

Dark Webs

Goth Subcultures in Cyberspace

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The rapport between Goth subcultures and new technologies has often been a subject of fascination for those who are both part of that subculture and external observers. William Gibson, who provided much of the impetus for such intersections via his contributions to cyberpunk, made the connection between technology and Gothic rather embarrassingly explicit in his 1986 novel, *Count Zero*. Less mortifying was the crossover that occurred in the late eighties and nineties between Goth and Industrial music, particularly via bands such as Nine Inch Nails or Frontline Assembly, exploiting a hardcore techno sound combined with a strongly Goth-influenced aesthetic.¹

This connection between the Gothic and technoculture has contributed to the survival of a social grouping that Nick Mercer, in *21st Century Goth* (2002), refers to as the most vibrant community online, and is also the subject of several studies by Paul Hodgkinson in particular. This paper is not especially concerned with the Gothic *per se*, whether it can tell us something about the intrinsic nature of the web or vice versa, but more with the practice of a youth subculture that does indeed appear to be flourishing in cyberspace, particularly the phenomenon of net.Goths that has emerged in recent years. Claims that sites and newsgroups form virtual communities are, of course, not specific to Goths. With the emergence of the Internet into popular consciousness in the early to mid-nineteen-nineties following the invention of the World Wide Web, commentators such as Howard Rheingold in *The Virtual Community* (1995) made grand claims for the potential of online or virtual communities. No longer would individuals be restricted to accidents of geography, social status, biology or ethnic identity when forming connections in cyberspace, but would instead pursue their own interests and desires. This virtual world was entirely virtuous, and Rheingold defined such communities as ‘social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on those public discussions [that interest them] long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.’²

By the end of the nineteen-nineties, opinion was becoming much more sceptical about the possibilities of online communities. Michele Wilson (1997), for example, has argued that much thinking on these groups tends to confuse community with mere communication, and that the complete withdrawal from an embodied, political and social reality results in an abstract notion of community that favours the nostalgic simulation of communities that never existed over the messy reality of engaging with a social environment that does not conform to one's every desire. Similarly, Shawn Wilbur (1997) points out that the much abused phrase, 'virtual community', disguises the fact that we operate within not one but several notions of community, that as well as communication it involves an 'immersion' that is usually geographical. At the same time, we had become used to notions of virtual community long before the arrival of the Internet, relying on communal experiences shared by letter or telephone and, particularly with the advent of television, a sense of shared experience in major events such as the Olympics or World Cup. For Wilbur, then, virtual communities are not impossible but the attempt to reduce them to a single, elegant definition is less preferable to the multiple, even contradictory accounts that one encounters online and elsewhere.³

The practice of virtual communities has been demonstrated by a number of writers, such as Susan Clerc's examination of electronic fan culture (1996), Randal Woodland's (1995) and Nina Wakeford's (1997) discussions of the gay community online, and the work of Ananda Mitra (1997), Madhavi Mallapragada (2000), and Ellen Arnold and Darcy Plymire (2000) on different ethnic groups on the web and in discussion groups. Sonia Livingstone (2002) also shows that the activities of youth subcultures online, often so alienating to older observers, actually originate in those 'mediating family subsystems' that have relied on new technology to keep in touch with extended and dispersed families or kinship groups throughout the post-war period.⁴ Even when restricted to one cybersubculture such as Goths, a paper such as this cannot and should not intend to offer a comprehensive and elegant solution to how such virtual communities should operate. It is important, however, to offer a working hypothesis of what this much abused phrase means here. First of all, while Rheingold's vision of a virtual community is naïve, he is right to point out that for any claim to community there must be an element of persistence and group endeavour: this is not the same as permanence, for all communities eventually perish, but individual efforts, while they may participate in a wider collective, do not alone constitute evidence of a vibrant cooperative venture. Secondly, while aware of the dangers that attend to the oversimplified equation of community and communication, and also aware of the calls of theorists such as Arturo Escobar for a full-blown 'anthropology of cyberculture', it is the discursive elements of such communities that I am most interested in, the linguistic sites of struggle that form a sense of identity in the process of articulation. Such language games, if they are to be perceived as mutual, must be dialogic rather than monologic and this itself has important consequences for the construction of subcultures, indeed, any culture. Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, it is clear that the most active online Goth groups are frequently located in a physical

socius: the environment of clubs, music stores (not quite yet replaced by MP3 downloads) and friends' houses that underpinned Goth lifestyle in the 1980s remains as important today.

What, then, do Goths do online? The facetious answer would be 'pretty much the same as everyone else': that is, they use it as a forum for communication via bulletin boards and newgroups, information on clubs and music, create personal websites to establish an online presence, sex, entertainment and, increasingly, as a means to engage in commercial activity, especially for fashion and music. Hodkinson (2004) comments that in contrast to the 'high media profile' of 1980s Goth, the contemporary scene is much more small-scale and 'has survived and developed . . . predominantly outside the realms of mass media and commerce.'⁵ What television and print tire of often finds its place in multifarious bulletin boards and community discussion groups – media used by the masses but not necessarily mass media in the traditional sense. Mercer's *21st Century Goth* lists somewhere between six and seven thousand sites, and I encountered several more that I could not find listed there. Mercer's definition of the Goth scene is a wide one, but even so there is plenty of evidence that the Goth subculture is a lively and active presence on the Net. This group, as with many such cultures online, has also drawn considerably from elements of cyberpunk, particularly its neo-pagan elements and its cynicism regarding mainstream Christianity, what Samuel R. Smith calls (after Philip K. Dick), a fascination with 'the invented religion future'.⁶

One important function of the Internet is to define the etiquette of Goth culture; that is, the conventional rules of behaviour which characterise a Goth. Newsgroups, such as those listed under alt.gothic, and the web-based FAQ (frequently asked questions list) at www.darkwave.org.uk serve a useful role here. Significantly, many of the conventions that define participation in Goth sites and newsgroups are very similar to other rules of netiquette found elsewhere on the web, such as reading FAQs before asking a question (a major source of irritation online, when the same question may be asked hundreds of times during the lifetime of a discussion group) or posting irrelevant material. There are, however, differences: alt.gothic must be one of the few places online where the topic 'I love/hate Marilyn Manson' has been turned over so often that it is now considered out of bounds, while the distinction between Darkwave and Nu-Metal is unlikely to keep most other discussion groups awake at night. Likewise, although not specific to Gothic discussion groups, religious discussion can be a source of tension. Finally, any subject-specific forum tends to develop its own jargon or vernacular and Goth groups are no exception: particular favourites of mine are GAF, 'Goth as Fuck' (the highest accolade), and HSE, 'Hand/Staple/Forehead', indicating angst. There are also multiple band acronyms, such as SoM for The Sisters of Mercy and ASF for Alien Sex Fiend, as well as the usual online suspects (ROFL, 'rolling on the floor laughing', and IMHO, 'in my humble opinion'). Such acronyms, as with any jargon, can serve a variety of roles: while genuinely helping speed up communication in some instances (try typing Fields of the Nephilim instead of FotN a hundred times), they also comprise a semi-ritualised language that establishes barriers not merely between Goths and

non-Goths, but between online newbies and more experienced users. It is important to note, however, that not all jargon serves the same function. As Brian Connery observes, some acronyms such as IMHO actually perform as rhetorical tools that, paradoxically, grant authorisation in an anti-authoritarian space: 'Authority is no longer prior to discussion; it is granted by the audience in the course of discussion.'⁷ An obvious corollary of the rejection of mainstream identity cultures (such as more orthodox religions) as part of a techno-subculture is the turn to technology to provide definition and alternate identities, often in very mundane – if practical – ways.

As well as public forums and discussion groups that define and even regulate the formation of a subculture, the Internet and the Web in particular, offers a wonderful opportunity to publish a personal vision to the world via a personal home page. As Charles Cheung points out, home pages are 'sign vehicles' that offer a liberation from the typical signifiers of sex, age and race that are difficult to conceal in face-to-face communication; in the task of self-presentation, 'we can manipulate all the elements until we are satisfied.'⁸ Cheung is a little optimistic here: many personal Goth home pages are (sometimes intentionally) atrocious in terms of taste and design, but that is a particular delight of the Internet: as the authority of dialogue is not a priori to discussion, so taste itself is something that is negotiated by the active reader of the Web. This does mean that the average Internet user has to wade through page after page of garbage, but this is not the same garbage for every reader, and the possibility exists for some true curios amidst the dross. Mercer provides a good guide to the best of these, and some good examples include I Am An Evil Princess (www.angelfire.com/ca4/jackiism), where Goth princess Jacklyn airs her likes and dislikes, and the fabulously named (and marvellously designed) Josie Nutter: Gothic Anime Girl (www.josienutter.com). It is not insignificant, particularly in the light of the nineties Riot Grrrl phenomenon that extended online to sites such as *geekgirl* (www.geekgirl.com.au) and *Cyber Grrrl* (www.cybergrrl.com), that a majority of the most interesting Goth websites are created and maintained by women. This reinforces, perhaps, the posthuman ideas of theorists since Donna Haraway (1991) and Chela Sandoval (1995) that the liminal subject positions occupied by women, as well as by colonised peoples and the working classes, has forced them already to become cultural hybrids who have 'already developed the cyborg skills required for survival.'⁹

Regardless of whether women make better net.Goths than men, the most important elements of defining Goth subculture online, as offline, are music and fashion. I will restrict myself mainly to music and, as with any subculture that defines itself through this medium, one of the major uses for the Internet consists in sharing files and information. There are plenty of sites that provide music files from bands such as Incubus Succubus and Tapping the Vein, as well as old favourites such as Bauhaus and The Sisters of Mercy. MP3.com, for example, has a section on Goth music and other mainstream sites such as Audiogalaxy (www.audiogalaxy.com) and the relaunched Napster feature Goth artists in alternative music sections. A useful starting point for information and files the

long-running alt.gothic.music newsgroup, meanwhile, is useful for keeping up to date with an ever changing scene.

Chris Straw, in his entertaining essay on the heavy metal industry of the 1970s, 'Characterising Rock Music Culture' (1990), noted that the functions of music in subcultures include the ability to demonstrate esoteric knowledge, garnered from combing independent record stores and the music press, as well as cohering social events around clubbing and live performances. This was why heavy metal had so little subcultural capital, dominated as it was before punk by megabands working for the main production labels, themselves often with a controlling share in large retailers or huge concert events that dominated suburban America where heavy metal sold so well. Straw defines a music-based subculture as one where groups may interact to such an extent that boundaries between professional, semi-professional practitioners and the audience blur to a degree: this is why punk – with its 'anyone can do it' mentality – was a music subculture (as were many post-punk movements such as Goth) and heavy metal was not.¹⁰

The Internet simultaneously supports this subcultural capital of music with regard to movements such as Goth and undermines it. Andrew Stoker's music page at www.nyx.net/~astoker/gothmusic.html, for example, outlines a fairly extensive list of essential listening for the wannabe Goth, from originating acts such as Joy Division, Bauhaus, The Damned and The Cure to second wave Goth (or Darkwave) music such as Switchblade Symphony and Nocturne. Similarly, the alt.gothic FAQ (frequently asked questions) at alt.gothic.faq can bring anyone with a few hours up to speed on the etiquette of Goth and Darkwave. It has been over a decade since I was seriously involved with Goth subcultures and the effort to maintain a sense of status in the sometimes backbiting camaraderie of such a group was precisely that, an effort which required masochistic hours trawling through record stores. Of course, the masochistic pleasure was part of the appeal, as well as the more straightforwardly enjoyable process of listening to releases bought (and taped – the lo-fi precursor to file sharing) by friends. Today, however, a quick search online on a relevant news group or websites will provide a wealth of information that seems to render the capital of subcultural knowledge redundant by rendering it in surfeit.

And yet, of course, I deliberately miss the point: information is only part of the equation. It no longer matters how much I *know* about the culture of Goths, because I no longer *practice* being a Goth, for all that I can read websites, newsgroups and blogs, download music files and even order appropriate garb from Deviant Clothing (www.deviantclothing.co.uk). Practice, as is clear from numerous newsgroup postings and discussion groups, is an important strategy for dealing with the information overload that media such as the web provide. As Mercer correctly observes, 'the Net always dilutes critical impact, through its sheer variety, whereas a handful of music papers could focus attention on certain bands and scenes.'¹¹ Likewise, if he or she does not attend live gigs and no longer goes to nightclubs where certain music and fashion styles can be observed as part of what Ben Malbon calls 'sensational performance',¹² the online tourist has few means to ascertain the value of his or her knowledge. One way in which newsgroups in

particular provide a means of filtering and refining the practice of being a Goth is via regular postings for recommendations, of which the following, from 'Anish', is an interesting example in terms of the thread it generated:

Hello. I'm just recently getting into darkwave and gothic music, so I'd like to ask for recommendations (bands, albums, CDs, whatever you think is important.) My background is in doom and black metal. These are some bands from those genres and gothic genres that I know and like: Esoteric, Endura, Sopor Aeternus, Faith & the Muse, Machine in the Garden, Zaraza, Wumpscut, The Soil Bleeds Black, Haggard, Theatre of Tragedy, This Empty Flow, Canaan.

I sort of like these bands, but not quite as much as the ones listed above: Fields of the Nephilim, Dead Can Dance, Sisters of Mercy, Rasputina, Eterne.

Thanks in advance. Please email me if possible.

This particular request resulted in half a dozen responses over subsequent weeks, typically lists of bands and albums, as well as links to websites and some advice on file sharing. The original post had apparently fulfilled certain discursive features of self de-authorising discussed by Connery and was treated by most respondents as a polite request to which respondents had an opportunity to display their own knowledge of the genre. It is likely that this thread would have continued for some time, accreting a substantial if somewhat chaotic taxonomy of Gothic and Darkwave music. The list was brought to an abrupt end, however, with a posting from 'Marieke', that repeated Anish's original request with the single line: 'kill yourself now poser'.

It is very common for these types of threads to descend into abusive flames, some of them fairly good-natured in a rumbustious fashion, as participants argue over the virtues and vices of their personal tastes. Marieke's terse flame, however, is significant in a very interesting way that begins to demonstrate some of the means by which subcultures as contested sites of identity can establish themselves discursively online. 'Kill yourself now poser' establishes a very different interpretation of Anish's message. No longer was it a courteous request well within the bounds of etiquette, but rather a self-important display of knowledge by someone who, far from seeking the advice of fellow participants, was seeking to establish *a priori* authority by flaunting their subcultural knowledge.

One noteworthy way in which such linguistic games operate on the Net is a phenomenon known as 'trolling', or posting deliberately foolish or stupid messages in order to attract abuse or corrections. Typically, the troll posts a message that is obviously incorrect, dangles bait, as it were, so that an officious respondent will post an indignant correction. By correcting such a mistake, the trollee believes that he or she demonstrates superior knowledge; instead, by not realising the complex linguistic game being played out, he or she is shown as being outside the community. As Michele Tepper remarks, trolling 'serves the dual purpose of enforcing community standards and of increasing community cohesion by providing a game that all those who know the rules can play against those who do not. It works both as a game and as a method of subcultural boundary demarcation because

the playing pieces in this game are not plastic markers or toy money but pieces of information.¹³

One example (and there are many) of a troll from the alt.gothic.culture newsgroup, posted by 'Jeff' with the subject line 'What a misguided group you are', is worth quoting at length:

I feel pity on you people. I really do. You feel the need to express yourself is to look like freaks and dress up as if every day is October the 31st. It may be cool for you and I certainly am not going to curtail your fashion sense, but when does it end? You are not very original and the whole infatuation with death, vampires, Satan and the like is all just a smokescreen. Some of you are just posers just pissed off and trying to get back at your parents. You know as well as I do that that is what this is – rebellion.

You are rebelling against the establishment, against Christianity and against your parents. That's fine. I'm all for rebellion, but just what exactly do you expect to accomplish? . . . I am a Christian, but unlike many so-called Christians I am not a hypocrite. I am not here to change your mind nor am I even going to attempt to. I just came to say that it disturbs me to see this infatuation with goth. I would have some respect for you if you dressed original and looked original, but you all look like a bunch of freakin' Morticias and the lead singer from the Cure. I admire you in one sense for not conforming, but I disagree with your beliefs. I think you are misguided and that you are followers, not leaders. You follow the teachings of other people and believe everything they say instead of being revolutionaries and following your own path. Some of you advocate satanism and mock Christ even going so far as to ridicule him in the most savage, sacrilege [*sic*] way you can.

I am willing to listen to your feedback and feel free to tell me if I am wrong and more specifically where I am wrong.

Jeff's message attracted a large number of responses, most of them abusive or sarcastic ('brainwashed Christian fool', 'You've got gall bitching about blind followers while proclaiming allegiance to a 2000 year old prophet', and, my personal favourite, 'Would you happen to be American?'). By about the tenth posting, participants were beginning to congratulate themselves that they had well and truly trounced Jeff when one poster, 'Curgoth', sent the following admonition to a fellow contributor who commented that Jeff dared not even reply to the 'sound opposition': 'Far more likely, he's pissing himself laughing at how successful his troll was. He doesn't need to post any more, because people are still running around getting excited.'

It is not clear that Jeff's original message was necessarily a troll: certainly, he did not follow it up with a post to the alt.gothic.culture newsgroup along the lines of YHBT (you have been trolled), but he did include one more message that made it look likely, a single line reply to a poster called 'Alchemy': 'Who's the more foolish? The fool or the fool that follows it?' Read as a troll, 'What a misguided group you are' offers some interesting clues to the process of subcultural demarcation. Firstly, it invites participants in the group to respond, which sets in motion the game. Secondly, it offers an obvious piece of flame-bait, the troller's declaration of his own Christianity; this, however, is not the main point of the posting, which is the lack of originality among Goths ('I would have some respect for you if you dressed

original and looked original, but you all look like a bunch of freakin' Morticias and the lead singer from the Cure') and, by extension, an inability to think for themselves. Those who launched into attacks without pausing to consider consequently proved his point.

Trolling can be fun, but, particularly when it gets out of hand, it can also be particularly damaging for any online subculture. Susan Zickmund (1997), in a fascinating if somewhat gloomy study of race hate groups, notes the importance of flame-baiting and overt offensives to extremist organisations online and, indeed, to those who oppose them.¹⁴ That is not the subculture of Goths, which likes to think of itself as more tolerant and easygoing. As such, newsgroup system administrators have developed their own response task force (known as the alt.gothic.Special-Forces, or AGSF) to prevent the alt.gothic forums descending into incommunicative flame hell. The AGSF home page (thingy.apana.org.au/~fun/agsf/) rather ostentatiously outlines their mission as follows: 'Whenever the newsgroup is being invaded by trolls or other lowlifes, we band together to bring these idiots to justice.'

Thus far we have considered the ways in which forums such as alt.gothic.culture and alt.gothic.music tend to monitor the boundaries of a specific form of subcultural performance, occupations that tend to be fairly negative. More general activity in such groups, however, tends to be more positive than the trolls and flames discussed above would indicate. The vast majority of postings attempt to disseminate information about record releases, gigs and clubs, and there are also various discussion threads on films (the adaptation of Anne Rice's *Queen of the Damned* being a particular favourite at the time of writing) and books, a lively one that had run for several weeks having the subject line 'Dead Poets Society?', with respondents listing favourite writers such as Byron, Burroughs and (of course) Poe, as well as more unusual Goth choices such as e. e. cummings and Dylan Thomas. While Goths probably represent the more literary minded end of youth subcultures, books are much less likely to stimulate engaged debate than music in these newsgroups, though several respondents often indicated an awareness of the cultural formations of their choices, such as 'Amazon', who simply appended the line, 'Wow. That's a lot of boys, isn't it?' at the end of her list of favourite writers.

An intriguing feature of most of the alt.gothic forums is the relative lack of spam, or indeed the nature of that spam which does find its way onto such boards. Spam, like excessive flaming or trolling, often rings the death toll for newsgroups: too many messages for more money, more sex and more hair drive away participants, but most of the newsgroups here appear to have involved moderators who work behind the scenes to clear away the garbage. One notable exception is the gruesomely appealing alt.gothic.suicide, which does indeed carry postings on different ways to join with the infinite, but also is an interesting dark doorway into some of the more tasteless and extreme elements of Goth subculture. This newsgroup, the discussion threads of which include 'How to house-break your new slave' and 'Need an abortion but can't afford it?', does appear to be afflicted more extensively than other sites with typical pornographic cross-postings that can easily be

encountered in any number of groups; most of these postings, however, attracted hostile responses, informing the original spammer that such messages were inappropriate. Those that were welcomed tended to be postings that redirected visitors to sites with 'Vamp chick pics' or 'death education videos', but perhaps the most entertaining pseudo-spam was an appeal from one 'Cartman' for 'Female Gothic Teen Slaves For World Conquest', whose message was: 'Please Email Me if interested. Please send resume and photo. Dental Plan available.'

The blurring of boundaries between a particular subculture such as that inhabited by Goths and more general use of the Internet can be witnessed in a discussion forum such as alt.gothic.parenting. Many of the postings here include such things as warnings against leaving children in cars or debates about the likelihood of Down's Syndrome, issues that can affect any parent – although, admittedly, most parents are unlikely to announce the birth of their child with the tag line, 'Welcome a new baby bat!' This illustrates the point that simply setting up a forum does not, of itself, create a subculture, although alt.gothic.parenting is interesting because of the large number of postings it attracts. The subcultural formation is obviously anterior to such a newsgroup, but that group is important insofar as it provides an interface to information that is available freely elsewhere, but is unlikely to be trusted in quite the same way because it does not interface with and supplement the culture. The messages on alt.gothic.parenting are similar to those posted on just about any parenting site: their subcultural significance lies not in their content, but the fact that participants wish to hear from and respond to others who are both parents *and* Goths.

This need to connect, to make those relations or ties that are, as Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman (1999) point out, necessary if a forum for communication is to become a community, can be seen in two other types of postings.¹⁵ The first, and largest, can be summed up as location postings, along the lines of 'Hi, I live here and would love to meet ...'. The supplementary nature of virtual communities is nowhere clearer than in the large proliferation of websites, newsgroup postings and chat sites that are concerned with regional locations, such as the Colorado Net Goths site (www.gothic.net/~anri/co-goths/) and the UK Goth webring (ww.darkwave.org.uk/~bex/webring.html). The opinion frequently offered as the epitome of a hacker or cyberpunk ethos, that cyberspace offers a perfect and complete disembodiment free from the distinctions of gender, race, age, class and location, is a foolish one.¹⁶ As Hodkinson remarks (2002), 'rather than leading to the replacement of an off-line lifestyle with an on-line one, resources and forums on the internet function to facilitate the subculture as a whole.'¹⁷

The inability of cyberspace, or unwillingness of participants, to transcend this embodiment is also very clear from the second type of posting, of which one example from alt.gothic.culture will suffice. A message posted by 'Ms Lynx' asked: 'Are there any african american goths out there? Contact me!!!!!! Please! (I'm all lonely).' There are many more postings forming networks between female Goths (a post-Andrew Eldritch Sisterhood, as it were), but this particular message indicates the ways in which virtual communities are not, and should not, be complete

in themselves. Such incompleteness is not necessarily a failing of the Internet: indeed, Ms Lynx was quickly put in touch with the Goths of Color website (www.angelfire.com/oh4/gothsofcolor/), and other virtual discussion forums indicate an interest in ethnicity online, such as the Yahoo groups for the Jewish Goth Club (clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/jewishgothicclub) and Goths For All Races (clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/gothforallraces). There is, however, a danger in that the apparent ease of virtual communication can erase the heterogeneity, even tensions, that exist in any subcultural group. As the Goths of Color website observes: 'For anyone who has ever searched the net, scouring for Goth pages, I am sure you have probably been struck by the complete lack of "difference". They all look alike! Same outfits, same backgrounds, same waify, high-nosed little snots with bad poetry . . . Racism has no place in the Goth culture. Period. Elitism of any kind belongs with jocks, with drunken jet-setters. If that is your attitude, then kindly join them.'

Earlier in this paper, I considered the criticism of online communities that they are no more than a simulated fantasy that sublimates the difficulties of 'real' community into a perfect communication between like-minded individuals. The apparent miscommunication that takes place online on a daily basis could perhaps be taken as evidence that even this fantasy of interaction is misplaced, yet I will conclude by taking a different line. Net.Goths bring exactly the same sorts of concerns to cyberspace – music, fashion, parenting, discrimination – that concern them offline, and their discussion of such concerns can be viewed as vigorous and dynamic. Cyberspace does not replace the material world, but rather supplements it, and frequently does so very well: a resurgence of Gothic subcultures has been aided greatly, as Mercer points out, by the Internet, but the desire to transform communication into community still requires embodiment – information about clubs and gigs becomes an invitation to meet in those places, to participate as more than a tourist in a subculture that has been successfully disseminated across cyberspace's dark webs.

Notes

- 1 On the relationship between Gothic, technoculture and cyberpunk, see Lucie Armitt, 'The Magical Realism of Contemporary Gothic', in David Punter (ed.), *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000) pp. 305–16; Allan Lloyd-Smith, 'Postmodernism/Gothicism', in Allan Lloyd-Smith and Victor Sage (eds), *Modern Gothic: A Reader* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 6–19; and Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London, Routledge, 1996). Especially important to subcultural studies of Goth technoculture is Paul Hodkinson's work, such as "'Net.Goth': Internet Communication and (Sub)Cultural Boundaries', in David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (eds), *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (Oxford, Berg, 2003), pp. 285–98.
- 2 Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World* (London, Minerva, 1995), p. 5.
- 3 Michele Willson 'Community in the Abstract: A Political and Ethical Dilemma', in David Bell and Barbara Kennedy (eds), *The Cybercultures Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 644–57. Shawn Wilbur 'An Archaeology of Cyberspaces:

- Virtuality, Community, Identity', in David Porter (ed.), *Internet Culture* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997), pp. 5–22.
- 4 Sonia Livingstone, *Young People and New Media* (London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 183–97.
 - 5 Paul Hodkinson, 'The Goth Scene and (Sub)Cultural Substance', in Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (eds), *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004), pp. 135–47 (p. 136).
 - 6 Samuel R. Smith, '“When it all changed:” Cyberpunk and the Baby Boom's Rejection of Religious Institutions', in Jonathan Epstein (ed.), *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern Age* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1998).
 - 7 Brian Connery 'IMHO: Authority and Egalitarian Rhetoric in the Virtual Coffeehouse', in David Porter (ed.), *Internet Culture* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997), pp. 161–80 (p. 170).
 - 8 Charles Cheung, 'A Home on the Web: Presentations of Self on Personal Homepages', in David Gauntlett (ed.), *Web.Studies* (London, Arnold, 2000), pp. 43–51 (p. 47).
 - 9 Chela Sandoval, 'New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed', in Chris Hables Gray (ed.), *The Cyborg Handbook* (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), pp. 407–22 (p. 408).
 - 10 Will Straw, 'Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The Case of Heavy Metal', in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds), *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (London and New York, Routledge, 1990), pp. 97–110. See also Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Metal Heads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1996), and David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford, Berg, 2000).
 - 11 Nick Mercer, *21st Century Goth* (London, Reynolds and Hearn Ltd., 2002), p. 10.
 - 12 Ben Malbon, 'Clubbing: Consumption, identity and the spatial practices of every-night life', in Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine, *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* (London, Routledge, 1998), pp. 266–86 (p. 270).
 - 13 Michele Tepper, 'Usenet Communities and the Cultural Politics of Information', in David Porter (ed.), *Internet Culture* (London and New York, Routledge, 1997), pp. 39–54 (p. 40).
 - 14 Susan Zickmund, 'Approaching the Radical Other: The discursive culture of cyberhate', in Steve Jones, *Virtual Culture* (London, Sage, 1997), pp. 185–205.
 - 15 Laura Garton, Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman, 'Studying On-Line Social Networks', in Steve Jones (ed.), *Doing Internet Research* (London, Sage, 1999), pp. 75–106.
 - 16 A good discussion of the hacker ethic, as well as related publications such as *The Hacker Manifesto*, can be found in Steve Furnell, *Cybercrime: Vandalizing the Information Society* (Boston and London, Addison-Wesley, 2002), pp. 41–93.
 - 17 Paul Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (Oxford, Berg, 2002), p. 182.

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