*Thriller essay*

Thriller is broad film genre that aims to shock the audience with the frequent incorporation of unexpected events and plot twists. The genre has an extensive history, starting off as a typical hybrid between mystery, action, crime, and sometimes horror, blending elements and characteristics of all of these in a way which conveys a story that shocks the audience.

The improvement of technology has been an incredibly significant influence on the evolution of thriller as a whole. The thriller genre was born in 1903 with “A Daring Daylight Burglary”, a short indie film directed by Frank S. Mottershaw, and the first known thriller film ever. Since 1903, the improvement and evolution of technology has made a significant impact on thriller as a genre; most notably, camera and editing techniques as well as soundtracks. Original thrillers such as “A Daring Daylight Burglary” (1903) and “Bold Bank Robbery” (1904), as implied by their titles, are hybrids of genres like Crime, Horror, and Action focusing on events that could occur in real life such as bank robberies and burglaries, all of which equated to the birth of Thriller. However, over time in response to the evolution of technology, the term thriller had expanded as a much wider category of film that went beyond the traditional bank robbery with some slightly shocking action-horror elements plot. For example, thriller films began incorporating plot elements that included aspects of surrealism and themes of the supernatural. One of the first and most prominent instances of this is “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” (1920) directed by Robert Wiene. The film took heavy inspiration from experimental film genres like German Expressionism, Gothic Horror, and Melodrama, leading to an entirely new wave of thriller films. From 1920, thriller films began incorporating new techniques and conventions including camera techniques like Dutch tilts, extreme close ups, Steadicam shots and tracking, and editing techniques like rapid cuts and jump scare shots. As well as this, directors begun playing with audience expectations by using techniques that create a false sense of suspense or subconscious unease, usually as a build up for a jump scare.

As the genre continued to evolve and expand past its action-crime-horror roots, oversaturation was inevitable, particularly during the 70s and 80s when thrillers became formulaic and predictable. Audiences around this time period grew accustomed to these predictable plot structures which were the usual conventions of thriller since 1903: detectives chasing criminals and bank heists, diminishing the suspense that once defined the genre. This predictability essentially defeated the entire purpose of thrillers which is to thrill the audience. Films within the genre around this time could no longer just rely on tension, surprise, and psychological intrigue. In response, filmmakers began to innovate by shifting away from traditional action-driven narratives and embracing more psychological and character-driven approaches. This shift was most prominent in films like The Silence of the Lambs (1991), which blended psychological horror with crime thriller elements to offer a much more unsettling and interesting experience. The film’s success showed that audiences craved unpredictability, moral complexity, and deeper psychological exploration which inspired a new wave of thrillers that prioritized character depth and psychological tension over the typical conventional aspects of the genre. This innovation also eventually lead to thriller films shifting to plots and storylines that revolved around themes of the supernatural as well as including more cryptic and surrealist aspects. An example of this would be Se7en (1995). This film’s slowly drawn-out tension tension, psychological horror elements, and philosophical undertones helped redefine the thriller genre by pushing it toward more existential and eerie narratives rather than just fast-paced, action-packed crime stories. Se7en was also one of the first films apart from The Silence of the Lambs that influenced the new wave of thriller films that we know today, including Gone Girl (2014) and I'm Thinking of Ending Things (2020).

As socio-cultural attitudes evolved over time, so too have the narratives and character dynamics of modern thriller films. Older classic thrillers often seemed to rely on outdated stereotypes, with women frequently portrayed as helpless victims, LGBTQIA+ characters reduced to villains or tragic figures, and racial minorities often killed off early, reinforcing misleading representations of these groups. Today, as societal awareness and collective empathy have grown (to some degree), filmmakers have moved towards much more nuanced and inclusive storytelling by creating thrillers with complex characters that challenge outdated stereotypes and defy audience expectations. As well as this, the rise of the internet and social media has significantly influenced modern thrillers with films like Searching (2018) using digital platforms as both storytelling devices and sources of suspense. Online surveillance, digital footprints, and internet culture now tend to serve as new battlegrounds for tension, replacing the typical spooky, shadowy alleyways and anonymous phone calls of older thrillers. This shift reflects modern-day fears of privacy invasion, spreading of misinformation, and the overwhelming influence of technology on daily life to prove that thrillers continue to evolve alongside the anxieties of the time.

In conclusion, the thriller genre has evolved significantly since 1903, shaped by technological advancements, societal shifts, and changing audience expectations. From its early roots in crime and action, thriller films have expanded to explore more psychological depth, supernatural themes, and complex characters. Influential films like The Silence of the Lambs and Se7en sparked a large shift towards unpredictability and moral complexity. As society continues to evolve, thriller films will continue adapting as well as offering more inclusive and thought-provoking stories and plots.