Contemporary Gothic

Justin D. Edwards

In the United States, the words 'contemporary' and 'gothic' go together like zombies and brains. Like a swarming hoard, Gothic is ubiquitous: it is in our novels, our TV programs, on our computer screens and in our movie theatres. It has spread throughout literary and popular culture like a virus, infecting us with a contagion of tropes, figures and images. Gothic consumes and it is consumed by the feeding frenzy of audiences with insatiable appetites. This is seen in the best-selling novels of Stephen King, Anne Rice, Stephenie Meyer, L. J. Smith, Charlaine Harris, as well as in their mutated progeny: films such as *The Shining* (1980), *Interview with a Vampire* (1994), *Twilight* (2008) or TV series such as *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–). Yet there is also a significant continuity in the aesthetics of the American Gothic from the late 18th century to the present. For instance, there is a continuum between the psychological breakdowns of characters in Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic stories and those found in Stephen King's novels. The vampires in works by Rice and Harris are the heirs of the pseudo-vampiric creatures found in H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Hound' (1924) and 'The Outsider' (1926). And the generic hybridization of Gothic and Romance in the sagas by Meyer and Smith mirror the blending of Gothic with Romance in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Gothic never dies: it just morphs into different forms at different historical moments.

Contemporary U.S. Gothic is not homogenous. Nor is it unified through a specific body of texts. Rather, there are multiple strands of contemporary Gothic that range from, among many others, the paranormal romance of Meyer's *Twilight* saga to the queer Gothic of Poppy Z. Brite's *Lost Souls* (1992) to the eco-Gothic of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) to the Gothic sci-fi of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) to the apocalyptic Gothic of Max Brook's *World War Z* (2006). Contemporary Gothic is, like that which came before it, an adaptable mode. It is a shape-shifter: it transforms into different beasts to match the demands of new audiences whilst simultaneously reflecting the deep-rooted personal, social and cultural anxieties of the day. These are a myriad of fears which include, but are not limited to, new forms of advanced technology, ecological devastation, the migration of people, the speed of hyper-capitalism and the powerful forces of Globalization. These phenomena threaten to unsettle the homely American nation, transforming it into an unhomely place, an alien nation.

Sympathy for the Undead

One way of assuaging these fears is by domesticizing them. If the monster is sympathetic, then it can be safely integrated into the home. In Isaac Marion's *Warm Bodies* (2010), the zombie makes a good boyfriend; in Harris's *Dead Until Dark*

(2001), the vampire makes an excellent lover and a potential father figure; in Andrew Fox's *Fat White Vampire Blues* (2003), we laugh at the obese, lazy vampire who is forced to go on a diet; and in Christine Pope's *Darkangel* (2014), we are invited to sympathize with a witch who is faced with embracing her clan and supernatural powers or giving them up for a mysterious man and the possibility of a 'normal' family. Zombies have cell phones, vampires feel guilt and witches have biological clocks. The Gothic monster is not necessarily an icon of terror, threatening humanity by consuming blood or brains or creating more of the undead. Rather, in contemporary Gothic, these figures are often humanized and engender sympathy, not the fear inspired by confronting the otherness of the undead rotting corpse or the bloodthirsty vampiric cannibal. 'As monsters are sought out', writes Fred Botting, 'radical difference is diminished: they become familiar, recognized, expected, "normal" rather than "monstrous" monstrosities, domesticated to the point of becoming pets' ('Monsters' 500).

This marks a paradigm shift in Gothic: monsters are invited into the home. Nowhere is this more apparent than in recent representations of the American zombie, a figure that once reminded audiences that the human condition always ends in rotting flesh. The zombie hoard once signaled a loss of the self and individuality, just as it unveiled the dark side of mass consumer culture and the fragility of humanity in a social structure underpinned by the dehumanizing impacts of hyperglobalization. The zombie lacked cognition and was motived only by the base instinct of its ravenous appetite for human flesh. Yet this 'most abject and inhuman of Gothic monsters' has been transformed: it is now often a sentient and emotional being that is used as 'a metaphor for alienated otherness' (Spooner 183). For instance, in S. G. Browne's *Breathers: A Zombie's Lament* (2009), the newly revived zombie, Andy, tells his own tale of living in his parents' basement, attending Undead Anonymous meetings, falling in love with another zombie and seeking to find a place in a world where zombies are marginalized as outcasts. Likewise, in Carrie Ryan's post-apocalyptic young adult novel *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (2009), the main protagonist, Mary, reflects on how other characters choose to become zombies and, as the plot develops, her attitude to the undead is increasingly sympathetic, even envious; after all, zombies have, from her perspective, uncomplicated lives. And in Jonathan Maberry's *Rot and Ruin* (2011), the zombie hunter, Benny, must confront his hatred of zombies when, as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), he discovers that sometimes the worst monsters are humans. Zombies, it would seem, are people too.

Robin Becker's *Brains: A Zombie Memoir* (2010) is a significant contribution to the sentient zombie narrative. Here, the English professor and B movie aficionado, Jack Barnes, is bitten when the zombie apocalypse hits small-town Missouri. Once undead, Barnes realizes that he has retained information and knowledge: he has not lost his understanding of Walt Whitman, the New Testament, Zombie films, the best recipes for piecrusts or the cultural significance of Freud ('as massive as his cigar') (1). He also has some control over his craving for brains and, although he does not have speech, he can read and write. 'In death', he explains, 'I am a flesh-eating zombie with a messianic complex and these superpowers: I can think and I can write' (1). He heads north to Chicago to seek out Dr. Howard Stein, the inventor of the chemical compound that produced the virus, and prove his sentience so the good doctor will give him the antidote. Along the way, he meets several other thinking zombies – Joan, a zombie nurse who can suture wounds, Ros, a gun-slinging zombie who can speak, and Guts, a young zombie with a quick sprint – all of whom form a bedraggled band of undead who embark on a shuffling pilgrimage to the Jewel of the

Midwest, the Heart of America. The zombie narrative tropes of hordes of staggering corpses and the consumption of tasty human victims are not abandoned, and yet Becker's text also illustrates how a lack of appropriate social infrastructure leaves the nation vulnerable to large-scale catastrophes. Moreover, by adopting Barnes's point of view, Becker explores the zombie as a misunderstood minority and the political drive for human rights. Barnes does not just want to eat human brains; he wants to sing his barbaric yawp to the living and undead citizens of the world.

The reference to Walt Whitman's yawp (section 52 of 'Song of Myself') is just one of the text's many allusions to literary and popular culture. Barnes names two of the militarized zombie hunters Ros and Guil, and when they are bitten Barnes proudly announces that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are undead (72). When he laments being hunted as a zombie, Barnes paraphrases Rodney Dangerfield: 'monsters can't get no respect' (5). There are direct references to Edmund Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, George Romero's zombie series, Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein*, Max Brooks's *Zombie Survival Guide*, Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot*, as well as many other novels, poems, TV programmes and musicians. Even the protagonist's name, Jack Barnes, is a thinly veiled allusion to Ernest Hemingway's narrator and protagonist, Jake Barnes, in *The Sun Also Rises*. Likewise, the scientist Howard Stein echoes the name of the American shock-jock Howard Stern, just as Dr. Stein is a short hand for Dr. Frankenstein.

These references appear alongside the political assertions of liberty, freedom and civil rights. Seeing himself as a leader in an emerging zombie rights movement, Barnes calls for the nation's 'zombietariat' to unite and fight for the 'pursuit of life, liberty, and brains' (62). What Barnes calls his 'Zombie Army' and 'Operation Zombie Shield' are not meant to be aggressive attacks on humanity. Rather, he sees his movement as having a revolutionary politics that is aligned with Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and Martin Luther King. In fact, he describes his manifesto, 'A Vindication of the Rights of the Post-Living', as 'revolutionary as the Magna Carta, the Treaty of Versailles, *The Feminine Mystique*, The Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights' (177, 167). A self-declared freedom fighter, Barnes's story turns the figure of the zombie as a devolved form of humanity, a decayed and reanimated corpse, on its head: 'Zombies are the next step in human evolution', he declares, zombies are us and we are 'determined to gain our rightful place in the world' (155, 104-5). Here, Barnes's voice reverberates with Henry Thoreau's assert of the right of revolution, as well as the right to resist or challenge governance that is ineffective, inadequate or tyrannical (383-5). For behind its humor, the text asks pressing questions about political rights and the relations between sentient beings: What beings should be feared? Who should be cared for? Who should be restrained or locked up? The zombie's physical and mental impairments speak, with tongue firmly planted in cheek, to what Barnes calls the plight of the undead. But the symbolic logic of the text extends to the political rights of other beings who might have imitations due to disability, age, illness or incapacity. The memoir poses a significant question: what does it mean to be human? And Barnes provides the answer: the human should not be conflated with the humane.

A sympathetic zombie like Barnes complicates the relationship between self and other. After all, if the reader sympathizes with the zombie, then there is an intimate connection between the self and the monster. This in turn resists the representation of the monster as the other in relation to the self, and it also gestures to the possibility of the human as being othered, thus inverting the self-other dynamic

that is often invoked in Gothic representations of monstrosity. Such an inversion might include the individual human (a person who is demonized as inhumane in relation to the monster) or it might include the structures of society (the inhumane conditions of social structures that marginalize the monster). However, this is not always a simple inversion of self and other. For while we often conceive of the relationship between human and zombie as a dichotomy, the sympathetic zombie often demonstrates how this relationship is a continuum: the zombie's cognition does not necessarily diminish its appetite for, or consumption of, human flesh. Moreover, the zombie might have retained certain aspects of its former self and lost others; Barnes, for instance, retains his memory and capacity for self-reflection, but loses his ability to move quickly or to speak. This continuum and the zombie's call for equality and civil rights force us to reflect on where we draw the line between the human and the zombie. The other is always constructed through artifice; or, as Barnes puts it, 'Go ahead and sympathize. Construct me as the "other"' (12).

It is in this context that song of myself becomes song of myself-as-zombie. The human condition is shadowed by its monstrous creation: the post-industrial global economy that is perpetually restructured around the latest speculative financial scheme, maintained by national and transnational government subsidies, and enforced by a massive military industrial complex that profits from a so-called war on terror. The American industrial economy of the past is simply the latest detritus to be disposed of in the landfill of history and those made redundant by outsourcing – the zombietariat – are relegated to the margins of society, made into pariahs and outcasts by the demands of a high-speed capitalist Empire that circumnavigates the globe. When Barnes laments the loss of humanity, 'Oh, hateful, hateful humans' (68), he mourns the death of compassion, altruism, self-reflection and empathy at the hands of those who have exceeded humanity by adapting to the new world order. These leads to ethical and ontological questions: what if being zombie is more ethical than being human? And what if being undead is preferable to being dead? Perhaps the zompire, a collective body politic made up of an egalitarian new species, is more desirable than a human Empire wherein the humane aspects of humanity are dead. In fact, Barnes's 'zombie self' comes to the realization that his human self was part of a dehumanized state that he finds in the ubiquitous shadow of life: 'It took zombiedom', he confesses, 'to give me a soul, death to make me "human"' (112). This is echoed by Ros, who comes to realize that mortality is overrated and that human life is not necessarily humane or a form of living: 'Perhaps life as a zombie is better than no life at all' (71).

High-Tech Gothic

The industrial age that died alongside the monstrous zombie has been replaced by a post-industrial era underpinned by digital and communication technologies that have transformed contemporary life. In a society where the service sector generates more wealth than the manufacturing sector, the economic structure has transitioned from the production of goods to the provision of services. As a result, knowledge becomes a valued form of capital – human capital – as the production of ideas is a main driver of the American economy. Globalization and automation have led to the decline of manual labor in the United States, and the rise of professional work in the sciences, the creative industries, engineering, IT and computing has grown in prevalence and value. This has had a profound impact on the dissemination of information sciences and technologies so that the hyper-development of advanced technology plays an increasing role in contemporary culture and society. Ever faster and more powerful,

computer systems and telecommunications have converged to engender a sea change wherein new technologies store and process information and communicate it instantaneously across the globe.

Ghosts and spectres are sometimes associated with a pre-modern and pre-industrial past, relegated to 'under-developed' cultures that rely on superstition rather than the rationality associated with science, technology and modernity. This distinction is challenged by Jacques Derrida, who suggests that advancements in technology produce ghosts: daguerreotypes and photographs produce ethereal and liminal images of people as spectral figures, audio-recordings and telephones disembody human voices, and cinema presents the actions of people who may be deceased (the walking dead). New technologies engender new anxieties. This is consistent with a strand of Gothic wherein technology generates spectres and monsters that includes, for instance, the biotechnology of Dr. Frankenstein, the transformative chemistry of Dr. Jekyll and the grotesque medical experiments of Dr. Moreau.

The widespread dissemination of the internet through personal and home computing has produced its own ghosts and fiends who, according to internet lore, linger in the shadows and wait for a chance to haunt, possess, curse or infect users. These digital ghosts and ghouls appear on web-series, podcasts, creepypasta and social media sites and include, among many others, threatening and spectral figures such as the Rake, the Midnight Man and Slender Man. A tall and thin figure in a black suit, Slender Man's face is featureless and his head is white and black. His presence is signaled through audiovisual distortion on the screen; sometimes this is the only way of detecting him. He is provoked by attempts to document or understand him, and he haunts those who try to gather information about him by appearing as a dark shadow in your room or disrupting the flow of information to your computer. He demonizes information transfer and threatens those who seek him out. In this, he is a manifestation of Gothic that reflects contemporary social and cultural concerns about technology and its significant changes to everyday practices and attitudes. But like other internet monsters, the absent presence of Slender Man encourages us to reflect upon an ontology based on the necessity of absence in order to image presence, and challenges traditional European metaphysics about the past and the impact and effects of that which is yet to come.

In fiction, Gothic has been adapted for a technologically-defined context in novels such as *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986) *and Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) by William Gibson and his co-authored pieces with Bruce Sterling, 'Burning Chrome' (1982) and 'Red Star, Winter Orbit' (1983). These texts hold a mirror to contemporary techno-social relations, the advanced consumer culture of late capitalism and their impacts on contemporary subjectivity, consciousness and human behavior. In so doing, they recycle and re-appropriate Gothic tropes such as the undead, decaying bodies, spectral presences, claustrophobic spaces and fluid movements between past and present. In *Neuromancer*, for instance, characters such as McCoy and Dixie Flatline traverse the borders separating technology from the organic body, life from death. After his physical death, McCoy is reconstructed through his brain patterns, a ghostly revival that is mirrored in the regeneration of Dixie, who, according to name and history, is simultaneously alive and dead. By crossing these borders, the text dislodges the being and non-being from their homely settings through a process of organic and technological mongrelization. Bodies and brains are manipulated through new technologies to engender frankensteinesque creations that re-map human and non-human conditions.

In *Gothic High-Tech* (2011), a collection of twelve short stories by Bruce Sterling, we find the end of postmodernism and the rise of a post-postmodern era wherein wealthy North Atlantic societies are gradually crumpling and others are anarchically emerging. 'We are into an era', Sterling writes in an essay in *Wired*, 'of decay and repurposing of broken structures, of new social inventions within networks, a world of "Gothic High-Tec"' and "Favela Chic", a crooked networked bazaar of history and futurity, rather than a cathedral of history, and a utopia of futurity' (np). In this context, he asserts, time and space must be reconceived and re-presented as atemporality in order to remain sensitive to the convergence of 'the symbol of the ruined castle', the 'ruins of the unsustainable' (located in Gothic High-Tech), and the 'informalized, illegalized, heavily networked structure of the emergent new order' (located in Favela Chic) (np). This convergence has not been domesticated or brought into sociality in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, and this has led to an unhomely state-of-being and new aesthetics in creative productions – including fiction – that he calls 'Frankenstein Mashups' which 'take elements of past, present, and future and just collide 'em together, in sort of a collage. More or less semi-randomly, like a Surrealist "exquisite corpse"' (np).

One of the stories in *Gothic High-Tech* that captures Sterling's Frankenstein mashup aesthetic is 'The Hypersurface of this Decade', which is set in a fictional area called the Silicon Roundabout in the very real neighborhood of Hackney, East London. Located near Old Street Station, the first-person narrator's abode is a gentrified space that was once an industrial sweatshop and which now makes features of the Victorian redbrick walls, Edwardian Girders and shrapnel from the Blitz. This space is wired and networked to form a 'Web-Squared situation' where 'no effort need be made to reconcile the differing scales of the virtual and the material. They can simply exist in raw form' (60). Within this atemporal setting, the ghosts of the past merge with the spectres of the present and future hauntings. The 'ghost-host of time-layered East End urban phantoms' are traces within the bricks and mortar; here, 'possessions are over' and have been replaced by data so that 'dematerialization is defined by its surfaces' (59-60). Materiality is supplanted by zones of interactive transactions, network docks, social-software communities, Twitter streams, blog posts and the 'hypermodern Web'; this disembodies communication, separating data from corporeal and material contexts, and transforms it into a series of spectral traces that flicker across a screen (62). The 'multimodal urban landscape' and 'urban futurity' of the story is haunted by the 'dead past's invisible hand' and by future collapse: the collapse of financial infrastructures, branding, copyright, and Walter Benjamin's 'aura' (60, 61, 62). It is haunted by nostalgia for a lost future.

Many of the stories in *Gothic High-Tech* represent the collapse of postindustrial societies and imagine a future within a post-postindustrial world. In 'White Fungus', for instance, a guerrilla urbanist rejects new reward systems to redesign 'junkspaces', the postindustrial detritus of the future, into homely places to live. Likewise, in "The Exterminator's Want Ad", the first-person narrator describes his life in jail after the fall of a hyper-capitalist and hyper-technological America that is now ruled by a socialist government. As a self-proclaimed 'political prisoner', the narrator is an advocate of what has been lost: the neo-liberal capitalist system driven by profit, self-interest and greed. But the economy has tanked and reverted to preindustrial poverty. Hyperinflation has transformed the suburbs into a dead 'Permanent Foreclosure Zone' surrounded by abandoned highways and areas with 'constant power blackouts' (75-6). Former financial centres are the Gothic ruins of advanced captiralism: 'bunt-out skyscrapers, lotta wreckage, junk, constant storms

and no air conditioning' (84). Killing bugs is the only thing left for the narrator to do. In both of these stories, Sterling reflects on how new technologies and economic changes alter the world and conceptions of personal identity, but his texts are also concerned with the shape of the future. How will new technology alter social relations? How will economic institutions respond to these changes? And how will political structures and governments transform in relation to techno-economic changes? These questions lead to a haunting presence in the texts: the stories are haunted not just by the past or the present but by the future. This convergence engenders atemporality, a state of temporal, historical and ontological disjunction, wherein the immediacy of presence is replaced by the metaphoric figure of the ghost that is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive, but which is situated in a contemporary culture that is haunted by its own futurity (Derrida 116-122).

Uncanny Textuality

New technologies have led to new ways of accessing and reading texts. Gothic novels are now often read on tablets and e-readers, resulting in dire predictions about the future of paperback and hardcover books. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Gothic novels no longer restricted by copyright can be read on open-access websites, and previously inaccessible Gothic texts have become more widely read as archives are digitalized. Gothic has never been impeded by new technologies; after all, early Gothic fiction was mass-produced by advancements in the printing press and was often circulated in newly founded circulation libraries. And contemporary Gothic is particularly well placed to address changes in access to texts, for Gothic fiction has always been self-reflexive about its own textuality. It is littered with discovered manuscripts, counterfeits, inset tales, false translations, narrative fragmentation, structural contradictions, as well as dubious claims to authenticity.

Contemporary American Gothic novels continue to explore uncanny textuality: Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* (2005) interweaves a series of letters and oral accounts to link the narratives of Vlad the Impaler and Count Dracula to protagonists living in the 1930s, 1950s and 1970s; Jennifer Egan's *The Keep* (2006) is primarily set in a dark and mysterious castle, which includes a series of secret underground passages that have their textual corollary in the distorted and haunted perceptions of the main character; and in Glenn Cooper's *Library of the Dead* (2009) the secret identity of a New York serial killer can only be found in a mysterious and dangerous medieval library that lies underneath an 8th century monastery. One of the most critically acclaimed recent Gothic texts to engage in uncanny forms of textuality is Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), which follows Will Navidson and his family after they move to a typical suburban house and discover a mysterious labyrinth. The novel uses unique typography to map out embedded narratives – a textual labyrinth – that requires the reader to manipulate the text by turning it sideways or reading it upside down. Written in the Gothic tradition of Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, Danielewski's novel is structured across rhizomatous pathways so 'the hunt for prey is the quest for a transcendental signified that will ground the other signifiers towards one united meaning; a signification that will cure the horror of the unreadable text, ensuring that the multiplicity of endless pathways is mastered and mapped' (Watkiss 12). Yet the measure of disorder and randomness in the closed system of *House of Leaves* is based on the impossibility of this kind of reading practice.

A striking example of how contemporary Gothic is linked to textual experimentation is J J Abrams and Doug Dorst's *S* (2013), which is sold in a black case embossed with the capital letter S in a Gothic font. Inside the case is what looks to be an old library book, *Ship of Theseus*, which has been extensively annotated by two readers using different colored pens. This leads to several layers of narrative: the novel *Theseus* tells one story, the penned annotations comprise another, while the translator's note, foreword and footnotes help to construct the story of the mysterious and elusive author of the novel, V M Straka. The notes in the margin tell several stories, but they are focused on uncovering the academic mystery surrounding the fictional book's author. Text and paratext are self-consciously blurred so that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other, thus calling attention to the materiality of the book and highlighting the text as a physical object through the insertions that are placed between the pages: letters written in Swedish and English, postcards from Brazil, newspaper clippings and other documents that supplement the layering of the stories.

In the fictional paratext of the foreword to *Ship of Theseus*, the scholar F. X. Caldeira, a character who may have been created by Straka, presents the author as a mysterious and unknowable figure. Straka could have been murdered; he might have committed suicide; he may still be alive; perhaps he never existed. This mystery is amplified by the rumours that have circulated about his life: some stories claim he was involved in the attempted assassination of Mussolini, others assert he was involved in the murder of Trotsky and the 1920 bombing of Wall Street. This raises questions about the life and death of the author and calls attention to the materiality of the text by gesturing back to medieval manuscripts wherein the collaborative efforts of the author, scribe, illuminator and commentators in the margins obscured the notion a text being the work of a single writer. Like the medieval manuscript, the author of *Ship of Theseus* remains unclear, and *S* is the work of a creator, Abrams, a modern 'scribe', Dorst, the commentators in the margins, Jen and Eric, as well as 'illuminations' by New York graphic design company.

From this perspective, there is a continuum between *S* and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). For the paratext of Walpole's Gothic novel presents the work as a newly discovered medieval manuscript that has been translated for an English audience. Moreover, in the first edition, Walpole conceals his authorship, engendering a sense of mystery surrounding the source of the text and its writer. This leads the literary critic Jerrold Hogle to assert that counterfeit or 'the ghost od counterfeit' is central to Gothic: 'the "Gothic revival" in the eighteenth century, the remnant of "obligatory" or "natural" meaning', he writes, 'is replaced as the sign's point of reference by counterfeits of that remnant: portraits or armour hung on walls […] illustrations of the medieval 'Gothic' in books, performances or editions' (501). Such counterfeit speaks to Abrams and Dorst's presentation of *Ship of Theseus* as a 1949 translation of a mysterious author's last work, and the appearance of authenticity is conveyed in the worn binding, the library catalogue number, as well as the seeming real postcards, articles and letters.

Contemporary Gothic in the US does not shy away from textual experimentation, new technologies or new forms of monstrosity. Rather, American Gothic adapts to social and cultural changes (and related fears and anxieties) by shaking-up the signifying process and invoking defamilarization by offering the writer access to a non-realistic mode that resists documentary verisimilitude and discursive practices. These texts, then, underscore the slippery nature of language and map out new territories to explore the uncharted character of new socio-cultural

phenomena that are not immediately intelligible. This is not to say that contemporary American Gothic breaks with a tradition that began in the 18th century. After all, Gothic has always relied on uncanny disruptions, liminal states of being, monstrosity, grotesquery and tensions between the real and the unreal. Yet the rise of new technologies and digital culture in the information age has engendered fruitful material for understanding the spectres and monsters of contemporary modernity while also reflecting on a past that continues to haunt the present and the future.

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