cannot be contacted with such immediacy. Barnes could always run to a neighboring house to use a telephone, but in terms of screen time, this would create a delay in the action sequence. Besides, why have Barnes run to another location when he can make a call from his current position. The narratives of action/adventure films are based entirely on the pace of the events.

Figure 5.7-5.10 “Wake up and smell the 90’s.”

The above sequence shows the power of mobile distance communication in affecting the progression of a film’s discourse. Two communications through three different, highly advanced (at the time of Die Hard 2’s release) mobile devices allows the narrative to proceed down a path that would not have been available even five years before its production. The presence of advanced communication technology will become an even more essential component of the next film in the series, Die Hard with a Vengeance, further ingraining the cell phone as the future of distance communication in Hollywood productions.
Die Hard with a Vengeance (1995)

In Die Hard with a Vengeance, McClane (Bruce Willis) is set in his true home, New York City. Through previous information in Die Hard, McClane has expressed that he is a New York cop and only moved to Los Angeles to try to save his marriage. Holly (Bonnie Bedalia) and John have become estranged, with John living in New York while Holly and the kids live somewhere else. McClane appears alcoholic and is a more grizzled and weathered version of himself than in the previous two films. McClane wakes from a bender to deal with the terrorists wreaking havoc in downtown and proclaims several times throughout movie that he has a “Bad fuckin’ hangover.” Hangover or not, McClane is still the wiley, veteran police officer and is always up to the task. The task, however, is a mysterious one, as McClane is sent to Harlem with a sign strapped to his body reading “I Hate Niggers.” There is no reason given as to why McClane has been chosen for this job or what purpose it serves, only that it must be done. With a little help from a “Good Samaritan” named Zeus (Samuel L. Jackson), McClane escapes from impending assault by the local street thugs. The narrative officially begins when McClane and Zeus arrive at the police precinct and the unknown assailant that made him wear the sign contacts McClane.

A bomb explodes in the first minute of the film in a busy, downtown area. In order to prevent further bombs from detonating in the city, McClane must travel on foot to specific pay phones in an allotted amount of time to answer the terrorist phone calls. Zeus must also travel with McClane as a punishment for helping him. Here the telephone becomes the central mode of communication and will remain so for the first half of the film.

The pay phone has become virtually useless in today’s society, but in 1995, the majority of people did not own a cell phone and frequently made use of pay phones. In a city like New
York, there would have been a pay phone on every corner, allowing the terrorist to willfully maneuver McClane to any place in the city and still have access to distance communication. The search for and answering of the assigned pay phone becomes part of the game that McClane must play in order for survival. The other part of the game is to answer the riddles that terrorist gives in order to stop the impending bombings.

Figure 5.11 McClane and Zeus trying gain access to a pay phone.

The dichotomous relationship between old technology and new technology is significant in *Die Hard with a Vengeance* because a well-financed, savvy terrorist is using a cell phone to manipulate a deteriorating police officer through an archaic pay phone. While McClane and Zeus struggle to make it to each pay phone location and answer riddles, Simon (Jeremy Irons) watches closely from concealed locations, viewing his prey’s struggle. McClane first realizes that he and Zeus are the subject of a cruel, voyeuristic game when they have to kick a woman off a pay phone in order to answer the incoming call (figure 5.11). McClane tries to make up an excuse as to why he could not answer the phone as quickly as he should have and Simon retorts that he should just say that there was a fat woman talking on it and he could not answer.

McClane now knows he is being watched. There are different ways for Simon to deal with McClane, but the cell phone allows him the freedom to move to any location near or far from McClane. His proximity to the action is completely in his control. Instead of having to use the
closest pay phone or find a landline inside an apartment or office, Simon is able to operate on the rooftops of nearby buildings, carefully playing the game on his terms.

Unlike the previous two *Die Hard* films, *Die Hard with a Vengeance* also creates a mystery behind the figure that is perpetuating the criminal acts inflicted on McClane and New York City. The movement of Simon from location to location provides two narrative functions: the first is that he is able to witness the outcome of each of McClane’s tasks and the second is to make sure that the actual reason for blowing up sections of New York City is being accomplished. Simon, much like Hans (Alan Rickman) from *Die Hard*, masks his true intentions of thievery behind an elaborate terrorist plot. In order to keep the police and later the FBI busy, he first blows up several locations around the city to build anxiety within the local law enforcement and then creates a bomb scare directed towards one of New York City’s hundreds of public schools. With all of the law organizations preoccupied with locating the school bomb, Simon is able to easily slip in and out of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York with millions of dollars in gold bullion.

The conversation that occurs to jump-start the panic-stricken search for the bomb in the school takes place in a very public location after a subway explosion in Manhattan occurs. The cell phone becomes the impetus for the communication between McClane, Zeus, the FBI, and the police, who receive a call as they enter a van (figures 5.12-5.13). The phone is placed on speakerphone dock, so everyone in the car can be involved in the conversation. Technology has moved beyond the requirement of such a dock in today’s cell phone market because even the most archaic of mobile devices has a push button speakerphone option built in providing the same service. However, in 1995 this was a high-tech device, indicating the technological
capabilities of federal government organizations. The federal government, unlike state
governments, always has access to innovations in all realms of technology.

Figure 5.12-5.13 Cell phone turned into a mobile speakerphone.

At the beginning of the conversation, Simon smugly identifies all of the men participating
in the phone conversation. The FBI agent and the men from “other organizations” do not wish
their presence to be made known. Simon, however, points them out anyway, showing his
knowledge of those tracking him and his ability to always stay one-step ahead of the authorities.
This is not all just good homework on the behalf of Simon. He is actually located on the rooftop
of a neighboring building. He is physically watching the conversation as it takes place, ensuring
his plan goes into effect. He warns the police and FBI of the bomb located in a school
somewhere in New York City and instructs them of the rules that they must abide to. The bomb
reacts to transmitters (e.g., walkie-talkies), therefore eliminating the use of them by law
enforcement. Again, this is 1995, so the average citizen, including police officers and
firefighters does not possess a mobile phone. The main source of distance communication used
with such proficiency in the Die Hard and Die Hard 2 has been effectively eliminated. If law
enforcers have to make a call, they must use a pay phone, which is time consuming. Moreover,
Simon is not the average citizen; he, like the FBI, is well financed and has access to every piece
of desirable technology, including a cell phone. In addition, the bomb in the school is a fake,
allowing him to utilize the walkie-talkie, while the police, etc. struggle on the pay phone. This
narrative sequence follows the parameters of action/adventure films by utilizing the most
efficient form of communication possible. The cell phone allows for the prompt passage of
information, leading the story in a direction that will provide an innovative pattern of events and
collection.

After walkie-talkies are rendered useless, the cell phone begins its pivotal role in the
forthcoming events of the narrative. McClane is given a cell phone to use, but soon after shoots
the phone on accident during a close quarters confrontation with terrorists in an elevator.
Finding another cell phone to use becomes the only means through which McClane will be able
to communicate with other police. McClane and Zeus figure out the real reason behind the
terrorist plot and have to relay the information to Walter (Larry Bryggman), McClane’s boss.
They see a man in a Mercedes driving down the road talking on a cell phone and proceed to take
the car and the phone (figure 5.14). In 1995, it was most likely that only a well-to-do individual,
such as one driving a Mercedes, would have a car or cell phone. Within American culture at this
time, the cell phone signifies wealth. Someone driving a Chevrolet Lumina would probably not
be the owner of a cell phone in the early to mid 90’s. After stealing the Mercedes, McClane
immediately calls Walter to inform him of the robbery of the Federal Reserve Bank. Here, one
of the classic problems with cell phones problems occurs again. The signal is lost and McClane
is unable to give Walter the necessary information. A frustrating component of using a cell
phone is that a call cannot always be completed. In addition, signal loss serves as a narrative
device to thwart the use of a cell phone by the characters, but still acknowledge its presence.
This is most common, as mentioned earlier, in the horror genre. McClane’s reaction to his
misfortune is one expressed by many individuals in the diegetic world of cinema and in real life,
“God damn cellular fuckin’ phones!”
Even with the introduction of the cell phone as a vital communication medium, distance conversations between McClane and his superiors become nonexistent. The issue with early cellular technology was that the network connecting mobile devices was not nearly as functional as it is today. The emergency services are rendered helpless in *Die Hard with a Vengeance* because they are not able to use regular transmitting devices and even those with cellular phones cannot complete their calls because the system is so easily overloaded. The possibilities of distance communication are recognized in the film’s narrative, but are taken away. This, however, allows McClane to, once again, become the one man wrecking crew that the *Die Hard* franchise necessitates. The main theme behind each of the three films is that a heroic, lone hero has the ability to defeat a criminal organization on his own even if his access to technology is limited. Granted, McClane has Zeus as a sidekick, but the bulk of the action surrounds McClane and his uncanny ability find his way in and out of certain death situations.

*Speed (1994)*

Although *Speed* was released a year before *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, it provides an appropriate segue between the two action/adventure franchises discussed in this chapter. *Die Hard with a Vengeance* utilizes the cell phone at a critical turning point in its narrative. The police are given an alternative to conventional communication methods (e.g., the walkie-talkie) after the terrorists render them useless. Without the accessibility of the cell phone in the mid
90’s, McClane and the rest of emergency services would be left virtually helpless because there are only so many pay phones in New York City.

Jack Traven (Keanu Reeves) has a similar problem after a bus explodes in Los Angeles and the man behind the bombing alerts him to yet another bomb located on a different bus. Jack does not own a cell phone and is not currently working when he receives the bomb threat from Howard Payne (Dennis Hopper). Therefore, he has a limited amount of time to board the endangered bus and get in touch with the police department. How can Jack do all of these things in a minimal amount of screen time? The simple, expedient answer to this problem is finding a cell phone. This is 1994, so like Die Hard 2 and Die Hard with a Vengeance cell phones are not a common possession among average citizens. Jack must search out a cell phone, while chasing down the bus with the bomb. As luck would have it, he commandeers a Jaguar, likely to be driven by someone possessing wealth and more importantly a cell phone (figure 5.15). Just like McClane who sees a man driving a Mercedes while talking on a car phone, Jack happens upon a Jaguar owned by an apparent music mogul; this being just the type of person who would own a cell phone in 1994. Jack tries to stop several other cars before he gains possession of the Jaguar, but in terms of screen time and narrative cohesion, Jack must commandeer a vehicle that contains a cell phone. The film is called Speed for two reasons: the first being that the bus must maintain 50 miles per hour after Payne arms the bomb on board, otherwise it will detonate and the second being that the events of the story happen in overly expeditious manner. If action/adventure films call for a rapid succession of extraordinary happenings to occur over the course of the story, Speed sets a hallmark within the genre.
As with the *Die Hard* films, the antagonist, Howard Payne, has access to the most high-tech devices to accomplish his task. Two devices are central to Payne’s control of Traven and the bus. The first is a camera hidden behind the bus’ rear view mirror, which allows him to watch all that occurs on the bus. The second is his cell phone, which he uses not only to keep in contact with Jack, but he also as the detonator for his bombs. Payne detonates the first bus bomb from a location near the actual event. He is located in a car and is able to blow up the bus and then call Jack from his mobile phone (figures 5.16-5.17). Payne calls Jack on a pay phone near the explosion, which Jack answers. Later in the film, Payne detonates a smaller bomb aboard the bus via cell, which kills one of the passengers as she tries to escape (figures 5.18-5.19).
Again, here the similarities between Simon in *Die Hard with a Vengeance* and Payne can be discerned. In order to maintain complete control of the situation they must remain mobile and able to communicate in any location.

The cell phone is the intermediary between Jack and Payne, but more importantly, it connects Jack and the rest of the police force. Jack must negotiate Los Angeles traffic in order to stay above 50 miles per hour. This is accomplished through Jack’s ability to communicate with Capt. McMahon (Joe Morton), who guides him through the crowded streets while talking on the cell phone. With all of the road construction occurring around Los Angeles, there is no way of knowing which streets are less congested than others are. The mobile phone provides the information necessary for the bus to sustain 50 miles per hour.

The cellular phone is not responsible for the pace of the narrative throughout the entire film. It does, however, deliver the catalyst for the bus to begin its journey through the streets of Los Angeles, which eventually leads to the survival of all but one of the passengers on board. Jack stays in contact with the police and Payne through one device, while remaining in constant motion. Without the cell phone, *Speed’s* discourse would have to move forward through other avenues of communication or lack thereof. The introduction of the mobile phone into *Speed’s* narrative eliminates the use of alternative means of communication. By allowing Jack to gain possession of a cell phone, any communication issues have been solved. The plot proceeds forward in a fashion that accommodates for the most rapid action in the smallest amount of screen time.


Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) is a covert assassin working for the United States government who becomes an amnesiac after being shot in the back and falling into the ocean.
during a botched mission. The premise of the three films is to follow Bourne while he attempts to uncover his true identity and understand why mysterious assassins and government officials are hunting him. Bourne has many of the seemingly superhuman gifts associated with an action/adventure hero: he is proficient in many languages, able to work his way through even the most difficult obstacles, he can be hurt, but not stopped, a penchant for using any close object as a lethal weapon, is highly skilled in hand-to-hand combat, can seduce women, etc. These traits are all extremely important for an action hero to succeed in defeating his or her enemies, but in the information age one must always stay one-step ahead of the game. Control over the communication and information media that have effected nearly every facet of today’s society is vital to conquering the adversity set before action heroes such as Jason Bourne. A hero must defeat his enemy by using the very devices that are being utilized to hunt him.

In 2002, the cell phone explosion had been fully realized with everyone from adolescent children to senior citizens embracing the technology. Hollywood was no exception. The Bourne Identity (2002) made no qualms about incorporating any and every technological innovation in existence in the early 2000’s. The potential of the cell phone is fully realized over the course of the three films, allowing the narrative to progress at an exhausting pace. Mobile technology is central not only to Bourne’s survival, but to operation being carried out by the men and women who are trying to kill him. Information is at a premium and the faster one can get it, the more effective one can be.

The Bourne Identity is largely covered in a cloud of confusion, at least for its main character. Bourne searches to understand why he was fished out of the ocean with several bullets in his back. Who has done this to him? How does he know different languages? How does he know how to fight so well? His search begins after he has recovered aboard the fishing
vessel where the men who saved his life work. The man operating on Bourne pulls a small object from his back while removing the bullets; it has information on it that proves to be vital to his existence. The information on the capsule leads him to a safety deposit box that is full of foreign currency, passports, a gun, etc. He does not know why he has access to this box, but uses its contents to begin the long process of self-discovery and preservation. Not only does the box provide a means for Bourne to survive, but also alerts the men in charge of the program responsible for his all of his training that he is still alive. Bourne must now use his skills to avoid the authorities, while trying to ascertain his true identity.

At first, Treadstone, the program he worked for as an assassin, completely outmatches Bourne. They have every piece of technology at their disposal to track and locate him, while he must rely on his instincts to get out of trouble. Unlike the days of leaving messages for people at designated locations, the advances of technology in 2002 allow the hunt for Bourne to operate at a breakneck pace. Treadstone has the capability to contact multiple agents at one time through the cell phone, constantly updating each man on the status of Bourne and also importantly, how to pursue him (figures 5.20-5.21). The prompt passage of information allows the hunters to readjust intermittently. This forces Bourne to make decisions constantly with little time for rest. Treadstone’s operation spans across the Atlantic Ocean with Conklin (Chris Cooper) located in Washington D. C. and Nicolette (Julia Stiles) located in Europe. From a
control room filled with state-of-the-art tracking equipment, Bourne can be located the moment he pops up on the “grid” (figures 5.22-5.23). With numerous agents and other law enforcement organizations at the ready, Bourne is forced to make expedient escapes from each of his destinations.

Figure 5.22-5.23 Treadstone’s operational capabilities

One scene is particularly crucial to the succession of events that occur, in not only The Bourne Identity, but also in the next two films. Bourne is on the run with a woman named Marie (Franka Potente) who places a phone call from a phone booth to the house of an old friend. Treadstone personnel are able to trace the phone call and deduce that Marie could have likely made the call. The agents assume this because the call is made from one of the locations where Marie and Bourne would most likely be positioned. Treadstone operators are then able to search back into Marie’s phone records over the previous years and learn that the number she has called belongs to an acquaintance of hers. Information provided by not only the actual pay phone, but also the records kept through the phone company have led Treadstone to the approximate whereabouts of the fugitives. This is all accomplished with minimal effort on behalf of Treadstone due to the technological sophistication of their operation. There is little break in the action due to the accessibility of the telephone and the pace of the narrative is unimpeded.

In direct correlation to Marie’s phone call Bourne is able finally gain access to a cell phone, which leads him to come in direct contact with his pursuers. An agent is sent to the
farmhouse of Marie’s friend. The landline is cut preventing any outside contact with the police. Neither Bourne, Marie, nor Marie’s friend has a mobile phone at this time, therefore completely leaving them to their own devices. Bourne cleverly leads the assassin away from the farmhouse and gains an advantage by fighting the man out in an open field. Bourne kills the agent and more importantly retrieves his cell phone. Bourne can now communicate while moving, leveling the playing field between him and Treadstone. Furthermore, Bourne is able to search through the recent calls in the cell phone and call Conklin at Treadstone. This one call provides the catalyst for the story to continue into the next two films. Bourne is now in direct contact with those that wish to kill him and able to manipulate them as they have done to him. From this point on the reliance on the cell phone for Bourne to communicate is absolute. The narrative follows a pattern of communication from public locations made possible only by mobile technology.

Bourne seemingly falls off the grid at the conclusion of The Bourne Identity, as he is shown finding Marie in an exotic port where they can live their lives in seclusion. His trail is not left cold for long; however, as his fingerprint is planted at the sight of a murder and Pamela Landy (Joan Allen) rekindles the hunt for him.

The Bourne Supremacy (2004) begins, in medias res, with Landy as the point man of a botched mission; an unknown source attacks Landy’s men and leaves a trail pointing to Bourne. Communication technology is at the heart of the mission. A complex network connecting men in the field, the “hub,” Landy, and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) facilitates the operation. The complicated mission ends in tragedy as the survey positions are too far away from the actual crime when they are needed to salvage the mission. During the crime scene investigation, one of the agents finds and scans Bourne’s fingerprint on his PDA. Even the once unconventional use of a fax machine is far too outdated for the purposes of government work in The Bourne
Supremacy. The PDA has the capability to scan and send the print directly to a computer, where the print can be immediately identified (figures 5.24-5.25). In *Die Hard 2* McClane is required to fingerprint the bad guy he had just eliminated and then proceed to find a fax machine to send the prints to Al in Los Angeles. This entire scenario has been rendered obsolete with the programs available for hand held devices such as a PDA. The print is identified and the narrative can progress forward in a matter of seconds. The CIA knows exactly who they are dealing with in one quarter of the time it took McClane to perform the same process in *Die Hard 2*. Time is at a premium in the *Bourne* films and the advances in information technology have hastened the process of transmitting data necessary to the events of the plot.

Figure 5.24-5.25 Bourne’s fingerprint sent through a PDA.

The CIA soon discovers Bourne’s location and they send an assassin to eliminate him once and for all. Bourne is able to escape with his life, but the same cannot be said for Marie who is shot as they try to make their escape. Bourne now knows that no matter what he does or where he goes, the CIA will always be able to find him. The answer to his problems is to solve the mystery of his identity and relieve him of the burden he has been carrying inside since his amnesia began.

Bourne knows that the CIA will be monitoring all transportation hubs, hoping that he will slip up and reveal his location. Instead of vigorously trying to find those individuals responsible for Marie’s death, he makes his presence known by using a passport that will immediately
disclose his location. He is making the CIA come to him. After the CIA learns his whereabouts, a consulate officer detains Bourne. While interrogating Bourne the officer receives a call on his cell phone alerting him to the danger that Bourne represents. Bourne assumes that the voice on the other end of the phone has indeed warned the officer of his importance and decides to take action. He disarms and defeats the officer, along with the other guards located in the room, and as he moves to escape, copies the officer’s SIM card while he is unconscious (figures 5.26-5.27). Bourne’s cell phone is now connected to the officer’s cell phone. If the officer receives a call, Bourne can listen in. Moreover, Bourne now has all of the stored information that the agent’s cell phone contains. In 16 seconds of screen time Bourne is able to record the SIM cards information. In order to listen in on phone conversations in the past, the CIA would have to bug a landline while the person was out of their office or house. Cell phones are more easily monitored, but complex computer systems are typically needed such as the one used by the FBI in *The Departed*. A cell phone SIM card is the only way to attain information via phone in such a short amount of time. Bourne had to have the correct device on his person to achieve such a feat, but it is no surprise that he did have it being the resourceful man that he is.

Action/adventure films call for the protagonist to often have the most modern technology available, unless you are John McClane, and Bourne follows those conventions. The interchangeability of cell phone technology is necessary for Bourne to act as efficiently as possible. The officer wakes up and immediately makes a call to Landy telling her that Bourne has escaped. He is unaware that Bourne has made a copy of his SIM card. Bourne now knows that Landy is the person in charge of his pursuit and learns where she will be headed to next. Learning this information is necessary, but more importantly the quickness with which Bourne receives the data allows the events to occur in immediate succession. The narrative continues to
maintain its blistering pace with Bourne using each bit of information to swiftly move towards his objective.

Figure 5.26-5.27 Bourne copying the SIM card.

Bourne now needs to figure where Landy is staying and decides to use old technology to learn her location. He thumbs through a phone book calling every hotel until he reaches the one where Landy is staying. He now has her location, but he does not know what she looks like. There are many ways to go about figuring this out, but the cell phone provides the most expedient solution. Bourne calls the front desk with his cell phone asking to speak to Pamela Landy. While his initial cell phone call is being connected, he approaches the front desk and asks the same thing; to be connected to Landy. The desk clerk dials Landy’s room using her room number, which Bourne sees and now knows. The call made from the desk is busy because his cell phone call is still being connected. The busy signal provides Bourne with an out instead of actually having to talk to Landy and give away his position. After he has Landy’s room number he simply ends the other phone call that was made on his mobile phone, which he has had hidden in his pocket. The interconnection between the landline telephone and the cell phone has given Bourne the capability of acting as two people. He is able to trick the desk clerk who unknowingly gives out Landy’s room number to a stranger. Now having Landy’s room number Bourne is able to wait for her to exit her room, revealing her identity and allowing him to follow her to the CIA’s office. One could accomplish the same task with another landline, but Bourne
is working alone. The mobile phone’s covertness, due to its size and portability, allows such manipulation to occur. Bourne’s resourcefulness is largely dependent on the attributes of his cell phone.

Now that Bourne knows what Landy actually looks like, he follows her to the office where the operation is being headquartered. Bourne ascends to the roof of the building adjacent to Landy’s location where he sets up a rifle. While viewing Landy through the open blinds of her office Bourne makes use of his cell phone to call Landy’s cell phone (figures 5.28-5.30). He has her number because of copying the officer’s SIM card from the interrogation room. The mobility of his cellular phone allows Bourne to call Landy from a location that gives him the advantage. Landy has no idea that she is being watched through a riflescope and could be shot at any moment. While Bourne is talking to Landy he sees Nicolette standing in the room. He offers to meet with Nicolette and Landy who tries to outsmart Bourne by saying that she does not know whom he is talking about. Bourne answers by saying that she is standing next to you. At this moment Landy realizes that she is being watched, which produces an intense reaction in not only Landy, but creates suspense for the viewing audience. The uniqueness of the conversation builds the tension between Bourne and Landy. The conversation might have materialized in any number of ways, but the effect of Bourne watching Landy through a riflescope while talking on his cell phone from a rooftop adds high drama and suspense. Mobile technology is the only reason a scene shot in this way can exist, as opposed to him calling from a pay phone in the lobby of the office building or something else to that affect. The uniformity of distance communication has been revitalized because of the incorporation of mobile technology. Also, Bourne is able to see Nicolette from his vantage point enabling the next sequence of events to occur.
Bourne continues to stay barely one-step ahead of Landy and her team as he attempts to gather information concerning his involvement in Treadstone. The cell phone remains a constant in Bourne’s pursuit of the truth. He is able to stay mobile and still communicate, which is the only way he can possibly survive while solving the mystery of his identity. *The Bourne Supremacy* concludes with a flash forward of Bourne again located in a building opposite of Landy looking at her through a window with binoculars. This scene will be revisited in *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) as Bourne nears the end of his quest to determine how he became the dangerous amnesiac that he is.

*The Bourne Ultimatum* begins almost at the moment *The Bourne Supremacy* ends with Bourne injured and the Russian authorities in pursuit. Bourne is able to drop out of sight momentarily, but soon reads a newspaper article concerning his exploits of running from the police. The reporter who wrote the story, Simon Ross (Paddy Considine), has been given inside information from an informant who was involved in Treadstone and another operation called Blackbriar. The CIA’s spying capability knows no bounds as they monitor cell phone...
conversations from around the world with a program designed to pick out words that involve secret or disconcerting information. Ross mentions the word Blackbriar in a call that he has made leading the CIA to track him as a national security risk. Having read Ross’ article, Bourne contacts him to set up a meeting. Unfortunately, for Bourne, Ross is already being tracked when the meeting is to take place, therefore putting Bourne back in harm’s way.

Ross and Bourne are to meet in a busy mall area. Bourne being ever cautious hides and surveys the situation before going out to meet Ross. Bourne realizes that Ross is being monitored and discretely slips a new cell phone in Ross’ pocket while passing by. Bourne knows that the CIA has tapped Ross’ phone and therefore he must contact Ross on a clean line. Simply placing a new cell phone in Ross’ pocket is an easy fix to a complex problem. Before the miniaturization of modern cell phones, this solution would have never been available. Bourne and Ross would have had to figure out some other way to communicate, which would have led to alternative events to occur in the narrative. With the replacement of Ross’ cell phone, the action can continue forward without pause for a setting change.

The following sequence is only made possible through the advantages of mobile communication. Bourne must guide Ross out of the busy mall area and to safety without the CIA being able to track him (figures 5.31-5.32). Bourne calls Ross and begins to guide through elaborate steps, which will allow Ross to avoid detection. Bourne meanwhile moves in the shadows, taking out CIA operatives that stand in the way of their escape. The two men work fluidly together while being separated by throngs of people over a considerable distance. The
CIA immediately realizes that Ross is talking to someone on another phone and the agents move to try to track the signal. This is to no avail, however, but they do know that someone is safeguarding Ross by guiding him and taking out their agents. The CIA soon after realizes that Bourne is the one controlling Ross’ movements through the cell phone, so they call in an assassin to eliminate both men. The specialized assassin is only used when the CIA feels the situation is getting out of their control and therefore, the identity of the targets is concealed until the assassin is to be utilized. Again, the cell phone makes this entire process much simpler in terms of the speed of action necessary in this sequence. The assassin is informed of his target via text message; sending the pictures of both Bourne and Ross (figure 5.33). The assassin only has to flip open his phone and look at the picture message to engage his prey. The fast-paced cutting between Bourne, Ross, and then later the assassin makes for a compelling and suspenseful sequence. Bourne choreographs Ross’ movements through the cell phone and then the assassin lays in wait for one of the men to slip up. Bourne and Ross must move with a preciseness only
made possible with through mobile communication. Bourne could have just snatched up Ross and they could have attempted to escape together, but in order to innovate within the action/adventure genre the narrative needs to follow a new path. A hero rescuing someone in trouble is an old scenario that has played out in much the same way over years past. In this case, the cell phone has provided a way for the hero and the victim to work together in a way that adheres to the cultural environment of the information age in the 21st century.

Unfortunately for Ross he does not listen to Bourne and ultimately meets his demise at the hands of the assassin. Bourne is able to escape and the race towards absolution from his past continues. Later in the film Bourne has again met up with Nicolette, who reveals that she was a former romantic interest of his, strengthening his bond with her. She begins to help him search for the person who was Ross’ contact from the CIA, a man named Neal Daniels (Colin Stinton). She has been working with Daniels and has inside information as to his location. Bourne and Nicky, as she is more often called, proceed to try to meet with Daniels, but not before the CIA figures out that Nicky is now involved with Bourne’s plan. Bourne and Nicky set up the next “asset,” Desh (Joey Ansah), by sending a false message that Nicky needs to meet with him. Here the cell phone, much like the telephone in the past, provides the deceit necessary for the protagonists to follow their plan. Desh does not know that Nicky is working with Bourne and therefore has no reason to suspect that she is now the enemy. The phone provides the perfect cover through its ability to manipulate. Desh meets Nicky, which allows Bourne to then follow him. Desh has been assigned to kill Daniels and Bourne aims to try to stop him. Here the mobile capability of the cell phone not only plays a part in communication, but becomes the trigger for the detonation of a bomb. Desh is able to plant the bomb and then move away while
all along possessing the power to trigger the explosive at any moment (figure 5.34). The
detonation could be achieved in any number of ways, but the cell phone provides the most
Figure 5.34 Desh detonating the bomb via cell phone.

convenient source. The cell phone can provide many kinds of transmissions, therefore leaving
no reason to use another source to blow up the bomb.

In many scenarios within the three Bourne films, the narrative could move forward
without the use of a cell phone. There are always ways to construct a story around different
means of communication. The importance of utilizing the cell phone lays in the speed in which
the events of the narrative occur. Information is passed with immediacy, creating a filmic
environment that allows little time for rest and relaxation. Action/adventure films that take place
in the present demand that information technology become a significant part of the story.
Furthermore, the guesswork and lucky breaks that were once part of the success of protagonists
in action/adventure films have diminished. Information technology such as computers and cell
phones provide assurance, verification, and confidence to a character such as Jason Bourne. He
is able to proceed to his objective with more certainty than, for example, the James Bond of old.
Bourne receives reliable answers in a matter of seconds by bugging a cell phone or searching the
Internet. Information is abundant and readily available, which has created the cultural
communication atmosphere of needing more, faster. People demand instant gratification;
waiting is no longer socially acceptable. Why should a fictional film character such as Jason Bourne be any different?

**Action/Adventure, Narrative Form, and Telephony**

The most obvious narrative form present in the action/adventure films of this analysis is dual-focus epic. In each film a there is a struggle, with one side of the conflict trying to overcome the adversity presented by the other. The main difference from traditional stories of conflict and the *Die Hard* films, *Speed*, and the *Bourne* films is that in each case a singular man is trying to defeat his opponent. McClane does have some help from his male sidekicks and women play a significant part in helping both Traven and Bourne, but the end it is up to these men alone to ultimately defeat their adversaries. Unlike epic stories of battle such as *Braveheart* (1995) or *Troy* (2004), McClane, Traven, and Bourne are often alone in the pursuit of their goals. Because it is one man fighting an evil force in each narrative, the incorporation of conversation between each protagonist and his antagonist is prevalent. All three heroes not only fight their opponent with strength and technology, but also through dialogue. This creates an action/adventure war of words. Each man must prove they are in control through both words and physical strength. These conversations develop the personality of the characters, provide information, and build suspense. The plot of each film is directly affected by the banter that takes place between the protagonists and antagonists, predicting future events and providing information necessary for narrative momentum. These conversations take place regularly throughout each film creating tension and suspense, which are two fundamental attributes of the action/adventure genre. Furthermore, the rapid fire and witty dialogue within each conversation corresponds to the narrative flow of action/adventure films, expeditious and explosive.
Along with dual-focus epic, the *Bourne* trilogy also has elements of single-focus narrative structure. Although Conklin in *The Bourne Identity* and then Landy in the latter two films represent the closest thing to a developed antagonist, the films are really completely about Bourne and his internal struggle. His actions cause reactions by the CIA for the most part, not the other way around. He usually has the upper hand and those that wish to cause him harm must do so on his terms. This is not true in every case, but the narrative mostly utilizes the actions of Bourne as a catalyst for events to come. Moreover, Bourne initiates most of the conversations that take place, especially those by cell phone. Bourne is the one who contacts Ross and Landy. If he did not want to talk to them, they would have no way of getting in touch with him. His desire to seek out the truth of his identity is the only reason the CIA is able to track him in the first place. He is found while living with Marie, but that is a result of him getting too comfortable in his environment. He is discovered due to his own negligence, as alluded to in *The Bourne Supremacy*, not because of the CIA’s superior tracking skills.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

Telephony has evolved parallel to the film industry, resulting in distance communication media that can have a major impact on the construction of film narratives. Telephones not only provide immediate communication between individuals over great distances, but also as this analysis has shown, they are channels of deceit, provocation, confrontation, and death. Telephones and their mobile offspring, cell phones, are able to manipulate truth in ways that are not possible via face-to-face conversation. Criminals are able to use them to steal and murderers are able to use them to trap victims. Telephones connect heroes and villains, enabling suspense to build until a final cathartic confrontation manifests itself when the two sides clash. Moreover, as telecommunication technology has developed, the possibilities of creating intricate conversations between film characters have become limitless. There is no longer a need to find the nearest pay phone or get to a house where a landline is present; cell phones provide communication from nearly any location unless, of course, the narrative dictates that the characters are too far from a cell tower to get a signal. The transition between old communication technology and new is evident in each of the three genres selected for analysis. Distance communication has long been a possibility due to the increasingly powerful technologies of the telegraph, landline, telephone, two-way radio (e.g., the walkie-talkie), fax machine, and pager. The cell phone, however, has taken the possibilities of communication far
beyond the limits of these older technologies and created new and innovative ways of rendering the events of a story.

The three genres that I chose to analyze all have a long history within Hollywood and provide clear examples of telephony at work within their narratives. All of the case studies that were selected aligned with the conventions of their respected genres. One of the main elements within each film is the use of telephony, in some form, to supplement the established genre conventions. In the horror genre, each film demonstrates the capability of telephony to connect the killer with his or her victims. Whether on a landline telephone or a cell phone, each killer uses telephony to mask their identities—leaving their victims in suspense as to the whereabouts of their stalker and when he or she will strike next. The bloodlust of the killer is perpetuated through distance communication, teasing their victims until it is time to strike. The gangster genre uses telephony as a means to an end. One of the main elements within the gangster genre is the rise and fall of the protagonists as a result of their carelessness and as retribution for their wrongdoings. Telephony supplements and then becomes a reason for this downfall to occur in each of the gangster genre case studies. Tony is able to set up Johnny through the telephone, which leads to him becoming the undisputed kingpin within his gang. This then leads to his eventual demise as he becomes more and more obsessed with power. The film case studies that come after Scarface involve telephony in more intricate ways. The chapter concludes with The Departed, which completely centers on the capabilities of mobile technology. The phone, in all of its variations, provides a distance link between the characters in each film and more importantly supplies secretive information to law enforcement. Telephony plays a vital role in the downfall of the gangsters within each narrative. Phones are tapped by law enforcement
allowing secret information to be compromised and the fast pursuit of each criminal is often times facilitated through phone calls.

There are two major conventions within the action/adventure genre. The first is the defeat of an adversary and the second is the incorporation of violent sequences into the story. Telephony does not directly cause either of these two things to happen, for the most part, but does give each side of the conflict an edge. Gadgets and technology play a major role in action/adventure films; whoever has the high-tech devices gains an advantage. However, this does not always lead to victory for one side, as demonstrated in the *Die Hard* films. Within the realm of technological innovations is communication technology. The newest and most sophisticated devices typically play a major part in the plot of an action/adventure film. Each case study presented within the action/adventure genre utilizes modern communication devices to drive the narrative forward. Granted, it is not always necessary to use the most advanced forms of telephony within an action/adventure film, but the presence of such technology helps distinguish one film from others. Communication between the protagonists and antagonists is often a vital element within the action/adventure genre. Their distance conversations, whether through a walkie-talkie, telephone, or cell phone, establish a game of words creating more tension within the conflict which eventually ends in the violent demise of the villain. Furthermore, mobile technology, as exemplified in the *Bourne* trilogy, has created many options for the characters of action/adventure films in terms of when and where they can communicate. Each chapter of my analysis has begun with examples of a genre that employs an older form of distance communication (e.g., the telephone or walkie-talkie) to accomplish the goals of the narrative. The telephone and walkie-talkie not only provide distance communication in each example, but more importantly, they supplement certain conventions imperative to each genre.
The telephone provides anxiety of the unknown in the horror genre and perpetuates criminality and violence in the gangster genre. The walkie-talkie provides instantaneous communication between hero and villain in the Die Hard films, perpetuating the rapid narrative movement necessary in the action/adventure genre. The ability to deceive and complicate via a given communication device is critical to the events that transpire in films within all three genres. Distance communication hides the identities of both the heroes and villains, giving each side of the conflict the advantage of anonymity. Narratives in each genre rely on the telephone to reveal certain information through character conversation, releasing enough data for the story to continue forward. The cause-and-effect component of film narratives has long relied on telephony to provide the impetus for certain events to occur. Within the discourse, certain genres necessitate events to occur more quickly or sometimes rely on distance conversations to establish the relationship between certain characters. These relationships result in one of the three types of conflicts that have been included in the conclusion of each chapter. Most notably, Altman’s (2008) theory of dual-focus epic is present within each genre discussed here. The creation of conflict is not the result of a phone conversation, but telephony plays a pivotal role in developing each conversation and communication, which eventually leads to some form of resolution. Telephony has evolved into a more innovative and informative cultural device and filmmakers have embraced the possibilities, harnessing its potential in terms of character communication and narrative movement.

The cell phone has changed the time and space in which characters in motion pictures are able to communicate. The widespread use of mobile technology in today’s cinema aligns with the interconnection between film and telephony throughout history. The two technological media continue to share an invaluable relationship. Any locale is viable for mobile
communication as opposed to the stationary locations needed for landline conversations. Moreover, cell phones are not only portals for conversation, but possess the capability to do the work once requiring several different devices. Of course, performing these tasks while out in a public environment is the true gift of mobile technology. Much like today’s business and entertainment, film narratives are able to move at the speed of the technology. Information is passed at a rapid rate, allowing for a wide range of narrative possibilities. The action/adventure genre has become more fast-paced than ever before. All three Bourne films continue forward with little lull in the action due to the constant influx of information and conversation provided by the cell phone. The secrecy and deceit provided by the intricate mobile communication network in The Departed allows the opposing sides to duel in an unorthodox fashion. The police, the FBI, and Costello’s gang all are trying to outwit one another through a series of covert texts and phone calls. In addition, the cell phone actually provides the housing for the spirit in One Missed Call, with the terror derived through the contact lists of each victim. The cell phone and the information it contains has become the actual perpetuator of violence as opposed to facilitating the violence of the device’s owner.

Telephony has been fundamental to the development of American popular culture, the film industry being no exception. The diffusion of mobile technology into world culture is undeniable. The information provided here is another example of the reliance on distance communication within culture. As the demands of business, government, entertainment, etc. become more and more pressing, innovators come up with new ways to supplement the current conditions. The ability to communicate across great distances in a rapid fashion is fundamental in advancing relationships between different cultures. Filmmakers have capitalized on the most modern communication devices to supplement the narratives of their films. These technological
innovations are not essential for the resolution of a film narrative, but they do provide new options for cinematic communication—creating dialogue and leading to events that would not have been possible without telephony.

This analysis has sought to examine the history of telephony in conjunction with three popular movie genres and explain how mobile communication has changed the way filmic narratives can now function. Motion pictures set in the present day, the near past, or future must acknowledge the presence of mobile communication or explain why it is their characters cannot use them. Either way, the cell phone has created quick resolutions for many issues that once needed much more explanation and development. The process of creating a coherent narrative has at one time become less and more complicated. In any case, mobile technology provided new options to the relatively restricted communication associated with telephones and pay phones.

The innovative ways in which characters communicate through mobile technology and how the events of movies can now progress have provided the bases for this analysis. A more comprehensive study delving into other film genres and subgenres would be useful in further explaining how mobile technology is being utilized in the movie industry. Perhaps a study focusing on a specific director or screenwriter and his or her dependence on the cell phone would go further to understand the effects of mobile technology on narrative. This study functions as a basis for understanding how film narratives have evolved in terms of distance communication. The evidence provided here unlocks the relationship of telephony and film, but would benefit substantially from the incorporation of more specific examples from each genre.
References


