

Interactivity in Contemporary Gothic Horror Cinema

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David Punter and Glennis Byron put forward an important question in relation to the monsters of postmodernism and what came after when they asked ‘Can ghosts of ghosts abject otherness?’ (159) Repeating this insightful question in the contemporary context of our transmedial culture, I would suggest that in order to find an accurate response, we must consider the function of the monster and of horror more broadly in the context of the obsessive textual sampling and hypertextuality that appears to define new Gothic trends which proliferate across multiple media. In this new context, does the object of fear which is so important to the Gothic, lose its power over the subject due to our awareness of and contribution to its existence as a cultural product? Does the monster lose its capacity to scare audiences who grew up with ‘Leatherface’ and now look fondly upon his horrific visage with nostalgia and even delight? Certainly in the case of Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011) – a horror film replete with postmodern literary and filmic features – most of the monsters are, ultimately, easily managed and defeated. The surviving teenagers know quite well how to deal with their demonic pursuers owing to almost complete knowledge of the modern horror genre. Arguably, the real threat in the film, and the most genuine source of terror, is not the monsters in pursuit of the teens, but those behind the surveillance operation that brings murder and destruction on the group out of self-interest and for their own entertainment – interestingly, those with whom we share point of view. In the new media

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context of the film, the Gothic discourse of Otherness manifested in the concept of the monster seems to have shifted. The new media/technological paradigm that includes practices common to social media and online gaming brings about new opportunities for fear and nostalgia in Gothic works. *The Cabin in the Woods* demonstrates awareness of this and its self-conscious engagement with the Gothic horror genre will be explored here in relation to this self-reflexivity.

Along very similar lines, popular Gothic cinematic forms have become increasingly interactive in recent years. Much contemporary horror cinema can be seen to involve hypertextual processes such as literary sampling and mash-up, which function to remediate Gothic aesthetics and push the Gothic in new and challenging directions. A list of Gothic cinematic texts that demonstrate such trends would include, alongside *The Cabin in the Woods*, *Tucker and Dale vs Evil* (2010), *John Dies at the End* (2012) and *Evil Dead* (2013). This paper will propose that these are films which plunder the canon of Gothic and horror film and literature, not for the sake of Gothic parody or pastiche, but in order to construct themselves as new hypertextual¹ Gothic forms. It will argue, through an analysis of *The Cabin in the Woods* in particular, that such films evidence a continuation of the palimpsestuous re-writing and overwriting that has for so long defined the Gothic mode in a popular culture context; a practice that has long been (and that continues today) to be driven by genre convention and fan culture.

The manner in which these films interactively engage with earlier formats of Gothic horror through homage, riposte, repetition, and rejection will be the focus here. I will argue that the echoes and repetitions that characterize the films differ significantly from those found in earlier Gothic horror cinema in that focus is placed on aesthetics rather than hermeneutics through the simultaneous horror and pleasure (of recognition) that the films ultimately work to evoke. In doing so, it will be

important to consider contemporary horror cinema¹, its current state, and its engagement with both the genre of Gothic horror and recent trends in online culture. These considerations will be the foundation for my point that the transmedial aesthetics of contemporary Gothic horror cinema respond to cultural shifts that tally with the increasing mediatisation of culture. Equally, they will reveal the way in which the Gothic has undertaken new directions as part of ongoing literary and filmic expansion beyond the remit of postmodernism both textually and theoretically.

Horror cinema and horror fandom in the twenty-first century

Horror cinema in the last number of years, and in particular since the expansion of what is often referred to as the social media revolution, has undergone a number of significant changes. On-demand internet streaming of films and other media has allowed for audiences to become increasingly selective and to gain access to film content that may otherwise have only been available on limited release. In this context, it is interesting that the most watched horror films on Netflix, which currently lists over 700 films as part of the horror genre for streaming, include films such as *Troll Hunter*(2010), *Tucker and Dale vs Evil*(2010), *Pontypool*(2008), *Funny Games*(2007), *Evil Dead*(2013), and *The Cabin in the Woods*(2011). Significantly, these are films that can be linked together by the fact that they are driven by a rigorous self-consciousness and dedicated to a culture of referencing other horror intertexts. Netflix proves an extremely useful source for those of us researching contemporary film and television. With its own extremely reliable system of collecting data on its users and their

¹ Hypertextuality is used here with direct reference to the theories of Gerard Genette in relation to transgeneric practice in which adaptation takes place. It outlines the relation between a text and another text or genre on which it is based, but which it ultimately transforms, modifies, or extends.

preferences, the company can monitor when and where products are viewed, by whom, and even when films and shows are paused and discontinued. With over 44million streaming customers worldwide, Netflix's use of data collection allows them to discern what users want and to cater for the needs of niche and fan users. Alexis Madrigal argues that this has allowed for a reversal of Hollywood marketing that opens up the market to the audience (2014). With this in mind, it is interesting that among the most watched films in the horror genre, those films considered to be the 'genuine frighteners', are underrepresented - by this I mean films committed to generating an aesthetics of fear and singular engagement in their audiences - like *Paranormal Activity*(2007-), *The Shining*(1980), *The Thing* (1982), and *Saw*(2004)². This appears to suggest a shift in popular horror cinema in the last number of years wherein self-referential horror and horror that responds acutely to audience knowledge of genre content, has become more prevalent. In order to try to account for this shift to some degree, it is worth considering wider cultural trends in the same period.

In 2005 online culture underwent an important change and transformed from a medium predominantly oriented toward publishing, to a medium driven by communication and user generated content. Advancing from this in the following years, the development of free web platforms, inexpensive software, and the availability of professional quality media devices such as HD video cameras were the conditions present that enabled a certain amount of democratization in the film and music industries. While these changes are still very much ongoing, we can at this point, consider the enduring impact of huge cultural change that has been brought about by recent media developments and the increasing cultural relevance of audience generated content. Some would argue that

²For more on Netflix statistics relating to horror, please refer to *The Movie Review Query Engine*: <http://www.mrqe.com/lists/netflix100>

the impact of these developments is much greater than it seems and that it is not just culture and the way that art and media products are generated that has changed, but alongside these things, everyday life has also altered significantly. Since the majority of objects that we use daily are, both mass-produced and technological, everyday life is, in itself, to a certain extent, now a media product. This changes our behaviour as media consumers and producers. This opinion is put forward by Lev Manovich. In his essay, 'The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?', Manovich discusses, through the theories of Michel de Certeau, the manner in which we negotiate and renegotiate our way through the structures and strategies that are already in place from traditional media institutions. Customisation is the new strategy, or tactic, for the consumer/ producer (322). Although Manovich does not engage in any analysis of the resultant cultural products or strategies themselves, we can see a perfect example of his point in emerging bespoke cultural practices and trends in fan culture and developments in fanfiction in particular, where the broader notion of design for customization seems to have been co-opted into the area of popular fiction and its remediation.

New Gothic writing strategies in this forum emerge in response to what is acknowledged in fan culture studies as 'acquired fan knowledge' (Hills 133)³. These strategies engage with key aspects of fandom, including desire, repetition, and identification (with the texts, but equally with the fan group in which a sense of belonging is created). From this situation, new reading strategies also develop, and in turn, new sub-genres of the Gothic arise in their own right; defined by fluidity, fantasy, and fanaticism. This is acutely evident in contemporary trends in horror

³Matt Hills, in his book *Fan Cultures*, also importantly highlights the significance of the endlessly deferred narrative in texts that are aware of acquired fan knowledge as a condition for the fostering of extra-textual content in fan culture contexts (133).

cinema. The participative strategies which are generated through Gothic horror fandoms and the general popularity of horror texts since the seventies has resulted in a large number of horror films and television series that respond to the acquired fan knowledge of their viewers and demonstrate an open awareness of the creative potential of fan agency. Henry Jenkins, writing on ‘textual poaching’⁴, discusses fan culture in relation to the dynamics of those texts that acknowledge the influence of fans, but which also continue to work to contain them (xvii). He highlights the importance of fan agency in the development of genre and of particular film and television franchises, noting the importance of textual self-consciousness.

Arguably, this perspective on new media cultures is linked to changes in literary and filmic practice since the emergence of postmodernism when the reader, author, and text entered a new relationship whereby they became intimately dependent on each other. Early postmodern critics, such as Roland Barthes, suggested the birth of a new kind of reader in the latter half of the twentieth century that was prompted by changes in mass culture and late capitalism, one that interacts with the text so much so that the author and the text lose a large portion of ‘authority’ (Barthes 142). Alongside the particular cultural conditions of late capitalism, awareness of these popular postmodern theories and ideas drove the trend of increasing self-consciousness in popular fiction and film. This has extended so broadly in popular culture today that a wide range of popular texts now operate as ‘meta’ texts; guided by intertextuality, self-referencing and pastiche on a wide range of levels. Acknowledging this, it is probable that the social media explosion of the last ten years has again produced a new kind of reader and a new kind of fan in popular culture contexts; one that is born out of developments in and reactions to

⁴Jenkins concept of textual poaching comes from Michel de Certeau’s original considerations of the idea in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

postmodernism, and also to online and transmedial reading strategies and practices.

In a culture where downloading music and film allows for the emergence of niche and cult markets where the consumer/reader is free to choose from a vast array of styles and genres, we find that new texts that work within genre frameworks such as Gothic horror have to address a very different kind of audience. We see this in contemporary trends in fanfiction writing, and in keeping with the focus of this paper, in fanfiction that identifies itself in relation to Gothic horror. Interestingly, in the arena of fanfiction, the majority of Gothic horror writing is produced by young fans and re-crafts fantasy worlds where angsty teenage writers can flesh out their repressed sexual desires and identities. What is interesting about fanfiction, however, is less the content of the literature and more the broader cultural change that it reveals, especially as the publishing industry itself responds to such change by mimicking the strategies of its consumers.⁵

Horror Fan Agency and the Cabin Horror Paradigm

Paralleling changes in the institutions/ industries that govern cultural production in a new media age are interrelated changes in reading and consumption trends. Together these bolster the development of emergent aesthetics. This is referred to as participatory culture by Jenkins, who defines the term along a number of lines, highlighting the importance of certain conditions in participatory culture; in particular that it has few limits to artistic expression and that it is defined by the idea of creation for

⁵ For example, a significant proportion of the best-selling popular fiction novels of the last number of years started out as fanfiction, the 'Fifty Shades of Grey' novels of E.L James being a perfect case in point, beginning as they did, as Twilight fan writing.

sharing with a peer group which values a wide range of personal contributions. These conditions create unique cultural environments that are driven by social connection and group membership which foster the production of focused cultural texts.

In terms of genre, while Jenkins is perhaps more focused on twentieth century sci-fi cult classics such as *Star Trek*, it is worth noting that in this area, Gothic horror has also been massively popular with fan groups, perhaps due to the ease of replicating the aesthetics of Gothic literary and filmic style, but also perhaps due to the ease with which Gothic can be used to reflect and to express the anxieties frequently felt by the consumers-turned-creators of these cultural products. Gothic horror fandom and the general popularity of horror texts since the nineteen seventies, has resulted in a large number of horror films and television series that respond to the acquired fan knowledge of their viewers and demonstrate an open awareness of the creative potential of fan agency and this claim does not apply to just horror film franchises and cult horror films. It is also evidenced in the horror remake trends of the 1980's which brought us reworked classics such as *The Thing* (1982) and *The Blob* (1988). We see it too, in the expansion of vampire cinema during the nineties, when the 'vampire flick' became a genre of its own through films like and *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), and *Interview With a Vampire* (1994), all of which had a wide audience and fan appeal.

In recent years, the creative potential of fan agency has reached new heights with the aid of social media which has allowed fans to petition for changes in popular film and television series. The online petition to bring back Andrea in season four of *The Walking Dead* (2010-) and the ongoing competition between fans of *Dr. Who* (2005-), again online, to name new characters and concepts in the show, testify to expanding industry recognition of fan agency aided by online culture and changes in consumer behavior. Perhaps one of the implications of this growing

powerful fan agency in relation to horror cinema is that recent horror cinema appears to respond more to fans' nostalgia and unique fan knowledge, than it does to artistic notions of creative originality. Those films that we watched collectively as teenagers, and films like them, seem to be more successful than the modern remakes, and more engaging than efforts at generating a new kind of scare in horror cinema. Whedon and Goddard, in making *The Cabin in the Woods* seem to have harnessed this new potential for horror cinema. In realizing that they could never please the horror fan audience with a film that was either a remake, or a new horror concept, they offered a film defined by that very tension between desire for originality and nostalgia for the classic horror.

Reading contemporary popular horror cinema as a correlative of Gothic fanfiction, and accepting both as intimately linked to developments in transmedial cultural practice can allow us to understand recent trends in horror cinema and the manner in which the genre has become increasingly interactive. In much recent horror cinema, the tenets of Gothic horror as we know them are remediated with a particular agenda – one that intends to disrupt the notion of a coherent narrative, and revels in superficiality, but which also offers its characters the chance to break out of their stock types. Of this type of film, the 'cabin movie' seems to dominate as an extremely popular genre. The success of cabin horror films like *Evil Dead* (1981), *Antichrist* (2009), *Friday 13th* (1980), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Dale and Tucker vs Evil* (2010), affirms this. The cabin scenario in horror cinema is one that is much loved by horror aficionados and easily recognizable to most horror audiences. Its repetition across many levels of horror, from serious to spoof, implies the reliability of the trope, which perhaps comes from its fairy-tale origins (one thinks of little red riding hood and equally, goldilocks, both of whom have horrific encounters in small houses following a journey through the forest). In *The Cabin in the Woods*, the full potential of the cabin scenario and its contemporary cultural relevance are explored by Whedon and Goddard.

What results is a horror story that functions on a multi-lateral plane of engagement with its viewers. It develops within its own textual parameters, but only through interaction with audience and fan knowledge, which is enhanced by direct reference to other horror narratives.

The Cabin in the Woods

The Cabin in the Woods is an open pastiche of the modern horror film, and somehow manages to echo and reference almost every monster imagined by the popular horror genre in the last sixty years. These monsters are all reborn in a film which self-consciously repeats traditional horror narratives and their standard characters. Its main thrust is formed through key concepts such as recognition, knowingness, and nostalgia, as evidenced toward the end of the film in the series of glass elevators which contain various monster types ready to be unleashed to wreak havoc on unsuspecting victims. In the elevators there are both generic and specific monsters. A list would include: escaped convicts, and clowns among the classic or generic, and among the specific monsters a pain worshipping redneck family, echoing *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974); a doll-faced gang, repeating *The Strangers* (2008); a figure much like Samara of *The Ring* (2002); a Merman, much like that in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954); and twin girls who recall *The Shining* (1980), to name a few. These function in the film as a sort of conveyor belt of consumer horror products, which is a commentary on the genre in and of itself, but which also works to inspire delight rather than horror in the knowing audience.

However, in spite of the film's demonstrated awareness of its own mediatization in relation to past and future horror texts, and its response to online culture and technological advancement in society, the print origins of Gothic horror are firmly re-established. Interesting, one could go so far

as to say that they are even honored in the film's highly ambiguous and referential final scene, when, in an extended shot, a giant hand charges up through the ground to destroy the fateful cabin, referencing both the giant helmet of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and the zombie hand of Stephen King's *Carrie* in the same move. Interestingly, Whedon described the film as an effort to reinvigorate the horror genre, claiming it to be a critique of what we love and what we hate about horror cinema. In an interview with *Total Film* magazine, Whedon said

I love being scared. I love that mixture of thrill, of horror, that objectification/identification thing of wanting the people to be alright but at the same time hoping they'll go somewhere dark and face something awful. The things that I don't like are kids acting like idiots, the devolution of the horror movie into torture porn and into a long series of sadistic comeuppances. Drew and I both felt that the pendulum had swung a little too far in that direction ('Total Film' 1).

The film, as such, operates both as homage and as an effort in contributing to the future of horror. Whedon and Goddard together in interview have commented on this, saying that rather than setting out to turn the genre on its head, they instead sought 'to embrace the genre and make something new' while honoring those who came before them (2011, DVD).

Acknowledging the way in which they sample earlier horror forms, Whedon and Goddard also reveal their own motivations as fan writers. As part of a much celebrated Gothic horror fandom, they seek to push horror in new and challenging directions and demonstrate a tension between the need to repeat, but also to reform a particularly well developed cultural schema. In *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt Hills suggests that the pleasures of the horror fan are associated with connoisseurship more than emotional response and notes the subcultural capital accumulated by fans in terms of genre development (7). *The Cabin in the Woods* is a film that appears to

be constructed on this very premise, conscious of its already established fan audience and the pleasure of recognition that can be derived from nostalgic repetitions found in cult horror texts. Nevertheless, the film does more than simply repeat genre conventions and reference cult horror films. It uses these repetitions to generate a new path for Gothic horror cinema.

The premise of the film is revealed when five teenagers: the whore, the athlete, the scholar, the fool, and the virgin, are coerced by a futuristic surveillance operation into visiting a portentous cabin in the woods, where they are forced to indirectly choose a monster and ultimately their own untimely deaths. This is part of a loosely explained ritual sacrifice. Both horrifically and hilariously, having entered the iconic cellar of the creepy cabin, (knowing well from their knowledge of horror cinema that this is a bad idea) they summon a 'zombie redneck torture family' and spend the remainder of the film desperately trying to escape from their impending gory deaths. Ultimately, the virgin and the fool become aware of the surveillance program of which they are a part. However, by upsetting the required sequence of deaths needed for the ritual, they manage to survive and cause an apocalypse heralded by a league of evil giant gods who erupt into the film in the final shot. The absurdity and self-referential nature of the plot mean that it is not possible to impose a coherent or logical map of the intertextual plain of the film. After an hour and a half of echoes and repetitions we are left with the distinct feeling that this film is much more about aesthetics than it is about hermeneutics. We are not drawn into an effort in constructing narrative and meaning. Instead, we are invited to enjoy the references; to revel in our own knowledge of the genre as fans, and also to question the nature of our engagement with the 'meta' levels of the text.

Gothic horror tropes and motifs are widely sampled in the film. The narrative image set up for the film in its promotional material is based on standard slasher-horror iconography. The initial release film poster displays, at its center, a distant image of the creepy and isolated cabin,

undertoned in blood-red and surrounded by silhouetted forest trees. Overhead, are close-up shots of the terrified and blood-smearred faces of the five ‘doomed’ teenagers. These are accompanied by their titled film roles as archetypes. The title of the film appears in a Gothic font and is followed by a mention of Whedon and Goddard’s previous horror genre offerings: *Buffy* (1997-2003), *Cloverfield* (2008), and *Lost* (2004-2010). The message to the prospective audience could not be clearer. However, there is a complete reversal of these established expectations when the film begins. We meet the five characters in a suburban setting which is heavily informed by media and communications technologies. The introductory dialogues relate to issues surrounding surveillance culture and technologies and we are subsequently introduced to the monitoring lab where every action of the five is being watched and manipulated by a team of researchers and technicians. At this point, the film becomes blatantly self-conscious and the audience soon garners an awareness of the meta-levels on which the film is operating. It is evident from the very beginning that the film is working on two different filmic paradigms and as the film progresses, this interplay becomes more intense, brilliantly demonstrated in the scene when the five approach a ramshackle gas-station in a blatant reference to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). In this scene, the scholar enters what appears to be an abandoned filling-station store. His curiosity is engaged by the creepy objects scattered around inside when he is suddenly approached by the owner: a cliché of rural isolation and a reference to the standard harbinger character in this type of horror film. As the five gather outside, the menacing gas-station owner warns them of the dangers of their destination and openly designates ‘the whore’ character as a potential first victim, ominously telling them: ‘you’ve got enough [gas] to get you there. Getting back [he spits], that’s your concern’. Here the film involves itself in the sex and death paradigm of the slasher-horror film narrative, in which the whore is the first to go while the virgin or ‘the final girl’ as Carol J. Clover has dubbed her, survives. Clover outlines the

significance of slasher-horror narrative paradigms in relation to gender in her consideration of the female survivor figure of the horror genre, who, defined by her androgyny and ‘sexual reluctance’, survives in the absence of male intervention (35). Clover discusses a paradigm that all horror fans are well aware of, and one that is played with in *The Cabin in the Woods* by its critically informed directors. The whore is indeed the first to go, soon followed by the ‘macho’ guys, leaving the virgin and the fool to face their ends together. Interestingly, however, the fool also survives, perhaps also saved by his androgyny and sexual reluctance. In the film, this level of engagement with audience and critical responses to the horror genre reveals the extent of the film’s repetition and rejection of well-known horror paradigms, a depth required in order to engage with a hyper-aware fan audience. By initiating this level of interaction, *The Cabin in the Woods* invites us into its game. As viewers, we are encouraged to bet on the sequence of deaths and to engage our special knowledge of Gothic and horror narratives in order to follow the story. We have a special vantage point, knowing from the beginning about the surveillance program that observes the doomed five and we share perspective with the voyeuristic surveillance team who gamble on the horror events from the safety of the other side of a screen. We are thus forced to ask ourselves, as Whedon and Goddard explain ‘what it is about watching kids get killed that [we] enjoy?’ and ‘why do bad things keep happening to these blonde girls?’ (2011, DVD)

Interactive Gothic and ‘para-sites’ of horror

A major point in this discussion is that recent horror cinema and *The Cabin in the Woods* as a case in point involves processes of literary sampling which pushes the Gothic in new directions. I use the term literary sampling here, inspired by points made by Julie Sanders in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* to refer to a trend that is evident in

many contemporary literary forms which celebrate the pleasure of recognition through remediation and hypertextuality. Sampling, used with reference to music trends in mixing and sampling is when a sample of one sound recording is re-used either as an instrument or as part of a collective of sound recordings in a new piece of music. Arguably, this works exactly the same way in literature, when a part of an earlier text is reused functionally or artistically in a new piece of text. Sampling in music often works cohesively within certain genres, in particularly in hip hop and jazz. In literature, it is also usually genre specific and is a useful term in relation to genres like Gothic horror and science fiction in that it makes us aware of the palimpsestuous nature of the genre across both literature and film. It is significant that sampling is distinct from horror mash-up; a mode which blends and hybridizes forms seamlessly. In relation to intertextuality, sampling is the mixing and loose connection of horror tropes wherein our attention is drawn both to the agglomerate of forms but also to the process of mixing itself.

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Understanding how literary sampling works can lead us to an outline of what we could for practical purposes call interactive Gothic; a contemporary mode of Gothic aesthetics defined to a certain extent by the conditions of late postmodern hypertextuality but to a larger extent by trends in online and fan culture. In this modality, Gothic horror works as a set of Gothic literary/ filmic conditions which include a set of source texts that are accepted as Gothic horror by readers and fans; a self-conscious engagement with Gothic aesthetics; and a cultural agenda which celebrates homage and repetition. Principally, interactive Gothic involves a remediation of the established aesthetics of the Gothic and a promotion of the remediated product to contemporary readers/ audiences who are uniquely placed in relation to reading not just across genres but across media as well. In *The Cabin in the Woods*, the film itself is both a parasite of horror and what Hills would call a 'para-site' of horror ('Pleasures of Horror' 118): it reflects and includes the multi-dimensional nature of the horror genre as it exists culturally across the various fora of television, reality (as in real life horrors), and theory and criticism. It works on a concept of Gothic horror that has been continuously remediated and renegotiated and that is bound to be consistently remediated in the future.

In a consideration of the remediation of aesthetics in contemporary culture, J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss the importance of trans-media crossovers and the formal logic by which new media technology refashions prior media forms (8), stating the requirement to critically engage with the genealogy of new media with an awareness of this process. While hypertextuality is understood as a new text actively

refashioning old texts, remediation is essentially when a new form refashions old forms. Remediation brings with it a new transmedial aesthetics, which are to be found in many new forms that have emerged in twenty first century and continuously advancing techno-culture. These forms, like online fanfiction and much recent horror cinema, depend on other texts and readers in a unique way. Arguably, they are bound by the death of art that was signaled by postmodernism, and they interact excessively with earlier genres and styles. This interaction frequently assumes the reader's recognition of the echoed texts. As part of this new aesthetics, interactive Gothic becomes more than simply a style of literature; it is reflective of a 'state of literature'. It is a literary/filmic environment in which the reader and the author are implicated in a complex dynamic in relation to authority.

In *The Cabin in the Woods*, Gothic horror is part of a system of literary sampling in the film which effectively remediates the features of Gothic horror for a unique fan audience. As such, it forms part of a new contemporary Gothic aesthetics in transmedial literary and filmic culture. If we accept this idea, then we must ask how has the Gothic changed in its new contexts? As I claimed earlier in this paper, the focus of contemporary popular horror cinema has shifted away from the 'genuine scare'. There is an evidenced preference for nostalgia over real horror and terror. I would suggest that this move away from terror does not make the films any less Gothic. In fact, films which delight in the replication of celebrated horror motifs are reconnecting with the artifice, superficiality, and sense of fantasy that drove the Gothic of the late eighteenth century. Some critics might still argue that Gothic aesthetics are ultimately motivated by terror of the monstrous as it embodies the sublime, the uncanny, the grotesque, and the excessive. This would appear to suggest that what we have is essentially a diluted version of the mode. However, in the context of contemporary horror cinema, and films such as *The*

Cabin in the Woods, the role of the monster as a central figure of the Gothic is necessarily changed, yet it is as powerful a metaphor as ever.

Literary works (including film) are always ‘inhabited by a long chain of parasitical presences, echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts’ (J. Hillis Miller quoted in Gilbert & Gubar 2000: 46). However, in the case of *The Cabin in the Woods*, these parasitic references are functional and the manner in which the film works as a Gothic hypertext reveals much about the current state of the Gothic in popular culture and in relation to fan culture in particular. As a genre marked by its fascination with stories retold and rewritten, the Gothic can be seen in popular culture contexts to continue a long tradition of repetition and open-endedness. So, while Whedon claimed the film to be ‘the horror film to end all horror films’ (Beyer 2012), it is perhaps even more accurate to view it as the horror film to end all horror spoofs, bringing the horror genre in new directions, challenging audiences, and fans in particular, to engage their acquired knowledge of horror and to take part in an interactive Gothic text.

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