

*Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage
Phenomenon*

Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes (editors)

Mauro Di Lullo, Stirling University

New York and London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2016

ISBN: 9781784530259 £59.50

This collection is an important academic resource for all scholars working on the political and social significance of global horror cinema. It shows us the urgency of understanding the relation between digital horror cinema, and political and social events. The most immediate effect of this inquiry is realised in the introduction: that the digital aesthetics of horror do not merely emerge to register the fears and concerns of our panoptical neoliberal global society, but that these films actively contribute in the deconstruction of encoded silences, immoral and repressive political regimes (in the Western neoliberal regimes and in the Middle East theocratic states), and a range of cultural anxieties surrounding the institutional powers that create mass-scale neoliberal government surveillance. As the editors suggest, '[o]urs is a world in which social media has enabled the emergence of new forms of online subjectivity, even as the proliferation of surveillance technologies position us as objects of an authoritarian gaze invested in tackling criminal activity and maintaining the civil order of the status quo' (2). On this point, we need only to remember and discuss most recent legislation in France, Turkey and so on, where several investigatory organisations are given increasing power in the name of 'public safety and protection from terrorism related offences'. As horror realises all too well, however, to act always in the other's best interest brings some far more dangerous political motives from elsewhere.

Digital Horror presents its title matter as 'a diverse range of films with differing perspectives on the contemporary world but, in its more complex and engaging manifestations, unified by an interest in the impact of new technologies upon our diverse societies, our relation to the past and the present, and upon human subjectivity itself' (11). Thus, the book examines the complex ways in which horror films engage with changes, transformations and adaptations in digital technologies. This is explored through eleven different essays separated into three well discussed sections: 'Haunted Technologies and Network Panic', 'Digital Horror and the Post National', and 'Digital Stylistics'.

The first of these sections closes with a pioneering piece by Neal Kirk: ‘Networked Spectrality: *In Memorium*, *Pulse*, and Beyond’. Here, the author responds to the frequent yet limited critical readings that locate social and cultural anxieties affecting the relationship between ghosts and technology. While, as Kirk affirms, ‘ghost stories migrate from literary to audio/visual media, they become more self-conscious of how to represent the spectral in those new media environments’ (54), very few readings have examined the ways that ghosts become as distributive and mobile as the technologies in which they manifest. To counter the critical readings that might ‘obscure important technological processes that enrich the relationship between ghosts and social use of new media technology’ (55), Kirk explains a new theoretical framework: ‘Networked Spectrality’. This approach ‘aims to account for representations of ghosts that are transitioning from the singular, linear, personal and analogue to ghosts that are digital, multiple, nodular and distributive’ (55). This theoretical framework of viewing the *circulatory nature* of films such as *Pulse* (2006) (John Sonzero’s remake of Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s film *Kairo* (2001)), allows a vision of horror that construes itself as a channel for the haunting of digital communication transmissions. Kirk argues that ‘[a]s representative of contemporary cultural productions that depict the internet and new media as a source of fear, *Pulse* is noteworthy because, in the language of the film, it creates the conditions for our society ‘to be digitally haunted by new media e-presence and ghosts supposedly ungoverned by traditional spectral mechanics’ (59). Kirk’s close readings of *Pulse*, and the ‘online only’ film *In Memorium*, offers a lasting vision of the ways in which fiction demonstrates technical horrors that are far too much a digital reality. Kirk ends his essay by suggesting that while new media technologies are continuously increasing, ‘other digital nightmares awake as technological development continues to proliferate’ (64). Yet, there are three more essays composing the first part: Steffen Hantke’s ‘Network Anxiety: Prefiguring Digital Anxieties in the American Horror Film’, Steve Jones’s ‘Torture Pornopticon: (In)security Cameras, Self-Governance and Autonomy’ – highly inspiring in its historical, political and social significance – and the equally relevant Steen Christiansen’s ‘Uncanny Cameras and Network Subjects’.

The second part also discusses the ways in which horror films engage with transformations and adaptations in digital technologies. It is composed of four essays: Linnie Blake and Mary Ainslie’s ‘Digital Witnessing and Trauma Testimony in Ghost Game: Cambodian Genocide, Digital Horror and the Nationalism of New Thai Cinema’, Dejan Ognjanović’s ‘“Welcome to the Reality Studio”: Serbian Hand-Held Horrors’, Zeynep Sahinturk’s ‘Djinn in the Machine: Technology and Islam in Turkish Horror Film’, and Mark

Freeman's 'An Uploadable Cinema: Digital Horror and the Postnational Image'. All the essays are important to the book's purpose, but Zeynep Sahinturk's article is most significant in its political and social significance. 'Djinn in the Machine: Technology and Islam in Turkish Horror Film' is a new resource in the field as it draws upon the recent Turkish political instability, as well as the dangerous authoritarian perspective existing in that country. Furthermore, Turkish horror cinema is increasingly flourishing outside its country of origin and Sahinturk examines a brief history of Turkish horror films, providing a comprehensive discussion of Hasan Karacadağ's *D@bbe* films, the first film of which is, as Sahinturk describes it: 'an unacknowledged remake of *Kairo*' (98). Demonstrating a comprehensive knowledge of the Turkish horror genre and the religious sources that influence its productions, Sahinturk explains how striking it is that, whereas early Turkish horror films were simply remakes of Western cinema titles, films 'made after the 2000s choose to create horror out of Islamic tales and thus became popular' (96). The author argues that by utilising the 'ghost-in-the-machine' technique, in addition to the counterfeit narrative device of the found-footage phenomena, 'post-millennial Turkish horror films underline both the extent to which horror is a truly transnational genre and the dominant role played by US and Japanese films at the cutting edge of the medium' (96). Sahinturk provides a substantial case for how such films 'explain the popularisation of Islamic mythology as a source of horror in a Turkey ruled by the AKP [pro-Islamist Justice and Development Party] for the last decade' (97). Turkish political contexts – and how these have informed critics and filmmakers alike – are explored in this essay, which demonstrates the metaphorical ideas operating behind expressions of political ideology. The essay is an essential resource for scholars engaged with Turkish political life under Mr Erdogan's authoritarian regime.

The third part is composed of three essays: Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet's 'Night Vision in the Contemporary Horror Film', James Aston's 'Nightmares outside the Mainstream: August Underground and Reel/Real Horror', and Xavier Aldana Reyes's 'The [*REC*] Films: Affective Possibilities and Stylistic Limitations of Found Footage Horror'. This final part is also able to show us the importance of understanding the relation between digital horror cinema, and political and social events, and how horror films engage with transformations and adaptations in digital technologies. Monnet in particular suggests, '[n]ight vision brings a whole new visual rhetoric to the horror film, [...] One of the most immediately striking things about night vision is the eerie green glow that turns people into uncanny figures with opaque and shiny eyes' (123). Monnet discusses the night vision technologies developed by British and US military forces during the invasion and occupation

of Afghanistan and Iraq, demonstrating the alarming anonymity night vision casts upon the figures below its gaze, threatening to dehumanise civilians and military targets that are rendered ‘often indistinguishable objects in an [almost unreal] field of vision’ (125). Turning to night vision in horror cinema, Monnet’s main argument is that there are ‘three main kinds of uses of the night vision sequence in contemporary horror: forensic revelation, traumatic memory and uncanny depersonalisation’ (127). The analysis that follows – a close reading of *28 Weeks Later*, *World of the Dead: The Zombie Diaries 2* and *Entity* – present a Gothic scholarship able to engage with pressing social and political issues regarding biopolitics, its significance in our postmodern world, and the perception of the most controversial cases of military intervention. These films, Monnet claims, ‘reflect discomfort with the military digitalisation of death and the concomitant dehumanisation of civilians, soldiers and viewers alike in highly mediated, digitised and visually alienating virtual environments. Most of all, however, the films reflect discomfort with contemporary neoliberal militarism’ (134). The link between digital horror movies and the disappearance of politics in our neoliberal global world is perfectly shown in this convincing essay.

Overall, this book is an important contribution to film and Gothic studies in their relation to political and social issues. This volume works on many interdisciplinary levels and it strongly attests to the underappreciated impact that Gothic scholars manage on a daily basis through critical exploration of ethical, social and political issues.