

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
Department of English and American Studies

Bc. Lada Prokešová

**Transformation of the Horror Mode in the Context of New Media:  
Unveiling the Immersive Journey of the Digital Horror**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Mgr. Woock Elizabeth Allyn, PhD.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma „Transformation of the Horror Mode in the Context of New Media: Unveiling the Immersive Journey of the Digital Horror“ vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne..... Podpis .....

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## **Annotation**

In this thesis, I investigate the phenomenon of digital horror narratives and the potential for the novel reader's experience. It is grounded in the transformative tendencies of horror mode and its inclination to adopt innovative societal forces. The implementation of such horror-mode narratives into the digital environment resulted in the emergence of a new type of horror narrative – creepypasta. Such a horror-mode phenomenon represents a shift in the narrative content, and the author-reader relationship, which then pulls the readers towards a more immersive experience. I claim that these stories represent collective narratives shaped not only by specific community requirements but also by the material aspects of the digital narratives. Together, these components are then mirrored in the distinct content. Moreover, they generate the unique horror experience that results from this specific configuration of the three aspects of materiality, community behaviour, and narrative elements.

## **Anotace**

V této práci se zabývám fenoménem digitálního hororu a potenciální vznik nové čtenářské zkušenosti. Výzkum vychází z transformačních tendencí hororových narativů a jejich sklon přejímat určité společenské predispozice. Integrace hororových narativů do digitálního prostředí totiž vyústilo ve vznik nové formy hororu – creepypasta. Tento fenomén se vyznačuje specifickým obsahem a vztahem mezi autorem a čtenářem, čímž vede čtenáře k imerznímu prožitku. Argumentuji, že tyto texty reprezentují kolektivní narativy, jež jsou tvarovány specifickými požadavky kladené komunitou, současně však jsou utvářeny materiálem, tedy prostředím, ve kterém jsou situovány. Tyto dimenze se potom odrážejí na celkové formě obsahu. Navíc utvářejí jedinečný hororový čtenářský prožitek pramenící ze specifického vymezení jednotlivých aspektů, tj. již zmíněný materiální prostor, komunitní chování a narativní prvky.

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## **Introduction; New Media as a New Narrative Space**

The emergence of new media meant a significant shift in various aspects regarding communication, and opportunities within the scope of creative endeavours, leading to numerous novel forms of content, and creative expressions. Such content is thus materially impacted by the parameters of the environment, Creepypasta being an example, a text that not only emerged within this new creative space but also depended on it. Prior to a further investigation of the core subject matter, a contextual framework needs to be established, specifically a brief description of the platform within which the text exists, that is digital space, one of the interactive spaces that emerged from the new media. The onset and significant rise of new media led to a great expansion of theories and approaches within the field of media studies. The new millennium heralded even greater development with the introduction of Web 2.0, marking a new epoch and fundamentally reshaping the concept of digital media. A crucial expansion that is associated with both these technological innovations, is the transformation and consumption of the content. The next few paragraphs expand upon these concepts.

Multiple scholars characterized new media, one of the most notable ones is the theorist of communication studies Everett M. Rogers in his *Communication Technology: The New Media in Society* (1986), ascribed to new media three aspects, interactivity, demassification, and asynchronous communication.<sup>1</sup> Such features are mentioned in the context of new media almost invariably, or even expanded upon. For example, media scholar, Martin Lister in *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (2003) characterized new media as digital, interactive, hypertextual, visual, networked, and simulated.<sup>2</sup> Media and Communication theorist Des Freedman then ascribed new media with a number of characteristics and draws from the previous scholars, stressing the great potential of the internet as a communication tool and expanding the list of the tendencies of new media that gifted the internet with its novel prospects: interactivity, hypertext and hypermedia, non-linearity, virtuality and extraterritoriality, digitality, acceleration of time/space compression, modularity, remediation, demassification, asynchronicity, and convergence.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of listing these features by various scholars is to showcase the general tendency to present new media as an interactive space that accentuates the

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<sup>1</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (SAGE, 2012), 111.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Lister, et al. *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 2009.), 13.

<sup>3</sup> James Curran, et al. *Misunderstanding the Internet* (Routledge, 2016), 277.

power of the individual. Such facets were even more encouraged with the emergence of Web 2.0.

A revolutionary step that significantly reshaped the creative space, and acknowledged the digital social infrastructure was the arrival of Web 2.0. The term was brought into vogue by Silicon Valley media specialist Tim O'Reilly and further described in his 2005 article "What Is Web 2.0 Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software." O'Reilly defined Web 2.0 as a collection of interconnected principles, tendencies, and actions.<sup>4</sup> Web 2.0 essentially repurposed the digital space, making it more accessible and open. It is a shift in the possibilities of users' experience and operate web services, and is represented by social networking sites, online forums, web-hosted services, blogs, etc. One of the relevant facts within the framework of this thesis is the rise and encouragement of participation within Web 2.0, leading to further transformation regarding the relationship among the users, dismantling the traditional hierarchies, specifically the introduction of the dynamic role of producer and consumer, as the consumer has the potential to become a producer as well. This then in turn gave rise to participatory culture, a concept discussed in the second part of the thesis.

Nevertheless, the emergence of new media is grounded upon the foundations of the old media, and these attributes are intensified and facilitate certain functions of media, for example, the matter of an enhancement and acceleration of sharing content. Such development became even more apparent with the appearance of the internet of the second generation, Web 2.0. Consequently, leading towards the potential to create new content as articulated by Freedman who pursues the notion that the internet as such indeed represents new ways of expressing and creating, stressing the rise of democratic media culture, thus overcoming the traditional 'one-to-many' way of interaction,<sup>5</sup> supporting the idea that both the content and social aspects were indeed significantly shaped by the medium within which it is formed. This notion that a medium not only influences the content but serves as a context-setting device was articulated by Christina Schachtner. In her book *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, she presented the view of digital space as a unique space for the creation of non-

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<sup>4</sup> Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software." (O'Reilly Media, 2012), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Curran, et al., *Misunderstanding the Internet*, 278.

fictional narratives and introduced structural characteristics that influence the manner in which people interact, produce, and communicate content.

Such notion that content is essentially affected by the space was expanded upon further giving rise to Schachtner's typology of narration, listing six basic categories of narrative within the digital space, narrations about interconnectedness, self-staging narrations, stories about supplying and selling, narrations about managing boundaries, transformation narrations, and stories about setting out and breaking away.<sup>6</sup> Each category is formed upon distinctive features regarding specific themes and topics employed within these narratives. For the purposes of the current discourse, one category is most relevant, that is the narrative about interconnectedness.

These narratives are grounded in the principle of communicating and establishing connections among other network actors.<sup>7</sup> Such a tendency is to be found in digital space in general due to the inclination to create communities, however, these narratives carry further properties, specifically shaping their content while actively forming connections with others. Schachtner further distinguishes three specific inclinations within the scope of the narrative of interconnectedness, presenting subcategories. To provide an insight and specification of the nature of this category, the three tendencies are: self-reflecting and exchanging worldviews,<sup>8</sup> seeing and being seen while striving for validation and searching for a sense of belonging,<sup>9</sup> and finally sharing personal experiences going beyond connecting with others.<sup>10</sup> This category of narratives is crucial for the following discourse since these tendencies are incorporated into the Creepypasta texts, as fictional narratives.

Schachtner's typology does discuss non-fictional narratives, nevertheless, the following sections examine the phenomenon of Creepypasta, fictional horror stories, placed and formed side by side with these non-fictional narratives. The term is derived from 'coppypasta,' copied and pasted texts distributed on the internet, creepypasta then refers to horror-mode content that circulates on the internet. The thesis delves specifically into the textual form, a group of texts with distinctive features, therefore the term will be

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<sup>6</sup> Christina Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.), 125.

<sup>7</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 125.

<sup>8</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 128.

<sup>9</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 132.

referred to with a capital letter. From this perspective, the space represents a source of potential and affordances regarding the fictional narratives and the reader's experience as well. The content is shaped under the influence of its materiality and affordances of new media, specifically Web 2.0, giving rise to tools such as hypertext and paratext discussed in part one. The specific arrangement of the content and the appearance of the content of the fictional narrative is rooted in the already-established practice of the non-fictional narrative. This claim is addressed throughout the thesis, most extensively discussed in the first part.

Returning to the primary subject matter, it is within this space that such fiction emerged, therefore necessarily bringing new possibilities regarding storytelling, stemming specifically from the environment of the digital space, from the users who were turned into both the producer and the consumer, analogically the author and the reader. Both these factors necessarily affected the digital horror stories as well as the experience of the entities, the readers, and authors, who consume their own connect, that is the narratives. In other words, Creepypasta is an intersection of the tendencies of the digital space and horror writing, which carries novel characteristics regarding the formation of the narratives, the appearance, and consequently forms its own narrative tendencies.

The fiction exists simultaneously within the digital space while operating separately which affects the mechanisms mentioned. Within the following three parts, different dimensions of the texts are considered. The first section examines the materiality of those stories and the potential stemming from the environment as such and the changing behaviour of the individuals due to the material conditions. The second part analyses the stories as a result of collaborative endeavours and the changing role of the individual identity as a result of operating within a community and how it is reflected in the storytelling. The final part then investigates the unifying tendencies within the texts that formulate them and characterize the unique horror experience. All three sections strive to explore and examine the effects upon the reader's experience when engaging with those texts, an experience that is essentially liminal, pushing the individuals to re-examine and reappropriate the digital space and its tools for the purpose of storytelling.

## **Part I. Digital Space and Shifting the Horror Experience; The Bridge to the Liminal**

This initial section investigates the tools and their incorporation into the narratives and how they are incorporated into the narratives. The investigation is done through the lenses of Derrida's concepts that designate the specific incorporation of digital affordances, and its reappropriation into the narratives. This section also reflects upon the way digital space shapes the form and appearance of the narratives by employing certain elements from this environment as part of the content itself. The focus is on the activity of both the author and audience, their engagement with specific digital devices, and their influence on the narrative. The first part is then concluded with analyses that showcase the concrete effects of the material conditions introduced throughout the section and how these tools contribute to the authors and readers who are immersed in an ambiguous experience.

### **Introduction to Part I., The Liminality, an Alternative Experience**

This segment introduces the idea of liminality a concept that is interwoven within all the aspects of the Creepypasta narratives and therefore is reflected upon in all three sections. The terms 'liminal' and 'liminality' are widely recognized as anthropological concepts, originally developed by Arnold van Gennep, and expanded significantly upon by Victor Turner, utilizing such terms for a middle stage, between rites of passage, discussed later in this section. An important quality assigned to this liminal stage is the ambiguity and the space between. This concept of in-betweenness may be employed within the discourse of an experience, that is an experience that displays liminal quality, is liminoid. The second half of this section is a brief introduction to the crucial concepts of the poststructuralist approach, thus developing a complex framework allowing a nuanced reexamination of the digital tools within Creepypasta narratives.

The essay "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology" (1974) by Turner deals with this convergence of liminality and experience, and does so in terms of Comparative Symbology, a field that deals with symbols and their cultural frameworks, situating the discipline between semiotics and symbolic anthropology.<sup>11</sup> Symbols are understood as dynamic systems, that change over time, and

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<sup>11</sup> Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology" in *Rice Institute Pamphlet* 60, no. 3 (Rice University Studies, 1974), 53.

more importantly, possess the capacity to psychologically influence the individuals who are exposed to them.<sup>12</sup> Resulting in an experience of an individual who undergoes the liminal experience, of representing a state.

Turner draws on Arnold van Gennep's exploration of rituals, coining the term "rite of passage," which are rituals that represent transformations of individuals, resulting in changes on a larger scale, the collective shift. Turner then expands further on the scope and claims that all rituals are forms of passage.<sup>13</sup> Van Gennep describes a three-part schema within the rite of passage, and that is separation, transition, and incorporation.<sup>14</sup> Each phase is marked by specific qualities and essentially represents the individual steps in the transformational journey, moving from one state to another. Beginning with separation, which is the process of departure from the primary state, as the individuals engage with symbols, escaping their identities and roles.<sup>15</sup> The second phase, transition, amounts to the most relevant, as it represents the focus of Turner's notions of rituals. Transition is a state of ambiguity and uncertainty, representing a threshold, a state between the old and new.<sup>16</sup> It is essentially the in-betweenness, of the other two conditions. The third and final phase, incorporation, is the return of an individual to the community, gaining novel status.<sup>17</sup> A similar process occurs when both author and reader are engaged in the Creepypasta narratives. Engagement is understood as the reading process, which is influenced by the medium that houses these stories, which then in turn is interlinked with the specific sociological workings of the narratives connected to the issues of production and authorship. Lastly, the medium affects the reading process in terms of the texts are a whole, that is they share certain unique narrative features that contribute to the liminal experience.

However, the liminal experience is based on specific elements and tensions, and since it represents a unique phenomenon, that challenges the norm, a tendency widely examined within the poststructuralist approach. Jacques Derrida, the leading figure of poststructuralism, in his influential essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," (1967) points out the flaws of structuralism which failed to

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<sup>12</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 55.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 56.

<sup>14</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 57.

<sup>15</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 57.

<sup>16</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 57.

<sup>17</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 57.

sufficiently describe the structure. He examined the nature of the centre and contributed his understanding of it as existing outside the structure itself, thus allowing free play, instead of understanding the centre as part of the structure which creates boundaries and limits discourse.<sup>18</sup> Derrida's understanding then allows for a dynamic and ambiguous structure and meaning that is relational and contingent.<sup>19</sup>

Further examination of the concept of liminality, through the poststructuralist lenses, uncovers further intricacies as another characteristic of the liminal alongside the ambiguity is a paradox,<sup>20</sup> which is intertwined with ambiguity. Paradox essentially presupposes the existence of contradictions, leading towards the concepts of binary opposites. Ambiguity is merely the state of having multiple meanings. In this sense, paradox pushes the possibilities of ambiguity beyond the state of possibility and presents a state in which multiple possibilities are presented simultaneously. The crucial idea however is the concept of binary opposites and possible ways to engage with the paradox, specifically the tension that stems from the multiplicity of interpretations.

The liminal is viewed as a space in which the traditional hierarchy is disrupted, it allows for the recombination of cultural elements, resulting in the defamiliarization of the familiar and subsequently giving rise to new cultural forms.<sup>21</sup> This disruption of the traditional order and hierarchy is found in an approach that seeks to destabilize or decenter the established. Deconstruction is concerned with the binary oppositions, and going beyond them, specifically it strives to deconstruct them, a destabilize them, since as Derrida notes in his essay, the binaries limit the free play,<sup>22</sup> which is the limitation of the creativity of the producers. Liminal is what defies the binary or somehow goes beyond it, displaying the dynamic nature that is pursued by Derrida, offering a multiplicity of meanings, which then again affects the reading processes, and brings intricacies amplified when conjoined with the mentioned medium utilized for these narratives.

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, eds. James L. Marsh, John D. Caputo, and Merold Westphal (Routledge; 3rd edition, 2013), 109.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 110.

<sup>20</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 58.

<sup>21</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," 60.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 111.

Furthermore, liminality and deconstruction if conjoined in the framework of a reading process, then reveal the intricacies of the reader's experience that originates from the affordances of the materiality of the literature. In other words, the claim is that the Creepypasta texts allow a reader to access a unique reading experience, which can be defined as liminal. The following pages discuss this notion. Liminality, or ambiguousness, stems from three main sources in the Creepypasta context. It is the liminal elements of the materiality, liminal in the identity, and in the narrative elements employed in Creepypasta texts, that result in an experience that is in its essence liminal or on the borders, based on hesitation and uncertainty. Each of these is discussed in their respective parts.

### **The Architecture of Digital Horror Narrative**

The internet space was heavily affected by the emergence of the mentioned Web 2.0 as its architecture brought dynamic qualities,<sup>23</sup> ultimately altering the materiality of internet spaces. More specifically it implied the emergence of new tools that resulted in new creative opportunities, the rise of participatory culture is one of the factors responsible for such a shift. Participatory culture, while not a new phenomenon significantly spread across and led to the formation of new communities on the internet which had its own consequences, further exploration of this topic is undertaken in the subsequent chapter. Returning to the initial concern, these tools established within the digital space, enabled to form of novel sorts of output, including novel forms of narratives that are profoundly impacted by its realm of formation imbuing the narratives with specific components that contribute to their unique architecture, that is a specific appearance, consequently altered the experience and expectation of the audience.

### **Defining Creepypasta and its Space**

This specific shift occurred within the horror mode which manifested itself in the emergence of digital horror stories, Creepypasta narrative. 'Creepy' stories are generated strictly in the digital environment with the purpose of being spread across the space. While Creepypasta has many specifics with respect to its appearance, explored in detail in the subsequent chapters, the core aspect that is taken into account and reflected upon the narratives, is the embraced nature of the material features of the digital and

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<sup>23</sup> O'Reilly, O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software,"<sup>23</sup>.

novel opportunities of the medium that houses these narratives. In other words, the dynamic qualities of Web 2.0 are transfused onto the content. There are, however, multiple different spaces, and websites, that provide different environments for Creepypasta storytelling. These websites provide different architecture and entail different engagement with the narratives, therefore generating slightly different texts and providing diverse experiences.

One such specific social platform that is used for this form of horror storytelling is the discussion site Reddit. Other websites contain Creepypasta narratives, however, this platform was chosen as it has the potential to reap all the benefits offered by the digital environment, generating unique horror texts. The social platform Reddit represents the most open space, that enables users to fully engage with each other, and form diverse communities. It is this space that allows for an investigation of the peculiar subversive qualities in the context of digital horror-mode narratives. Moreover, as a discussion forum, the site requires only a registration in order to instantly participate in the discourse, or within the Creepypasta community, storytelling. In this view, Reddit represents an open space that produces user-generated content, in the form of Creepypasta texts.

The Creepypasta community specifically is defined as an audience that is attracted to the horror mode content. The concept of forming a connection based on affect is discussed by Katerina Bantinaki, a scholar, who articulated her notion of horror being an effective response. In her article “The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion” (2012) she presents the emotions evoked by horror, which is the generally understood as a negative emotion, while simultaneously being a positive experience.<sup>24</sup> Within the context of participatory culture, such a community strives to amplify this positive experience, that is to amplify and enhance the horror experience. This is enabled and facilitated by the digital space that pushes the boundaries of traditional production and consumption of the texts.

The readers do not only consume the content, but they are directly involved not only in the generative process as well. The digital space enables direct interactions between the audience and the author, it is a process without a gatekeeper, and the flow of the content

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<sup>24</sup> Katerina Bantinaki, “The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion.” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 70 (Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 383.

is not mediated through any official institution. This is a result of Web 2.0 as a platform that allows for content that is nearly unfiltered by gatekeepers, entities that control and filter the flow of information, thus marking a significant difference from the traditional media.<sup>25</sup> These implications then facilitate the functioning of the community as any user is able to become a creator, which in turn raises the question of the firmness of boundaries and relationships regarding the creator/consumer identity. Analogously within the investigation of the Creepypasta space, it is the dismantling of the reader/author entities and their transforming roles, and their consequences upon the narratives, discussed more rigorously in the second and third chapters.

In the context of horror narratives, space with such characteristics facilitates to achieve of the objective of the community to generate a narrative that more directly affects the audience. This is embraced by the audience and authors as they employ diverse elements that would further magnify these effects. The community strives to intensify the horror experience, understood collectively within the community as positive, through the immersive techniques as the phenomenon of found footage horror films as both are created, even carefully crafted, and melded into a specific form. Adam Daniel, a scholar in the field of digital studies and horror, examined the emerging horror forms and the shift connected to the new media. One of the concepts discussed, in his *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms*, (2020) Daniel argues that the audience is emotionally impacted, affected, through heightened sensory and sensual faculties.<sup>26</sup> Therefore pointing out the evolving medium and its consequences on content, with the possibility of altering the experience of the audience, pushing the established boundaries. Adam Daniel articulates that one of the forms of horror cinema found footage, is one such a form that shifts the experience of the audience, specifically through the tendency to erase the distinction between the viewer and the viewed.<sup>27</sup>

According to Daniel, an embodied experience is also allowed through the depiction of the erasure of diegetic and non-diegetic worlds within the content, which is described as a portrayal of a liminal space.<sup>28</sup> The Creepypasta texts allows a similar experience, however, the boundaries are pushed even further, due to the direct involvement of the

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<sup>25</sup> McQuaill, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 221.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Daniel, *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021) 32.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel, *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel, *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality*, 37.

audience. In other words, it is the audience that maintains and even enriches the blurred boundaries, due to their involvement in the storytelling process. The essential idea is that the digital community leverages the evolving medium, blurring the boundaries among the participants, not only in the sense of hierarchy but in the sense of the proximity of the narrator and the audience, as well as the boundary within the fictional and outside of the fictional. This process of blurring is not simply depicted as argued by Daniel but directly participated in.

In the context of Creepypasta, this is done not only through the specific presentation of the story but also the immediacy of the narrative, that is the mentioned lack of gatekeepers, which leads to the emotional charge of the story. The audience is in direct contact with the character that is the victim or rather in contact with the 'source of the horrific,' as a narrator doesn't need to be a victim in their own narrative, but on the contrary, the narrator may be the horrific element of the story or may present distorted narrative image, revealed at the end while providing clues throughout the story. This then illustrates the adoption of novel opportunities brought by the digital. These mentioned features are not all the elements that contribute to the novel experience, however, only represent the considerations of material aspects of the medium, which may be understood as certain conditions or predispositions offered for the narrative and employed by the creators. There are other factors that need to be considered, such as the role of the entities and their own implications, that is the social aspect, the narrative itself which forms the experience through the creation of the ambiguous space through the deconstructive tendencies.

The absence of a third party that would regulate the content bears further implications on the nature of the content, specifically regarding the participation of the boundary erasure described above. The free flow and limitlessness of the texts represent one of the tools which, one of which is the complete subversion of the existing form, specifically the subversion of the primary function of a medium. Reddit is a space for discussion on a wide range of topics, users are seeking support or help regarding diverse subjects, therefore naturally relying on interaction and dynamic features. This interactive space, primarily meant to facilitate connection and discussion among its users, then started housing horror-mode narratives, therefore incorporating the fictional into a space with contrasting expectations. This unique conjunction of space with set expectations and the applied utilization of it influenced the form of the narrative and

generated the realism that is symptomatic for the found footage horror, that similarly exploits material qualities of a medium as articulated by Daniel in the work presented above.<sup>29</sup> It thus contributes to the illusion and the subsequent hesitation regarding the unclear boundary between real and fictional, and the experience is defined in relation to the space that surrounds the narrative. Furthermore, readers interact with the fictional narrative and approach it conformably with the other posts found on the website.

Creepypasta represents a narrative that challenges the binary opposition regarding the primary function of a medium, or social media website and its traditional form, shaping the narrative that dismantles the structure with clear boundaries. There is a consistent form of the post that represents the fictional narratives that agree with the other posts in the Reddit space, which are primarily concerned with non-fictional subjects, resulting in a narrative that is ambiguous in its nature, presenting itself as authentic, while still conveying a fictional output. This is then mirrored in the narrative itself as the narrative entities, the readers and authors adopt further subversive qualities, which results in ambiguous identities and space.

The crucial components that are present in all Creepypasta narratives, contribute to storytelling, and are ultimately utilized as the tools that challenge the established horror experience are the paratext and hypertext. These features represent the tools that contribute to and essentially serve as a manifestation or rather a placeholder for the subversive qualities regarding the materiality of the narrative, blurring the borders, and subsequently producing the liminal horror experience. The following sections provide an insight into those two components and through an analysis reveal their functional aspects in the context of Creepypasta storytelling, and the specific subversive adoption.

## **Paratext**

Creepypasta narratives, like any other written narrative, do not appear without the company of the surrounding elements, paratext, is also described as a threshold that invites the reader and offers them to possibly engage with the narrative.<sup>30</sup> The conceptualization of paratext was first articulated by literary theorist Gérard Genette, mainly associated with the literary field of narratology. Genette developed a framework

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel, *Affective Intensities and Evolving Horror Forms: From Found Footage to Virtual Reality*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, "Introduction to the Paratext." In *New Literary History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 261.

that emphasized the role of paratext in an interpretation of texts, and the experience of the readers. Genette in his *Introduction to the Paratext* (1991), addresses the dynamic nature and changing role of paratext and identifies its various forms.

The role of paratext is amplified in the context of Creepypasta due to the aims of the community defined above, thus paratext serves as one of the tools that are utilized for a liminal horror experience. The capacity to invite the reader to engage is in the context of the digital fiction pushed further and the paratext represents an important narrative element that houses the reader's contributions in the form of comments, thus promoting the dynamism and dismantling of the traditional structure typical for the liminal as described above. The presence of paratext marks authorial comments,<sup>31</sup> which forms another form of paratext found in the Creepypasta texts, that is the commentary provided by the author, who simultaneously, narrates the story, essentially framing the narrative. In this case, however, the function of the paratext carries the same qualities as in any other instance, the internal story being accompanied by additional textual features that provide an external context to the core narrative. This external context is not a part of the real space of the author, but rather an additional context regarding the fictional space of the narrative itself, leading to the notion of a space that is somewhat separate from the physical space, and paratext is the invitation for the audience into this space. Therefore, such an understanding of the surrounding text does not hinder the understanding, rather it affirms the significance of the material aspect of those narratives and its capacity to generate the liminal space within the context of Creepypasta narratives.

### ***Author's Commentary***

The ambiguity that is imbued into the paratext is embodied in the ambiguous identities of the narrators who in the paratext present themselves as both the author and the narrator in one person. The paratext, as described by Gérard Genette, as a material provided by the author, represents an external material,<sup>32</sup> in opposition to the internal, fictional content. The presence of the paratext then suggests to its audience the presence of the real. However, the paratext in the context of the Creepypasta narrative is never utilized in such a manner, on the contrary, it does provide the context of the narrative, the context is fictional, and its presence gives a sense of authenticity. This then

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<sup>31</sup> Genette, *Introduction to the Paratext*, 261.

<sup>32</sup> Genette, *Introduction to the Paratext*, 261.

represents one of the subversive qualities of such texts. These users utilize the specific digital space for fictional stories, including the frame narrative which provides additional space for the fiction as well as a tool for direct engagement with the readers.

The paratext and its ambiguous tendencies promote the dynamicism found in the space as the author is directly engaging with the audience which is expected to enrich the narrative. In the story “If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back” the user TheYesAndNo tells a story in the form of a disturbing encounter which is supposed to serve as a warning against creatures the narrator encountered in the woods. Starting with a paragraph that introduces the story, or as the narrator describes it, as an event, involving the distressing incident and posting the story in the hopes of warning others, saving them from the same encounter, and simultaneously being unconcerned and acknowledging that their narrative might be dismissed as fiction, initiating the story with the following: “Look, I don't want to post this just for it to be called a piece of fiction, but if it does, I guess I can't do anything about it.”<sup>33</sup> The narrator further justifies in this introductory part, that this event disturbed them to such a degree that they are unable to sleep, which then creates a further sense of unease in the reader as the narrator withholds the reason why, and initiates the narrative with the effect that the incident had on them.

The narrator essentially begins the story with the context for the experience they are about to tell, providing the audience with additional information for what is essentially the inner narrative. The narrative as such is presented as a warning, therefore pushing the readers in a specific direction regarding the perception of the text as authentic. In this instance, the medium has the capacity to push the creator to utilize the tool of the paratext which is influenced by its digital environment, subsequently shaping the perception of the narrative. The author utilizes the paratext to artificially generate tension between the authentic and fictional by employing an element of a paratext which traditionally serves as a way for the author to essentially communicate the external with the readers.

### ***Titles***

Another element that is considered to be a paratext is the title and its specific form that is influenced by the digital space. The titles of the Creepypasta tales display similar

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<sup>33</sup>TheYesAndNo, “If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back,”

curious properties and have their specific purpose and form as the frame narratives. Considering the same story, “If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back” the title of the story embodies the purpose of the story, the purpose that is explicitly conveyed in the introductory part of the tale, that is the title itself conveys a warning of sorts, which then once again blurs the two positions. The intriguing form of the title stems from its specific appearance as well as its meaning. The title has a form of phrase, moreover, due to the gap,<sup>34</sup> the author bestows upon its readers a sense of unease, stemming from the lack of information, or the lack of specificity. Once again, the functionality of the narrative is twofold. This specific form strives to connect with the audience, targeting them on a personal level which warns its readers as well as evokes the hesitation that stems from the reading process of the title, stemming from the unique linguistic configuration. In other words, the author constructs the title by combining language units that are outside of the normal range of their possible relationship, and its effect upon the reader stems from the reading process that gradually reveals these improbable combinations. These can be examined through the approach of affective stylistics.

### **Affective Stylistics**

The creators manipulate titles in a specific manner and eventually amplify the horror liminal experience. Titles represent the initial interaction with the story that arises from the title of the narrative. The reader in the reading process faces the author's careful and deliberate composition of the title. Similarly, the reader is then faced with a certain process when encountering the title, word by word as constructed by the author. The Creepypasta narratives and their authors are defamiliarizing the medium and subverting its function, contributing to the horror experience. Such efforts are manifested in the careful crafting and specific selection of linguistic elements in the titles.

The paratext in the form of titles then carries the potential to affect the reader and stems from the reading process. Such an understanding of reading as an event was articulated by a literary scholar, Stanley Eugene Fish, who developed the approach of affective stylistics, a concept belonging to the broader reader-response theory. Fish in his “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics” (1970) argues for including the response

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<sup>34</sup> Gap is a significant device adopted by the authors and found throughout the whole narrative with the intention to invite the reader into the narrative, as they intentionally withheld information or asked questions regarding the events. This topic is substantially expanded upon in the following part.

of the reader in literary analyses while rejecting any fixed meaning of a text. Thus, challenging the tenets of New Criticism and rather embracing the affective aspects, seeing the subjective as productive.

Affective stylistics is concerned with such a shift from the inquiry about the meaning of the sentence and seeks to uncover its effects upon the reader, emphasizing the dynamics of the reading process.<sup>35</sup> Fish focuses on the reader's experience rather than fixed interpretations, thus assigning the reader with an active role, considering the subjective interpretation. In his influential essay mentioned above, he stresses the importance of careful analysis when reading, that is word by word and impression by impression, which then shape the reader's perception and consequently the meaning of the text.<sup>36</sup> According to Fish, the author presents certain perspectives in the text, that inevitably influence the reader's perception as it unfolds in time.<sup>37</sup> Such a proposition then is parallel with Derrida's understanding of the meaning as relational and contingent.

Derrida maintains that the meaning arises not from the words, but rather from their relationship with other words and the system as a whole,<sup>38</sup> opening a wide array of interpretations. Such a process is significant for the authors who utilize these workings and processes of interdependence in order to defamiliarize the content. Fish explores the concept of the range of possibilities, as the author selects specific words and phrases that shape readers' perceptions.<sup>39</sup> In the Framework of Creepypasta, the author is aware of the range of possibilities and deliberately goes beyond it through careful selection, relies on the interconnectedness, and achieves a level of defamiliarization that is unfolded in the process.

Considering the identical example discussed above, "If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back," the reading process, gradually, that is word by word, conveys not only a warning but also embodies an unease and the bizarre nature of such suggestion, while remaining vague about the identity of those who smile, utilizing the label 'them.' Furthermore, the phrase 'make sure' then suggests a necessity, in the title it reveals a necessity to smile back at 'them'. This inexplicit, encrypted title, raises questions in

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<sup>35</sup> Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* second ed., (Routledge, 2006), 175.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics." In *New Literary History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 124.

<sup>37</sup> Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," 125.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 117.

<sup>39</sup> Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," 125.

readers, concerning why one should need to smile back, and at whom, which draws the audience in. The impression of the title as a warning is enhanced due to the author's direct appeal to the readers. That is to say, the author defamiliarizes the title as the act of smiling is interpreted in this instance as a necessity, which goes beyond the traditional interpretation, interpreting smiling in the neutral sense, not a sign of danger or hostile behaviour. In the context as presented to the readers, however, the author pushes the readers towards another perspective, in which a smile entails danger. The overall meaning and the experience are based on the relationships among the individual words.

### **Bricoleurs**

The intricate appearance and process of construction of the titles can be also defined in terms of another concept by Derrida, that is the bricoleur. This concept involves essentially the reappropriation of elements, and their recombination, according to their objective.<sup>40</sup> This process is then evident in the Creepypasta titles, which carry the specific attributes that are essentially imprints of the medium. These properties of the titles closely resemble their formal properties, the internet phenomenon of clickbait, a text that aims to attract attention. The properties defining such strategy include intentional vagueness, misleading quality, use of emotionally charged language, and the curiosity gap.<sup>41</sup> The authors recombine the fictional account with certain tools and practices utilized in non-fictional content, imbuing the fictional content with the practice designed for other purposes. Despite the knowledge that clickbait, as a misleading title, is widely employed primarily for sharing fake information,<sup>42</sup> in the Creepypasta context, such recombination generates the impression of the fictional text belonging and blending in the digital realm with other potential non-fictional content. The author, yet again is contributing to the sense of authenticity, as they employ an element found in truly authentic texts and is applied to the fictional ones, generating the tension between manufactured authenticity and fictional.

In the case of Creepypasta, the structure of the titles specifically represents a crucial tool that contributes to the overall experience. The titles, as will be illustrated in the subsequent analysis display a pattern in the configuration of the individual linguistic elements. The authors not only rely on the gaps, but they are defamiliarizing them. A

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<sup>40</sup> Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," 117.

<sup>41</sup> Qiwei Li, "Clickbait and emotional language in fake news," (The University of Texas, 2019), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Li, "Clickbait and emotional language in fake news," 3.

process that was described as symptomatic in the liminal space. In this case, the authors reappropriate the form of the title, defamiliarizing the title by incorporating the resemblances of clickbait, imbuing the stories with a sense of authenticity as they are depicted in the same form as other texts found in the medium.

## **Hypertext**

Considering the defining features of the new medium introduced in the initial section, hypertext represents one such tool that shapes and allows for certain narrative strategies that form not only the narrative but also the reader's experience. In this context, Creepypasta narratives are essentially accessed through such a specific navigational device that leads the user from one place to another, connecting the individual paths,<sup>43</sup> that is from the general Reddit board to the individual stories. The users are able to move throughout the digital space or enter the immaterial, that is the content that exists in a digital form. In this sense, hypertext is the tool that helps to access and move throughout the liminal space, more precisely allowing the liminal experience. The two following sections examine the hypertext within the context of the reader's choice and the second briefly outlines the non-linear potential, examining the extent of the liminal in the Creepypasta.

### ***Hypertext and Reader's Choice***

As mentioned above, hypertext enables the movement of the reader within the digital realm, that is it serves as a navigation tool in the digital space. The impact of this device upon readers is examined by a scholar Nancy G. Patterson, who in her article "Hypertext and the Changing Roles of Readers," (2000) defined hypertext as a tool responsible for an immersive quality since it implies an unprecedented level of engagement with the texts.<sup>44</sup> Another scholar, John M. Slatin in his article "Reading Hypertext: Order and Coherence in a New Medium," (1990) viewed hypertext as a tool that reconfigures and challenges the traditional engagement with the text, one of them being the rise of co-authorship in the digital space.<sup>45</sup> The rise of co-authorship and its association with identity is discussed in more detail in a second part.

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<sup>43</sup> Lister, *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy G. Patterson, "Hypertext and the Changing Roles of Readers." In *The English Journal* (Portland, 2000), 76.

<sup>45</sup> John M. Slatin, "Reading Hypertext: Order and Coherence in a New Medium." In *College English* (Vol. 52, No. 8, 1990), 871.

Nevertheless, the reader's choice in this case has significant consequences upon the appearance of the text. The reader's choice navigating through diverse paths within the space and the individual texts as well. Specifically, the space as such offers a wide range of narratives, therefore the reader has the ability to choose a specific one from this spectrum of narratives, hence the importance of titles that display certain qualities, drawing the attention of the reader as discussed in the previous section. This simply illustrates the great influence of the medium on the content, its form, and what eventually becomes the norm, marking and distinguishing it from other texts carried by other media.

In the scope of Creepypasta texts, hypertext is only the tool that facilitates the experience, as it represents only one of the wide arrays of elements that are intricately merged together. On the other hand, the function of hypertext is not solely navigational, implying a more active reader. When its presence is considered as a part of the fictional texts themselves, the implications become clearer. Hypertext carries two sorts of affordances, one of them being its employment as the navigational tool, as mentioned above, however, within the scope of literary creativity, such a tool enables the rise of non-linear texts.<sup>46</sup> The second potential presented by the hypertext is if it is utilized as paratext, that is the material that surrounds the primary text. In such cases when additional material is connected to the narrative through the use of hypertext, the narrative at hand then becomes more complex and has further implications regarding the reader's experience. These two primary capacities are discussed in detail below since both contribute to the hesitation and once again contribute to the artificial creation of authenticity, co-creating the liminal. Moreover, hypertext can be utilized for a specific narration within the Creepypasta space, generating a complex narrative, constructed from individual narratives, and built seemingly independently, further contributing to the hesitation. This is exemplified in the section below, a narrative that explores and challenges the boundaries of the liminal itself through hypertextual navigation.

### ***Hypertext and the Liminal Experience***

As established above, hypertext entails the reader's ability to move through the digital space, exploring the realm of content. Another aspect of the hypertextual feature is the potential to offer a non-linear narrative. Literary scholar, as well as an expert in the field

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<sup>46</sup> Patterson, "Hypertext and the Changing Roles of Readers." 78.

of digital humanities, N. Katherine Hayles in her work “The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext,” (2001) describes hypertext as a tool that takes away the authority of the author.<sup>47</sup> However, in the context of Creepypasta, the non-linearity technique is on the contrary harnessed by the authors and generates highly immersive narratives. Hayles indeed argues that hypertext allows for an immersion that is grounded in the evolution of narratives within the digital space, as the reader becomes the co-author.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to note that Hayles discusses hypertext in the context of hypertext fiction, a genre essentially based upon non-linearity.

Creepypasta is not necessarily non-linear, however, hypertext offers a form of non-linearity exemplified below. It should be emphasized that in these cases the non-linearity is the result of authorial intentions.

The navigation through the hypertext is significant as authors narrate their stories in multiple parts and have the possibility to do so through the tool of hyperlinks.

Hyperlinks in this form, serve as gateways that lead to further content, present the reader’s expectation which can be confirmed or challenged.<sup>49</sup> A notion articulated by Alice Bell who explored in her work “Schema Theory, Hypertext Fiction, and Links” (2014), how the narrative schema of hypertextual fiction influences readers’ expectations, an argument for the hypertext fiction, nevertheless also applicable to Creepypata. In this framework, hyperlinks enable the author to potentially continue the narrative further influencing the reader’s engagement with the story at hand. Moreover, hypertext influences the form of the narratives, as the authors may utilize the method of telling the narrative in multiple parts, to imbue their narrative with further tension and potentially a sense of authenticity since the dissection of the narrative into parts is accompanied by certain temporal delay, simulating the temporality of the fictional narrative.

Another potential carried by the hypertext is its possible utilization of hypertext as a paratext, enriching the narrative with further content. Hypertext facilitates the incorporation of other types of digital content, thus generating a narrative composed of various media, such as visuals, videos, and sounds.<sup>50</sup> The effects of the inclusion of an

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<sup>47</sup> Katerina N. Hayles, “The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext.” In *Narrative* (vol. 9, no. 1, 2001), 31.

<sup>48</sup> Hayles, “The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext,” 25.

<sup>49</sup> Alice Bell, “Schema Theory, Hypertext Fiction, and Links.” In *Style*, (vol. 48, no. 2, 2014), 141.

<sup>50</sup> Slatin, “Reading Hypertext,” 874.

additional medium upon the narrative are apparent in the story “Hey a subreddit where I can finally post this. Actual true story.” The original poster zushiba, recounts the experience of living in a house with an evil room, describing the terrifying experience of hearing noises, yelling, and red-orange glowing, eventually leaving the house.<sup>51</sup> The narrator in the introductory part includes a link to Google Maps with the supposed house in which the story takes place. Although the readers cannot be absolutely certain about the authenticity of such a claim, readers will still hesitate, therefore this link to an outside source will generate the possible aspect of realism, that is the real reference, the anchoring of the immersive experience.

The result of such an incorporation of verifiable data, or at the very least potentially verifiable data imbues the story with the hesitation between the real and fictional, as the reader faces multiple possible interpretations. The tension between the readings of the story as possibly authentic is further strengthened through the additional content provided by the author. Such a method of attaching texts from outside sources involves creating links to other texts or in the example above simply further content. There is a similar tendency from within the narratives themselves.

This capacity of hyperlinks to lead the reader to further content is not limited to the incorporation of other media, but an incorporation of links to other stories, therefore creating a web of interconnected narratives. These capacities are manifested in the story “I'm a nosleep moderator. u/cmd102 made me post this” by SirGrumpasaurus which employs a number of metafictional qualities<sup>52</sup> such as the reference and acknowledgment of the NoSleep as narrative space, moreover the role of the moderators in this space who are to a certain extent responsible for the content and are capable in part to guide the community. The narrator of the story has indeed the status of the moderator as it is revealed in their profile page, once again representing the anchor in the real. Nevertheless, the hypertexts in this case serve as a tool that refers to other stories, which lead to other stories. The narrator of this specific post references a different story, that is they include a link to this story called “nosleep moderator u/cmd102 approved this post” by a user deathbyproxy<sup>53</sup> which included links to further

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<sup>51</sup> Zushiba, “Hey a subreddit where I can finally post this. Actual true story,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>52</sup> Thoroughly discussed in the third chapter.

<sup>53</sup>Deathbyproxy, “nosleep moderator u/cmd102 approved this post,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

stories, “I’m a nosleep mod. u/cmd102 said I could post this”<sup>54</sup> by nataliahs and a story “You all need to stop posting. Right now,”<sup>55</sup> by Aleksandrovitch, which seems to be the origin of the idea that is developed throughout all the rest of the individual narratives, as the story by the use Aleksandrovitch was published two years apart from the rest of the other stories. The same user then continues the narrative one year after publishing the original post, they publish the story “You need to stop reading, right now.”<sup>56</sup>

This is a case of very elaborate, labyrinth-like storytelling, utilizing the materiality of the digital medium, specifically the tool of the hypertext that helps to reference and interconnect other stories while relying on the peculiar collaborative aspect that is further expanded upon in the comment section by these authors as well as the readers. Such collaborative storytelling displays the utilization of the capacity of hyperlinks to generate a narrative that has the potential to endure the temporal distance, creating a narrative that is open to enrich further.

## Analyses

### “HELP!!! I’m Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit!” by Jgrupe

In this post, the author tells the story of a narrator and his brother who got trapped in an Underground Parking Garage in downtown Toronto as they were on their way to a baseball game. As they are trying to find a place they are led into the dark abyss of the garage tunnels, to a point where sections stopped being titled by the alphabet letters and marked by strange symbols. The sense of unease is intensified as the architecture of the place starts to change into narrow tunnels, impossible to escape from. They ran out of gas, the battery died and the two of them were left in cold and darkness surrounded by strange noises, with an intensifying feeling like something was outside of their car. The narrator then suddenly remembers that he has a phone and service therefore typing this story as a warning and a plea for help.

The next post, or the second part of the story, is followed by their encounter with a stranger who at first seems to be another victim of the tunnels, however, the ending of the second part suggests otherwise. In the next part, they escape the creature and seemingly find their way out which once again is another illusion created by the place

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<sup>54</sup>Nataliahs, “I’m a nosleep mod. u/cmd102 said I could post this,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>55</sup> Aleksandrovitch, “You all need to stop posting. Right now,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>56</sup> Aleksandrovitch, “You need to stop reading, right now.”

that defies the laws of physics. As they are trying to navigate the way, an exit door appears. Their initial feeling of relief is replaced by horror when they realize that they found themselves, not in Toronto, but rather a different version of it. A place occupied by gruesome looking, cycloptic creatures with upside-down faces. With a growing fear for their safety, they try to return to the garage tunnels however they are caught by the guards who eventually help them return to their world. Finally, upon their arrival home, the narrator remains feeling anxious and scared that he is not truly safe as he hears voices and sees strange silhouettes in the night. He ends the narration doubtful about his future as he contemplates a comment made by one of the guards about some other danger asking what would happen if “they” found the narrator and his brother, leaving even the readers uncertain who “they” are.

The first incorporation of the paratext is the title of the story. The narrator asks for help through the title, at the same time presenting the reason why he requires it. The title captures the sense of distress as the initial word ‘help’ is capitalized, followed by exclamation marks, and it simultaneously prompts an interaction from the readers. Then followed by words such as *trapped*, *underground*, and *tunnel* imply the narrator’s limitation of movement, intensifying a sense of urgency. When put together, the title indicates the central theme that unites the narrator’s claustrophobic experience which corresponds with the overall theme of entrapment and being endangered. The author also establishes a relationship with the audience, employing the rhetorical device of conative function which prompts readers to further engage and ultimately invites them into the story.

The author thus employs the form of a narrative of interconnectedness, which is reflected specifically through the title, which is disguised as a narrative that aims at communication with other actors within the network. Thus, what can be concluded from the title, is the tendency of the author to generate a fictional narrative, that imitates the form of non-fictional content, told by a narrator. This is reflected in the choice of the capitalization of letters, thus imitating a conversational tone, which is maintained throughout the whole narrative. Simultaneously the author defamiliarizes the title, marking it as fiction, while the form resembles authentic content.

The end of the first part of the story is constituted by the narrator’s explanation of how he is able to communicate the situation to the readers, writing this experience as a

warning, which once again serves as a device that engages the audience, establishing a relationship with them:

“If you happen upon this parking garage, the one with too many levels, don’t go any further down. Stay near the surface. Get out while you still can. And if you see a parking attendant, PLEASE tell him we’re stuck down here on level  
ÆÍ █ Å ⊥ ⊕ ↔”<sup>57</sup>

This closing paragraph of the first section represents a contextual tool through which the author not only provides the background information to the story but at the same time further promotes the interactivity between the narrator and the readers. The text is composed as if it were the creator who is directly speaking to the readers, thus sustaining the imitation of the non-fictional content, through this direct addressing. Such a technique is employed as a tool that prompts reciprocity from readers and essentially invites them to interact with the text in the comment section. Moreover, the author utilizes readers’ interactions, reflecting upon them in the next part of the story, however, the author does so through the narrative, illustrating the complexity of the relationship between the author and the narrator. Such genuine interactivity is then, another tendency to sustain the tension between the authentic and fictional through this practice within the scope of the non-fictional narratives.

In part two of the story, the narrator reflects upon the interaction by the readers by inserting a note that could be equivalent to a footnote:

“I turned on my phone and took a look at my post here, wondering if anybody had ideas for how to escape. Damn, thanks for all the suggestions, everybody.  
  
Oh, I should probably get this out of the way since a few people were wondering why I didn’t just call the cops. Sorry, I guess I should have been more clear. There’s just a weird WIFI signal down here labelled “Ûñ”^ ||[°°o-тPμ↑△~½” and not actual cell service - so calling the cops was unfortunately out of the question.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite being incorporated in the middle of the text, still from the perspective of the form it represents a paratext, as this sequence contains important contextual information

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<sup>57</sup>Jgrupe, “HELP!!! I’m Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit! (Part 2),” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>58</sup>Jgrupe, “HELP!!! I’m Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit! (Part 2).”

regarding the events recalled by the narrator, nevertheless, in terms of the narrative, it allows the author to further develop the story. In this passage, the narrator turns directly to the readers and strengthens the relationship between the reader and the author. This supports the dynamic nature of the creepypasta storytelling, by acknowledging the interpretation and participation of readers and reflecting upon their interpretation then forming the narrative, therefore representing a reflection of a genuine interaction. Such incorporations of the behaviour that is traditionally taken from the general digital environment and content, then further exemplify the ability of authors to appropriate certain tools and repurpose them for storytelling, resulting in a text that brings out hesitation regarding the authenticity of such text within its audience.

The comment section represents the manifestation of the engagement with the content. One anonymous user suggested that the narrator and his brother might have found themselves in the 'Backrooms,' referencing another Creepypasta, describing backrooms in the comment as an "alternate level of reality, with entities hunting humans who noclipped there by mistake."<sup>59</sup> This points towards the openness of digital space,<sup>60</sup> as the users are contributing to the story by referencing other Creepypasta content and are able to make unexpected connections among those texts. As reflected by the author in the next part of the story, there are the commentators who suggest calling for help, "Dude call the emergency services! Unless your batteries alr dead?!"<sup>61</sup> Another user supports the narrator's, fictional story which promotes the immersive quality and also alludes to a different Creepypasta<sup>62</sup>:

"I've heard of this phenomenon happening before. Also happens with elevators. There is a bottom to this parking garage (which in turn leads to an exit) but it usually takes several months to reach it."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>[deleted], "HELP!!! I'm Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit!," Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>60</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 86.

<sup>61</sup> My\_RedemptionArc, "HELP!!! I'm Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit!"

<sup>62</sup> The possible Creepypasta story, or rather an accumulation of multiple Creepypasta stories, this user is referencing is most likely "The Elevator Game." The story is built on the premise of accessing alternative realities through specific steps in an elevator. Other stories with the same motif of entering different realities through an elevator ritual include: "After reading about the Elevator game here, I decided to play it." (darkinferno07), "Hidden Rules For The Elevator Game" (Kyle Harrison), "Do Not Play the elevator game. Words of a big time skeptic." (ripped\_geek), and many others.

<sup>63</sup> LombaxMaster, "HELP!!! I'm Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit!"

These references and possible connections to various content, the different creepypasta stories, showcase the interconnectedness among not only the users but also their works. This aspect of intertextuality has consequences imposed directly upon the content, which then accordingly affects the experience around this interrelated content, which will be addressed in further chapters. The materiality in this case facilitates access to this additional information, through the employment of hypertext. However, in this story, hypertext is primarily employed as a mechanism that facilitates readers' navigation throughout the story.

The narrative is told in four parts, each of which is accessed through a hyperlink at the end of each of the individual parts, and at the beginning of the subsequent narratives, provides a link for the previous part, thus allowing an easier orientation. Therefore, the author utilizes the hyperlink system, not solely for the purpose of imitation of the narrative of interconnectedness, but as a vehicle in between the parts of the narrative. On the other hand, a hyperlink allows for a dissection of the story into individual parts, which then, in turn, allows for the tendencies that mark it as an imitation, such as the interaction between the network actors, to take place. This illustrates the two-fold purpose of the hyperlink the system.

#### “What to do with a garden full of shoes?” by msmith thekid

The story begins with the narrator and essentially passes on an account of events experienced by his friend, whose son died under suspicious circumstances. He expresses his uncertainty surrounding the events and feels confused as he is expected to cooperate during the investigation. Then the focus shifts to the narration of his friend, Carl who moved with his family into an old, isolated house. Ever since then, cold spots around the house would suddenly appear and seemingly move through the house. Other incidents had occurred, including the finding of numerous old children's shoes buried in the garden. Despite being scared at first, both the narrator and his friend would not consider it a threat. However, further incidents occurred according to Carl, such as the unusual odour in the house, and the disappearance of their cat which would be later replaced by a cat that appeared at their doorstep on Halloween. One night Carl and his wife woke up and found out that all the shoes they found in the garden were gone, and among them also Noah's shoes, one of Carl's children. As they went to check up on their kids, they found their younger son, Archie, wondering around the hallway. He made a chilling remark on seeing his brother Noah leaving with a group of dancing

children, making their way into the garden. It was then that the parents found Noah's dead body. His mysterious death was followed by speculation about neglect or abuse. The narrator admits he is not sure where is the truth, despite being friends with the family. While helping them with the funeral, the narrator stumbles upon a box in which should be Noah's shoes, instead he finds it empty. The narrator then only acknowledges his suspicion on where those shoes are, however, cannot bring himself to look.

The title of the story once again function as a tool that engages the audience, as it is formed as a question for the audience. This form of title, expressed as a request, seeking advice from an audience, represents the first establishment of the relationship between the author and the other users, while simultaneously initiating further interaction with them, which then may prompt the author to develop the story further. From a reader's perspective, the title in the form of a question predicts the overall theme of uncertainty and helplessness which frames the whole story. The emotional engagement of the readers is further manipulated by the author who incorporates an unusual phrasing. The author is aware of the range of possibilities in the sentence 'What to do with a garden full of ...' and incorporates the word, 'shoes' which surprises and potentially disturbs the readers who make certain predictions when reading,<sup>64</sup> and we may argue that word such as 'shoes' is outside of the common range of possibilities that are narrowed down by the linguistic context. This fundamentally manipulates with reader's relationship with the text as it forms the reader's expectations and mirrors the disturbing turn of events presented in the story.

The title thus combines two tendencies, the first is the process of defamiliarization which stems from the lexical arrangement, as the narrator makes inquiries about a garden full of shoes, evoking an unsettling image within its audience. Simultaneously is the nature of such a strange proposition, as the author employs the curiosity gap, which draws its audience in. This is then tied to the second technique utilized by the author and is mirrored in the title, and it is the focus on the form. The title, formed as a question, thus relies on the connection among the network actors, treating the readers more as an audience to whom the narrator turns to for advice. Thus, promotes the reappropriating and repurposing of the techniques and norms of the digital space, which

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<sup>64</sup> Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," 124.

is additionally enriched and strengthened by the readers as the interaction then illustrates their desire to maintain the hesitation.

In another part of the paratext, the introductory section, the narrator expresses his doubt surrounding the story. The author frames the story with a preface by the narrator who provides the readers with a description of his inner conflict about the story of his friend he is about to tell. The narrator alludes to the troubling nature as he asserts the following: “I can’t stop thinking about it, replaying the story as Carl told it to me...Mostly, I can’t stop thinking about the shoes.”<sup>65</sup> This not only incorporates the helplessness but also sets up the subject of haunting obsession, despite creating a distance from the story as such when considering it is not his story per se, but a story of his close friend who is the one who essentially recounts the events. This depersonalization then mirrors the stand of the readers who are also not directly involved with the story and similarly are receivers of the story, in the same position as the narrator. The narrator in this case presents himself as a mere mediator of the story.

The comment section then further develops the theme of uncertainty, as the author continues the narration with the narrator who questions the truthfulness of the story as presented by his friend Carl. The narrator does so as one of the users questions the narrator’s uncertainty by inserting the following comment: “I don't think they did anything to Noah. What makes you think they did?”<sup>66</sup> To which the author responds with the narrator’s claim that Noah’s sudden death is odd, but simultaneously indirectly rejecting a supernatural element of the story:

“You never know what really goes on behind closed doors do you? Perfectly healthy boys shouldn’t just die... and I love my friend but his story is...it doesn’t make sense... I just don’t know”<sup>67</sup>

The narrator here further generates tension and questions the supernatural while the readers are reinforcing it, which through this reciprocity, further develops and extends the experience of the audience. The story is further advanced as another user suggests that the events in the story might be the result of a curse bestowed upon the house by some previous owner, and it might be traced through public records.<sup>68</sup> The narrator then

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<sup>65</sup> msmith\_thekid, “What to do with a garden full of shoes?” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>66</sup> Theuntraceableone, “What to do with a garden full of shoes?”

<sup>67</sup> msmith\_thekid, “What to do with a garden full of shoes?”

<sup>68</sup> stonedoblivion, “What to do with a garden full of shoes?” Reddit, r/nosleep.

replies with an appreciation of the advice and further inserts that he is returning to visit the family and make sure that their other son, Archie remains well.<sup>69</sup> This interaction between the users and the author composed of these responses contributes to the creation of the story as a whole. In turn, this ability to influence the narrative is indicative of genuine interaction, and interaction that has the ability to impact the content,<sup>70</sup> which assigns the content with the dynamic quality.

The narrative in this case is told through not only the post shared by the author, but also through the comment section. Therefore, both the audience and the author utilize the digital space, and the tools that are conventionally utilized for discussion, for fictional storytelling. In other words, the story is partly based on an imitation of the non-fictional content, and it is done through the discussion between the readers and the author, a formation of a narrative that imitates conventional discussion. Repurposing the devices of comment section for storytelling, as well as the form that marks the narrative of interconnectedness generally employed for generating non-fictional texts, is utilized as a narrative technique, contributing to the sense of authenticity, which forms the liminal experience.

“My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying” by Maliagirl1314

The narrator describes the recent unsettling events surrounding his wife, Lynn, whom he had known for years now, and who never displayed any abnormal behaviour, nor suffered any mental illness. However, this changed as she started to act strangely. His wife started to peek behind corners, curtains, from inside a trunk, furniture, even at night, while smiling sometimes even laughing, making the narrator unnerved. When the narrator confronted her after one such experience, she laughs it off, which makes the narrator think, that she only tries to share his love for all things creepy. For a while, her strange habit seemed to stop. When he confronts her about it, the narrator is left terrified as she answers that maybe she only got better at hiding. This comment left him disturbed and paranoid. Lynn’s behaviour gets even more unsettling, more bizarre, making weird noises, having wide eyes, and grinning unnaturally. The narrator gets so overwhelmed with fear, that he runs away to his brother’s house, telling him, that he and Lynn had a fight. He stays with his brother Chris and his wife, Rebecca for the night.

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<sup>69</sup> msmith\_thekid, “What to do with a garden full of shoes?”

<sup>70</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 82.

Feeling confused but finally safe, the narrator is awakened in the middle of the night as he feels the sudden all too familiar sensation of being watched. He opens his eyes and sees Lynn behind the window, grinning. The next day, the narrator decides to call Lynn's mother as he does not know where else to turn. Her mother is at first quite dismissive, however, her demeanour changes after the narrator's insistence that something is truly wrong with Lynn. Still, her only advice is to seek professional help. This makes the narrator ask for help from Chris and Rebecca who believe him and are determined to support him. When Chris and the narrator arrive at their house, the first thing they notice is the rotting smell, quiet, and darkness. Exploring the narrator's home, they found several eyeballs, carefully displayed in the narrator's closet, presumably collected by Lynn from small animals. They are determined to leave when suddenly both are overwhelmed with the sense of being observed. To their horror, they find Lynn under the bed, an unnerving smile spread across her face, with blood on her hands. In an attempt to help his wife, the narrator is attacked with a piece of glass clutched in Lynn's hand. Both Chris and the narrator managed to escape and call the police, however, Lynn was nowhere to be found. The narrator, in an attempt to get away from his wife as far as possible, stayed at a motel, when he got a text saying, "I found you,"<sup>71</sup> with a photo of a close up of Lynn's eye, leaving the narrator once again with a sudden feeling of being watched.

The author indicates a sense of unease and escalating fear as conveyed in a title that is in the form of two short sentences. The phrase "My wife" here indicates a personal matter and when juxtaposed with the following, it signals disturbing behaviour from a close person which in itself evokes both fear of this person and fear for them. Moreover, such personal involvement entails a strong emotional connection that is shared across the readers. The following part then provides more background to the story by providing a vivid description of the wife's behaviour as "peeking from around corners and behind furniture." The wife's habit of displaying a child-like behaviour points towards some sort of error or even disturbance. The sinister nature of things is confirmed to the reader in the second part of the title which says, "It's gone from worse to terrifying," which implies a gradual progression of discomfort, leading up to terror, which is mirrored throughout the story itself.

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<sup>71</sup> Maliagirl1314, "My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying," Reddit, r/nosleep.

In the focus on the form, the title as such, employs the tool of curiosity gap, in which the author provides partially the context of the experience, and what is essentially the result of the recalled events. Such technique is then combined with the defamiliarization, drawing readers in. Furthermore, a level of defamiliarization is the title with respect to the space, as the title stresses the disturbing and unusual, leading the reader towards the negative interpretations, signifying a possible danger, that stands out and is defamiliarized within a space mainly employed for interaction and discussion.

This sense of unfolding fear is present through the alternation between the state of safety and control with a sudden sense of paranoia and danger. This sense is amplified through the reader's engagement who themselves are infected by such emotions as the subject of paranoia and being watched representing the preoccupation with the sensory perception. This is confirmed by several readers who display their sense of unease in the comment section, an example being the following:

“Watching behind corners has got to me one of my number one fears. You've successfully creeped me out and made me grateful I have my TV playing so I'm not just laying here in the dark”<sup>72</sup>

Additionally, such a response is evidence that the author successfully transported the experience of the narrator onto the readers, who were essentially lured into the world of the narrator. This direct response from the reader and expression of their distress from reading the story is combined with comments that discuss and develop the story in multiple directions and further generate an unnerving plotline. Such a response is to be expected as the author of the story marked it as a series, therefore encouraging such discussions among the readers. However, the story told is only a one-part narrative.

The author utilizes specific tools, thus forming certain expectations for the reader, and inspiring a sense of hope of bringing potential resolution to the story. This is nevertheless taken away from the readers since there are no other interactions by the narrator. In other words, such a technique of designating a text as a series, while not providing a continuation of the narrative, then heightens the established tone of fear and essentially amplifies the ominous nature, while imbuing it with a sense of authenticity. The qualities infused into the storyline, such as the sense of uncertainty experienced and

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<sup>72</sup> tasteslikefailure “My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

described by the narrator, correspond to the actions of the narrator as the missing continuation suggests that the narrator is indeed in danger, giving the impression of the narrator and author being one and the same. The author deliberately blurs their identities with the narrator. This then illustrates the potential of such digital narratives to deliver an experience that disembarks from the digital and seizes the reader or perhaps lures the readers more into the narrative space.

The readers negotiate the interpretation as one of the claims that appeared in the comments is the idea that Lynn's mother knows more than she lets on. They also observe the narrator's short note that he and Lynn's mother never got along as her demeanor towards him was distant or even cold and during their brief encounter, Lynn was the one who ended the meeting, which was viewed by the narrator as a gesture of kindness.<sup>73</sup> The readers, however, interpret this behaviour as a link to the strange actions displayed by Lynn. An example of such an interpretation is expressed in one such comment that communicates the idea that the reason why Lynn kept the visit so brief is to prevent her mother from telling the narrator about her unsettling habits. Such an interpretation was agreed upon by a significant number of readers,<sup>74</sup> which was signalled not only by other comments of the same type but also through the amount of upvotes for comments such as this:

“I think the wife crept on her mother her whole childhood. Who wouldn't be a bit on the offensive if you had to raise a child like that, you'd never be able to sleep! It makes sense why the mother-in-law acts the way she does and can't help her daughter, she's already tried.

Also why the wife would usher OP<sup>75</sup> off, so fast so mom wouldn't accidentally let it slip; had to "keep up appearances" for as long as possible.”<sup>76</sup>

Another example of an alternative interpretation of this story presented by readers is illustrated by one user who shares the idea that the narrator is in reality dealing with some sort of supernatural entity that is pretending to be his wife, but something similar

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<sup>73</sup> Maliagirl1314/, “My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>74</sup> The comment presented below received 1600 upvotes, signalling approval of the statement

<sup>75</sup> OP is an abbreviation for the original poster, in a sense the author of the post, but for our current purposes, it means the narrator of the story.

<sup>76</sup> GalaxyFlower12, “My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying.”

is happening to Lynn who is also facing such entity.<sup>77</sup> The user also explains that this theory is based once again on the information provided by the narrator as he briefly mentioned Lynn's comment about how the narrator scares her sometimes too,<sup>78</sup> suggesting that both of them are haunted by some malevolent forces. Such an interpretation of the narrative was agreed upon by a significant number of readers, as the comment that initiated this theory received over 2,400 upvotes.

These are the instances in which the readers change certain meanings and develop the story in a certain way. The comment section demonstrates that Creepypasta storytelling is established on the dynamic nature between the author and readers, but also indicates the presence of the generative aspect of this type of storytelling as it is the readers themselves who further develop the storyline or find possible explanations for the events as presented by the narrator of the story. The comment section proves to be the most significant paratext feature in this case, as the readers are in a way creating their own content, through these interpretations of the original story and ultimately enriching the narrative. This signals a significant level of repurposing the digital tool of comment section, into a device for enriching and developing the narrative further.

The tool of hypertext is utilized in this narrative not by the author but by commentators, who provide a link, and a comment that says: "In case anybody is having trouble picturing someone peeking at you."<sup>79</sup> This link takes the users to another Reddit post which is an unsettling picture of someone peeking through a closet. This aligns with Schachtner's claim that the digital space brings the possibility for anyone to share and post their images online,<sup>80</sup> which implies that the readers are able to attach and essentially bring together different content and formats in order to convey or enrich the meaning and experience. In other words, they promote the interconnectedness of the content in the digital space.

In this case, the commentator utilizes the possibility to attach an image and, therefore integrate another medium into the story. This incorporation of another format in the

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<sup>77</sup> denatured\_enzyme\_, "My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying," Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>78</sup> Maliagirl1314/, "My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying."

<sup>79</sup> Thetwistedspelen, "My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying."

<sup>80</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 100.

digital space is known as the characteristic of multimodality but is utilized by the reader who contributes to the narrative, therefore proving the co-creative possibilities in the digital space. The employment of extralinguistic elements, in the form of a photograph, supports and even enriches the story, as it serves as a visual aid that accompanies the narrative and enhances the experience for other readers.

“A brain injury let me see the real world. I don't like it.” by cosmogoblin

The story starts with the narrator telling the audience about a car crash that happened two years ago and despite the odds the narrator survived. During his surgery, however, due to his critical condition, he was considered clinically dead for 95 seconds, which led to him being in a coma for eight months. Surprisingly he recovered. Then the narrator recalls the night of the crash. The narrator mentioned that he is a neuroscientist and that night he was coming back from his research on the perceptual phenomenon known as synaesthesia, a condition that enables one to experience things through multiple senses, meaning people with such conditions are able to smell sounds for example, while his research specifically focused on people who are claiming to see auras.

The narrator continues with his description of the events that followed his discharge from the hospital, and with the help of a nurse Anita, everything seemed to be going well. However, when the narrator got a brain scan, he noticed some abnormality in one part of his brain, in the amygdala, the centre of emotional processing, which led him to self-medicate with psychostimulants and antipsychotics. Gradually he lowered the dosage. It was then that he started experiencing disturbing sensory perception. During his shopping, he discovered that all the fruit was rotten, having mold growing on it, while nobody but him noticed. Then he started noticing auras that surrounded people, dark shadows. This made the narrator significantly more nervous, causing him to stay isolated in the house. After two weeks he finally went outside only to find that the world around him was rotten and decaying, with trees covered in mushrooms, houses falling apart with an omnipresent foul smell. Things got even stranger as he took a photo that displayed a world without any weirdness, a normal world, and his conclusion was that his brain damage enabled him to see the world unfiltered, due to the damaged amygdala that is supposed to filter the input. Determined to know more, the narrator decided to observe and explore further this unfiltered world. He saw that all the people were surrounded by a dark aura with tendrils that seemed to be feeding off of them,

deteriorating people's faces, a second sun, and morbidly large flies with four legs and hand-like limbs.

These bizarrely looking creatures seemed to notice the narrator's ability to see them which unnerved him and made him hide in his deteriorating house, to which the flies followed him and surrounded it, trapping him inside. The narrator ends the story with his concern about his supplies as he barricaded himself in the house, with the continuous pervasive buzzing of the flies outside, leaving himself in a dark in fear for his life.

The author incorporates once again a specific structure, which consists of two short sentences as in the previous story.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, as in the previous stories, the title is crafted in the narrator's voice, who asserts already in the title to have had a brain injury and further elaborates that this granted him to perceive the world differently, precisely he is able to "see the real world." In this case, in the title itself, specifically mentioning 'brain injury' may indicate a potentially unreliable narrator and implies a certain distrust of the content. Such distrust may be eventually dissolved as the readers discover the narrator's scientific background, which prompts the audience to trust the expert's judgment.

Nevertheless, as the readers examine the first sentence of the title further, they encounter the second part, expressing the idea of gaining the ability to see the real world, which unsettles the reader, through the implication of perceiving a false or unreal world, as well as the abstractness of the phrase. The sentence does not say how the 'real world' is different from the other one lived by everyone except the narrator. The author attempts to disturb the reader further, as the second part of the title plainly elaborates on the real world as the narrator offers an unidentifiable evaluation of such a world. That is to say that the second sentence of the title simply says, "I don't like it," which then confirms the implications of the unsettling nature conveyed by the previous section of the title and intensifies the emotional effect as it leaves the interpretation open, including the appearance of the 'real world,' being deliberately vague. Overall, the reader is gradually unsettled by such structure of the title as well as by the language that

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<sup>81</sup> This is also present in the following chosen story, therefore implying a certain tendency of Creepypasta texts, which, however, does not form a rule whatsoever.

encourages individual readers to assert their own interpretation and engage fully with their imagination.

The narrator expresses a sense of hopelessness in the closing paragraph, while simultaneously acknowledging the narrative space “So with nothing else to do, I’m posting my account to the internet. As if that will do any good. The best I can hope for now is that I run out of food and starve to death.”<sup>82</sup> The narrator justifies why he is telling the story in hopes of reaching out to the readers, attempting to connect them, and prompting them into further interaction, a pervasive element within the Creepypasta narrative, that is discussed in the final part of the thesis. However, in the context of materiality and repurposing, the author draws attention to the space in what is considered the paratext, as it does not represent the story as such, but it provides the context of the narrator who reflects on the text. In this case, the author repurposes the tool of paratext as a part of the narrative.

The comment section then serves as the tool that promotes the openness of the digital space,<sup>83</sup> as the readers express unique perspectives on the story. However, such openness is restricted in this narrative space to the shared identity,<sup>84</sup> which guides the recognition of the central theme being the ambiguity of the story. The readers are offering their advice on the narrator’s situation and expressing concern about his well-being. One reader shares his experience with a brain injury which led to hallucinations and interprets the narrator’s story as a state of psychosis, therefore advising the narrator to call the emergency service.<sup>85</sup> This interpretation leans into the idea of an unreliable narrator as predicted by the analysis of the title. Moreover, it works with the theme of ambiguity and generates tension that leads to further dynamic interaction.

The narrator responds to the content generated by the readers, responding with feelings of dissatisfaction with the feedback he received:

“Lots of comments here that really aren't helpful. Do I sound crazy? I'm not. The antipsychotics act as a filter; without them I can see the world as it really is. I'm

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<sup>82</sup> Cosmogoblin, “A brain injury let me see the real world. I don't like it,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>83</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 86.

<sup>84</sup> Unified identity of the readers as co-creators who share the narrative space, tools, and conventions. Concept introduced by Norman N. Holland “Unity Identity Text Self,” 1975.

<sup>85</sup> Starshapedsand, , “A brain injury let me see the real world. I don't like it.”

sure some of those posters are genuinely concerned for my health, but I wonder: how many of them are, consciously or otherwise, working for the flies?”<sup>86</sup>

Apart from the functional aspect of such a response from the author, considering such a response generates further content, is also a sign of true interactivity.<sup>87</sup> Such response is shaped by the content of the readers, which forms the relationship between the author and the audience and additionally proves that the audience, or the readers are the co-creators with a genuine power to significantly shape the content and its interpretation. Regarding the shaping various interpretation, the narrator’s assertion that the readers are somehow cooperating with the flies makes him even more unreliable which is showcased in other comments.

In this instance, the author reappropriates the space of the paratext, the comment section, as a space for continuing the narrative, thus defamiliarizing the content in the context of the space in this process. The narrative is highly imbued with authentic tendencies, specifically this technique of storytelling that imitates a genuine discussion and interaction with the readers and the incorporation of genuine scientific information. Furthermore, this interplay between authentic and fictional is developed and maintained by the readers, their discussion, and interpretations as they attempt to present an alternative explanation, while the narrator defends their stands. This indicates that readers and the narrator genuinely create the narrative collectively, leading to an inquiry regarding the concept of authorship in such spaces, as well as the subject of identities formed in this space, issues examined in the second part of this thesis.

## **Discussion to Part I. The Liminal in the Subversive Presentation of the Story**

This section explored the implications of the materiality of the medium that houses the Creepypasta narratives, specifically illustrating that the affordances of the digital medium imprinted upon the narratives, expanding the potential regarding the narrative possibilities. The materiality of the medium participates significantly in generating an ambiguous space, defying the traditional conventions of the horror mode by challenging the primary function of the space that was turned into a narrative space which offers an ambiguous experience that lies in the reader’s process. Both the authors and readers are

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<sup>86</sup> Cosmogoblin, , “A brain injury let me see the real world. I don't like it,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>87</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 89.

the bricoleurs who recombine the elements of the digital space and escape the strict binaries between the authentic and fictional, resulting in the genesis of the liminal space based on constant tension and dynamicism.

It is apparent from the analysis, that the narratives are subjected to certain tendencies, still presenting a type of text that is essentially in a constant state of flux, as the readers are adding to the narrative, challenging it with their interpretations, enriching it with their contributions. It is important to note that this does not imply a complete overturn of the roles as the author has the ability to respond and displays a significant degree of control over the narrative, that is they have the ability to set boundaries. Once again, the readers are able to reject the boundaries and defy the author. This ‘play’ between the author and readers is situated in the paratext of the narratives and enabled by the materiality.

As the analyses illustrate, paratext promotes the dynamism between the author and readers who become the co-creators in this process. Therefore, in the context of Creepypasta, we may understand paratext also as the vehicle of interactivity that leads to the whole content and the whole experience. The efforts to push the reader toward participation are apparent in the analysis of the titles, which display a high level of defamiliarization and equally highly interactional properties. These characteristics stem from the digital space and its employment as a medium for collective storytelling, entailing alternative roles of both the readers and the authors, as they essentially challenge the traditional identities, an issue that is discussed in the subsequent section.

Creepypasta texts are significantly enriched with the properties of digital media. Specifically, the structural characteristics as articulated by Christina Schachtner. As the analysis demonstrated, Creepypasta is a text that is generated in a system with a specific structure. Interconnectedness is identified as one of the specific features that affect the content in the digital environment.<sup>88</sup> However, the stories themselves are heavily influenced specifically by the interconnectedness on the social level which results in the dynamic system of storytelling. In other words, it is the social network that gives rise to this organization of the narrative. The storytelling process therefore could be summarized as follows: The author establishes a relationship with the audience and through various elements of paratext invites them to interact, the readers then react to

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<sup>88</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*, 89.

the content through the paratext feature, the comment section, and may even create their own content. Then the author, adhering to another structural characteristic of digital media, interactivity, replies to the reaction by influencing their further content accordingly. Interconnectedness generates a whole and ties the individual pieces of text, therefore Creepypasta is viewed as not individual texts but as an assemblage of various texts by various authors, grounded in a specific generative system.

To extend such observation, these features enable authors to push the boundaries of storytelling experience as they are appealing to the participation of readers, who are co-creators of the content. Paratext has gained a prominent quality as it is part of the content and would disappear in a printed adaptation. The strategy employed by the authors regarding the paratext is to appeal to the possibility of participating, which may be seen more as a necessity and a norm for Creepypasta, as all the analyses demonstrated this. This intricate way of storytelling is certainly influenced by the medium but is also based on the intention of the author, and the audience to create an experience around a horror-mode narrative which is based on collective storytelling. The digital space is then a tool to access this experience. This idea of the reader's perception being formed by the author's intentions and its implication to the content will be pursued in the following chapters.

## **Part II. The Sociological Workings of the Digital Horror Narrative and its Implications upon the Experience; Authors, Readers, Narrators, and Monsters**

The first chapter established the great influence of the materiality of the digital space upon the content, while pointing out the importance of collectivity and readers becoming the narrators as well. This chapter expands upon these notions, exploring the implication of storytelling in community and its contribution to liminal experience. The intricate mechanisms of such digital community, allow for a specific form of a content, while maintaining a distinctive and considerable level of coherence among the individual narratives.

## Introduction to Part II.

Creepypasta represents a unique narrative in the consequence of the space which enables a new kind of manipulation with the features of the narrative, that enriches the storytelling as described in the previous section, and consequently the experience. In spite of that, the discussion concerning such content cannot stem solely from the description and functions of digital materiality, due to the heavy emphasis on the active user. In other words, considering only the architecture of digital horror storytelling is insufficient for a description of these narratives and cannot fully capture the implications and effects of such a body of text. Therefore, in order to thoroughly explore the effects and essentially the nature of Creepypasta, the aspect of the social workings needs to be considered.

This section discusses the investigation of the formation of content within the framework of participatory culture. Emphasizes the role of collectivity and its function as a tool operating on the broader level, resulting in a coherent space and its operation on the level of individual narratives and its transformative force upon the identities in the Creepypasta space. Then returning to the previous inquiry of the collective efforts to achieve certain objectives and its influence on the content, specifically exploring the characteristics of the community of practice, expanding upon the concept of affinity space and the importance of unified identity.

### **The Powerful Participation; Investigating the Engagement as a Source of the Original Output**

The Creepypasta community was generated in the digital space and represents an active element, an active and creative audience that produces its own content and is primarily accessed by other community members. Meaning that the content is both generated and consumed within the community. These characteristics point toward the manifestation of the phenomenon of participatory culture, a culture that encourages generating and sharing one's content in a group with a certain level of connection among the members, while the practice of the community is shared and handed over to the newcomer.<sup>89</sup> Such implementations are very close to the processes promoted by the discussed Web 2.0. However, Web 2.0 merely facilitates such operations, as a participatory culture is determined by the community factor. This is also expressed in part by the claim that

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<sup>89</sup> Jenkins, *Defining Participatory Culture*, 4.

Web 2.0 facilitates participation in the sense of enabling one to be engaged or interact with something rather than being involved in it,<sup>90</sup> as the latter refers to operating in a community which is referred to as participation.

### ***Participatory Culture, Fandom, and Content***

The concept of participatory culture was explored and articulated in connection with fandom culture, an audience, formed by a group of people who share a certain level of passion surrounding certain cultural products. The phenomenon of participatory culture was extensively addressed by the media scholar Henry Jenkins, who explored the impact of new media, later digital media. Some of his notable include *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992) which is considered to be one of the most important works within the fan studies. Jenkins focused on the TV fans and described them as highly knowledgeable about their object of *fandoming*, high engagement with it, and most importantly, he described fandom culture as one that represents the counterculture that confronts the mainstream, while drawing inspiration from outside content.<sup>91</sup> The Creepypasta community is in many regards similar to the concept of fandom culture but simultaneously diverges from it at certain points.

A more suitable approach to this space is its understanding as an affinity space, a space based on shared interests among the members who strive to support one another,<sup>92</sup> a characteristic articulated by Nicolle Lamerichs' *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures* (2018). Based on the previous inquiry in the first part of this thesis, the link among these community members is their objective to capture the liminal experience within the horror mode. The members represent the horror enthusiasts who share and discuss their contributions among themselves. The significant difference is the question surrounding the object of the mentioned *fandoming*. Now, it was established that the shared interest is indeed horror, however, there delineation must be made between the specific content the members draw from and the way it is appropriated. It could be simply asserted that for the Creepypasta fandom, the object of appropriation is horror fiction and the Creepypasta community is a group of horror fans. This assertion is not necessarily false, but it is too broad and

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<sup>90</sup> Jenkins, *Defining Participatory Culture*, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, (Routledge, 2013), 17.

<sup>92</sup> Nicolle Lamerichs, *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*, (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 16.

disregards the level of creative productivity of the participants and their highly original content.

Fandom is characterized as a participative audience that bases its content on material produced by the entertainment industry, that is appropriated by the fans and processed.<sup>93</sup> In the case of community, it simply does not fit the definition as the Creepypasta authors may be inspired by or reference certain topics from outside the community. An instance of an outside reference is when the content revolves around an artifact of pop culture, such as the story *Suicidemouse.avi*, which refers to a well-known cartoon Mickey Mouse. This is indeed an instance of references taken from the outside from the outside, and the narrative as a whole is original. Nevertheless, the main impetus is the originality of the output, and the content enriches the space, even though it may follow a certain theme or concept that is already established either from the outside or within the community itself. This tendency is then illustrated in the analyses.

The users tell stories and often include their own fictional places such as the story “I work at a private museum for the rich and famous. One horrifying exhibition made me quit” by the user *lcsimpson* whose multiple narratives revolve around, as the title suggests, a secret museum that houses unusual, eerie exhibitions that are hidden from the majority of the public and is meant only for wealthy guests such as the poisonous glass butterflies<sup>94</sup> or the “child-sized beetles from Madagascar.”<sup>95</sup> In this first story, the narrator tells one of his experiences during which one of the exhibitions, a seemingly dead woman who resembles more of a plastic mannequin, escapes during one of the tours, while one of the guests kills a woman by pushing her to a Living Wall, another of the museum’s exhibition, which tore her apart. At the end of the story, the narrator suggests that they have other stories to tell, which entails that the author intends to create a series of interconnected stories that are centred around this unusual museum created by the author. These invented spaces are not necessary in order to achieve a level of originality.

Many stories are inspired by or draw from already-existing concepts and elements from other pieces of literature or folklore. An example of such intermingling is the short

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<sup>93</sup> Jenkins *Defining Participatory Culture* 1.

<sup>94</sup> *lcsimpson*, “I work at a private museum for the rich and famous. One horrifying exhibition made me quit,” Reddit, *r/nosleep*.

<sup>95</sup> *lcsimpson*, “I work at a private museum for the rich and famous. One horrifying exhibition made me quit.”

Creepypasta “Krampus” by the user Rha3gar who published a story about how on the night of December 5<sup>th</sup> their town is terrorized by the murders occurring each year.<sup>96</sup> The story draws from, as the title suggests, European tradition, however, this reference is further subtly incorporated into the text, such as the date of these murders in the story which coincides with the date of the Krampus tradition. The narrator shares that the killer leaves behind short tales written in a verse, which reveal that the victims were not good people, this once again refers to the folklore of Krampus punishing bad behaviour. Moreover, the inclusion of these rhymed tales highlights the innovation and creativity behind the story, as the author imitates the poetic storytelling of the poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas” but introduces the horror element as well: “Krampus only laughed, as he shook his rusty chain. He hung Fredrik by the neck, until he writhed in pain. The links constricted, digging into skin. Fredrik then cried out, paying for his sin. He begged and pleaded, until his final breath. With a beautiful snap—Frederick bled to death.”<sup>97</sup> Simultaneously it is not suggested by the narrator that it is indeed the mythological creature that commits the crimes, and the interpretation suggested by the narrator is that the explanation is not of supernatural origin, but rather presents an idea that the town is in fact dealing with a serial killer. This is illustrated in the closing paragraph of the story: “The police are seeking any information that may help bring the killer to justice.”<sup>98</sup> The interpretation of the narrator does not necessarily coincide with the indented interpretation of the author, as it may serve as the dynamics among the poster and the audience who are pushed by the author towards speculating whether or not there is or is not a supernatural entity involved. Such a dissonance of interpretations is discussed in a later section. This example illustrates the idea that despite its heavy inspiration drawn from external material, the story as a whole is marked by considerable innovation regarding the content.

These examples illustrate, that horror is simply a way of sharing such content, similar to the fans expressing themselves in the written form, in the case of fanfiction, which also can be written in diverse modes. This is also connected to another aspect that is found in the discussions on fandom culture, and it is the emotional engagement with the mentioned object of *fandoming*. Emotional engagement is considered a crucial aspect of

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<sup>96</sup> Rha3gar “Krampus,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>97</sup> Rha3gar “Krampus.”

<sup>98</sup> Rha3gar “Krampus.”

fandom similar to the affinity space in which the stories are generated, it serves as a structural glue that forms the experience.

### ***Collectivity and Creativity***

As evidenced above, the Creepypasta community is very specific in its output. There is, however, a dimension of the Creepypasta narrative that is appropriated, that is the reliance on collectivity in regard to the creative production. A substantial amount of culture from the previous eras is based on the processes of borrowing, imitation, copying, and more importantly collaboration among individuals.<sup>99</sup> These operations based on certain forms of inspiration are distinctive and to a degree similar to the essence of fandom culture as well as the digital culture. The collaborative aspect however is apparent within the Creepypasta narrative as well as the broader level, the space as a whole that is marked by both its impetus of the original and its tendency to rely on existing content.

Such collective creative efforts stem from the oldest prehistoric era, for example, some of the oldest cave paintings consist of individual paintings that as a whole generate a larger artwork.<sup>100</sup> Creepypasta space, the Reddit forum, then represents a canvas onto which the individual creators contribute their creations that produce the whole. The collaboration in the creepypasta context functions on multiple levels, on the individual, and in a broader context. The individual stories are marked by collaborative efforts in form of the comments, as the users react to the story, they provide a certain contribution. This is illustrated in the story from the analysis of the previous section, “A brain injury let me see the real world. I don't like it,” where the other users contribute alternative interpretations and question the narrator's reliability. This is reflected by the narrator's response as discussed in the analysis. The responses by other users construct the story as a whole, they expand the narrative as they add information or provide their own insight into the fictional account, this simultaneously promotes interconnectedness among individuals and strengthens the relationships among the users.

Such cooperative efforts also operate on the broader level, which are represented by systematic collaborative constructions. The individual operations are also marked by

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<sup>99</sup> Giancarlo Frosio, “Cumulative creativity, collaboration and borrowing.” In *Reconciling Copyright with Cumulative Creativity* (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2018), 18.

<sup>100</sup> Frosio, “Cumulative creativity, collaboration and borrowing,” 20.

certain references to other stories, as in the story analysed, “HELP!!! I'm Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit!” as one of the commentators mentions that the narrator may be trapped in the backrooms,<sup>101</sup> This establishes the interconnectedness of the stories of the Creepypasta space, and it is done through readers’ ability to understand and utilize the knowledge gained through the interaction with other Creepypasta stories, an aspect that is considered in a later passage. Simultaneously it showcases a somewhat self-sufficient space, that is a space that is constructed by specific concepts, and elements that are not part of reality and generates a fictional world.

The narrators themselves make such references to other works, an example of this is the story “The thing in the backrooms” by the user named ThatExoGuy, whose narrator gets stuck in a never-ending labyrinth of rooms. Following the encounter with the other trapped victim of the maze, Vanessa, and the narrator are haunted by a terrifying uncanny monster that lurks in the backrooms.<sup>102</sup> The author of the story draws from an already-introduced Creepypasta motif of the backrooms and adheres to the ‘rules’ of the backrooms motif for example a story that that may be the inspiration behind this is named simply “The Backrooms” by the user yourdndguy who seemingly establishes the rules of the backrooms, even mentions the existence of those creatures. Nevertheless, the primary focus of the story is the existence of the space described as backrooms as the former story that was discussed is more directed towards the narrator’s experience with the entity itself. Accordingly, this story expands the Creepypasta motif of backrooms, which is done by other authors who utilize such a topic. Therefore, despite some sort of established ideas and rules for specific motifs, they are not definitely fixed, but rather they are in development due to the interactions with the motif, exemplifying ‘the free play,’ that is the formation of novel narratives that draw from the existing ones.

In this sense, the broadest level of the collaborative principle then generates a narrative space that resembles in certain aspects a story world. The individual output is transformed through the collaborative process and forms a larger whole, eventually a new narrative space that is interconnected through certain mechanisms such as the references among the individual output, which is nevertheless marked with some sort of evolution or an enhancement of the topic at hand. This then results in a cohesive

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<sup>101</sup>Jgrupe, “HELP!!! I'm Trapped in an Underground Parking Garage With No Exit!,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>102</sup> ThatExoGuy, “The thing in the backrooms,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

narrative space that is different and separated from the reader's world. Simultaneously through this narrative method, the concept of authorship is blurred, and clear boundaries among the identities and entities found in the narrative process are discarded and the traditional roles are being challenged.

## **Where Are We; The Strange Separate Space of the Creepypasta Narratives**

Creepypasta narratives are interconnected on various levels, built in the everchanging landscape of the internet, through community cooperation. There are, however, more aspects that operate in such a space that is separated from the reader's world but otherwise unified. The community eventually generates a space, or a story world that connects all the individual narratives. This ability to generate a structured and coherent story world despite consisting of multiple narratives, and seemingly representing primarily individual narratives, resembles the processes present in Greek mythology, a sum of narratives that exhibits such a level of unity that occupies a space of its own.<sup>103</sup> Creepypasta space operates with similar features and achieves a considerable level of coherence.

As described above, the catalyst for further content is taken from the inside of the community, therefore the source of immersion is in the fandom itself. This self-sufficiency regarding the inside influence on the content then forms the notion of boundary and allows narrators and readers to operate in a separate creative realm, that is other than the real world. Greek myths are described as a story world that does not correspond with such conception as the extraordinary does not prevail in the individual narratives.<sup>104</sup> Parallel to this is the space observed in the Creepypasta narratives, as the author presents their own world, which is infected by the extraordinary, returning to the concept of liminal. The community is thus unified not solely by their objective but also through the content, despite the push towards originality. Such a level of unity significantly influences readers' experience, towards a more immersive experience.

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<sup>103</sup> Sarah Iles Johnston, "The Greek Mythic Story World," (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 290.

<sup>104</sup> Johnston, "The Greek Mythic Story World," 290.

## The Source of the Liminal in the Collective

The setting of the narrative is not a significantly distinct world, on the contrary, the author presents an ordinary landscape that merges the real or possibly real facts, with fictional events. Moreover, the story as presented by the author does not represent the whole narrative, as the readers have the ability to enter into the story and partake in the narrating. This dynamic nature of the creative process is traced to the idea of engaging the reader's imagination through the untold parts of the narrative.<sup>105</sup> That is a concept introduced by the literary scholar Wolfgang Iser, one of the most prominent figures within the phenomenological approach. Some of his major contributions to the field of reader-response criticism are *The Implied Reader* (1972) and *The Act of Reading* (1976). A more detailed account of his contributions is expanded upon in the third part of the thesis, since other concepts of his are applied on the analysis regarding the concern of that section.

Nevertheless, the gap is once again leveraged and employed by the Creepypasta authors as the stories they present to their audience always include a blank of sorts, something that is untold, and it is up to the reader to fill in the gap. The author invites the reader to do so, the reader must resolve what is unknown to the narrator. This process then represents essentially one of the tasks of the author to present a story with a sufficient gap that would engage the imagination of the reader to such an extent that they will provide an assertion, as they engage not only with the narrative but more importantly with the narrator. The author is essentially inviting the readers into the narrative and the readers contribute to the narrative as they step into the fictional space of the narrator. It is in this moment where the erasure of the border that distinguishes between fictionality and fact takes place. This is the space in which the readers who are contributing to the narrative are transforming not only into the world of the narrator, but also transforming their roles from the reader into the role of author, or at least co-author, they are taking on an alternative identity in order to participate in the narration. Such a process gives rise to a space that offers multiple interpretations, giving both the audience and the author to experiment with diverse possibilities within a dynamic space, which entails fluidity of identities.

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<sup>105</sup> Wolfgang Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach." In *New Literary History*, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 230.

As discussed in the previous part, liminality is the point of transition that is accompanied by a number of symbols that display the transition.<sup>106</sup> In the context of consideration engagements with the narratives, certain behaviour in Creepypasta space is understood as symbolic acts, that mark the transition and thus facilitate the liminality. The symbolic act of appropriating a new identity which enables a series of transitions that take place. The author transitions into a narrator who experiences the fictional event. The reader is transformed on two levels, on the non-fictional level during participation, they take on the role of the author or co-author who constructs the fictional narrative. On another level, the co-author is transitioned temporarily into a fictional narrator, participating in a fictional space, and engaging with the fictional narrator. The merge of the author and narrator represents the ambiguity and reinforces the immersive aspect as the reality seems to be hijacked. The reader knows for a fact that the author is a real person, and the narrator is a constructed identity that passes on a fictional account, nevertheless, they are reacting to such an account with sincerity. Therefore, when participating in storytelling the readers consider the gap in the narrative that exists in the reality that is different from theirs.<sup>107</sup> They are accepting the narrator's reality as theirs, therefore the readers then automatically take on, similarly to the author, an alternative identity, as they engage with the narrator of the story. Participation is then the symbolic act that takes the reader-turned into a co-author into the liminal. This simultaneously leads to a change in the behaviour of those who are involved in these narratives.

### ***Norms of the Liminal***

This displayed behaviour does indeed adhere to certain rules, as there are requirements that need to be met in order to properly contribute to the narrative. In this space, the individuals utilize elements that heighten the immersive quality by reinforcing the state of suspension of disbelief. One mentioned obligation from the reader who enriches the story of the original poster is the suspension of disbelief, as the reader automatically does not question the authenticity of events and simply accepts the post as a real story, and this represents the entering into the liminal.

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<sup>106</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," 55.

<sup>107</sup> Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach." 287.

Another important component of the narrative is the temporal configuration of the text. The story as constructed by the original poster is through the use of specific temporal framing: beginning the post by referring to the moment of writing, then the narrator recounts the event that already happened, and finally ending the story, referring back to the moment of writing. In this retrospective narration, the author does not offer a resolution, on the contrary, this is the space in which the author presents the gap that must be filled by the readers who enrich the story, the process described in the previous section. This framing which sets the event in a specific temporal perspective enables the author to conclude the story with an attempt to engage directly with the readers. The original poster then has the ability to respond or not respond which then leads to a more immersive narrative through the simulation of a realistic time delay.

An example of this is the story “ I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days” by the author Makayladosrituals, telling a story of a ritual after which the narrator passed out, which led to a sense of paranoia and stress, therefore reaching to the audience. The narrative ends with an ominous tone, pleading for the occurrences to stop, expressing a significant level of distress:

MAKE IT STOP. MAKE IT STOP. I FEEL LIKE SOMETHING'S GOING TO  
JUMP ME I FEEL LIKE THERE'S SOMEONE IN MY HOUSE, EVEN  
THOUGH IM HOME ALONE. STOPSTOSPTOP.<sup>108</sup>

The author then interacts with the readers through the comment section, reassuring the audience, reacting to the readers' remarks concerning the narrator's safety, writing: “Stay safe, OP. You'll be fine.”<sup>109</sup>

In these responses, the author once again engages with the readers, evaluates, and considers their propositions and interpretations. This indicates that the narrator returns to the story continues the narration and recounts further experiences they had.

Considering the example above, the author interacts with the audience and essentially continues the narrative, assuring them about their safety, and announcing the plan to perform another ritual, which other readers warn her against. In other instances, the author may provide clarification of the story: one of the readers makes an inquiry about

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<sup>108</sup> Makayladosrituals, “I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days.” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>109</sup> anii-mus, “I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days.”

the narrator's specific situation, seeking an understanding of events,<sup>110</sup> to which the author responds, clarifying the circumstances.

Such a device, additionally to the specific framing of the narrative, serves as an indicator of the specific role bestowed upon the author who becomes a character, that closely resembles their persona, such a phenomenon is closely examined in the following passage. Drawing onto the example above, the author's announcement implies in the non-liminal space viewpoint that the author is planning to write another story, while the readers' reaction still remains within the liminal, warning the author about the possible dangers of participating in the ritual, not acknowledging the non-liminal in their responses.

### *Dialogue*

This exchange of interpretations, essentially a learned behaviour through the regular participation. This is understood as a dialog during which the constructed identities of multiple narrators, rather than the real author and the real readers, collectively form the space. This process of forming the narratives is the crucial part of the reader's experience, within the liminal that is maintained through the behaviours of the community, unifying the individuals and the narratives. The crucial aspect that underlies the reader's experience is not simply participation but a dialogue, in the form of an exchange, an exchange of interpretations that gradually form the narrative.

The transactional reader-response theory emphasizes the reader's involvement with the text. During the reader's engagement with a text, the scholars maintain that meaning is not the intention of the author and is formed with heavy reliance upon the context since the same text can be read differently upon a second reading.<sup>111</sup> Therefore drawing attention to subjectivity as an aspect of the reader's encounter and engagement with a text. A heavy emphasis on subjective interpretation and understanding of a text was emphasized by the literary scholar Norman N. Holland. Holland included within the scope of the transactional reader-response theory, the psychological aspect, and its connection to the reader's interpretation. In his essay "Unity Identity Text Self," (1975), Holland maintains that readers engage mentally with a text, instead of passive reception,

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<sup>110</sup> [deleted], "I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days." Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>111</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 170.

on the contrary, readers interact with it, integrating it into their minds.<sup>112</sup> One of the crucial explorations throughout his studies is the reader's identity and its relation to the reading experience.

Holland's notion of identity theme represents a pattern of the essence of an individual, which serves as a tool for navigation in the world, as well as a framework for the interpretation of texts.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, this internal pattern then influences the interpretation. According to Holland, the interpretation is constructed upon the 'DEFT' principles, which is an acronym for defence, expectation, fantasy, and transformation,<sup>114</sup> thus emphasizing the subjectivity of the interpretation. Moreover, the individual interpretations are influenced by the knowledge the readers already have. The readers essentially re-create their identity through engagement with the text, through a process of reading.<sup>115</sup> Readers' identity is thus essential to our understanding and consequently reading experience.

The main argument of Holland's approach is the notion of the transformative and dynamic force that is brought about through the engagement with the text. This change that is suggested supports the notion of the liminality within the Creepypasta space, as the interaction with the text influences the reader's further interpretations. Within the context of such digital fiction, the engagement with the narrative is strengthened due to the contribution to the narrative in real explicit, that is physical form. This physical interaction then forms not only the individual identities, but it is transformed the space as such. In other words, the readers' interactions with the narratives collectively form the narrative space, that essentially generates and expands itself further, as it re-creates itself through the readers' engagements and their identity re-creation.

### ***Community of Practice as the Unifying Force***

This section discusses one aspect of an issue that is explored further in the third part, which focuses on peculiar complexities related to reinterpretation and rereading the narratives. This section discusses the strategies that unify the digital space and expands upon Holland's notions of the transformative effects. The transformative nature results

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<sup>112</sup> Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self." (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 816.

<sup>113</sup> Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," 815.

<sup>114</sup> Norman N. Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity." In Criticism (Wayne State University Press, 1976), 341.

<sup>115</sup> Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity," 342.

from readers' involvement with certain kinds of text, such repeated engagement then forms expectations and boundaries regarding the narrative itself. This points towards certain boundaries, effectively forming a coherent space.

Creepypasta's liminality also implies not only temporary transitions in terms of the reading experience, considered in the following part, but it involves a permanent transformation.<sup>116</sup> Once again these transformations operate and have implications for both the individual level and the story world level. The space in which Creepypasta stories are situated is constantly developed by individual narratives as they fuel. Individual readers and the authors, that is the original posters, who engage with the Creepypasta space, have the possibility to improve themselves creatively. This is supported by the fact that this community represents the concept of what is known as a community of practice, which enables the development of the space as a practice that stems from the learning of the community. The members gradually shaped the space by installing the narrative norms and the norms of engagement among the members, eventually creating a distinguishable form of narratives.

The concept of community of practice was developed by sociologist Etienne Wenger in one of his seminal works *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (1998), which examined the learning process within a community of individuals that share certain interests. His focus is on the principles within the community, their tendencies within the scope of their practice. Wenger in his studies does not consider the aspect of individuality within the process of learning. The processes that are typical for the community of practice allow for the continuous development and growth of the space through the growth of the content and its quality. Arising from not only the individual but needs to be fostered by the community as a whole. Nevertheless, the role of the individual remains as well, due to the impetus for originality that enables dynamic growth.

An important element at play in the community of practice is the constantly evolving experiences that are converted into a form of reification.<sup>117</sup> That is, the regular contact of the individual members of the community, and their experience with these stories, guides them in the formation of the narrative norms, as the narrative gaps and the

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<sup>116</sup> Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology," 58.

<sup>117</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, (University Press, 1998), 89.

necessity to take on the role in order to participate in the community. More specifically, the transformation that takes place through learning in the community includes specific processes that have consequences on the space as a whole and includes “the evolving forms of mutual engagement,”<sup>118</sup> which refers to the strategies utilized by the authors, or the original posters and the specific roles taken on by the readers and their activity in the comment section.

Another process of learning involves the “understanding and turning their enterprise,”<sup>119</sup> which manifests as the development of the space itself, as the members transform the horror narratives through their collective activity into a more immersive experience. This is thus achieved only through collective and participatory efforts that are learned from the community, that is their common objective to form an immersive narrative. In other words, both the readers and authors are aiming to form the hesitation in the narrative that balances on the binaries of authentic and fictional.

Lastly, the community “develops their repertoire, styles, and discourse,”<sup>120</sup> which refers to the evolving community’s knowledge of the Creepypasta form and space and the subsequent unification of the space through the acquired tools such as the reference. Another illustration of this process is the originality of content produced by the individuals, regarding not only the content as such, but specifically the unified form of the narratives discussed in the third section. Further development of the community is adopting the tools available to the community as a result of digital materiality, that is the utilization of hyperlinks, pictures, and other elements discussed in the previous section.

The digital space further enhanced the possibilities of communities of practice such as the Creepypasta community. The individuals are practically in constant medialized contact, thus erasing the boundary of time and space, which in turn strengthens the ties among the members and facilitates the processes of learning as described above. Moreover, the narratives need to be rooted in spatial and temporal aspects in order to be unified and coherent enough if we should consider the alternative space generated by the community as a story world. The spatial unity of the Creepypasta narratives is

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<sup>118</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 95.

<sup>119</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 95.

<sup>120</sup> Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 95.

provided mainly by the materiality and its implied interconnected systems of links as described in the previous section.

On another level, a social level, the narratives are created through the structured actions of individuals, as the original poster, and the readers are forming a dialogue, which then constructs the narrative as a whole. The consequence of this dialogue or interaction-based content is that the concept of authorship starts to be blurred. The erasure of the traditional hierarchy between reader and author is one of the consequences of the liminal as the liminality, or this “mid-transition pushes forward uniformity.”<sup>121</sup> Such a claim is tied to the troubles of identifying and distinguishing among the narrative entities, that is those who are part of the narrative process and the experience, as their identity transitions throughout the process.

The role of the reader who interprets a story is simultaneously a potential author who may either contribute to this concrete narrative that was interpreted or have the option to initiate their own narrative and be inspired by the story or only take certain elements thus contributing to the intertextual nature of that space. Then, in turn, the author becomes a reader when interpreting the contributions of other readers who transition into the world of the narrative that was presented to them. In this sense, the entities achieve uniformity through the continuous transitions of their identities throughout the whole Creepypasta space.

### **Where is the author and reader?**

Based upon the previously discussed concept, the space as such gives the impression of an organized whole, however, the persistence notion is liminality. The space remains organized; however, the nature of the organization is challenged. As discussed in the previous section, the individuals, readers, and authors reappropriate the digital space, and its tools and form a new structure. Turner discusses the existence of the anti-structure within the liminal, meaning such space is based on an overthrown structure in which the traditional roles, statuses, and responsibilities are erased.<sup>122</sup> Such a process then suggests that the liminal forms an empty space, thus enabling the emergence of novel identities and statuses. Moreover, the liminal space promotes the tendency

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<sup>121</sup> Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology,” 59.

<sup>122</sup> Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology,” 60.

towards anonymity and push towards uniformity.<sup>123</sup> This section explores these processes and the emergence of tendencies toward the uniform in terms of identities and their implications upon the content.

Liminality as a creative space requires a discussion regarding the interplay of not only the blurred identities as discussed above but also the nuances regarding the complexities of the hierarchies of those identities. Considering the participatory and collective attributes of the space also suggests an overthrow of the traditional structures. The transition as described, illustrates the notion of an authorship of Creepypasta text being a temporary performance, rather than a fixed authority. The concept of authorship underwent a significant reconsideration during the second half of the twentieth century crucially by the two French intellectuals Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, both of which challenged the traditional understanding of the author.

Roland Barthes, a significant figure within the post-structuralist theory, is recognized for examining and challenging the concepts of meanings, and text. In his influential essay, “The Death of the Author” (1977) advocates for a separation between the author and text so that the main responsibility for the story at hand falls onto the mediator or the performer of the story.<sup>124</sup> Within the context of collaborative storytelling, arises the notion of multiple ‘authors,’ or those who perform, the role of those who mediate narrative, illustrating another tendency that pushes traditional storytelling. Creepypasta space is an open one, as anyone is able to contribute and initiate their own story therefore the assumption then is that if all the entities in the narrative space have the potential to be the author, then in the traditional sense, no one truly is, as the texts stem from collective efforts. Therefore, representing the unified tendency of the liminal space as a whole, enhancing the community and shaping it into the community of practice as discussed above.

Moreover, this collectivity of mediators is marked by another distinguishing feature that challenges the traditional narratives and contributes to the restructuring of the narrative space which is sustained within the community. It is the tendency to maintain anonymity, and leverage it, making it part of the narrative. Michel Foucault in his essay “What is an Author?” (1969) examines the concept of author function and maintains

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<sup>123</sup> Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology,” 56.

<sup>124</sup> Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text*. (Harper Collins Publishers, 1977), 146.

that the authenticity of certain texts can be displayed in other ways.<sup>125</sup> The way the narrative is presented within the digital realm, anonymity is not a defamiliarizing principle, on the contrary, represents the norm. Therefore, in order to bring about the immersion for the reader, the Creepypasta stories need to be presented as a post that is indistinguishable from others, presenting a fictional story as non-fiction, only situating it into the Reddit environment. This includes presenting a story not as an author, but as a user, addressed specifically in the Reddit environment as an original poster, without using a real name. Anonymity represents the unifying tendency, disruption of this tendency would then interfere with the principle of expectation, thus interfering with the process in which the readers re-create their identity.

### *The Second self; The Push towards the Authentic*

The unification in terms of the status of the individual entities, represents only one step in the transformation process. As mentioned in previous sections, those who initiate the narrative represent a crucial aspect of the individual narrative. Gradually turning toward the subject matter of the subsequent section, this segment below explores the specific facets of narrative examination.

Discernible within the Creepypasta space, is the emblematic technique of constructing the narrative as a personal account recounting an experience, the narrator being part of the story, in simple terms, a character separated from the author. However, within the digital space, one of the types of narratives employed by the users, identified by Schachtner, is the 'Narrations about Interconnectedness,' representing content that is centred around presenting oneself and connecting with others.<sup>126</sup> Creepypasta narratives imitate those narrations, in a sense they appropriate such form, the form of personal experience, and utilize it for fictional narrative. Giving rise to the complexities and ambiguities of the self, diverging from the traditional notion of separating the narrator from the author.

It is apparent then, that authorship and context are interconnected, a notion articulated in one of the works by Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (1969), in which he challenged the boundaries of definition such as 'work' of an author, exploring the

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<sup>125</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Modernity and Its Discontents* (Fordham University Press, 1992), 302.

<sup>126</sup> Schachtner, 128.

concept of *écriture*, referring to the conditions of the text.<sup>127</sup> This then leads to the notion that context shapes the perception of the text. When discussing the notion of “the ‘author’ as a function of discourse” and its evolution within the social and cultural context, he emphasized four distinct features, texts as the objects of appropriation tied to the institutional framework, rejection of the author-function as a universal matter, rejecting a spontaneous formation of the author-function, and understanding author not as an individual but as constructed from multiple egos.<sup>128</sup>

Within the discussion of the second feature, the notion of ‘author-function’ has changed with time, as at a certain point in time, authorship, or in a certain sense a lack of authorship was not questioned.<sup>129</sup> In other words, the anonymity of certain texts was not viewed as problematic, on the contrary, it is suggested that certain texts benefited from anonymity.<sup>130</sup> Such a tendency is present in the digital culture, as anonymity is marking its return. Thus, revisiting the previous inquiry of imitation of the form of the narrative, this notion then strengthens the idea of anonymity being a necessity rather than optionality, if the goal of the author is to bring about the hesitation by imbuing the story with the sense of authenticity in this process of implementing anonymity. A productive tendency of anonymity is its implication of creative freedom, anonymity grants the ability to create or alternate one identity, which ties into the further notion of the second self.

Another attribute important for the inquiry of the author's identity within the Creepypasta framework is Foucault's fourth attribute of the function of the author that goes beyond the presence of the author indicated through linguistic markers.<sup>131</sup> He suggests that these markers denote not a real author, but a second-self, that is separated from the writer and the narrator.<sup>132</sup> Thus suggesting a necessary intertwinement of these two entities, resulting from anonymity which is appropriated as a tendency found in the medium. In this case, anonymity has the ability to free the author from the shackles of conventions contributing to the free play within the narrative.

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<sup>127</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?” 302.

<sup>128</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?” 309.

<sup>129</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?” 306.

<sup>130</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?” 306.

<sup>131</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?” 308.

<sup>132</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?” 308.

These shifts within the context of dynamic liminal then signal the complex nature of identity that directly influences the form, furthermore, being one of the factors in the formation of the artificial binaries. Considering the specific treatment of the concept of the author, and the pervasive tendency to present a narrative that seems authentic, the authors rather than inventing a character presented as the narrator, extend their identities, and re-construct them. Expanding upon Holland's notion, it is the authors who use certain core patterns that are simultaneously transforming and challenging the identity within the formation of the story, eventually forming the second self.

This second-self is within the context of Creepypasta manifested as an aspect that the narrators do indeed share with the author as a real-life persona, or at the very least, aspects that the reader can imagine to be part of the real writer. Moreover, this could be extended to the other users who contribute and become co-authors themselves. The narrator embodies a trait that is resolutely a reflection of the authorial persona, and it is the shared space of the two identities or rather the medium utilized for the narrative. This crucial similarity displayed in the narratives is the affinity for horror shared by the community as a whole, which can be illustrated by the frequent references to the Creepypasta space.

A prime example of this is the story by a user named A\_Red\_Scarf who tells a story "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"<sup>133</sup> a title which already suggests that both the author and the narrator, the author's second self, share a space of the community. In this story, the narrator writes about his imprisonment in an unknown space unable to contact anyone and without any access to online sites except Reddit "I tried to reach out to anyone, ANYONE on my Facebook, Instagram, Twitter—and nothing! ... So now here I am, typing this out on Reddit for anyone to see. PLEASE SOMEONE RESPOND."<sup>134</sup> Through the pleading, the narrator also acknowledges the purpose and functioning of Reddit, as being a discussion forum that relies on interaction between the poster and other users. This shows that both the author and narrator share the physical space, that is rooted in the real space, the narrative as such is, however, a fictional one. Such a technique is identically utilized throughout the Creepypasta texts.

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<sup>133</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?" Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>134</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"

Another example of this is the story “I hope I make it through the night, I need your help /nosleep,” posted by a user fullthundermoon who in the introductory part stresses their involvement in the community without ever contributing with a post of their own, and once again expresses a distress about a situation:

I’ve been a lurker on this page for a while, and I never thought I would have anything to contribute here. Unfortunately, now my time has come and I am totally lost, freaked out, and have no idea how to proceed.<sup>135</sup>

Then the narrator proceeds to tell the story about how they have been haunted by the supernatural their whole life, with things lately escalating, leaving the narrator hopeless and uncertain about the future, seeking help in the community. This example further illustrates how the authors intertwine the real with the fictional, as this is indeed the first story on the subreddit posted under this username account, further restricting the distinction between the real-life poster and the narrator. Therefore, contributing to the overall authentic appearance of the story, attempting to assign them the status of nonfiction.

Such illustration points to both the deconstructive tendencies not in terms of the space as discussed in the first part, but in the narratives itself. Moreover, the authors themselves challenge the boundary of real and fiction within the narratives, that does not result from the subversive treatment of the medium, but rather reflects the individual choices of the authors to form an immersive narrative, imbuing it with further hesitation. Building upon these examples and exploration, this notion foreshadows the discussion in the final part of the thesis, subsequent to the analyses.

## Analyses

### “The Mojave Phone Booth” by darthvarda

The narrator of the story recounts a past experience from their youth in the 1980s. Before recounting the experience, they draw attention to the peculiar appearance of a phone booth in the Mojave Desert in the 1960s which was later removed as too many people supposedly were aware of this booth. The narrator comments on the strange nature which mainly stems from it being built in a secluded area, many speculate about its origin and purpose and even the narrator is unsure about the truth behind the booth.

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<sup>135</sup>Fullthundermoon, “I hope I make it through the night, I need your help /nosleep,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

One night the narrator found themselves in a desert as their car broke down. With the night gradually advancing the narrator decided to walk in the dark, despite the growing dread they faced as they mentioned that they are partly of Navajo origin, therefore knowing various legends and stories connected to the area. Suddenly the narrator starts hearing noises behind them only to reveal that it is a starving coyote. Once again despite the fear that he may be attacked, the narrator continued walking. For a moment they got a sense of relief, however not long after, they heard another sound that caught their attention. The narrator saw the coyote pursuing him on its hind legs, with its human eyes, laughing. At that moment the narrator ran as fast as he could and hid in the phone booth. A few moments later, another strange event occurred. A man in a black suit arrived at the phone booth, and shortly after the phone rang and was picked up by the stranger claiming that someone was calling him. After the cryptic phone call, the man offers the narrator a ride. The story ends with questions about not only the eerie coyote but also about the man and the strange phone call, concluding that the narrator may never know and perhaps does not even want to know. Ending the story with a note that they will never travel to the desert ever again and a reference to the Coyote from the tales. Coyote that is always hungry and watching.

The narrator begins with background information and more essentially provides the link to the real by establishing the setting around a genuine location and existence of the Mojave phone booth. Moreover, it is enriched with other authentic facts such as the remoteness of the booth, its popularity on the internet, and its subsequent removal in the year 2000. The concept of the second self is intertwined with the setting, supported by the narrator's comment on their cultural background it can be concluded that even that represents authentic information about the author themselves. Therefore, both the author and the narrator represent individuals who are tightly connected to the location as well as the cultural heritage that is reflected in the story, both rooted in real concepts. These qualities represent the overlap between the narrator and the author of the story.

Such incorporation of authentic and genuine information about the setting that serves as the core basis for the story promotes the overall uncertainty and the immersive quality of the narrative as the reader is pushed towards consistency in the interpretation, and the real and fictional elements blend into the separate realm of the liminal. This space exists on the borders between the real and fictional, therefore the readers do not have to decide what aspect represents facts and what is a mere fabrication. The self-sufficiency of the

space is also supported by the intertextual elements, related to the main theme of the post, which is the legend of a skin-walker, not directly mentioned by the narrator, but by the readers. This represents one of the gaps that is generated by the author and fulfilled by the readers who are able to do so through their knowledge of the Creepypasta space.

The author is relying on such knowledge of the readers and based on their contribution, the readers do in fact recognize and connect this story as intended by the author, recognizing, and maintaining the patterns within the space. The creature of a skin-walker is very widely used throughout the Creepypasta narratives, it is one of the elements that connects it to the outside materials. Other stories that employ this creature include for example, the story “I was in prison for 15 years. There was a skinwalker in there with us”<sup>136</sup> by an unknown author, “My wife heard a skinwalker in our house last night”<sup>137</sup> by a user named JayBakd, or the story “They uncovered a mass grave in the Carolinas. Please, lock your doors”<sup>138</sup> by MrFrontenac and many others. Each of the stories incorporates the motif in various manners, drawing on the knowledge generated in the Creepypasta space, similarly, as the Creepypasta stories include another motif mentioned above, the backrooms, even in the case of the ‘skinwalker’ motif the authors create and possibly reimagine the legend, establishing rules of the narratives. The motif of a legend is quite prominent and is featured extensively outside the Reddit space or NoSleep subreddit, that is other websites, and recently it has been incorporated in other media as well, which may be understood as a direct influence of Creepypasta stories.

The author manufactured a narrator who told a story about a skin-walker encounter without explicitly mentioning it, including only the description that is prevalent in other stories as well such as the uncanny resemblance to human qualities. This is the author employing the pre-intentions of the narrative, that guide the readers. Readers were able to identify it through these descriptions and other clues such as the narrator's connection to the Navajo tribe and the setting of the narrative. The intention of the author of the story is to prompt the readers to engage with the narrative, therefore the narrator seemingly evaluates the nature of the horror as inconclusive, hesitating whether it was a real coyote or “something more sinister”<sup>139</sup> while the author is being aware of the

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<sup>136</sup> [deleted], “I was in prison for 15 years. There was a skinwalker in there with us,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>137</sup> JayBakd, “My wife heard a skinwalker in our house last night,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>138</sup> MrFrontenac, “They uncovered a mass grave in the Carolinas. Please, lock your doors,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>139</sup> Darthvarda, “The Mojave Phone Booth,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

dominant interpretation of such a story, and the readers are as well, therefore concluding the latter. Therefore, it is through these collective efforts that the liminal emerges, the author brings about uncertainty as they merge the real and fictional, incorporating sufficient gaps that are eventually solved by the readers, who refer to the internal source, that is the knowledge that the creature of skin-walker is indeed a possible motif.<sup>140</sup> The whole meaning is however deciphered by cooperative forces, based on the participation of the readers.

This participation is prompted by the concluding part, which includes the gaps, manifested as the questions asked by the narrator. The temporal frame is clearly established, as the author begins with the authentic information, followed by the story itself, which takes place in the past, as the narrator recalls the experience and then conclusion that takes the reader back into the moment of the narrator and author writing the story, once again this illustrates that both entities are engaged in the same act of writing, erasing a clear distinction between the two and bringing about the liminal. Both the introductory and closing parts serve as a tool for reflection and the narrator's meditation surrounding the tale as an experience. For the author, it serves as a space for the mentioned gaps which invite the readers into the liminal as their interpretative strategies rely on the knowledge of the readers, specifically the motif of the Skinwalker legend as part of the space.

#### “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments” by nazisharks

In the story at hand, the narrator describes an experiment they were part of with unforeseen circumstances and disturbing results. Their post begins with a dedication that says “To Those Who Sleep” which could be scrutinized if such an analysis was included in the first part of the thesis, as it bears certain peculiarities regarding the paratext and its impact upon readers, moreover, dedications as such are not common for the Creepypasta texts, therefore in this story the purpose of such phrase is functional in a sense of approaching and engaging with all the readers, or could be interpreted as a warning which is common for the Creepypasta narratives.<sup>141</sup> Regardless, in the

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<sup>140</sup> The legend of the skin-walker is primarily utilized as an element that is taken originally as an external source, establishing intertextuality on the broader level, and after a repeated adoption of the topic in the Creepypasta space, it evolved into an internal motif.

<sup>141</sup> The dedication may be understood as a metaphor as “those who sleep” may be those who remain unaware of the truth about the existence, which is something that is also incorporated further in the story. The narrator alludes to the possibility or at least they engage in a conversation about the existential question of the beginning of the universe and the nature of existence as such. Those who

introductory part, which frames the story, the narrator says that what they are about to tell happened some time ago, and despite the rumours on campus or online, the narrator claims that they are the only one who really knows what happened during the Arkansas Sleep experiment and proceeds telling the story. The narrator tells us that they and the other three students were chosen by Professor Richardson to participate in a groundbreaking experiment regarding our need for sleep and its possible complete elimination. The experiment took place on the outskirts of Searcy, Arkansas in Octagon, an abandoned building, leaving the students isolated with a machine, which through its unique mix of soundwaves disturbed their sleep processes and disallowed dreaming. Despite the initial apprehension regarding those claims, after three days with three hours of sleep, the group indeed felt revitalized and able to discuss their ideas. On the fourth day, however, they all started to experience uneasiness and paranoia started to invade their debates about the experiment actually being controlled by the government, one of them speculated about the possibility of all people outside being dead, creating even more tension in the group. Another discussion revolves around Richardson's unconventional ideas and unpublished articles regarding the existence and the necessary preconditions for it, suggesting something beyond the material, and the belief in pre-physical which is the source of free will. This then leads to them admitting that they all had been feeling watched during their dreamless sleep proposing the professor is in there somewhere with them. With the rising paranoia, the further incident takes place as during the third week the participants start to isolate themselves more, and the narrator starts seeing figures just before waking up and voices. A similar phenomenon is described by another participant, James started hearing his dead mother who requested James to ask the narrator "if he remembers the shed"<sup>142</sup> leaving the narrator speechless as he never shared his childhood experience regarding the place, which revolved around an eerie encounter with a faceless man. The rising fear in all the participants and their obsession with an escape escalated as one of the students, as witnessed by the narrator, got into an elevator, and went up, which was impossible as the building had only one floor. James sliced open the third participant and disappeared without using the door, after witnessing this the narrator tried to go to sleep. After a while, he was woken up by

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sleep are the readers who are not yet aware of the 'truth' presented by the narrator, remaining asleep. Even more so, in the opening paragraph, the narrator does indeed claim they know the truth, which could be interpreted as a truth about the experiment or as truth about the existence. Nevertheless, the dedication is an implicit warning or foreshadowing regarding the unfolding of the story.

<sup>142</sup> Nazisharks, "The Arkansas Sleep Experiments," Reddit, r/nosleep.

the professor claiming he slept for several days explaining to him that it was all a dream, promising to pay off his student loans if the narrator stayed silent as no one would believe him anyway. Trying to believe that all of this was just a dream was obscured by the fact that the narrator is not able to find the others anywhere, therefore addressing their friends to let them know they are okay and asking the readers their opinion about the bizarre occurrence.

The story includes multiple discussions concerning the topic of psychology, specifically their discussion regarding how certain spaces is shaped by the human psyche, they also discuss the nature of this experience possibly comparing it to other studies referencing the Milgram Experiments or their philosophical discussion concerning free will, creation of the universe and the metaphysical influences, the importance or purpose of dreams,<sup>143</sup> and so on. Therefore, the author may share a certain degree of knowledge with the narrator who was pursuing a psychology degree with an interest in philosophy, which builds a bridge between the author and narrator. Further uncertainty is established through the setting of the story, specifically mentioning Searcy, Arkansas, and the octagon building in which the story takes place. In the comment section, certain comments confirm the existence of such a place as for example “Searcy is my hometown. Nobody talks about the octagon building,”<sup>144</sup> which is a case of the reader enriching and contributing to the genuine information of the narrative. The original poster responds to this by saying that they advise against looking for the building as it is supposedly located in a wooded area without cell service.<sup>145</sup> This contributes not only to the dynamic nature of the narrative, that is the participation and interaction among the community members, but it showcases the functionality of this interaction, as this comment contributes to the story with the motif of isolation and being disconnected, which conjoins with the motif of paranoia and solitude depicted throughout the narrative.

The story is set in a realistic setting, in Arkansas, giving the impression that the story takes place in the author’s world, while the events experienced by the narrator are unusual, and defy the nature of our world. However, considering the motif of psychology and the psychological experiment being the source of the unnatural

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<sup>143</sup> Nazisharks, “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>144</sup> Commented by hrhog, Nazisharks, “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments.”

<sup>145</sup> Comment by nazisharks, Nazisharks, “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments.”

experience, the readers may interpret the events with a rational basis, as the unusual can be explained as the result of lack of sleep. However, the fact that the friends of the narrator are missing must also be considered. The task of the reader is to consider both of these options, searching for the leads in the text and filling the gaps. By not firmly establishing a firm position, the narrator avoids being explicit in his explanation, providing readers with space to engage creatively with the narrative.

The narrator shares the story, framing it similarly as pointed out in the previous analysis, as some sort of past experience, beginning the narrative with references to the present moment and space as the narrator writes about the possibility that the readers encountered certain information surrounding the events they are about to describe:

This happened a few years ago. You may have heard rumours if you're on campus. Some even circulated online. Nobody knew what really happened. Because I'm the only one who knows and I kept quiet. For a multitude of reasons. None of them matter now. Here's what really happened.<sup>146</sup>

This may be understood as the spatiotemporal anchoring of the narrative which represents the metafictional element of the creepypasta, as it points towards the language awareness and the act of writing. A distinct feature from what could be considered the traditional metafictional quality which is the uncertainty between the clear boundary between the real and fictional, is the narrator's indication that only they are able to tell the true story. This then may be treated as pre-intention provided by the author of the story for readers who can treat the narrator as an unreliable one, guiding the readers in their interpretations. The fact that the narrator may not be accurate in the provided descriptions, is the confession of possibly hallucinating certain things as well as acknowledging their paranoia regarding certain feelings of presence and being watched. Once again this can be the result of being confined together in one space for a longer period.

In the closing part of the story, the narrator once again draws attention to writing, simultaneously presenting a reference to the space by acknowledging that there is a chance for the other characters to be the readers of the story, "James, JT, Don, if you're out there and read this, let me know you're ok. And everyone else, let me tell you what I

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<sup>146</sup> Nazisharks, "The Arkansas Sleep Experiments," Reddit, r/nosleep.

think.”<sup>147</sup> This bridges the real and fictional space, or perhaps merges those two realms together, as they address both the characters and the readers, who are invited into the liminal by participating on the same level with them and not only with the narrator.

The readers provide their own insight reacting to the inquiry made by the narrator and sharing their own experiences when sleep deprived. One of the comments mentioned that during a certain period of time when they were forcing themselves to stay awake as long as possible they would hallucinate on multiple occasions, even hearing conversations and “songs they had never heard before.”<sup>148</sup> Another comment proposes that the narrator and the others may have an illness Fatal Familial Insomnia,<sup>149</sup> which is extremely rare however, therefore not likely to account for the events unless the other characters were mere figments of the narrator’s imagination which is also a possibility as it was mentioned, the narrator is unreliable.

These experiences may be interpreted by other readers as genuine experiences or their own fictional tale, regardless, it enriches and expands the story with further narrations, therefore shaping the Creepypasta space, and reader’s experience who encounters not only the primary text but the texts from other readers that are part of the story, forming a whole as they are relevant to the narrative at hand. Readers’ texts are relevant as long as they operate within the realm of the narrator and its characters, that is the reader’s comment does not have to contribute to the narrator for example in the form of advice, but simply evaluating the situation described by the narrator, that is the story itself. Therefore, it bears no consequences whether the experiences described by readers are true or not as they illustrate the shared realm, eliciting the immersive. The readers seemingly synchronize with the narrator’s notion and possess certain ambiguous stands regarding the purpose of dreams and sleep. In other words, similarly to the narrator, most of the commentators do not consider their experiences as something incomprehensible, or unnatural, nevertheless they do incline to it, simply for entertaining different theories.

The main lead that connects this story to the shared space is the motif of the undisclosed experiment with unexpected consequences. One of the creepypasta that is well-known among the members of the community is the creepypasta “Russian Sleep

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<sup>147</sup> Nazisharks, “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments.” Reddit, r/nosleep

<sup>148</sup> Pomqueen, Nazisharks, “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments.”

<sup>149</sup> RAND\_bytes, “The Arkansas Sleep Experiments.”

Experiment,”<sup>150</sup> which was not published on Reddit, however other stories that revolve around such topic are “The family experiment,”<sup>151</sup> “The Volkov Experiment,”<sup>152</sup> or “A Simple Experiment Showed Us the Twisted Nature of Reality”<sup>153</sup> all of which reveal some unexpected turn of events during the mentioned experiment and as suggested by the last title, this event prompts readers to contemplate about the nature of reality. The topic of an experiment and its unforeseen consequences then brings certain limitations during interpretation and participation, as the author relies on certain shapes of these contributions. In this case, the author relies on the shared knowledge of the community that such a motif is possible in the Creepypasta space, therefore the circumstances of the experiment itself are primarily not questioned by the readers, but rather its consequences and implications.

“I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days.” by Makayladosrituals

The story dwells on the theme of rituals circulating on the internet and the legends surrounding it. The narrator of the story presents herself as Makayla, who as even her username suggests, Makayladosrituals performs various rituals and shares her experience. The narrator begins the recounted experience by providing a link to her other story, in which she recounts an experience of performing the Hooded Man ritual, from Wednesday night,<sup>154</sup> setting the individual events into the context of the Creepypasta space.

She continues the narration by reflecting upon the recommendation of performing an elevator game, a theme introduced by the readers of her previous linked story, providing another source introducing the game, its rules, and the process. A game that is supposed to take the participant into alternate reality, requires at least ten story building and pressing the elevator buttons in a specific order. Makayla proceeds recounting the eerie experience of encountering an entity in a form of a girl on the fifth floor, which aligns with the instruction of the game. Upon reaching the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, the final step of the ritual. She steps outside of the elevator, into the hallway but is overwhelmed by fear and an

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<sup>150</sup> The original place of publication as well as the original post was not found.

<sup>151</sup> Poloniumpoisoning, “The family experiment,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>152</sup> Deathbykoolaidman, “The Volkov Experiment,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>153</sup> Zachariusfrost, “A Simple Experiment Showed Us the Twisted Nature of Reality,”

<sup>154</sup> Makayladosrituals, “I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

eerie, suffocating atmosphere and returns to the elevator, leaving the building. Makayla returns home and begins to write about her experience, but the feelings of distressed and panic grow even further as she describes waking up back in the hallway of the building, despite being sure she did manage to get home and falling asleep on her couch. She ran back home, again, however having the feeling of being followed she wasn't able to fall asleep or rest. She closes the narrative with her expressing appreciation for any feedback, but this is followed by additional distressed and seemingly urgent message, pleading for help: "I FEEL LIKE THERE'S SOMEONE IN MY HOUSE, EVEN THOUGH IM HOME ALONE. STOPSTOSPTOP."<sup>155</sup>

The author of the story presents a narrative that is built upon already existing texts within the space as well as the previously published work of the author themselves, creating a narrative that exists within a network of text. The author essentially incorporates a new narrative into such a web of interconnected themes and topics, illustrating the tendency to enrich and expand the space, imbuing it with a dynamic tendency.

The space allows for certain affordances of the medium to be transmitted onto the story itself, employing the medium, essentially incorporating it into the narrative, dimming the boundaries between an author presenting a story and a narrator recounting an experience. This can be exemplified through specific tools employed by the author, such as initiating the narrative with direct references to the subreddit space and the author/narrator addressing the readers. Thus, situating the author as the narrator and the readers into a shared space. The narrator further includes links to other stories, further emphasizing the connection between the author and the narrator, consequently blurring the clear distinction between the real space of the author and the fictional narrator. Therefore, further maintaining the constructed identity throughout all of the stories. In this case, the author forms a complex narrative that consists of individual stories, that are to a degree self-sufficient, in the sense of describing separate events, and experiences that form the individual stories.

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<sup>155</sup> Makayladoesrituals "I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days." Reddit, r/nosleep.

The author essentially mirrors and reflects their action upon the fictional narrative described by the narrator, further blurring the boundary and allowing for an ambiguous experience. In this case specifically, while she is referring to her story, that is ‘The hooded man ritual’ and includes a link to it saying that that was the ritual she had done Wednesday night, meaning the author posted the story on Wednesday. Another illustration of this mirroring is the narrator’s commentary on the specific temporal progression, reporting she performed the ritual on Friday and published her post on Sunday night, however, due to the circumstances described in the story she did not manage to do so.<sup>156</sup> This information could have been omitted, but the narrator justifies and comments upon such temporal details, once again closing the imaginary gap between the narrator and the author.

This interdependency of the individual narrative is reflected in this concrete narrative, in the form of a theme, the narrator's action of performing various rituals which in this specific story leads to undesirable consequences. Moreover, it is a form of a gap that the author incorporates into the story, which operates with this notion of carelessness regarding the Creepypasta rituals. The audience bases the interpretation upon the knowledge that the author had written the other stories, or that the narrator posted her other experiences with previously performed rituals. This is apparent in one of the contributions made by one of the readers who expresses concern about her safety. Due to her involvement in various games and rituals, each of her stories seems to be more and more disturbing according to the reader, suggesting she draws too much attention to herself, even predicting the growing danger in the next attempted ritual.<sup>157</sup>

The unclear nature of the identity of the author thus forms a crucial aspect regarding the specific and ambiguous experience of the readers who are essentially operating with their interpretations on two levels or realms that are blended together. The end of the narrative includes an appreciation for feedback which could be interpreted as an expression by the author, requesting a response to the author’s creative abilities. On the other hand, simultaneously as a way for the narrator to connect with the readers and ask for help, a tendency within the Creepypasta context. Within the Creepypasta space, these two interpretations work simultaneously on both levels, the non-fictional and

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<sup>156</sup> Makayladoesrituals, “I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days.” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>157</sup> Have\_Rivets

fictional, as readers are expressing their concern about the narrator's safety, which is rendered as a sufficient recording and transmission of the immersive experience.

Moreover, the stylistic choice, such as the capitalization of the letters and the lack of space between the words of the final line, underscores the sense of urgency and panic described throughout the story by the narrator, strengthening the feeling of authenticity, presentation of a recounted experience rather than a fictional narrative.

The connections among the individual narratives by the author are not the only intertextuality found in this narrative. It is apparent that the topic of ritual is not an original idea of this specific author. The narrator recounts the experiences with the rituals that are already established within the Creepypasta space, therefore the author is relying on the knowledge of the readers and their awareness about the stories with such topics.

The author employs the themes and concepts and enriches them, representing a form of retelling. The impetus of the originality stems from the interconnection and firm attachment of this specific narrative into the group of existing stories presented by the identical narrator. Such dependency is reflected in the comments who do acknowledge the interconnections among the stories as one of the comments says to try a staircase ritual.<sup>158</sup> This further underlines the readers' ability to operate and engage with two levels in the Creepypasta space. Some of her readers suggest other rituals to Makayla, the narrator, simultaneously providing creative suggestions to the author to write another story.

The main conclusion drawn from this story is the dependency of the individual posts, the individual texts that are essentially bound together as the user, that is the real physical author tells the stories through a single narrator who recounts all these experiences. The written aspect, that is the narrator's interpretation of events is heavily reflected in the behaviour of the author as the physical entity. Therefore, in this story, it is significantly difficult to distinguish between the identity of the author and the narrator. It is mainly the aspect of intertextuality and intricate treatment of the intertwined identities that gives rise to realism. Furthermore, the narrative is represented not through the individual posts but rather through the other texts published by the

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<sup>158</sup> Kermetthefrog, "I did the elevator ritual. I think something followed me home. I haven't slept properly in 3 days." Reddit, r/nosleep.

author, as the reader's experience in its full arises if we consider (not necessarily read) all the user's posts.

Intertextual elements are also utilized by the readers as they engage with the narrator, therefore another purpose of the intertextuality functions here as a tool for filling in the gaps of the narrative. In this case, the readers are responding and trying to find, and offer a solution to the situation as presented by the narrator. Once again, the gaps here serve their function as the readers utilize their knowledge, that is the internal source, accepting the events as described by the narrator, not questioning the status of the story.

Another crucial aspect that points towards the ambiguous nature of the reader's experience is the heavy reliance on other rituals and experiences connected to those, not only written by this user but by other users as well. This is illustrated by the number of commentators who recommend the 'rituals she may want to try, which further showcases the cooperation between the reader and author, from which stems not only the narratives but also the overall experience. On one level this is understood as a recommendation for further fictional stories the physical author may want to write, but on another level, the liminal, this is truly interpreted as a ritual that others 'recommend' trying.

#### “\*\*\*EMERGENCY ALERT\*\*\*” by TheCrystalGem

The story begins with a message, an emergency alert that disrupted the narrator's evening watching a television show. The alert urging the local residents to seek immediate shelter due to weather threats raised suspicion. In the first part of the story, the first update, the narrator tries to reach out and gather information regarding the strange event, noting that the local authorities do not appear to cooperate or communicate. The feeling of isolation rises in the second update, the second part of the narrative, as the narrator accesses some radio transmissions, presumably of certain government authorities. The uneasy feeling escalates as the narrator witnesses the sudden appearance of a girl outside, simply walking in the storm. In the third part of the story, the narrator reports about the continuous weather conditions, remaining in the house, only with his dog keeping him company. The feeling of isolation is strengthened by the pervasive lack of communication with authorities and services. The narrator is then abruptly interrupted by a voice telling him to open the door. Ending the part by acknowledging the rising danger and fear that this update may be his last.

In the last part of the story, the fourth update, the narrator reports on accessing another radio transmission, a conversation regarding a 'subject 002.' Another finding is a transcript detailing some sort of experiment on 'subject 013,' referring to a woman named Elizabeth Keller. The transcript details a session during an experiment conducted by an authority named Professor Whitfield, part of the 'MEW Foundation,' who tests the 'subject 013' reactions while giving the subject electroshocks. Such discovery disturbs the narrator while remaining isolated, he ends the narrative with a promise of further updates.

The narrator of the story refers to the place of publication, referring to “scrolling on Reddit.” This illustrates one of the features shared by the author's and narrator's identity which is very prominent throughout the Creepypasta narratives. Aside from the narrator's identification with the author, the reference to the medium and the self-reflexive quality is pervasive in the whole narrative. These persistently frequent elements shape the story into an account of events that indeed resemble a genuine report of the narrator's experiences. Some specific examples of this are the narrator's reflections upon these aspects at the beginning of each part, meaning that each part presents some sort of frame narrative in which the narrator directly responds and reflects upon the engagement with the audience. The second part of the story titled “\*\*\*EMERGENCY ALERT\*\*\* (UPDATE 2)” begins with the following:

Hello everybody, and sorry for the wait. I know a lot of you have been waiting to hear more about my current situation. I have, however, been reading and responding to some of your comments, and I have some new insight into what may be going on.<sup>159</sup>

After this introductory part, the narrator continues with new information, as the author continues the story. Here the narrator reflects upon the space, mentioning the comment section and responding to those comments which additionally represent the genuine aspect, as indeed the narrator did interact with the readers similarly to the reflection upon the time interval between the two posts. There is also a reference to the qualities of the medium, specifically the poster's ability to update and edit individual posts. In the first part of the story, the narrator includes an edit in which the narrator promises to keep the readers posted, that is the author indicates a continuation of the story.

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<sup>159</sup> TheCrystalGem, “\*\*\*EMERGENCY ALERT\*\*\* (UPDATE 2),” Reddit, r/nosleep.

This story also includes the narrator specifically describing his current situation: “I'm going to take them upstairs, but I'll take my phone with me. We just entered the bathroom. Nothing out of the ordinary ...Huh, the lights just flickered...As I'm writing, I can hear a siren.” In the first instance, the narrator also indicates that the story is written on the narrator's phone which is a common practice when browsing the app while the story was written by the author accessing the site by using a computer as there is an easier access, enables easier editing and so on. This also illustrates the argument in the previous section, that is the idea of presenting a story with the appearance of a post, presenting one medium as the other, in order to install a sense of realism in the reader.

An immediately prominent and indeed impactful feature of this specific story is the abundance of questions posed by the narrator, the gaps that represent the tool for the author to create tension and uncertainty in the narrative and for readers as a way to engage and participate in the narrative, as they have the possibility to resolve the story which reminds them a puzzle manufactured by the author. Therefore, what may be an insufficient amount of information, in this story serves as a way to engage with the audience, inviting them to partake in the storytelling. This is combined with the elements of directly asking questions. Therefore, in this narrative, the author incorporates gaps in the narrative that are created through direct questions such as when the narrator closes his first part of the story, that is the first post, and asks whether anyone lives near him.<sup>160</sup>

This sets up the dynamic quality of the narrative and prompts the readers to enrich the narrative in a specific manner. One of the commentators answers this question and says that they are from Oregon as well but are not in the same situation. This would then imply some sort of isolation of the narrator. Another commentator however mentioned that they are also from Oregon and noticed a weird weather. Both imply certain interpretations, and the latter contribution imbues the narrative with immersive quality as not only do they share the space but also the situation with other individuals. This is the choice of the reader to engage in such a manner, as it represents one option of the interpretative strategy of the reader, even though not necessary as the narrator employed other tools, as described above, that give rise to the immersive.

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<sup>160</sup> TheCrystalGem, “\*\*\*EMERGENCY ALERT\*\*\*,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

The second sort of gap that can be identified in the narrative is the implicit gaps in the narrative, which are incorporated by the narrator such as why these events are happening, a specific example is the question of who is responsible for the shutdown of the town. Some pre-intentions set up by the author, that possibly guide the narrative, is the conversation heard through the radio, as one of the voices mentioned some sort of situation in the narrator's town. The narrator presents the conversation heard from the radio in a specific manner, including the word 'over.' This is significant as the narrator mentions that he believes that he is listening to the police or some other official forces. In the latter part, some commentators mention that "these people" are not police or military. This represents a pre-intention as it is later revealed that they are indeed some sort of secret organization of the government. These pre-intentions may be brought up later in the narrative but may also serve as a gap, a lead for readers to follow and resolve the events in the story. It is not simply a gap as it prepares the readers and tries to push them in a certain direction, the author guides the audience in their interpretations. These need to be correctly identified by the readers, moreover, they need to employ appropriate interpretative strategies. In this case, the readers do not question the veracity of the story, that is they accept the narrative as authentic; they do not question the fact that the narrator received such a notice on their phone or the presence of the girl in the street. Rather they offer their insight into what might be happening, specifically, one of the commentators suggests that the girl is an escaped experiment, and the government is somehow responsible for it.<sup>161</sup> As the story unfolds, this is shown to indeed be the case. The readers employ this interpretation as this is the motif of some sort of secret event done by someone who is more powerful than the narrator, which is a similar case to the analysed story above, "The Arkansas Sleep Experiments."

## **Discussion to Part II Sustaining the Liminal through Community**

The first section illustrated the influence of the medium utilized for storytelling, one of the aspects that evokes the liminal experience. The second part explored the sociological intricacies regarding the construction of the narratives. The community challenges the horror mode by appropriating the traditional mode of narrating and they push the boundary on the level of the reader's experience. In other words, there is a

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<sup>161</sup> [deleted], "\*\*\*EMERGENCY ALERT\*\*\*," Reddit, r/nosleep.

certain enhancement regarding the reader's experience, and it is linked to the behaviour that is found in the fandom culture, the blurring of the boundary that separates fact and fiction.<sup>162</sup> Specifically, there is the tendency to transmit a more immersive horror experience by presenting the story as an authentic real-life experience. However, an aspect that pushes the concept of fandom is the original output, that is a concept that originated within the space, that is then expanded upon or reinterpreted.

This emphasizes the collective aspect of the narrative production, that is an interplay among the narratives and readers, as potential authors who enrich the space by drawing on existing stories and providing their perspective. Thus, such collectivity functions not only in the context of individual stories but within the space as a whole, creating a repertoire of themes and topics that are interconnected through references and simultaneously constantly developed. In this sense, this space then forms a self-contained, coherent space.

This unity and consistency are enriched with the objective of the community to achieve an experience, that is the immersive experience as mentioned above. Influenced by such aim, the authors, and readers appropriate alternative identities. Consistent with the liminal processes, during their engagement with the Creepypasta narratives, the traditional roles, status, and identities are removed, and replaced by alternative ones. These changes are then manifested in the content, further sustaining the liminal. One of the significant manifestations of these transformations of identities is the utilization of gaps created by the author, which engages the readers and prompts them toward possible interpretations.

These interpretations are not completely free, as a level of consistency is crucial for the formation of a coherent narrative, which once again points to the deliberate maintaining of self-sufficient space. However, these reinterpretations within a boundary also point to a level of unification of the interpretations. Readers engage repeatedly within the community with Creepypasta narratives, internalizing the tendencies, incorporating the interpretation, and re-creating their identities which then in turn influences their output. Therefore, these reinterpretations are viewed as a dialogue between authors' and readers' identities. These identities stem from the intermingling of aspects of the real physical world and the digital community domain, as the identities mirror an

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<sup>162</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 17.

intersection of these two. This then showcases that the creation of artificial binaries does not result simply from the medium housing the narratives but from the social mechanisms within the medium.

## **Part III. Something Wicked This Way Comes or What Happens after the Story is Over; The Horror is in Deconstruction**

### **Introduction**

In the previous sections, it has been established that the Creepypasta storytelling carries subversive properties, specifically the notion that Creepypasta is the result of a specific treatment of a medium, that is an employment of a discussion forum as a space for the construction of fictional narratives, appropriating a technique of collective storytelling. The second chapter, then investigated the sociological workings, the ambiguity that stems from the generative processes of the content and of identity. This section explores the specific elements of the narrative and their own subversive properties, showcasing the appropriation, interplay, and dependence on the existence of the binary of the authentic and fictional. The Creepypasta texts that are formed in a distinct environment, within a distinctive community, then display distinct features, more specifically, the techniques that correlate with the previous tendencies, that is the subversion, and pushing the narratives in order to capture a horror experience that borders between the real and the fictional.

### **The Meta and Deconstruction**

One of the unique characteristics of the Creepypasta narrative is its tendency to draw attention to its own structure and the temporal aspect of the narrative with the intention to immerse the reader into the narrative. The authors employ the technique of embedded narratives with their distinct treatment of the frame narrative which functions as a contextual framework for embedded narrative. This technique brings subversive qualities, blending the authentic with the fictional. In the following passages, I will introduce the key theoretical concepts as articulated by Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal regarding the embedding techniques, the connection of the narrative structure to 'the meta', and the implications upon the reader's experience.

### **Embedded Narratives and Levels**

Genette in one of his works, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) examines the structure of the narrative, developing a systematic theory, identifying techniques, devices, and constituents. One of his examined topics is the concept of the embedded narratives, describing them as levels representing a separation that is beyond simple

temporal or spatial partition, representing a certain threshold of the narrative itself, dissecting the narrative into interconnected individual levels.<sup>163</sup> Genette discusses the conception of levels in connection with narrative voice, therefore dealing with the narrator of the story fostering a connection to the embedded narratives, as he notes that the different levels are marked by different narrators. Genette specifically distinguishes between the extradiegetic level, the first or outside of the story, and the diegetic, or intradiegetic, which refers to the told narrative within the outside narrative.<sup>164</sup> A third level, which is beyond or within the intradiegetic level is the metadiegetic level.<sup>165</sup>

A similar emphasis on the various narrators at various levels is discussed by Mieke Bal, a narratology scholar, notable for her discussion within this field. In her work *Narratology: An Introduction* she gives the example of the Scheherazade in Arabian Nights and Nelly Dean in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Bal points to the various narrators on various levels, as she specifies that Scheherazade is a primary narrator, narrator A tells a story through narrator B, who tells a story through narrator C, and so on.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, she indicates the effects of these nested stories and the qualities that enrich the narrative, she states that the nested storytelling in Arabian Nights accentuates the themes of paranoia and suspense of the story itself.<sup>167</sup>

## The Meta

Affiliation with the discourse on narrative levels is the concept of 'the meta.' Regarding the levels, Genette distinguished the three levels, one of them being the metadiegetic level, which represents a layer of the narrative, necessarily connected to the other levels, simultaneously distinguished by the independent narrator. For the purposes of creating a comprehensive, broader perspective on Creepypasta and the reader's experience, both metanarrative and metafiction need to be considered, since the elements of metafiction and the metanarrative seem to co-exist, moreover, significantly intertwined with each other. The discussion is mainly concerned with the basic introduction of the terms, specifically focusing on the possible impacts of the meta qualities upon the reader's experience, therefore limiting the following theoretical concerns, mainly regarding the

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<sup>163</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 228.

<sup>164</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 228.

<sup>165</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 228.

<sup>166</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 52.

<sup>167</sup> Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 52.

concept of metafiction, to the basic postulates laid out by literary scholars Monika Fludernik, Ansgar Nünning, and Patricia Waugh.

Monika Fludernik, in her work “From Metadiscursivity to Metanarration and Metafiction,” defines the terms metanarrative and metafiction as employed interchangeably due to their affinity towards the reflective abilities however to diverse aspects of the narrative. She draws from Ansgar Nünning's criticism of literary theoreticians and their previously persistent neglect of the role of the narrator with the connection to the act of the narrating, as he considers the specific techniques employed by the narrator to be one of the crucial properties when establishing the narrative mimesis.<sup>168</sup> Describing it as a communicational scenario, corresponding to the principle of metanarrative, a technique that includes the self-reflective property of the act of storytelling. Nünning then describes metanarrative as the reflection upon the act of narration and metafiction as the self-reflexivity upon the artificiality of the narrative,<sup>169</sup> therefore connecting the metanarrative with the embedded narratives, and aligning with Genette's notion despite the view of presenting seemingly an opposite of the traditional understanding of the ‘meta’ in the narrative, as noted by Bal.<sup>170</sup> Bal in her article however maintains that it is not an inversion of the traditional understanding, since Genette's metanarrative is represented by the most inward story, diverging from the traditional notion of meta representing the ‘beyond,’ but rather a different perspective on the same subject, that is the concern of embedded narratives.<sup>171</sup> Therefore the key common property of metafiction is the aspect of including another layer to the narrative, telling a story within a story, moreover, all the theoreticians point to the notion of generating an immersive quality, as the metanarrative property influences the reader's experience and push it towards more realistic experience, corresponding to the abilities of the embedded narratives as the complementing properties to the narrative as noted by Bal.

Additionally, another ‘meta’ that represents an important concept in the context of Creepypasta narrative is its affiliation to metafiction, already mentioned in the passage above, concerning Nünning's distinction, metafiction representing another type of self-

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<sup>168</sup> Monika Fludernik, “Metanarrative and metafictional commentary.” In *Poetica* (Brill 2003), 4.

<sup>169</sup> Fludernik, “Metanarrative and metafictional commentary,” 4.

<sup>170</sup> Mieke Bal, and Eve Tavor. “Notes on narrative embedding.” in *Poetics Today* (Duke University Press, 1981),42.

<sup>171</sup> Bal, “Notes on narrative embedding,”42.

referential narrative, but does not contain the reflection upon the act of storytelling.<sup>172</sup> Metafiction is defined in *Glossary of Literary Terms* by Meyer Howard Abrams, borrowing the description provided by Robert Scholes, defining metafiction as a novel that significantly diverges from realism, providing other terms ‘surfiction’ and ‘fabulation.’<sup>173</sup> The literary scholar Patricia Waugh in her work *The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, represents one of the pioneering works on metafiction. In her work she includes these terms as well, describing them as a text with self-reflective properties. Additionally, she mentions the ‘introverted novel’ ‘the anti-novel’, ‘irrealism’, and ‘the self-begetting novel’, which are all described as texts that result from a form of self-conscious writing, a novel that draws attention to its own structure and artificiality, however, all these different terms are described as accentuating different aspect of self-reflection.<sup>174</sup>

Waugh discusses the historical justification behind the emergence of metafictional novels. The purpose behind the development of the ‘meta’ terms, is described as a sign of the awareness behind the intricate interaction between the perception of reality and language with its ability to generate its own meaning.<sup>175</sup> Metafiction is then understood as a way to cope with the uncertainty regarding reality and our experience, such a reflection is then attainable through the reflections upon the construction of the narrative that is scattered throughout the fictional content. However, it is important to note that according to Waugh, metafiction is an inclination of a text towards the overemphasis of certain oppositions and tensions regarding the construction and deconstruction of the illusion, the narrative boundaries, and techniques of the story, not a subgenre.<sup>176</sup> Such a notion more or less aligns with Robert Scholes and his understanding of fabulation, which is taken to share the crucial properties with the term metafiction, a mode of writing.<sup>177</sup> Therefore text, rather than being metafictional, carries certain tendencies or is imbued with certain qualities that enable the self-reflective properties.

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<sup>172</sup> Fludernik, “Metanarrative and metafictional commentary,” 5.

<sup>173</sup> M. H. Abrams, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Cengage Learning EMEA, 2015), 258.

<sup>174</sup> Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, (Routledge, 1996),14.

<sup>175</sup> Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 3.

<sup>176</sup> Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 14.

<sup>177</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 258.

The properties may be viewed as diverse and distinct, however, in nature, they all emphasize one common aspect, which is the textual element. Waugh maintains that metafictional tendency stems from the intricate and constant intertwinement of the fiction that is then reflected upon through the acknowledgment of its construction, thus emphasizing its textuality, consequently blurring the line between fiction and reality.<sup>178</sup> Fludernik provides a detailed refining of the understanding of metafiction, distinguishing the individual elements, while the main property of metafiction as such, considering the 'inventiveness' of the narrative contrasting it with the metanarrative which regards the constructedness, both terms carrying the function of self-reflection.<sup>179</sup> This therefore represents a more nuanced definition of metafiction and simultaneously showcases its relationship to the concept of metanarration.

The metafictional texts are also described as texts that challenge certain norms and reveal the construction of these norms, Waugh gives an example of parody fitting into the metafictional category or different retellings, utilizing alternative narrative approaches, while relying on the reader's knowledge of the previously established literary traditions.<sup>180</sup> This then implies that metafiction texts or the 'meta' properties as mentioned by Waugh, are close to the concept of intertextuality, referencing other texts but through the concept of meta referencing to the status of fiction as well. The metafictional features thus suggest the author's attempt to shift the reader's experience, pushing it beyond just a simple boundary of the story world and the outside world, thus establishing a tie-in to the previously discussed concept of liminality, introduced in previous sections.

In the case of Creepypasta, the two concepts, metafiction and metanarrative seem to be intertwined and blended together. A more detailed account of such an inquiry and its consequences on the reading experience is provided in a later section. The notion of metafiction seems to be subverted in the context of Creepypasta, the text itself does not establish a reference to the artificial or fictional nature, it is rather the opposite. Nevertheless, metafiction aims at the examination of the boundary between reality and

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<sup>178</sup> Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 15.

<sup>179</sup> Fludernik, "Metanarrative and metafictional commentary," 28.

<sup>180</sup> Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 5.

fiction,<sup>181</sup> which is through the subversion of the metafictional principles in the context of the Creepypasta narrative even accentuated.

## **Creepypasta as a Deconstruction**

Before continuing the inquiry of the deconstructive qualities of Creepypasta texts, a specification of terms must be laid out. The working definition for the current purposes, established upon the reviewed literature, is the metafictional text is to be understood as a text that acknowledges its constructive processes of the textual aspects, challenging the narrative norms, but simultaneously accentuating the act of writing and the artificiality of the text, acknowledging it, and admitting to it, in order to make the reader reflect upon the contemporary cultural tendencies. In the most general sense, metafiction is a text that goes beyond the traditional properties and nature of the narrative. These characteristics of the concept of these metafictional texts are built upon the following discussion, therefore it was critical to establish summarize, and clarify the postulations embodied in the term.

### ***Deconstruction and Subversion***

Deconstruction is an approach that arose from the work of Jacques Derrida, who in his influential essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1967) identifies the insufficiencies of structuralism, regarding the description of structure. Derrida commences with the examination of the paradox of the centre, which is in structuralism understood as a fixed point that governs the play of the structure, simultaneously centre is not affected by the play, and escapes the structurality, therefore presenting a paradoxical notion that the centre is not part of the structure but rather exists externally.<sup>182</sup> In other words, structuralism accepts the centre as a governing force, but simultaneously as Derrida pointed out such understanding of the centre then creates boundaries and limits discourse, therefore removing it from the structure, situating it outside, then enabling dynamism and ambiguity of the structure.

Such fluidity and interconnectedness lead to the notion of a meaning that is relational and contingent. According to Derrida, this process was then a result of an event, or in Derrida’s terms a rupture, a state without a centre during which, signification is determined by its various relationship to other signs, thus presenting the infinity of

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<sup>181</sup> Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 2.

<sup>182</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” 109.

possibilities, where the ‘play’ takes place.<sup>183</sup> The binaries then remain crucial, as they depend on each other, and a comprehensible understanding stems from the understanding of both elements equally, therefore overcoming the hierarchy between the binaries. Moreover, Derrida explains through the concept of ‘bricolage’ and ‘bricoleur’ that the play is then the interaction that stems from stepping out of the oppositions, generating, and exploring novel ones, and transcending the old ones.<sup>184</sup> The meaning is thus in a constant state of flux, and evolves through the various relations.

As an approach deconstruction is an understanding of a language carries ideologies which shapes interpretations. Derrida essentially challenges the stability of the traditional understanding of the western philosophies, logocentric and criticizes its status of objectivity since they are rooted in language that is innately dynamic and ideological.<sup>185</sup> Following the deconstructivism and its principles, the identities are also under the influence of the unstable tendency of language, and is based on contradictions and fragmentations.<sup>186</sup> Deconstruction points to the intertwinement of readers and texts which gives rise to the undecidability of the texts, implying multiple even conflicting meanings, therefore understanding meaning more as temporary affair.<sup>187</sup> Lois Tyson in her *Critical Theory Today* then outlines a second motivation behind deconstruction, which is to uncover the ideologies behind the texts.<sup>188</sup>

For this purpose, the fundamental deconstructivism concepts for the overall framework of this thesis are the dynamic tendencies and ambiguities regarding the meaning of the text. Such a notion is then compatible with the view of the reader as active and part of the making-meaning process, a notion of the reader-response theories. This then has consequences upon the construction of the individual stories, since they result from the collaborative efforts of the readers, not only in a mental sense but a physical contribution and co-authorship of the narrative. The subsequent passage discusses the interconnection of the deconstructive tendencies and the self-conscious narrative. The last concern regarding the terminology is the pervasive usage of the term subversion.

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<sup>183</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” 110.

<sup>184</sup> Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” 115

<sup>185</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 256.

<sup>186</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 257.

<sup>187</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 259.

<sup>188</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 259.

Subversion refers to the act of destruction of the established system. Such a definition aligns with Derrida's notions introduced in the preceding sections, specifically the notion of decentralization and its implications. In addition, subversion is a concept widely incorporated by other poststructuralist critics, besides Derrida, some of them include Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin with his concept of carnivalesque, which in general sense is an alternative perspective on literature. Or the poststructuralist feminist scholar, Judith Butler, who for instance in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) explored gender norms through the lenses of subversion. She utilized the concept of subversion to explore and offer an alternative view upon her field of study. From their perspective, as well as from a number of others, the term subversion, implies both a destructive and productive tool. Within the scope of this study, the understanding of subversion essentially includes the characteristics of destabilization of the established tradition and challenging the conventions of the storytelling while simultaneously providing an alternative narrative strategy. The following pages then explore these innovative tendencies in the context of Creepypasta narratives and its crucial contribution to the genesis of the liminal space.

### **Subverted tendencies**

The Creepypasta authors employ specific elements that are rooted in similar principles as metafiction, that is the blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction. That is the pervasive focus in the writing on the ontology of the narrative, the proclivity for a level of self-reflection which however points towards other direction from the traditional metafictional narratives. It was established that the meta quality of a text entails a self-reflection of sorts upon the narrative. In the case of creepypasta, this self-reflection seems to be part of the narrative itself. Authors display a level of self-awareness regarding the creepypasta texts, establishing some knowledge regarding these narratives, however, rather than accentuating the fictionality of the narrative, the authors are pushing the other direction, that is establishing the authenticity of the narrative. One of the techniques is the assumed position of a narrator of the narrative, blurring the lines between the identities due to the medium, which was discussed in the previous section. However, other textual elements are employed across the narratives and function as components of metafiction with subverted properties, resulting not only in a narrative that balances upon the boundaries of authenticity and fiction but also the experience of the readers who question their reality.

The individual elements that carry the metafictional tendency of transcending the traditional nature of the text are employed in the form of reoccurring patterns or narrative conventions, affecting the reader in their experience in the same manner as metafictional texts do. There are certain textual properties employed by the reader, which influence the reader's experience in a similar manner as the metafictional texts, however, in the Creepypasta context, the reader is pulled in the other direction. Situating this within the framework of Derrida's discourse, the crucial binary that is employed and forms the narrative is the opposite of the authentic and fictional. This does not stem solely however from the text, but also from the treatment of the medium as such, discussed in the first part, and from the construction of the story, discussed in the second part. Regardless, in terms of the text, the authors explore the extent and challenge the narratives therefore inherently the binary through the various elements employed in the narrative. This is then achieved by the incorporation of the strategies of metafiction and metanarrative, applied to specific components discussed below.

### ***Temporality***

One of the crucial narrative patterns that represent the subverted metafictional properties, is the arrangement of temporality. As referenced in the introductory section, the structure and the specific arrangement of the story significantly influence the reader's experience. Authors of the Creepypasta stories present this fictional narrative as a recollection of events that occurred in the past while utilizing the metanarrative in the form of reflecting upon the constructiveness of the narrative. Simultaneously the frame of the narrative is marked with a temporal reference to the constructiveness of the story. In other words, the narrator in the frame narrative refers to the moment of constructing the story at hand. This metanarrative quality is essentially contained in the frame narrative, employed specifically in the form of a time reference, and it is provided by the narrator of the story. These temporal references, marked by a significant level of self-reflection anchor the narrative within a temporal framework that resembles the author's reality, that is the space outside the narrative frame. Such inclusions of these remarks regarding the construction of the narrative are inherently metafictional since they simultaneously carry the reflection upon the ontological nature of the narrative. However, this essentially results in the rise of subverted metafictional tendencies.

In the discussion on metafiction and its crucial attributes, the core idea is that in metafictional texts, the author uncovers fictionality. The narrator on the contrary insists

upon non-fictionality, and reinforces it through temporal references, giving a sense of authenticity. Nevertheless, the result of blurring the boundaries between the real and fictional remains. The element that can be described as subverted metafictional quality of temporal reference is illustrated in the following example. The story, which was used as an example in the first section, “If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back”<sup>189</sup> by the user named TheYesAndNo, tells a story of a supposed experience that involved an encounter with mysterious creatures in the woods. The author begins the narrative with the following:

Look, I don't want to post this just for it to be called a piece of fiction, but if it does, I guess I can't do anything about it. Some of you might not believe this, some of you might say this is fake, truth is, I don't care anymore. All I want is to get this out as a warning.

Currently, I'm staying at a Motel and it's like 2 am. There's some signal here. The incident I experienced earlier caused me to not get any sleep, hence the reason as to why I'm posting this here. I guess I'll just start then.<sup>190</sup>

The narrator then tells the story itself. This segment is according to the assessment from the first part of the thesis considered to be a paratext when considered from the perspective of the medium as a narrative space and its subversive consequences upon the Creepypasta narrative. With the sole focus on narrative as such, this section of the narrative illustrates the metanarrative properties imbued with the subverted metafictional qualities. The author utilizes the narrator who reflects upon the constructiveness, specifying spatiotemporal configuration, that is the place and time of the construction of the narrative, ending this section with an explicit disclosure “I guess I'll just start then,” indicating that the subsequent segment is the internal story, the internal or embedded narrative. This is then connected to the metafictional quality, meaning that instead of drawing attention to fictionality, the narrator maintains, even reinforces that the embedded story is indeed authentic, rejecting the notion of presenting fiction. The narrator displays a level of self-awareness regarding the nature of the status of that narrative, signalling it with “I don't want to post this just for it to be called a piece of fiction... Some of you might not believe this.” This illustrates an

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<sup>189</sup>TheYesAndNo, “If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back.” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>190</sup> TheYesAndNo, “If you see them smile at you, make sure to smile back.” Reddit, r/nosleep.

acknowledgment of Creepypasta texts and their fictitious status, which is reflected in the narrative itself, leading to the conclusion that the governing centre exists outside of the Creepypasta space, stems from the real world of the physical reality of the author and the reader.

In other words, the subversive quality is the narrator's acknowledgment of the fictional status of other texts but rejecting the quality being applied to their own narrative.

Nevertheless, inside the Creepypasta space, the barrier between the real and fictional is unclear without disclosing the fictional status as in metafictional texts, supporting the existence of the liminal, the separate space, generated upon those ambiguities, changing the norms and the traditional boundaries of metafiction. Despite the 'outside' knowledge regarding the status of Creepypasta texts, this subversive nature of elements that are based upon the metafictional tendencies, the reader is allowed to be immersed in the narrative further.

### ***Narrative Validation***

Another recurring pattern in the narrative which is connected to the self-reflection of the construction of the narrative, with the ability to further erase the reader's certainty regarding the nature of the story is the narrator's reasoning and validation of the ability to share such a narrative. A justification provided by the narrator in the example above is the inability to fall asleep. The narrator being aware of the status of the Creepypasta stories is apparent in the inclusion of a direct reference to its fictional status, however, as part of the narrative, the narrator distances their own narrative and refuses the fictional status. Such commentary upon the circumstances regarding the ontological nature of the story then once again represents the metanarrative tendency and simultaneously constitutes the immersive experience by subverting the metafictional inclination by validating the narrative and reinforcing the authenticity.

A relevant feature related to the pattern of such narrative validation is the issue of the narrator. The narrator remains the same, in both the frame of the narrative, which contains the self-reflexive properties, while the embedded narrative is told by the same narrator.<sup>191</sup> This diverges from the defined notions of metanarrative, which maintains

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<sup>191</sup> However, this is not always the case. There are several stories in which the author tells a story that is mediated, that is, the story revolves around finding some sort of artifact that contains the story that in this case represents the embedded narrative. In such cases, there are indeed multiple narrators.

that the individual narratives are told by multiple narrators.<sup>192</sup> This difference from the traditional understanding of embedded narratives aligns with the notion of subversion. The aim of the author is to tell a story and transmit an immersive experience, presenting a story that appears to be authentic by adhering to the norms of the medium utilized for the storytelling, as is discussed in the first part, one of them being the pervasive nature of internet narrative being personal,<sup>193</sup> which is in Creepypasta achieved by telling the story in the first person. This then leads to the notion of Creepypasta presenting a personal horror, that is a narrative in which the proximity between the narrative as a whole and the reader is significantly reduced, allowing an immersive experience, which once again is linked to the concept of Creepypasta existing in the liminal space.

### ***The Open Ending***

The culmination of the reflection upon the process of storytelling is embodied in the tendency to tell a story that lacks a clear resolution, which as it was established in the previous section, prompts the readers into participation. However, this pattern is simultaneously understood, in the context of metafictional and metanarrative properties as a tool that allows for deeper immersion, retains the liminal space, and generates a level of personal connection with the narrative, that is an experience that spreads into the outside of the liminal.

This element is connected to the previous notions and tendencies of metanarrative and elements through which the subverted metafictional qualities operate. The narrator recalls the event in the form of an embedded or internal narrative, framing it into an outer narrative that is rooted in the specific temporal arrangements that contain explicit references to the narrator's reflection upon the constructiveness of the narrative. However, the ambiguity represents the crucial part of the outer, frame narrative. The open-ended structure employed in the Creepypasta narratives goes beyond the simple general definition of an unresolved conflict, but rather resembles an incorporation of the intentional gap, as discussed by Iser, which forces readers to employ their imagination, that fill in the missing information.<sup>194</sup>

Creating a connection to the concept introduced in this section, metafiction, metanarrative, and its subversions, the open-end is further modified and understood in

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<sup>192</sup> Bal, "Notes on narrative embedding," 52

<sup>193</sup> Schachtner, *The Narrative Subject: Storytelling in the Age of the Internet*,

<sup>194</sup> Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach," 276.

terms of subversion, as the readers do not simply use their imagination in the reading process in order to cope with such structure, but they are required to participate and propose the resolution themselves. This type of ending involves a heightened activity of the reader, who is expected to fill in the gaps and participate in the construction of the narrative, further reinforcing the authenticity effect. The readers are turning away from the fictional status, therefore continuing the tendency, and pulling the narrative towards the subversion of the metafictional. In the context of Creepypasta stories, the reader is thus thrown into the narrative as they try to resolve and continue the construction of the narrative by directly engagement with the narrator not necessarily the author, a complex proposition discussed in the latter section on the issue of the cycle of interpretations and constructions of the narrative.

This connection between temporality and open endings and its subversive metafictional tendency may be illustrated in the story analysed in the first section of the thesis, “My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying,” in which the narrator, after recalling the event, in a form of an embedded narrative, draws its narration to the moment of constructing the narrative stating: “Because 40 minutes ago I got a text from an unknown number. Just three words : "I found You."... I started typing this out immediately after. I don't know what to do. I'm alone and scared, and I can't help but feel that I'm being watched”<sup>195</sup>

The narrator thus alludes to the notion of the danger being still present, amplifying the effects of subverted metafiction, as the narrator reflects upon the act of construction of the narrative which functions as a tool that moves away from its fictional status. In other words, the boundary between the real and fictional is blurred through the tools discussed above, creating uncertainty in a reader, such an effect is increased by the required activity of the reader who is to continue the story, therefore immersing themselves into the narrative. The significant level of immersion is displayed for example through readers’ utilization of the previously required knowledge, such as references to other stories by other authors as discussed in the previous section, therefore contributing to the consistency of the space.

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<sup>195</sup> Maliagir1314, “My wife has been peeking at me from around corners and behind furniture. It's gone from weird to terrifying,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

The open-endedness of the narrative is closely associated with the specific temporal arrangement in which reduces the temporal distance between the reader's experience and the narrative due to the narrator's engagement with the reader. The open ending ultimately embodies the subverted metafictional tendency, as the narrator indicates that the conclusion was not reached, therefore maintaining further that the narrative represents an authentic experience, achieved through such openness and hesitation which stems from the gap of the narrative. Moreover, it opens a space for further narrative, inviting readers to reconsider the narrative and revisit it, allowing for a more complex reading process discussed in the subsequent section. Readers are eventually becoming part of the narrative.

### **Meta, and Subversion in Creepypasta**

The oppositions as described by Waugh, still exist in the Creepypasta context but it stems from the outside of the narratives. That is, the tension that generates the uncertainty between reality and fiction, which represents the staple of the metafictional text, relies on the existence of the 'outside' space, meaning it is decentred, the centre exists outside of the Creepypasta space itself. The fictional status of Creepypasta is established only through the knowledge stemming from the outside of the narratives. And since certain Creepypasta stories do lack fantastical elements, the reader cannot establish the veracity of the events as presented by the narrator, without the 'outside' knowledge. To extend such an observation, according to the literary theorists whose discussion upon the concept of metafiction, Creepypasta unconsciously examines and pushes the boundaries that question authenticity, significantly interfering with the immersive properties of fiction.

Creepypasta with its form then dismantles the traditional distinctions and boundaries of the embedded narratives. The binaries as such still exist, but they are however treated in a distinct manner that enables participation and allows for multiple interpretations through the ambiguities. Both the frame and embedded narrative are highly dependable cannot be separated and must be read as a whole. The frame narrative does not only introduce, puts the embedded narrative into a context, and later even continues the embedded narrative, but contains the elements that draw the reader in, and invite the reader in, bringing in the metafictional properties that have their own implications discussed in the previous passages.

The immersive quality stems from the deliberate interplay of the individual aspects such as the combination of various narrative levels. The traditional view of these levels is dismantled and constitutes an overall ambiguous environment based on the uncertainty of individual boundaries. In other words, emerge into the liminal space.

#### On the Complexities of Reading, Interpretation, Rereading, Reinterpretation

A significant process for the Creepypasta readers is the constant rereading, reinterpretation, and evolvement of the narratives at hand. As discussed in the previous section, the readers in the community possess certain shared interpretative strategies that are utilized in order to push the narrative further, maintaining the tension between the binary of authentic and fictional, and potentially directing the storyline. However, the process or the experience of the reader as an outsider figure is transformed into a reader who enriches and co-creates the narrative which involves a more entangled and complex process. The paratext in the form of the comment section that enriches the story, based upon the interpretative strategies of the community, represents the interpretation of the reader who does not question the authenticity of the text but rather accepts it. The second, position exists at the external level, the reader is aware of the fictional status. The content produced by the readers, that is the comment section, is then a product of intricate, complex, and interconnected processes, built upon two levels of the reader's encounter with the text. A consequence of such a process, including the generated tension between the two levels that are rooted in the two binaries, is the emergence of the liminal level of experience, is an ambiguity that exists between the two positions regarding the interpretation and treatment of the text. The following section introduces Iser's notions which are incorporated into and build upon the analysis representing one of the foundational components of the overall theoretical framework.

#### *Iser*

Iser in his phenomenological approach stresses the importance of considering not only the actual text but also the action involved in the engagement with the text, the reading process. The work to all its extent arises only through the coupling of the text with the reader's engagement with it, forming the virtual dimension.<sup>196</sup> Considering such a process then reveals the complexities of the reader's interaction with Creepypasta narratives. The text in its complexity is created by what Iser distinguished as two

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<sup>196</sup> Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach," 284.

different forces, the artistic which is the text being created by the author, and the aesthetic which is the action involved in the reading process.<sup>197</sup> In the context of Creepypasta content, these roles are not well-defined or divided between author and reader. Similarly, as the ambiguous identities involved in such a context, both the reader and the author are involved in diverse tasks, therefore both being part of the artistic and aesthetic pole, since both are involved in creating the text and interpreting it in order to provide further input. Therefore, additionally, a significant property of the virtuality, specifically of Creepypasta narratives, is the collaboration which requires both author and readers to be involved in the artistic and aesthetic dimension of the narrative.

Here, the two levels of interpretation need to be considered. Virtuality, according to Iser, refers to the range of various potentialities and perspectives. On one level, an external level, the reader is aware of fictional status, which produces one set of perspectives, these are not actualized, remaining invisible to others, aligning with the concept of the aesthetic pole. However, in the Creepypasta context, the author assumes the position of the narrator who recalls a certain incident, similarly, the readers who become the co-authors, react, and interpret the supposed event, the conclusion being an existence of another level. Therefore, on the internal level exists a separate set of possibilities and perspectives that are actualized and are represented by the contributions. This is represented as the paratext itself which continues the narrative. On this internal level, the reader participates in the artistic dimension and becomes the co-author, which is the transformation of the liminal realm. These interpretations of the reader as a co-author are not entirely a different set of interpretations but rather an expansion of the potential interpretations. Readers are leveraging their knowledge of the Creepypasta space, that is their interpretations are not limited by our rational world, but they operate with the established knowledge in the Creepypasta realm.

Another notion proposed by Iser is the reader's inclination towards the implementation of a certain pattern, finding consistency, forming an illusion, and simultaneously breaking it.<sup>198</sup> A similar process is occurring in the Creepypasta space on the internal level of the reading process since the readers as co-authors are finding the solution implementing a level of consistency upon their interpretation. This process is also collaborative among the readers and between the readers and the author, the pattern and

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<sup>197</sup> Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach," 279.

<sup>198</sup> Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach," 294.

consistency of the Creepypasta texts then stems from the internal level of the reading process, therefore contributing to the emergence of the new reader's experience. The process that is under other circumstances hidden but not in such case of digital fiction is based on collaborative efforts during the reading process. The reader during their reading process is in a state of constant rearrangement, reinterpretation, revealing novel connection.<sup>199</sup> These processes are made visible in the Creepypasta space. The co-authors and authors build upon and constantly rearrange their expectations regarding the narrative which unfolds in time. Simultaneously, this openness and transparency of the reading process and the potential interpretation of readers does not entail stripping away the horror experience which is the hesitation of the tension between authentic and fictional. A significant property discussed in the following section is the specific utilization of temporality regarding the narrative, which retains ambiguity and tension.

## Analyses

### "Hello? Can anyone see this post?" by A\_Red\_Scarf

The story written by A\_Red\_Scarf, begins abruptly, as the narrator describes being trapped in an unknown, dark, silent space, still however having access to the internet, saying that he was not able to reach anybody on other social media platforms, and Reddit being their final resort, therefore asking for a confirmation that the other users can see this post. The narrator decides to move forward in the space while documenting the experience. The narrator finds themselves in a hopeless situation, reflecting upon the situation, essentially writing for the sake of writing. The end seems to be unreachable, and as the story progresses, the space seems to get narrower until the narrator writes seemingly panicked that the "CAN FEEL THREE WALLS NOW." In a great distress without the ability to move back, the narrator types out their final plea asking if anyone can see the post.

This narrative lacks the metanarrative element, as the author does not employ the framing of the narrative. Nevertheless, what is apparent is the heavy emphasis on the shared space of the narrator and the author, accentuating the real space that is utilized simultaneously as an important part of the fictional narrative. The reference to the space serves as a tool to justify the existence of the narrative. The narrator refers to the Reddit space as the last resort for communication.

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<sup>199</sup> Iser, "The reading process: A phenomenological approach," 283.

I tried to reach out to anyone, ANYONE on my Facebook, Instagram, Twitter—and nothing! Either the whole world is in on a sick joke where they all collectively ignore my existence, or my posts don't actually make it through. So now here I am, typing this out on Reddit for anyone to see.<sup>200</sup>

The narrator thus validates the ontology while employing the same medium as part of the fictional narrative, therefore enhancing its sense of authenticity. This shared space is then utilized as the bridge that connects the fictional and the authentic identities, leading to a hesitation between these two opposing tendencies. The narrator references to the space as a medium for communication and interaction, posing questions while displaying a level of self-reflection.

Another subverted metafictional tendency is the reference to the process of writing, more specifically it is labelled as typing out the post, as illustrated in the example above. Throughout the story, the narrator does so in a consistent manner, “my phone barely lights up my fingers as I'm typing this...I'm gonna log my journey as I start venturing further...I'm struggling to type with one hand.” By employing these references to the process of drawing attention to the writing process, the narrator once again accentuates the narrative medium as a part of both the process of writing the narrative as a fictional account and writing it as an authentic experience, as it is presented. In other words, the narrator merges the two spaces together, creating a tension between the binaries that are mixed together, as the medium is presented as being in both spaces, the authentic and fictional.

The narrator ends the narrative not with a resolution, on the contrary, the situation they found themselves in seems to be significantly deteriorating. Pleading for help, once again asking whether the readers can see the narrative, once again labelled as post, the narrator remains in the same situation, even in more dangerous circumstances: “The ceiling is gonna crush me if I keep moving. I barely fit as is. The path never got bigger.”<sup>201</sup> This signifies the danger is still present, and the situation stays unresolved, bringing readers into the narrative, who are asked to interact with the post, thus maintaining the hesitation.

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<sup>200</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, “Hello? Can anyone see this post?” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>201</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, “Hello? Can anyone see this post?” Reddit, r/nosleep.

The sense of omnipresent danger is emphasized by the narrator's warning to the readers at the end of the narrative not to move if they were to find themselves in the same situation: "if anyone ever gets stuck in a place like this, DON'T MOVE FORWARD."<sup>202</sup> This simultaneously also contributes to the sense of the prevailing danger, not only for the narrator but the readers as well.

Further interaction by the narrator is missing, which prompts readers to interpret this within the range of hesitation, as one of the comments says the following: "Wait guys I think OP is unable to see our interactions with his posts. Maybe that's why he thinks his friends don't care about him on his socials"<sup>203</sup> This reveals that a missing author's interaction offers the readers a source of potential interpretations, that are nevertheless initiated by the author. Another possible strategy of the author to guide the readers in a certain direction is by directly addressing and commenting upon the potential readings. An example of this is illustrated at the beginning of the narrative, after the narrator begins with the description, expressing distress, maintaining that they are "not under the influence."<sup>204</sup>

The author forms certain boundaries to the interpretation, within which the readers are expected to form a continuation of the narrative. The readers utilize multiple clues from the narrative, while most of them respond to his pleas, saying that they do see the post,<sup>205</sup> which showcases that the readers accept the narrator's space as their own, entering into the narrative as they interact directly with the narrator, not the author. Nevertheless, some enrich the narrative further, as one of the comments offers an explanation, saying that it seems like the narrator found himself in a hell that was specifically made for him<sup>206</sup> an explanation possibly deriving from the narrator's mentioning that they "hate being alone and anyone who knows me will tell you how much I hate isolation. This feels like a nightmare"<sup>207</sup>

Certain interpretations display even greater creativity as one of the comments says the following: "Accept the situation and be at peace. Nobody here can help you. We put you

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<sup>202</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"

<sup>203</sup> WalrusArtist, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?" Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>204</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"

<sup>205</sup> samusfan21; unfashionablyl8, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"

<sup>206</sup> IAmAn\_Anne, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"

<sup>207</sup> A\_Red\_Scarf, "Hello? Can anyone see this post?"

there for a reason. You shall come out a new man as my master mentioned.”<sup>208</sup> Such interpretations emphasize the multiplicity of interpretations and, therefore present a decentred narrative that rejects an unambiguity. It is the author that opens the possibilities within the scope of possible interpretation, while the reader then, operating within certain borders, has the potential to form their own interpretation, co-forming the authentic for other readers. Another tendency that decentres the narrative is the omission of the frame narrative wherein the narrator elucidates the contextual situation. On the contrary, the narrator pulls the reader into the narrative, suddenly, beginning with “I don’t even know where I am.”<sup>209</sup>

In this instance, this omission of the frame is not necessary since it does not affect the tension of the authentic and fictional since the narrator documents what is happening in that moment. Therefore, the narration does not need a metanarrative element, since in within this Creepypasta narrative, the technique of directly reporting events does not require the temporal framework which imitates the author’s physical space. Similar technique was employed in the story analysed in previous chapter, “\*\*\*EMERGENCY ALERT\*\*\*” by TheCrystalGem as well as in the following example. In these cases, the immersive stems from the temporal references substitute the source of authentic that emerges from framing the narrative, as the narrator tells a story as a recollection of their experience.

Despite the possible divergent tendencies of an original interpretation, therefore presenting what may be perceived as an alternative interpretation, still operates within the boundaries set up by the author. The boundaries emerge not only due to the clues presented by the author but also the unifying pattern established in the narrative, which brings about coherency within the narrative and consequently within the experience. The unifying pattern implemented by the author is the space that surrounds the narrator, representing the element that endangers the narrator, and it is identified as such as illustrated in the examples of the individual comments, all referencing and acknowledging the effects and danger of the space.

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<sup>208</sup> That\_Dimension\_1480, “Hello? Can anyone see this post?” Reddit/nosleep.

<sup>209</sup> That\_Dimension\_1480, “Hello? Can anyone see this post?”

“It gets closer every time I talk about it” by LemonGoodness

The narrator recounts an experience that involves an encounter with an entity that advances as the narrative progresses. In the first part, the narrator recalls a camping trip with friends in the Arizona desert, first encountering being dismissed as a hallucination. The narrator however discovers that the human-like entity remains always in his sight, while their panic is increased as no one else can see the figure but the narrator. Moreover, it seems that the mysterious entity is getting closer when acknowledged. After this recollection, the narrator says that it happened four months ago, and ever since the discovery they decided not to mention the entity to anyone, simultaneously expressing the fear and the consequences of posting the story, however expressing great distress and helplessness in the situation, seeking advice.

In the second part of the story, titled "It gets closer every time I talk about it - Update," the narrator reflects upon the time delay between the part of the narrative, and continues to explain the events after the narrator posted the story. The entity appeared later than anticipated, nevertheless, after it appeared, it did not stop and led the narrator to search for a solution in churches, telling the priest about the female figure with jet-black eyes, lacking a mouth and nose, which only makes the figure move even closer to the narrator. Thus, once again, ending the narrative by asking for advice, assuming the technique of narrative of interconnectedness, utilizing it to tell a fictional story, thus indirectly referring to the space as a discussion form, while remaining in the space of the horror. That is, the events are presented as taking place in the same space as the readers.

The last update by the narrator describes the figure appearing in very close proximity, as the fear subsides and is gradually replaced by what is described as hunger and the having the urge to come closer to her. The last words of the narrator are a warning to the readers, urging them not to talk about her. This part is then expanded upon in the edit by another narrator Leo, one of the narrator's friends, who received a text message in which the narrator said his goodbyes. Being worried, Leo explains that upon calling the authorities, the narrator's apartment was found empty only ashes. Leo mentioned that he read all the other posts, expressing fear since all people who were exposed to the knowledge of seeing the mysterious figure are seeing her too. Leo then closes the narrative as he warns the readers again, not to mention or talk about the entity.

The narrator initiates the story, setting up a frame within which the author aligns their physical temporality with the narrator's fictional temporality, referring to the progression of the narrative and the real events of composing it. The author references not only the process of writing but the medium: "I shouldn't be posting this. I don't know what will happen when I hit the "submit" button."<sup>210</sup> The narrator expresses a similar concern when ending the first part of the narrative, or the first post, seeking help from the readers. This represents the decentring tendency since each part is framed as such. First, the narrator sets up the recollection or evaluates the events, which is followed by the experience itself, and then ends each of the parts of the narrative with a plead, or in the instance of the last part of the narrative, also a warning. Such a specific schema is employed by the author to enforce the temporal context to fit both the narrator and the author. Therefore, metanarrative and metafiction tendencies are employed within the fictional space to give a sense of authenticity.

Moreover, the end of each part reinforces the defencelessness and growing danger which culminates in the third final part told by the narrator's friend, warning the others, that is the readers, not to talk about her. The narrative then shifts the danger onto the readers themselves, who are left without a definite resolution. The reader's sensation of threat is increased through the justification of the narrator switch that occurs at the end in the final part of the narrative. The sudden switch from the original narrator to his friend is explained as follows: "I saw this laptop on his bed, opened to this thread, so I read it. I read the other posts, too, and now I'm really scared." He then reveals that he too is starting to be aware of the entity, confirming the narrator's theory within the narrative, that the threat is magnified when the entity is acknowledged and deliberately addressed.

This then reveals the pattern that ties the narrative together, which is the idea that an unexplained danger has the potential to be spread through exposure to a mere knowledge of the danger. In the narrative, it is not revealed what happened to the narrator, but it is suggested that Leo and others face the same danger, potentially those who interacted with the post, creating a sense in the reader of being included in the narrative. This then brings about the experience of tension and hesitation within the reader, who have been lured into the narrative, through the author's employment of

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<sup>210</sup> LemonGoodness, "It gets closer every time I talk about it," Reddit, r/nosleep.

various subverted tendencies as described above, giving the sense that the reader now faces similar danger.

The functionality of the unifying pattern is mirrored by the readers who thus explore the possible interpretations, as they offer in their contributions the possibilities of purging themselves from the knowledge. One of the comments mentions never talking about it since the figure seems to be at a much greater distance.<sup>211</sup> Some even seemingly perpetuate the idea of possessing a certain knowledge as a threat by mentioning that they “saw something strange yesterday.”<sup>212</sup> Other readers speculate among themselves on how this ‘curse’ came to be, concluding that the narrator may have talked to someone in a bar, infecting himself without realizing it.<sup>213</sup> These discussions and interpretations then essentially expand upon the unifying pattern, as the readers contribute to the Nevertheless, the emphasis is upon the ‘inflectional nature’ within the narrative unifies in a sense the interpretations of the readers, who are capable of generating further content within those boundaries through the various interpretations.

### **Discussion III. The Liminal in the Deconstruction, a Discussion**

As established throughout the thesis, Creepypasta represents a type of fiction that embodies an ambiguity, a hesitation that oscillates between the question of the authenticity of the artifact, and its fictional status. This section examined the most specific aspects of those narratives, which essentially push the boundaries of the traditional concepts of metafiction. The role of the reader and the author is not as distinct as is traditionally understood. There are no clear boundaries between these two roles, a notion that was introduced in part II and significantly expanded upon in this section, as there are significant consequences for the reading process specifically the complexity of it in the form of the emergence of two distinct levels of the reading process entailing a different set of potential interpretations. An external one that remains hidden and aligns with the traditional concept of the reader’s reading process and interpretation and the internal one in which the reader operates with a broader set of possibilities. An ambiguous nature and hesitation nevertheless remain, as the tension between the authentic and inauthentic, or fictional. This stems not only from the collaborative forming of certain patterns, that is the consistency in filling the gaps in the

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<sup>211</sup> Ringlord7, “It gets closer every time I talk about it,” Reddit, r/nosleep.

<sup>212</sup> Jintess, “It gets closer every time I talk about it.”

<sup>213</sup> darlingest\_dreams, “It gets closer every time I talk about it.”

narrative, but also from the structural properties of the narrative, which includes the employment of specific temporal configuration.

The results of these analyses revealed the pervasive property regarding the structure of the Creepypasta narratives, the temporal openness implying the potential to constantly evolve and construct the narrative further. The lack of clarity produces together with the author's appeal to participate in the storytelling process, as well as with other properties of immersion. When examining the effects stemming from the ambiguity and its effect on the reader, a paradox of sorts arises. Despite the idea of generating a text in an environment that enables any reader to contribute, and enrich the text with their own interpretation, the reader is merely tricked into the belief of being in control, as ultimately it is the author who controls the reader's experience through author's interactions with the contributions made by the readers. Therefore, this paradox stems from the effect of the digital horror experience, despite being collaborative, the narrative is in fact not rooted in equality. The readers are trapped in the narrative and in their search for potential solutions. Through the elements employed by the author, specifically the open ending, narrative validation, and specific temporality.

The specific treatment of temporality represents a crucial aspect of the Creepypasta narratives, as it is not only the norm but, throughout the narratives, has its productive quality in itself. The readers are constructing the meaning while reflecting upon the aspect of temporality, moreover, in certain cases, the temporality itself has the potential to generate meaning. The second function is to imbue the narrative with a sense of authenticity, due to the pervasive references to real-time and space configurations. Specifically, the real space configuration is embodied in the validation of the narrative. Both these are subversions of the traditional understanding of the metafictional tendency. The open ending represents the space that promotes the plurality of interpretation and essentially decentres the narrative, which moves the narrative forward. Therefore, ambiguity does not however represent an obstacle, on the contrary, it represents the generative force, that encourages readers toward a creative output throughout the whole space.

## Conclusion

This work examined the readers' experience that emerged from the phenomenon of Creepypasta as a horror mode narratives within the space of the digital. Initiated by the first chapter, Digital Space and Shifting the Horror Experience; The Bridge to the Liminal, introducing the material dimension of those texts, including the environment of the digital. Through the lenses of poststructuralism, it was illustrated that digital features are reappropriated, and their general function within the context of non-fictional content was transferred to fictional content, by individuals. Such processes of recombination and reappropriations of the digital tools and functions within the digital environment represent one of the sources of the liminal experience.

This behaviour is learned in the community, which allows for the emergence of a space that is coherent. This was examined in the second chapter The Sociological Workings of the Digital Horror Narrative and its Implications upon the Experience; Authors, Readers, Narrators, and Monsters. I applied the theories that examine the workings of communities, due to the complicated nature that applies to Creepypasta community, that rather than a community in a traditional sense, or in a sense of fandom, truly forms a narrative space that resembles a world. This world is however once again ambiguous due to the alternative identities formed within the space, while retaining the elements of the authentic.

The third section, Something Wicked This Way Comes or What Happens after the Story is Over; The Horror is in Deconstruction then delved into the horror experience which stems from the tendency to engage the audience in an authentic terror, bring to fruition the horror, not only through the blurred identities of the individuals but purely through the narrative devices. Crucial is the tendency to form and transform an experience that draws its attention to itself, but in the opposite direction, and essentially subverts the traditional 'meta,' a technique that pushes the narrative possibilities. In this sense Creepypasta pushes the boundaries of what was just until recently considered to be an evolutionary narrative that challenges tradition. This underscores the protentional of the digital space, and the rapid pace in the rise of various innovations offered in this environment.

Creepypasta represents one of the novel contents that arose from the technological evolution, allowing for a unique horror experience that stems from the unprecedented

level of authenticity, forming texts that constantly balance between the fictional and the real. The authenticity stems from repurposing the digital tools, assuming the ambiguous identities and their dynamic roles imprint themselves onto the content that balances between the two levels, the real and the fictional. All three chapters reflect the three dimensions that generate the liminal, an ambiguous experience brought out from the specific configuration of material, social, and horror mode.

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