Chapter 5

Gothic Digital Technologies

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Creators of Gothic fiction have always been swift to take advantage of new media technologies: the rise of the novel led to the appearance of Gothic romances, the falling price of print in the nineteenth century led to the publication of mass-market 'penny dreadfuls', and the development of film, comics and television gave rise to new genres of horror films, horror comics and Gothic TV, respectively. The internet has proven to be no exception, and the twenty-first century has seen the rise of distinctive new forms of 'digital Gothic', which make use of the technological possibilities of online media to find new ways of constructing and distributing Gothic narratives.

Gothic fiction existed online before the rise of the World Wide Web, and amateur writers were posting horror stories onto usenet groups such as alt.horror and alt.horror.creative as early as 1990.[1] However, the online horror fiction of the 1990s was almost entirely text based, as plain text was the easiest form of data to transmit via usenet or bulletin board systems, and in most cases its only distinctively digital trait was its means of distribution. Most of its writers published their works via the internet because the barriers to entry were lower than in traditional publishing, rather than because they were interested in the formal possibilities of digital media. Many of these authors described themselves as aspiring horror writers who hoped to one day see their works in print. 'How can I get my stories accepted for publication?' was a frequently posed question in the early days of alt.horror.creative (Colin 1998; Marano 1998).

Digital Urban Legends

The early internet also played an important role in the distribution of urban legends, which often differed from horror fiction only insofar as

they were presented as true stories rather than as overtly fictional narratives. Users of the alt.folklore.urban usenet group were already swapping such tales in 1990, often claiming that the events they described had really happened to them. The legend of Bloody Mary, which had already been circulating for decades, was brought to new audiences in 1994–5 thanks to its distribution via chain emails and usenet groups (Gauthaman 1995; Emery 2017), while the legend of the Black-Eyed Kids was created out of whole cloth by Brian Bethel in two short stories posted to the 'ghost-discuss' mailing list in 1998, which were subsequently reposted to the alt.folklore.ghost-stories usenet group (Bethel 1998).[2]

Much more than the usenet horror stories of the same era, these urban legends drew upon distinctive features of online communication: specifically, the ease with which stories and rumours could be quickly and cheaply distributed to large audiences via email, and the difficulties involved in knowing whether such online dissemination can be trusted. If Bethel had communicated his stories by more traditional word-of-mouth means it might have taken decades for the urban legend of the Black-Eyed Kids to become widely known. But by posting his narratives online, he was able to create a new piece of modern folklore virtually overnight. Similarly, the makers of the 'found footage' horror film *The Blair Witch Project* (Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, 1999) pioneered the use of online misinformation as a form of viral marketing by deliberately circulating online rumours that their film was composed of genuine found footage and that all the people involved in creating it were dead or missing, thus effectively inventing new urban legends in order to raise anticipation for the film's release (Davidson 2013). The fact that they chose to circulate these rumours on the internet, rather than through traditional print media, attests to their recognition of how much harder it could be to disentangle fact and fiction online.

The flatness and anonymity of digital text-based communications played an important role in the success of these urban legends. When someone you have only interacted with online claims to have had a seemingly supernatural experience, it can be very difficult to know how seriously their claims should be taken – usually much more difficult than it would be if they told you the same story in person, with all the contextual, nonverbal clues provided by face-to-face communication as to whether they might be lying, joking, delusional or completely serious. When more stories appear in response, with dozens of other people claiming to have had similar experiences, it becomes even more difficult to sort fact from fiction. Rumours and conspiracy theories have always flourished online for precisely these reasons, and it was the acute

awareness of this that led Barbara and David Mikkelson to create the snopes.com website in 1994 as a space in which such stories could be collected, compared and analysed for accuracy. David Mikkelson was himself an enthusiastic collector of urban legends – 'Snopes' was his username on the alt.folklore.urban usenet group – and since 1994 his site has moved from simply gathering such stories to systematically fact-checking them (Snopes.com n.d.; Tepper 1997: 39–51). The fact that the main business of snopes.com today is fact-checking political stories circulated via news websites and social media demonstrates the cultural continuity between the online urban legends of the 1990s and the 'fake news' and conspiracy theories of the Trump era: both thrive on the speed with which narratives can be propagated through online environments and the difficulties involved in verifying whether or not they might actually be true.

While the urban legends of the 1990s exploited the nature of online communications more creatively than most early online horror fiction, their basic format was still that of the story written in plain text. The development of distinctive forms of digital horror media began in earnest in the later 1990s, after the rise of free website building services made it easier and cheaper for individual internet users to build their own websites. Once anyone could have their own horror fiction webpage, rather than simply submitting a text file to someone else's BBS, online archive or usenet group, it became much easier for authors to incorporate elements such as animations, images or hyperlinks into their fictions, permitting the use of formal features which could not be faithfully reproduced in traditional text-based media.

One influential webpage of this kind was *Ted the Caver* (2001), a website purporting to be the online journal of a caving enthusiast, describing his experiences exploring a nearby cavern (Anonymous 2001). Created as a free website on Angelfire, its early entries were mostly indistinguishable from those on any number of other websites devoted to the hobbies of their creators, but as the entries progressed, the events described became increasingly unsettling. The final entry, posted on 19 May 2001, described the author's resolution to return to the cave one last time to find out exactly what is inside it, ending with the words '[s]ee all of you soon, with a lot of answers! Love, Ted.' This is followed by a hyperlink, marked 'Next' – but the hyperlink, if clicked, simply leads back to the same entry. It is thus implied that Ted was never able to write another entry on his website, presumably because he was killed by whatever it was that lived within the cave.

The basic narrative structure of *Ted the Caver* is familiar from any number of 'found document' or 'found footage' horror narratives, in

which the unfinished nature of the text or film bears mute witness to the (presumably unrepresentably horrible) fate which has befallen its creator. The webpage itself playfully alludes to its own kinship with 'found footage' horror films: upon discovering a mysterious symbol, Ted remarks that 'The first thing I thought when I saw it was "Blair Witch Project".' But *Ted the Caver* also helped to pioneer two techniques which would become foundational to online horror fiction, the use of real-time updates and the use of hyperlinks.

In traditional 'found document' or 'found footage' horror fiction, the action is over by the time the audience arrives, the author or filmmaker is dead (or worse), and all that remains is to go through the films or papers they have left behind in order to discover what happened to them. However, over its two months of active existence *Ted the Caver* delivered its story to its readers in irregular instalments, supposedly corresponding to Ted's repeated visits to 'Mystery Cave'. Each time an update appeared, there was no way of knowing when (or if) the next instalment would be uploaded. While the site was being updated, its audience was thus involved in a story which seemed to be unfolding in real time, rather than something which had already concluded, and the final entry only became 'final' retroactively after its readers had given up hope of a new entry ever appearing. The website thus exploited the awareness of its audience that a free website, once created, can linger indefinitely in cyberspace, even if its creator has long since died, leaving the online record of their life 'frozen' at the moment of their disappearance or death, forever awaiting the next update.

Since 2001, many other creators of online horror fiction have also used this 'live update' format to build tension and anticipation among their audiences, sometimes using long periods of silence to hint that something awful may have happened to their creators. The *Marble Hornets* YouTube channel, for example, used a technique very similar to that of *Ted the Caver* in 'Entry #26' (2010), which ended with the protagonist's resolution to find his missing friend. This video was followed by a seven-month period in which no new videos were posted on the channel, implying that he, like Ted before him, had met some horrible fate (DeLage and Wagner 2009–14). Unlike Ted, he did eventually return to post 'Entry #27', but the audience had no way of knowing this during the seven months of silence which followed 'Entry #26' and could only find out by continuing to check whether any further news had been posted.

The second distinctive technique which *Ted the Caver* employed was the use of hyperlinks. When reading a book, it is obvious from the diminishing number of pages when the end is approaching, films have

set run times which are advertised in advance, and even stories uploaded onto a single webpage can have their remaining length gauged using the scroll bar on the side of the screen. But the crude website form of *Ted the Caver*, in which each page ended with a link to the next, made it impossible to know in advance how many pages there were going to be. It is only when the final link turns out to go nowhere that it becomes apparent that the story had reached its end. The website's use of hyperlink structures was basic compared to some of the works which followed it, but it nonetheless gave the text a distinctive digital quality that could not have been reproduced on paper. Even more significant was its choice to illustrate its narrative with hyperlinks that led to pictures, rather than to simply embed pictures in the text. This was common practice on early websites – slow connection speeds meant that webpages would load much faster if pictures were not included – but it gained a new significance in the context of a horror narrative, as readers had to ask themselves each time whether they really wanted to see the picture that would appear on their screen when the link was clicked. None of the images in *Ted the Caver* are scary or disturbing, but the same principle of the 'horrible hyperlink', which effectively dares the reader to click on it despite their knowledge that it might lead to something awful, would go on to be used in much more aggressive ways in subsequent works of online horror fiction such as *The Grifter* (2009).

Another important early work of online horror fiction, *The Dionaea House* by Eric Heisserer, began in 2004 (Heisserer 2004–6). Much more formally ambitious than *Ted the Caver*, its narrative was spread across one LiveJournal, three blogs and a website, each of which was updated in real time as its story unfolded, leading up to a major climax on Halloween 2004. Whereas the narrative of *Ted the Caver* was confined to the personal webpage of its creator, *The Dionaea House* used fake social media accounts to create the illusion of different people independently interacting with the mysterious house at the heart of its story, each of them separately recording their experiences on the internet. At one point, even the comments section of a blog is used as a space for storytelling, with the fictional authors of different blogs communicating with one another via comments on a blog post. The fact that these were real blogs, whose time-stamped posts and comments proved that they were being updated in real time, in line with the fictional events that they described, lent *The Dionaea House* a much greater sense of authenticity and immediacy than *Ted the Caver*, and indeed the one blog on which comments were not disabled is full of reader comments anxiously enquiring whether or not the events it described had really happened (Heisserer 2004).

Similar usages of fake social media profiles to create the illusion that the fictional characters within a narrative are real people and that its events are befalling them in real time have been a feature of many subsequent works of online horror fiction. The Slenderman vlog *TribeTwelve* (2010–), for example, makes use of two YouTube accounts, livestreams, two Twitter accounts, a Vine account and an ask.fm account, requiring its audience to repeatedly shift between different websites in order to follow its narrative, as though trying to reconstruct the lives (and deaths) of real people from the multitude of digital traces they have left behind.[3] Indeed, *TribeTwelve* goes further than *The Dionaea House* by having its creators respond 'in-character' to comments posted by its audience, thus further enhancing the impression that the events of the story, far from being over and done with, are actually happening right now.

The Dionaea House is also an important example of what would become one of the trademarks of online horror fiction, the story of serial infection. The predatory house at the centre of its narrative uses each victim to lure in others. It does so primarily by physical means, such as having its minions mail tokens of previous victims to their loved ones in the hope that they will come looking for them, but by the end of the story one of its servitors also started posting taunts on the blog of its latest target, implying that the house was now also using digital means to seek out its prey (Heisserer 2004). This motif of viral infection or corruption spreading via technology was popularised by the Japanese horror films *Ringu* (*Ring*, Hideo Nakata, 1998) and *Kairo* (*Pulse*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2001). The plot of *Ringu* centres on a videotape which kills anyone who watches it unless they make more copies of it, while *Kairo* depicts an epidemic of hauntings which spreads via the internet. *Kairo*, in particular, seems almost prescient in its depiction of predatory ghosts and internet addicts as virtually interchangeable parts of the same spiritual ecosystem, locked into near-identical loops of compulsive behaviour. Its scenes of alienated young people using online technology to communicate, not with each other, but with dangerous supernatural forces which use them as vectors for their own viral proliferation, prefigure the very similar set-ups used in many subsequent works of online horror fiction, including *Smile Dog* (2008), *Ben Drowned* (2010) and the extended Slenderman mythos.

The haunted internet depicted in *Kairo* infects its victims, watches them, isolates them, and drives them to madness and self-destruction. In doing so, it acts as a literalised metaphor for the anxieties which have beset the users of online communication since its popularisation in the late 1990s. As the internet has become more pervasive, worries about the ease with which it might be exploited by criminals, terrorists,

ideological extremists and sexual predators have become increasingly widespread. When the protagonists of *Kairo* stumble across malevolent supernatural beings online, they are thus only experiencing a hyperbolic version of these real concerns about the extremely dark places to which our use of the internet may take us.

Internet Horror Fiction

Internet horror fiction came of age between 2007 and 2010. By this point stories of horror and the paranormal were regularly posted to internet forums such as Something Awful (founded 1999) and the /x/ board of 4chan (founded 2003). It was from these groups that specialised horror fiction websites such as 'The Holders' (founded 2007), 'The SCP Foundation' (founded 2008) and 'Creepypasta' (founded 2008) branched off, providing more permanent repositories for stories that had originated as ephemeral forum posts. Horror-themed vlogs proliferated on YouTube after the success of *Marble Hornets* and its imitators in 2009–10, while Reddit acquired a dedicated horror fiction subreddit, 'NoSleep' in 2010. Collectively, these websites now host thousands of works of user-submitted horror fiction, ranging from paragraph-length microfictions like 'The Bad Dream' (Anonymous 2008) to extended works of cross-platform multimedia fiction such as the already-mentioned *TribeTwelve* and *Marble Hornets*. Today, there is almost certainly more horror fiction being published online than via all forms of traditional media put together.

One distinctive quality of these websites is their collaborative nature. 'Creepypasta' has a team of administrators who decide which user-submitted stories merit inclusion on the site; but 'The Holders', 'The SCP Foundation' and 'NoSleep' were all groups to which anyone could contribute. This means that their fiction is of extremely variable quality, but it also means that when ideas catch on, they can be rapidly reiterated by the community. Spin-off concepts such as 'The Rake', a monster which speaks to people in their sleep; 'Candle Cove', a nightmarish children's TV show; and 'The SCP Foundation', a secret conspiracy devoted to the containment of paranormal phenomena were swiftly taken up and developed by other writers in a process which Chess has likened to a form of open-source debugging applied to fiction rather than code (Chess 2012: 375).[4] As a result, even though the original stories can be identified in each case, the narratives which have grown out of them are perhaps best understood as forms of crowdsourced modern mythology. Each story has been retold in many different ways, with those elements

which are felt to be most effective retained in subsequent retellings, while less successful additions are allowed to sink into obscurity in a kind of accelerated process of Darwinian evolution.

Many of the best-known horror stories which emerged from these online communities dealt, like *Kairo* and *The Dionaea House*, with themes of viral infection via digital media. One now-classic example is *Smile Dog*, a story posted to 4chan in 2008, describing an apparently haunted image of a demonic dog. Those who see the image are supposedly afflicted with nightmares until they agree to 'spread the word' by forwarding it to others, infecting them in turn (Anonymous 2010). The narrative is thus very similar to that of *Ringu*, with one distinctive online twist. After describing how, if he was cursed by Smile Dog, he would choose to 'spread the word' rather than suffering continued nightmares, the narrator then posts the image itself, thus implying that he has already been infected – and now the reader is, too.

Like *Ted the Caver*, *Smile Dog* takes a classic horror trope – in this case, the haunted picture – and modifies it to fit a digital context. The story exploits the fact that, online, images and videos can be reproduced and shared endlessly, with a speed and efficiency that makes the copying and recopying of the cursed videotape in *Ringu* seem positively primitive. If the Smile Dog image really was haunted, the internet would allow its curse to be distributed very quickly indeed. The story thus plays upon real fears about how quickly images and videos – of child abuse or terrorist atrocities, for example – can spread across the internet, and how difficult it is to completely suppress them when they do. Many similar stories of cursed images and videos have proliferated online, giving rise to internet legends such as *The Grifter*, a video supposedly so horrific that watching it leads to insanity or death, and *Mereana Mordegard Glesgorv*, a video which supposedly drives its viewers to blind themselves. However, the layout of *Smile Dog* also takes advantage of the way in which webpages tend to be read; most internet users scroll down reflexively as they read, so that by the time they reach the text hinting at what may be coming, there is a good chance that the Smile Dog image will already be on their screens. This effect would be very different in a book, where the reader would have to deliberately turn the page to see the image. Online, such material can 'creep up on' the reader, appearing onscreen almost before they realise it is there. A more ambitious use of scrolling can be seen in the Korean webcomic *The Bongcheon-Dong Ghost* (2011), in which a comic strip that appears to be composed of still images suddenly animates, complete with sound effects, when the reader scrolls down to certain points, creating a series of images

that visually and aurally assault the viewer at unpredictable intervals (HORANG 2011).

The capacity of online media to shift unexpectedly is a source of rich possibilities for creators of horror fiction. A seemingly still image can be programmed to animate unexpectedly, subliminal images can be inserted into webpages, and text can be programmed to warp and shift. Sometimes these tactics are used very aggressively, as in internet 'screamers', when a seemingly benign image or video is suddenly replaced with a loud scream and a horrific image in order to trigger instinctive fright reactions in viewers. Other works use them more subtly: the Gothic webcomics of Emily Carroll, for example, use images that flicker almost subliminally between the mundane and the horrific in order to communicate the decaying mental states of their protagonists (Carroll 2013, 2014). A similar fascination with the corruption and decay of information can be seen in many other examples of online horror fiction, which often begin with phenomena that look like ordinary computer glitches. These effects are especially associated with the internet horror meme 'Zalgo', which has been in circulation since 2004. Supposedly, Zalgo is a supernatural being whose presence is marked by the corruption of words and images, so that 'Zalgo' texts progressively disintegrate into illegible chaos. Again, the digital nature of such media is crucial here: online text, videos, images and sound files can all be programmed to glitch or corrupt in ways that often leave their audiences initially uncertain whether they are experiencing a genuine computer problem or whether this is an intended part of the fictional experience. Several internet horror stories of the 'haunted video game' subgenre, such as *Ben Drowned* (2010) and *NES Godzilla* (2011), also make use of these techniques, presenting their readers with screenshots and gameplay videos which initially seem just slightly glitched, but then escalate into increasingly bizarre and threatening forms until it becomes clear that some kind of malevolent force is at work (Cosbydaf n.d.; Hall 2017).

The Slenderman Mythos

All of these traits – the use of internet communities to collaboratively develop new urban legends, the preoccupation with themes of infection and corruption, the use of fake social media updates to create the illusion that horror narratives are unfolding in real time, the use of subliminal imagery, and the manipulation of the formal possibilities of online media to develop new ways of scaring and disturbing one's audience – can be seen in the single most iconic figure to emerge from

the online horror fiction boom of 2007–10, Slenderman. Like several earlier online horror memes, Slenderman began as a throwaway forum post; Eric Knudsen simply edited a tall, faceless figure into the background of two old photographs, added an evocative snippet of text, and posted the resulting images onto the Something Awful forums in 2009. Other writers, artists and filmmakers rapidly began developing a body of legends around this enigmatic figure, leading to the development of a swiftly growing 'Slenderman Mythos' (Chess 2012: 378–81; Boyer 2013: 243).

Slenderman thrived on YouTube. The *Marble Hornets* YouTube vlog, which began in 2009, used Slenderman as the basis for a zero-budget found footage horror series in which a film student searches for clues about what has happened to his missing friend by watching the videos he has left behind. In these, Slenderman makes various, often subliminal, appearances. By watching video footage of Slenderman, the student apparently attracts the attention of the creature himself, the proximity of which causes amnesia and glitches in the video. Once he realises that he is being followed by Slenderman, he begins filming everything that happens to him so that he can check for lost time and tell-tale glitches, thus creating even more cursed Slenderman footage, which will presumably be capable of infecting others in turn (Chess and Newsom 2015: 31–3). The *Marble Hornets* series ultimately ran for five years, attracting a large audience – its YouTube channel has almost half a million subscribers – and inspiring huge numbers of imitators in the process (DeLage and Wagner 2009–14).

Why did Slenderman – or at least the *Marble Hornets* version of Slenderman – possess such appeal for creators of online horror fiction? Part of its popularity was no doubt due to how cheap and easy Slenderman was to depict on film, especially in comparison to earlier online horror monsters such as Bloody Mary or The Rake. Poor-quality hand-held camera footage was very much part of the 'slendervlog' aesthetic, so all that was needed to stand in for Slenderman itself was a faceless mannequin in a suit, or an actor with a stocking over his face; further, as the extreme proximity of Slenderman caused the film to glitch, there was a built-in excuse for never showing it in close-up. But Slenderman also neatly embodies the anxieties over online communications which I have discussed over the course of this chapter. Like so much online content, Slenderman is anonymous and faceless: 4chan's users even call themselves 'Anonymous', and wear masks when assembling in public (Chess and Newman 2015: 56). The way that Slenderman follows its victims evokes fears of cyberstalking, online harassment and internet surveillance, all of which can feel like being stalked by some

faceless, omnipresent monster.[5] Like computer viruses, or online pornography and propaganda, Slenderman proliferates virally. Within the Slenderman mythology, anyone who has ever opened a Slenderman video file is a potential target. Slenderman's victims, like the figure of the internet addict in the popular imagination, tend to become unhealthy, anxious, obsessive and socially isolated, and the fact that the monster is often depicted as preying upon children reflects the anxiety that young people might be particularly vulnerable to being misled, traumatised or exploited by the individuals and content they interact with online. Like the ghosts in *Kairo*, Slenderman can thus easily be read as a representation of the fear that new communications technology, rather than bringing us together, may in fact drive us apart, infect us, corrupt us and ultimately destroy us.

Slenderman shot to international notoriety in 2014, after two twelve-year-old schoolgirls in Wisconsin stabbed one of their classmates in an attempt to impress and/or placate the fictional monster. Following this incident, something of a moral panic erupted over the supposedly malign influence of online media in general and online horror fiction such as Slenderman in particular (Chess and Newsom 2015: 2–9; Maddox 2017: 1–14). As is so often the case with such panics, the media frenzy triggered by the Wisconsin stabbing effectively mirrored the features of the very fiction it warned against, describing Slenderman as a monster dwelling in the darkest parts of the internet, waiting to corrupt any vulnerable young person who happened to chance across it, which is virtually identical to the way in which it is depicted in most actual Slenderman media (Crawford 2015: 35–47). Indeed, the ease with which Slenderman was adapted to such technophobic narratives is another strong reason for suggesting that it has effectively functioned as a metaphorical embodiment of such anxieties all along.

As figures such as Slenderman have become more widely known, the old barriers between traditional horror media (copyrighted, single-author, for-profit, overtly fictional) and online horror media (viral, anonymous, crowdsourced, non-commercial, often blurring the lines between fact and fiction) have increasingly broken down. Eric Heisserer, the creator of *The Dionaea House*, went on to become a professional screenwriter after selling an adaptation of the story to Warner Bros. *Always Watching*, a feature film adaptation of *Marble Hornets*, appeared in 2015. The online legend 'Candle Cove' was adapted for television as the first season of *Channel Zero* (2016), a television show based on internet horror fiction. Eric Knudsen, the creator of Slenderman, first asserted his copyright over the creature and then subsequently sold it to the production company Mythology Entertainment (Rogers 2016): *Slender Man*

(Sylvain White) was released in 2018. In the early 1990s, the dreams of alt.horror.creative users that they might become professional horror authors based on the stories they posted online were little more than fantasies; but, twenty-five years on, such dreams are being realised with increasing frequency.

In response to these developments, some creators of online horror fiction have become more professional, while others have retreated deeper into anonymity. An example of the former would be the paranormal-themed podcast *Welcome to Night Vale*, which since its launch in 2012 has transitioned from being a free project produced for fun into a formal production company which raises income via live shows, paid membership options and the sale of merchandise, leveraging the enormous popularity that it has acquired on the social networking site Tumblr (Weinstock 2018: 3). An example of the latter would be the 'interface series' which appeared on Reddit in 2016 in the form of snippets of interconnected horror fiction posted apparently randomly into discussion threads on unrelated topics. These snippets collectively constituted a form of anonymous guerrilla fiction, placed into deliberately incongruous contexts and posted without explanation or attribution in order to disturb and intrigue those readers who chance across it (_9MOTHER9HORSE9EYES9 2016).

This bifurcation is representative of the way in which the internet has developed in recent years. The anarchic digital landscape of the 1990s has, to a great extent, now been tamed, mapped, indexed and integrated with the global capitalist economy. Indeed, websites such as Google, Facebook and Amazon are now just as central to that economy as any old-style industry or media corporation. At the same time, however, the modern internet is difficult to police effectively because of its scale, and widespread anxieties remain about the awful things which may lurk in its hidden corners or on the 'deep web' beyond the reach of traditional search engines. Thus, while some forms of online horror fiction are being integrated into the mainstream media ecosystem, others continue to resist adaptation into traditional forms such as single-author novels or single-director feature films, clinging instead to distinctive viral and anonymous digital formats which allow them to express and exploit what is most unique, and thus potentially most terrifying, about online media. As I have discussed, Gothic is always one of the first genres to make use of new and emerging media forms because its traditional concerns with disruption and monstrosity match up so well with the anxieties that new forms of media inevitably provoke in the societies within which they appear. The time may come when the internet seems no more inherently threatening or destabilising than the novel or the

newspaper; but until that day arrives, digital media is likely to continue to provide rich new materials and formal innovations for creators of Gothic fictions.

Notes

1. Usenet groups were online discussion groups, popular during the 1980s and early 1990s. Though still extant today, they are now little used, having been largely superseded by internet fora after the rise of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s.
2. According to American urban legend, Bloody Mary is a ghost who appears to attack or terrify anyone who repeats her name in front of a darkened mirror. The Black-Eyed Kids are supposedly malevolent supernatural beings who manifest as dark-eyed children.
3. Ask.fm is a social networking site where users can send one another questions to be answered.
4. All of these originated in throwaway works of horror-themed microfiction posted to the 4chan and Something Awful message boards.
5. As Chess and Newsom note, 'The Slender Man's lurking presence has a chilling effect, just as a web-based lurker does' (Chess and Newsom 2015: 55).

Film and Television

Always Watching (James Moran, USA, 2015)
Channel Zero (Syfy, 2016)
Kairo (*Pulse*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Japan, 2001)
Ringu (*Ring*, Hideo Nakata, Japan, 1998)
Slender Man (Sylvain White, USA, 2018)
The Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, USA, 1999)

Webpages

Note: all webpages accessed 12 January 2018.
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