Tampere University

Riikka Nieminen

[TITLE REDACTED PER ORDER OF THE O5 COUNCIL]:

Horror and the Uncanny in the Works of the SCP Wiki

ABSTRACT

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Horror fiction is a genre that often defies classification in its variety and means of production. Especially new media horror, or online horror, is subversive and at the cutting edge of new technology. Horror and the uncanny are concepts that are closely connected, and the SCP Wiki is no exception: SCP articles describe objects and entities that have different kinds of supernatural properties that have been acquired by the SCP Foundation, a secret organization dedicated to protecting the world from anomalies. The Foundation is the subject of the SCP Wiki – a collaborative creative writing project that has been in operation since 2007 and has to date produced thousands of texts. In this thesis, I will examine the works of the SCP Wiki and the connection of horror and the uncanny, through the lens of the concepts of networked spectrality, the register of scientific writing as a tool in construction of horror and forms of new media horror such as creepypasta and unfiction.

Starting from the traditional, in chapter 2 this thesis will explore horror and its traditions and connections to Freud's concept of the uncanny, as well as the register of scientific writing. Next, in chapter 3 we will move onto the subject matter itself – the works of the SCP Wiki – and the science of the supernatural in horror literature. Finally, chapter 4 will cover the concept of digital horror and the 'spectral' nature of new media horror with the concept of networked spectrality, a framework that addresses the change from 'traditional' horror ('hauntings' as singular and personal) to new media horror ('hauntings' as collective and interactive), and its relationship with the uncanny as a literary device. . The primary material will consist of eight SCP entries among the highest rated entries of all time, that exemplify prototypical features of what SCPs are.The aim of this thesis is to analyse how the texts of the Wiki construct horror using the conventions of the horror genre, the uncanny, realism, online-based publishing, reader participation and the register and conventions of scientific research.

Keywords: uncanny, networked spectrality, online horror, creepypasta

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

From spooky stories told around a campfire to CGI monstrosities pulled straight from your nightmares onto the silver screen, there has always been a demand for horror stories. There are those among us who dedicate their entire lives to the art of horror, either as a creator or a fanatical consumer, and then there are those who only enjoy the occasional peek into the realms of nightmares.

Horror as a genre is marked by its diversity and the horror genre evolves as people's fears evolve: the eighties are known for bloody slasher movies and the 'cabin in the woods'-setting, while the 2010s have seen evolving technology as a source of horror (Cherry 2). Horror fiction, among other functions such as thrill seeking and pure entertainment, provides a way for the consumer to process their fears in a safe setting. According to Cherry "[s]ince fear is central to horror cinema, issues such as social upheaval, anxieties about natural and manmade disasters, conflicts and wars, crime and violence, can all contribute to the genre's continuation" (11). These uncertainties of life, environment and situation can be harmful to a person's psyche, as repression of "unacceptable" (violent, perverse, sexual) impulses can lead to those impulses being manifested, while 'normal' children and adults are 'normal' because they have found socially acceptable outlets to express those impulses (Grixti 79). Additionally, "[c]hildren who are continually and intensely absorbed in horror-producing scenes in comics and on television are engaged in 'a form of self-therapy', unconsciously trying to resolve their socially unacceptable impulses by working them out vicariously". Therefore, horror can be an effective tool of cathartic release, as "'vicarious experience' of aggression provides a relatively harmless release for pent-up aggressive instincts, and [horror can] thus be of therapeutic benefit in the socializing process" (ibid. 78).

Whatever the reason, as long as there are scary stories to tell, there are people eager to listen, and people eager to create. In the 21st century, as smartphones, computers and internet access are more and more essential to everyday living, it is easier than ever before for an aspiring horror

author to publish their work via a blog, their own website or other forms of self-publishing, therefore lack of financial resources or connections in the publishing industry are no longer impassable obstacles. With the addition of social media into the mix, whole communities have developed around the common interest of creative fiction. One of these communities is the online horror community. The genre of online horror is constantly being moulded by the members of this community, and like other genres, it is often hard to precisely define. In the most general terms, a genre is a set of "conventional structures used to construct a complete text within the [text] variety, for example, the conventional way in which a letter begins and ends" (Biber & Conrad 2), but, as the horror genre is a diverse one, the only true common denominator is often content that is meant to unsettle or disturb. Fear is a highly subjective issue, and things that are scary to some people might be unremarkable to others; many people are terrified of spiders, yet some can handle them with ease and even keep them as pets. Online communities are similarly hard to define as they overlap and mix into one another and rarely have any concrete criteria for entry. However, one can make generalizations based on the subjects these communities are formed around.

One of the subjects that are in the centre of the online horror community is creepypasta. When one searches online dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster or Cambridge, no definitions can be found, though Wikipedia defines creepypasta as "horror-related legends that have been copied and pasted around the Internet", that are "often brief, user-generated, paranormal stories intended to scare readers" ("Creepypasta"). The term was originally used to describe short, one-off posts but later, as the genre evolved, broadened to include multi-part series that can utilize different media (text, forum posts, YouTube videos etc.); the term is sometimes used as an umbrella term to describe all online-based horror content. It can be considered an "emergent genre of Internet folklore that involves the creation and dissemination of [a] particular style of creative horror stories and images" (Blank & McNeill 6). Creepypasta was originally meant to describe short horror stories meant to be shared by copying and pasting them around the internet – the term is a portmanteau of the words *creepy* and

copypasta, which itself is a portmanteau denoting viral, copied and pasted text ("Copypasta"). By definition, then, creepypasta is meant to be copied and pasted, shared, to 'go viral'. "In the process, the narrative texts often undergo modification, annotation, and/or reinterpretation by new posters in a folkloric process of repetition and variation" (Blank & McNeill 6). This means that creepypasta can be considered a form of urban legends and folk lore of the internet age. As a genre, it is also often multimodal, including photoshopped images or even video games based on a particular character or story: "Legends are also often embodied through the process of ostension, the acting out of a legend (the term is derived from Latin *ostendre*, to show rather than to tell*). Ostension is key to almost all contemporary legend complexes, but especially so in today's multimedia contexts of use and creation" (ibid.). As creepypasta grew more popular, it too started to develop different offshoots, arguably the most prominent (and certainly the most prolific) of which is the SCP Wiki aka the SCP Foundation, a massive collaborative writing project that to date has produced thousands upon thousands of stories.

The subject of this thesis are the works of the collaborative writing project known as the SCP Foundation. The term is used to both refer to the project itself and the fictional secret organization that is its subject. For the sake of clarity, the term SCP Foundation will be used when referring to the fictional institution, and SCP Wiki is used to refer to the website and the writing project. According to an account of the history of the SCP Wiki, *History of the Universe,* the Wiki and its subject, a fictional secret organization, were first conceived in 2007. The first entry, SCP-173 'The Sculpture', was posted as a one-off creepypasta on the paranormal board /x/ on the image board 4chan. The entry described a statue, constructed of rough materials such as concrete and rebar, that could move incomprehensibly fast when not within a direct line of sight, i.e. observed by someone or something. If line of sight was broken, the statue would quickly move behind the nearest person and snap their neck, killing them. The structure and subject of the text, which resembled a scientific log and presupposed the existence of at least 172 previous SCPs, quickly drew the attention

of users who then began to share SCP-173 in reposts. By January 2008 many original SCPs had been created, and these would later become the first SCP series. The growing number of entries was then moved to the SCP Series wiki on *EditThis,* a Wikipedia clone, and later to *WikiDot*, which was considered a more sustainable platform. Since then, the site has continued growing and now contains thousands of SCP entries in addition to essays, short stories, experiment logs and other types of texts that chronicle the activity of the Foundation and related groups of interest.

The SCP Wiki is an online creative writing project compiled in a Wikipedia-style website that registered users update and edit collaboratively. At the time of writing, series I – V have been completed (each series containing one thousand SCP entries) and series VI is underway. The 'slots' are not filled in order, but rather the writer is free to choose the designation they want from those that are still available, as sometimes SCP designations are used to allude to other SCPs, either because they are in some way connected, or as a purposeful misdirection, or the number designation is somehow relevant to that particular SCP. The community is open to everyone, but new submissions and edits are heavily critiqued and polished before being accepted into the canon of the texts. This process happens through discussion on the forums and voting on the submissions themselves: if a submission gets enough upvotes (likes), the submission is accepted, if not, then it simply fades to obscurity (although the best of the worst are often kept for posterity, as are submissions that are intentionally poorly written for comedic purposes). During the 13 years that the project has been in operation the site has amassed a collection of several thousands of texts of varying types, the most important of which are the SCP entries. These are descriptive texts that, again similarly to Wikipedia, are meant to catalogue a variety of anomalous objects, entities, locations or even events that the SCP Foundation has encountered and attempted to – sometimes unsuccessfully – understand and contain. The entries are written in a scientific register and despite the subjects of these texts being of a fictional (often paranormal) nature, the style and feel of the texts is as realistic and as close to the writing style of scientific research as possible.

The postnational nature of internet communities means that it is nearly effortless for writers to come together and combine their varying cultural backgrounds to create something entirely new. Catherine Frost, in her article on the postnationality of the internet, highlights four important factors based on Benedict Anderson's work on the "development of national consciousness" that are also visible in the development of online social relations: "shifts in ideas of time and social attachments" that allow for a feeling of "shared […] community with others they have never met but that they recognized as facing the same contingencies in life"; alignment with or promotion of "particular ways of making sense of the world"; reinforcement of new modes of political engagement; and finally, identification of "new modes of inclusion and exclusion that might result from [the internet's] spread and use" (Frost 46). These four factors can in fact be seen in internet communities, including that of the online horror community, who create their own folklore with creepypasta, and specifically in the works of the SCP wiki, which can be seen as a closed community of those familiar with the 'culture of the group' (although technically there are no 'barriers of entry' as anyone can register as a user on the site). In addition to this, the ease and availability of self-publishing that exists today abolishes many of the barriers an aspiring author might face when trying to get their work seen, and so the scale of what literature can be is broadened - therefore, literary studies should also endeavour to delve into these emerging new genres. The genre of creepypasta, and SCPs as a type of subgenre, are new types of writing that have not yet been academically researched sufficiently. Still, their nature means that they are constantly evolving, even more so than more 'traditional' types of literature.

While horror has a longstanding tradition, new media and online horror require novel conceptual frameworks. Starting from the traditional, in chapter 2 this thesis will explore horror and its traditions and connections to Freud's concept of the uncanny, as well as the register of scientific writing. Next, in chapter 3 we will move onto the subject matter itself – the works of the SCP Wiki – and the science of the supernatural in horror literature. Finally, chapter 4 will cover the concept of

digital horror and the 'spectral' nature of new media horror with the concept of networked spectrality, a framework that addresses the change from 'traditional' horror ('hauntings' as singular and personal) to new media horror ('hauntings' as collective and interactive), and its relationship with the uncanny as a literary device. The aim of this thesis is to analyse how the texts of the Wiki construct horror using the conventions of the horror genre, the uncanny, realism, online-based publishing, reader participation and the register and conventions of scientific research. The primary material will consist of eight SCP entries among the highest rated entries of all time that exemplify prototypical features of what SCPs are. Analysis will be supported by theoretical works regarding horror fiction as a genre, the uncanny as a literary device and genre studies, particularly in the area of scientific research, beginning with an overview of the secondary material, and progressing into analysis of selected texts. We will end on a discussion of the materials, with the observation that the SCP Wiki is a new type of subgenre, that combines literary traditions and new media formats in a unique way, and as such is a notable work in the tradition of online horror in particular, and the horror tradition in general, which warrants further academic analysis. In fact, the SCP Wiki can be seen as an uncanny version of Wikipedia, something familiar made strange, via Freud's concept of the uncanny and new media horror characteristics.

2. Horror and the uncanny: tradition and modernity

Horror as a genre

Horror seems to be a fundamentally divisive genre: some consider horror stories to be great fun, while others deem violence and shocking elements distasteful. Some people might watch a scary movie with their friends around Halloween, but otherwise keep all things dark and macabre at a comfortable distance. The genre indeed has a longstanding tradition, starting from 1765 when Horace Walpole published the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto,* and in the years since, the genre has continued to grow and diversify (Bracken). As different forms of artistic expression (e. g. poetry, music, film, then blogs, animation, and even YouTube) – have developed alongside traditional literature, the genre has transformed from its origins of Gothic ghost stories to a portrayal of modern life, modern anxieties, and modern technology. Additionally, being a 'horror creator' is not limited to being a published author or filmmaker anymore – anyone with an interesting concept can now create and distribute content easily, or even take familiar stories and adapt them for a modern audience. *The Invisible Man,* a modern film adaption of the H.G. Wells novel originally published in 1897, which – even factoring in the loss of revenue caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – is at the time of writing the 9th highest-grossing film of 2020 ("2020 Worldwide Box Office"), showing that old motifs interpreted through a modern lens continue to hold the attention of the consumer. The story of a man obsessed with his experiments is told anew as the story of a woman terrorised by her millionaire inventor boyfriend, exemplifying the universality and longevity of the genre. While the original story centred around anxieties around science, particularly chemistry, the retelling focuses on developing technology and how those in power could (ab)use that technology to hurt vulnerable people.

There are different theories on why horror stories are appealing to us; would it not make sense to want to avoid things that deliberately make us experience unpleasant emotions, particularly in entertainment, which is supposed to be something leisurely enjoyed in our free time? Some see the

appeal of the horror genre as being "based on the process of narrative closure in which the horrifying or monstrous is destroyed or contained", providing catharsis in a narrative where order is restored and chaos dispelled (Jancovich 9). Others state that horror stories are a way to process cultural and societal anxieties (Cherry 11) and even a person's own unconscious impulses (Grixti 78-79). In any case, the psychology behind the appeal of horror is likely irrelevant to the average consumer, who simply enjoys a good scary story.

Horror as a genre of fiction is one that tends to draw from other genres and utilize a variety of different characters, narratives and styles, and as such is one that can be said to be marked by its diversity (Cherry 2). Everyday objects such as videotapes *(The Ring,* 2002), dolls (*Annabelle,* 2014), televisions (*Poltergeist* 1982, 2015) and even mirrors (*Oculus,* 2013) can be used as subjects of horror and the settings can vary from hotels (*The Shining,* 1980, based on the 1977 novel), to the woods (*The Blair Witch Project,* 1999), to prisons (*Silence of the Lambs*, 1991, based on the 1988 novel) and gas stations (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* 1974), not to mention the variety of characters that can be found in these tales. Therefore, it can be difficult to describe the genre in terms of its typical features. The only real common denominator seems to be the feelings of fear and unsettlement (Cherry, Grixti).

As fear is a highly subjective concept, it stands to reason that horror stories also delve into topics that are subjectively scary, rather than universally terrifying. It is also bound to culture, which is seen in the fact that while the tradition of urban legends and folklore (harkening back to the very beginnings of the tradition of oral storytelling) is present all over the world, the subjects of the stories often stem from the local culture. For example, Scandinavians tell stories of mischievous elves, while in the United Kingdom similar tales are told of fairies and leprechauns. However, while every culture has its own fairy tales and urban legends, some characteristics seem to appear across cultures. In an interview with *The Atlantic*, Dr. Margee Kerr, staff sociologist at Pittsburgh-based "haunted house"-attraction ScareHouse states:

> Monsters are defying the general laws of nature in some way. They have either returned from the afterlife (ghosts, demons, spirits) or they are some kind of non-human or semi-human creature. This speaks to the fact that things that violate the laws of nature are terrifying. And really anything that doesn't make sense or causes us some kind of dissonance, whether it is cognitive or aesthetic, is going to be scary (axe-wielding animals, masked faces, contorted bodies). (Ringo)

She goes on to highlight humans' obsession with death, and the fear of death manifesting itself in reanimated corpses, spirits from beyond the grave and undead abominations. These manifestations illustrate how when the familiar (the natural circle of life and death) is challenged, our brains are made uncomfortable by the disruption. This disruption and resulting discomfort are known as *the uncanny,* first conceptualized by Sigmund Freud. The concept can be difficult to define; it can be "something beautiful, but at the same time frightening", "what should have remained hidden but has come to light" or the familiar made strange (Royle 2 – 3, 5). Freud asserts, that "[s]omething must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny", and adds that "the essential condition for the emergence of a sense of the uncanny is intellectual uncertainty" (Freud, 125). The concept of *the uncanny valley* is commonly used in robotics to describe the phenomenon "whereby a humanoid robot or computer-generated figure bearing a close but imperfect resemblance to a human being arouses a sense of unease or revulsion in a person viewing it" ("uncanny valley"). While Freud could not have predicted modern advances in the field of robotics, he did connect the concept of uncanny to human-like figures such as dolls and automata (Freud, 135).

As the subjects we associate with the uncanny have changed, so have the subjects of horror. Both are time-sensitive, meaning that the subjects of horror stories change as time passes: the supernaturally resurrected undead zombie of classic horror cinema is today a victim of a genetically manipulated virus. The image of the disfigured, primal and cannibalistic monster stays the same, but as superstition gives way to scientific understanding of the world, so does the method of resurrection evolve. As horror is a way to process cultural and societal anxieties, it is natural that trends in horror

shift according to the world around us. These trends are arguably most visible in the area of film, as today the film industry tends to be more in tune with the trends of pop culture. The history of monsters on the silver screen dates back to the late 1800s, to the silent film *The Haunted Castle* (*Le Manoir du Diable*, 1896), even though by today's standards, the bat figures and skeletons suspended on wires seem more comical than scary. In 1910 Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* received its first film adaptation first as a short, then a full-length feature in 1931. It is speculated that "the fear of death and the possibility of resurrection in gothic novels and their movie counterparts reflected contemporary society's fear of premature death and illness, before the advent of modern medicine" (McGrall). In 1932, "following a test screening [of Tod Browning's *Freaks*], a woman threatened to sue the studio, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), claiming that the film had caused her to suffer a miscarriage!", after which the film was banned for 30 years (ibid.). *Freaks,* a film about so-called circus monstrosities, exemplifies the fear of the *other*, of those who are ostracised by society, again connecting to the concept of the uncanny: these characters are seen as *not quite* people, *not quite* human. In the wake of World War II, "the spectre of invasion and atomic war cast a long shadow over the horror genre. For example, *Godzilla* was a product of radioactivity, and aliens invaded Earth in 1953's *The War of the Worlds* and 1958's *The Blob* and *I Married a Monster from Outerspace*" (ibid.). Then in the 1960s, as film technology was evolving, an era of change in what was deemed appropriate for public consumption arrived: notably, in 1968 George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* caused such a controversy that it resulted in the introduction of the MPAA Film Rating system later that year, "pushing the envelope of what was acceptable to show onscreen" (ibid.) The 70's explored threats from within the family unit and children as capable of violence with *The Omen* (1976), and *The Exorcist* (1973) while in the 80's the slasher subgenre was in full bloom with classics such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Friday the 13th* (1980). When the slasher became too familiar to audiences, films parodying the conventions became popular, such as *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*(1997), and subjects less focused on the supernatural, such as serial killers took

over the silver screen in *The Silence of The Lambs* (1991) and *Se7en* (1995). The turn of the millennium saw the horror genre split into two, seemingly opposite paths of minimalist storytelling, kicking off the found footage genre and viral marketing with *The Blair Witch Project* (1990) and the excessive torture porn genre with *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005) (ibid.) These notable examples demonstrate the tendency the horror genre has of evolving to portray surrounding society and relevant cultural shifts.

In recent years technology has become more and more a part of everyday living instead of a luxury. As we become more connected to each other and to the world via the internet, concerns of security are more and more prevalent with each new case of hacking or security breach, which begs the question: while we are connected to each other, who else is connected to us? These concerns have paved the way for a trend of literal ghosts in the machine in the horror genre. Japanese films such as *Ringu* (1998), *Kairo* (2001) and *Chakushin ari* (2003) and their American counterparts *the Ring* (2002), *Pulse* (2006) and *One Missed Call* (2008) explore the idea that a haunting or curse can spread from person to person via VHS tapes, computers and mobile phones respectively, acting much like a virus. These types of films "can encourage readings that primarily focus on the social anxieties associated with technological advance" (Kirk 55), linking technology to the world of the spectral.

The term *networked spectrality,* coined by Neal Kirk (ibid.), refers to the "representations of ghosts that are transitioning from the singular, linear, personal and analogue to ghosts that are digital, multiple, nodular and distributive. It also considers how haunting becomes more interactive through new media technologies" (ibid.), meaning that gone are the days of hauntings in graveyards; the afterlife is now as immediate and omnipresent as the internet. Considering the fact that Facebook even provides an option to memorialize a deceased loved one's page, the concept of a soul living on through their digital footprint is not that far from reality. The participatory nature of new media means that the spirits haunting it are also changing "from ghosts that manifest in, through and with, the aid of analogue 'broadcast' media to new digitally-manifesting

media spectres. When ghosts are coupled with new media technologies, haunting is not merely a singular, personal, temporary occurrence of the supernatural but an endemic threat to increasingly networked and globalized contemporary society" (ibid., 57). With his concept of *hauntology,* Jacques Derrida explores the aspects of time and immediacy:

> This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the "to be," assuming that it is a matter of Being in the "to be or not to be," but nothing is less certain). It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would *comprehend* them, but incomprehensibly. How to *comprehend* in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end? Can the extremity of the extreme ever be comprehended? And the opposition between "to be" and "not to be"? *Hamlet* already began with the expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the spirit comes by *coming back* [revenant], it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again. (Derrida 6)

The term is a "wordplay on 'haunting' and 'ontology', suggesting that all that can be said to exist – which, according to traditional Western ontology, means to be immediate and present – is haunted by all that which it is not – that is, the absent and the deferred", and as such "nothing enjoys a pure presence; instead, day is defined by not being night; light is defined by not being darkness; the self is defined by not being other; and so on" (Henriksen 270). With this in mind, new media horror can be seen as a haunting concept in itself: it is as ancient as it is modern with its roots in the oral tradition of storytelling; it is as omnipresent as the internet and yet spectral, beyond the scope of our traditional senses.

The internet was built on two important principles. The procrastination principle meant, that "if the system could be initially designed simply, then solutions for potential problems could be solved at a later date" and the 'trust-your-neighbour' principle, meaning that the internet

was meant to be "open [with] no specific technological restraints on the flow of information" (ibid.) While these principles have made the internet the essential tool it is today, allowing for sharing of knowledge through open-sourcing and creative work unhindered by financial constraints, it also means that the sheer amount of data cannot all be monitored, making room for some of the more unsavoury sites on the surface web, not to mention the black markets of the deep web and dark web. Therefore, if one includes the context of networked spectrality, the approachability, immediacy and accessibility of the internet means that the digital spectral is also brought closer to our everyday lives, as a constant, immediate element we carry with us in the form of our smartphones and laptops. As such, recent works utilizing this concept, along with the opportunities of new media, have created a community around online horror, that is by nature collaborative, postnational and based on the concept of the supernatural in our everyday lives, in other words bringing the other to the familiar, heavily relying – as horror often does – on the concept of the uncanny and the subversiveness of new media.

Online horror communities and new media horror

Horror on new media platforms is by definition subversive, as new possibilities are created with new technologies. Generally, the term 'online horror' is used very broadly, encompassing those forms of storytelling outside of traditional print media, TV and film. This new form of horror is at the same time more intimate and more communal. A prominent example that takes full advantage of the unique properties of its platform is the 2017 freeware visual novel *Doki Doki Literature Club!* by Team Salvato. The game begins in a way that is immediately recognizable to anyone who has played a visual novel style dating simulator before. The faceless protagonist, who the player is free to name as they wish, represents the player as they move through the story by making dialogue choices. The player is a male high school student persuaded by a friend to join an after-school literature club, which consists of four attractive girls. The player gets to know these girls and their personalities through

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reading their poems and writing poems themselves through a minigame. The art style is colourful, cute and unassuming, but as the story progresses the player will start noticing that something is not quite consistent with a seemingly light-hearted story: characters make comments that seem out of place and self-referential, and it is heavily implied that one of the girls is a victim of domestic violence, while another actively engages in self-harming behaviour, cutting herself. The climax of the story happens, when one of the girls, Monika, is revealed to have become self-aware, realizing that she is a character in a video game and falling in love with the player. In a fit of jealousy, she tampers with the coding of the game to make the other girls kill themselves so that she can have the player all to herself. While playing the game, if the player looks into the program files, Monika can be seen making changes to the game by leaving messages for the player and even deleting the character files of the other girls. In order to finish the story, the player must delete Monika's character file, causing her to lash out angrily at the player, but eventually accept her fate and ultimately delete the entire game putting it into an unplayable state unless the player reinstalls the game altogether. The story of the game is executed in such a way that it simply would not work as well in any other type of media. The fact that the story is about a video game character becoming self-aware is underlined by Monika making changes to the player's computer, giving the impression that the character is *actually* interacting with the player's real-life possessions. The game is even coded in such a way that it can access the player's personal information, leading to a scene near the end of the game where Monika calls the player by their real name instead of whatever nickname the player provided at the start. This would not be possible in any other format, as there is no method for a book or a film to be personalized in such a way. Instances like this make the game feel more intimate and more real, making for a more engaging experience.

   While not all new media works certainly employ such blatant fourth wall breaks as *Doki Doki*, by their very nature they are often more intimate experiences. Compare going to the cinema to see a monster movie to playing a game that actively makes changes in your computer alone

at home. Leaving the cinema can be a very grounding experience; as the horrors on screen are left into the darkness of the theatre, it can feel like one is leaving the dangers of a fictional adventure behind and returning to safe, familiar reality. However, when you play a game, you bring it into your space and actively interact with it; there's no door to go through that would figuratively and literally lead you back into the real world.

On the other hand, the element of community around different works has also become more pronounced than before. That is not to say that communities around book series or film franchises have not existed in the past; the ease with which these communities are formed is simply enhanced by technology and the internet, as is the possibility of interacting with the story or its creator while the story is still being told, rather than commenting on a finished product after the fact. Two recent examples of this are the story of Dear David told by author and illustrator Adam Ellis on Twitter, and the Daisy Brown YouTube channel. The story of Dear David began on August 7th, 2017 when Adam Ellis tweeted about a ghost child named David who was haunting his apartment. He chronicled how David would haunt his dreams, how his cats started acting strangely, and how he would find strange objects in and around his apartment. The story culminated to Ellis posting pictures of the ghost child watching him sleep. The story of Dear David unfolded entirely on twitter until March 12th, 2018 when Ellis posted his (seemingly) final tweet on the topic, saying that he was doing okay and that he would be concentrating on "other projects". He has since sold the story to New Line who are planning on releasing a film based on the story (Sneider).

The story in and of itself feels familiar and iterations of a character being haunted by the ghost of a child are fairly common. However, what was notable about it was that Ellis' audience was witnessing it in real time: as the ghost of David would appear, Ellis would post about it and his followers would flock to his Twitter, hungry for the newest details of the haunting, regardless of the time of day or their location, and people all around the world gathered in his mentions to wonder and worry about Ellis' safety – even to argue about the legitimacy of his story. Regardless of one's

personal beliefs on the supernatural and the existence of the afterlife, one must admit that Ellis' way of presenting his story was quite clever: posting to Twitter could be seen as the modern, interactive equivalent of keeping a diary, and the motif of finding an old journal in the attic of a decrepit house is a common starting point for a horror story, for example in movies such as *The Cabin in the Woods* (2011). In fact, even the first edition of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was supposedly a translation of an old manuscript (Smith 18), and while the 'found manuscript' trope is indeed a historic one, it is more equivalent to the modern-day found footage genre (while technically diaries are manuscripts, a diary is one that is specifically about the author, their feelings, thoughts and daily life). Ellis posted the story in increments relative to real time mixed with posts about his work and more personal tweets, onto a platform that is meant primarily for social interaction. As Twitter provides a way for people to easily connect with their idols, a story told in this way feels more personal than if Ellis had appeared on a TV show. In addition, followers had the chance to ask questions and give advice directly to Ellis. The distance between content creator and consumer is reduced, and that respectively brings the consumer closer to the work itself, as the 'good faith' fans have towards their favourite celebrities is extended to the work. The 'intimacy' of the experience also gives it an additional feel of realism, as it almost feels like a first-hand account being told by a friend.

Intimacy and a feeling of closeness with a creator (and with other members of the audience of a given work) can be powerful tools in a creator's arsenal. A similar story to that of Dear David is the story of Daisy Brown, the lonely girl with a pet monster. Daisy's story begins on July 18th, 2017 with Daisy's first video titled "How I feed Alan" uploaded onto the channel she named after herself. The vlog-style video shows a girl, whose face is off screen, holding a strange creature and feeding it sugar pills. While the creature is very obviously a puppet, Daisy treats it as if it is a real, living thing. This trend continues throughout her uploads, in which she tells the audience more about Alan: he is a monster – something Daisy is surprised to find out is not commonplace – made by her father. She cares for Alan, plays with him and watches him grow, until Alan eventually

becomes strong enough to physically overpower her, at which time he begins abusing her both verbally and physically. Finally, she discovers more monsters in her basement, befriends one called Lithop and hatches a plan to escape with her. As they make their escape, Alan attacks them, and Daisy ends up killing him in the ensuing scuffle. Where Daisy Brown's story differs from most others is that while the videos tell a story by themselves, a majority of Daisy's backstory and details about her life, her parents, and even her and Alan's inner thoughts are revealed only through the closed captions of the videos. If one were to ignore these, the story would still make sense, but a large piece of the full picture would be missing. For example, in the captions of "Artistic video" Daisy tells Alan a story she made up about two queens who fall in love but cannot be together, revealing to the audience something pivotal about her character: while she is mature enough to be able to take care of both herself and Alan all alone, she is the kind of girl who still finds comfort in fairy tales.

The story of Daisy Brown is significant in two ways: it demonstrates the effectiveness of intimate, realistic storytelling, but also of willing suspension of disbelief. The simplistic puppet is quite obviously papier-mâché and controlled by Daisy herself, yet the audience has no issues treating Alan as if he were a real, living creature. The audience is 'in on it', understanding that what they are being presented is meant to be treated as if it were real, even though it is clearly fiction; the pretence is a part of the experience. This is a fundamental element of unfiction and ARGs, or alternate reality games. The concepts are very similar in nature: both refer to "a cross-media genre of interactive fiction using multiple delivery and communications media" ("Glossary"). These terms are often used synonymously, as this is still an form of fiction that is emerging and defining itself, although community consensus seems to be that ARG is used to refer to works that require active participation from viewers (such as solving puzzles) for the story to progress, while unfiction refers to works that are interactive, but the audience-author relationship does not affect the conclusion of the story ("What is Unfiction?"). Both Dear David on Twitter, and Daisy Brown on YouTube fall into the latter

category, allowing for interaction between the audience and the creator, while still being completely controlled by the creator, rather than allowing the audience to impact the direction the story takes.

While not specifically a social media platform, YouTube does create a space for interaction and community through the comment sections on videos. Using this – as well as a Twitter account – Daisy would regularly interact with her viewers and answer their questions like any other vlogger on the platform. She would always be in character, staying true to her distinctive writing style and tone. Daisy's story, like that of Dear David, is presented as real and immediate. While the videos contain some editing, and the captions that provide an integral piece to the story certainly take some time to implement, the feel of the videos is again one of immediacy, as if the viewer is following this lonely girl's life in real time; intimacy, as Daisy invites her audience to witness both her everyday life in the form of cooking videos and vlogs, but also the darker moments of her abuse by Alan; and community as Daisy interacts with her followers and her followers interact with each other.

These examples bring us to an important point about new media horror. While new media horror stories can still be classified the same way as older works by their content (as ghost stories, monster movies, slasher films etc.) they are more effectively defined through their form and interactivity. It is more a rule rather than an exception that new media horror uses the platform and its features as story components, as functional pieces required to tell the story – this is not about a character making a quick self-referential joke, these elements are necessary to tell the full story, to push the narrative forward and create a more immersive and intimate experience for the audience, and most importantly, these stories could not be told as they are through any other media, in the same way that a filmmaker would be crippled by the removal of their camera.

If new media horror is more effectively defined by its form rather than its content, that means that we end up with a plethora of new subcategories, with some prolific works, such as the SCP Foundation, claiming an entire space just for themselves. Here we fully enter the world of *creepypasta*, *unfiction*, and ARGs. Most of us have likely encountered the early forms of creepypasta

at some point in our lives without realizing it. In the 1990s, as communication via email was becoming more commonplace, chain emails started to emerge, warning the receiver to forward the message to a certain amount of people or else they would be haunted by a restless spirit. If you had an email address in the 1990s or early 2000s, you have probably received one yourself and lived to tell the tale. These chain emails can be seen as the earliest instances of creepypasta (Roy). Even then, the stories were marked by two things that would develop into defining the genre: their presentation of supposed realism and their shareable nature, laying groundwork for future works functioning within the realm of networked spectrality. Creepypasta would typically be written in first person, as if it were a first-hand account of real events, and shared through emails, forum posts or other platforms typically intended for personal use rather than publishing, such as blogs. Later, as the community around creepypasta grew, suspension of disbelief would become more difficult as readers became accustomed to the typical elements of creepypasta as a form of fiction. The pretence of realism would be somewhat abandoned as websites and communities dedicated specifically for sharing creepypasta emerged, but the tradition of the first-hand account has more or less endured. The shareable nature of creepypasta is still visible in literal calls-to-action type warnings, but nowadays has been integrated more into the networked aspect of creepypasta, meaning that while before chain emails would spread from person to person regardless of whether they wanted to receive them, now it is more common to find warnings directed towards people who are already members of the online horror community. A good example of this appears in the creepypasta *The Gristers,* a story of small humanoid creatures that feed on fear, and that will eventually attack when discovered. The story ends in an explicit warning:

> So please. This is my warning to you. Stop reading creepypasta. I know you love it. I know you love frightening yourself. But you've got to stop. Every time you read it - every time you get that feeling of dread in your stomach- you're drawing the gristers to you. And if you don't stop reading, at least, please. Never check out those sounds in the house when you do. ("The Gristers")

Here the text speaks directly to the reader, making them participatory in the narrative, creating a parallel between the narrator and the reader: as the narrator first discovered the gristers when reading creepypasta late at night, so did the reader likely discover this story.

New media horror comes in many forms, including the arguably more traditional text-based form. When discussing new media horror, it is important to understand that the mixed media format is becoming more and more common, and even simply text-based stories take advantage of formatting tricks that are more easily executed in digital than in print form, breaking the conventions of traditional narratives (the SCP Wiki employs these means regularly, and they will be discussed in more detail in the analysis section). However, when arguing for the inclusion of new horror media into the long tradition of horror fiction, one must also discuss the tradition of Gothic literature. Gothic literature has a centuries long tradition and so does its analysis. According to "[t]he Gothic can represent a confluence of many issues reflecting on gender, race, history, class, nation, and the self", and there is prolific writing interpreting the Gothic from the point of view of different literary theories, for example Stephen D. Arata's examination of "how vampirism in *Dracula* can be read not only in gendered terms but as a symbolic representation of colonisers parasitically feeding off the colonised" (9 – 10). One could argue that since new media horror is in its form distinctly different from the tradition of horror literature (digital vs. analogue), the analysis of horror too should evolve to accommodate the shift. While the genre is arguably one of the most diverse in fiction, the 'building blocks' of the spirit of horror have remained throughout the centuries. Returning back to *The Castle of Otranto,* subversion of expectations appears to have been at the core of horror from the very start. According to Smith the critical discussion surrounding the work focuses "as much on the novel's two prefaces as […] the novel itself": the first edition of the novel published in 1764 includes a preface that claims the author to be Onuphorio Muralto, a fictitious Italian, originating from the 16th century and presents *The Castle of Otranto* as a "genuine medieval romance" (18). In the second preface, published in the second edition a year later, Walpole takes ownership of the text and reveals it as an

attempt to create a new mode of writing: "this is to be found in Walpole's claim that the novel was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success'" (ibid., 18-19). The second preface elicits a more realistic reading of the work with the supernatural elements as an allegory for "the presence of illegitimate aristocratic claim on forms of political power" (ibid, 22.) rather than the fantastical improbability of an ancient romance as first thought (ibid., 18 – 19). What is particularly interesting, is that a similar 'deception' was employed by the previously mentioned video game, *Doki Doki Literature Club!,* which presented itself as a dating simulator (i.e., a romance) only later revealing itself as both a work of psychological horror and the writer's exploration of his love-hate relationship with anime (Jackson). These two works, so dramatically different in medium and separated by centuries, sharing such a core element suggests that, while the methods may differ, the subversion of expectations – the element of surprise, in other words – is and has been integral to the horror genre not only in terms of story elements, but the presentation and form of the story as well. While this is not necessarily surprising, as the unknown and unexpected generally trigger a fear response in humans, the differences between the two works make the similarities in form quite striking. Just as Walpole's medieval romance is actually a story of political power structures, so is Salvato's visual novel romance an exploration of divisive character tropes and mental illness.

What *Doki Doki* also succeeds in is that it does not reveal its hand early: the player is required to complete approximately two hours' worth of gameplay before the façade of high school romance is definitively broken by Sayori's suicide: the player discovers Sayori has hanged herself in her bedroom, at which point the game's music begins to distort, the image on the screen is blurred and various graphical glitches appear along with an error message advising the player to look into the game's program files for additional information. Next, the game is restarted, this time without Sayori, which causes several glitches in the game and the story truly starts moving towards its darker

conclusion. The gameplay leading up to this point has been almost indistinguishable from any other dating simulator, where the player progresses the story by making dialogue choices and playing minigames. However, there has been a gradually growing sense of unease and a feeling that something is not quite right, partially due to the incongruity of this brightly coloured and 'cute' game being labelled as psychological horror and the game itself having a disclaimer of not being suitable for children or those who are easily disturbed, but also due to the small hints dropped by the characters leading up to this point, mostly dropped by Monika, who ultimately becomes aware of the fictional nature of her reality. For example, she makes a comment about a pun not making any sense in translation (even though the game is originally in English – this is a nod to the fact that the visual novel genre is more common in Japan and many games are imported and translated to English after the fact), she urges the player to save the game in case they make a choice they regret, and her poems revolve around themes of discovery and awareness. This growing unease plays on the expectations of the player of the genre and creates a feeling that something is not quite the way it should be, which in itself is an experience known as the uncanny.

On the uncanny

The uncanny is described as "an experience of disorientation, where the world in which we live suddenly seems strange, alienating, or threatening" (Collins & Jervis 1); all of these aspects are naturally entwined with the horror genre. It is in fact exactly this feeling of disorientation that makes horror, in a word, horrific; whether it be a cursed VHS tape, a monster lurking in the shadows or a serial killer on the loose, the safety and normality of the everyday natural order has been disrupted, which is inherently disorienting and frightening. Still, something simply being new or surprising in a familiar context does not make it uncanny; Freud stated, that "[s]omething must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny" (125), continuing that the term uncanny refers to "everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open" (ibid.,

132). He then presents examples of the uncanny: things that resemble the human form but raise suspicion as to whether they are animate or inanimate (such as dolls or automata), things that resemble the human form *too* closely (doubles or doppelgängers), and an experience of taking different routes in an unfamiliar city and yet somehow ending up in the same place (ibid., 135, 141 – 143, 144). The surrounding conditions are also an integral part of the unease related to the uncanny when it comes to fiction; for example, supernatural things are commonplace in fairy tales, but fairy tales in themselves are not typically uncanny (ibid., 153). Subversion of expectation the core of the uncanny: a spirit in a fairy tale would not raise eyebrows, but one appearing in a murder mystery would. When the world around us appears in a way that is contrary to what we consider base reality, we experience the uncanny. In terms of horror, the uncanny is more obvious in stories dealing with some aspect of the supernatural – a murder victim haunting their killer from beyond the grave perhaps – however, it can be extended to more realist narratives. In stories featuring human antagonists such as serial killers, the antagonists often appear stronger, faster or more intelligent than normal human beings in the pursuit of their victim, while the story itself contains no supernatural elements. They are more than human in their abilities, but less than human in their intentions, and while murder is definitely commonplace in the modern world, we never quite believe that it could happen to *us.*

As stated before, the root of the uncanny is in familiarity – there is no uncanny without something to contrast with. In fiction, anything can happen, but if one desires to employ the uncanny, the story must establish rules for its reality. In the case of horror fiction, stories are often based on our real-life perception of reality, and the horror stems from the ways that familiarity is disrupted. A basis in reality is also a fundamental element of creepypasta, as "[c]reepypastas tend to be preoccupied with questions of authenticity"; now one begins to see how the concepts of horror, the uncanny and realism are closely connected (Henriksen 267). In the case of earlier iterations of creepypasta, part of the pretence of realism would stem from explicit assurances of the story's validity

and the first-person narrative style. The foundation of realism is also in the core of the primary material of this thesis: the works of the SCP Wiki.

On scientific writing

As discussed previously, there is no uncanny without something to contrast with, and what better way to establish a context of (supposed) realism than to frame a story in the context of scientific research, data, and definitions. As the name suggests, the SCP Wiki is a Wikipedia-style collection of articles of objects, entities, locations and phenomena that display some type of anomalous – i.e., supernatural – qualities. The site is presented in a way that is meant to convey to the reader that they are somehow accessing a secret database compiled by the SCP Foundation. Here we discover that the site and the manner in which the SCP articles are written are very specific and formulaic – again calling back to our previous observation about new media horror being defined by its form rather than its content. In addition, we can see that the SCP articles are written in a way that conforms to the conventions of scientific writing. According to Lindsay, there are "three immutable characteristics of good scientific writing that distinguish it from all other literature. It must always be precise, clear [and] brief […] and in that order. If it is vague, it is not scientific writing; if it is unclear or ambiguous, it is not scientific writing and if it is long winded and unnecessarily discursive, it is poor scientific writing" (4). Now, a general rule of thumb when it comes to horror is that the more you reveal about a monster, the less scary it becomes. Human beings are naturally afraid of the unknown, since we cannot prepare for what we do not know is coming – but what we know definitely *is* coming – and our minds have a tendency to fill those gaps of information with nightmares more horrible than the next. The uncanny, too, requires an element of unfamiliarity and strangeness; something feels strange, but we are not quite sure *what* or *how.* An SCP article therefore poses an interesting challenge: if the articles are supposed to be clinical and precise, but the more you describe a monster the less scary it becomes, how does one balance these aspects and write a successful SCP article that both conforms to the

established guidelines and unsettles the reader? The SCP Wiki confronts this issue and aids new writers with a plethora of guides on how an SCP article should be written. The *How To Write An SCP* guide in the section *Writing Style* describes an SCP as a "technical paper", and echoes Lindsay's notions of being precise, concise and professional, and states that "researchers should try to be detached and unemotional in their writing. Not because they don't have emotions, but because letting that slip into their writing makes them seem less objective and makes the writing more emotionally charged". What is particularly interesting is that the conventions of scientific writing seem to directly contradict those of fiction in general, and horror in particular. How is a writer meant to convey feelings of fear and unease (i.e., the uncanny) to the reader, when employing a style that discourages the use of value statements or emotionally charged language? The writers of the Wiki have not only found answers to these questions, but also managed to use the register of scientific writing as a tool in the construction of horror. This will be expanded on in the following chapter, but for now, let us examine the conventions of the scientific register.

According to Biber and Conrad "a register is a variety associated with a particular situation of use (including particular communicative purposes)" and that "the description of a register covers three major components: the situational context, the linguistic features, and the functional relationships between the first two" (6). Generally speaking, when working with a scientific register, the situational context of the text is typically that of research and reporting; the writer has particularized knowledge of a certain topic and the reader wishes to acquire that knowledge. Regardless of the subject matter, the text exists as a conduit of information between the writer(s) and the reader. To facilitate this transference of information, the linguistic features of the text aim for precision, clarity and brevity. The use of simple English is preferable, since many of those who read scientific articles in any field may not speak English as their native language and – even more importantly – the aim of a scientific article is to "have as many people as possible read it, understand it and be influenced by it" (Lindsay 5). Specialized vocabulary may be needed to discuss particular

aspects of a field of study, but in such cases it is assumed that the reader is aware of basic concepts and terminology of the field; nevertheless, overly complicated sentence structures and terminology for the sake of sounding more professional are generally frowned upon. Additionally, scientific texts tend to avoid emotionally charged language and subjectivity. This is again, due to the primary function of the text: conveying objective information, rather than the writer's feelings and opinions on the matter. According to Lindsay there is no special 'language' one must learn to be able to write a good scientific article; the three cornerstones mentioned above are enough (11). However, "the perception of scientific writing as a stiff, formal, and difficult medium is an illusion", and the "basic language of science is simple, clear English" (ibid.). Special vocabulary may be needed to explain complex ideas, but overall, the text should be simple and easy to read. Lindsay's description is somewhat of an ideal of clarity and simplicity and it can be quite difficult to attain when dealing with intricate concepts – yet, though their subjects can be just as intricate, it is a more than apt goal for an SCP article.

For the purposes of this thesis, a comprehensive exploration of the structure a scientific research paper is not needed. An SCP article is essentially a log of an anomaly and what the Foundation has done with it; it describes the anomaly, how the Foundation discovered it, what the Foundation has done to contain it and in some cases includes interviews or the results of experimentation conducted (it is also worth noting that experiment logs are also written with emphasis on the results, rather than the methods or material – the conditions of the test are stated in the most simplistic terms, often in list form). Therefore, it can be considered to resemble the section of a scientific research paper that deals with its results (although it should be noted that conventions may vary significantly between different disciplines – what is relevant to this thesis and the context of the SCP wiki in general is natural science).

The results section of a scientific paper is separated from the discussion on the implications of said results, as it "preserves the objectivity of the [results], which should be presented

clearly and clinically without comment. This encourages the readers to draw their own conclusions and judgements" (ibid., 31). The results-section in itself is typically not the most interesting or important part of the text. The following discussion, however, where the results are analysed and compared to previous work on the subject are typically the 'meat' of the text. Results should be presented in a way that "makes it very clear which […] results are the important ones", and which of them are related, but less relevant to the present study. (ibid., 33). Precise numerical information is typically expressed through graphs and tables – this allows the writer to be slightly more vague in text for the sake of readability (ibid., 35.) Writers should avoid linguistic ambiguity by being aware of general standards of writing, such as avoiding clusters of nouns, complex adjectival phrases, nouns derived from verbs and imprecise words that can cause confusion as to the exact meaning of a phrase. (ibid., 56 – 62). There is also the concept of reader expectation; a scientific article is more easily comprehended if the reader has a base knowledge of the subject matter. This also applies on a linguistic level: "New thoughts are grasped much more readily when they are perceived from the comfort of what is already understood. So, the first part of a sentence should usually be used to make readers ready by linking them to previous information before the rest of the sentence discloses the new idea", therefore "generating within the reader an expectation against which he or she can compare new information" (ibid., 64) is a powerful tool in walking the reader through even more complex concepts and linking those concepts into the 'narrative' of a study. This can be done through repeating established information and the use of linking words (ibid., 64 – 65).

Like the results section of a scientific paper, an SCP article also encourages the reader to arrive at their own conclusions about the specific nature of a given SCP. Information is presented clinically and with minimal speculation, allowing for individual readings – this is a part of what has made the SCP Wiki so popular, as readers gather together on forums to discuss different anomalies, present their interpretations and speculate on how different SCPs would interact with each other. This happens on the discussion forums of the Wiki, but also elsewhere on the internet, such as Reddit and

YouTube. Here, the parallel between the SCP Wiki and 'real world' science is striking: online horror enthusiasts discuss SCPs with an analytical view and depth comparable to that of scientists discussing the latest discoveries in their respective fields. In-depth analysis of this kind requires the reader to engage in willing suspension of disbelief, to treat the text as if what is being presented is truth rather than fiction. This, again, is an integral element of unfiction, a classification that fits the SCP Wiki quite well. The Wiki is an interesting case of creative collaborative writing, that combines the concepts of horror, the uncanny and the realm of scientific writing in a unique way, assuring its place among notable works of new media horror. In the following chapter, we will delve into the works of the Wiki, the science of the supernatural, networked spectrality and how these elements are combined with the advantages of digital media.

3. The SCP Foundation: quantifying the uncanny

On the SCP wiki

The SCP Wiki is, in a way, a 'manual' on how to deal with supernatural phenomena. It catalogues all the anomalies encountered by the SCP Foundation and is formatted to resemble an internal data network with requests for security clearances and warnings. In folklore as well as popular culture, supernatural entities have particular weaknesses, and it is not uncommon to see characters flip through a grimoire to find information on how to defeat or get rid of said entities. In this way, the SCP Wiki uses a familiar motif, and builds on the formula of the 'science of the supernatural'. As stated before, the SCP Wiki has been around for some time now; the very first entry was written in 2007 as a one-off creepypasta that has later grown into a website with thousands of SCP articles, short stories, essays, poems and other forms of media. The focus of this thesis will include only the SCP articles, as those account for the vast majority of the texts within the wiki, with essays and short stories providing 'supplementary material'. The term SCP is used to refer to both the article and the anomaly the article is about, therefore for the sake of clarity, this thesis will separate the concepts by using the terms 'SCP article' or 'entry' and 'SCP object' or 'anomaly'. The site itself is somewhat difficult to navigate at first glance; despite it being a Wikipedia-style site, it lacks the organizational efforts of Wikipedia. Wikipedia as it exists today is a decently reputable source for everyday use, as it has millions of active contributors all around the world; information is constantly updated and reviewed, and one can find information on recent events soon after they have happened. While the SCP wiki has only about 90,000 registered users, the amount of content produced is significant ("Site Members"). Yet, the disorientation a new reader can feel while first accessing the wiki helps 'set the scene' for what is to come. At time of writing, five series of SCP articles, each containing one thousand entries, have been finished, and the sixth series is currently underway. Most important links are listed on the front page, but one must know where to look to find more specific information. For

the uninitiated, the site can feel like a rabbit hole with no sense of beginning, end, or general direction, similar to how one can 'get stuck in a Wikipedia loop', clicking through cross-referenced articles for hours. According to Royle, "[t]he uncanny is not a literary genre. But nor is it a non-literary genre. It overflows the very institution of literature. It inhabits, haunts, parasitizes the allegedly non-literary" (19). Similarly, the SCP wiki is not a literary genre – it is an amalgamation of creative fiction, scientific writing, encyclopaedic writing, horror fiction and creepypasta. It mirrors the style of Wikipedia, the reliability of which as a source of information is also sometimes in dispute, in a way parasitizing the format; it adopts the language of science, portraying itself as a legitimate collection of documents; it draws on the diversity of subject matters of horror and the collaborative nature and new media format of creepypasta. In fact, the SCP wiki is in a way an uncanny version of Wikipedia; something that feels familiar on the surface but containing things that are beyond our view of how reality functions.

SCP articles have a specific structure that they follow. While authors are free to bend these rules in creative ways, some basic elements are always present. Let us examine the original SCP article, SCP-173 'The Sculpture', for reference. SCP-173 establishes the basic form of an SCP article: it features first the item number, object class, special containment procedures and lastly the description. As the SCP article is meant to be a catalogue of anomalous objects in Foundation custody, it makes sense that the most important information to the 'employee' would be listed first, i.e. the object class. Object classes in-universe give the reader information about the anomaly and how one should approach interaction with it ("Object Classes"). There are five primary classes: Safe, Euclid, Keter, Thaumiel and Neutralized, the first three of which are the most common. The classifications are not used to indicate the potential danger of the anomaly, but instead the Foundation's understanding of the object in question and difficulty of containment. Safe-class indicates anomalies "that are easily and safely contained", however, this does not mean that they are not dangerous, simply that the Foundation has adequate information about precautions needed to contain and handle the

anomaly so that it does not pose a threat. Euclid-class anomalies "require more resources to contain completely or where containment is not always reliable" because "the SCP is insufficiently understood or inherently unpredictable". Autonomous, sentient and/or sapient anomalies typically fall under this category "due to the inherent unpredictability of an object that can act or think on its own". Keter-class covers anomalies that are difficult to contain reliably due to lack of understanding of the anomaly, and that require complex containment procedures. Keter-class SCP objects are not inherently dangerous or malicious, "just that [they are] simply very difficult or costly to contain". Thaumiel-class anomalies are ones that "the Foundation specifically uses to contain other SCPs", meaning that its properties can in some way be used to the Foundation's advantage to counter other objects' anomalous properties and lastly, the somewhat self-explanatory Neutralized-classification is given to objects that are "no longer anomalous, either through having been intentionally or accidentally destroyed, or disabled". For a simplified guideline to determining the proper object class for an anomaly, the Wiki has created the Locked Box Test:

- If you lock it in a box, leave it alone, and nothing bad will happen, then it's probably **Safe**.
- If you lock it in a box, leave it alone, and you're not entirely sure what will happen, then it's probably **Euclid**.
- If you lock it in a box, leave it alone, and it easily escapes, then it's probably **Keter**.
- If it *is* the box, then it's probably **Thaumiel**.

This form of classification is an example of the richness of the lore of the universe, the community's attention to detail and the scientific background of the study of SCPs. It can be seen as the SCP equivalent of Linnaean taxonomy; while mostly uncodified and open to interpretation, some elements of the 'canon' of the wiki are set. As with scientific writing that relies on conventions in terms of structure and reporting of findings, there are certain elements that are standardized. While the wiki is not entirely meant to be a 'scientific' work – as it is a work of fiction that uses supernatural subject matter and ultimately is more focused on telling interesting stories rather than perfectly copying

scientific papers – the register of scientific writing is an element of presentation: the aim is to make the reader *feel* as if it *could be* real, to take something familiar and make it strange and uncanny. This not only applies to the subjects of individual articles, examples of which are discussed in a later section, but the wiki as a whole. There is a 'method to its madness', a structure, a basis in reality, that aims to make the reader question their own reality, leaving them unsettled as a horror story should. The subject matter may be strange, but the texts are in a way bound to reality by their presentation, leaving the writer free to explore anything they wish in the content. The Object Classes, as well as other elements of the structure of an SCP article help establish the logic of the universe, the 'rules' of the reality. Ultimately, these are details that are meant for those who frequent the wiki and have an understanding of the context, rather than providing information for a new reader. The word 'Keter' means nothing to someone reading their first SCP article, but to someone familiar with the universe, who knows that Keter-class entities are difficult to contain giving them greater potential to do harm, the term instantly establishes a context, information of what to expect. It helps 'set the stage' for readers, before diving into the specifics of the Containment Procedures and finally, the actual description.

The Special Containment Procedures vary according to the properties of the SCP object. In SCP-173's case, it is to be kept "in a locked container at all times", and when personnel must enter, they must do so in groups of three while maintaining direct eye contact with SCP-173 at all times. At this point in the article, the reader does not yet have a definitive knowledge of what the object is, only a basic understanding of its properties implied by the containment procedures. In-universe, it makes sense that this information would be provided first, as it is the most important in terms of handling the object and should be readily available to researchers looking for information, for example in the event of a containment breach. Narratively, this gives the reader a taste of what is to come and builds intrigue.

The following description is often the 'meat' of the text. It describes the object, its

anomalous properties and sometimes how it came to be in Foundation custody. SCP-173's description tells the reader that it is a statue constructed from concrete and rebar that is incredibly hostile and will kill anyone it comes in contact with. However, it can only move when not observed, therefore personnel entering its containment must do so in groups and inform each other before blinking. Finally, there are the possible addenda, experiment logs or interviews, that in some cases rival the description in terms of where the bulk of the story is told. SCP-173, being the very first SCP and in way the prototype of what an SCP article is, does not include these additions. Later iterations of SCP articles are often modified and added to, however as SCP-173 is 'the original', it has remained mostly unchanged through the years.

The structure of the text can be described as a technical paper, an attempt to catalogue supernatural phenomena with a scientific method, or an attempt to explain something that defies explanation with our current understanding of the laws of physics and nature. According to Grixti, "beliefs in witchcraft in a society technologically more backward than ours served not only as a means of accounting for the otherwise inexplicable misfortunes of daily life […], but also as a means of placating a growing unease created by moral and economic conflicts in a changing society" (169 – 170). They were a way of making the world make sense when the crops suddenly failed or a loved one unexpectedly died. Tragedy rarely feels like it makes sense, and it can be difficult to accept that sometimes bad things just happen without any 'higher purpose'. In these situations, to resolve cognitive dissonance, one would have to restructure their worldview in a way that makes two incompatible ideas compatible: "Accusations of witchcraft […] can be argued to have resulted partly from a state of cognitive dissonance which arose when individuals had to resolve the psychological conflict created by a set of mutually exclusive demands, desires, and expectations in a changing social situation" (ibid., 171). Conspiracy theories can be seen as a modern version of accusations of witchcraft – although it should be noted that while conspiracy theories are often claims made by ordinary people directed towards an authority, accusations of witchcraft were generally top-down,

directed *at* ordinary people. However, it was not uncommon for a member of the general public to accuse their neighbour of witchcraft, and neither is it uncommon to hear dismissals of conspiracy theories being countered with accusations of being 'a part of the cover-up'. The lack of control one can sometimes feel in a constantly changing, irrational world can feel overwhelming, therefore one tries to make sense of it by reasoning that there must be some hidden authority pulling the strings. Western societies are structured in a way that is controlled by governments and corporations, and distrust in authority is, in many cases, completely valid. There are many examples of government agencies misusing their power, such as Project MKUltra, a program of human experiments conducted by the CIA in the 1950s and 1960s (Dunning). While government intervention is a necessary part in order for society to function, the intricacies of bureaucracy can leave the individual feeling powerless and confused. This anxiety can give way to conspiracy theories that give the individual some sense of control, that they are 'in the know', outwitting the authority. The SCP Foundation is a representation of a massive global organization, that uses its power indiscriminately and absolutely. It taps into anxiety, distrust of authority and a certain fear of the progress of science and medicine, and in that way, almost feels familiar even if one has never heard about it before. Modern science can do incredible things, and if one does not fully understand the scientific principles behind these advancements (as most people do not), it can feel like science is 'perverting' the laws of nature. In the case of the SCP Foundation, that is exactly the case, as the Foundation regularly performs experiments on SCP objects and entities that have supernatural properties, even using D-Class personnel as disposable test subjects. In his work on the nature of authorship, Michel Foucault describes writing as an "interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier" (300). This means that whatever the content may be, language used is always a reflection of the writer, which goes against the supposed neutrality of modern science. Even if there is no hidden agenda, simply by virtue of being human, researchers reflect their own viewpoints in their texts, or fail to consider viewpoints that are not relevant to themselves. In the case of the SCP

Foundation, the (in-universe) author characters are rarely mentioned, adding to the feeling of 'monolithic facelessness' of the institution. Foucault continues: "the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death", adding that "we should re-examine the empty space left by the author's disappearance" (303). Considering the ethical leanings of the SCP Foundation, the lack of authorship and ownership of the texts (in-universe) can be seen as a rejection of responsibility and ethics – perhaps employees would rather not have their name attached to a series of experiments that cost the lives of countless D-Class personnel. Does the end justify the means? If the survival of humankind, the planet or reality itself is on the line, how far can we extend the concept of 'acceptable losses'? These questions do not have easy answers, not in the works of the SCP Wiki nor real world science.

The science of the supernatural

Ghost stories operate on certain rules: to get rid of a vengeful spirit you burn its remains, to kill a vampire you drive a stake through its heart and silver bullets are particularly effective against werewolves. In 1996, *Scream* defined the rules to surviving a horror movie: no sex, no alcohol or drugs, and never, ever say "I'll be right back". These rules vary depending on the particular lore one happens to abide by, but most fictional worlds do in fact operate in an internally logical way, the logic just happens to be one that allows for supernatural phenomena. The SCP Foundation is based on a desire to catalogue and scientifically determine these 'rules of engagement' for supernatural occurrences – a goal that it shares with real-world natural sciences. The S

According to Lindsay, when writing in a scientific style, one must "make sure what you think you have said is the same as what the reader thinks you have said", leaning on the three fundamentals of scientific writing: precision, clarity and brevity (55). The aim is to convey to the reader the information one has gathered effectively, therefore unnecessarily 'fancy' vocabulary or complicated turns of phrase are counterproductive. In addition to this, one must also consider 'reader expectation': "New thoughts are grasped much more readily when they are perceived from the

comfort of what is already understood" (ibid., 64), in other words, if one provides the reader the context of something they already know and only then presents the new information joined together with guiding linking words, it is much easier for the reader to grasp. Particularly when writing for an audience of non-scientists, it is important to keep the information understandable and interesting. Similarly, a work of creative fiction that includes a supernatural element typically operates with internal consistency and clarity; while some forms of writing might allow for more abstract and experimental choices, there are some conventions that are generally followed in literature. Most of them are so obvious that we might not even recognize them as 'conventions to be followed': we are used to seeing fictional narratives in western contemporary pop culture move linearly in time from the past to the future, (with perhaps the occasional flashback or vision of the future) having a main character or characters who the story revolves around, having a set beginning and ending, and employing descriptive language to convey the emotions of the story. The SCP wiki and each individual article *are* narratives; yet they follow none of the aforementioned conventions. So how can an SCP article tell an engaging horror story, when it is confined to the relative simplicity and clinical approach of a scientific register?

Part of the answer lies in the juxtaposition of form and content, of meticulous, realistic presentation of supernatural subjects. As the tone of an SCP article is meant to be cold and clinical, when this style is used to describe things that typically would evoke emotional responses, the disconnect can be jarring. In-universe, the Foundation is definitely cold in its approach to SCP anomalies, as sentient or sapient entities are held against their will and the advancement of science and understanding of supernatural phenomena is often done at the cost of D-Class personnel, who are considered, in all meaningful ways, disposable. D-Class personnel are "typically drawn worldwide from the ranks of prison inmates convicted of violent crimes, especially those on death row", however if necessary, "political prisoners, refugee populations and other civilian sources […] that can be transferred into Foundation custody under plausibly deniable circumstances" can also be used. D-

Class personnel are typically used in testing of SCP objects and their effects on human subjects. In real life too, researchers have engaged in unethical practices in terms of research on human subjects: those that are at a disadvantaged position in society have been coerced into unsafe medical research without a full knowledge of the risks involved, either physically or psychologically. A well-known example of malpractice of this type is the Stanford Prison Experiment, that ultimately escalated to humiliation and acts of cruelty towards and by the test subjects themselves ("The Story: An Overview of the Experiment"). Additionally, medical science has a tendency to ignore or minimize the experiences of marginalized groups, such as the false belief that black people are less sensitive to pain than white people (Sabin) and according to the Association of American Medical Colleges, 56% of active physicians are white (AMAC). Scientific research is something that is supposed to be neutral, ethical, and objective. It is meant to be a tool for us to understand and describe how the world around us works. Yet, the Foundation regularly engages in unethical practices, sometimes for its own gain.

The ethics of scientific research are a crucial part of any research, not simply to maintain the validity of the findings, but also to protect the people involved, as "[t]ypically, experimental subjects for research are in positions of relative disadvantage, both within the larger social system and within the research situation itself", and misconduct in research is often underreported (Shrader-Ferchette 4). The SCP Foundation operates as a secret organization at the fringes of society, and regularly uses mind-altering substances to erase the memories of people exposed to uncontained anomalies, "[y]et, if people have basic human rights to bodily security and rights to life, then they also have rights of information necessary to safeguard those basic rights", a fact that the Foundation regularly chooses to ignore (ibid., 5). In practically all testing involving human subjects, the Foundation employs D-Class personnel, the safety of whom is of no interest to the researcher. They are disposable, often made to interact with dangerous SCPs simply to see what will happen. Usually, "[b]ecause researchers have a built-in conflict of interest – they need subjects in order to obtain

information – they must also be careful to protect subjects' wellbeing" (ibid., 7). The SCP Foundation has no such concerns. As the Foundation often deals with threats to humanity – and even reality itself – of apocalyptic proportions, their disregard for human life is seen as acceptable in their pursuit of a 'common good'. However, D-Class personnel and innocent bystanders are not the only 'acceptable casualties', Foundation staff are also regularly placed in dangerous situations due to (sometimes intentional) lack of oversight, as is evident in the case of Agent Joseph and SCP-294 'The Coffee Machine', which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

The 'mission' of the Foundation is threefold: secure, contain, protect. Secure uncontained anomalies into Foundation custody, contain them, and protect the general public. This protection often takes the form of suppression, as in some cases, even the knowledge of a mind-affecting SCP anomaly can cause harm, but also the existence of the Foundation itself is considered top secret, in order for them to continue effectively conducting research – meaning without worrying about general ethical concerns and a code of conduct for the scientific community. The Foundation considers itself to be protectors of the 'natural order', their goal being to maintain normalcy for the vast majority, so that they can live in a "sane and normal world" without fear. ("About the Foundation"). This 'higher purpose' makes it easy to justify almost anything in any capacity. Highly trained researchers "have a duty to do research because, as members of specific professions that contain almost all of the available expertise in a certain area, they have a near monopoly over information about, and implementation of, certain socially relevant policies", and the Foundation has absolutely monopolized the field of supernatural phenomena (Shrader-Ferchette 24). They work in conjunction with practically every world government, effectively acting as a global institution with a near-absolute monopoly on research of the anomalous. Other groups of interest exist, however, they typically operate on a national level, sometimes cooperating with the Foundation, but often acting in their own interest or for financial gain (these groups remain largely outside the scope of this current thesis, as they have their own origins and lore) (ibid., "Rival agencies and groups of interest"). Even

so, the Foundation has no real geopolitical agenda, considering the protection of normalcy and reality to be their ultimate goal. In this way, the Foundation represents two kinds of reflections of modern anxieties: the fear of the unknown, what we do not understand but what threatens our understanding of the world, and the distrust of overwhelming, absolute authority. As discussed earlier, lack of public oversight allows for abuses of power, and history has proven that human beings have a nearly limitless capacity for cruelty, and thus people often make excellent antagonists for horror stories.

SCPs and the uncanny

The concept of a lack of transparency in scientific research is one that itself is almost uncanny; we tend to think of science as being for the benefit of all (like advances in medical science) and one of the hallmarks of a reputable scientific research is the process of peer-review, in other words, a general sense of 'openness'. However, the SCP Foundation has little consideration for such matters, preferring (often out of necessity) suppression of information and clandestine operations. This uncanniness makes for excellent starting points for horror stories. The works of the SCP Wiki are as diverse as its 'parent genre' horror, and as such they sometimes defy classification. Yet, while again not inherently connected, it seems that the uncanny is a core element of all SCP articles, as it is a core element of horror. The entire premise of the narrative of the SCP Foundation is that it is something that operates at the fringes of society, ever-present but only briefly glimpsed by ordinary people in their day-to-day lives, and the internal network of the Foundation that contains the SCP articles was never meant for the public eye. It is quite literally "what should have remained hidden but has come to light", one of the many descriptions of aspects of the uncanny (Royle 2 – 3).

As previously stated, for a piece of media to trigger a feeling of the uncanny, something familiar must be presented in an unfamiliar way. An SCP object can be anything the writer can think of, still sometimes the most effective SCP articles are ones that are centred around an everyday object, with anomalous properties that might at first glance seem even whimsical. A great example of this is

SCP-294 'The Coffee Machine'. This SCP is like any standard coffee vending machine, "the only noticeable difference being an entry touchpad with buttons corresponding to an English QWERTY keyboard", capable of producing any liquid from traditional drinks like coffee to non-consumable liquids like motor oil, and even substances not typically occurring in liquid form, like glass. The addenda describe several tests conducted on the machine, including an incident where a Foundation agent named Joseph requested a "cup of Joe" and received a cup filled with his own blood, tissue and other bodily fluids, that the apparatus had supernaturally extracted from his own body.

       The Foundation's decision to place a potentially dangerous SCP object in a staff break room as a "money-saving venture" displays a general indifference towards the safety of the employees, and while branded as a cost-cutting measure, the decision was more likely motivated by a desire to 'see what would happen'. After all, how much money could an organization, that has a global reach and seemingly endless resources save by replacing an ordinary vending machine with a potentially dangerous one? While the Foundation is, at first glance, a serious and professional venture, as they are indeed in charge of protecting all of humankind, they also seem to have a mischievous streak of 'let's just see what it does' -type of mentality. It is reminiscent of the 'What could possibly go wrong?' -trope, which is also common in horror. Characters in a horror story do not see a threat, or choose to ignore it, leading to a conflict or a dangerous situation. On the other hand, this is an example of the diversity of the horror genre: the feel of this article is almost whimsical on the surface, as the addenda demonstrate: a researcher requesting "the best drink I've ever had" received a cup of rum and cola that during his bachelor party he had deemed the best he had ever had, and another received a Vienna lager he had once had on a beach with his friends. However, what has the potential for whimsy also has the potential for destruction, as a request for "the perfect drink" resulted in a subject's suicide since after that "everything's just one big letdown". Here, it is not what is presented outright that brings about the feeling of fear, but the *potential* the object has: "just as it is possible for material which is not really threatening to give rise to the physiological responses normally associated

with fear […], so too threatening material can be 'recoded' as safe with a consequent lowering of tension" and "objects and situations which pose a substantial threat can be assimilated into a system which codes them as harmless since they can be associated with familiar and strange elements" (Grixti 149 – 150, 153). The familiarity and everyday nature of a vending machine makes this SCP feel as if it is harmless, even though it has the potential to cause harm, both physical and psychological. The element of a threat is there, but it is coded as whimsical, due to the everyday contextualization.

Another prominent example is SCP-087, 'The Stairwell', which describes a seemingly infinite, dark stairwell at an undisclosed campus building. It is described as something that could be found at any campus around the world, perfectly ordinary on the surface, but anomalous upon closer inspection. The stairwell appears to go on forever, well beyond the physical constraints of the building and geological surroundings, to absorb all light brighter than 75 watts and contain entities the specific nature of which remains yet undetermined. Additionally, SCP-087 relies heavily on the universal fear of the deeps and the paradoxical call of the void. The unknown is a primal source of fear for humans, as we fear what we do not understand. Our minds try to fill in the blanks and often invent monsters in the spaces we cannot see, and therefore measure and fully grasp. We rely heavily on our eyesight, and if we cannot rely on that, we feel unsafe.

During explorations of SCP-087, D-Class personnel report hearing the voice of a child pleading for help. As they continue to descend into SPC-087, the source of the pleading seems to stay at a constant distance of approximately 200 meters, almost as if luring the D-Class personnel down the stairwell, taking advantage of their desire to help a vulnerable child. Eventually, a disembodied human-like face will appear, designated SCP-087-1, causing the D-Class to flee. The concept is reminiscent of how an anglerfish uses bioluminescence to lure in prey, although it is undetermined what the motivations of SCP-087-1 might be, as it does not attack but simply unblinkingly stares at the D-Class inside the stairwell. A transcript of exploration III also describes the face staring into the camera attached to D-9884's gear, rather than at her, almost as if it were making eye contact with the

staff member viewing the video feed. It brings to mind the famous quote: "And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you" (Nietzsche 68). The goal of the SCP Foundation is to gather information of anomalous phenomena in order to protect humanity, but is the Foundation provoking or inviting these phenomena by disturbing them? The article states that the door to SCP-087 is disguised as a janitorial closet and cannot be opened without a key *and* an electric current applied to the lock – and yet, this is not enough of an indication for the Foundation to simply stay away. Here, it is easy to draw parallels between the Foundation's operations and real-world questions about the ethics of science, as discussed in the previous section.

SCP-087 defies the laws of physics, as it is "unknown if [it] has an endpoint", seeming infinite, a concept our brains have difficulty grasping. In addition, the descent into the 'depths of the Earth' invites images of descending into Hell itself, as it has been depicted in many pieces of media, starting from Dante's depiction of Hell in *Inferno* as circles deep within the Earth. It is a familiar image, which itself reflects the fear of the unknown, as in spite of the technological advancements we have available today that have given us an understanding of what lies in the Earth's core, it is still mostly inaccessible to humans and therefore an unknown abyss. Paradoxically, we still feel the need to explore caves and the depths of the ocean, as even though the unknown is frightening, our desire to know what lies in it often outweighs our fear.

Both SCP-294 and SCP-087 feature an object that one might encounter daily, and with which everyone is familiar. The reader can easily imagine that these objects could be located at *their* specific campus; that the darkened stairwell at *their* campus could be the one brimming with monsters. As the SCP wiki is written in a way that *appears* as if the entries could be legitimate (if not for the supernatural subject matter), the reader's suspension of disbelief is used against them with the goal to unsettle. The uncanny is "not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation […], it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar", "of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context"

(Royle 1). That small seed of doubt that makes one question the very laws of nature when walking down a dark stairwell – "What if this is *that* stairwell? What if I'm trapped here forever?" – that nagging feeling of something familiar seeming just *wrong* (which is the feeling of uncanny) is what makes for a particularly effective setting for a horror story. This also makes the reader participatory in the story, as they can easily picture many times they too, have walked down a dark stairwell. Anything around us has the possibility to be twisted into something frightening. As the digital age turned different pieces of technology from specialized, scientific instruments to average, everyday items, they too have become very familiar to us, and as such are not only used as a platform for horror content, but as a source of horror in and of themselves both within the SCP Wiki and the genre of horror in general.

As we can observe, the SCP Wiki is a work that draws not only on the tradition and history of horror literature, but different, seemingly incompatible aspects of the literary sciences. Scientific writing (in the realm of the natural sciences) rarely deals with the hidden, uncanny or obscure, however that is exactly what the SCP Wiki does. In addition to the traditions of horror, literature and scientific research, the SCP Wiki takes advantage of the multimodality of online and new media horror to create a collection of works that is currently unparalleled (within its genre of new media horror) in terms of the depth of the lore and, more importantly, sheer volume. In the following section, we will discuss how these aspects of new media are used to create a new form of horror.

4. Digital horror

Networked spectrality

These days it is difficult to even imagine a full day when one does not use a phone or a computer in some way. Entertainment and fiction too are available for us just at the press of a button. As horror is heavily influenced by societal and cultural changes, it makes sense then that the ghosts that used to haunt houses now haunt our electronics. An SCP article that quite concretely exemplifies this is SCP-1471 'MalO ver.1.0.0', a mobile app that, when installed, causes the user to receive text messages and pictures on their phone implying the approach of SCP-1471-A, an entity appearing "as a large humanoid figure with a canid-like skull and black hair", that follows the user. Humanoid figures that *almost* resemble us are by nature uncanny, as we are most familiar with the human form. The exposed, canid skull invites associations of death and animalism, of primality, that contrasts with the modern 'packaging' of a mobile app, creating a feeling of bringing together something ancient and something new. SCP-1471 occupies virtual space, and spreads in a way similar to a computer virus, or alternatively, a digital curse. Similar program-based SCP articles are plentiful, however, returning to the topic of networked spectrality, some very interesting observations can be made.

SCP-1471 is a quite literal representation of the concept of networked spectrality. The idea, coined by Neal Kirk refers to a theoretical framework that "takes into consideration relevant developmental, technical, social and political dynamics of digital networks and dependent technologies as they relate to conceptions of haunting", where "the terms 'spectral' and 'spectrality' are used broadly to suggest the wide range of cultural productions, theories and scholastic paradigms that address ghosts and hauntings" (55). According to Kirk, "[i]n fiction and in social use, new media technologies have become participatory, multidirectional portals connecting the living and the mediated, spectral dead", even the internet's core "networked structure and end-to-end principle […] strengthens associations with the spectral" (ibid, 56). The internet and the digital space are almost

ghostly concepts; ever-present and absolutely integral to our modern lives, but unseen, unheard, and only accessed with special tools. It exists simultaneously everywhere and nowhere; it is both immediate, updating every second, and eternal, as public information once recorded can never truly be erased. SCP-1471 is born from this ethereal space and operates as a living organism slowly forcing its way from nothingness into something tangible, attaching itself to its unfortunate victim. It can even be seen as an allegory of the way we interact with technology in the modern age: we are tethered to our smartphones, always returning to the digital with each sharp ping of a pop-up notification, and eventually, it could consume us and our identities entirely, cutting us off from 'the real world'.

SCP-2413 'Critical Thinking' is a similarly mind-affecting anomaly, that can be read as a commentary on surrounding cultural environment, although on a much narrower scale, focusing on the creative writing community. SCP-2413 is "an entity that may affect any person […] that is cognizant of its existence", meaning that just by knowing about SCP-2413 one becomes vulnerable to its effects, which are described as non-specific auditory hallucinations and excessively critical opinions. One can infer by the description that this particular article is intended as a metacriticism of the SCP wiki community (and can be seen as a commentary on the creative writing community in general), in other words, it expresses frustration towards the unnecessarily negative tone people sometimes use to criticize others' creative works: "This [critical] behaviour will begin to escalate in severity, leading to the instance being incapable of enjoying any creative work. While [the affected] display preference for critique of written works, individuals incapable of reading have shifted their critique to other works". The author personifies the negativity often found in online creative communities as a cognitohazardous SCP entity, giving it a presence that is reminiscent of the chain-email origins of creepypasta.

These SCPs are examples of how the digital space has in a way brought the uncanny spectral into our everyday lives. Information can spread all over the world in minutes – if not seconds – and if that information were to be harmful, we would have very little to protect ourselves. They are

allegorical to how we consume media, both for entertainment and education, and without sufficient filters (i.e. media literacy and critical thinking skills). Without these filters, we become, in the parlance of the SCP Foundation, instances of these SCPs repeating and replicating them (i.e. replicating the idea within ourselves and sharing it to others). This invites readings of the reader as a double, a copy of the anomaly, also deemed fundamentally uncanny by Freud: "The double has become an object of terror, just as the gods become demons after the collapse of their cult" (143). The self is in a way corrupted by the anomaly, replicating it, and spreading it on like a virus. Memetic SCPs as a whole can be seen as the literal ghost in the machine, occupying digital space, which in itself is a somewhat uncanny concept: the digital space, a space we know exists, but cannot observe or interact with without specific tools. We use the term 'space', but the digital cannot be quantified in terms fitting our three-dimensional understanding of base reality. Even the electronic version of this text document exists within that abstract space, as literary concepts expressed in words on a representation of paper consisting of ones and zeros in a space that can be accessed anywhere, anytime. This space, in turn, can also be seen as a digital abyss, a modern great beyond, a void that feeds the fear of the unknown empty – a concept the works of the SCP foundation employ regularly, at times even quite concretely.

Functions of the unknown

As the unknown is a fundamental source of fear, it can be an effective tool in the construction of horror. The SCP Wiki uses three main methods of hiding information from the reader: redaction, expungement and blackboxing. Out of the three, the first is the most common. *Dr. Mackenzie's Glossary of Terms* defines redactions as something that the reader is not allowed to access; information that requires a higher security clearance than that which the reader is supposed to possess. Redactions always appear in brackets and capital letters, sometimes in boldface as **[REDACTED].** Expungement has a more specialized function: "something that is expunged has been permanently

deleted from all records because the information poses a hazard in and of itself, such as […] a memetic hazard" (ibid.). These and also appears in all-caps within square brackets as **[DATA EXPUNGED].** The third method, blackboxing, simply refers to omitting information by replacing the text with black boxes ▮▮▮▮▮ to mimic something being marked over with a black marker. This method is the least common and is generally to be avoided in favour of the previous two. Its function is essentially the same as a redaction, however, as it is "a massive distraction within the visual field" and generally makes the text more difficult for the reader to process, its use should be carefully considered by aspiring SCP authors ("What Hides Beneath"). Additionally, one can also encounter less frequently used types of omission such as [DATA LOST] or [DATA OMITTED DUE TO X]. However, these can be seen as stylistic variants, used for flavour rather than active narrative function. The latter one in particular is more of a stylistic choice, for example in cases where the author wishes to portray a casual conversation without adding unnecessary padding that would interrupt the flow of the narrative, they might include something like [Several minutes of off topic conversation omitted for brevity].

In addition to the concrete methods described above, SCP authors (like horror authors in general) know that it is crucial to describe something without being too clear and ruining the mystery of the anomaly. A description-section is one of the core elements that is included in every SCP article. This poses a challenge for the author, as they have to tread the fine line of revealing just enough to pique a reader's interest, but not too much as to ruin the mystery. Problems occur when "outright stating the SCP object's anomalous properties reduces the horror and mystery to a single sentence", and as the description comes right after the special containment procedures, "the article "peaks" right at the beginning, and everything else is a downward slope" (" How To Be Scary Without Saying Anything"). Although the form of an SCP article does not conform to conventional storytelling, every article does indeed have a narrative – a story of the anomaly and how it came to be in the Foundations possession or what the Foundation has done with it.

The purpose of redaction is to use different types of elision as tools. Leaving out details such as names or dates can add an air of mystery to the article, but more importantly, it helps maintain the momentum of the narrative. SCP articles (and the wiki as a whole) are somewhat atypical as narratives that do not conform to the conventional constraints of a beginning, ending or even situational context. They do not have characters and only a few prominent members of the organization are named, and a large part of their characterization is done in the supplementary material, like short stories and essays, posted on the site. The reader does not need to be weighed down by which particular researcher was in charge of an experiment, or when it took place. What the reader is interested in is the anomaly and its effects. Even the effects of the anomaly can be omitted, or simply implied rather than outright stated – while SCP articles are effectively narratives in list form, lists are rarely exciting narratives, as typically a list simply make statements without build up or tension. To balance the clinical approach and formulaic execution of an SCP article with an interesting story, a writer needs to guide the reader in a desired direction without outright stating what they mean, allowing the reader to independently 'connect the dots'.

Telling a story in list form

As discussed before, SCP articles are atypical narratives that are essentially stories in list form. An illustrative example of the way an SCP article can use implication to guide the reader's associations is Dr. Clef's Proposal for SCP-001 or 'The Gate Guardian'. SCP-001 is a special designation that is not a single SCP but consists of multiple proposals that *could* be SCP-001. They are not competing for the title of SCP-001 so to speak, but rather readers are free to apply their own interpretations to whether there is one, true SCP-001 and the other are decoys or fakes, or if the proposals describe SCP-001 as it exists in different parallel realities: "In theory, one, some, all, or none of them could be the real SCP-001" (SCP Explained "SCP-001"). While the Gate Guardian is classified as Euclid/Keter, presumably due to the fact that while inactive and undisturbed the entity remains in

place, as it has displayed sentience and therefore is inherently unpredictable, it poses a threat of apocalyptic proportions if it were to become active. The special containment procedures note that "[b]ecause of the nature of SCP-001, no containment procedures are necessary", though it should be monitored at all times from a distance of more than 10 kilometres for any signs of activity. The proposal describes a biblical angel guarding the gates to what is implied to be the garden of Eden. The text paints a picture of a giant, flaming creature with wings and a sword that can instantly disintegrate anyone or anything that displays aggression towards it. The description is clear in its allusions to the Bible and the depictions of angels as, not the cherubs we are used to seeing in paintings, but as terrifying, ethereal creatures that defy explanation. It is described to be "a humanoid entity, approximately seven hundred (700) cubits in height, located in an undisclosed location near the intersection of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers", possessing a varying number "of luminous, wing-like appendages" emerging from different parts of its body, "a weapon, possibly a sword or knife" that emits flames that appear to be the same temperature as the surface of the Sun, and is "standing in front of a gate of immense proportions", behind which lies "a pastoral grove within, containing numerous other entities of the same composition as SCP-001". The description, the use of the archaic measurement of cubits and the location that places SCP-001 somewhere in modern-day Iraq lead the reader towards associations with the Bible despite the fact that the word 'angel' is not mentioned anywhere in the article. Still, the image of a biblical apocalypse becomes clear in the reader's mind. As a contrast to the concept of networked spectrality, this SCP entity can also be seen as an example of a networked spirituality. If one recontextualizes the spectral or ghostly into a religious framework (Christianity does in fact already have a concept of 'the Holy Ghost'), one can see the intangibility of the internet and the digital world as a type of spiritual realm, the altars of which are our own desktops. As the digital becomes more commonplace, it would make sense that this world too would be affected by our systems of making sense of the world, and religion is certainly such a tool for many people around the world.

Alternatively, this SCP-001 can be read to place biblical mysticism on the same level as other supernatural phenomena – perhaps what we think of as angels and heaven are just manifestations of a parallel reality, which can be glimpsed through the gate. Perhaps they are simply states of being that function in a way beyond our current understanding of science, rather than inherently 'holy' or 'divine', and the concept of the Christian God is an entity from a parallel reality, the properties of whom seem to us like magic, because they have an ability to manipulate matter in a way that we do not. The context of science surrounding the SCP Foundation certainly would allow for such readings. Historically, gods and magic have been a way for human beings to make sense of phenomena we had no capacity to understand, for example natural phenomena such as thunder was seen as the wrath of the gods. For a person with no concept of climate science and electricity, the sky erupting in fire and thunderous noise would definitely seem otherworldly. However, modern humans can explain, measure, and make sense of these phenomena. In the case of this particular SCP-001, the 'divine realm' can also be seen as a natural phenomenon, albeit one we do not yet understand, and one whose existence might redefine our own laws of physics. SCP articles as a whole often invite the reader to recontextualize existing concepts; often an anomaly is something that draws from a familiar framework or topic. But the subversiveness of the texts is not only limited to their content, but to their form as well. An SCP article, to put it in the most simplistic terms, is a narrative in list form, and as such they often utilize functional features as devices for furthering the 'plot', such as the previously discussed use of elision, but the new media platform also provides the project with possibilities other formats do not have.

Functional features as parts of the narrative

As discussed previously, SCP articles as new media horror are most effectively defined through their form. However, this can be taken even a step further: as some SCP articles use their functional features to drive the narrative, meaning that things such as the formatting of the web page can provide

an additional narrative element to the article. The by-now familiar structure of an SCP article can be strategically challenged in order to tell a story that defies the established rules. For example, each SCP article has a numerical designation, such as SCP-173, and often a clarifying title, such as 'The Sculpture. There are some exceptions to this, such as '[REDACTED PER PROTOCOL 4000-ESHU]' or 'Taboo' (technically SCP-4000) and '●●|●●●●●|●●|●' (SCP-2521).

Taboo is, even among SCP articles, a unique text due to its clever premise. Taboo describes a place outside of our dimension occupied by "nomenclative hazards", beings who "may not be referred to by any name, title, or designation", only by description. If a "nomenclative breach" occurs (that is to say, the place itself or the entities contained within it are given any sort of distinguishing name or designation), notable anomalies to our base reality occur, including but not limited to hallucinations, "[t]he development of nonhuman physical characteristics among exposed subjects, such as feathers and pollen sacks", and "[s]udden involuntary transport of exposed subjects to the **wilderness of unnamed things**", therefore increasingly florid and imaginative terms need to be used when documenting or speaking of Taboo. This not only creates an interesting contrast between the scientific register of the bulk of the text and the expressive descriptions, which are highlighted in boldface and different colours, but also takes one of the defining features of what an SCP article is – a description – and turning that into an anomalous phenomenon, the subject of an SCP article. It goes against the conventions of scientific writing sacrificing precision, brevity, and clarity in favour of a unique concept. This concept manages to feel at the same time magical and horrifying, exemplifying the diverse nature of horror: a fantastical world where space and time lose their meaning, populated by surreal creatures such as "**the native entity with a head resembling that of a rabbit's**", but one where our words, even our names, have the power to cause chaos. This concept can also be seen as challenging the fundamental concepts of scientific research. Research is ultimately about naming and defining concepts. Naming things in science is done with a perceived ultimate authority, that become 'fact' as they enter public consciousness. In truth naming things, and

language itself, is abstract, subjective, and everything but absolute. While scientists typically have expertise in their given field, and therefore do have some authority derived from that expert knowledge, in actuality all research, however meticulously controlled, always reflects the attitudes and views of the researcher to some degree. Even in so-called hard sciences, like biology, where classification is based of Linnaean taxonomy, experts sometimes wildly disagree on naming conventions, even whether these conventions that have been relied upon for years are accurate to begin with (Ereshefsky 355 – 369; Witteveen & Müller-Wille). Taboo challenges that ultimate authority, forcing the Foundation from that position of authority into one where they must violate their own standards in order to achieve their goals. Francis Bacon himself, in his work on developing the fundamentals of scientific writing, states:

> And for all that concerns ornaments of speech, similitudes, treasury of eloquence, and such like emptinesses, let it be utterly dismissed. Also let all those things which are admitted be themselves set down briefly and concisely, so that they may be nothing less than words. For no man who is collecting and storing up materials for ship-building or the like, thinks of arranging them elegantly, as in a shop, and displaying them so as to please the eye; all his care is that they be sound and good, and that they be so arranged as to take up as little room as possible in the warehouse. And this is exactly what should be done here. (Bacon)

And yet, he goes on to say, that "[f]or the mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect according to their true incidence; nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced", himself going against his owns statements against overly complicated and descriptive language, showing that scientific objectivity is not as such, self-evident (ibid). In "**the place where the nameless are found**", as the very fundamentals of reality can be warped by simple words, one must redefine what the

foundations of science are, as seen in this excerpt of an interview with the "**gentleman with the leporine visage**":

> **"Good morning, strange traveller."**
> **Dr. Japers:** Good morning.
> **"It's nice to see a new face around these parts. Kindly excuse the smoke; just airing my thoughts. How is your name?"**
> **Dr. Japers:** How is…? I'm sorry, I'm afraid I can't tell you that.
> *Dr. Japers bows.*
> **"Are you *simple?* I'm merely asking how your name is. *My* name has smelt of raspberries lately, I think—or snapdragons, perhaps. It's so hard to tell these days, but one makes an effort."**
> **Dr. Japers:** Ah, my apologies. I'm afraid my name has tasted rather tart as of late.
> *Leporine entity laughs and doffs its hat.*
> ([REDACTED FER PROTOCOL 4000-ESHU], SCP Wiki)

As Dr. Jaspers declines to disclose his name, **the native entity in question** admonishes him for even suggesting such a thing and one has to wonder, how is a researcher to conduct an interview when they cannot even properly name their subject, let alone anything else? The following interviews all employ increasingly imaginative language when referring to **the fluffy one**, complicating the entry significantly and defying the principles of clarity, brevity and precision, however, making the article a far more interesting read.

SCP-2521 has a similar approach: the entity described in the article is one that enjoys and collects written or spoken information about itself, stealing documentation that describes it and kidnapping people who speak about it, therefore the SCP-2521 article is by necessity entirely composed of pictures (as any text based entry, even a digital one, would simply be taken away by SCP-2521); even its title is stylized as '●●|●●●●●|●●|●' with each grouping of dots indicating a number. As with Taboo, SCP-2521 takes an (even more) central element of what an SCP is and uses it as a building block for an SCP entity that requires the rejection of both written and spoken language

to tell a compelling narrative. It manages to convey all the necessary information – object class and designation, the physical and anomalous properties of the entity, containment procedures and experiment logs – in simplistic 'clip art'-style imagery. This exemplifies multimodality of new media horror and the possibilities new media provides; narratives are no longer confined to a single medium, but can employ multiple to tell a story. Like Taboo, it takes a fundamental element of any narrative – language – and turns it into a threat, although in this case it is not language itself that is dangerous. In the case of SCP-2521, speaking or writing about it is a way to 'summon' this supernatural entity, working like a spell or a curse. Again, the new media format allows for simple pictograms to be used that still manage to conform to the basic structure of what an SCP should be.

These SCPs are examples of the unique nature of SCP articles. Both Taboo and SCP-2521 are *format-screws,* which "intentionally violate some aspect of the SCP format or framework, generally because the SCP itself affects the documentation" and *infohazards,* "objects that are dangerous to know about [and that] spread simply through people telling each other about them"("Dr. Mackenzie's Glossary of Terms") An infohazard can be seen as a virus that spreads from person to person, or from computer to computer. This ties back into the concept of networked spectrality and the "change from ghosts that manifest in, through and with the aid of analogue 'broadcast' media to new digitally-manifesting media spectres" (Kirk 57). Kirk states, that "[w]hen ghosts are coupled with new media technologies, haunting is not merely a singular, personal, temporary occurrence of the supernatural but an endemic threat to an increasingly networked and globalised contemporary society", highlighting the immediacy of modern hauntings and working as an allegory for modern technological anxieties (ibid.). Technology is, as stated many times now, an integral part of our lives. Not only do most infrastructures rely heavily on the internet and other computer-mediated networks, but so do individual people in terms of their work and social life, especially so at the moment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If these electronic networks were to become compromised – infected with a virus or haunted by a ghost – the entirety of civilization as we know it would collapse. Technology

is integral to the functioning of everyday institutions (finance, education, health care, etc.), but the average person has no idea about the intricacies of these global networks, and therefore the fear of catastrophic failure is easily justified.

Nonlinear storytelling

The SCP wiki itself can be seen as a network: in-universe it functions as a data archive for Foundation employees, integral to the functioning of the Foundation, and in reality, it brings together a community of people with a love for horror. It consists of SCP articles, essays, short stories, poems, and other different types of creative writing, and tells the story of the SCP Foundation and its goal of protecting the world from supernatural threats. However, this is not a linear, comprehensive story rather than a collection of snapshots of SCPs, experiments, and the inner workings of the Foundation: there is no beginning, no ending, nor a set order in which one should read it. This makes it difficult to establish coherent lore for the universe. Some elements are codified in writing guides – the structure of an SCP article, object classes, certain terminology – but especially for someone just learning about the project, it can seem like an incomprehensible mess. Some articles reference other articles, but can sometimes include contradictory statements of, for example, testing that has been done on a particular SCP object. There is no set information about how the Foundation came into being or who runs it. While this gives writers the freedom to write their own interpretations of the Foundation into being, it also means that the story will never be entirely consistent – nor does it need to be.

Approaching the SCP wiki is like approaching the internet in general: there is a cornucopia of information easily available if one knows where to look, but if one does not have much technical experience they would have difficulty in finding and singling out the *relevant* information they are looking for. In a way, the wiki is a work of magical realism: it is based on our reality, but a version of it where supernatural entities exist. Still, it is not confined to our typical view of narrative structure, both in terms of a single article and the wiki as a whole, as it does not have a set start or

end point:

> …works of magical realism can be fictions in which anything can happen or un-happen.
> Such narratives are not governed, in the way that realist narratives are, by the 'sense of
> an ending' […]. They need not conform to notions of 'ordinary' or 'familiar' plot
> development or characterization. By the very tension and irresolution of the compound
> (both 'magical' and 'realist'), this discourse is condemned to an enclosure within the
> interminable (Royle 161).

The SCP wiki exists without the traditional concepts of beginning and ending. Even if one were to start reading the wiki from SCP-001, one is immediately confronted with an article, that does not even conform to the traditional form of an SCP article, but one that consists of 37 'proposals', each a full article. The top of the page displays a warning:

> **GENERAL NOTICE 001-Alpha:** In order to prevent knowledge of SCP-001 from
> being leaked, several/no false SCP-001 files have been created alongside the true
> file/files. All files concerning the nature of SCP-001, including the decoy/decoys, are
> protected by a memetic kill agent designed to immediately cause cardiac arrest in any
> nonauthorized personnel attempting to access the file. Revealing the true nature/natures
> of SCP-001 to the general public is cause for execution, except as required under
> ███-██-██████.

This warning immediately complicates any ideas the reader might have had about what an SCP is; not only does the SCP wiki break the rules of traditional narrative structure, it breaks *its own rules* about what the content of the site can be. It claims that at the same time, several and no false SCP articles have been created, and that unauthorized access will cause death via a memetic kill agent, again portraying a situation where simply the knowledge of something can cause harm. The supernatural subject matter allows for a multiverse to exist, where all of it and none of it is real simultaneously, where nobody knows the true origins of the Foundation because there are none; the Foundation simply is, always has been, always will be, at the fringes of society. In this way, there is a comingling of the content and the platform: the wiki too, while technically quantifiable, *feels*

infinite, something that has always been there, at least for the online horror community. Like SCP-087 'The Stairwell', the intrigue of the wiki is similar to the call of the void. One can easily lose oneself in the wiki for hours, simply moving from one article to the next, like one can easily lose oneself in the wealth of information on the internet. The knowledge that *something* is there, waiting, makes one want to reach in and discover the 'monster' lurking in the darkness, even at the expense of one's safety, or in more literal terms, one's precious time.

5. Conclusion

New media horror as a form of writing is still developing, and therefore research into the topic is somewhat lacking. Unfiction in particular, while popular, remains quite uncodified. On the other hand, new media horror can be difficult to define or codify, as it is a 'genre' that is constantly changing and evolving according to cultural shifts, intracommunal attitudes and technological advancements.

The aim of this thesis had been to provide a glimpse into an emerging artform, however much is left outside of its scope that could warrant a full-scale investigation. That being the case, it has been my attempt to demonstrate the aspects of the SCP Wiki that make it worthy of research. At present, there are no other works quite like it, both in terms of topic and sheer volume. The eight articles examined all display characteristics that are prototypical to SCPs, and in some cases, unique in terms of literary tradition. While operating in the realm of scientific writing, the texts manage to convey a narrative despite the fact that they are confined by formulaic restrictions. They use the supposedly neutral and matter-of-fact nature of scientific writing to evoke feelings of fear and unsettlement in the reader without evocative language. Drawing on the tradition of Gothic literature, SCP-1471 recreates the traditional positioning of a mysterious, supernatural entity that haunts its victims in a 21st century context as a mobile app, and SCP-087 provokes images of a descent into the deep, with a modern, analytical research context. The texts create a rich universe with attention to detail, while themselves luring the reader deeper and deeper into the depths of a wiki that seems interminable: there is no beginning, no end, only the uncanny eternality of a hidden world. It establishes the rules of the reality, but then immediately breaks them, in cases like [REDACTED PER PROTOCOL 4000-ESHU] and ●●|●●●●●|●●|●, taking the core concepts of an SCP article and turning them into its subjects. It plays with the familiar, turning it strange, like SCP-294, bringing the uncanny and the everyday together. It is an excellent display of Kirk's framework of networked

spectrality, even touching on a potential networked spirituality. The nature of the internet and social media have indeed changed our lives on a fundamental level, and the same applies to the arts. It is far easier to publish independent works than ever before, and new forms of artistic expression will surely continue to develop along as technology does. In conjunction, new frameworks, like that of networked spectrality and modern, digital folklore must also be explored.

As demonstrated, the SCP wiki is a manifold piece of media, that draws from a wide array of topics and fields. The writers of the community are constantly reinventing and pushing the boundaries of what an SCP can and should be, collaboratively crafting an infinite multiverse with a core element of "insisting in the reality of what is clearly not real. The fiction is always trying to put on the air of being not-fiction" ("What is Unfiction?"). In addition to this, they are using familiar elements and repurposing them to create something new, such as the use of the scientific register. Creepypasta as a genre can be seen as a continuation of the tradition of urban legends since the copy-and-paste format of sharing stories can be compared to the oral tradition of storytelling. Online creative writing in general is closer to the spoken variety, as "internet writing is different. It's unedited, it's unfiltered, and it's so beautifully mundane" (McCulloch 4). That is not to say that a creepypasta by default is unedited and unpolished, but as the format often emulates forum posts, emails or other first-person accounts, it can be regarded as the genre of campfire ghost stories of the internet age. The SCP Foundation takes this concept and takes its unfiltered and 'genuine' nature to the other extreme, taking stories of monsters lurking in the shadows and breaking them down with scientific research and analysis.

At present, outside the writings of Neal Kirk, the subject of networked spectrality remains somewhat undiscovered by the larger academic community. It is difficult to predict what technological developments may be invented in the future, but considering that wearable technology (smart watches and glasses, some medical equipment) is already starting to appear into the market and transhumanism no longer seems like a concept purely out of science fiction, perhaps this concept

could be expanded to encompass a new tech-based networked human existence, as well as a networked spirituality. As we become more and more dependent on technology, both in terms of business and entertainment, it seems natural that along with social networking, an increasingly large part of our existence becomes digital, creating a need for different disciplines of the study of networked existence.

Overall, the works of the SCP wiki are an example of how new media horror brings together the old and the new, the traditional and the novel, uncannily pushing the boundaries of both the past and the future.

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