

Master's Thesis Project

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Abstract

This thesis examines the connection between the 1980s and the supernatural genres seen in American films by discussing how people reflect the time in relation to Svetlana Boym's theory on restorative and reflective nostalgia along with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Monster Theory.

The reason for creating this thesis is based on how it is striking that many supernatural movies depict the '80s. This discovery raised the question of why the supernatural genres are used when portraying the '80s.

To describe the connection between the '80s and the supernatural genres, it is essential to use the two theories mentioned above about nostalgia and the use of monsters.

The feeling of longing for something is one of the main reasons why people are fascinated with representations of the past, along with needing to escape one's everyday life. Boym represents two kinds of nostalgia. The first one is restorative nostalgia, which is when people long for something in the past and want to restore the past. The second one is reflective nostalgia, which is when people reflect the past and their own emotions about the past and thus, might criticize it. This paper argues that restorative nostalgia cannot stand on its own, which indicates that in such cases, where restorative nostalgia occurs, there is a feeling of both types of nostalgia – meaning that it is not one or the other. However, whereas restorative nostalgia is dependent on reflective nostalgia, reflective nostalgia can appear by itself since this kind of nostalgia is the first sense of the two types that people feel, as this thesis argues.

Cohen's Monster Theory can be related to the theory of nostalgia since this theory indicates how monsters – the unknown – can be a representation of societal issues, meaning that it relates to the sense of reflective nostalgia, where people might criticize the past.

It is also relevant to mention the most important historical and cultural elements of the decade since this is what is used in movies to imply in what period the story takes place. These elements are also used to represent society at the time – including societal issues and thus, it becomes possible to analyze how people reflect the decade. Therefore, this thesis makes an account of The Cold War and the kidnappings that happened in the ‘80s since these are the most important themes of the analyzed movies and series. Furthermore, the account of this thesis also includes a description of the two supernatural genres, science fiction and horror, since these are the ones seen in the analyzed works and thus, can highlight how the films are related to the supernatural. Additionally, there will be an account of escapism since these genres provide an opportunity for escapism.

Through a hermeneutic interpretation, the films that this thesis analyzes are Tommy Lee Wallace’s movie, *IT*, from 1990, The Duffer Brothers’ Netflix-series, *Stranger Things*, from 2016, and J. J. Abrams’ movie, *Super 8*, from 2011. These films depict the ‘80s in matters of historical and cultural notions, such as The Cold War, along with representations of societal issues, such as kidnappings and the paranoia that occurred because of the frequent kidnappings and the uncertainty about The Cold War. Thus, the films all evoke the sense of reflective nostalgia especially by using monsters representing societal issues, whereas *Stranger Things* and *Super 8* make the sense of restorative nostalgia evolve from reflective nostalgia using popular culture.

The analyses investigate how the historical, cultural, and societal factors contribute to the interpretations of the monsters in the films along with people’s reflection of the decade. The monsters are interpreted as a kind of criticism of the decade because of how the monsters represent societal issues. Moreover, the analyses prove how it is possible to long for the past – restorative nostalgia – despite how one may be aware of and criticized the issues of the past.

It is possible to state that the supernatural is connected to the '80s by representing societal issues of the time, drawing on this period in history in relation to the elements of the supernatural genres. The feature of the unknown, in, for example, movies, fascinates people and enables them to escape their everyday lives. Moreover, people tend to be fascinated by the past in either learning from it or longing for it.

The supernatural is especially connected to the '80s because of the decade's problematic history, culture, and society that gets represented through the unknown and thus, contribute to the supernatural genres.

Nostalgic feelings about history and society are connected to American supernatural films set in the 1980s because of how these films use supernatural features to depict society.

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The connection between the '80s and the supernatural in American films: representing the '80s' society through reflective and restorative nostalgia

Introduction

When browsing through horror and science fiction movies, it comes to mind that there appears to be a connection between the '80s and the supernatural genres. It is interesting to examine the reason behind this connection. When thinking about present days' American films, it is clear that the supernatural still has a strong connection to the '80s, which is seen in the way some supernatural movies from the 2000s are situated in the decade.

This thesis examines the connection between the '80s and the supernatural, which will be done through an analysis of the different ways of representing and reflecting the history, culture, and society of the '80s regarding Boym's theory on nostalgia and Cohen's Monster Theory, focusing on *IT*, *Stranger Things* and *Super 8*. Furthermore, it is essential to analyze the reason why people are fascinated with the supernatural in general but especially, why they are fascinated with the '80s connection to the supernatural. The analysis will be executed by using the hermeneutic method by doing thorough interpretations of the works. The hermeneutic method is the method that is primarily used in the humanities because the method helps unveil how certain works – such as movies or novels – can be interpreted (“Hermeneutics”). In this way, the hermeneutic method provides the opportunity for interpretation in this thesis.

The essay will explain the '80s' society, culture, and main events of the decade's history. The '80s was the time of The Cold War, where the U. S. and Russia were fighting non-violently for the rights to be the only superpower. Part of The Cold War was the space race, which becomes evident when analyzing films representing the '80s since space is an indicator of the unknown. Many factors about The Cold War were kept secret from the public for political benefits. Additionally, the decade was a time of frequent kidnappings, where the main motive seemed to be pedophilia, which there had not been spread awareness of earlier. At the time, the

authorities did not have the ability to deal with kidnapping-cases in such a manner where the case could be investigated immediately. The people of the time, therefore, dealt with trust issues with the authorities because of how the authorities were not able to handle kidnapping-cases as well, as they can today, and because of how everything seemed to be kept secret regarding The Cold War. Thus, the people were left in doubt and confusion about what could happen. These issues made people have a feeling of uncertainty and made them feel unsafe. The feeling of uncertainty leads to a need for escapism for people, which can be found in something that is completely out of this world – meaning the unknown and supernatural. These themes can be found in films, such as Tommy Lee Wallace's 1990 film adaptation of Stephen King's two-part novel from 1986, *IT*, The Duffer Brothers' Netflix-series, *Stranger Things*, from 2016, and J. J. Abrams' movie, *Super 8*, from 2011. Horror and science fiction films allow people to escape into another world because of the featuring of the supernatural. The supernatural feature indicates how horror and science fiction films represent the viewers with something unknown, which makes the audience enter another world where they forget about their own issues because they are temporarily living in another world where they have to fight the monsters to survive and save the world.

The unknown featured in these two genres can be said to represent the monsters of the time, as is indicated by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his *Monster Theory*. This theory helps understand how the past can be viewed, which creates a perception of why the supernatural fiction of today still appears to have a strong connection to the '80s.

The monsters of the time can be said to be kidnapers and child molesters, which tends to make children the main focus of movies and series within these genres. The reason behind children being important in these kinds of films is that children can be seen as the victims of the decade because of the lack of help from authorities, which will be elaborated later. Furthermore, it should be noted that the monsters in these films situated in the '80s are often

alien creatures hinting at the space race of the time that created a feeling of uncertainty because of how space is a representation of the unknown. Moreover, the fact that humans could now travel to space created the idea that creatures from space could also come to earth. Arguably, this idea that was represented to people through, for example, series and movies made them feel unsafe because of how this notion relates to something unknown.

The featuring of monsters influences how people reflect on the decade. Svetlana Boym's theory on nostalgia is separated into two different kinds of nostalgia. One is wanting to relive the past, whereas the other is emotion-focused, meaning that it orbits around how an individual feels about the past. This theory provides an understanding of the different ways people can reflect the past. Because it, throughout this thesis, becomes evident that nostalgia is one of the main reasons for watching series and movies representing the past, it helps one understand the reason why people today are still fascinated with the '80s' connection to the supernatural. The first sense of nostalgia that arises when watching movies featuring monsters is reflective nostalgia. Through this kind of nostalgia, people can criticize the past because of the way the monsters are representing societal issues of the time. From this kind of nostalgia, restorative nostalgia can evolve, where people want to restore the past. Arguably, restorative nostalgia can spring from reflective nostalgia because the viewers are often represented with bad events through popular culture. Restorative nostalgia can remind people of their childhood or, for those who have not lived through the decade, can give people the feeling of stability. This feeling can occur because of the simplicity of the past and because of how people know what happened at that time and in this way, can keep a distance to whatever is happening in the movie and thus, keep their focus on the positives. Restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia can be seen in the Netflix-series, *Stranger Things*, and also, in the movie, *Super 8*. Both of these examples are set in the '80s with supernatural content. Both *Stranger Things* and *Super 8* present issues of the '80s, however, in opposition to *IT*, these films look back at the '80s with

a mindset that is imprinted with Svetlana Boym's notion of restorative nostalgia in addition to reflective nostalgia. *IT*, on the other hand, appears to remain critical of the decade, meaning that this movie only shares the sense of Boym's theory on reflective nostalgia.

The two ways of reflecting on the '80s explain how it is possible to view the decade in with different mindsets, meaning that some people might want to relive those events of that time, whereas others might think back on the decade with a feeling of regret perhaps because of the war, kidnappings, and murders.

Nostalgic feelings about history and society are connected to American supernatural films set in the 1980s because of how these films use supernatural features to depict society.

Theories

The theories that will be explained in this section are relevant to the thesis in showing the reason behind people's fascination with the '80s' supernatural features and thus, the connection between the decade and the supernatural. The relevance of these theories is based on their method of analyzing ways people reflect what is represented to the viewers in, for example, movies.

The fascination with the monster – The Monster Theory

The use of a monster is often done to represent something that has to be overcome – people have to kill the monster before they can move on. Thusly, the monster becomes a part of how we reflect things as, for example, the past.

Both of the supernatural genres relevant to this paper – the horror genre and the science fiction genre – features the monster. It can be stated that these two genres go hand in hand in many cases. As the horror genre grew in popularity, so did the science fiction genre (Grady Hendrix 19). Hendrix notes in his book, *Paperbacks from Hell* that “It didn't matter if it was a murder mystery, an alternate-history sci-fi novel, or even an old pulp reprint – Satan was the secret ingredient that made sales surge” (21). This quote indicates that what people were

fascinated by was the unknown, which authors or producers often represent through some type of monster. The unknown – the monster – is found within both the horror genre and the science-fiction genre. The quote also implies that when people need an escape from their everyday lives, which will be elaborated later, arguably, they tend to seek to the genres of the unknown, meaning the horror genre and the science fiction genre, since it is noted how the sales went up when authors included the unknown in their works. The reason behind the popularity of these genres might be the fact that they include some sort of alienation to the real world that the audience live in.

In addition to this, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's notes, in the chapter "Monster Culture: Seven Theses" from his book, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, that the monster's body is the representation of people's fears and fantasies (4). Furthermore, this notion attributes to the suggestion that these kinds of fictional works are representations of society. Moreover, Cohen also mentions that "social, cultural, and literary-historical" relations generate the monsters in movies, series, and novels, which also indicates that fiction often tends to be illustrations of society (5). Along with the implication that monsters are depictions of real-life society, it is also interesting to note how Cohen points out that they also represent the unknown and are undefinable, meaning that it is not possible to categorize them (Cohen 6).

The idea that monsters symbolize the unknown goes along with the previously made statement that people are fascinated by the unknown and also, the fact that the unknown from time to time is found in real-life society (Cohen 7). The unknown in real-life is seen when people feel unsafe or uncertain about what is happening in society and how what is going on may impact their lives. Thus, people relate the sense of uncertainty to the notion of the unknown in fictional works.

Additionally, Cohen suggests that otherness – the unknown – happens in real-life between cultures, religions, races, and nationalities (8; 10). What is striking here, is that the otherness

of the unknown can be applied more concretely to society since the otherness is what is seen when talking about people of other civilizations than one's own. For example, when one does not have insight into another culture, this culture to that person becomes unknown and in this way, a part of the otherness.

Arguably, during The Cold War, the secretiveness from the government created a feeling of uncertainty for people about what was happening and whether or not they would be safe in the potentially upcoming violent war, which never came. Thus, it becomes possible to argue that the depiction of the unknown in movies is a representation of the feelings that were amongst people during The Cold War. The connection between the monster and people's uncertainty of The Cold War can also be put in relation to what is later stated about the monster where it is declared that there seems to be a clear link between the monster and control (Cohen 14). The reason behind the connection between the monster and control appears to be how the government tried to control everything and everyone by keeping much of what they were planning secret so that the enemy – the Russians – would not find out the U. S.'s next move. Their attempt to keep their considerations about the war secret left people feeling unsafe and neglected by the government, which will be commented on later.

Cohen indicates that while the monster represents the people's fears, it can also be created, for example by authorities, to demonstrate what happens if people try to fight the monster themselves – because if they were to do so, they would most likely be attacked (Cohen 12). Arguably, this demonstration could signify that the monster is a representation of a warning against exploring the unknown and thus, it means that the authorities have the people under control by signaling that a specific group of people are the enemy – the monster (ibid.). Thereby, the authorities are the ones who decide who should be trusted and accepted and who should not. Arguably, this kind of warning can arise because the authorities want to keep people

from investigating what is happening and thus, people are kept in the dark about what is happening in society because they are not informed about every aspect of the conflict.

The creation of the monster in movies could represent the filmmakers' understanding of how the authorities handle society's issues, which is the way the government creates a monster by representing what is happening in the world from their perspective only. When the authorities represent the issues of society through their perspective, they influence the people, who possibly have not heard both sides of the story. Thus, the argument returns to the notion about people's trust in the government since the fact that some people only know one side of the story makes people question the authorities.

Nevertheless, whilst the monster represents a kind of warning according to Cohen, he also argues that it symbolizes our desires and awakens our curiosity (17). This symbolization means that while the people fear the monster, they are also attracted to it in a way, which was also argued by Hendrix (Cohen 17; Hendrix 21). The reason behind how people's fear and curiosity can appear at the same time could be how people have a desire to explore the unknown even though it scares them, which is also what is seen in horror and science fiction films including monsters.

Finally, Cohen argues that monsters have always existed and will always precede to exist (20). This argument is made on the account of the fact that people, including the authorities, will consistently have issues with something or someone, which then creates the monsters of society.

The inclusion of a monster in films representing the past influences how people think about the past and thus, this theory helps explain the connection between the supernatural and the '80s because of how a monster often represents societal issues, which there were an abundance of in the decade.

Summary of The Monster Theory

This theory indicates how what fascinates people most is the unknown, which is often represented as a satanic force, meaning that the unknown is often expressed through the appearance of a monster.

Monsters represent people's fears, curiosity, warnings against the enemy. Furthermore, the representation of the monster illustrates society. This illustration implies that the monster in, for example, movies can be used to depict societal issues and people's reactions to these, which can be analyzed through the theory of nostalgia.

The theory of nostalgia

The way one remembers or represents the past can be reasoned by analyzing a person's sense of reflective and restorative nostalgia

Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (XIII). She adds that "[n]ostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (ibid.). This quote implies that nostalgia is the sentimental way one feels about the past.

Nostalgia is not only seen as a good set of emotions for individuals, which can be seen in the following quote: "Nostalgia ... is essentially history without guilt. Heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than with shame" (qtd. in Boym XIV). This quote illustrates that nostalgia – in the shape of longing – is not something people should feel about everything. Rather, people must remember or acknowledge that some parts of history or some places are not something that one should long for because, for example, when longing for a specific element of the past it can be related to yearning for cruelty, war or inequality since you cannot relive the positive features of the past without including the negative features. People can focus on the positive things when reflecting the past, which means that nostalgia has been given

positive connotations – meaning that people miss the past and that they do not look back at it with regret despite the negative features it might include.

Thus, leading this paper to Boym’s suggestion that there are two different kinds of nostalgia or reflections of certain times and places (XVIII). The two different kinds are presented as “critical reflection and storytelling” and are called “[r]estorative nostalgia” and “[r]eflective nostalgia” (ibid.). These two types of nostalgia are defined in the following quote: “They do not explain the nature of longing nor its psychological makeup and unconscious undercurrents; rather, they are about the ways in which we make sense of our seemingly ineffable homesickness and how we view our relationship to a collective home” (Boym 41). This quote indicates that the two kinds of nostalgia should be viewed as ways of analyzing the feeling of nostalgia.

The two kinds of nostalgia are described as follows: “Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt” (Boym XVIII). Ultimately, this means that restorative nostalgia occurs when individuals want to relive the past – when they want to restore it, whereas reflective nostalgia appears when people question their memories of the past (ibid.).

Reflective nostalgia

Reflective nostalgia, “does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols” (Boym XVIII). This quote indicates how reflective nostalgia is more experimental and can include multiple factors of the past – negative as well as positive.

Furthermore, Boym states how this kind of nostalgia “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time” (41). This quote signifies how reflective nostalgia dwells on details and in this way, often obtains a different outcome of

reflection than restorative nostalgia since reflective nostalgia is when people reflect the past including all feelings that this may entail – also, the bad feelings about the past.

Reflective nostalgia also has the features of being “ironic and humorous”, which indicates that this type of nostalgia is open to change and playfulness (Boym 49). This notion hints at the idea that things could have been different, which can be connected to when people think critically about the past.

Thus, reflective nostalgia can be said to represent the way individuals think about their feelings about the past, such as thinking critically about their longing for the past.

Restorative nostalgia

Restorative nostalgia is defined as being “at the core of recent national and religious revivals; it knows two main plots – the return to origins and the conspiracy” (ibid.). It is stated that this type of nostalgia restores the past, which indicates that it is consistently seeking to rebuild the past (Boym 41).

Moreover, restorative nostalgia is driven by “the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus, question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition” (Boym 44-45). This quote implies how this kind of nostalgia, as it is consistently seeking to restore the past, fears the representation of something that criticizes a given time and place.

Thus, restorative nostalgia can be seen as the part of nostalgia that individuals feel when wanting to relive the past.

Summary of the theory on nostalgia

The two different kinds of nostalgia show how it is possible to look back at the past with longing but also, how it is possible to reflect the past with an open mindset that because of its openness allows one to be critical. Thus, according to Boym’s theory, either one is wanting to

relive the past or one is reflecting one's feelings about the past, which means that one may be critical of the past.

It is interesting to point out that nostalgia, in everyday use, means longing for something of the past, whereas, in this theory, it is described how it can be both longing and critical. Arguably, the reason for using the word "nostalgia" when referring to something that is potentially criticizing the past could be that it refers to something that is of the past that one has an emotional connection to. So, when describing how it is possible to condemn the past as well as it is possible to yearn for the past, reflective nostalgia is determined as being another kind of nostalgia that is more inclusive in remembering bad things as well as good things, where people reflect their feelings about the past.

However, Boym seems to neglect the idea that it can be possible to connect the two kinds of nostalgia, meaning that it is possible that restorative nostalgia grows out of reflective nostalgia. This understanding of nostalgia would suggest that individuals can criticize the past and one's feelings about the past whilst longing for it. Arguably, the criticism is seen when humans see all the issues of a certain period in time and criticize it to explore what lied behind those problems meanwhile idolizing the past, as many do with the '80s, for example, because of the popular culture that was back then. In other words, individuals realize that the problems that occurred in the past were alarming but they also tend to view the past as desirable because it evokes memories for those, who have experienced it, and a kind of stability for those, who have not lived through it. Here, stability implies that some people might have the sense of restorative nostalgia when they try to escape the uncertainty of the present since the involvement in the past means that everything is predictable because it already happened and also, the fact that the past represents simplicity and is thus, not uncertain.

The theory of nostalgia is relevant when examining the connection between the '80s and the supernatural since the representations of the decade featuring supernatural elements differ depending on how the various filmmakers view the '80s.

Monsters' meaning for nostalgia

The theory on monsters and the theory on nostalgia work together when considering how people reflect the past.

When exploring Cohen's thesis on monsters, it becomes clear that monsters represent the society of the time that they are set in. Thus, when looking at Boym's theory on nostalgia, it is evident that the monsters are used as a tool for reflecting the past, meaning that the monsters are often a way of criticizing society of the time. The use of monsters as a way of reflecting the past means that the monster can be connected to the theory of reflective nostalgia since the monster would represent the negative feelings individuals have about the past.

These theories will be represented through the analysis of the chosen series and movies, where it becomes clear how the theories cooperate in representing the past.

What the science fiction and horror genres are made of

The upcoming notions on history, culture, and society help enhance the understanding of the connection between the '80s and the supernatural genres since it, throughout this thesis, becomes evident that historic events and societal issues influenced the supernatural genres.

The '80s was the decade in which cable television became a standard for most households in America ("Life in the 1980s"). This fact meant that culture was much more at hand for people and that people became aware of different cultures through television. Additionally, it also meant that TV helped spread awareness of various topics through, for example, fiction that evoked reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia, on the other hand, can be elicited from the use of materialistic culture that represents the time such as, for example, board games, as can be seen in *Stranger Things*, which will be elaborated in the analysis.

Additionally, it was a time of war and distrust, which tend to appear as themes in the movies representing the '80s.

To explain how the '80s is connected to the supernatural, it is relevant to look at historical factors to understand what influenced the fictional genres in their representation of the time since it is clear that the series and movies that are to be analyzed in this paper have been influenced by the '80s society.

First of all, the 1980s will be introduced by accounting for the most important events of The Cold War to this thesis and the history of the time in general. Secondly, this part of the thesis researches the kidnappings and missing people in the '80s and the reasons behind these. Thirdly, there will be provided an account of the term 'escapism' since it can be argued that when people need an escape, they tend to seek to fictional genres in films and literature. Lastly, the science fiction and horror genre will be described because of the genres' connection to the '80s since they often reflect the societal issues of the '80s.

The Cold War

Concerning the series and the two movies that will be examined in the analysis, it is relevant to note on The Cold War since this helps explain the plots of the films and the series.

A "cold war" is defined as "intense [...] rivalry between nations, short of military conflict" or "a continuing state of resentful antagonism between two parties short of open hostility or violence" (Dictionary.com "Cold war").

The name of The Cold War is interesting, as it contains the word "cold", which indicates that there was no violent war going on between the involved superpowers, which were the U. S. and the Soviet Union. The war was boiling beneath the surface, meaning that nothing violent happened but that the two enemies were prepared for a violent war.

The Cold War took place after World War II that had left eastern and western Europe completely separated (Britannica.com "Cold War"). At this time, the two main superpowers of

the world came into play since the eastern superpower – the Soviet Union – wanted to keep their occupied countries communist, whereas the U. S. wanted the opposite (ibid.). There was a strong resentment towards communism throughout the west during this time (ibid.). In Stephen J. Whitfield's book, *The Culture of the Cold War*, he notes how “[c]ommunism became more loathed than organized crime”, and also, how people feared the influence it might have on American culture (2).

Throughout the period of The Cold War from 1945 to 1989, the U. S. and the Soviet Union continuously spied on each other to be ahead of the enemy. The spying meant that there was a sense of distrust between the two governments, which implied that the two superpowers constantly had to be prepared for anything.

It is essential to comment on the Space Race in relation to The Cold War (“United States relations with Russia: The Cold War”). In October 1957, the Soviet Union was the first of the superpowers to succeed in sending a man into space and later, also, a dog (ibid.). Three months later, the U. S. also succeeded (ibid.).

By the creation of a new type of weaponry, the atomic bomb, it was implied that whoever had a nuclear weapon had a lot of power (ibid.). In 1947, the U. S. suggested that some kind of control of nuclear weapons should be established and proposed that the weapons should be destroyed (ibid.). However, the Soviet Union declined the suggestion and in 1949, it was announced that “the Soviet Union had detonated its first atomic bomb” (ibid.). Furthermore, as the U. S. detonated its first hydrogen bomb in 1952, a year later, the Soviet Union claimed to have the same capabilities (ibid.).

In 1954, the Atomic Energy Act was signed by President Eisenhower, which indicated that it was now possible to “exchange [...] information on peaceful uses of atomic energy” (ibid.). This act indicated that it should not be necessary to spy on the enemy since the

information would be given to the other party freely. However, the two superpowers continued to spy on each other throughout The Cold War (ibid.).

Arguably, the spying and deceit between the two superpowers also affected the people since there seems to be a tendency of paranoia in the shape of distrust in the government in the '80s. This distrust could be happening because of how everything was uncertain since there seemed to be a war on the horizon, but it never came and thus, people lived in uncertainty, not knowing whether or not they would be safe.

All of these notions explain how warfare – especially The Cold War – took place without ever becoming violent and thus, only spreading fear and resentment amongst people, which is depicted in the analyzed series and movies.

Child kidnappings in the '80s

Child kidnappings happened frequently throughout the '80s, as can be seen in the series and the movies that are to be interpreted.

As the '80s came along, the sexual liberation of the '60s can be argued to be one of the reasons for the acknowledgment of different sexualities in the '60s, '70s, and '80s (“Child Kidnapping in America”). The acknowledgment meant that people had become more aware of pedophilia (“Child kidnappings that captured our attention”). Furthermore, this awareness entailed that to the public, child abductors now seemed to have an alternative motive for kidnapping children, which was sexual abuse, aside from blackmail, which had been one of the main reasons so far (“Child Kidnapping in America”). The alternative motive meant that at this point, not only wealthy families had to worry, but on the contrary, every family had to worry (ibid.).

The most noted child kidnappings of the '60s, '70s, and '80s are abductions of boys (“Child kidnappings that captured our attention”). These cases indicate the growing awareness of pedophilia since the people that were abducted were children.

The cases of Steven Stayner, Etan Patz, Adam Walsh, Johnny Gosch, and Jacob Wetterling are some of the most noticeable child kidnappings, according to Madeleine Baran and Jennifer Vogel (*ibid.*). These cases all have something in common – the fact that they are boys, they were abducted from places in which they were supposed to be safe, the fact that some of them were among the first children to appear on milk cartons instead of missing-posters, and lastly, every one of these cases helped build a better system for when a child goes missing (*ibid.*). Among these cases are also the ones that prove the assumption about pedophilia being a reason for kidnapping children to be true. These are, for example, Steven Stayner, who escaped seven years after he was kidnapped, and then, was able to tell that he, and another kidnapped boy, Timothy White, was abused sexually (*ibid.*). Another example is Etan Patz’s case, which “helped spark the modern missing children’s movement, highlighting pedophilia as a motive” (*ibid.*). These go along with the cases of Adam Walsh and Jacob Wetterling, whose cases contributed to fighting against sexual offenders, and lastly, the case of Johnny Gosch, whose case became crucial in the battle against child trafficking (*ibid.*).

After the end of the ‘80s, the much-debated case of the girl, Jaycee Dugard, happened (*ibid.*). This case was also a case of pedophilia as the reason behind the kidnapping, which became clear when Jaycee was rescued from her child abductors in 2009 (*ibid.*). She was kidnapped when walking to the school bus stop by Philip Garrido, who was a convicted sex offender, and his wife, Nancy Garrido (*ibid.*). After being found and having been missing for 18 years, it was discovered that she had also been sexually abused and that she, since her kidnapping, had given birth to two daughters (*ibid.*). This case resulted in an outrage from the public since one of the abductors, Philip Garrido, was already “a registered sex offender on federal parole” (“Child Kidnapping in America”). Thus, even though he was a registered sex offender, he could continue his line of crimes by kidnapping Dugard. This fact made people

frustrated since this case showed how crimes like this still could occur with ease despite the improvements of the system.

The multiple cases of child kidnappings throughout the '80s created governmental paranoia, meaning that people distrusted the system, which more specifically can be said to have been distrust in the court system, social institutions, and political institutions (Spring-Serenity Duvall and Leigh Moscovitz 10). Not just because the kidnappings happened, but also, because the actions that were made to put a stop to the child abductions did not seem to be working as they should ("Child Kidnapping in America"). Arguably, the distrust that was already gained from the constant uncertainty throughout The Cold War and was thereby enhanced, when child kidnappings became a more recurrent event.

The main problem of kidnapping-cases was that often, the law enforcement could not do anything about it because the law said that 72 hours had to pass from the disappearance before any action could happen ("Child kidnappings that captured our attention"). Another problem was that institutions, such as the FBI, could not deal with such child abduction cases unless there was evidence that showed that it was, indeed, an abduction ("How 'Stranger Things' Captures '80s Panic Over Missing Kids").

Duvall and Moscovitz point out how a string of child kidnappings occurred in the period after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001 when the U. S. was recovering from the said attacks (1). They also call attention to the fact that the U. S. was in a vulnerable state when this string of child kidnappings happened, which implies that the country was trying to recover from the terrorist attacks and thus, their focus was on recovering and therefore not on other crimes at the time (ibid.). It can be said that the country was also in a vulnerable state in the '80s because of The Cold War when multiple child kidnappings happened. This fact could mean that crimes, such as child kidnappings, became frequent because of the country's vulnerable state and thus, contributed to people's criticism of the decade.

Additionally, child kidnappings are often referred to as “stranger danger”, and especially referred to this way throughout the ‘80s (“How ‘Stranger Things’ Captures ‘80s Panic Over Missing Kids”). This reference is captivating because the “stranger danger” indicated that there was talk of someone that was unknown. The fact that the kidnappers are often unknown implies that they are anonymous in most instances and thus, can be connected to people’s fear of the unknown. Because of their anonymity, it can be said that the kidnapper has ‘no face’ since it is rare that people and witnesses actually see the abductors and let alone their faces (ibid.). Hence, it becomes possible to make a comparison between a kidnapper and a monster, meaning that the fact that the kidnapper has ‘no face’ implies that this person might as well be a monster (ibid.).

Moving through the 20th century, it became clear that one of the main reasons for child kidnappings includes sexual intentions. The government’s handling of child kidnapping cases throughout the years turned out to improve due to people’s fight for changing laws connected to kidnappings. However, in the ‘80s, some cases fell through because the revision of the law was still in progress. What angered the public was how, at first, it was limited what could be done about the cases, and secondly, when abductions still happened after the change and additions to the law.

The fact that the authorities did not act immediately on such crimes as the many child kidnappings that happened in the ‘80s made the people develop distrust towards the authorities and perhaps also even each other since it appeared that no one could be trusted.

Escapism

Arguably, the fear that was developing amongst people in the ‘80s due to The Cold War and the child kidnappings simultaneously created a need to escape from the unsafe and uncertain world they were experiencing, which can be spotted in the three works that are to be analyzed later.

Escapism is defined as “a way of avoiding an unpleasant or boring life, especially by thinking, reading etc. about more exciting but impossible activities” (“Escapism”). This definition means that escapism is when people try to escape their everyday lives by using, as exemplified in the quote above, fiction, such as watching movies, going to the theatre, or reading novels.

Yi-Fu Tuan defines escapism as a universal term that is constantly used by all human beings without them necessarily knowing that they are using it (xi; xvi). It is what humans do when their everyday lives become undesirable or troublesome (Tuan xii). Escapism is, more often than not, viewed as something positive since individuals get to think about something completely different from their own lives and thus, get to worry about something other than their own problems (Tuan xi). However, Tuan goes on to explain how escapism can and should be seen as something that can be both good and bad:

And what is wrong with the unreal – with wild fantasy? Nothing, I would say, so long as it remains a passing mood, a temporary escape, a brief mental experiment with possibility. However, fantasy that is shut off too long from external reality risks degenerating into a self-deluding hell – a hell that can nevertheless have an insidious appeal (xvi).

Here, it is indicated how escapism can be healthy since it can get one’s mind off of things that haunt them in their everyday lives. Although, it is also stated how it can be dangerous if one starts to avoid reality completely since this would mean that that individual no longer would be able to function in the real world. If people were to stay inside the world of escapism and in this way, not deal with the real world, this would mean that the people would live in a world where no one is aware of the actual truth. It is possible to connect this to denial. Whereas

escapism is something people use to escape their everyday lives temporarily, denial is a state people can go into when their everyday lives are too troublesome for them to handle at that time. Thus, when people use escapism, they are aware that they are doing so and opposingly, when people are in denial, they are not aware of it.

The fact that humans will always need an escape from the real world is also argued in Jeremy E. Sherman's article, "The Art of Escapism for People Suffering a Reality Overdose".

In this article, it is stated that:

We humans have a challenge that other organisms don't have. We are confronted with way more reality than any of us can stomach and we are afforded way more ways to escape it. [...] We humans have language which exposes us to way too much world and affords us way too many ways to ignore, dismiss, and reject it, as I do when, at the end of the day, I escape into thug-life fantasies ("The Art of Escapism for People Suffering a Reality Overdose").

This quote indicates that because human beings are developed in a way that has given us language as a method of communication, humans are, in a way, unprotected from all knowledge of the world (ibid.). Thus, human minds have to embrace much more than they would have to if individuals only had to care for themselves and their closest (ibid.). Thereby it can be said that human beings deal with much more stress than what can be handled (ibid.). Additionally, Sherman argues that people would not even be able to deal with this amount of stress if they did not have the opportunity for escapism (ibid.). This particular statement is declared later on in the article, where it is written that "[w]e humans face way too much reality, more than a body can stand. We need escapism" (ibid.). In this quote, he distinctly makes the case that escapism is necessary for human beings to deal with the stress of their everyday lives.

The genres of science fiction and horror provide an immense amount of opportunities for escapism. As mentioned, when people need an escape, arguably, they tend to seek the genres featuring the unknown – more specifically – the horror genre and the science fiction genre because these genres include some sort of alienation to the real world that the viewers live in. When alienation is presented to the people, they automatically travel into the fantasy world where such things are possible and thus, make the escape far away from their everyday lives, finding themselves in a much different world. Here, it might be possible for the audience to feel some sort of success in connecting with the hero of a certain movie and watch the hero defeat the villain, which can make the audience feel the hero's success because of the established connection.

Sherman describes how escapism can give individuals the sense of being indestructible in the following quote: “Hobbies, pastimes, daydreams, and fantasies are how we discharge the tensions that accumulate in our anxious, exposed human lives. I have a lot of respect for [...] every form of venting our anxiety through fantasies of invincibility” (ibid.). This quote indicates how escapism makes it possible for people to get rid of their anxieties temporarily. Adding to this statement of invincibility, he also asserts that “[I]ike many, if not all of us, I just want to win. I just want to imagine I'm winning” (ibid.). This quote implies that all human beings have a need to feel success, and if this is not possible in real life, it is essential that individuals are exposed to this feeling through escapism represented in, for example, movies.

Another way of defining escapism can be found in Bernd Henning and Peter Vorderer's article on escapism. Here, it is defined as follows: “most people have, due to unsatisfying life circumstances, again and again cause to ‘leave’ the reality in which they live in a cognitive and emotional way” (qtd. in Bernd Henning and Peter Vorderer 101). The escape from reality can, as mentioned, be done through fantasies, which can be executed by, for example, daydreaming or watching a movie. In this research, it has been discovered that watching television or movies

are some of the most common ways of using escapism (Bernd and Vorderer 100). This shape of escapism also involves how the viewers are forced to focus on something else than their own issues for a while, meaning that when watching a movie or series, the audience is focusing on the characters' issues and not their own problems. Furthermore, people crave stability. Stability includes the fact that people enjoy learning about how people at that time had many similar issues to the ones people have today, such as problems of love and friendship, since this makes the audience able to relate to the fictional characters. Arguably, the knowledge of the past's similar issues calms the audience because they recognize that set of emotions and thus, relate to the characters and become excited to watch the characters solve these issues or, at least, evolve from that state of mind or that time in their lives.

It should be noted that when the audience, for example, watches a movie that represents societal issues of the past, they are forced to deal with those issues through the movie, which could indicate that they have not escaped what they tried to run from by pressing play. However, because of how, in the example above, the movie represents societal issues of the past, it can be argued that the audience is escaping because the movie represents issues of another distant time that the audience does not have to deal with because those issues are, as noted, in the past.

Thusly, it can be stated that watching television or movies is a meaningful way of escaping one's everyday life. Escapism is a competent resource for people dealing with problems in their daily lives, such as the people from the '80s during the uncertainty that The Cold War and child kidnappings left them with. The fact that escapism is often performed by turning to supernatural genres shows how the supernatural can be connected to the '80s. This connection can be seen because of, for example, how many movies take place during this decade, indicating that this was a time where people needed to escape and also implying that this decade was filled with thrilling events. Furthermore, this decade is distant from the present, which,

along with the excitement, attracts viewers because this means that they do not have to deal with the problems represented in the movie and can experience the tensions of the decade.

The way of escaping one's everyday life is done through hobbies or fiction such as television and movies, especially within the horror and science fiction genres since these genres present a completely different world than the viewers are used to.

The supernatural genres

The series and the movies that are to be studied in this thesis are all found within supernatural genres.

Arguably, supernatural genres can give a greater sense of being out of this world since it takes place in an alien environment.

The essence of the supernatural is in the sense of the unknown. The term "supernatural" can be defined as something that is "caused by forces that cannot be explained by science" ("Supernatural"). This definition indicates that the supernatural – the unknown – is often represented through some type of monster.

Features of the supernatural can be found within two genres especially that are relevant to this thesis. These are the genres of horror and science fiction.

The horror genre

Horror is meant to frighten and scare the audience, whereas science fiction can do the same but is mainly focused on future technology ("Horror"; "Science fiction"). However, both genres create a sense of the unknown for the audience (Barry Keith Grant 4).

The horror genre can be described by noting its impact on the audiences' emotions, according to Grant's article, "Screams on Screens: Paradigms of Horror" (3). The word, "horror", is itself correlated to when an individual feels fear (Grant 4). Additionally, it is stated in the article how "horror seeks to rudely move us out of our complacency in the quotidian

world” (ibid.). It is also mentioned how the audience can “channel [their] own aggression and anger” (Grant 15).

Thus, horror is purely built of fear and anger.

The science fiction genre

Science fiction focuses on future technology but also, “deals principally with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals” (“Science fiction”).

The genre was established after the industrial revolution of which “the social transformations [...] led writers and intellectuals to extrapolate the future impact of technology” (ibid.). At the beginning of the science fiction genre’s existence, certain themes within this genre were established, which primarily included “space travel, robots, alien beings, and time travel” (ibid.). Furthermore, the genre contains “prophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, elaborate scenarios for entirely imaginary worlds, titanic disasters” and “strange voyages” (ibid.). Moreover, the writers within this genre of science fiction “often seek out new scientific and technical developments in order to prognosticate freely the techno-social changes that will shock the readers’ sense of cultural propriety and expand their consciousness” (ibid.).

It has been demonstrated that some of the writers that work within the genre of science fiction allow readers to recognize the science fiction work in relation to critical theory, which is used to criticize society (Carl Freedman 44). The criticism becomes possible through the representation of the time and society the science fiction work takes place in. The representations of society are only seen through the different creators of science fiction’s eyes, which means that it is purely the creators’ view on society at that given time of the science fiction work that is represented to the audience or the readers.

Thus, it can be stated that science fiction is based around future technology and can, at the same time, be a reflection of societal issues.

Children in science fiction and horror

In many science fiction and horror movies, children often play an important role because of their unique abilities, which will be commented on in this section.

David R. Shumway argues that children must be protected “against external threats” because of their “incompetence” (406). This suggested incompetence of children in movies makes the children accessible for the diabolic creature in those particular movies and in this way, the children can become possessed by the monster. This notion signifies the opposite of what has been argued in the first sentence of this section – that children cannot fight for themselves and thus, need to be protected by adults. However, more often than not, the children in movies seem to confront the dangers themselves and can be successful in doing so, meaning that they sometimes do defeat the monster. When the children in movies feel the need to fight the danger themselves, it might be because they feel abandoned by the adults. After all, the adults are the ones that are supposed to protect them and must have failed to do so, if the children need to fight the monster themselves.

The fact that children fight for themselves in these genres is stated George Edgar Slusser’s chapter “The Forever Child: *Ender’s Game* and the Mythic Universe of Science Fiction”, where he writes that “the child is both innocent and resplendent with primal power and wisdom; he is a being that enters the adult world “trailing clouds of glory” (75). This quote implies that children do represent innocence but are also seen as powerful and clever, meaning that children can and do confront what can be called ‘adult-issues’ despite their impeccability and, as previously mentioned, their incompetence. It might also be relevant to add the fact that frequently, the children in science fiction and horror movies win or survive. In addition to the quote above, it is also noted how “the child is no passive victim of fate”, meaning that children in these types of movies take care of themselves and are not necessarily dependent on adults (ibid.). A reason for the independent children could be related to the paranoia or the distrust in

authorities that especially occurred in the '80s, because of how children, in movies representing this decade, often take the role of the heroes that save the world because they do not trust the authorities to do the best thing.

Furthermore, the fact that the child represents wisdom is also noted in Gay Barton's chapter that childhood is primarily used as a "superior mode of wisdom and vision" (132). This quote says that children are depicted as the wise characters in films. This depiction may be occurring because children view the world differently than adults, meaning more innocently, which often makes them take the most humanitarian approach to the issue they are dealing with, which is illustrated in *Super 8* when they convince the monster to leave by communicating with it (Abrams 01:36:35-01:38:12).

Additionally, it is stated how a protagonist child in science fiction or horror movies "usually lives in the real world but has consciously to operate in another world sometimes at very great odds with it" (Alida Allison 142). This quote indicates that children in this genre are a representation of the connection between the real world and another alien world – possibly the world in which the monster lives. Furthermore, these worlds are called "contrastive", which is an important term, "because the ways the child character learns first to recognize the contrast, and then to negotiate it, are often central to the story" (ibid.). This quote means that the child has the important role of connecting the two different worlds, which is often done to make peace between the two worlds.

Hereby, it can be stated that children are essential to the horror and science fiction genres because they are a crucial element of connecting the real world to a supernatural world, and because they embrace what is necessary to save the world.

Summary of the genres

Thus, it can be stated that the genres of science fiction and horror share the primary feature of the unknown – alienation – and also, the fact that children often carry the role of the hero because of their innocence.

Furthermore, these genres are used as an escape for people who need to break away from their everyday lives and the issues that it entails. Additionally, it is clear that these two genres, however, primarily science fiction, often create critical content to criticize society. Arguably, the representations of society vary from movie to movie depending on the way the creators of the movie want to depict society.

Adding to the connection between the supernatural and the '80s, the horror and science fiction genres represent a great opportunity for escaping one's daily life since they draw their audiences into a supernatural world that makes people forget the issues of everyday life. These genres help describe the connection between the supernatural and the '80s since the representation of the decade occurs frequently in these supernatural genres. The reason behind the fact that supernatural genres often depict the past might be because of their unique way of reflecting societal issues, which were significant to this decade because of what was happening in the world.

Summary of what the science fiction and horror genres are made of

This account has explained the history, culture, genres and ways of analyzing individuals' behavior, which is relevant for the analysis of this thesis since these elements all lay the groundwork for the environment and societies represented in the series and the two movies that are going to be examined.

These different paragraphs on history, genres, and escapism can help analyze and describe the kinds of science fiction and horror productions that take place in the '80s, which are to be examined in the analysis.

Thus, these sections are essential in examining the connection between the '80s and the supernatural.

Analysis

The analysis of the chosen movies and series will exemplify the connection between the '80s and the supernatural and also, the reason why people are fascinated with the decade.

The three films that are to be analyzed all take place in the '80s, which can be seen from the physical and social environment that the movies are situated in. Furthermore, the three works represent the '80s in different ways concerning nostalgia, which is where the focus of the analysis will be.

The first movie that will be analyzed is Wallace's film, *IT*, from 1990, secondly, The Duffer Brothers' Netflix-series, *Stranger Things*, from 2016, and lastly, Abrams' movie, *Super 8*, from 2011.

Analysis of *IT*

Stephen King's two-part novel, *IT*, was published in 1986 and adapted into a two-part movie by Wallace in 1990. The story takes place in the '60s, when the main characters are children, and in the '80s, when they have grown up. The time the movie is situated in is indicated by the physical setting, meaning historical indicators, and general surroundings of signifiers from the decade. This analysis argues that what happened in the '80s and the reasons behind what happened is mirrored to what happened in the '60s because of how history repeats itself in this movie, which will be elaborated later in the analysis. Very similar events happen in the movie with 30 years apart, which means that the distance in time will not matter for the analysis of the '80s' connection to the supernatural because the events signify the same things since the movie was published in the '80s and thus, provides a reflection of that time.

In this two-part movie, the viewers are introduced to a suspicious crime scene at the beginning of the film where it is indicated that multiple children have gone missing from the

town, Derry. One of the main characters asks the authorities questions about what is going on but is told to stay out of it. Then, he calls his old friends for help because similar things occurred when they were children. Back then, it was a monster who took and murdered the children, which the main characters were also haunted by but did not get kidnapped. They stood together and fought the monster until it disappeared and then, promised each other that they would come back and fight it again if it returned, which the viewer finds out it does. The main characters, who are now adults, travel back to their hometown to fight the monster once again but this time, they kill it. As the audience follows the main characters on their trip down memory lane, the viewers get to see flashbacks of exactly what happened to the main characters when they were children – meaning their encounters with the monster as well as the issues of their everyday lives.

How reflective nostalgia is presented through distrust in authorities

This movie represents the '80s through Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia. Despite the conclusion that often, restorative nostalgia springs from reflective nostalgia, this movie appears to be highly focused on reflective nostalgia only, which indicates how some reflective nostalgia never evolves.

To elaborate, the fact that this movie only evokes the sense of reflective nostalgia is first of all indicated when the viewers are introduced to the missing children in the movie, meaning that the movie hints at the child kidnappings as a signifier of the time, which, as pointed out in the historical account of child kidnappings, occurred frequently throughout the '80s. This notion is seen in the first scene of the movie, where a little girl goes missing right outside her home and soon after, is found killed in her garden (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:02:15-00:03:20). As mentioned, here, the many child kidnappings and murders that happened in this decade are signified for the first time. The kidnappings are further illustrated in the following scene, where it is noted how there are currently six children missing in that neighborhood, and how the

authorities will not explain anything to the public (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:03:59-00:04:03). This example indicates the distrust people appeared to have towards the authorities and the system throughout the decade since the authorities either would not or was not able to tell the public what was going on and why what was happening could not be stopped (“Child kidnappings that captured our attention”). The kidnappings make one of the main characters, Mike, who still lives in the town, reflect on how this also happened when he and his group of friends were children and thus, call his friends for help. The child kidnappings are illustrated again when Mike calls one of the main characters, Bill, who then is reminded of how Bill’s little brother, George, disappeared and was later found murdered (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:10:55-00:12:28). As in the first kidnapping and murder of the little girl that is shown in the movie, the movie-viewers do not observe what is done or investigated about this kidnapping and murder of George but are rather left to believe that the case was not investigated. Thus, once again, there appears to be a sort of representation of distrust in the system in the movie because of the uncertainty about George’s case. Furthermore, the scene where Bill’s little brother, George, gets kidnapped and murdered, is what makes the children in the movie act and try to fight for themselves and “save the world”, per se, since the authorities in the movie do not act on it as needed. The unhelpful authorities that are represented in the first murder of the little girl, the murder of George, and also, in the notion that six children have gone missing frustrate the audience of the movie as well as the characters in the movie. Thus, what is evoked from this movie is reflective nostalgia since there is a critical reflection of the time (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:02:15-00:03:20; 00:10:55-00:12:28; 00:03:59-00:04:03).

Reflective nostalgia can be seen in the fact that it appears that the movie can be said to raise questions about the events that occurred in the decade by representing them in a critical way in the movie. This critical depiction is seen in the way the characters consistently question the different authorities that appear in the movie, such as teachers, parents, and the law

enforcement. The questioning of the authorities is seen in the following quote, where Bill says: “This whole town is IT in some way. All of them” (Wallace, *IT - Chapter 2* 01:05:55-01:05:59). Here, it is clear that Bill thinks of all the people in the town as part of the evil that happens in Derry since the people in the town do not act on the unsettling things that occur. Then, another main character, Bev, answers Bill by indicating the same thing: “Bill is right. If we call the police, get the town involved, something bad is going to happen to one of us. Maybe all of us” (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 2* 01:06:09-01:06:17). As Bill’s statement above, this quote indicates how the people of the town cannot be trusted because they seem to be directly connected to the immoralities of the town.

Additionally, the questioning of authorities can be seen when one of the other main characters, Mike, is doing an oral presentation of how every 30 years, a large number of people go missing from their town (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 01:02:00-01:02:40). Here, the teacher almost dismisses him, when she says: “Thank you, Michael, for that illuminating if somewhat morbid history. Now, who’s next?” (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 01:02:40-01:02:47). What can be seen in this quote, and the way the teacher expresses herself, is that she appears to be uncaring about his oral presentation, which implies that she might be ignoring something that potentially could be significant. This example implies that when the children seek an authority for guidance, they are let down. This lack of help might be part of the reason why the children distrust the authorities since the authorities do not provide the guidance that the children seek. In the second part of the story, *IT – Chapter 2*, it is indicated that the authorities in the movie, meaning the adults that the children try to enlighten, are in denial. The denial is seen when Bev comments on the incident with their teacher: “She didn’t wanna know” (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 2* 00:48:44-00:48:46). To this comment, Ben answers: “None of them wants to know” (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 2* 00:48:53-00:48:55). Along with the other notions of unhelpful authorities in the movie, these quotes could indicate that perhaps the authorities in the movie

do not want to acknowledge what has happened in the past and what is happening currently. Thus, the authorities can be said to be in denial by unconsciously choosing to ignore any signals that indicate danger, which leaves the children of the movie to save the world alone. This distrust in authorities happening in the movie as well as it did in the real world created a sense of feeling unsafe, which, as mentioned, is highly represented in the supernatural genres.

Escapism and denial in IT

Escapism is featured in the movie itself as a tool of escaping reality for the characters. However, much of the time some of the characters seem to be in denial as opposed to having chosen not to deal with their issues by using escapism.

The past's issues almost become taboo by the authorities' dismissal of the notions of these issues that are brought up from time to time, as in the example mentioned above with the teacher's reaction to Mike's oral presentation (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 01:02:40-01:02:47). The notion that the issues are taboo can be argued since they do not appear to want to remember what has happened in the past perhaps because the past was filled with horrific memories, which makes them look at the world with innocence and naiveté. Furthermore, it can be argued that the fact that the past was filled with cruel memories might have made the people come into a state of denial because they never received the answers they needed about what was happening, hinting at the uncertainty of the time and the inclusion of the unknown. Thus, because of their past experience with authorities not providing the help that was needed, this makes very few of them dare to ask questions when something mysterious happens.

Additionally, it is important to point out the fact that the main characters do not appear to remember what they have experienced in Derry either when they are called up by their childhood-friend, Mike. This call is seen in the following quotes, where Bill is telling his girlfriend about what happened after she asked who was on the phone: “The call was from a guy named Mike Hanlon. I haven't heard from him in almost 30 years, not since we were kids.

Audra, my brother who died..? [...] He didn't just die. He was ... murdered" (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:15:05-00:15:26). After this revelation, Bill's girlfriend, Audra, goes on to ask why he never told her, to which Bill answers: "Because I forgot. Because I forgot. Almost as if it never happened." (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:15:28-00:15:33). This quote tells the audience that even one of the main characters, Bill, has not been able to remember what happened, which indicates that, as the adults did when Bill was a child, Bill has now also repressed the awful things that happened and have, in this way, been in denial. This repression may be because the things that have happened to Bill are simply too awful to deal with and thus, the need for repressing something psychologically occurs. Psychological repression, or denial, from a Freudian perspective, is contrastive to escapism since it is done unintentionally, whereas escapism is not. Escapism can be seen as a temporary distraction for the mind, whereas repression is constant to relieve oneself from the pain.

The use of escapism within the movie itself is indicated in the following example, where Bill is seen writing a horror story (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:05:32-00:05:45). The fact that he is writing a horror story signifies that he is using escapism himself and is not mentally present in the real world at that moment. His lack of presence in the real world happens because he is experiencing another world through writing, which can be seen in the way he dismisses his girlfriend when she asks him to stop working (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:05:47-00:05:51). This example signifies how Bill does not want to re-enter the real world since he is caught up in the story that he is writing. The reason for Bill to use escapism could be due to the many horrible things he has experienced throughout his life, such as the death of his little brother. Thus, he is using his hobby of writing as escapism to avoid confrontation with his everyday problems and arguably, to eventually achieve the feeling of success by writing a best-seller ("The Art of Escapism for People Suffering a Reality Overdose"). However, since Bill seems to be in a state of denial about his issues, it is possible that he does not use escapism to

temporarily forget what he went through as a child but rather, to escape more common everyday issues.

Escapism is thusly related to the connection between the '80s and the supernatural because of the way the supernatural genres represent an opportunity for escapism for people who, for example, are dealing with societal issues.

The monstrous notion of "It"

As mentioned, one of the horrific elements in the movie that helps determine it as part of the horror genre is the monster – the unknown. The monster first appears as a clown that is eating children, hence the murder of the children at the beginning of the movie (Wallace, *IT* – *Chapter 1* 00:02:15-00:03:20; 00:10:55-00:12:28). As noted in the theory-section of this paper, it has been explained that the monster, in movies such as this, is an embodiment of people's fears (Cohen 4). Additionally, the monster is also a representation of otherness (Cohen 8). Through this representation, it becomes possible to say that people's fears can be said to occur when something is unknown, meaning that the people's fears are connected to something they are not comfortable with because they do not know it or because they have not experienced it before. People are most comfortable when in a certain routine with their own and society's habits, meaning that when something comes to disturb that kind of monotone everyday life, fear occurs because the new element that is disturbing the people's routine is unknown at first. Either, people can choose to deal with it by fighting the monster, hide or run away, but some people may choose to ignore it as a sort of defense mechanism because they cannot enclose that sense of the unknown. The fact that people either confront the issues or try to avoid them is also what is seen in the movie, as noted previously in this paragraph, when some people ask questions when something unusual happens, whereas others quiet down and pretend nothing happened.

Arguably, the monster in this movie could be a representation of the kidnappers of the '80s since the movie's plot shows how children go missing and get murdered. The way the movie evokes the sense of reflective nostalgia makes the movie a kind of critique of the society and the system of the time, especially concerning children. The reason behind the criticism that mainly involves children is that it appears that the children that are the most vulnerable in this situation have to fight for themselves without any help from the authorities, which seems obscure to the viewers since the main characters are children. The critical elements of the film can also be seen when the children turn to the authorities in the film and get turned down and encouraged to move on, as mentioned earlier. This critical feature of neglecting of children and their worries can also be seen when Bill sees blood coming out of his little brother's photo and screams, whereas his parents come to help him but then become angry with him because they see the situation as Bill reminding his parents of what has happened, which brings them back to the state of unhappiness and therefore, do not want to listen to what Bill has experienced (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 00:13:30-00:14:45). These examples indicate that distrust in the authorities in the movie occurs as well as it did in real life in the '80s since it was limited what could be done about child abductions, as explained earlier, which is also the case in the movie. Because of this neglect and distrust in authorities, the children try to stand up for themselves and fight the monster themselves. The children's independence, as mentioned, indicates the sense of neglect many people felt at the time since horrible crimes happened right before their eyes and how the authorities could not act on it immediately.

The fact that the monster in the movie first appears as a clown is appealing to children because they make the connection between the clown and something fun and positive because this is what they normally experience when seeing a clown. Later in the movie, it is revealed that the clown is only a manifestation of the real monster. This revelation happens for the first time when the children make the statement that the clown is not human, which can be seen in

the following example, where the children are looking through old photos of the town from the 1700s. Here, Bill discovers that the clown, Pennywise, is in one of the photos (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 01:08:44-01:08:46). As they continue to look through the photos, they notice that he is in many of them (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 01:08:54-01:08:59). Then, Beverly goes on to note that “[i]t’s not a man”, which leads to Bill’s definition of Pennywise as: “It... It!” (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 1* 01:08:59-01:09:00; 01:09:00-01:09:03). This conversation indicates that the children will not call Pennywise something human since the clown appears to be supernatural because the monster has been alive for so many years. Furthermore, the fact that the monster appears as a clown hints at the notion that it is the man without a face, which is a notion that can be connected to the anonymity of kidnappers. The reasons behind this connection could be that the children, at this point, do not know what the actual monster looks like or that when a person is in a clown costume, the face is concealed by make-up, which makes it difficult to notice the exact characteristics of the face.

In the second part of the story, the second movie that is called *IT – Chapter 2*, it becomes clear what the real monster looks like, which appears to be an alien. The reason the monster can be defined as an alien is that the monster is unlike anything the children have ever seen and because it is clear that it is supernatural due to its ability to transform itself into whatever is needed, such as the clown from the beginning of the story (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 2* 01:22:15-01:22:17). The notion that the monster is supernatural and thus, unknown is usually connected to the description of an alien that is defined as “strange and not familiar”, which makes the audience relate the monster of the movie to an alien (“Alien”). This movie can be related to the space race of The Cold War since this is when the government was trying to discover the unknown parts of space, which created conspiracies about life on other planets – meaning aliens.

As previously mentioned, the monster is a representation of people's fears and the unknown but is also said to be representing social and cultural connections from the time in which it appears (Cohen 5). These representations can be said to indicate a connection between the monster and the kidnappers of the time, meaning that the monster in *IT* represents the kidnappers of the decade. Thus, as previously mentioned, it is possible to view the movie with a connection to reflective nostalgia and in this way, view the movie as a kind of criticism of society at the time since the child abductions were not prioritized by authorities to the same extent they are today because of the changes of and additions to the law that have, since then, been making it easier to investigate this type of crimes ("Child kidnappings that captured our attention").

Additionally, it is important to note how the monster is also a notion of control in society, meaning that it represents a warning for people – it is meant to warn people against the enemy of the time (Cohen 14). As the movie is both partly situated in the '80s and published in this decade, this means that the monster in this movie may be a representation of the kidnappers since many children disappear and get murdered in the movie, which means that the movie warns people against this kind of monster of the time.

Furthermore, the monster is meant to appeal to the people's desires and activate their curiosity (Cohen 17). This appeal indicates that the monster in the movie, arguably, tries to make the audience aware of societal issues of the time, since the movie was published in the '80s, by making them curious about what is happening, why, and who is behind the monster. Rising awareness of the monster of the period could make people question the authorities in that decade and in this way, make people more critical of authorities.

The movie can be related to the genre of science fiction since this genre explores the technology of the future, meaning space and what might be discovered there and thus, some kind of alien creature ("Science fiction"). However, whereas *Stranger Things* and *Super 8* are

primarily found within the science fiction genre, and despite *IT*'s inclusion of an alien, this movie is mainly determined as being a horror film with some characteristics of science fiction because its primary purpose is to scare people. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both science fiction and horror are focused on some sort of alienation and otherness – meaning the unknown. Yet, where the science fiction genre most often tends to be the genre that criticizes society, this can also be said to be the case for this particular horror movie (Freedman 44).

Thus, this movie is a representation of the time through both supernatural genres, making the audience question the authorities because of the issues of the time represented through this movie. Furthermore, this representation of societal issues through the monster makes the movie part of the connection between the decade and the supernatural genres, meaning that the movie captures people's attention because of its critical reflection of societal issues.

Children as heroes

Regarding the criticism of society, it is interesting to examine the common feature of children in horror and science fiction movies. As mentioned, it is a common observation that children must be protected because they are incompetent in doing so themselves (Shumway 406). Although, in this movie, it is clear that the children are capable of protecting themselves and stand together against the evil power. They are capable of doing so because they feel the responsibility of having to do something to protect their friends since they feel abandoned by the authorities. They feel abandoned because the authorities do not seem to do enough about what is happening. Thus, the children of the movie enter the adult world with their wisdom and sense of superiority by fighting the monster themselves (Slusser 75; Barton 132).

The children's incompetence could be a ruling factor when noting upon the monster possessing children. Even though the majority of children in this story fight for themselves and is not letting the monster get to them, one of the characters, a bully, named Henry, can be said to become possessed by the monster later in time, as an adult, because it tells him to kill the

other characters, who have grown up at this point in the movie, which he tries to do (Wallace, *IT – Chapter 2* 00:44:23-00:46:09; 00:59:30). The reason for Henry being the one the monster possesses may be due to his incompetence – which is also related to children – since he is in a mental institution because of what happened to him and the others as a child. Again, here, it is clear that the monster presents itself as something the characters know and can relate to since the monster at this point appears as Henry's previous best friend whom the monster killed when they were kids.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the children in the movie are the only ones who can see the monster, which implies the previously stated idea that children can be situated in the real world whilst communicating with another world (Allison 142). This ability to communicate with another world might be because of how the incompetence of children means that they have not been influenced yet and because of this, they are able to see the unthinkable and believe whatever comes their way. Thusly, the children become the world's only hope of fighting off the evil that is in the world since they are the only ones that appear to be aware of the dangers. However, it should be noted that the main characters are still able to see the monster when they have grown up. The fact that they still see the monster as adults could indicate that they have been traumatized and in this way, still carry that kind of influence with them into adulthood since it, with a Freudian perspective, is evident that children carry trauma with them throughout their lives.

The inclusion of children in the supernatural genres helps enhance the supernatural features – such as the monster – and get the plot going since the children tend to be the ones that can communicate with that kind of supernatural creatures with more ease than adults could.

Summary of the analysis of IT

Thus, *IT* can be said to be a horror movie that features elements of science fiction in the shape of an alien and the representation of a critique of society at the time by evoking the sense

of reflective nostalgia for the audience. The critique of society is included because of the people's anxiety and anger about what happened in that decade, meaning the multiple kidnappings and murders of children and also, the fact that people were kept in the dark by the authorities. This fact indicates that the people did not know what to expect since no one gave them any answers and because of this, they felt unsafe. Thereby, it can be stated that people lived in fear of the enemy in society kidnapping children – the monster of the time.

Thus, the supernatural can be connected to the '80s through this movie by looking at the representation of societal issues. The movie fascinates people because of the inclusion of the unknown, which, as mentioned, is a depiction of the societal issues of the time.

Analysis of *Stranger Things*

The second part of the analysis is an examination of the first season of the Netflix-series, *Stranger Things* from 2016. This series also depicts how the '80s are connected to the supernatural.

The first season of the series depicts the story of a group of friends and family that are trying to find one of their best friends, Will, who is taken by a monster that reminds the boys of the Demogorgon from their board game, *Dungeons and Dragons*, in the first episode. The series keeps much focus on this board game but also, gadgets, such as walkie-talkies, which the boys use to communicate with each other throughout the entire series, and additionally, the focus also lies on the featuring of popular songs of the time, such as "Should I Stay or Should I Go" by The Clash (The Duffer Brothers 00:16:45-00:18:19). Arguably, the board game can be said to be the main characters' way of using escapism since it makes them enter another world in which they have to defeat the monster, making them forget the issues of their everyday lives. Thus, the fact that the series is situated in the '80s is indicated through the materialistic culture of the series, such as, for example, *Dungeons and Dragons*, but also, through the historical notions that appear in the show, such as the indication of The Cold War and the space

race. Furthermore, the first frames of the first episode present when and where the series takes place by saying “November 6th, 1983. Hawkins, Indiana. Hawkins National Laboratory. U. S. Department of Energy.” (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:00:14-00:00:40).

The notion of the supernatural

After the viewers have been introduced to the time and place, the scene mentioned above indicates that the series belongs to the science fiction genre since it becomes evident that something supernatural is happening in relation to future technology. The series is also defined as belonging to the thriller-genre, however, this will not be elaborated.

Firstly, a man working in the lab comes running towards the viewers, clearly running from something, which then is implied to be something inhuman since the unknown creature has managed to come from wherever the man was running from to the elevator in a split second without him noticing (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:00:40-00:01:41). This scene, along with the fact that the series begins with some sort of indication that there is an investigation in future technology in the series since the unknown creature appears at a laboratory, indicates that the series is part of the science fiction genre because of the supernatural creature. The fact that these examples are the first thing that is presented to the audience sets the universe that the series takes place in and the set of rules for the series, meaning that the viewers expect the show to follow the guidelines for the genre that have been laid out during the first scene. These examples that create the guidelines mean that the audience connects this show to the supernatural since it starts with the notion of the unknown.

The introduction of the laboratory as “national” means that it belongs to the government (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:00:14-00:00:40). Since the viewers are introduced to the fact that it is a national laboratory, it is hereby indicated that the

series takes place at a time where the government made or tried to make big revolutionizing discoveries – which points to the science fiction genre – that might benefit the country politically in relation to The Cold War, which is also included in the later seasons (“Cold War”). Thus, it becomes possible to connect The Cold War to people’s relation to the unknown because it was a time of uncertainty for the people since they were not made aware of all that was happening, which will be elaborated in this analysis. Additionally, the fact that the series takes place during The Cold War that included this feeling of uncertainty can evoke the feeling of reflective nostalgia for the viewers. The uncertainty that people felt during this time is part of the explanation of how the ‘80s are connected to the supernatural since the supernatural is a representation of the unknown and thus, uncertainty, which was a general feeling amongst the people in that decade.

The forsaken yet heroic children

As was also seen in the analysis of *IT*, the group of friends in *Stranger Things*, who are children, feel responsible for finding Will because the authorities, in their opinion, do not perform as they should in such a case.

Following the first scene at the laboratory, the viewers are introduced to some of the main characters of the show, who are the boys, Will, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:01:51-00:02:50). The fact that the main characters are children in their preadolescence signifies that, as in the other movies that are analyzed in this paper, the children are meant to be the heroes of the series since the main characters are often the ones who solve the problems. Thus, the children are the heroes despite their assumed innocence and incompetence (Slusser 75; Shumway 406). The fact that the children are the heroes means that once again, it is implied that children were neglected by the authorities – the adults – since the children in the series have to stand on their own, as is seen later in the series. The reason why the authorities neglect the children in the series might be

because they do not take the children's worries seriously because of the children's presumed lively imagination. The grown-ups of the show might keep their focus on what they find important at the time – the political and societal issues of the country – and thus, not the children. Arguably, the reason that the children in the series do not seek the authorities – their parents – for help is because of the paranoia that occurred at the time because everything in the world felt uncertain and unsafe and that is why, people – in this case, the children – feel that no authority can be trusted (“In season 3, *Stranger Things*' celebration of '80s pop culture becomes a political ideology”).

The fact that people cannot rely on the authorities becomes evident when Will disappears and no one in the town takes it seriously at first aside from Will's mother, brother, and his friends, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:11:24-00:12:11; 00:17:11-00:17:21). The fact that the authorities of the town do not take Will's mom seriously when she expresses her concern about her son's disappearance is seen when she goes to the police and is told that “a boy his age, he's probably just playing hooky” (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:17:18-00:17:21). This example indicates that the authorities may not have taken cases seriously before there was more evidence, as has also been noted earlier in this thesis when looking at real cases of abducted children in the '80s. As mentioned by Madeleine Baran and Jennifer Vogel in the previously mentioned article, “Child kidnappings that captured our attention”, this may have been because the authorities could not act on it before there was more evidence, which meant that they did not have to worry before they could step in and do something. So, the authorities, in this case, do, to the audience, not appear to worry about Will's disappearance and thus, leave the parent, Will's mom, Joyce, in doubt about whether or not her child is still alive. Furthermore, it can be argued that this kind of neglect of civilians helped create or enhance the paranoia and distrust in the government that took place at the time. Additionally, it can be

argued that she feels abandoned by the authorities who are supposed to get her the help she needs because they do not listen to or believe her. The fact that the authorities do not listen to Joyce is seen when the officer, Hopper, tries to tell her that Will's body has been found, where Joyce objects (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Three: Holly, Jolly* 00:01:30-00:01:45). Here, she explains how that cannot be true because she just talked to him spiritually by using her Christmas lights as a way of using a kind of Morse Code, which the viewers have seen her do (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Three: Holly, Jolly* 00:01:30-00:01:45; *Chapter Four: The Body* 00:02:29-00:02:49). Joyce's story makes Hopper explain how it is normal to be delusional after losing a child (ibid.) The way Hopper answers her implies that even though Joyce tries her hardest to explain the situation and get help, the authorities do not believe her and therefore, will not help her. These examples can be argued to be one of the reasons behind the indication that people had difficulty in trusting the authorities of the country during that time since instances like this make people feel neglected.

Thus, the children can be said to be the heroes of this series since they do not give up on their friend and are the only ones that help Joyce. Children are essential when it comes to the '80s' connection to the supernatural because they have the capability of believing something supernatural, as has been noted earlier. Additionally, their abilities that go beyond what is known and the way they, despite their abilities, are constantly neglected makes them the underestimated heroes of the series. The fact that the children stand on their own also evokes a sense of reflective nostalgia for the audience because of how the circumstance with children fighting for themselves appears cryptic to the viewers.

The suspiciousness about authorities

Throughout the series, it becomes evident that the authorities cannot be trusted, as was also mentioned above.

In addition to the already mentioned examples, the distrust in authorities is seen when the chief of police in Hawkins, Hopper, asks the government-workers in the national laboratory for help regarding the disappearance of Will, which they agree to by letting him watch their surveillance tapes but then, they lie to Hopper about what they know (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Three: Holly, Jolly* 00:17:21-00:17:45). Hopper makes it clear that they are lying when they have watched the tapes by stating that it was raining on the night of Will's disappearance and there was no rain on the tapes they watched (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Three: Holly, Jolly* 00:17:52-00:18:06). This scene signifies that the laboratory workers have shown Hopper some other tapes than the ones taped on the night of Will's disappearance, which indicates that they are trying to hide something and thus, indicates that they cannot be trusted.

Additionally, the distrust in authorities is indicated when Hopper searches for wires through his entire house and succeeds in finding some, which means that the authorities have been monitoring him and also, as the viewers get to see, the rest of the people in the town (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Five: The Flea and The Acrobat* 00:15:00-00:16:09). The fact that the authorities are also watching the other people in the town is signified when the viewers see the government-workers listening to people's phone calls, including Joyce's phone call to Will's father (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:30:15-00:30:37). The monitoring of the town-people makes the characters in the show alongside the viewers wonder about the reason behind this. The monitoring appears suspicious to the viewers and signifies that the authorities are hiding something from the public since they find it necessary to monitor the people.

Moreover, the implication that the government is hiding something becomes evident multiple times throughout the series, where they do not answer people's questions distinctly. An example of the secretiveness is seen when Will's body is found, whereas Hopper asks the man who found Will about the place where the body was found (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter*

Four: The Body 00:35:04-00:36:12). Here, the man answers that the place is state-property, which Hopper knows is not the case and thus, threatens the man to tell him the truth, whereas the man then explains how he was told to call in the murder and “not let anybody get too close [...] [to] the body” (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Four: The Body* 00:35:04-00:36:12; 00:36:19-00:36:27; 00:36:27-00:36:40). This quote implies that the authorities, meaning the laboratory-workers, who are working for the government, are hiding something from the public and that they know the truth about Will’s disappearance, which appears suspicious to the audience. The distrust and suspiciousness are also exemplified when Hopper asks about the autopsy of Will’s body, where he is told that the doctor was let go because the state troopers, who are working at the laboratory, told the doctor that they would take care of it themselves (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Four: The Body* 00:22:34-00:22:57). This information appears obscure to Hopper and the viewers since it is not customary to have state troopers performing an autopsy. The suspicion about Will’s body continues when Hopper breaks into the laboratory and finds Will’s body, which he cuts open only to find it stuffed with cotton (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Four: The Body* 00:45:41-00:47:05). This scene implies that the suspicion that Will is not dead and that the authorities simply want the people of Hawkins to think so, so the town-people will not ask any more questions about Will’s disappearance, is accurate. Another example indicating how the authorities may be hiding something is seen when Hopper discovers that there are rooms that appear to be children’s rooms at the laboratory (*The Duffer Brothers Chapter Five: The Flea and The Acrobat* 00:04:19-00:04:35). The discovery of the children’s rooms leads him to investigate the history of the laboratory furtherly, which he does by reading through old newspapers. Here, he finds out that the authorities have taken children before, which can be seen in the following quote: “Look. This woman, Terry Ives, she claims to have lost her daughter, Jane. She sued Brenner, she sued the government. Now, the claims came to nothing but what if... I mean what if this whole time I’ve been... I’ve been looking

for Will... I've been chasing after some other kid" (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:05:52-00:06:12). This quote implies that there seems to have been other missing children involved with the national laboratory. This implication leads this analysis to the description of another main character, the girl that shows up after Will's disappearance and joins Will's group of friends, named Eleven, whom they call El (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:45:53-00:46:08). The discovery that the government has been sued for taking a child before gives the viewers the indication that the girl that was taken by the government might be El because of her characteristics, which will be elaborated in the next section.

The authorities' secrets, which are starting to slip out in the series, make the characters feel unsafe because of how the secretiveness gives the people the feeling of uncertainty since they are not told what is going on. Thus, evoking the sense of reflective nostalgia for the viewers because of how this secretiveness and suspicious behavior appears as untrustworthy traits of authorities.

The connection between the supernatural and the '80s appears partly from the suspiciousness since this is related to the unknown through its creation of the general feeling of uncertainty and the feeling of being unsafe that was found amongst people in the decade.

El – the secret weapon

Throughout the first season of the series, the viewers follow El's flashbacks to what appears to be human experiments including a supernatural force in the laboratory. El's flashbacks give the audience the indication that the government is developing a kind of future technology – hinting at the science fiction genre. It appears that what they are developing is a new powerful weapon, as was done in reality during The Cold War, which will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

As mentioned, El appears after Will's disappearance. The boys find her in the forest whilst looking for Will and take her to Mike's house without his parents' knowledge (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter One: The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:45:53-00:46:08; *Chapter Two: The Weirdo on Maple Street* 00:00:11-00:00:17). As El stays with the boys, it becomes evident that she has supernatural powers, which seems to be what the laboratory wanted to experiment with. The experiments will be elaborated later. The first time El's supernatural powers are revealed to the viewers is when Lucas wants to tell Mike's parents about having found El and letting her stay at Mike's house (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Two: The Weirdo on Maple Street* 00:29:37-00:29:49). Here, it is clear to the viewers that El keeps the door shut with her mind in order for Lucas not to get out of the room and reveal their secret (ibid.). It is clear that El is the one keeping the door shut with her powers since her nose starts bleeding, which is seen as the camera zooms in on her (ibid.).

As the viewers get to know El's character better, they learn more and more about her past and her time in the laboratory, where she had to control things and people physically with her mind. An example of El's abilities is seen when the audience sees one of her flashbacks where she is put in a tube of water to find "it" (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:20:06-00:20:07). In the following quote, it is indicated that El's supernatural powers are used to connect with another world when she walks with Dr. Brenner, who runs the laboratory, into a research area of the laboratory:

It's okay, Eleven. Don't be frightened. These are all friends. They're just here to watch. Don't focus on them. Stay in here, like before [...] Now remember. Whatever it is, it can't hurt you. Not from here. There's nothing to be frightened of. It's reaching out to you because it wants you. Hmm? It's calling you... so don't turn away from it this time.

I want you to find it. Understand? (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:19:23-00:20:10).

As Dr. Brenner says “[s]tay in here”, he points to El’s forehead, indicating that she needs to keep focus and stay inside her mind (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:19:37-00:19:39). The quote indicates how the authorities are using her to stay ahead in the scientific field by using her powers to connect with another world in which there is a monster and thus, exploring the unknown. Additionally, it is indicated how El is used as a spy since she is connecting with another world in which she sees a Russian man speaking and then reports what she has seen and heard, as was also done in The Cold War with the American spies that investigated Russia and vice versa (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Five: The Flea and The Acrobat* 00:42:42-00:43:37; “United States Relations with Russia: The Cold War”).

The fact that the laboratory in the series takes part in The Cold War is also indicated when Hopper asks one of the laboratory workers what they are working on at the laboratory in the following quote: “Staying one step ahead of the Russians?” to which the laboratory worker answers: “I expect. Something like that” (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Three: Holly, Jolly* 00:17:09-00:17:14). Along with what has been seen at the laboratory so far, these quotes indicate that the laboratory takes part in The Cold War by experimenting and trying to make new and revolutionizing discoveries that, potentially, can give the American government more power.

The connection between The Cold War and this series can, therefore, be said to be connected since El appears as the secret weapon of the war. This fact also connects the supernatural to the decade since the uncertainty about what was going on at the time is expressed through the supernatural, which also, in this case, makes reflective nostalgia arise in the viewers’ minds.

The monster

The monster in the series can be said to represent the monster of the time – the child abductor.

As mentioned, El is used as a tool to enlighten the government about the unknown. She is the only one who can communicate with the other world and is, in this way, used as a medium between the two worlds, which is a tendency within this kind of genre (Allison 142). Arguably, the reason behind the child being able to connect with another world, as opposed to an adult, might be the previously stated fact that children are seen as innocent and incompetent and thus, are easier to manipulate and possess (Slusser 75; Shumway 406).

As noted earlier, the monster of the time was not only seen as a monster because of the cruelties it performed but also, because often “the monster” – meaning the child abductor – symbolically, had no face since it was a fact that more often than not, the kidnapers were anonymous (“How ‘Stranger Things’ Captures ‘80s Panic Over Missing Kids”). The notion that a monster has no face is also pointed out in *Stranger Things* when Joyce describes what she saw when she encountered the monster: “It was almost... human, but it wasn’t. It... it had these long arms and... it didn’t have a face” (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Four: The Body* 00:02:09-00:02:18). Furthermore, this characteristic is also confirmed by Nancy, Mike’s older sister, in a conversation between her and Jonathan, Will’s older brother, where she also has seen the monster. Here, Jonathan asks her what she saw, where she begins to describe it as follows: “It was almost like he... he didn’t have...”, to which Jonathan finishes her sentence by saying “Didn’t have a face?” (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Four: The Body* 00:33:37-00:33:48). Here, an actual monster is commented, whereas in the real world, it is not the same kind of monster physically but a monster in being anonymous and thus, unknown, and also through the cruel actions that are performed. However, it is also essential to mention the previously noted “stranger danger” since this can be connected to this scene because of how

the monster represents the stranger (“How ‘Stranger Things’ Captures ‘80s Panic Over Missing Kids”).

While the crimes, especially the kidnappings, are continuing throughout the series, the national lab and thus, also, the government, only shows interest because they are trying to hide their work from the public, which, unfortunately for them, escaped – meaning the monster that they have discovered. Since the monster escaped, the public becomes aware that something is going on and starts to ask questions, which the government is trying to avoid because they want to keep it a secret so it will not be revealed to the enemy – the Russians – or make the people go against the government because of the danger the government has put people in.

Therefore, the monster in the series can be said to represent the monster of the time, meaning a kidnapper, that the authorities in the series accidentally let out, which also, occasionally happened in the real world, indicating the perpetrators who were on parole (“Child kidnappings that captured our attention”). The supernatural monster that represents the unknown in the ‘80s in the series in a way, also, represents the unknown of the ‘80s in real life because of how the monster is an illustration of the kidnappers that often got away with their crimes at first. Thus, the feeling of reflective nostalgia emerges through the representation of the monster.

El - the victim, the superhero

The distrust in authorities that took place during this decade is especially signified when exploring El’s story.

As noted earlier, it is indicated in the series that El was taken from her mother as an infant by the government so they could perform experiments on her. The reason for the government wanting to use El for experiments might be because the character, who is indicated to be El’s mother, Terry, took part in her share of governmental experiments by being voluntarily drugged while she was pregnant, which is explained by her sister in the following quote:

They'd pay... you know, a couple hundred bucks to people like my sister, give 'em drugs, psychedelics. LSD, mostly. And then they'd strip her naked and put her in these isolation tanks [...] These big bathtubs, basically, filled with salt water, so you can float around in there. [...] They wanted to expand the boundaries of the mind. [...] The thing is, though, is that she didn't know she was pregnant at the time [...] Terry miscarried in the third trimester [...] Terry, uh, pretends like Jane is real, like she's gonna come home someday. Says she's special. Born with "abilities" [...] Telepathy, telekinesis. You know, shit you can do with your mind. That's why the big, bad man stole Jane away [...] Her baby is a weapon, off fighting commies. You know, the doctors all say it's a coping mechanism. You know, to deal with the guilt [...] (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:25:11-00:27:58).

This quote explains how the suspicion the main characters in the series have regarding the authorities might not be entirely baseless. The quote implies that because Terry was used in experiments herself, it has made the government curious about what abilities her child might have and thus, they took the child to find out, which is seen in multiple scenes throughout the series where El's abilities are tested in the laboratory. Furthermore, this quote also implies how the experiments take place during The Cold War because of the notion that El could be a potential secret weapon against the communists (ibid.). This notion also hints at the paranoia about the government there was amongst people at the time by indicating how people in the series cannot trust the government because the government will do anything to win the war and become the strongest superpower and therefore does not consider the general needs of their people. The quote implies how the government would go as far as putting their own people in danger or misery to win the war. The fact that the series depicts the government's handling of

The Cold War in this way, can also be seen as an illustration of how people at the time felt because the government was secretive about what was happening and that made people paranoid about whom to trust. Additionally, the quote implies the sense of paranoia about the government since El's mother does not trust the authorities and says that they are the ones who stole her away (ibid.). Moreover, the paranoia can be seen in the way Joyce and Hopper react to the story, where the viewers see their shocked faces since the quote proves their suspicion. Their reaction implies that they believe Terry's story, which enhances their distrust in the government and thus, their sense of paranoia about the government. Here, it is essential to mention a CIA project in the past, where the experiments were performed on humans and involved drugging the people who signed up "for mind control, information gathering and psychological torture" ("MK-Ultra"). The Duffer Brothers have told the magazine, *Rolling Stone*, that this project is the inspiration for the series ("Stranger Things' true story is based on a mind-blowing CIA experiment"). These notions confirm the paranoia and uncertainty people felt in the decade.

An example of when El's abilities are experimented with is when she is put in a tube of water to connect to the unknown world, which is called "The Upside Down" in the series (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:19:23-00:20:10). In the tube, she is able to enter the other world and see specific scenarios of what is happening there, depending on what she is focusing on. An example of her abilities is shown when she is trying to find the monster and succeeds (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:41:12-00:42:09). Along with what has been noted earlier, this example signifies that she is the medium between the two worlds and that she functions in both worlds, which is often the case for children in supernatural films (Allison 142). Even though Dr. Brenner promised her that the monster could not see or harm her, it sees her, when she approaches it through her mind (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Six: The Monster* 00:41:12-00:42:09). After the monster sees her, she reenters the ordinary world

because she becomes frightened when the monster screams at her (ibid.). Here, it can be argued that El feels neglected by the authorities because Dr. Brenner broke his promise about how the monster could not hurt her, which to her appeared to be untrue since it is seen in the scene that she can touch the monster, which means that the monster should also be able to touch her. Throughout her time at the laboratory, El has been scarred because of the things she has had to do, which can be seen especially in the beginning of the series, where she does not speak and becomes scared easily by loud noises or when people try to approach her (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Two: The Weirdo on Maple Street* 00:00:10-00:00:50). Furthermore, as previously indicated, she finds it difficult to trust authorities, which is seen in the example mentioned earlier, where Lucas wants to tell Mike's parents about El to which El has a strong reaction (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Two: The Weirdo on Maple Street* 00:29:37-00:29:49). This example also illustrates how the authoritarian people working at the national laboratory have made El distrust authorities because of the way they treated her. Moreover, the fact that she feels neglected by the authorities leads the children in the series to handle the situation on their own. Their realization that they have to handle matters by themselves is based on how El indicates how the authorities are "bad people" and that if they tell their parents, they will be in danger because if so, the parents will contact the authorities (The Duffer Brothers *Chapter Two: The Weirdo on Maple Street* 00:28:52-00:28:53; 00:29:13-00:29:19). This indication of neglect makes the audience feel the sense of reflective nostalgia since this implication that the children felt neglected makes the viewers think critically about the decade.

Hereby, the connection between the supernatural and the '80s becomes evident because El has supernatural powers that are supposed to help the government fight Russia, meaning that the events of the '80s in this series becomes connected to the supernatural.

The notion of nostalgia

In this series, it is evident that both kinds of nostalgia come into play.

The reflective kind of nostalgia is seen in *Stranger Things* because of the way the series depicts the issues of the time such as the kidnappings, neglect of people, The Cold War, and the intertwining distrust in authorities.

However, restorative nostalgia grows out of reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia is seen in the way the series remind the viewers of the materialistic culture of the decade, which makes them long for these things and thus, makes them want to relive that time. Furthermore, the materialistic culture can also create a sense of how this period was a simpler time, which is also something people crave in addition to stability. Stability, aided by simplicity, is, as mentioned, found when the viewers know how the decade turned out.

Thusly, it can be said that *Stranger Things* represents the '80s through culture and by commenting on The Cold War and the societal issues that went on at the time through both reflective and restorative nostalgia.

Summary of the analysis of Stranger Things

This part of the analysis has shown how the '80s are connected to the supernatural through the representation of a monster that depicts societal issues of the time.

The monster in the series is both a representation of the child abductors of the time but also, a representation of the government's secretiveness of the decade that led people into uncertainty and created paranoia about the government.

The audience of the series is captivated with this representation of the past because it features the unknown, which have been proven to fascinate people immensely. Furthermore, it can either give them the feeling of reliving their childhood or youth through the sense of restorative nostalgia or it can make them long for it through the feeling of stability and simplicity. This feeling implies that they know everything they see and additionally, do not have to cope with the issues that are represented because it takes place in the past. However, the audience can also get the feeling of reflective nostalgia since they are made aware of the

issues of the decade. This awareness allows them to think critically about the time or reflect critically on the emotions they feel when reflecting the past, for example, when feeling the sense of restorative nostalgia.

Thus, it can be stated that *Stranger Things* is a modern-day representation of the '80s' uncertainty – expressed through the supernatural – that can evoke both feelings of nostalgia.

Analysis of Super 8

Another movie that represents the '80s through both restorative and reflective nostalgia is J. J. Abrams' *Super 8* from 2011. This movie is another example of how the '80s are connected to the supernatural.

The plot of this movie consists of a group of friends who are making a monster-movie and while filming, they observe a train colliding with a car (Abrams 00:16:51-00:18:50). They find a man at the crime scene, who tells them that someone will come after them if they are found at the crime scene (Abrams 00:23:43-00:23:59). Following this scene, people start disappearing and mysterious noises and movements are observed in the town. These disappearances and strange observations make the group of friends try to unveil what is happening, which leads them to the secretiveness of the government.

The fact that the movie takes place in the '80s can be seen through the historical markers in the film as well as materialistic culture as, for example, gadgets, such as the old camera the group of friends uses to create their movie. Furthermore, the period the movie is situated in becomes clear since the movie also features indicators of historical events such as The Cold War and the indication of how kidnappings happened frequently in this decade.

The child protagonists' fantasy and paranoia become reality

The children are, as mentioned, creating a monster-movie, which later turns out to be a kind of prediction of the future, which will be explained in this section.

The fact that the main characters, who are children, are making a monster-movie makes escapism occur since these kinds of movies are often used as a way of this (Abrams 00:02:27-00:02:33; Bernd and Vorderer 100). The children use their hobby of making movies as a way of escaping their everyday lives because, as it turns out, behind the curtains their lives are filled with issues regarding their families, which no one confronts each other about (“The Art of Escapism for People Suffering a Reality Overdose”). However, the routines of their everyday lives change drastically, when they witness a massive accident. While the children of the film are shooting a scene for their own monster-movie, they see a violent accident, where a car drives on to the train tracks and collides with a moving train (Abrams 00:16:51-00:18:50). After the crash, the children find the man, Dr. Woodward, who was driving the car. He tells them as follows: “They will kill you. Do not speak of this. Or else you... and your parents... will die” (Abrams 00:23:43-00:23:59). This quote indicates how there is some kind of untrustworthy authority that wants to control what is happening, whom the viewers are introduced to when a bunch of men dressed in what appears to be military uniforms come rushing towards the crime scene (Abrams 00:23:43-00:23:58). The fact that the military is the noted untrustworthy authority is also implied, when one of the main characters, Joe, recognize the train as an “Air Force Train” (Abrams 00:32:12-00:32:14). In addition to the notion on military men above, this observation means that in this movie, there is also a sense of distrust in the authorities since it has been indicated by Dr. Woodward that it is the Air Force, the military, who will kill whoever finds out about the accident. Furthermore, the scene where they speak with Dr. Woodward implies that the military and thus also, the government, are hiding something, which later turns out to be a supernatural monster. The implication that the authorities are hiding something is seen in the fact that he indicates in the quote above that they will stop whoever knows about what happened (Abrams 00:23:43-00:23:59). The fact that the authorities are hiding something will be furtherly elaborated later in this analysis.

A part of the children's storyline of their own movie becomes reality since they come to deal with a real-life monster and not just their imagined one, as will be commented later. The fact that the storyline that the children made up for their movie, providing an opportunity for escapism, comes true signifies how the paranoia of the '80s about what was going on in the world sometimes resulted in illustrations of a monster, which, as mentioned, represents the unknown, in fiction. These illustrations possibly occurred because some people felt the need to express their thoughts, fears, and emotions about the societal and political issues of the time, which is possible through fiction, evoking the sense of reflective nostalgia through potential criticism (Boym XVIII). Some people might still need to share their feelings about a certain time, which can be seen in the way filmmakers represent the past. Thus, it can be stated that the '80s still to this day appear to have a connection to the supernatural because of how the children in the movie get to express themselves through their supernatural movie, which filmmakers still do today.

The paranoia about the government

As was also seen in the analysis of *IT* and *Stranger Things*, this movie is also a portrayal of the paranoia people felt in the '80s because of the uncertainty that came from what was happening.

The distrust in authorities, in this case, the military, is especially seen when Joe comes home to find his father, the police officer, Jackson Lamb, sitting in a meeting with the other policemen in the town, where they are discussing how the Air Force has not answered any questions they have asked, how the Air Force potentially could be looking for Dr. Woodward's research, and that the Air Force appears to be looking for someone (Abrams 00:42:46-00:43:03). This example indicates the distrust in authorities because they are not giving the people any answers. The next example of the wariness about the governmental authorities is seen when Lamb is asking Colonel Nelec about what is happening, where Nelec will not answer

his questions (Abrams 00:51:23-00:51:31). This example creates a sense of suspiciousness for the characters as well as the viewers since it seems distrustful when the authorities do not answer people's questions. Lamb then tells the colonel about what he caught on the radio about a military mission called "Walking Distance", which makes Nelec give in and agree to talk at another place and time (Abrams 00:51:31-00:51:46). When Lamb drives to the military base to get an explanation from Nelec, he is put under military arrest and held captive (Abrams 00:54:43-00:55:08). Since this appears like a suspicious behavior from the authorities of the country, it implies how the military must be hiding something from the public and that they will do anything in their power to keep it that way. Furthermore, it implies the distrust in military authorities since the military is supposed to protect the people of their country but mischievously perform that duty because of how they treat the people that have discovered some of their secret work as if they were the enemy. This treatment of people is also seen in the following scene, where it is clear that they are drugging Dr. Woodward to get information out of him (Abrams 00:55:08-00:56:58). However, the reason why they are drugging Dr. Woodward might be because they view Dr. Woodward as a traitor since he will not give them the information that is necessary for them to protect their country. Furthermore, it is implied that the military is abusing their power to complete their job and therefore appears distrustful by, for example, torturing their own people for information. This abuse of power is indicated when Dr. Woodward answers Nelec after Nelec tells Dr. Woodward that if he helps them, the military will take care of him: "I've seen what happens, Mr. Nelec, when you take care of people" (Abrams 00:56:00-00:56:07). As the viewers see Dr. Woodward expressing his answer to Nelec from the hospital bed, it is clear that Dr. Woodward is in a critical state. This quote along with the image of Dr. Woodward in the hospital bed and the following image of a soldier drugging him illustrate how the words "[taking] care" in this case could imply something immoral such as torture (ibid.). Additionally, the immorality can be seen when the military

executes their “Operation Walking Distance” by starting a fire just outside of the town, where it is also mentioned how the evacuation of the town is starting soon (Abrams 01:04:45-01:04:59). This example shows how the military intentionally starts a fire to have an excuse for evacuating all citizens so that no one will ask questions about what the military is doing in the town when they are going to investigate Dr. Woodward’s work and thus, the unknown, which will be commented later. This notion indicates how the military in this movie takes crude measures in hand to get the information they need, even if it means that they have to go against their own people.

Additionally, it is clear how the people of the town do not trust the military and thus, the government when Joe’s father is answering the people’s questions about what is happening at a town meeting. Here, the viewers hear a woman complain as follows: “I wanna know who took them. Twenty microwaves... gone from my inventory. Everywhere you look, things are going missing. We’ve got trains crashing, people vanishing. Belmont County’s without power. You know what this feels like to me? This feels like a Russian invasion” (Abrams 00:45:38-00:45:58). This quote, along with the example above, indicate how the people feel neglected by the authorities because of how the authorities are not providing the answers the people need nor the answers the police need to take care of the civilians and make the civilians feel safe (Abrams 00:51:31-00:51:46). The quote also illustrates how people might have felt during The Cold War with the woman’s comment on the Russians, meaning that the people might have felt uncertain about what was happening in the world since they, at the time, were not given any answers and thus, only had suspicions about what might happen. The lack of answers leads the characters in the movie, and possibly also the people of the ‘80s, into fear and uncertainty, which evokes them to distrust the authorities because this lack of information makes them feel neglected.

These examples illustrate how people might have felt in that decade, which was emotions of fear, uncertainty, unsafety, and ultimately, paranoia because of how much of The Cold War was kept secret. Additionally, this illustration adds to the viewers' sense of reflective nostalgia because of how the movie represents real issues of the time that thus, can be viewed critically.

This notion of the '80s' paranoia furtherly explains how the decade is connected to the supernatural because the supernatural can be an illustration of feeling unsafe.

The leery parents

The way that the people of the town feel neglected by the authorities can also be said to apply to the children, the main characters, of the movie because of their parents. An example of the neglect of children would be when Joe sees his father crying because of Joe's mother's death, where Lamb pretends like it is nothing and shuts the door on Joe (Abrams 00:07:33-00:07:47). This reaction from Lamb makes Joe feel abandoned and alone since the scene signifies how they cannot talk about what they have gone through as a family, hinting at his mother's accident. Furthermore, it is seen when Lamb tells Joe that he wants to send Joe away at a baseball-camp during the summer, whereas Joe objects, but Lamb does not listen:

It's a six-week program. Hands-on training with college coaches. You'd like it. I know I did. [...] And it'd be good for you to spend some time with kids who don't run around with cameras and monster make-up. [...] You'd like it there. It's what we both need (Abrams 00:07:54-00:08:50).

In this quote, it becomes evident how Lamb does not take Joe's feelings, wants, and needs into consideration. It appears to be Lamb who needs to have a break and not Joe since Lamb pushes the baseball-camp on Joe and says that it is what they both need, perhaps because he cannot cope with raising Joe at this point. As seen in this scene, it is clear that Joe does not

want to go away, and that he is disappointed about his father pushing it on him. Another example is when Lamb is having a discussion with Joe about whether or not Joe should keep seeing one of his best friends, Alice (Abrams 00:51:55-00:53:38). Here, Lamb indicates that he does not have time to deal with Joe and his issues because he has to take care of the town. This remark makes Joe feel neglected and abandoned since he is commanded to do something but is not given the opportunity of objecting. Thus, Joe might be losing faith in his father as an authority because he does not listen to Joe or consider Joe's feelings. Additionally, he might start distrusting his father as an authority because of how this potentially gives Joe the feeling that Lamb is ignoring Joe and his emotional needs. Arguably, this neglect makes Joe stand on his own and avoid involving his father in Joe's matters.

Aside from Joe's father, the neglect of children can be seen in examples including Alice and her father, Louis Dainard, too. Dainard appears dominant and as a questionable authority throughout the entire movie. This dominance is seen when it becomes clear how Alice is scared of her father when he sees Joe talking to her outside their house (Abrams 00:30:10-00:31:08). Moreover, it is evident how Dainard is a questionable authority when Alice explains to Joe what happened on the morning of Joe's mother's accident, which can be seen in the following quote: "He drink that morning. My dad. He missed his shift. Your mom took it for him ... the day of the accident" (Abrams 01:00:04-01:00:31). In this quote it is indicated how Dainard has a drinking problem, and that because of his alcoholism, Joe's mother died. The quote proves how Dainard is a questionable authority to Alice since he is an alcoholic, which means that he is presumably unable to take care of a child. Additionally, Dainard's alcoholism is seen when Alice comes home late one night, where he catches her (Abrams 01:02:23-01:03:57). In this scene, the viewers see him sitting with a bottle of whiskey yelling at Alice (Abrams 01:02:37-01:03:15). He appears threatening since he becomes angry with Alice because she does not want to obey his orders (*ibid.*). Following this part of the scene, Alice runs out the door, gets

on her bike, and tries to escape from Dainard, who then, tries to follow her in his car while being intoxicated, which results in him crashing into a parked car (Abrams 01:03:15-01:03:57). This scene shows how Dainard is a questionable authority but also, that he cares for Alice since he follows her and tries to apologize out of the window of his car (Abrams 01:03:50-01:03:53). However, his abusiveness still makes Alice feel neglected and alone since her father does not appear to be capable of taking care of her.

Thus, the paranoia of the decade might partly be about whether or not a child could trust its parents since the parents did not always consider their children's wants, needs, and emotions, which in the world of fiction results in the children trying to stand on their own and be independent.

The fact that the children in this movie get neglected adds to the connection between the '80s and the supernatural because of how the supernatural represents societal issues, such as the many kidnappings of the decade, which indicates some sort of neglect since some of the children under other circumstances could have been safe. Furthermore, the representation of neglect in the movie makes the audience feel the sense of reflective nostalgia since this is represented as significant to the decade and thus, something the period can be criticized for.

The monstrous kidnapper

The historical indicator that kidnappings occurred frequently through the '80s is seen in the movie when people from the town disappear one by one. It is especially highlighted when Alice is taken right in front of her dad (Abrams 01:03:55-01:04:45). The scene indicates how kidnappers are connected to the unknown and symbolically have no face because of how, more often than not, the kidnappers were anonymous. This anonymity is seen in this particular scene when Dainard sees that his daughter is being taken but does not know what took her. However, it is clear that he notices how the abductor is not human and thus, it can be concluded that it is some kind of monster (Abrams 01:10:01-01:10:36). This notion of the monster is indicated in

the following scene where the entire town is being evacuated and relocated to a national military base where Joe is looking for his father and finds Alice's father instead (Abrams 01:04:45-01:04:59; 01:10:01-01:10:36). Dainard then tells Joe as follows: "It took her. It took Alice. [...] I saw it. It was big. And, I don't know, it was something... I've never... I've never... No one believes me. They just keep giving me pills and... No one believes me" (Abrams 01:10:09-01:10:28). Firstly, this quote demonstrates how the unknown in the movie is some kind of monster since Dainard does not know how to define it. Secondly, the quote implies how the military is trying to hide what they know from the public since they seem to drug the people that appear to have come close to a part of the truth, as has been pointed out in the previously mentioned example including Dr. Woodward and Nelec. This treatment of witnesses means that the military especially makes the people that have seen or noticed something unusual feel neglected since the military abuse their power over these people to get information or to make sure that their secret will not slip out. Furthermore, it makes people distrust the authorities because they are ignoring people's requests to get answers about what is happening. This disregard of people makes the people of the town feel abandoned by the authorities, who are supposed to protect them.

Again, it has been depicted how kidnappings happened frequently in the '80s since moviemakers symbolize them in multiple instances of this movie that represents the decade.

This section also adds to the connection between the decade and the supernatural because of the '80s kidnappings that are illustrated by using a monster as the kidnapper and thus, criticize that part of the decade by evoking the sense of reflective nostalgia for the viewers.

The alien

The unknown in the movie, as mentioned, is expressed through a monster (Cohen 8).

The first time it becomes clear to the viewers that something unknown is featured is after the train crash, where Joe has taken cover and waits for the explosions and crashes to stop

(Abrams 00:18:38-00:18:45). Suddenly, after the explosions and crashes appear to have stopped, he hears another big noise and rustling coming from one of the carriages, which makes him look (ibid.). He sees how this is the only carriage that is still moving, which indicates that something is inside it (Abrams 00:18:45-00:19:16). Additionally, along with the movements and noises of the carriage, he also hears a strange unknown squeaky noise that seems to be separated from the carriage noises (ibid.). The movements and noises imply that whatever is in the carriage is something that Joe cannot define and thus, represents the unknown for both Joe and the viewers of the movie.

One of the first sightings of what appears to be a monster happens when Joe is at the churchyard, where he sees something big moving inside the building (Abrams 00:54:15-00:54:43). It is evident that what is moving inside the building is supernatural since no human would be able to perform those kinds of movements. Moreover, the fact that the unknown is a kind of monster becomes clear in the previously mentioned example, where Alice is taken, and her father describes what he saw as something non-human (Abrams 01:03:55-01:04:45; 01:10:09-01:10:28).

The monster in the movie appears to be some type of alien, which becomes clear through Dr. Woodward's research. The research is elaborated when the main characters, the children, in the film find a recording where Dr. Woodward explains what is happening and what they are researching, which can be seen in the following quote:

... told them that this creature is more sophisticated than any of us, that his species is predominantly subterranean, [...] and that he is being treated without compassion or respect. I explained that all he wants is to rebuild his ship, a craft made up of those cubes, a complex shape-shifting alloy. Remarkable material that we'll never fully understand. He has been desperate to reconstitute his ship since it crashed here in '58.

But instead of giving him the help he needs we've held him as a prisoner. [...] He's been restrained and experimented upon, biopsied, and tortured by Nelec. Through pain and lack of compassion, we have taught him to hate us all. We have turned him into an enemy. I told them I knew these things because he made contact with me, that he makes a psychic connection by touch. [...] The moment we made contact, I understood him, and he me. What I know is that if we don't change this and begin helping him, we will all pay the price. But Nelec won't listen. [...] He'll have me discharged. [...] But I won't give up. I will do everything in my power to set him free (Abrams 01:15:35-01:17:17).

In this quote, it is evident that the monster is alien, meaning some kind of creature from another planet since it is mentioned how the creature's ship has crashed on earth. The fact that Dr. Woodward is talking about the creature's ship indicates how the creature may be a type of alien since the word "ship" is usually a word people use to describe transportation to or from space, especially considering the notion that this ship has crashed on earth (ibid.). Furthermore, the fact that it crashes on earth signifies that the ship has come from space. The research that is performed on this creature – the alien – and the alien's material is an indicator of how the government took part in the space race of the '80s, which was a part of The Cold War. In the movie, it is signified how The Cold War and thus, the space race suffused most of the decade and the governmental workers' minds, which meant that the government's focus is, in this movie, taken away from the people, who originally were the ones they were trying to protect. However, the government has failed in doing so since people end up feeling neglected and therefore, do not trust the government. Additionally, this quote says that the ship is made of "[r]emarkable material that we'll never fully understand", which indicates that the material is a kind of future technology and thus, hinting at the science fiction genre (ibid.).

The fact that the monster is an alien indicates the connection to the space race of The Cold War but can also be an illustration of the decade's monster – the kidnapper – and in this way, makes the viewers get the feeling of reflective nostalgia through this representation of the kidnapper, which is significant as something that can be criticized from the decade. The analyzed elements of this section are adding to the connection between the '80s and the supernatural since the monster is an alien and thus, illustrates the discoveries of the decade, which created a sense of uncertainty for people, in addition to illustrating the possible comment on the monsters of the time.

The heroic children

As noted earlier in this analysis, the children are forced to stand up for themselves because of how the authorities neglect them.

The scene where the children find the tape of Dr. Woodward's research, along with the lead up to the scene, indicates how the children feel the need to take measures into their own hands since no one appears to be willing to or able to help them save Alice or get answers about what is happening. This lack of help from the authorities can be seen when the people of the town have been evacuated, where Joe finds out that Alice has been abducted. Here, Joe says that he wants to go against the authorities' evacuation of the town to save Alice since it has become clear that the authorities do not want to help when Dainard says that they do not believe him (Abrams 01:10:35-01:10:55; 01:10:09-01:10:28). At the end of the movie, the alien builds his ship and takes off, after Joe convinces it to leave by confronting it with its own thoughts and feelings about wanting to go home, and thusly, Alice is saved (Abrams 01:40:54-01:42:38; 01:36:35-01:38:12). This example shows that it turns out to be the children who saved the world because they stood up against the authorities to save their friend and thereby, have possibly saved many others from being taken by the monster.

This section of the analysis shows the connection between the supernatural and the '80s by implying how people felt neglected during this time, which is represented through the supernatural, and thus, people started handling matters on their own. Furthermore, the fact that people had to handle things by themselves gives the viewers a sense of reflective nostalgia in the way the movie represents critical societal issues that are difficult to deal with without help from the authorities.

The notion of nostalgia and fascination with the past

As in *Stranger Things*, this movie can be said to represent reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia since it criticizes society at the time while representing the popular culture of the decade (Boym XVIII).

This representation is done by presenting the authorities as questionable characters with debatable intentions and through this presentation of authorities, giving the idea of how people felt neglected and abandoned because the authorities failed in stopping horrible events from happening. Furthermore, the movie makes the audience long for the period by drawing on the idea that people desire stability and simplicity, as has been elaborated earlier. This desire can be exemplified through the materialistic culture, such as how the group of friends uses an old camera when they are filming their movie, as mentioned at the beginning of this analysis.

Thus, the movie represents restorative nostalgia in making the audience want to relive the decade by using materialistic culture and through this, creates the feeling of simplicity and stability. Reflective nostalgia is evoked through the illustration of the issues of the time and making the viewers reflect critically on these issues and thus, also their own emotions about what has made the feeling of restorative nostalgia occur.

Here, the connection between the supernatural and the '80s is displayed in how the viewers can interpret the movie's representation of the past's societal issues, which is done through supernatural features. Through these features, the viewers become able to criticize the period

but at the same time, long for it since it also makes the feeling of stability and simplicity arise through the materialistic culture.

Summary of the analysis of Super 8

What the analysis of this movie shows is that restorative nostalgia springs from reflective nostalgia since the issues of the time are clear to the audience but are represented through popular culture including materialistic things that people long for alongside the sense of stability.

It is evident that the children's fantasy that is shown in the making of their monster-movie becomes reality, which implies that the children have foreseen the future. This understanding draws on the previously made notion of children's abilities to connect with another world and how their abilities go beyond adults' abilities.

The monster – that is an alien – in the movie is both a representation of the enemy of the decade, the kidnapper, but also, as in *Stranger Things*, the monster helps evoke the paranoia about the government since the monster is kept secret from the public even though it attacks people, meaning that people are not made aware of why the kidnappings are happening. These examples also hint at the uncertainty and distrust there was at the time about The Cold War and also, the space race since the monster is an alien. Furthermore, the parents also appear as untrustworthy because of their way of handling things, which makes the children distrust them. Therefore, it is the children that must step up and fight the monster since the adults cannot be trusted because they will not listen to the children. The children's independence makes them the heroes. Furthermore, children may be more capable of fighting the monster since they represent innocence and are for that reason easier to influence and can thus, become possessed by the monster. It could also be because of how children are often the ones who can communicate with another world – or in this case, a creature of another world. Thus, the

children are able to become the heroes because of the wisdom they gain about how to handle the monster that the authorities cannot (Barton 132).

It is clear that the movie represents reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia because of how it represents societal issues of the time while showing the period's popular culture.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown how there is a connection between the supernatural and the '80s because of how the supernatural is used to illustrate societal issues of the time.

Summary of the analyses of the three works

Through the analysis of the two movies and the Netflix-series, it has become clear that there are different ways of reflecting the '80s, which are separated into two kinds of nostalgia – namely, restorative and reflective.

The interpretations of the films have shown how they all evoke reflective nostalgia by criticizing the society at the time. However, *Stranger Things* and *Super 8* also create the feeling of restorative nostalgia by reminding people of the materialistic culture, which makes people long for it because they miss that time since these features carry a sense of simplicity over them and give the viewers a sense of stability. It should be noted that the reason why *Stranger Things* and *Super 8* also represent restorative nostalgia might be because they are newer than *IT*, which means that the creators of the series and the movie have had the opportunity of distancing themselves from the issues of the decade.

As noted in the section on nostalgia, it was pointed out that the reason for people to long for something that they have not experienced was that they seek stability in knowing everything about a certain period. However, through this analysis, it has become clear that stability is a minor factor in this series and these films. The reason why stability is a minor factor in these cases is because the audience is made aware of the issues of the time, which makes them criticize the past's issues. However, at the same time, the viewers still feel a sense of longing

for the stable factors of the decade, meaning the things they know from the past perhaps because of the simplicity of certain features.

Thus, it can be said that all three works that have been analyzed represent society through criticism. However, the newly made series and movie can also be said to glorify the '80s through representations of popular culture.

The analysis of the series and the two movies has shown how the '80s are connected to the supernatural through the fact that the supernatural, in these cases, is used to represent societal issues of the time.

The fascination with supernatural representations of the '80s

The analysis of the three works within the horror and science fiction genres highlights the connection between these supernatural genres and the '80s through the interpretations of the different representations of the decade. Drawing on the analysis, the fascination with series and movies representing the '80s through supernatural elements will now be commented.

Nostalgia expressed through monsters and culture

The connection between the supernatural and the '80s becomes clear through the theory of nostalgia in cooperation with Cohen's monster thesis.

Nostalgia explains the different ways in which individuals can reflect the past – that is restorative and reflective – and Cohen's monster thesis specifies how this can be done, especially regarding reflective nostalgia. As mentioned, monsters are used in these kinds of films because the monsters represent societal issues, people's curiosity, and fears. Thusly, the monsters are a representation of how society looks at a certain time – in these cases, the '80s. The monsters embody the problems of society and highlight them for the movie's audience, which creates awareness of the issues for the viewers. This accentuation means that the audience gains the ability to reflect on the problems of the given period, which in most cases,

makes them criticize what happened meaning that they are feeling the sense of reflective nostalgia.

The historical indicators, which also include the representation of societal issues, make it possible for the audience to reflect critically on a certain time, meaning that the audience looks at the represented history with modern eyes. The fact that the viewers reflect the past from their contemporary perspective means that it becomes possible for them to objectify past events and thus, review what happened in the past and the reasons behind these occurrences. In other words, this reflection can create social criticism when comparing it to the present since this makes the differences stand out. The social criticism arises when filmmakers feel the need to emphasize what mistakes are important to reflect and learn from so that particular societal issues will not arise again.

Although people criticize the past through the sense of reflective nostalgia, they can also come to desire the past through restorative nostalgia. Firstly, they have gone through the first sense of reflective nostalgia and through this, they have become aware of the problems of the past, which people need to learn from. However, since the societal issues of the time are represented through popular culture, it appeals to the audience in a way that makes them feel the sense of restorative nostalgia.

This thesis states that reflective and restorative nostalgia are connected and not separated, as Boym initially suggests in her work on the theory. To elaborate, as mentioned earlier, restorative nostalgia grows from reflective nostalgia. However, it is important to note on how this is not always the case, as seen in the analysis of *IT*, which shows how the movie only represents the past through reflective nostalgia since the audience does not appear to develop any type of want from that movie but only sees the issues that were. Thus, it can be stated that some reflective nostalgia never evolves into restorative nostalgia.

The materialistic culture might elicit memories for the viewers, which makes them long for the past. Additionally, for the ones who have not experienced the decade themselves, certain indicators of the past, such as materialistic culture, might evoke a feeling of stability and simplicity and also, a desire for this, when watching movies that represent the past. Thus, longing for something in the past can grow out of criticizing something in the past since the problematic features of the past are often represented through popular culture. The viewers long for the past because they can relate to the popular culture of the time and this means that popular culture can make them desire the sense of stability that those features of the popular culture that existed back then provides.

To elaborate on the materialistic culture that relates to restorative nostalgia, this thesis focuses on the cultural features that include, for example, gadgets, games, and music as has been mentioned earlier. The materialistic culture of a certain decade signifies that time since people recognize the elements of this as something that was popular during those years. An example of an element of the materialistic culture could be the board game the boys play in the Netflix-series *Stranger Things*, which is *Dungeons and Dragons*. This board game was published in the '70s and grew in popularity fast ("Dungeons and Dragons"). Thus, the fact that the main characters play this game underlines that the story takes place at a time in which this game was popular, which was the '80s ("About the Series"). In addition to The Duffer Brothers' confirmation that the series is inspired by the game, this is also evident since the series features monsters from the boardgame such as the Demogorgon (ibid.). The boys name the real-life monster plaguing their town after a creature from their board game, which is seen when the group of friends defines the monster in the town as the Demogorgon and also when the viewers are introduced to the monster featured in the board game that the boys are playing (The Duffer Brothers *The Upside Down* 00:05:01-00:05:05; *The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:01:47-00:02:45). Thus, the board game becomes a clear signifier of the decade since the

entire story revolves around the game becoming reality for the main characters. However, as mentioned, the featuring of the monster is also used to imply the societal issues that occurred at the time, meaning the frequency of kidnappings during that period and the uncertainty people felt about this and also, The Cold War. Additionally, the monster is used to indicate the paranoia about the government by being something that the government is hiding from the public in relation to The Cold War.

Thus, when representing culture in films depicting the past, it can evoke a sense of restorative nostalgia that evolves from reflective nostalgia since people consider the societal issues that come along with the popular culture of the past.

Therefore, it can be stated that the connection between the supernatural and the '80s is primarily seen in relation to reflective nostalgia since this is where people rethink the past and become influenced by the filmmakers' introduction of the monster as a symbol of the societal issues.

Restorative nostalgia evoked through reflective nostalgia

As mentioned, what has been argued in this paper is that restorative nostalgia springs from reflective nostalgia, meaning that the two kinds of nostalgia go hand in hand even though some reflective nostalgia never develop restorative nostalgia. Thus, restorative nostalgia cannot survive without reflective nostalgia.

In an article from 2011, Daniel Mendelsohn makes an account of *Mad Men*, where he signifies that the past is glorified by, for example, showing the women as sexy and desirable despite the fact that the women are smoking while pregnant ("The Mad Men Account"). Arguably, the way he comments this example implies that nostalgia is only restorative, even though he mentions that people are aware of the bad events of the past. Even though he appears to only argue that people long for the past and ignore the bad events, environment or societal norms, it is evident through the example with the smoking pregnant character that this could

be an attempt to evoke reflective nostalgia since it is clear from a modern point of view that pregnant women should not be smoking because it can harm the baby. To elaborate, this scene is putting down the basis for social criticism but can also be seen as restorative since the smoking pregnant character is presented as desirable. Arguably, in opposition to the argument of this thesis, Mendelsohn's argument implies that the series, *Mad Men*, is camouflaging the sense of reflective nostalgia through restorative nostalgia by glorifying the societal issues, which makes the viewers long for that period whilst reflecting on the reason behind this longing because of the representation of societal issues. However, as mentioned, this thesis argues that restorative nostalgia can only spring from reflective nostalgia because of how it is inevitable that the viewers notice the societal issues that are represented first.

The fascination with the past

In the last section of Mendelsohn's paper, he argues that the reason for the restorative nostalgia that arises despite the bad events and societal norms in *Mad Men* is that people want to experience their childhood again and that the people, who have not experienced that particular decade, want to experience their parents' childhood and youth ("The Mad Men Account"). However, arguably, the wish to experience one's own past or one's parents' past is not part of nostalgia but rather the reason why such representations of the past capture the audience's attention. Mendelsohn indicates how people are curious creatures that desire the knowledge that led them to this point in time (ibid.). This desire goes along with the previously made statement about the desire for a sense of stability and a feeling of safety because human beings enjoy knowing what will happen, which means that any story taking place in the past that they experience today makes them feel a sense of safety. This sense arises because of how people come to know that the issues they feel today were also part of society back then through watching films representing the past. The similar issues to the ones people have today make the fictional characters relatable, which again, makes the feeling of safety arise. People want

to relive the past, even though they might not have lived through it because the movies and series representing the past give the viewers the opportunity of pleasing their need for stability and simplicity. These feelings can be found in film adaptations of the past because of how the past represents a simpler time filled with occurrences that have already happened and thus, the people watching do not have to deal with those issues.

As noted, people enjoy watching something relatable because it makes them feel as if they can be part of the world they are presented with and thus, identify themselves in that world. Moreover, most characters in films develop as real human beings do personally and emotionally, which captures the viewers' attention. The audience gets caught by a movie or series since people crave watching other people, meaning the fictional characters, develop, as mentioned, so they can connect with the characters.

Through the explanation of the reason why representations of the past capture people's attention, it becomes possible to argue that a representation of the past by itself is fascinating to people because it gives a sense of stability and reminds people of a simpler time despite the representation of societal issues. However, the supernatural movies or series that represent the past can create this depiction of the past while capturing its viewers' attention by including something supernatural. Arguably, the feature of something supernatural is what initially makes the audience reflect the past critically because of how this genre uses, for example, monsters to represent societal issues. From the sense of reflective nostalgia, the sense of restorative nostalgia arises through the illustration of the past itself focusing on the cultural features, which are the ones that people tend to long for. The fact that the depiction of the past arises from the representation of societal issues of the period means that people can be fascinated with both a representation of the past itself and also, the supernatural elements potentially representing social criticism. Thus, the connection between the '80s and the

supernatural is established since people can be interested in the history of the decade and the unknown representing the issues that were.

Why children?

Potentially, the main reason for using children as main characters in these kinds of films is that the audience becomes able to see the presented world through innocence – meaning through the eyes of a child – since it has previously been established that children represent innocence.

Through the children's eyes, the viewers of the analyzed series and the analyzed movies can get a new perspective on the past, which, arguably, makes them understand the issues of the past in another way. The child's perspective might enhance what they learn from the mistakes of the past than the reflection of history would have through the eyes of an older and more influenced character.

Moreover, the innocence of children means that they are easier to influence and manipulate and thus, easier for the monster to possess, as has been noted earlier. Since the children are easier for the monster to connect with, it can be argued that the children become the key to understanding the evil of the world at that given time since they are the ones that are most likely to be able to communicate with it because they have a certain openness to their personalities. Thus, the children's innocence becomes useful in order to potentially save the world since they, in this manner, become the key to defeating the monster.

Additionally, it is important to note the fact that in two of the three analyzed works, the story's development is predicted by the children at the beginning of the movie and series. These works are *IT* and *Stranger Things*.

In *IT* the prediction of the future of the movie's storyline is seen when Bill tells his group of friends one of his stories, which is narrated in the following quote:

They felt its breath, hot and horrible against their faces, but at that moment they released the stones and ran out of the cave. Now, they were back home. But nothing could change the way they felt. They'd learned to be strong together. They'd beaten the dragon with their magic stones, and nothing would ever be the same again (Wallace, *IT* – *Chapter One* 00:55:18-00:55:37).

In this quote, Bill narrates exactly what is going to happen in their real lives without knowing it. The fact that his story becomes reality is seen at the end of the movie, where the children attack the monster with “magic stones”, meaning silver since they found out that silver can kill the monster (Wallace, *IT* – *Chapter One* 01:29:59-01:30:36; 00:55:32-00:55:34; 01:17:09-01:17:11). This scene shows that the children have been able to predict the future and as a result of this, know what to do, hinting at the wisdom children have, as mentioned earlier.

The prediction of the future is also seen in *Stranger Things*, when the main characters and thus, children, play the board game, *Dungeons and Dragons*, which has also been noted above (The Duffer Brothers *The Vanishing of Will Byers* 00:01:47-00:02:45). As mentioned, the children know the monster that haunts the town from the board game, which indicates that their game has come to life (The Duffer Brothers *The Upside Down* 00:05:01-00:05:05). Arguably, as opposed to *IT*, the board game is not as much a prediction of the future as it is a way of gaining knowledge about what to do in another world including monsters. In other words, the children's live imagination allows them to gain knowledge about how to handle an apocalyptic world. Furthermore, as seen in *IT*, it appears that children's abilities sometimes go beyond adults' abilities because children's imaginations allow them to see what is considered impossible for adults, which makes them capable of dealing with things in a different way than adults because children see more possibilities. The children's abilities, at least in this series'

and this movie's case, make the children the ones who are capable of saving the world because of the innocence and wisdom they have due to how their minds go beyond what is known.

The children in films representing the '80s are not just the main characters of the motion pictures but also, the heroes of the movies and series since they are the ones solving the problems. Because of the neglect of people from the government and also, the parents' neglect of children, the children, along with the adults, did not trust the authorities. Since people in the '80s did not trust the government, films show how people do not rely on the government and thus, face their problems on their own – even the children. Arguably, the film-producers and writers want the children to be heroes because they were the victims of the decade, meaning that in the movies the children get the attention they deserved since it was not given to them to its full extent in the period itself. The fact that the children are used as heroes is also interesting to look at, when relating it to the fact that making children the heroes of this series and these films signifies that the adults were not capable of handling the issues in a necessary manner and thus, not capable of saving the world, meaning that the adults were not seen as trustworthy authorities. As noted, children can see more possibilities because of their innocence and imagination, which gives them wisdom. This wisdom and openness they have make them heroic because their abilities, in that way, go beyond the adults' and because of this, the children can be seen as some kind of superhero in comparison to the adults.

Thus, it can be stated that children are essential to the supernatural genres since they are essential for unveiling the supernatural features because of their innocence, live imagination, and wisdom. The children's potential makes them part of the reason for the connection between the supernatural genres and the '80s since this decade was a time in which people felt uncertain and thus, neglected, which meant that they, including the children, were on their own and thus, in films, have to use their unique abilities as a child.

Summary of the fascination with supernatural representations of the '80s

The completed argument of this analysis is that the '80s have a connection to the supernatural since it was a time of uncertainty about many things such as kidnappings, space, and war, which has since then been depicted through supernatural features in movies and series.

The feeling of uncertainty of a certain time can be represented through a monster in these kinds of series or movies and is evoking the sense of reflective nostalgia. As mentioned, a monster can be a depiction of societal issues and people's fears meaning that a monster represents the critical factors of a given time. Thus, a monster goes along with reflective nostalgia since it is an illustration of the problems of that particular time, which is criticized through reflective nostalgia. In the examples analyzed in this thesis, it becomes evident that children are often used in connection with a monster since children in films often have the special abilities it takes to defeat the monster. The use of children as victims appeals to the audience in such a manner that makes the viewers reflect upon the issues that a given movie or series represents through the eyes of a child. Arguably, this kind of reflection makes the audience scrutinize the problems represented in the movie or series because when children are involved in serious issues, people tend to take those issues more seriously. Thus, indicating that by using children in these analyzed movies, the filmmakers are trying to invoke the critical mindset of their audiences for people to realize the problems of the past and criticize these issues.

In movies and series, Mendelsohn argues that people tend to see the problems of the past but also, see through the issues and only view the represented past with a sense of longing for the past through restorative nostalgia. People have a tendency to long for something they know and thus, long for the sense of stability and simplicity. Furthermore, people enjoy watching characters that they can relate to and how minor problems that occur today also were problems back in the days, such as issues of love and friendship, for example. Additionally, as mentioned,

people find it fascinating to watch other people, such as movie characters, grow and develop their personalities. Furthermore, people enjoy following others throughout their lives to experience that the feeling that the human being is everchanging is not an isolated feeling, but rather universal, meaning that all individuals evolve and that there are multiple aspects of one personality. This observation can make the audience feel a sense of calm because of the representation of issues that might be similar to one's own. However, it should also be noted that character development also captures people's attention when a character has more than one aspect of its personality because this makes the storyline unpredictable and thus, part of the unknown that fascinates people.

In opposition to Mendelsohn's argument that the audience only sees a movie or series through restorative nostalgia, this thesis argues that restorative nostalgia cannot appear without reflective nostalgia. Individuals have to see the problematic issues of the time with critical eyes and then, it becomes possible for people to get the feeling of longing for something in the past, such as cultural features. Thus, it can be stated that what the audience long for in the past are not the reflection of societal issues but rather the feeling of stability and recognition in being able to mirror themselves in characters placed in a different period.

People are attracted to the representation of the past because it enables them to see how people at that time had some of the same issues and thus, are able to relate to the characters representing the feelings about the issues of that time. Additionally, the characters are relatable for the viewers because of how the characters constantly evolve emotionally in films as humans do. Furthermore, it is a decade that has features that people either want to relive or want to experience because of how these kinds of representations evoke the feelings of stability and simplicity. This reflection of the past brings out restorative nostalgia. However, the sense of restorative nostalgia springs from reflective nostalgia because of how the decade's societal issues, which make the viewers criticize the past and analyze it in relation to the present, are

represented through popular culture. The way restorative nostalgia can emerge from reflective nostalgia is seen in the analysis of *Stranger Things* and the analysis of *Super 8*. In this series and this movie, it becomes clear that restorative nostalgia is the case in the way the decade is represented to the viewer, meaning that it is illustrated in such a manner that makes the viewers desire the culture of the time – for example, the games and gadgets. This desire is related to the fact that people crave stability, which can be achieved by reliving something from the past. This experience of the past makes the audience realize that feelings and emotions of the past are not necessarily different from the ones people feel today, meaning that people back then had some of the same issues as people have today. This realization gives the audience a sense that the state of mind, which can make individuals feel lost and uncertain that is still present today, is universal because of how this feeling is represented in these movies that depict the past. Thus, giving the viewers the indication that this particular feeling of uncertainty is not unknown and has been dealt with before – and more importantly, has been overcome before. The fact that the feeling of uncertainty has previously been overcome gives the viewers a feeling of assurance that this feeling can pass. Furthermore, the fictional characters become more relatable when they grow or develop because this means that the viewers can mirror themselves in those characters since growing is human.

Finally, it becomes possible to conclude that the series and the two analyzed movies are examples of how one can represent a certain period in the past and also, of how this given representation can be viewed by the audience – meaning through either reflective nostalgia alone or reflective nostalgia that births restorative nostalgia. Furthermore, it has been concluded that depictions of the past are often illustrated as critical through the use of some type of monster that represents the societal issues of the time. Additionally, these kinds of movies and series constitute escapism for the audience since the series and films take the viewers into another world where the individuals watching the series or movie can temporarily

leave their own problems behind in the real world. Moreover, it becomes possible for the viewers to experience a sense of universality since it is possible for the audience to realize that all people share common problems – no matter when or where. This observation makes the viewers relate to the fictional characters and makes the audience curious about how the characters solve these issues or simply, just how the characters develop throughout the movie or series.

As a result, it can be stated that nostalgia arises through representations of the past, which influences the audience's view depending on the way the filmmakers depict the period – meaning by the potential inclusion of monsters. Thus, also showing the connection between the supernatural and the '80s since the movies represent the decade by using a monster, which fascinates people by being introduced to the unknown, but can also fascinate people by providing them with the opportunity of reliving the positives of the past and through this, get the sense of stability.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how the 1980s are connected to supernatural genres because of how the feeling of uncertainty that circulated has since been represented through supernatural features in, for example, films.

There is a two-part explanation of how the '80s are connected to the supernatural.

The first part revolving around the war-history and the multiple child kidnappings in that period. In the '80s, The Cold War took up much of the American people's attention and lead to paranoia and distrust in the authorities because of the secretiveness of the government's mission to become the only superpower and thus, win over Russia in that race. The Cold War included the space race, which made thoughts about the unknown of space occur. These thoughts are, especially, expressed through movies representing the '80s with notions of creatures coming from space – or, as most would call them, monsters or aliens. Throughout the

decade it is also evident that multiple kidnappings happened possibly because of the lack of development of laws that prevented or allowed the authorities to examine such cases further immediately. Furthermore, the recent awareness of pedophilia meant that this was a newly found motive for kidnappings, which made people feel unsafe because this meant that no child was safe.

The war-history and the child kidnappings are not necessarily connected but similar in representing the unknown because of the uncertainty about The Cold War and because of the uncertainty of whether or not the children would be found. This uncertainty correlates to the unknown and is represented through supernatural genres, which takes people's imagination to a higher level by representing societal issues as something completely unknown to people, such as a monster and thus, appealing to people's sense of reflective nostalgia.

The lack of immediate action from the authorities in kidnapping-cases, alongside the uncertainty of The Cold War, possibly made people feel neglected. Arguably, the feeling of uncertainty makes the need for escapism arise. Escapism is a term that defines a situation in which an individual feels that they are no longer present in the real world but rather, in a fictional one, in which they can worry about something else than themselves and their issues.

The horror and science fiction genres are two genres that create this opportunity for escapism more than other genres because of their feature of the unknown and unusual world, which is primarily used in these kinds of movies or series. Additionally, these genres can be said to represent societal issues, which means that when people use escapism by watching these movies or series, they are made aware of the issues, however, they do not have to deal with those issues because it is not taking place in their world. The societal issues in films always vary from real life in these kinds of genres – either by including non-existing characters, creatures, things, or places.

The horror genre is meant to scare and frighten people, whereas the science fiction genre is mainly focused on future technology. In the term, 'future technology', space and the possible discovery of aliens are included since travels to space still were new at this time and therefore, represented something unknown. Thus, it can be argued, that space technology was perceived as a kind of future technology. Furthermore, this future technology – meaning space travel – created a connection to an unknown world, which meant that uncertainty emerged because no one knew what was out there – potentially aliens, as has often been suggested by the supernatural genres. Since the horror genre is meant to frighten people, it often features some kind of monster because what people find most frightening is the unknown. As mentioned, the science fiction genre often also includes a monster in those types of works because of its connection to an unknown world.

According to Cohen's Monster Thesis, the feature of a monster in, for example, a movie or series, is meant to represent people's fears, curiosity, warnings against the enemy and can also illustrate society – meaning societal issues. Thus, it is signified that monsters are created to represent the problems of society of a given time, in which the movie or series takes place. As mentioned, an example of these societal issues is the paranoia or distrust in the authorities, which is seen in the analyzed movies and series. Another example is the kidnappings, in which the monster represents the kidnapper and thus, the real monster of that time.

The inclusion of monsters in films influences how the viewers reflect the past. The audience criticizes the past – meaning having the feeling of reflective nostalgia – before it becomes possible for them to long for the past – meaning having the feeling of restorative nostalgia, such as longing for the features of the popular culture that was in that decade. This notion on both kinds of nostalgia implies that the viewers see the issues of the past represented in the movies or series with critical eyes but, at the same time, they may come to long for it because of human beings' desire to relive something one might remember as positive – for

example, as part of one's childhood. However, individuals, who have not experienced that particular period in time represented in a given movie, can also long for the past because of the thirst people have for stability and simplicity, which can be found in the past because people know what that time involved.

The second part of the explanation behind the connection between the supernatural and the '80s involves how people relate to the popular culture that may appear in movies representing the decade. Even though certain films might depict societal issues through a monster and thus, evokes the sense of reflective nostalgia, some movies also represent the audience with the popular culture of the time, which appeals to the viewers' sense of restorative nostalgia.

Additionally, aside from nostalgia, another reason why people are fascinated with watching movies and series representing the past is how people enjoy when there is something they recognize. The viewers might recognize themselves in one of the characters of a movie or series. People enjoy seeing something recognizable that makes them feel connected to the characters in some way despite how the viewer may have been raised in a different period than the character. Additionally, it also brings a sort of comfort to the audience when they recognize some of the more common issues from the viewers' own lives that people also had during a period in the past since this lets the viewers know that those issues are universal and can be overcome. Moreover, it enables the audience to reflect on their problems with different eyes through the fictional characters'. People are also fascinated with watching others, such as fictional characters, develop, which creates a sense of excitement because of how the characters might not stay the same all the way through a plot. This character development also makes the viewers relate to the characters because it makes them human since humans also evolve emotionally. Alongside the enjoyment of watching characters develop and experiencing how they are solving their issues, the recognition that some issues have always been part of human

beings' everyday lives is also part of what keeps people interested in representations of the past. This interest occurs because the everyday life issues make the characters relatable for the viewers since they might share some of the same problems.

That being said, it is important to note that not all movies or series create the feeling of reflective nostalgia followed by restorative nostalgia. Some works remain within the realm of reflective nostalgia to keep the audience focused on the issues of the time, as, for example, *IT*.

The three analyzed works have shown how children are an important feature within these kinds of genres. Children are essential because they represent innocence and wisdom, which makes them capable of encompassing more than adults can since children are not influenced by as much as adults are because of their young age. Children are also easier to manipulate, which, for example, can be seen when a monster possesses a child or connects with one. However, children's wisdom can also be enhanced by being possessed since they through their connection with the monster will know more about the danger of society and in this way, gain knowledge about how to handle the danger that the monster brings to society. Furthermore, in the analyzed works, it is indicated how children in some cases predict the future or, at least, have a prediction of the future at hand, which again hints at their wisdom, meaning that this enables them to act on whatever happens because they already know from the prediction. Thus, it can be stated that children are essential to these kinds of movies and that the filmmakers are perhaps purposefully making the children the heroes because of their underestimated wisdom. Furthermore, it has been argued in this thesis that the producers make children the heroes of these films since they were the victims in the '80s because of the kidnappings and because they were neglected by the authorities.

IT represents a monster that arguably, is representing the kidnappers of the time because the monster in this movie takes the children. Additionally, the monster can be said to be alien since it appears that it has come from space, which hints at the space race of The Cold War.

Furthermore, this movie is a representation of the distrust in authorities and the fact that people were consistently kept in the dark about what was going on. Thus, it can be argued that this film is only giving the viewers a sense of reflective nostalgia because of its rich representation of societal issues and because of how the movie does not appear to include any focus on features of the popular culture of the time that people may long for.

Stranger Things can also be said to be a representation of the multiple kidnappings that happened in the '80s since it centers around the disappearance of one of the main characters, the boy, Will, which the monster has taken. Furthermore, it indicates The Cold War through the appearance of this monster because it becomes clear to the viewers that the government is trying to hide the monster from the public and the fact that they are trying to stay ahead of the Russians by experimenting with this monster. This secretiveness also enhances the feeling of paranoia and distrust in the authorities since people are kept in the dark about Will's and others' disappearances even though people ask questions. Thus, people feel reflective nostalgia when reflecting on the series and its representation of that time. However, this series develops restorative nostalgia from reflective nostalgia because of how a part of the focus lies on the materialistic culture of the time, such as board games. There is especially focus on the board game *Dungeons and Dragons*, which was very popular at the time and arguably, can make the audience who experienced the '80s long for that time since they remember playing it. Furthermore, the viewers that have not experienced that decade possibly long for it because of the simplicity that was or because of the sense of stability they get, when watching something that has already happened, which means that it is distant from their own lives. Thus, this series is creating a sense of reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia.

Super 8 is very similar in representing paranoia and distrust in the authorities because it becomes clear that the authorities are hiding the monster from the public. The monster is also a representation of the kidnappers of the time since it abducts people from the town.

Furthermore, it is indicated that the movie takes place during the space race, and thus, The Cold War since it is mentioned how the monster is alien. Because of people's negative connotations to the war and the kidnapers, the movie can be said to represent reflective nostalgia. However, as seen in *Stranger Things*, this movie also represents the popular culture of the time and the materialistic culture that belonged to it, which means that it can make people long for it because they want to relive it because of their desire to feel a sense of stability or simplicity. Thus, this movie, restorative nostalgia also springs from reflective nostalgia.

It can be stated that monsters are used to represent reflective nostalgia, which means that there seems to be a connection between Boym's theory on nostalgia and Cohen's theory on monsters. Furthermore, nostalgia can also be represented through culture, thus aiming at restorative nostalgia since many cultural features such as materialistic things might evoke people's memories and in this way, make them want to relive that period or, as mentioned, get the feeling of stability and simplicity. However, it is important to note that this paper argues that restorative nostalgia cannot stand on its own because people will always be able to see the issues of the time and not purely the features of the past that they might long for. The Monster Theory and theory on nostalgia help understand how the representations of the past function and why it is that people are fascinated with the past.

To conclude, this thesis has proven how the 1980s have a specific connection to supernatural genres – the horror and science fiction genres. The connection between the decade and the two genres is especially seen through the way the audience are reflects on the decade with the notion of monsters and materialistic culture when watching these kinds of movies or series, meaning that the audience becomes nostalgic by criticizing the past or longing for it. The fact that the audience becomes nostalgic is what makes these types of movies or series popular because it makes people reflect by reminiscing and criticizing the past, which can be enhanced through the use of, for example, a monster. However, at the same time, people can

long for the past despite the representation of a monster because of the associated representation of popular culture. Furthermore, the feature of a monster can enforce characters to develop since it forces them to act on what is happening, which is also something people desire to watch because it is something that every person can relate to – evolving.

Thus, the supernatural is especially connected to the '80s by representing different ways of reflecting the decade through reflective and restorative nostalgia.

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