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Making monsters: Gothic Processes and Metaphors in Contemporary Art

Lecture
Gilda Williams
28 Oct 2009, University of Westminster

1. Endless varieties of Gothic
‘There is a lot of second-rate work these days that illustrates Goth motifs, wearing gloom on its sleeves with big winks for everyone.’ – Ralph Rugoff, frieze, 2004

A dark strain of contemporary art exhibitions^2 and publications^3 in the US and the UK, and a March 2009 auction at Sotheby’s,

1) spooky motifs such as skulls, bones, tombstones, shrouds, devils;
2) references to horror film; atmospheric, often elaborate interiors suggestive of a haunted house;
3) adolescents; pointed arches, stained glass and other medieval or Shakespearean motifs;
4) monstrous combinations of human and animal forms, or the organic and the inorganic, in ‘Frankenstinian’ creations;
5) mirrors, masks and doubles;
6) references to 19th century gothic novelists, particularly Edgar Allan Poe;
7) evocations of death, decay and nostalgia;
8) blood; matted hair; dissections; amputations and prosthetics;
9) exotic settings and details, tending towards a Victorian, Egyptian or Orientalist flavour;
10) erotic a obliquely suggestive of sadomasochism, often in illustration and cartoon;
11) demonic children and children/doll/animal hybrids;
12) demonic animals, particularly bats, leopards, rats; flies and insects, sometimes dead or dying;
13) texts in gothic typeface;
14) ruins; desolate or dream landscapes; phantom cities;
15) a predominance of the colour black

From medieval architecture to 18th-19th century literature, from mid-20th century B-films to late 20th century goth subcultural style

2. What Gothic has become/what gothic could be

Vaguery and anachronism. Historically rich and potent term, which only returned meaningfully - late 1990s, will lapse into an art purely of motif

‘Candygothic’, a set of instable if recognizable ‘gothic’ triggers which play to a niche audience and corresponding market?

Signs of ‘otherness’ (sub-cultural fashion; a generic preference for the disturbing and violent over the life-affirming; distant times, people and places, etc.)

Frieze 2003
‘Too many young artists today simply regurgitate a slew of diluted Pop-Goth signifiers, filling graduate studios with a plethora of skulls and spider’s webs, vampires and fake blood, zombie heads, eyeball sculptures and ninth-generation variations of old Bauhaus videos. Thus defanged, Goth has never been more tiresome.’ [...]

In the past artists and writers were the necessary voices urgently articulating these truths and struggling to understand them. With this in mind, is it too much to ask where are the de Sades and Goyas, the Poes and Artauds, of today?  

- interface between life and death  
- the role of science and religion in determining the conditions of life  
- the effects of patriarchy and the domination of women and other oppressed groups  
- the legacy of slavery  
- the limits of pain and pleasure  
- how humankind defines monstrous and Otherness  
- and the psychology and lingering effects of dysfunctional families and an unhappy childhood  

contemporary gothic art express or expand meaningfully this set of themes?  
- anemic evocation of the weird and the deathly, relinquishing the genuinely destabilizing power  

3. How can we define Gothic?  

parallel investigation into the literary, architectural and art historical understanding of this term  
- originates in architecture history  
- renewed definition via the arts and primarily the ‘literature of terror’ invented in the 18th century and later developments  
- is revived again through Victorian Gothic Revival architecture  
- today used interdisciplinarily to denote a ‘dark’ strain of art, literature, film, fashion and music.  

an ‘accident of etymology’?  

Literary theorists, Varma, ‘gothic spirit’ Linda Bayer-Berenbaum writing in 1982, the two principal disciplines of gothic share numerous essential qualities. restless energy; enquiry into the unknown; intertwining motifs; nervousness; the supernatural; excess.  

Gothic novels set in gothic abbeys and cathedrals  

Horace Walpole: wrote gothic novel, built gothic architecture  

3a Chris Baldick’s - 1992 ‘Introduction’ to The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales- most valid and resilient.  

‘[The Gothic] should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce a sickening descent into disintegration’  

history, claustrophobia and disintegration - Andy Warhol’s Electric Chair and Louise Bourgeois’ Cells  

3b: curiosities about gothic  
Gothic: can easily accommodate bad art (Sedgwick: gothic novels not worth reading) (Rotten Tomatoes)  

Easily slips into parody: Jane Austen parodies - comical Northanger Abbey (1818), via the 17 year-old protagonist, Catherine Morland’s  

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7 Spooner calls Baldick’s ‘the most satisfactory definition of literary Gothic’ (Spooner, op. cit. 18) while for curator Christoph Grunenberg it provides the parameters in his examination of gothic contemporary art as defining ‘a true Gothic work’, Gothic: Transmutations of Horror in Late Twentieth Century Art (Boston: ICA), 1997, 195.  
8 Baldick, op. cit., xiii.
continual disappointment with what she has determined gothic ought to be. Arriving at the medieval abbey - how ‘distressing’ the difference is to her.\(^9\)

medieval period and, by extension, the Gothic, to give way to contradictory forms

Gothic: slippery, anything that makes you ‘feel gothicky’ (Alexandra Warwick)

Catherine Spooner: antithetical moments and ideas in culture.

‘[Gothic] can be progressive or conservative, nostalgic or modern, political or apolitical, feminine or masculine, erudite or trashy, transcendentally spiritual or doggedly material, sinister or silly. It is difficult to say what contemporary Gothic “is” of even what it is like, since it does all these things so well.’\(^10\)

Jerrold Hogle: Gothic is always fake; no ‘authentic gothic’ ‘revival of something that never happened’

You always choose gothic, adopt gothic: unlike abject, uncanny which happen to you (share supernatural, no ‘surprise ending’ – return of the Unfamiliar – also NOT automata, built like a robot, but not one

(gothic monsters can talk, gothic monster dress well – zombies?) seductiveness

3c. Bad Gothic/good gothic

Modern architects and historians - self-conscious, derivative Victorian Gothic architecture (bad Gothic) and the far superior, structurally daring and spiritually uplifting Gothic cathedrals of the 11-15th centuries (good Gothic)

If ‘bad’ contemporary gothic -e contradictory motifs - what is its counterpart, ‘good’ contemporary gothic?

shift from ‘bad’ (anti-modern) to ‘good’ (contemporary)

constant ‘good gothic/bad gothic’ dualism: purposeful gothic/sensationalist gothic; transgressive gothic/harmless gothic; honest gothic/artificial gothic; pure gothic/corrupted gothic, and so forth (barbaric gothic/classical)

Vasari/Ruskin; medieval architecture/revival architecture

Modern architects and historians - self-conscious, derivative Victorian Gothic architecture (bad Gothic) and the far superior, structurally daring and spiritually uplifting Gothic cathedrals of the 11-15th centuries (good Gothic)

If ‘bad’ contemporary gothic - contradictory motifs - what is its counterpart, ‘good’ contemporary gothic?

4. Gothic as an antidote to modernism

‘Return of death’

‘It only makes sense that artists are channeling a more intense aura: 9/11, the war in Iraq, the turbulent global economy and the recent SARS viral outbreak in Hong Kong have all left society and culture in a paranoid state’ (Michael Cohen, ‘The New Gothic’, Flash Art, 2003)\(^11\)

I find this an inadequate explanation from the extreme volte-face - from Greenberg’s derogatory attitude toward gothic, and the art world’s interest today despite some continued reservations in the Gothic. End of the 18th century, Martin Myrone offer exactly the opposite reason for its popularity:

\(^9\) Jane Austen (1818): ‘The windows, to which she looked with peculiar dependence, from having heard the general talk of his preserving them in their Gothic form with reverential care, were less what her fancy had portrayed. To be sure, the pointed arch was preserved – the form of them was Gothic - they might be even casements – but every pane was so large, so clear, so light! To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, the painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing.’ Northanger Abbey, cited in Myrone, The Gothic Reader, op. cit., 221.

\(^10\) Spooner, op. cit., (PAGE?)

it was the removal of death - not its proximity --, i.e., the end of public executions and the transferral of the site (sight) of death from the home to hospitals and other institutions that prompted the imaging of death in popular art forms over two centuries ago.12

5. Move away from modernism signaled by return to gothic

main theme: ‘the persistence of the past, and the fear and anxiety this produces’
broadly at its meaning (historically and cross-disciplinarily) beyond motif and concentrating instead on the system of themes and processes of Gothic/gothic art and literature

contemporary (post-1960) art has - on a par with film and literature -- adopted and updated

Contemporary artists use Gothic constantly: certain art forms also have permitted
- artists whose work is not ordinarily framed in this manner
- haunted places (Gregor Schneider, Jane and Louise Wilson)
- labyrinths and prisons (Mike Nelson, Janet Cardiff)
- shadows and spectres (Andy Warhol, Gregory Crewdson)
- ominous fragments of text and disembodied voices (Douglas Gordon, Raymond Pettibon)
- fragmented bodies (Paul Thek, Louise Bourgeois, (David hammons,)
- family secrets and the crisis of patriarchy (Charles Ray, Louise Bourgeois)
- the modern imaging of death
the making of monsters
ruins, which signal our relationship to the remnants the past (Rachel Whiteread, tacita Dean)

- the regular appropriation of often violent imagery from the mass media
- the establishment of installation art and its recurring use to create ‘haunted’ sites
- a return to figuration particularly from the 1980s, and the potential for these figures to be distorted to monstrosity
- and moving images or audioworks which enables extensive storytelling

6. One meaning, lost forever:
Ruskin’s social conception of Gothic architecture as overcoming divisions of artistic labour

John Ruskin’s - the most enduring – (September 2008, of his book The Nature of Gothic (1851-53), artist Meg Cranston’s most influential, ‘classic’ texts.13)

overcome the limitations of motif - not characterized by mere form (pointed arches, flying buttresses, stained glass, etc.).

‘come together so as to have life.’14

appreciation of ‘the labour of inferior minds’

connectedness between man and his handiwork and a leveling of society that is absent, in the modern world.15

socially equalizing and self-sacrificing value } (Marxism anti-gothic literature)

12 Myrone, Gothic Nightmares, op. cit., 36.
13 Meg Cranston, ‘I have always loved Ruskin’s writing but thought students wouldn’t be able to relate. They get into the idea that Ruskin’s socialism was related to his enthusiasm for the Gothic. Gothic cathedrals suddenly seem intriguing.’, frieze, issue 117, Sept 2008, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/meg_cranston/, accessed 5 April 2009.
14 John Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic”, from The Stones of Venice (1851-53), reprinted in The Genius of John Ruskin, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998, “It is not enough that it has the Form, if it have not also the power and life. It is not enough that it has the Power, if it have not the form.’., PAGE?
15 Ruskin, ibid., 176 ff.
ignore Ruskin’s central argument - socially and artistically significant interpretation

1919 the Bauhaus artist Lyonel Feininger - roughly executed, ‘Germanic’ woodcut titled Cathedral of the Future - spires and flying buttresses - stylized village Gothic church.

return of the work values, the artistic and community sensibility - spiritual fulfillment symbolized - modest Gothic church.


exclusively meant for art historians Western visual art and architecture produced between the 11th and the 15th centuries

The ‘Goth’ tribes – actually divided into Visigoths and Ostrogoths – randomly named during the Renaissance
all the invading tribes into the Roman Empire: the Huns, the Vandals, the Anglo-Saxons, the Lombards, the Celts, and others.

Coining during the Renaissance for a long-unnamed style pejorative meaning ‘barbaric’.

Giorgio Vasari (although some earlier uses are found in the writings of Filarete [1460-64] and Raphael [1518-19])
 lien to Italy and Greco-Roman origins – all that was monstrous, corrupt and ‘goffa’ (awkward) in non-classical art.

Gothic emerging simultaneously as both a historical (Gothic = ‘medieval’) / descriptive (Gothic = ‘barbaric’ ‘awkward’) term
Martin Myrone writes in the 2006 catalogue \ Gothic Nightmares.

an analogous move? - i.e., that the re-emergence - distancing in the contemporary from the predominance of
18th century gothic as
= a historically, cultural and formal alternative - classicism.

around the mid 18th century the term - associated with a fictionalized revisitation of the Middle Ages
the novels and architecture of Horace Walpole (1717-1797) (amateur)
the wealthy and privileged son of Sir Robert Walpole, long-time Whig prime minister (from 1721-42)
In contrast with the later 19th century claims by Pugin et al.

moral purity and a corresponding - archaeologically-driven accuracy
associated more with emotion and pleasure than with reason

Walpole’s - anti-intellectual, purely emotional spirit of Gothic, reiterated by Ruskin in the 1830s, Coleridge in the
1930s,17 and art critics to the present-day18 –

shifting the term ‘from an adjective of opprobrium into an epithet of praise’19 –

17 S.T. Coleridge (1936): “The Greek art is beautiful, when I enter a Greek church, my eye is charmed, and my mind elated; I feel excited and
proutd that I am a man. But the Gothic art is sublime. On entering a Gothic cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe”, from General
18 Gilda Williams (2007): “’Gothic’ in contemporary art is more atmospheric than neatly defined, [g]enerally anti-intellectual and unscientific...”, in
a **mythical, uncorrupted** original state

a specifically **English and German** political identity.  

A return to the linear severity of the ‘Old German’ or Dureresque print

a **mystical, national authenticity**, - Casper David Friedrich’s The Cross upon the Mountain or Tetschen Altarpiece (1808)

Goethe’s well-known promotion - **indigenous, Germanic** art forms  -- Gothic architecture - a symbol of national resistance in the post-Napoleonic era.  

**nationalist sentiment** - refusal of Southern European classical culture as pre-eminent.

places and periods other than the classical, literalized in Thomas Cole’s painting **The Architect’s Dream** (1840) - of Gothic, Egyptian, Grecian, and Moorish structures - alongside a Greek temple.

**Sturm and Drang**, - Swiss-born, London-based artist **Henry Fuseli**, most often seen as the **painterly parallel** to English literary

shadowy, claustrophobic works such as **The Nightmare (1781-82)** and **The Three Witches** (c. 1793)

Fuseli admired medieval Gothic cultures,  

- **scorned the gothic novelists** - overly detached issues of their day,

literary sources instead in the **Greek playwrights and Shakespeare**.

Myrone, what actually **unites Gothic forms in art and literature** - not their shared atmosphere or ghostly motifs, - relationship to their **wide audience**

shared meaning and purpose - not in the superficial similarities of motif,

by the **1830s**, with the art of Constable, Ingres, Delacroix et al., **Fuseli’s art** - outworn, overblown and decadent; 

taste for medievalism in the visual arts - illustrative, congenial art of the **pre-Raphaelites**

**Revivalist architecture** - Britain, Germany, France and the United States into - the 20th century

In the later 19th century architectural historians **Viollet-le Duc** (1814-79) - A.W. N. **Pugin** (1812-52) and **John Ruskin** (1819-1900)

7a. Gothic in the 20th c.

(Vanitas)

**Catherine Spooner; is it a revival?**  
Rebecca (Daphne Du Maurier, 1933) Hitchcock, year?

Nosferatu, F.W. Mumau, 1922; Dracula, Tod Browning, 1931; Frankenstein, James Whale, 1931

Psycho, 1960

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22 Henry Fuseli (1788-1818): ‘We are more impressed by Gothic than by Greek mythology, because the bands are not yet rent which tie us to its magic; he has a powerful hold on us who holds by our superstition or by a theory of honour’, Aphorisms on Art, no. 105, reprinted in Martin Myrone, ed. and Frayling, *The Gothic Reader*, op. cit., 197.


bad gothic, at its baddest.

review of Edith Birkhead’s survey The Tale of Terror (1921) - **Virginia Woolf** - the only defensible understanding of gothic fiction- Freudian *psychoanalysis*, brimming with symbolic traumas, complexes and sado-masochistic behaviours - reduce the text to a symptom.

Summers’ above-mentioned *The Gothic Quest* a **defense of a fading tradition**.

During the early 20th century ‘Gothic’ and ‘**Gothic Revival**’ heavily negative associations - narrative excess clinging to the past / modernism’s clean, futuristic optimism.

1924, **Virginia Woolf** - ‘on or about December, 1910, human character changed’,\(^{26}\) ‘Gothic Romance’

an epistemological break - **shackles of the Victorian period**- replaced with an improved social and cultural milieu: the Modern.

Gothic and Modemism are generally considered incompatible, antithetical -

One is **forward-looking**, the other nostalgic of the past
one **rationalist**, the other emotional
one prides itself on straightforward **functionality** while the other is prone to decorative excess and drama.

**modern** International Style, into a **unanimously reviled** building style.

**Frank Lloyd Wright** admired - an ‘organic’ architecture, given the column’s slender, stem-like columns and ‘skin and bones’ construction

The Italian Futurist poet **Filippo Marinetti** - his speech to the English: (1912-revised 1915)

Even **Kenneth Clark**, - expert and supporter of the Gothic Revival, - 1928 Introduction to *The Gothic Revival* woefully apologizing - a style of such candid distaste.

1948 **Erwin Panofsky**

‘[T]he panoply of shafts, ribs, buttresses, tracery, pinnacles, and crockets was a self-analysis and self-explication of architecture [intended to make us] re-experience the very processes of architectural composition.’\(^{27}\)

bears witness to the logic of its own construction

**Meyer Schapiro** had, in 1931, brilliantly assessed the early Gothic (1100 AD) sculpture adorning the abbey of Moissac

Modemist values.

‘A new sphere of artistic creation without religious content and imbued with values of spontaneity, individual fantasy, delight in color and movement, and the expression of feelings [...] **anticipate modern art.**’\(^{28}\)

\(^{25}\) See Anne Williams, ‘Edifying Narratives: The Gothic Novel, 1764-1997’ 151-118, in Christoph Grunenberg, ed., Gothic op. cit. The page numbers of this catalogue are in reverse numerical order.


\(^{27}\) Erwin Panofsky, Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism, 1951, 59. (GW to ch.)
good Gothic’/‘bad Gothic’ pattern;
‘good’ Gothic that is uncorrupted, as honest in its building methods as it was pious in its intent ‘bad’ Gothic -- over-decorated, undisciplined, materialistic -- decadent qualities that Walpole had admired.

Clement Greenberg
Jackson Pollock, Gothic, 1944

used disparagingly, as Greenberg did in his description of late Pollock

Mondrian: shed the brambles of gothic’

Chris Baldick, writing in 1992, - antithetical positioning of gothic against Modernism - continues the gothic’s perpetual positioning in terms of opposition -

of the enlightened, the rational – which from its literary inception, ‘hold the pejorative sense of Gothic in its place.’

a shorthand - all that is retrograde and stifling about pre-modernist art.

nothing worse, an artist today still working in the spirit of gothic

TJ Clark writes in 1994, ‘the gothic was ‘the opposite of what Greenberg considered the real strengths of the modern tradition’

20th century Russian filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein many decades later - its counter-cultural, evocative powers.

exceptions, (Andre Breton’s claiming of Horace Walpole as a Surrealist precursor)

Clement Greenberg’s dismissal of the movement - representing all that was retrograde and abhorrent in Surrealist art.

well into the 1970s-80s ‘Western medieval’; that is, ‘gothic’ was a historical rather than a descriptive term, as today.

medieval architecture (i.e., the soaring verticality of the old cathedrals and the coloured patterning of stained glass) - by association the mystical gravitas of medieval cathedrals

today, heavily reliant on 18th and 19th century literature, (i.e., having to with death, ghosts, monsters, etc.) - not into play

a 1958 essay Rodin Cathedral (1908), depicting tall, vertical, praying hands, - ‘evocation of the great Gothic naves of northern France’.

Rouault’s parallels with the Gothic -black outlined and strongly coloured compositions’ resemblance to stained glass windows - a craft the artist had mastered himself

1933, Rouault’s figures are compared with early Gothic gargoyles - albeit with the addition of modern ‘interest in the struggle within ourselves’ -

32 Albert Elsen, ‘The Humanism of Rodin and Lipchitz’, College Art Journal, vol. 17, no. 3, Spring 1958, 248: ‘Rodin’s Cathedral, a sculpture of two hands clasped in a gesture of prayer may have been simultaneously an evocation of the great Gothic naves of Northern France or of his visits to the forests of Belgium.’
Clement Greenberg’s 1965 - Anthony Caro as related to the English Perpendicular Gothic,\textsuperscript{33}

Lawrence Alloway’s - 1975 of Caro as Picturesque, citing the 18th century writings of William Gilpin

German nationalist spirit - (‘Gemanic’ in the writings of Vasari). (Feininger)

1929, the Modemist art collector and critic Wilhelm Uhde praised Picasso - embodying the ideal, modem manifestation of the Geman and Gothic soul

Well into the 1970s and 80s, modemist German artists such Ernst Barlach and Max Beckmann - Gemanic gothicism.\textsuperscript{34}

For Donald Kuspit - 1995, Georg Baselitz shares Uhde’s notion of a mystical, healing role - gothic.

Joseph Beuys - Roberta Smith’s 1988 discussion of Beuys’s work Felt Suit (1970), - compares to both animal skin and a businessman’s grey flannel suit before claiming that Felt Suit

‘... is also deeply Gothic, suggesting both a suit of armor and human husk: in other words, an ancient system of protection and a soul beyond need of protection.’\textsuperscript{35}

Kuspit or Smith’s notion of gothic -\textit{nationalistically-driven, ancient, emotional} art form rooted in a mythological past

contrasts with Christoph Grunenberg’s definition -, just two years after Kuspit’s article, in his 1997 ‘Gothic’ catalogue, - to do mostly with terror literature, violence, and horror film.\textsuperscript{36}

Jake and Dinos Chapman, Cathy de Moncheaux, Damien Hirst and Sue Williams that ‘gothic’ begins to find regular usage in art periodicals

contemporary gothic art -\textit{shed this nationalistic, nostalgic and ‘primitive’}

7b. Return of Gothic, late 20th c.
films within the horror genre such as The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1973), The Shining (Stanley Kubrick, 1980, based on the novel by Stephen King, 1977) and The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991) - cultural stock goes up

artist Mike Kelley’s Urban Gothic in 1985, a fictional Blade Runner-esque account of a kind of post-apocalyptic city\textsuperscript{37}.

Jeff Wall discussed Dan Graham’s mirrored pavilion, not as these works usually had been, in terms of its modemist glass-and-steel resonance but as an ‘abandoned crypt of Gothic tales’,

Modern Painters’ editor and founder, Peter Fuller (1947-90) - his neo-conservative attitude towards contemporary art,

at odds with established art publishing and American academia - the title for his magazine a phrase from Ruskin


Gothic subcultural motifs (skulls, daggers, tombstones, demon dolls)

Gothic TV (Six Feet Under, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, et al.) To these I might also add other possibilities:

at the end of the 1990s - return as a positive, descriptive term for art -

Christoph Grunenberg (Gordon, etc.) identifies - Bruce Conner and West Coast hyperrealist Paul Thek as examples of the sporadic eruptions of gothic in the 1960s.

at the time they were not framed at the time in these terms.

shed certain qualities (for example, as a signifier of English or German nationalism), and gained others (subcultural capital)

shift from ‘bad’ (anti-modem) to ‘good’ (contemporary)

In the 1990s Margaret Cohen - ‘Gothic Marxism’ to unite Breton’s fantasy-inspired uses of Marxism with Walter Benjamin’s ‘efforts to appropriate Freud’s seminal twentieth-century exploration of the irrational for Marxist thought’.

(Jacques Derrida)

Nicolas Bourriaud - ‘Alter-modernity’, a strain of 21st century artistic discussion

processes such as fragmentation, storytelling and the imaging of the ruins of postmodemism

8. Warhol - a gothic reading
8a. Danse macabre - 1. prevalence of death
The outbreaks of Black Death, famine, Hundred Years War from the mid 14th century - perpetual presence of death; this conventionally provides the backdrop for the prevalence of the danses macabres

“I guess it was the big crash picture, the front page of a newspaper: 129 Die. I was also painting the Marilyn’s. I realized that everything I was doing must have been Death. It was Christmas or Labor Day - a holiday - and every time you turned on the radio they said something like “4 million are going to die.” That started it.”

2. Death at any moment

Surprise - accident

3. Socially equalizing (everyone dies)

‘My death series was divided into two parts, the first one famous deaths and second on people nobody ever heard of, and I thought that people should think about them sometimes: the girl who jumped off the Empire State Building or the ladies who ate the poisoned tuna fish and people getting killed in car crashes.

‘What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. […]’

38 Grunenberg, op. cit.
40 Andy Warhol, in (Swenson?)
41 Andy Warhol, The Philosophy, op. cit., 96.
The sequence of works from the year 1962-63 suggests a parallel Warholian message: ‘The President can die, Liz Taylor can die, and just think, you can die too.’

8b. Blurring
The imagery of the gothic abounds with such blurring, confusing distinctions between figure and ground.

the ruin, which is both the object in the landscape and the landscape itself

the ghost, who also occupies a contradictory figure-and-ground position literally staged in the spectral photography of the mid-19th century.

unusual choice of imagery in Andy Warhol’s Death and Disaster series, particularly the car crashes and the race riots

imaging death Warhol untypically selected semi-indecipherable and indistinct images, rendered more illegible through multiple overlapping silkscreens

contrast with the solid, unambiguous outlines of the Campbell’s Soup Cans, the portraits and almost all the rest of his art

not abstraction

8c. Skin _Drella
Subsequent theorists - surface-based re-reading - Judith Halberstam’s Skin Shows: Gothic Horrors and the Technology of Monsters (1995)

all signs of monstrosity – Dracula’s pallor; Frankenstein loose yellow complexion; Dr. Jeckyll’s darkening visage in his transformation into Mr Hyde; the gruesome garment stitched from human flesh in The Silence of Lambs

“I’m ready to apply the flesh-coloured acne-pimple medication that doesn’t resemble any human flesh I’ve ever seen, though it does come pretty close to mine … So now the pimple’s covered. But am I covered? I have to look in the mirror for some more clues. Nothing is missing. It’s all there. The affectless gaze. The diffraacted grace …”

analogous emphasis on surface in his art: ‘If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.’

His identity lies on his skin, just as his art remains on the surface. This is the very opposite of Pollock’s emotionally fraught, deeply human layering of paint on canvas, Greenberg’s Modernist ideal.

8d. Dorian Grey
of I thought I was too small for Drexel Burnham, a 1986 Oscar Wilde’s gothic novel The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890).

double self-portrait: we see in the foreground the everyday ‘human’ Warhol – small, youthful, and unthreatening, poised shyly on the edge of a chair and able to speak the lingua franca of capitalism behind him a gigantic, demonic canvas visage – deathly, skull-like, stunned and toothless in a spiky fright wig.

scared painted image behind Warhol betrays his allegedly damaged soul – or at least his on-canvas performance of the monstrous Pop artist.

42 Gretchen Berg, ‘Andy Warhol: My True Story’, originally published in The East Village Other, summer 1966. Reprinted in Kenneth Goldsmith, I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews 1962-1987 (New York: Carroll & Graf), 2004. Recent research into the original tapes from this interview reveal that much of this often-cited quote were spoken by the interviewer herself, although Warhol agreed with her words, approved the text and keenly admired the resulting interview text, in which Berg’s voice is made to vanish altogether. See Matt Wrbican, “The True Story of “My True Story”,” in Andy Warhol: A Guide to 706 items in 2 Hours and 56 Minutes, op. cit., 00:56:00-00:57:00.