



POSTHUMAN / CYBER-GOTHIC

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANYA HEISE-VON DER LIPPE

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Keywords: American Gothic, popular culture, cyber horror, posthumanism, interview.

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Laura Álvarez Trigo: The objective of this section is to explore how the gothic and horror have technology and the digital at its center. You have done research on the discourse construction of monstrosity, and I want to open the interview by exploring how is it that technology has turned into something that we fear. A first noticeable parallel that I can think of with traditional monsters is that just like Doctor Frankenstein with his creature, we have created technology. In your work, you explore how the monster is perceived as such by virtue of being seen as the Other. If it is the gaze of society that turns someone or something into the monster, how do you think that contemporary narratives have come to embody that monster, that Other, in the technological and the digital given our dependency and blind trust on technology how has it come to be the Other and the monster that we fear?

Anya Heise-von der Lippe: That's a big question. First of all, thank you for inviting me to talk about these things, which are very close to my heart. You asked about definitions of the monstrous and how those also tend to extend to technology nowadays. I would take one step back

and say, to what purpose do we need to define the Other as monstrous? And I would say that happens in processes of human identity construction. So, when humans say ‘this is the Other’, this also creates a sense of unity—of a common ‘we’ that is opposed to this ‘Other’. That kind of cements our identity as human beings—and when I say ‘we’ and ‘our’, those are already contested categories in many ways. In most Western cultures, we would, for instance, exclude the animal from this ‘we’ and we see that in gothic texts around the turn of the 20th century where Darwinian theory began to influence gothic texts that talk about the animal as Other. We have *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (Wells 1896), *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson 1886), and *Dracula* (Stoker 1897). Those texts explore the boundaries between the human and the animal as Other. We have a similar thing with technology, let’s say, from the mid 20th century onwards into contemporary time, or even earlier emergences if you look at E. M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909), a short story from the early 20th century. It already explores this fear of dependency on the machine and what might happen if that machine doesn’t work any longer. But I think that, in Forster’s story, we still have a very clear sense of the machine and the human being presented as two separate things. There’s dependency, obviously, on emerging technology, but there’s no integration of human and technology. I think that what we see nowadays, in late 20th and early 21st century gothic and horror is a fear of an integration of human and technology. We have become so dependent on technology that it’s intruding into our bodies. There is no sense of a clear boundary between human and technology any longer. I think what gothic and horror texts do is to explore where that might lead us. So this is not just about the integration of human and technology but it’s also about the horror of what that might mean if the technology intrudes into the human body and what we might become if that happens. I think there’s the sense of horror that doesn’t stem from the technology itself but more from what it does to our sense of self as human beings, and I think that’s why we have started to also reject technology as the Other in a way.

LAT: In this sense, I’m thinking about what you’ve mentioned about this self-identification and I’m trying to compare how we feel about technologies such as robots that are commonly related to this idea of the uncanny valley, because we see us reflected in them through our similarities, but sometimes in horror there’s also these machines that are very non-human-like in appearance. I’m thinking about classic movies such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), but also more recent movies such as *Peripheral* (2017) and *Sequence Break* (2018). This seems to move away from this uncanny type of horror, and I’m thinking from this perspective of the horror and the gothic element, do these fictions where the machine is completely something non human, like a computer for example, do they shy away from this idea of the uncanny or is the gothic and the horror present in some other form?

AHvdL: I think the concept of the uncanny works pretty well as long as we have the sense that that technology is still separate from the human body. So then, we see gothic horror embodying the fear of the automaton becoming too like us that’s where we can apply the

uncanny and the uncanny valley. It goes back to Freud and his article on the uncanny, but obviously it's also the uncanny valley in terms of robotics when it becomes too like the human, it causes fear, or even a sense of disgust in many ways. The texts you mention, where technology isn't anything like the human, I think that's more a sense of intrusion and a sense of loss of boundaries that is at stake, no longer the uncanny. We're no longer afraid that the technology might become too like us or that we might no longer be able to tell apart a human individual and a separate robot. It's more a sense of technology intruding into the body, that we might be becoming something posthuman, something completely different by the integration with technology. There's an article that is called "Monstrous Machinery" by Micheal Sean Bolton (see Bolton), which is one of the first attempts at defining the posthuman gothic. He differentiates between those texts that are postmodern—where we have a fear of machinery—and the posthuman gothic where we have a fear of becoming technology in a way or of the integration of the human with the technology. We lose a sense of the self when that happens, we can no longer tell inside and outside, human and technology apart.

So I think the uncanny is often kind of still there in, let's say, texts that are focused more on a kind of traditional creation of horror of the machine, where you don't have this sense of becoming machine ourselves. Not every text is necessarily at the same level in terms of exploring the posthuman gothic. Where it is about shock effects, we often still have a sense of the uncanny, I think. But where it explores the edge of what we might become, we get gothic horror texts that are about the blurring of those boundaries. The example that Micheal Sean Bolton talks about is *House of Leaves* (see Danielewski) where we get this complete blurring of boundaries between inside and outside, where the house is much bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. It's constantly shifting around, you no longer can tell which level of the text you're on. So this kind of blurring of boundaries is, I think, essential to the posthuman gothic that moves away from those fears of the postmodern gothic.

LAT: This blurring of the limits between the human and the machine that you speak about also makes me think about the direct relationship we sometimes establish with the machines in these fictions. It is common for cyber horror and Sci-Fi horror narratives, those that deal with automaton, to deal with sexuality and sexual relationships and affirm and direct forms of attraction from these machines. So sometimes it is the machine that looks for this relationship when other times it is the human owner who imposes that relationship on the machine or on the robot. So we can find narratives where the sexual encounter is desired or maybe a factually established relationship, other times is forced, or it is a struggle between the human and the machine that tries to liberate itself. The representation of this sexuality, however, is rarely beneficial. It's rarely portrayed as something good so either it's the machine who is suppressed and we, as audiences, we often see men who establish this relationship with female robots as the 'weirdos' so to speak, like we know there's kind of something wrong there. So is it a form where the gothic surfaces? Is it a necessity within the logic of the gothic narrative for

this connection to become a threat or something that we find uncanny, again? And is this physical Otherness that we confront in the machine a form of abjection maybe?

AHvdL: I would say that the question is from whose perspective are we seeing those narratives; and it's often I think, in a sense, a way of trying to explore what becomes of a heteronormative model of sexuality. If you have a male creator enforcing their will onto a female robot that's very, I think, to a certain viewer, that may even be interesting or titillating or a story that they might like to explore. But for me it's often very cringe-worthy, and I'm not sure if this is in the narrative or if this is something that I, as a viewer, bring to that story. Overall, I think this kind of story often is about the questioning of certain boundaries and the question of what happens to things that we take for granted in terms of what human nature is, how do humans reproduce, what happens if humans try to reproduce with something that doesn't do reproduction in the same manner that humanity does? So, how do we think through those things? To frame this exploration of boundaries theoretically—from a feminist perspective, we could, for instance think of Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (See Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"). And I think this exploration of boundaries, that's what, at least some of these texts try to do too, from various perspectives. So it might be a very heteronormative perspective that looks at how uncanny it is to imagine a coupling with a robotic Other, or it may be a text that looks at this in terms of, let's say, more interesting explorations of new ways of relating to each other, like forms of kinship.

For instance, there's the music video for Björk's, *All is Full of Love*. It's visually a very interesting video about two robots who are kind of, I guess I would say, performing sex acts but it's not very clear what they're doing. It's very much about making love in a way, but it's between two machines, so it kind of explores something that, from a certain perspective, might look very uncanny but it also is a very interesting way of raising that question. As humans, do we find that interesting? Do we find that strange, perhaps? Is that a performance of love? Can robots express human attraction or love? What is going on there? So I think what some gothic texts do is also—I mean, the Björk video is obviously not gothic or maybe we can read it as gothic but it's more about posthumanist becomings I would say—but gothic and horror texts often like to play around with those ideas as well, either in a manner that is supposed to create horror or in a manner that is supposed to explore those possibilities, I would say.

LAT: That's very interesting. I really like the Björk example. So, thinking about this also from the perspective of the machine. So gothic fiction formats often are a format through which marginalized voices emerge. The genre has often been interpreted as a space for those without a voice to acquire one. This is interesting to me regarding the object of this thematic session due to the fear of autonomous or technology as a whole acquiring self-awareness and maybe rebelling against their owners or oppressors that they find in the humans. So, do you agree that this is a way in which the gothic is present in this technology, automata, cyber horror

narratives? Are these the voiceless that want to acquire a voice and what are those voices emerging in what form, and is it also a way of us losing our own voice?

AHvdL: In a way yes and in a way no. So let me try to unpack that. First of all, if we go back to *Frankenstein* (see Shelley), for instance, which I would read as a kind of proto cyber-gothic text, it's all there. The monster embodies a hybrid creature between animal, human and also a sense of technology coming in there in the act of creation—the spark of being, that is perhaps more present in later film versions. We have this very interesting construction of narrative perspectives where the monster is also allowed to speak, so in a sense it does exactly that, we're voicing the voiceless. We have this shift in perspective where the narrative perspective shifts from Victor Frankenstein, we've seen the monster from the outside as the devil a demon, and suddenly it shifts and we also get to understand the motivations of the monstrous creature, which is surprisingly eloquent—almost shockingly so—as if to draw the reader's attention to this new angle. And unfortunately, most of the early adaptations take this eloquence away. So, even this early in the history of the Gothic we already get the sense that the Gothic creates a possibility to voice people who've had no voice, marginalized people, the non- or perhaps not fully human. Also the monster is kind of shown as incredibly adaptable and while it's very artificial in its creation it's also a very natural perspective in many ways, it's a very sustainable creature. So even if it's a murderer, it's also a very interesting figure in terms of voicing marginalized perspectives and asking what it means to be human. And I think that also accounts for part of its continuing attractiveness for critics of various schools and backgrounds.

In a sense, the Gothic offers a platform for people to explore these marginalized perspective, but not all gothic texts necessarily do that. We have a lot of gothic texts that are very much focused on reinforcing order, reinforcing hierarchies at the end of the text, so while they explore all kinds of horrors throughout the text, they will go back to 'this is the structure the universe should go in' and 'this is the conclusion that we offer' in the end. In a way *Frankenstein* also kind of does that by resolving the plot through death in the end. However, I would say there are texts that take that further and one of them is a much more recent *Frankenstein* adaptation by Victor LaValle, a graphic novel called *Destroyer* (2017), which picks up this *Frankenstein* narrative but also combines it with an exploration of anti-blackness and police violence against Black people in the US. It takes up this idea of the monster being able to voice Otherness. It's also very much about technology, I don't want to talk too much about the plot—it's fascinating you absolutely all need to read it—but the main character is this Black boy, who's also a cyborg, who is also kind of zombified because he's dead, so it's a very Othered perspective in many ways. What the graphic novel does is exactly give marginalized voices a space and use this idea of technology to explore how it could create a narrative of resistance against this very standardized narrative of how societies work and who's left out of those constructions.

To maybe bring this back to posthumanist theory as well, this is also where Donna Haraway goes with the figure of the cyborg and the idea of all of these mergings of the organic and the technological, that could also be read as a form of liberation (See Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”). I mean, it’s an ironic myth, obviously, and she toys around with those ideas, and that’s perhaps not a utopian vision that could be achieved for various reasons, but it’s good that those ideas are out there and some gothic texts at least play around with those ideas and create a space for those to be explored a bit more. To come back to your question of voicing Otherness, I would say gothic texts can do that but not all gothic texts try to do that, it depends on the perspective people are working from.

LAT: In terms of this idea of the organic and how the Gothic emerged through a contrast with its precedent Romanticism, is there a place for cyber terror where the resistance to this other monster can be situated in nature? Maybe through the calmness or slowness of nature as opposed to the fast-paced aggressive menacing idea and aspects of technology.

AHvdL: In a way, again, kind of yes and no. If you look at *Frankenstein* again, which is my basic textual example for many of these things, you get a sense that nature is this very restful place. Whenever Victor Frankenstein is disturbed by anything and mostly, he creates those disturbances himself, obviously, but whenever he’s emotionally upset, he would go on a hike in the mountains, look at the nature, and then that calms him; that kind of takes him back to his own sense of humanity in a way. We get similar glimpses of nature being restorative in many of the texts that are based in this romantic sense of nature as this idyllic and positive place. In the same way *Frankenstein* also blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, even in the very creation of the monster, so it draws attention to the fact that those boundaries between the human and the natural world are very much artificial boundaries. What the Gothic often does by undermining these boundaries is also break up this sense that nature is this completely separate place. So, when we talk about the boundaries between the human and technology breaking up, we also, on the other end, talk about the boundaries between the human and the animal, the human and nature breaking up.

So often in the same text we get a sense of a blurring between technology, nature, and the human so that, in that sense, it’s no longer a refuge but it’s something that can also become very threatening. If you look at *Annihilation* (2018) for instance. I’m talking about the film because the visuals are very interesting. In that film, we get a sense that it’s no longer clear where this intrusive technology ends and where nature has become integrated with a very unfamiliar, very alien technology. All of these boundaries have been completely annihilated (in a way). So, if you take that to posthuman theory, obviously Donna Haraway also talks about “natureculture”: there’s no strict distinction between nature and human culture in those theories—nor should there be—because that’s very much also a construct that is erected by humans to uphold our dominant position on the planet. If you look at climate change, we see where that kind of position, this assumption of a hierarchy between humanity and the rest of

the planet, gets us, so I don't think we, to be very harsh, I don't think we deserve this resting place that nature is for many people. We should think about how to preserve that, and I think what texts often can do is draw attention to this necessity to think about those things.

LAT: You've hinted several times in your answers at this idea of moving toward the technological or the idea of the cyber. Many sci-fi narratives these days, and from decades before really, are exploring these possibilities of technological advances and, I guess this is something that's somehow present in *Annihilation* as well, how does it take us into the future, or farther in a sense, and other cyborg narratives and medical advances like cryogenization and all these things. This could mean that we could find a way of moving beyond the anthropocentric perspective through the cybernetic, which is what Donna Haraway and some other researchers maybe are hinting at or grounds that they're exploring. Do you think that cyber terror in this sense can be used as a tool to imagine a posthuman future and can we reconcile with the Other in the monster and, in this way, get closer to it?

AHvdL: So, in a way I think what posthuman theory already does is question those strict distinctions between subject and object that we've built there and point a finger to where those are not helpful in terms of describing realities. Because, as you said, we're kind of already exploring those technologies. So it's not a question of whether we want to confront them—we're already doing that in many ways. If we look at technologies that we are already using—you don't have to go to cryotechnics, which people are apparently also exploring—but look at all the day-to-day technology that we're using. Posthuman theory says we need new paradigms because we're already so enmeshed with technology that there's no way we can ignore that (see Wolfe). So, in a way, what gothic horror narratives do is explore the flip side of that, they're not necessarily looking at technology as this huge utopian thing, where we might become better posthumans—or transhumans—, but I think they look very much at what can go wrong, what might happen if we adopt technologies too quickly, or unthinkingly, if we adopt the wrong technologies, what might get lost if we take the wrong pathways.

I think part of what technology does in contemporary society is, it doesn't have a will of its own, but it has a snowball effect. We develop something and then we can't stop it at some point. If we look at it, someone sits down and creates a platform where you can rate your fellow female students based on their 'hotness' or their looks, which is a dubious project in itself, but may, at first glance seem harmless, containable. And a few years later that tool influences elections all over the world, and we didn't see that coming. So what gothic texts can do, if you look at things like *Black Mirror* (2011-2019) for instance, is think technologies into the future and decide or point out where this might be going, point out the worst case scenarios that might happen if we pursue those technologies further. It's more of a compass pointing in all of the bad, dystopian directions, so that we can, presumably, think about those things and change our ways and do things differently. That's not necessarily a completely new effect. If you look at things like James Tiptree Jr.'s novella *The Girl Who Was Plucked In* (1973), that's

very early proto-cyberpunk text, fairly Gothic too, and it already kind of goes in this direction and explores many of these questions. If you create almost human beings and then send them out into the world—avatars steered by other human beings—this is what might happen and this is what this would do to the people involved, emotionally but also quite physically. So it's not a completely new idea, but I think it's an interesting effect of this kind of gothic text. And again, I would say it depends on perspective because there are obviously also gothic texts that are very much focused on simply the creation of shock effects and horror or surface horror but, for instance, things like *Black Mirror*, I would say that those are more theory-conscious and trying to create a dystopian effect where people actually start to think about their use of technology and what this might do to us.

So, does this create a possibility for a dystopian or for a utopian view of the future? I would say probably not, but maybe it creates a possibility of reflection and I think that's probably worth more than a strict sense of utopia—of all the bright futures that we could have. The Gothic is very much a “negative aesthetic” (Botting 1), so it doesn't explore the shiny and beautiful things that we might have in the future rather, from its start as a genre, it tries to point out the fault lines in Enlightenment rationalism; and our exploration of technology also ties into that. We are so enamored with our own minds that sometimes we need the Gothic to show us where the body, and the Other, and things like that come in to clash with this idea of rationalism and the impressive things that human brains can do.

LAT: Do you want to add some closing remarks about where you think the cyber-gothic might be going? If it's going to expand, if it's going to continue to serve us to create this dystopian space you were talking about to reflect on the problems with technology that we have?

AHvdL: Yes, I think some of the questions you raised today already point in very interesting directions. For instance, to give those explorations more space to explore minority voices. If you have creators from various kinds of minorities that engage with those topics, you get, I think, very interesting stories, because those are often the kinds of voices who are aware of all of those problems, because they already face them in day-to-day life in contemporary culture, and have done so for centuries. So I think that's one of the spaces that the cyber-gothic could explore further or it's already exploring further. There are very interesting pairings of Black, Indigenous and PoC perspectives and gothic / horror, for instance, there's a horror anthology by a collective of Arctic gothic writers called *Taaqtumi* (2019) and there's a very interesting cyber-gothic Arctic horror story, I would say if I had to put a genre to it, that combines those ideas of Indigenous horror and very advanced cyborg technology. The story is “Lounge” by Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley and Rachael Qitsualik-Tinsley in the anthology *Taaqtumi*, which means ‘in the dark’ in Inuktitut, and I am especially interested in what happens to this kind of human-technology interaction scenario if you shift the perspective and take it out of the context of settler colonialist hierarchies. So those are the spaces where I think there's room for development and which are also, I think, very interesting to gothic criticism because in many ways

monsters have become this staple of contemporary mainstream culture where everything is in a way filled with monsters, and monsters have started to lose meaning. So in a sense, if everything is monstrous there's no space for the monster to be this warning of Otherness or this kind of harbinger of category crisis that Jeffrey Jerome Cohen talks about (see Cohen), because it's just a part of everyday life—it means everything and nothing. So to take the monster or the Other or also the cyborg figure to new spaces and to combine it with other genres—I think that's probably the places or those are the things that are the most interesting to take gothic criticism right now.

Open Q&A session

Mónica Fernández Jiménez: I wanted to ask if you could develop a bit more on the topic of kinship because you've mentioned some things and I've also seen that you've edited if I'm not wrong a volume titled *Kinship and Collective Action* (2020). It really caught my eye because I'm very interested in the idea of kinship, I've worked with it, the idea of kinship in the post era, let's call it the post-something because I've studied it in relation to postcolonialism and what I do, or some colleagues whose work I find interesting do, is thinking of kinship as separated from reproduction or linear reproduction in order to transcend notions of racial purity and things like that. I was surprised to see it in a completely, maybe not completely different context, because talking about the post era you've been talking a big deal about posthuman. So I was just thinking, although you've said some things, how kinship in its most strict linear terms challenged by technology or by cyber horror? Does cyber horror do something similar to what I've said in postcolonial narratives?

AHvdL: Let me say two things first, I co-edited that volume with three of my colleagues from Tübingen, who I'd like to mention briefly: Gero Bauer, Katharina Luther, and Nicole Hirschfelder. The interesting thing about the volume is that it arose from an interdisciplinary conference and the contributors take different approaches to kinship, so it's not just about the posthuman or literature, there are also sociological, art-based and education-focused approaches to kinship from various cultural backgrounds in that volume, and it's also not focused on gothic or horror. I think I'm the only person in that volume who actually works on gothic horror, and also the chapter I wrote is not necessarily from a gothic perspective but from a dystopian perspective. My chapter focuses on *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Cherie Dimaline and what I was interested in is kinship as a form of resistance narrative. It kind of works with what you talked about in terms of postcolonialism, so it's a resistance narrative against white settler colonialism and its exploitation of Indigenous people's bodies—and not just in the way that white settlers have done over centuries—but a direct exploitation of their bodies, their bone marrow because they—the white people—can no longer dream and the Indigenous people can still dream and that ability to dream is located in the bone marrow (which, is a very interesting metaphorical construction too, I think). So that's the the basic setup and what I look at in terms of kinship is the question of how the Indigenous people in

that novel build kinships beyond family relations, also kinship with nature, kinship with other beings in nature, and how kinship is also a form of narrative in a way because what they do is pass on knowledge through narrative and that is also something that Native American criticism explores (see for instance Daniel Heath Justice's work). So this idea of passing on knowledge not through kind of top-down history, the patriarchal line, but through learning from narratives that people from with whom you form a kinship group and practice kinship can tell you. Also, the idea, still present in many indigenous teachings, that you're not supposed to just learn, acquire knowledge, you're supposed to understand it, act on it, and grow from it in a way.

So if we take that to the question of how technology comes into that, and I think mostly in dystopian fiction, maybe if you look at more speculative fiction, Margaret Atwood's *MadAddam* trilogy for instance, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), where she develops this idea of a highly evolved, or not evolved, but technologically created posthuman species and explores this idea of where they might take forms of kinship that, still in that context, rely on biological reproduction but it's changed very much from what we understand human reproduction to be. The novel and the trilogy raise the question how a really sustainable species might explore ideas of kinship with other sustainable species. So the underlying question is obviously how could kinship help as a tool against what humanism does in terms of propagating hierarchies, propagating family structures that go top-down—patriarchal structure in families. And, in a way, that is not necessarily tied to technology, but you can take that to technology via posthuman theory. Haraway not only in the cyborg figure but also exploring ideas of creating together—“sympoiesis” (*Staying with the Trouble*, 2016)—creating together with other species, becoming together with other species, and in that way creating a new, more sustainable way of existing on the planet. She explores these ideas of kinship with animal species, but I don't think Haraway would be opposed to adding in technology because the cyborg figure also kind of explores those basic ideas and might even come into that as a form of solution.

MFJ: I'm looking forward to reading the article because I think it's a positive approach to technology and if we're talking about kinship, it usually is. It's very interesting I'll definitely read more about that because I just only got to a very small side of the whole issue which is kind of big so I was just really looking forward to hearing your answer it's been very interesting thank you very much.

Anna Marta Marini: As you mentioned *Annihilation* the movie, I really liked it and I do share your take that the visuals are very interesting. It really gives you a feeling that nature is blending with some technology or with something uncanny, something we cannot quite put our fingers on and we don't know if it's an alien, if it's something that comes out of a technology indeed, or if it's some alien technology, or if it's something that came out of our planet in some mysterious ways. I think they really nailed that sensation of 'I'm not quite sure what's going on', and it has these colors, very beautiful unicorn colors, it's very nice and so I was

wondering, do you think this maybe, using the same word that Mónica was using, this post-something gothic, this is kind of new contemporary use of gothic modes, do you think it does have new aesthetics? Does it bring something new on the visuals? Do you think that this gothic is evolving from what we are mostly used to see in horror and gothic narratives? Is it evolving somehow and it's giving us something new to look at in a way?

AHvdL: I would hesitate to call *Annihilation* a gothic narrative, although it has some gothic elements, especially in its relentlessness and in how it repurposes ideas of nature as monstrous. And I think that's part of the whole "post-" thing—that now we also have all kinds of hybrids and blends and texts that borrow from narrative traditions like the Gothic, but also borrow from science fiction, and also borrow from other narrative genres in a way. I think where this new aesthetic comes from is a blend of different genres where we have science fiction blending with dystopian speculative fiction blending with an underlying sense of horror or the uncanny that I can also place into that. So that's maybe one way of answering it.

The other would be that the Gothic is very adaptable from the beginning. We're not looking at the same kind of gothic that we have in the late 1800s with Walpole, Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis—where we have medieval castles and crumbling architecture and the "virgin in distress". We've moved far beyond that, I think in terms of aesthetics, even Mary Shelley moved beyond that already in 1818. So I think what the Gothic does very well is adapt to new threats, to new fears, to new cultural ideas to engage with, and to derive explorations of horror from. In a way this renewal of aesthetic is something that comes around again and again and again and I think often the most interesting gothic texts are those that also play around with new aesthetics on a narrative level, that also do something completely different with the gothic text—like *House of Leaves* plays around with the idea of doing hypertext in a printed book which is like a super weird idea but it works as a kind of staging of the Gothic. Also on a meta-narrative level it's not just a story about the Gothic but it's a gothic monstrous text in itself, and maybe that's also a way of looking at what happens with the aesthetics in films like *Annihilation*, which again, I'm not fully sure that I would call it a gothic text.

AMM: I wouldn't call it a gothic narrative per se but I do think there's a lot of this underlying anxieties and it's very actual, it's really contemporary and I think it's one of these cases that we have discussed even in other keynotes and it's a bit the basis of our conferences is this pervasiveness of gothic elements and modes in genres that you wouldn't really say 'this series is gothic' or 'this movie is gothic', but there is still this anxiety and this kind of way to cope with it.

AHvdL: Maybe also those are the more interesting places for the Gothic to crop up rather than those, let's say, standardized shock gothic texts that are really much about aesthetics. Jeffrey Weinstock talked about *Penny Dreadful*, which... it's very beautiful but it rarely explores a critical edge, it just replicates lots of very beautiful gothic aesthetics—which is also something interesting to do but it's not explorative or critical in terms of being theory-conscious or being

conscious of changes that are going on in contemporary society. I think there's places where the Gothic kind of pops up in unexpected ways or in genres where we don't expect gothic narrative modes, where it's also exploring critical edges.

AMM: Yes, maybe a little bit more stimulating to see how it can pop up as you say in some places where you wouldn't expect it really and with such beautiful visuals because it's really very nice that kind of color palette that doesn't really feel like a gothic narrative in the standard mainstream idea that people have for gothic really.

AHvdL: It's not dark but it's very uncanny, we talked about this fear of meeting someone or the figure of the doppelganger, so being afraid that something that is not you that is very alien could take over your role in a way and that's exactly what we have in *Annihilation*, so I'd say it's not visually dark but it's very dark in terms of where it takes the human imagination.

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