

art philosophy horror

INCOGNITUM HACTENUS



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Gods & Monsters

Contents

Editorial

Caryn Coleman and Tom Trevatt.....3

A Critique of Practical Nihilism: Agency in Scott Bakker’s “Neuropath”

Mark Fisher.....5

Iguana Runs This Town

Dave Tompkins: Interview with Walter Murch.....13

I, Monster: Gothic Metaphor in the Making and Unmaking of Andy Warhol

Gilda Williams.....19

Occult Negations or, The Changing “Standard of Reality”: Notes on Jeremy Millar

Benjamin Noys with work by Jeremy Millar.....31

Gods and Monsters Image Essay

Caryn Coleman and Tom Trevatt.....39

Cry Me a River: Darren Banks’ I’m Sure if there were a Monster in the Midlands we would have seen it on the Telly

Caryn Coleman.....42

Monsters, Marvels, Mystery, Morbidity, Melancholy

Allen S. Weiss with Work by Ronald Gonzalez.....44

Notes on Contributors.....45

Editorial

Caryn Coleman and Tom Trevatt

It's with fiendish delight that we present to you the second issue of *Incognitum Hactenus*, *Gods and Monsters*.

To a new world of gods and monsters...

Doctor Pretorius, *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935)

The second issue of *Incognitum Hactenus* tackles the complex ideas of monstrosity embedded in Doctor Pretorius' devilish quote. In this attempt, our *Gods and Monsters* issue poses a twofold question through, with, and about the monstrous. The first question is of our current socio-economic situation by addressing power structures, struggles for control, and the resulting monstrosities. The second, however, demands that we think of the monster as not just a figure that appears through the socialising and economising of the real, but as the un-figuring of the socio-econom-ethical field by the real.

Humans make monsters with their impact (be that through capital, religion, politics or ecology) but they must also confront the monstrous real as radically divorced from these realms. As a weirding of the empirical, the monster presents something that cannot appear within our own purview. Instead the monster exists independently of us, from our own world but as though from another.

The incredible contributors to *Gods and Monsters* take on board the "monster" in its various incarnations. **Gilda Williams's** "I, Monster: Gothic Metaphor in the Making and Unmaking of Andy Warhol" discusses Gothic monster-making in relation to Warhol's self-construction. **Dave Tompkins** interviews Walter Murch, the screenwriter and editor for George Lucas' first film *THX-1138* (1971) in which a "Big Brother like" futuristic society located beneath the Earth's surface are controlled by the government through drugs and subliminal advertising. Through eliminating the representation of

the monster in select horror films, **Darren Banks'** video *I'm sure if there were a monster in the midlands we would have seen it on the telly* reveals the liminal boundary between a place of sanctuary and a site of terror. **Benjamin Noys** tackles **Jeremy Millar's** work as a form of absence and negation, focusing specifically on the powers of these in relation to the interpretative function, proposing the occulting of thought as a strategy. **Mark Fisher** discusses Scott Bakker's *Neuropath*, drawing similarities between Bakker's work and the neuroscience of Pat and Paul Churchland, and the horror of Thomas Ligotti, approaching a critique of capital as dominant force. **Allen S. Weiss** presents his monstrous alphabet, originally written for artist **Ronald Gonzalez**, whose work *Bundle* is included here.

And finally, it is with sincere admiration and a heavy heart that we dedicate *Gods and Monsters* in tribute to Mike Kelley (1954-2012).

A Critique of Practical Nihilism: Agency in Scott Bakker's "Neuropath"

Mark Fisher

During the twentieth century, nihilism seemed to be a collateral counterpoint to the processes of rationalization both of production and of the State. That is to say: on one side, labour, on the other, the precariousness and changeable nature of urban life. Now, however, nihilism (the practice of not having established practices, etc.) has entered into production, has become a professional qualification, and has been put to work. – Paolo Virno[i]

“The whole reason I wrote the book,” Scott Bakker remarked of his novel *Neuropath*, “is that the question of cognition and experience is rapidly shifting social domains, moving from armchair speculative arenas to scientific and technical ones. ... Just ‘getting on with your life’ becomes a far different matter when corporations like Neilsens are investing billions in startups like Neurofocus. Nihilism is as practical and as present a problem as can be.”[ii] “The idea,” Bakker elaborated in a paper called “The End of the World As We Knew It: Neuroscience and the Semantic Apocalypse”, “was to write something set in a near-future where now nascent technologies of the brain had reached technical, and more importantly, social maturity, a time where the crossroads facing us—the utter divergence of knowledge and experience—had become a matter of daily fact. A time when governments regularly use non-invasive neurosurgical techniques in interrogations. A time when retail giants use biometric surveillance to catalogue their customers, and to insure that their employees continually smile.”[iii] What I want to consider here are some of the implications of this “practical nihilism”. Must the “semantic apocalypse” that *Neuropath* herald inevitably lead to political pessimism?

The plot of *Neuropath* centres on two friends, Thomas Bible, a psychology professor, and Neil Cassidy, a neuroscientist. When they were undergraduate students, they came up with what they called The Argument, which basically consists of a version of the

philosophical position known as eliminativist materialism. Eliminativist materialism goes further than those theories which argue that the mind can be reduced to the brain; for eliminativists like Paul and Patricia Churchland, such reductions still assume the existence of beliefs, fears, hopes and all the other mental categories seemingly revealed to us by introspection. Eliminativists maintain that such entities do not exist at all. They belong only to what they eliminativists call “folk psychology”, and instead of vainly searching for neural correlates for these will ‘o’ the wisps, eliminativists argue that we should look forward to a time when neuroscience will entirely replace the vague language of feelings and beliefs with a language appropriate to what actually happens in the brain. Consciousness, free will and other “intentional” features of human experience are fictions cooked up by our own neurophysiology. “[E]xperience, all experience, is simply a matter of neural circuitry”, as Bible succinctly summarises in *Neuropath*.^[iv] Or, as he puts it at greater length,

Everything you live, everything you see and touch and hear and taste, everything you think, belongs to this little slice of mush, this little wedge in your brain called the thalamo-cortical system. For you, the road is as wide as a country road should be, the sky is as wide as it can be. But in fact your visual connection to these things is smaller than the nail of your pinky. When I clutch your hand, the experience comes hundreds of milli-seconds after the fact. And all the neural processing that makes these experiences possible - we're talking about the most complicated machinery in the known universe - is utterly invisible. This is where we stand in the Great Circuit that embraces us: out of sync, deceived, as fragile as cobwebs, entombed in a hardwired cage: powerless. This expansive, far-reaching experience of yours is nothing more than a mote, an inexplicable glow, hurtling through some impossible black. You're steering through a dream (N 108)

The novel’s action turns on the (personal and professional) differences between the two men. Bible is an academic, and for him the Argument remains at the level of a parlour game – something he wheels out to discomfit and scandalise laypeople, but which does nothing him living his life as if it didn’t matter. Cassidy, meanwhile, has been performing neurosurgery for the security services. For him, the capacity to radically adjust and even obliterate subjectivity and consciousness has ceased to be a matter of merely theoretical speculation: it is a fact of his working life. (In some respects the dynamic between the two men resembles that between the James Stewart character and his two young protégés in Hitchcock’s *Rope* – Stewart’s professor cheerfully proclaims Nietzschean doctrines at dinner parties, but is shocked when his students actually act upon them. The principal difference between this and the situation in *Neuropath*, of course, is that Bible and Cassidy are peers.)

For reasons that are never fully explained, Cassidy sets about depriving Bible of his capacity to function normally. He wants to tear down the screen separating what Bible experiences from what he knows. Cassidy performs a series of neurosurgical demonstrations on people loosely connected with Bible – making a porn star experience pain instead of pleasure; giving an evangelical preacher intense religious experiences; making a politician

into a cannibal; tweaking the neurology of a plutocrat so he is unable to recognise faces - before wiring Bible himself into a machine (called Marionette) which cycles Thomas through a series of traumatically anomalous neurological states. The great enigma in the novel is why Cassidy does this: why does he go to such sadistic lengths to prove to Bible what he already knows? The novel scrolls through a number of potential motives – including sexual jealousy and what seems to be Cassidy’s innately psychopathic personality - without really settling on anything convincing. Now, the novel’s eliminativist premises naturally make the question of “motive” problematic, and this goes double in Neil’s case. According to the Argument, “motive” is just another illusion, a rationalisation which obscures the real causes of our actions. Cassidy, meanwhile, has amplified his already-existing psychopathic tendencies by eliminating the illusion of free will. “You know that feeling you have, the feeling of making things happen, of being responsible? That’s just a product, something generated by your brain. It simply accompanies your actions, your decisions. Neil’s shut it down. He hasn’t made a decision or willed anything to happen in fucking years. He experiences decision, just minus the sensation of willing them.” (N 253) Yet removing motive and free will only brings to the fore the question of causality, and instead of asking what Neil’s motives are, we must ask what causes his actions. Ostensibly, Neil’s project is to continue eliminating what phenomenological philosophers call “intentionality” – the “feeling of aboutness” that humans, and to a lesser extent other conscious creatures, possess, but which the inanimate world lacks. As Daniel C. Dennett and John Haugeland neatly summarise, “Some things are about other things: a belief can be about icebergs, but an iceberg is not about anything; an idea can be about the number 7, but the number 7 is not about anything; a book or a film can be about Paris, but Paris is not about anything.”[v] “Before science,” Bible explains, “we largely understood the world in intentional terms. From the dawn of recorded history pretty much all of our explanations of the world were psychological. Then along comes science and bang: where storms were once understood in terms of angry gods and the like, they’re understood in terms of high pressure and cells and so on. Science has pretty much scrubbed psychology from the natural world.” (N 47) Cassidy wants to extend the elimination, so that – at one and the same time – “psychology” is scrubbed from the human, and human beings are fully reinserted into the natural world.

But instead of moving beyond intentionality, Cassidy’s relationship to Bible shows all the signs of an obsessive attachment. It matters very intensely to Cassidy what Bible thinks and feels. Rather than being a coolly rational presence, scientific detachment incarnate, Cassidy is a Romantic, Mephistopholean figure, engaged in a contradictory, necessarily self-defeating, quest.[vi] Despite having exposed experience as a myth, he wants to close the gap between experience and knowledge; he wants Bible to live the Argument. Cassidy is what we might call a naive eliminativist – he wants to directly eliminate all the furniture of human phenomenology (will, motive, consciousness) – and get directly to the Real. Bible, by contrast, is more of a Kantian, in that he accepts that there is a basic incompatibility between experience and the Real. In this respect, his position is actually closer to

that of Thomas Metzinger, a philosopher whose arguments may at first sight seem to underwrite Cassidy's position. The argument that Metzinger presents in *Being No-One* and *The Ego Tunnel* is that while, at the level of cognition, it's possible to debunk selfhood and intentionality, we are incapable of dispensing with these illusions at the level of lived experience – here, we have to operate as if they are true.^{vii} Metzinger in effect subscribes to a version of what Bakker, in “The End of the World As We Knew It: Neuroscience and the Semantic Apocalypse”, calls the “bottleneck thesis” [viii]:

we are natural in such a way that it is impossible to fully conceive of ourselves as natural. In other words, we are our brains in such a way that we can only understand ourselves as something other than our brains. Expressed in this way, the thesis is not overtly contradictory. It possesses an ontological component, that we are fundamentally 'physical' (whatever this means), and an epistemological component, that we cannot know ourselves as such. The plank in reason breaks when we probe the significance of the claim – step inside it as it were. If we cannot understand ourselves as natural, then we must understand ourselves as something else. ... We can disenchant the world, but not ourselves.

Yet this failure of disenchantment means that we (or at least our phenomenal selves) are haunted creatures, constitutively alienated – or rather these phenomenal selves are ghosts, deprived of the substance which they are vainly yet ineluctably condemned continually to posit. Ironically, the very fact that we are capable of understanding the naturalistic bases of all our phemeneological states disembods us from nature. We cannot simply be-in-the-world in the way animals that with more limited forms of consciousness can. No-one has described this fix more vividly than Thomas Ligotti:

No other life forms know they are alive, and neither do they know they will die. This is our curse alone. Without this hex upon our heads, we would never have withdrawn as far as we have from the natural – so far and for such a time that it is a relief to say that we have been trying with our all not to say: We have long since been denizens of the natural world. Everywhere around us are natural habitats, but within us is the shiver of startling and dreadful things. Simply put: We are not from here. [ix]

The echo of Heideggerian themes such as being-towards-death here brings us close to the terrain of existentialism, but Ligotti in effect proffers Heideggerian theses stripped of any redemptive promise. Atheistic existentialism was a form of mitigated nihilism, in which a repudiation of theistic transcendence was replaced by an assertion of human transcendence. Like *Neuropath*, but in the register of horror, rather than science, fiction, Ligotti presents an inverted existentialism, in which human beings are puppets, whose consciousness, far from delivering freedom, only serves to torment them.

At this point, it's worth pausing a while to reflect on Nick Srnicek's observation that “this period of horror and revulsion at neuroscience's implications seems to mirror the depression and meaninglessness of the existentialist movement. And just as post-existentialism turned to philosophies of affirmation and play and ultimately turned existentialism's

absurdity into a positive condition for liberation, so too it seems as though future philosophers might take neuroscience as offering hope and freedom from folk psychology's constraints."x A detour into existentialism may prove fruitful here, since many of existentialism's core doctrines continue to exert (a sometimes surreptitious) influence, and the revulsion from neuroscience – the rejection of *Neuropath's* Argument – is in many cases motivated by vestigial existentialist attitudes.

We can distinguish conservative and radical strands of the existentialist inheritance, even as we must recognise that they often interweave. To the reactionary, Fredric Jameson points out that Heidegger's "diagnoses of 'modernity'", his call "for a purgation of the decadent habits of bourgeois comfort by way of anxiety and fear of death" was "part and parcel of a whole conservative and anti-modernist ideology embraced by non-leftist intellectuals across the board in the 1920s".[xi] The other, leftist, strand of the existentialist legacy, meanwhile, was tied up with Sartre's assertion of absolute human freedom. After being rejected by successive waves of continental thought, Sartrean voluntarism, or some version of it, has been rehabilitated in recent years, via the work of thinkers such as Badiou, Zizek and Peter Hallward. However sophisticated these accounts are, they all ultimately rest on the claim that freedom is attained when mechanical causality is suspended. Freedom is conceived of in terms of a rupture with the mechanical causality that obtains at all times in the natural world, and which reigns in the social world when it calcifies into what Sartre called the practico-inert.

The power of the Argument in *Neuropath* is that it reasserts the claims of determinism against these refurbishments of the doctrine of free will. Yet it's important not to be too quick here. Determinism is not necessarily automatism. Even if we concede everything to the Argument, this isn't a warrant for pessimism or for the denial of freedom. The classic "compatibilist" solution to the free will-determinism conundrum – favoured by philosophers such as Spinoza and Hume – is to argue that freedom consists not in the absence of causality, but in a particular kind of causality. An entity can be deemed to be free if it can be said to cause its own actions. Now this naturally begs all sorts of questions about how we define an entity, and what it means to say that an entity can cause its own actions, questions that I cannot possibly begin to answer in any depth here. Suffice it say, however, that nothing in *Neuropath* which undermines this compatibilist account of freedom. It may seem that it does because *Neuropath* equivocates between consciousness per se and real-time conscious experience. The Argument establishes that real-time conscious experience is not only an illusion, it is necessarily an illusion. But this does not entail that consciousness as such is illusory – for where does the apprehending of the illusion happen if not in some form of consciousness? The very ability to posit the "bottleneck thesis" means that there must be some form of human consciousness which can "fully conceive of [itself] as natural". Here we are compelled to follow Ray Brassier and make a distinction between the phenomenal self (exploded by the eliminativist claims of the Argument), and the rational subject. Or to put it another way, the subject that is eliminated presupposes

a subject which eliminates. The subject which eliminates is the depersonalized subject of science – the bodiless “Cartesian” subject decried by so much cultural theory over the past thirty years. If the claims of *Neuropath*’s Argument are to be believed, however, it is in this Cartesian subjectivity, not in the embodied subjectivity beloved of cultural theory, where the possibilities for freedom really reside. Far from being the solitary figure derided by anti-Cartesianism, this subject is the site of collective intelligence: science and enlightenment are, after all, collective processes. Here, we can upend Bakker and Ligotti’s pessimism – by entirely naturalistic means, and without any interruption whatsoever in mechanistic causality, a form of collective intelligence has appeared which is capable of reflexively acting on the conditions which allowed it to emerge. A far more radical freedom than existentialism ever dreamt of becomes possible. There are no “judgements of God”, and, via neuroscience, genetic engineering and other techno-scientific practices, cognition can explore, augment and mutate its own naturalistic bases. Nature becomes a laboratory.

Neuroscience is on the cusp between what Bakker calls “practical nihilism” and the theoretical nihilism which Ray Brassier has argued is the correlate of the Enlightenment.[xii] The question of “practical nihilism” in *Neuropath* reminds us that the world of the novel is not denuded of agency. I don’t mean Neil’s agency, which, as I argued above, remains a throwback, saturated with intentionality. Neil is a nihilist of the traditional sort, who recodes the depersonalizing implications of radical enlightenment into a psychological drama. The agent without intentionality in *Neuropath* is that of capital itself. Bakker is correct to say that the most important implications of the novel concern capital’s instrumentalization of neuroscience; it is therefore a pity that *Neuropath* focused so much on the theatrical psychodrama between Neil and Thomas, and so little on Neil’s work as neuroscientist-for-hire. Cassidy’s neurosurgical work illustrates Paolo Virno’s claim that “[n]ihilism, once hidden in the shadow of technical-productive power, becomes a fundamental ingredient of that power, a quality highly prized by the marketplace of labor.”[xiii] But capital’s practical nihilism remains a mitigated nihilism. Even while capital fully exploits the results of neuroscientific research, it is at the same time committed to disseminating the ideological image of the conscious subject capable of exercising choice. It is capital, therefore, that must keep deferring the “semantic apocalypse”.

Rather than recoiling from theoretical and practical nihilism, then, one path to post-capitalism would consist in fully embracing it, so that the notion of the self-conscious subject – which, according to Althusser, is the very cornerstone of capitalist ideology - is no longer sustainable. One contribution neuroscience may make is in assisting us to overcome what Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams have called “folk politics”[xiv]: a form of politics which applies the already dubious assumptions of folk psychology to systems and practices whose abstraction and complexity cannot possibly be understood in its terms. In the folk political left, the reactionary and the progressive strands of the existentialist legacy have come to be fused. As Jameson has recently observed, anti-modernist ideology

is by no means now restricted to “non-leftist intellectuals”: “There is a tendency among the Left today -- and I mean all varieties of the Left -- of being reduced to protecting things. It is a kind of conservatism; saving all the things that capitalism destroys which range from nature to communities, cities, culture and so on. The Left is placed in a very self-defeating nostalgic position, just trying to slow down the movement of history.”[xv] The interlacing of melancholic pastoralism and can-do voluntarism has made for a disastrous cocktail, which concedes techno-modernity to capital, while retreating into reminiscences of revolts from the age of quill-pens or retellings of revolutions which happened in feudal conditions.

Agency does not entail voluntarism. On the contrary, voluntarism is likely to impede agency by obfuscating the causal factors which prevent entities from acting, or which can enable them to act more effectively. Marxism has always known this – what does the famous claim that men make history but not in conditions of their own making mean if not that agency is not the same as the assertion of will? In truth, leftist voluntarism involved a backsliding from the model of agency which Marx had proposed. This Marxian account of agency strikingly resonates with Catherine Malabou’s account of plasticity, which, as Nick Srnicek pointed out in his discussion of *Neuropath*, offers rich resources for rethinking agency in the light of neuroscientific discoveries. “What we have called the constitutive historicity of the brain is really nothing other than its plasticity,” Malabou claims. “In ordinary speech [plasticity] designates suppleness, a faculty for adaptation, the ability to evolve. ... Talking about the plasticity of the brain thus amounts to thinking of the brain as something modifiable, ‘formable,’ and formative at the same time. ... But it must be remarked that plasticity is also the capacity to annihilate the very form it is able to receive or create.”[xvi]

While thinking in terms of plasticity offers all sorts of new conceptual opportunities, we must now return to Bakker’s remarks on “practical nihilism”. For whatever the theoretical implications of neuroscience, Bakker is surely right that its practical applications will in the first instance be controlled by the dominant force on the planet: capital. Capital can use neuroscientific techniques to stave off the semantic apocalypse: ironically, it can control people by convincing them that they are free subjects. This is already happening, via the low-level neurocontrol exerted through media, advertising and all the other platforms through which communicative capitalism operates. Whether neuroscience’s practical nihilism will do more than reinforce capital’s domination will ultimately depend on how far the institutions of techno-science can be liberated from corporate control. Certainly, there are no a priori reasons why Malabou’s question “what should we do with our brain?” should not be answered collectively, by a General Intellect free to experiment on itself.

- [i] Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2004)
- [ii] These remarks were made by Bakker in a comment responding to a December 2008 blog post on *Neuropath* by Steven Shaviro. www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=698
- [iii] The paper was presented at the University of Western Ontario's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism in November 2008. It is archived in a November 2008 post on the Speculative Heresy blog [<http://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/2008/11/26/the-semantic-apocalypse/>].
- [iv] *Neuropath*, (London: Orion, 2008), 186. All subsequent references to *Neuropath* will be of the form (N page number).
- [v] Daniel C. Dennett and John Haugeland, "Intentionality" in R. L. Gregory, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), reproduced online at <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/intentio.htm>.
- [vi] In "The End of the World As We Knew It: Neuroscience and the Semantic Apocalypse", Bakker invokes the example of sentient aliens "similar to us in every physiological respect save that evolution was far kinder to them, allowing them to neurophysiologically process their own neurophysiology the way they process environmental inputs, such that for them introspection was a viable mode of scientific investigation. Where we simply see trees in the first instance, they see trees as neurophysiological results in the first instance." These aliens are bewildered by human beings' inability to naturalise their own consciousness. Why is Neil not like these more dispassionate creatures?
- [vii] Nick Srnicek outlines some of the parallels between Kant and Metzinger in "Neuroscience, The Apocalypse, and Speculative Realism", his response to Bakker's "The End of the World As We Knew It: Neuroscience and the Semantic Apocalypse". "Both Kant and Metzinger are asking what conditions are required for experience to be possible. But of course, rather than ultimately finding the source of these conditions within a transcendental subject, Metzinger finds them in the brain. And rather than describing experience as a single formal structure comprised of intuitions and categories, Metzinger offers a much more nuanced view of experience. Despite these advances though, in framing the interpretation of neuroscience this way, Metzinger still seems to place neurology in the clutches of a classic Kantian problem. And Metzinger himself even seems somewhat aware of it, as he will repeatedly argue that phenomenal immediacy is not epistemic immediacy, or as Kant might have put it – the phenomenal is not the noumenal. What appears as immediately and intuitively given has no necessary relation with an independent world." [<http://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/2008/11/26/the-semantic-apocalypse/>]
- [viii] As Nick Srnicek's remarks quoted above make clear, Kant in effect subscribes to a non-naturalistic version of the same argument, where it is our constitution as transcendental subjects which renders us incapable of conceiving of ourselves as belonging to nature.
- [ix] Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against The Human Race* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010)
- [x] "Neuroscience, The Apocalypse, and Speculative Realism"
- [xi] Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, (London/ New York: Verso, 2009), 426
- [xii] "Far from being "a pathological exacerbation of subjectivism", theoretical nihilism is "the unavoidable corollary of the realist conviction that there is a mind-independent reality, which, despite the assumptions of human narcissism, is indifferent to our existence and oblivious to the 'values' and 'meanings' which we would drape over it in order to make it more hospitable." Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, (Houndmills/ New York: Palgrave, 2007), xi The disenchantment of the world is an achievement of reason: enlightenment and nihilism are one.
- [xiii] Virno, p86
- [xiv] Their book *Folk Politics* is forthcoming on Zer0 books.
- [xv] Aaron Leonard, "Capitalism, the infernal machine: An interview with Fredric Jameson", <http://rabble.ca/books/reviews/2012/02/capitalism-infernal-machine-interview-fredric-jameson>
- [xvi] Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* Translated by Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 4-5. Independently of Malabou, Alex Williams has argued that plasticity provides an important model for reconceptualising solidarity. "This new form of solidarity," he argues, "must be capable of fluidity and rapid response, able to exploit weaknesses within systems and structures opportunistically and with a global purview, one which crucially can mirror the rapidity and fluidity of international finance. This is solidarity as plasticity, rather than the static brick-like form of Fordist labour solidarity, capable of flowing and shifting, yes, but also of fixing into position and assuming a hardened form where necessary." "Negative Solidarity and Post-Fordist Plasticity", posted at <http://splinteringboneashes.blogspot.com/2010/01/negative-solidarity-and-post-fordist.html>, January 2010

Iguana Runs This Town

Dave Tompkins: Interview with Walter Murch

I grew up watching George Lucas' 1971 film, *THX-1138*, in fragments, switching from Saturday cartoons to a narcotized underground world dictated by computers and possibly, an iguana. Often aired in the morning, *THX* was the anti-Saturday movie. The whit-out sets were suffocating and there was no outdoors. It was easy to lose your day in the film's nothingness, a world of holograms, bald human blanks, and "unassigned spaces." There were cordial chrome-faced police officers and a dwarf who favored Charles Manson. In this vague medicated push-button future, "drug evasion" was a crime as was any manifestation of desire.

Originally a George Lucas college project while attending USC in 1967, *THX-1138* would be stewarded by Francis Ford Coppola and receive a theatrical release in 1971. Two years later, members of the prog-rock group Captain Beyond could be seen dressed like *THX* cops in the gatefold of their album "Sufficiently Breathless".

As a child, I never gave the movie a proper listen. I always dismissed it as a bunch of mumbling bald guys who end up in a car chase. The only sound I remembered was the ending, when Robert Duvall's *THX* character emerged from a manhole and into a sunset that was caught somewhere between the end of the world and the start of Saturday chores, his first light being the day's last, all while drowning in JS Bach. The transition was not easy. I'd leave the TV and stumble into blind noon and start mowing the lawn, chewing up pinecones and gumballs with the "Passion of St Mathew" still blaring in my head, wondering what *THX* ended up doing with all of his newly acquired fresh air.

In 2004, I interviewed *THX*'s screenwriter and editor, Walter Murch, mainly focusing on the sound—from Lalo Schiffrin's score to the disembodied voices that told us, "The theater of noise is proof of all potential". I learned that God was a black funeral director from Oakland and the wookiee was from Texas. And the lizard, of course, was on purpose.

The first ten minutes of the film, inside the control room, is all intercom and push button voices.

The proliferation of recorded voices--telling you to do things--was beginning to happen. We were making that more extreme, making a whole society that functioned at that level. There was very little interpersonal communication at all. Everything was done through intercoms and electronic filters of some kind. If you can find the digital waveform of music and subtract that waveform from itself, you're left with anything that's not that music, which presumably would be the voice. I also used a lot of Moog synthesizer.

One of my favorites was “the libido leveler had been mislaid near the pulse-leveling gate.”

That was a mixture of stuff that George and I came up with writing the screenplay. In the late '60s the world was full of psycho-babble. We just pushed that further. We got an improvisational group from San Francisco called The Committee and sat them around a table and gave them a few of these lines as examples of the way people talked in this world. That's where the phrase wookie came from, that George then used in *Star Wars*. That was an improv line that one of the actors came up with. He knew a guy in Texas named Ralph Wookie. Wookie is in the film—you can hear it. He's the driver of one of the cars. You hear it in his intercom. “Uh—I think I ran over something. I think I ran over a wookie back there.”

The part where Duvall gets brainlocked while being forced into all these different positions. The voice from the console asks, “What's the real dope on those cortex bonds?”

We set these two guys up—also from the Committee—and set them up at the console. Imagine that you're teaching this other fella the console. Imagine that somebody is attached to this console but you don't really care what happens to that person. We seeded them with a few key lines but they just really took off from there.

How did you get the voices to sound so removed?

We recorded all the voices and took the tape to a technology school that had a HAM radio. We broadcast the tape out into the universe and picked it up on another receiver, a

sideband receiver. Then I would twiddle the dial to get all those phasing effects. That was all live. If somebody had tuned to our frequency for that hour they would've picked up all kinds—(laughter). We set up our own pirate radio station in a way.

You filmed at KTVU in San Francisco...

At the time, nobody had done that before—to show television consoles in the background of a shot. They were there for visual interest. Nobody's doing any work back there.

What was that iguana doing behind the bank of monitors? I saw an iguana grinning next to a reel-to-reel player. .

I don't know. That was simply to give the idea that this was a recorded voice. That it isn't live. And George just wanted to put an iguana in there. You don't really see it at first. Then it moves and you might catch it.

The iguana appears to be creating the voices, as if in on the joke. We always assumed that iguana controlled the city.

That's part of the whole idea. When we looked at science fiction films that had been made up to that time, they were all films about the future. It's like an American company making a film about Japan, but it's a film made by one culture about another culture. They were made by the present about the future. We wanted to make a film from the future, which has the same difference that when you see a film from Japan, made by Japanese. There are just mysterious things in there that you don't know because you're not a part of that culture. But that adds to the overall flavor. Everything is not digested for your consumption. *THX* is full of those kind of things. The sucking game, the lizard... and on and on. Things that presumably meant something to the people in the future, but we don't know what to quite make of it—it adds to the charm of the film. George's original intention was to shoot *THX* in Japan. We just couldn't make it work financially. We just had an almost zero budget to make the film. Think of the challenge of shooting the real world and making it seem like the future. We didn't add much. We'd go into a location and put up a bunch of numbers on the wall just to make it seem strange.

I'm curious about the people who appear to be watching a tennis match played by squids.

It was a combination of a squash match and me making sucking sounds. Shkewup.

Blending together the impact of the actual squash sound and the sucking idea.

The court room scene—there’s this babbling chant mixed in there...

That was inspired by the music of Steve Reich and Terry Riley. These layered things. I took the dialog of the trial and made loops of it and superimposed them all. We staggered them at different time sequences so they’d rub against each other in interesting ways.

There’s a moment where you hear the prosecutor’s voice but she’s not saying anything. She’s just sort of scratching her ear.

We were just fooling around with people’s perceptions of who was in control of the court system.

How much of the sound design was collaborative with Lalo Schifrin?

I temped the whole film with pre-existing recordings, mostly classical music. But I’d play the music (“Stabat Mater” by Pergolesi) upside down and backwards and slow it down and layer different types of music on top of each other at different speeds. Lalo took that score and transcribed it note for note and then had the orchestra play it. If you take the beginning of the film—the opening credits—and speed it up four times and play it backwards, it becomes another piece of music. He (Lalo) was taking backwards music and transcribing it for forwards play.

When I spoke with Lalo, he said that *THX* and *The Hellstrom Chronicle* were two of his most challenging soundtracks. With *Hellstrom*, he’d gotten his first Echoplex.

He did an incredible job.

One of the shell dwellers looks just like Charles Manson.

We paid attention to those things.

Another shell dweller is brought into the prison. He looks bored, drumming his fingers after Donald Pleasance—using Nixon sound bites—freaks out.

You hear something like a dental hose, a teeth cleaning.

That's Lalo making that noise with his mouth. He was doing it on the recording stage. He said, 'Quiet please! I have to conduct myself!'

Donald Pleasance played a great twitcher, not to mention that quick gleam in his eye after popping Etrephine...

When you hire Donald Pleasance, that's what you get. It was all scripted. He would take written lines and do them in a way that you just believed they were happening right in front of you, that he was making them up as he went—but it was all scripted.

The police officers were so polite.

George had a particular idea for the police officers... a sort of unctuous, solicitous, very kind voice. He found a black funeral director who had this voice when he was talking to bereaved people—we brought him into the studio.

And the voice of God, Ohm?

Same funeral director.

What was *THX*'s occupation? Engineering cops and "Slipping on the thermal transmitter?"

We didn't know exactly what it was he (*THX*) was doing. Their source of energy was some kind of nuclear device that was inserted into the middle of their head. So he's building the head of the robot and inserting the nuclear ampule into the critical phase area. Because he's coming off drugs and doesn't know it—the whole society is on Prozac. We didn't know about Prozac back then, but that was what it was. His roommate (LUH, played by Maggie McOmie) has been changing his medication so he goofs and there's an explosion.

All the African-Americans in the film were holograms.

There were not a lot of black programs on television in those days. It was just beginning to emerge. In that society, black people were the newscasters and the entertainers.

In those days it just didn't happen. The only hologram who's not black is the guy who's getting beat up. One of the channels is the violence channel. A spooky pre-reference to Rodney King, where every time you turned the TV on you saw a police man beating Rodney King. This was a whole channel of police beating people.

So much of *THX* was about sound, as with *The Conversation*...

To create a different world, a universe in sound. All these devices were real. A lot of the things he (Gene Hackman) was doing in *The Conversation* are still not able to be done. Eventually they will be. In a similar way to *THX*, we were taking certain trends that we were seeing at the time and pushing them to their limit.

You got caught sampling a French squeak...

I got caught sampling something off a record. It was a squeak in the scene where Duvall and Colley are trapped in a room with fetuses in jars. I looped it off a French album of music concrete that had been a big influence on me in the '50s. When the film ran in Paris, Pierre Henry, the composer, said "That's my squeak!" I saw my career ending before it began. The legal decision was that I had altered it sufficiently—that it was no longer what it was to begin with. It was "A Symphony for a Door and a Sigh."

I've noticed that *THX* has been sampled a few times. Ren and Stimpy definitely used those eyeball gurgles.

Yeah, the bugger gets bugged!

END

I, Monster: Gothic Metaphor in the Making and Unmaking of Andy Warhol

Gilda Williams

There was [...] enough Andy in Dracula — the pale, lifeless Carpathian vampire, embarrassed by his roots, lost in the modern world [...]
Victor Brockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*

‘If someone asked me, “What’s your problem?”,’ Warhol wrote in 1975, ‘I’d have to say “skin”.’ In fact Warhol — a commercially trained artist, a church-goer and homosexual, the unhandsome son of impoverished immigrants and all-round ‘colossal creep’ (as described by an acquaintance in 1960), who lived with his mother until the age of 43 — suffered plenty more severe ‘problems’, at least by the standards of an artist trying to make it in the early-1960s Manhattan art world. A childhood bout with St Vitus’ Dance left him permanently with albino-like, acne-ridden skin, prone to unpredictable blotches of red; Warhol seems to have channelled his multiple, ‘problem’ sources of Otherness towards a lifelong preoccupation with his flawed complexion.

Skin is always the damning signal of Gothic monstrosity: skin that is too tight (Frankenstein’s creature), too dark (Mr Hyde), too pale (Dracula), too superficial (Dorian Gray), too loose (Leatherface). Such is the brilliant thesis argued by literary theorist Judith Halberstam in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995). In the film *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), serial killer and gender catastrophe Buffalo Bill is preoccupied with sewing a dress from the skin of his victims, a macabre crafts project to which actress Jodie Foster, in the role of Clarice Starling, almost bodily contributes. In the early nineteenth century, writes Halberstam, the newly invented Gothic literary genre turned skin into the membrane-thin mark of monstrosity — with all the racist connotations therein well-intact, whether in slavery-ridden US or Empire-drunk Britain. In contrast with Gothic demons, monsters from pre-Enlightenment times openly declared their non-belonging to humankind. We are not exactly gnawed by doubt when conversing with a woman growing live serpents from her head, or an oversized man with the head of a

bull, wondering, ‘am I dealing with a ... a *monster?*’ No; the beasts of antiquity announced their monstrosity right from ‘how do you do?’, often through their semi-animal exterior. Instead a Gothic monster disturbingly approximates a human, attempts to *pass for* human, and is able to fool children, careless females and other trusting souls who fall victim to its cruel intentions. The new source of horror introduced by the Gothic monster was precisely this: duplicity; evil masquerading behind a borderline human exterior. Our fear of the monster lies in the risk that the final reckoning — ‘OMG! He’s not *human!*’ — arrives all too late, when fangs have been inserted, zombiehood inflicted. An attentive observer learns to spy the telltale clues that give the monster away, averting mortal danger.

Warhol’s very early childhood marked the years when Hollywood was achieving heights in the early horror film genre which often reworked Gothic literary classics: *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932). Surely the movie-crazy boy, regularly attending the pictures near his Pittsburgh ghetto, would have been familiar with those recent, popular thrills and the ongoing horror craze. I’m going to suggest that Warhol sometimes resorted to Gothic monster-making strategies — probably without deliberation — in constructing his unorthodox artist persona, communicating to the wide public that he craved the nature of his unrecognizable new art through his self-presentation as an equally unfamiliar entity: the artist-monster. Such a presentation was then usurped and expanded by critics and hangers-on in coming to terms with his unorthodox art and baffling persona. To be sure, Gothic metaphor abounds in the writing surrounding Andy Warhol.

Warhol was forever drawing attention to his weird, indefinably shaded skin. Consider his description of his daily beauty regimen in the effort of concealing his chronic acne:

When the alcohol is dry [...] I’m ready to apply the flesh-colored 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?(Warhol: 1975, 17)

Here Warhol self-depicts his creepy skin as barely human, more like the chemical product of a pharmaceutical laboratory than the human epidermis. For Halberstam, the hallmark of Gothic-monster skin is its inability fully to disguise the hideous immoral/immortal being lurking underneath. ‘The hide no longer conceals or contains’, writes Halberstam; skin fails to mask the inescapable monstrosity beneath. In Warhol’s account, the skin/pimple is covered, ‘but am I covered?’ he asks, questioning whether the non-human cosmetic will distract from the unsuspected but equally non-human creature existing beneath it. His late *Camouflage Self-portraits* (1986), in which Warhol’s fright-wig Polaroid self-portrait was silkscreened onto camouflage fabric, exaggerate both his unnatural, patchy coloring as well as, perhaps, his attempts to conceal himself beneath naturalistic cover. For his self-portrait the artist here abandoned his usual embellishing techniques for the

commissioned portraits, where he snipped out double chins, wrinkles, and bags to produce rejuvenated faces for his high-paying clients. Instead for his own portrait he actually accentuates his skin's preternatural lumpiness, its slack ill-fit to his Slavic jaw. His 'monstrosity' is abundantly disclosed on the skin/canvas. Warhol claimed that his art was 'just surface'; perhaps, like the artist's 'problem' skin, the thin canvas surface could barely contain the strange being — making 'strange' art, surrounded by 'strange' people, occupying a 'strange' world — behind it.

In his final fright-wig self-portraits from 1986 Warhol looks cadaverous, a ghostly association which took on macabre significance when the artist died within a year of their making. Critic Jennifer Higgie described the face seen there as 'disembodied and blank' — like a zombie — with skin caving in around his pronounced skull. Film critic and early Warhol associate Amy Taubin discussed this 'death's head-like 1986 self-portrait', as she called it, which greeted visitors to the then-newly opened Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, dwelling on the artist's

hair standing on end like petrified spikes, skull bones outlined through thin skin that glows as if radioactive, gaze frozen in bewildered horror before what it sees — which is nothing more than its own reflection in the lens of the camera [...] "the camera shows death at work" [...] [I]t's the face of someone trapped between Hiroshima and the age of AIDS, someone for whom death has the luminescence of the television screen (Taubin: 1997, 28)

Taubin's description — 'hair standing on end'; 'skin that glows'; 'gaze frozen in bewildered horror', 'death at work' — could have practically been lifted from a spooky novel to describe some terrifying central character. For Taubin, Warhol's skull-like visage doesn't just speak of death in general; his is an unmistakably contemporary mask of death: 'radioactive', poised 'between Hiroshima and [...] AIDS'. The subject here becomes collective, mediatized death — the very same subject of his *Death and Disasters* from some two decades before. Such a Gothicization of the artist finds instant verification in his art, as Warhol's artwork is made to fully correspond, through self-portraiture, with the monstrously half-living man who produced them. Taubin's discussion of the final self-portrait turns tautological: Warhol is modern death, and modern death is Warhol.

I thought I was too small for Drexel Burnham (1986) is a little-known magazine advertisement for an investment bank featuring the world-famous artist in a 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. On the back wall looms the immense, demonic 1986 self-portrait: behind its unassuming maker, the giant head stares out, stunned and toothless in a spiky wig. This self-construction — replicating a candid Warhol studio shot taken previously (Hickey et. al.:2006, 588) — operates as the modern-day rendering of a Gothic staple: the painted portrait supernaturally coming alive, emerging from the canvas. This stock horror trope has been repeated

since Horace Walpole's seminal *Castle of Otranto* (1764); this image rehearses in particular the narrative crux of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The scarred painted figure behind Warhol offers an on-canvas performance of the 'monstrous' Pop artist, betraying the allegedly damaged soul of the living Warhol who, like Dorian Gray, remains youthfully untarnished in 'real life' before us. In this advertisement, aimed at an audience potentially well outside the art world, we can see exploited a self-construction of the artist as his own double, the innocent version of a dark 'real' self — a central monster-making literary technique here put to work in Warhol's mainstream self-imaging.

References to a 'spectre' and the 'spectral' recur with particular frequency in descriptions around Warhol, the terms conveniently drawing together both his phantasmatic persona and his extreme pallor. Factory member Ondine described Warhol as 'a gray specter' (Stein: 1982, 209); *New York Times* critic John Leonard described the Factory-carer as a 'spectral janitor' (Carroll, 1969, in Pratt, ed.: 1997, 42). For Hal Foster, the experience of celebrity to which the artist was both devoted witness and over-exposed participant contributed to the artist's unstable, 'in-between' identity signaled by his 'strange presence', which was marked by his 'very white, even spectral' physical appearance' (Foster: 1996, 124). Italian film actress Gina Lollobrigida, meeting Warhol for the first time in 1973, is said to have referred to the artist as 'Death' (Colacello: 1990, 189); while photographer Cecil Beaton, recalling his 1968 Factory photo shoot, described the place as a 'haunted world, presided over by a zombie' (Hickey et al., 428). In his 1966 interview with Gretchen Berg, Warhol claimed he didn't 'have strong feelings on anything'; the monster, too, is numb to ordinary sensations. The zombie, as Marina Warner writes, is forced to live 'in a state of anomie degree zero, disaffection to the point of numbness' (Warner: 2006, 358), a description which perhaps tallies with frequent reports of Warhol's disengaged, monosyllabic blankness.

Continuing the earlier passage from Warhol's *THE Philosophy*, 'A' ('Andy') describes himself further to 'B' (possibly Brigid Berlin):

I have to look in the mirror for some more clues. Nothing is missing. It's all there. The affectless gaze. The diffracted grace ...

The bored languor, the wasted pallor ...

The chic freakiness, the basically passive astonishment, the enthralling secret knowledge ...

[T]he chalky, puckish mask, the slightly Slavic look ...

The child-like, gum-chewing naivety [...] the shadowy, voyeuristic, sinister aura ...

The albino-chalk skin, Parchmentlike. Reptilian. Almost blue ...

[T]he roadmap of scars. The long bony arms, so white they look bleached. The arresting hands. The pinhead eyes ...

The graying lips [...]

What exactly is the nature of this ageless human concoction, laughing at this obscene catalogue of deformities, which lists a mask-like face, bone-white limbs and paper skin? Just about everything about Warhol's physical appearance — not just the reptilian skin but the zombie-like 'affectless gaze', the Draculian 'diffracted grace' — betrays a deeper, metaphysical monstrosity. Warhol's 'problem' skin — scarred and pallid, bleached and translucent, 'almost blue' — can hardly contain the 'real problems' of this dehumanized emotional enigma, conjured here as passive, naïve, languorous, and disaffected.

Usually, for Warhol 'having a problem' was a euphemism for 'being gay'; when Warhol whispered 'does he have a problem?', it was code for, 'Is he gay?' Around the time Warhol was pining for gallery recognition in the early 1960s, ignored by the New York scene in part because, as Warhol friend and art critic Emil De Antonio put it, he was 'too swish', prominent literary historian Leslie Fiedler, in his influential — and brazenly homophobic — *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), was interpreting the nature of the modern American Gothic villain. Fiedler locates the twentieth-century monster as the urbane and effete homosexual, unapologetically described as both 'deviant' and 'freak' (Fiedler, 441). For Fiedler, novelist Truman Capote — the quintessential 1950s American 'queen' (to adopt Fiedler's term, typical of the period), exemplifies a new form of living Gothic anti-hero who endears himself to wealthy American women thanks to his campy overlap of good and evil, the sensitive and the Satanic. Warhol idolized and eventually befriended Capote, who, as Simon Watney writes, was like Warhol 'an exemplary fifties queer, a pilgrim in New York, drawn to its glamour and secrets' (Watney: 1996, 24). For Fiedler writing in 1960, such a figure binds together homosexuality with Gothic content,

Overt homosexuality carries with it, however, still the sense of taboo, and is almost always rendered, therefore, in Gothic terms [...] *The child and the freak haunt such landscapes [...]* (Fiedler, 441-42)

Child ('*child-like, gum-chewing naivety*'), freak ('*chic freakishness*'): Fiedler's words are the very terms with which Warhol later builds his Othered persona. The damning, pre-Stonewall renderings of the homosexual-as-monster evidenced in Fiedler's then-respected writings are reflective of the condemning cultural milieu in American in which Warhol began shyly to explore his sexual inclinations in the 1950s. Warhol never fully declared the open secret of his homosexuality, suggesting perhaps an ongoing shamed notion of gay sexuality (impermissible, some have claimed, within his family's values and religious heritage) which finds expression in Fiedler's insistence on a 'sense of taboo' demanded for the subject. Fiedler connects the allegedly doomed, homosexual Gothic figure epitomized in Capote with the failed love story among two male deaf-mutes in Carson McCullers's Gothic

tale, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940). Such characterizations might have had some influence on Capote himself, who some twenty years later made explicit the connection between McCullers and Warhol

In [The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter] you'll remember that this deaf mute, Mr Singer, this person who doesn't communicate at all, is finally revealed in a subtle way to be a completely empty, heartless person [...] Andy is kind of like Mr Singer. (Stein, 239)

For George Haggerty writing in *Queer Gothic* (2006), homosexuality in early Gothic fiction was regularly associated with extreme bodily abjection, 'dung, guts and blood' as Haggerty summarizes. Consider in this light, how when Warhol produced his own B-film brand of camp-Gothic film, *Flesh for Frankenstein* and *Blood for Dracula* (both 1973; directed by Paul Morrissey), his soft-porn, homosexualized variations on the horror classics included arguably the most extreme gore in Warhol's entire film oeuvre: the vomiting of blood and devouring of blood-soaked bread; close-ups of scars and surgical stitches; a stream of dismemberments; and a laboratory finale in *Frankenstein* that descends into carnage. Evidently promiscuity, queerness and physical abjection seemed compatible, onscreen subject matter for Warhol/Morrissey.

A few firsthand accounts from gallerist Ivan Karp and gallerist/curator Walter Hopps of visits in the early 1960s to the artist's home and studio suggest the encounter with the strange inhabitant of a B-film haunted house.

Andy's studio was a rather sumptuously bizarre Victorian setting. The lighting was subdued, the windows all covered, and he himself sort of hovered in the shadow. (Karp, cited in Stein, 195)

[A]t the door was a peculiar, fey, strange-looking person [...] The townhouse, gloomy and large, was peculiarly unfurnished. It was more of a collecting depot, a warehouse of things [...] He was some strange, isolated figure in his laboratory of taste experiments. (Hopps, cited in Stein, 192)

Each visitor rehearses a slew of creepy horror-movie stereotypes: a vast, dark, antiquated house; a strange variety of objects somehow barely filling an uninviting lab-like space. Complementing this Hammer Horror-film-like interior is Warhol himself: a shadowy, 'strange-looking', isolated figure, like a stock character drawn from scary-movie cliché. Such visions of the artist and his home are repeated, with some variation, in Jonathan Jones's later interpretation of Warhol as a 'twentieth-century Poe' (*frieze* 55). The B-film stereotype is borrowed in the construction of an unfamiliar, potentially frightening Otherness that Warhol easily enacted, emphasizing the outrageousness of his person, his environment, and, by extension, his strange new art.

In these portrayals Warhol is both demure and demonic, not unlike Capote's allegedly infantile yet corrupted gay persona, as Fiedler damningly depicted him. This confounding

mix of overlapping opposites is echoed in Warhol's hybridized Silver Factory nickname 'Drella', which emerged around 1964. 'Drella' merged together Dracula and Cinderella, with all the implicit gendered and mythical connotations of kindness and evil, purity and corruption, youth and agelessness. For Hal Foster the nickname was a 'fitting contradiction' for the artist (Foster: 2008); art historian Caroline Jones too claims that Warhol, with his 'blend of charmed innocence and sepulchral power' was well suited to the vampiric co-appellative (Jones: 1996, 237). On various occasions Warhol asserted that, like the vampire, he possessed no mirror reflection ('It's too hard to look in the mirror. There's nothing there', Warhol cited in Krandall, in Goldsmith, ed.: 2004: 350): the alleged 'emptiness' of Warhol and his art is as if reflected in the imagined vacant mirror. In vampire lore, the absence of a mirror reflection functions as evidence for the monster's false, infernal nature. As Gothic literary theorist Fred Botting writes, the missing reflection signals an 'unnaturalness that threatens all cultural values and distinctions' (Botting, 1996:149); in Warhol's case, distinctions might be compromised between artist and charlatan, between a human art and a non-human (machine-made, heartless) non-art. Though never specifying any reference to vampires, Warhol self-imaging as a transparent or purely reflective being introduces a Gothic affiliation able to enhance his enigmatic persona with added moral hollowness and mystique.

Like Warhol, the vampire originally hailed from some mysterious Eastern European outback. The demon's extreme pallor — presumably indicative of a craving for human blood — is an indispensable vampiric feature, from Bram Stoker to Anne Rice and beyond. When Warhol associate Patrick O'Higgins, a friend who saw Warhol's post-shooting mutilated torso firsthand, described the artist's devastated body, he claimed there was no redness to his scars. The 'ghastly tracks and scars and holes are white on white — white on that pale stomach of his. No red welts. Pale, pale as could be', O'Higgins gasps (Stein, 294), as if suggesting that the excessively pale oddity of the artist's outer layer, when punctured, revealed another even stranger, bloodlessness underneath — like physical 'proof' of a dubious humanity. Halberstam writes, 'Skin becomes a kind of metonym for the human; and its colour, its pallor, its shape mean everything within a semiotic of monstrosity.' One might here recall Richard Avedon's 1969 portrait of Warhol taken a year after the shooting, in which the artist lifts his black leather jacket to reveal his marble-white, scarred torn beneath. On Halberstam's terms, Warhol raises his outer animal 'skin' — which points towards the tough, urbane artist, coolly dressed in black — to reveal another, inner damaged being: the contrasting, unnaturally pale and fragile body beneath, sliced and stitched (like Frankenstein's Creature), and exposing his true, vulnerable and no longer fully human, unearthly body.

As Wayne Koestenbaum writes, the name 'Drella' semi-equates Warhol with the all-powerful, unearthly Dracula partially in terms of the 'bloodsucking' relationship he allegedly cultivated with those around him: '[T]he moniker signalled his early poverty and his current pathos, as well as his vampiric relation with his entourage' (Koestenbaum:

2000, 59). In 1969, Factory ‘Superstar’ Viva described Warhol to *Playboy* magazine as ‘Satan’, a kind of powerful, hypnotic evildoer whom she could not help but follow blindly (Carroll, 55). Artist Roy Lichtenstein described Edie Sedgwick’s obedience to Warhol as zombie-like (‘Edie seemed more like Andy’s zombie than his partner’, Brockris: 1989, 234). Particularly as depicted in the popular press, Warhol’s ‘Superstars’ — a coterie of unpaid, stunning women, inexplicably devoted to him — seem to replicate the vampire’s intense yet sexless bond with a coterie of terrifyingly desirable temptresses. In the literature, the modern vampire becomes an increasing communal rather than solitary figure, evidenced in late twentieth-century vampire films and novels most prominently beginning with Rice’s ground-breaking *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) — a fictionalized, novel-length celebrity interview published the very year Warhol’s own *Interview* magazine began to gain mainstream status. Warhol’s following of ‘Superstars’, hangers-on, employees, acquaintances, collectors, friends, and business associates fits the popular imagination with the contemporary, Lestat-like vampire as a socially powerful but treacherous outsider, a super-human success story.

Warhol, of course, was officially pronounced dead after the assassination attempt by Valerie Solanas in early summer 1968; medics reanimated him back to life. In one of his final books, *America* (1985), alongside images of graveyards Warhol narrated his unexpected return to life after his assassination attempt and the future prospect of death, representing himself as a kind of transparent non-being returning from the dead.

When I got shot, two bullets went through my stomach, liver, spleen, esophagus, left lung and right lung. The doctors and everyone else, including me, was [sic] sure I was going to die, so we all got ready, and then I didn’t do it [...]

I never understood why when you died, you didn’t just vanish, and everything could just keep going the way it was only you just wouldn’t be there.

I always thought I’d like my own tombstone to be blank. No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I’d like it to say “figment”.(Warhol, 1985: 126; 129)

Here Warhol, having narrowly escaped death, presents himself as doubly emptied of life: as a blank tombstone in death, and an invisible ghostly presence haunting the imagination — a figment — in life. Using contradictory logic, first Warhol wishes he could vanish when he dies, then hints that he’d never really been here corporeally in the first place. The implication is that Warhol is as alive in death as he is in life (or, equally, just as dead in life as he is in death). He starts off his self-presentation, like most Gothic monsters, as a puzzlingly undead figure (‘everyone [...] including me, was sure I was going to die’). Warhol played up this deathly self-image in some carefully staged post-shooting self-portraits, such as the 1976 Polaroids of himself (later made into painted silkscreens) in the company of a skull, the artist’s trademark pale skin offering a kind of double to the bright

white bone beside him. Around the same time Warhol described himself as ‘more half-there than all-there’ (Warhol, 1975: 87) suggesting a figure permanently sited somewhere between existing and non-existing.

The notion of post-1968 Andy Warhol as a deathly Doppelgänger to his living former self is rehearsed throughout the literature around him; ‘Warhol emanated a flat uncanniness — as if he were his own double, his own stand-in’, Hal Foster writes (Foster, 1996: 128). Having literally returned from the grave, Warhol’s physiological half-death was subsequently literalized in the common reading of the post-shooting art as a kind of ‘ghostly’ double of the better early work. The oft-repeated portrayal of a half-living, substitute Warhol who lingered phantom-like after the near-fatal shooting and producing equally diminished art was most imaginatively examined in critic Stuart Morgan’s essay ‘Andy and Andy, the Warhol Twins: A Theme and Variations’ (1987). In Morgan’s view, just as Warhol was reduced to his own phantasmatic double after Solanas shot him, the subsequent artworks were doubles for the ‘real’ art that Warhol had produced in the 1960s. Throughout the career, the artist and his work were made by the artist to function as doubles or stand-ins for the other: both equally machine-like; indifferent to art-historical convention; obsessively fixated on fame, success, beauty. This pattern, whereby the artist’s biographical self is perceived as perfectly mirrored in the art, was especially adaptable in the post-shooting history of the artist, in which his art and his identity were together pronounced ‘dead’: anemic substitutes for the ‘living’ art and the thriving artist that his public had known before, deceptively proffered after 1968 to his audience as the ‘real thing’.

The uncanny appearance of a human double, whether literal or metaphorical, is a Gothic mainstay (particularly evident in the Victorian period) and a central defining point of the uncanny for Freud. The idea of doubling has also informed readings of metaphorically doubled characters which recur in the literature, i.e., Frankenstein and his Creature; Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason; the second Mrs. De Winter and Rebecca, and more. For literary theorists David Punter and Glennis Byron, the Gothic double serves the purpose of undermining both the stability of self and Other, as well as for the sake of confusing boundaries between good and evil (Punter and Byron, 2004: 266). Art & Language’s bitterly condemning review of Warhol’s last *Self-portraits* in 1986 offers a similar Gothicized usage of the double, of a co-existing passive and sinister Warhol. The reviewers ask,

Is he like Milton’s Satan, an evildoer who does not perceive or cannot perceive the gravity of his own plight, or is he an “author”, simply bewildered before his own text? (Art&Language, Artscribe, Oct/Nov, 1986, 69)

Here Warhol is unsympathetically doubled, portrayed as caught between either evil stupidity or confused blankness. Art & Language eventually claim he is the latter: an artist ‘bewitched’ before his own pictures, unable at the end of his life to replicate — or ‘double’ — the Silver Factory of the 60s. In their view, the 1980s Warhol art-making machine has

been pathetically reduced to a genuinely repetitive, distressingly factory-like production of art-commodities. Once again, as with Morgan's post-shooting Doppelgänger depiction, near the end of his life Warhol is presented as a passive and lifeless double of his former self, reflected in what these critics see as mechanically produced, meaningless artworks catering solely to an inflated market fueled by the author's calculated celebrity. Art & Language dub Warhol's late art as a 'better-heeled simulacrum': an art even worse than its mere double, given its claims to bearing enough cultural and artistic weight to compensate for its apparent emptiness — an emptiness which has turned all too real. Warhol here is seen to commit the ultimate artistic monstrosity: betraying his early genius, ignoring his artistic roots and peers, and 'faking it' for the sake of profit.

In Gothic literature the monster becomes above all a moral monster, one whose very outlandishness defines normalcy. The Gothic monster represents what society rejects and yet embodies, the 'logical and inevitable product' of that very same, flawed society, as Punter and Byron write. Warhol's 'monstrosity' was in the eyes of some the extreme yet 'natural' result of an excessively consumeristic, celebrity-crazed, hedonistic late twentieth-century. The decline of art and society could be projected in tandem on the screen of Warhol's inscrutable white face: a blank, money-loving, strange-looking semi-human, in the same ways that his art was characterized by its detractors as hopelessly empty, market-driven, produced by artist-surrogates — either real machines or robotically obedient assistants.

Virtually all Gothic monsters exist in an ontologically ill-defined state between life and death. The terror genre is populated by an ever-expandable gallery of undead figures enduring a problematic, irresolvable place, operating in a permanent state of liminality, whether Frankenstein creatures, vampires, ghosts, zombies, replicants, and more. Others are symbolically undead — Du Maurier's unsinkable *Rebecca* (1938), or Norman Bates's undying mother, the talking cadaver seen in Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960). In her remarkable essay 'Andy Warhol: Performances in *Death in America*' (1999), Peggy Phelan presents Warhol's semi-human identity as mimicking some half living/half dead, self-erased, and machine-like creature — a barely human existential condition reflected in the artist's efforts to remove traces of his hand from his artworks. For Phelan, occupying the very epicentre of the artist's concerns, as witnessed in the *Death and Disasters* series, is not (as Foster had claimed in his psychoanalytical 'Death in America' text) the mass subject, but the spatial and temporal divide between living and dying, 'the liminal space between life and death'. Warhol's art for Phelan was an 'endlessly projected attempt to draw a line between life and death'.

This crucial ontological boundary is literally represented in Warhol's *Suicide (Silver Jumping Man)* (1963) in which a jumping silhouetted figure is pictured mid-flight, fatally leaping from a skyscraper. For Phelan, the long hard edge of the building in shadow, starkly drawn against the grey mottled sky, symbolically represents this final fault-line between the living and the dead. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* certainly had this same line — 'the

awful boundary between life and death', as Shelley describes it — as the irresistible, indefinable place that drives her story, igniting the ambitions of her main character, pushing him ambitiously to cross that frontier before all others. This very line for Phelan literally slices through Warhol's *Suicide*, dividing the canvas in two. In the *Suicide* silkscreen, a human life is caught between existential states, observed in the few nano-seconds that this human body hangs suspended in undeath. In fact all the *Death and Disasters* — especially the *Car Crashes* such as *5 Deaths*, whose teenage victims stare back at us from a place close to death, pinned beneath a crushed automobile, horrifically bleeding — show us the modern undead, caught at the ultimate existential juncture, in some unearthly place between life and death which they will occupy, through Warhol's art, forever. The *Death and Disaster* series are a lot more Gothic than they are Pop, the usual (and by now exhausted) Warholian art-historical appellative and one which has always felt hideously unsuited to this cheerless group of artworks.

To be clear, my idea is certainly not that Andy Warhol really was some kind of monster, or that he literally shared Gothic-monster traits. He was a flesh-and-blood human with flaws like the rest of us — if accompanied by phenomenal charisma, and possessing an artistic brilliance without compare. The artist ingeniously fabricated his persona in part through what we can now recognize as Gothic-born strategies, as I am proposing, but he has been successfully compared to both sinner and saint, from Thierry de Duve's (arguably misfired) 'Madame' analogy, to Koestenbaum's (mostly questioning) parallels between Warhol and Christ. I think that Gothic-inflected monster-making techniques intensified Warhol's self-fashioning into what Homi Bhabha has defined as a blessed/damned 'transindividual': 'a hybrid creature that is both a familiar presence and a phantasmatic icon' (Bhabha, 1998: 109). The Drella nickname, like the title of Bob Colacello's fabulous 1970s account of the artist, *Holy Terror* (1990), points to the mixture of the sacred and the profane, the blessed and the damned, habitually enlisted to invent ways to express, in mere words, Warhol's endlessly stupefying art and persona — 'immortal' not so much in the classical sense of 'enduring' or 'ever-lasting', but perhaps in the Gothic sense of 'forever undead'.

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***Occult Negations or, The Changing “Standard of Reality”*: Notes on Jeremy Millar** **Benjamin Noys with work by** **Jeremy Millar**

What follows are a series of reflections on Jeremy Millar’s exhibition “Resemblances, Sympathies, and Other Acts” (2011), which consists of artworks that probe questions of absence, negation, and the *powers* of these absences. In his press notes for the exhibition Millar remarks: “Most often, the first question asked of art is ‘what does it mean?’ ... I suspect the more important question to ask is ‘what does it do?’, even if it seems like very little, or nothing at all.”[i] The “powers” invoked here offer very little or nothing at all, suggesting that this working of absence is barely any kind of power. Of course we might be suspicious of such a claim to modesty. This is especially the case as this demand first of all asks us to discard our usual frames of interpretation, which is no little matter. So the absence is also one we are asked to share, to join, or even to invoke. This is because the kind of “doing” Millar’s art involves is, explicitly, an “occult” one – as the reference to “resemblances” and “sympathies” suggests. It is also an “activity” that operates through and on absences, gaps, null spaces and nullifications. To specify this form of action I want to invoke Millar’s practice as one of “occult negations” – the hidden or “occulted” invocation of “very little” or “nothing”.

What happens in the act of negation? Nothing; or the emergence of the making of nothing – nothing *happens*. According to the tradition God creates *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; but he creates *something* out of nothing. What if our creation were to be heretical or monstrous, in the sense of creating *nothing* out of something? What might it mean to have nothing take place? These questions form the guiding thread for my reflections or notes, which are the result of strange resemblances and sympathies between me and Millar that lie precisely in terms of the “activity” of negativity.[ii]

To begin, a quotation from Adorno:

People are afraid of negativity, as though it might remind them of the all too negative quality of life,

something they want at all costs not to be reminded of. Accusations of being destructive, exaggerated, outré, esoteric, and so on are used as readily as if nothing had happened.[iii]

For Adorno we ward off negativity, which inheres in our “damaged life”, by casting it out as mere destruction, or as an occult “quality”. Our fear of negativity in our own life leads us to displace it elsewhere, and especially onto the one who mentions it. Millar’s work, in part, resists this displacement, and so deliberately courts the judgement that it is “destructive, exaggerated, outré, [and] esoteric”.

It does so, first of all, by its belonging to a “tradition” of working with what T. J. Clark calls “practices of negation”.^[iv] Millar’s works have “sympathy” with modernist practices of negation, embracing the fact, as T. J. Clark states, that: “Modernism would have its medium be *absence* of some sort – absence of finish or coherence, indeterminacy, a ground which is called on to swallow up distinctions.”^[v] They do so through a doubling or reworking. This is the case with *Incomplete Open Cubes (Burnt)* (2010), which “completes” Sol Lewitt’s 1974 work *Incomplete Open Cubes* by sawing sections from the cubes and then burning the resultant sections of wood, which are returned to the centre of the sculpture. The initial act of conceptual negation, the incomplete cube, is subjected to another incompleteness, another negation. This is not a “negation of negation” that produces a positive, but rather a re-doubling of negation that leaves only burnt remnants.



Incomplete Open Cubes (Burnt) 2011 courtesy the artist

The second crucial element is the engagement with practices of the occult, “magic”, and ritual. This working with the occult is still a working with negativity, and one which gives negativity an artistic and occult form through the traces of destruction and the effects of absence that are registered as remnants. It is this practice that, I think, distances Millar from the contemporary uses of the occult that invoke it in celebratory and affirmative ways. This includes contemporary theoretical engagements with the occult, which treat it as a site of superior affirmation able to break with Western “rationalism”.^[vi] The occult or mystical or spiritual is regarded as positive, as the means to find a “higher” or “spiritual” excess that can be affirmed to escape the deadening constraints of the present. In Adorno’s critical remarks on the occult, those who practice it tend to “a positivity that excludes the medium of thought”.^{vii} Today, this often takes the form of denying that there is anything really disturbing about the occult, often by putting down any effects of disturbance to an over-attachment to the supposed “securities” and solidities of the Western Oedipal and bourgeois “Ego”. In this case the negativity of the occult is only in the eye of the beholder, and the claim is that we can find in the occult powers that are unproblematically transformatory and liberatory.

In this rendering of the occult as site of affirmative power even so-called “black magic” is treated as merely another path – the left-hand path – to a liberatory dynamic that accepts, welcomes and affirms everything. There is nothing truly monstrous here, except what we see as monstrous. Adorno was acerbic about this kind of tendency in occultism, which functions to reassure the practitioner: “[i]n vain they hope to look their total doom in the eye and withstand it”.^[viii] Today doom is withstood by being embraced; in R. D. Laing’s words, breakdown as/is breakthrough. Millar’s work displaces this affirmation of the occult by remaining with affects that are more “negative”: feelings of anxiety, destruction, absence and loss. While his art is certainly not without humour, it doesn’t take the easy path of simple celebration, the reversal of the occult or esoteric into new affirmations, but delays and tarrys with this negativity, implying not so much a “withstanding” but an entering into.

I’d go further and argue that Millar’s “practices of negation” don’t simply tarry with the negative, but tarry with it towards a different kind of transformation. This is not one of affirmative powers, the “Godly” power to create, but rather very little or nothing. The resort to the exaggeration of the occult is a strategy to make a space for change, an opening of negativity. This change may not be simply for the “good”, or simply a matter of “letting go” of our prejudices to immerse ourselves in molecular fluxes and flows. We are not simply called to “become-monstrous”, as though that were an easy solution to the constraints of the present. Millar’s operation, to borrow Adorno’s remark on Bloch, lies “in close proximity to sympathy for the occult”^[ix] and re-works the occult as site of sympathy and resonance that might not be what we wanted or imagined.

What kind of sympathy is in question? While the obvious point is sympathy for the

capacity of the occult to generate change – sympathy for sympathy – perhaps there is also something more in this sympathy for absence, loss and destruction. For Adorno: “The occultist draws the ultimate conclusion from the fetish-character of commodities: menacingly objectified labour assails him on all sides from demonically grimacing objects.”[x] While I wouldn’t presume to claim it’s Millar’s direct concern, in fact I’m making much out of the indirection of his work, I think that this passing through the object (and the subject) in the form of negation speaks to this sense of the “terror” of objects *qua* inert and petrified forms of labour. Sympathy here is sympathy for the destruction encrypted in the object. This is what Evan Calder Williams has called “hostile object theory”,[xi] which is not simply concerned with speculation about objects “outside” of their correlation with humanity but rather the blow-back of fetishisation onto the subject from the object. The “occult qualities” of Millar’s work speak, to me, of the labour occulted within them, and the general occulting of labour – which remains far more “secret” or “hidden” than many a so-called occult tradition or practice.

This sounds serious, and no doubt it is. But once again I’m wary of the overloading of significance, which is an effect ironically promoted by the occult references. Again, it’s not so much a matter of meaning or sense but of “doing”, and of a style of “doing”. T.J. Clark insists that “Modernism is agonized, but its agony is not separable from weird levity or whimsy.”[xii] This is another effect of these works, which combine literary or philosophical or artistic reference with horror, with the occult, and with “weird levity” reached through, I think, a certain agony. Consider *A Firework for WG Sebald* (2005), which consists of photograph of a firework set off at the site where the writer WG Sebald was killed in a car-crash on 14 December 2001. The work unstably combines the sincerity of mourning, finitude, and absence, with the “levity” or “whimsy” of the firework itself, set off in daylight, to unprepossessing effect – depending if we see the “face” in the smoke. The “levity” works the agony and, to return to the nature of the object in its petrification and hostility we could say, borrowing from Marx via Clark, that Millar “teach[es] the petrified forms how to dance by singing them their own song.”[xiii]



A Firework for WG Sebald (2005) courtesy the artist

The “song” I want to focus on particularly is the work *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man (The Willows)* (2011). In this work Millar is “cast”, quite literally, as the sacrificial figure from Algernon Blackwood’s masterful 1907 story *The Willows*. The story concerns two men on a trip down the Danube who become trapped on an island in the river surrounded by willows. On this island they are persecuted by “creatures” or “forces” that come from a world of enmity touching on our world. These “creatures” lie almost precisely on the ontological border between gods and monsters being, or seeming to be, malignant elementals or “forces of nature” that have pierced into “our” world. One of the men tries to offer himself as a sacrifice to placate them. Saved from this fate, the “creatures” choose another victim who the two men find drowned. Millar plays the victim and what we encounter in this work is a working of absence; the artist is both present, cast into the work, and absent, as mere simulacral figuration. Millar now gets to say, along with Poe’s M. Valdemar, the impossible sentence “I am dead”. [xiv] The casting process, in the double sense, operates the hollowing-out of Millar’s body from its appearance and mimics the strangely absent character of the victim in the story – who may appear waving at the start of the story, but thereafter is not present until appearing as the sacrifice.



Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man (The Willows) (2011) courtesy the artist

Blackwood’s remarkable story traces an experience of hostility through nature, through its “savage animism”, [xv] that is condensed in the phrase: “The willows were against us.” [xvi] The eerie power of the narrative lies in the fact that, to quote the central character, “the standard of reality ha[s] changed”; as good a definition of the work of art as any. Hostility inheres in objects: a missing steering paddle, a sabotaged paddle (“The blade was scraped down all over, beautifully scraped, as though someone had sand-papered

it with care, making it so thin that the first vigorous stroke must have snapped it off at the elbow”), cunningly rent canoes (“a long, finely made tear in the bottom of the canoe where a little slither of wood had been neatly taken clean out; it looked as if the tooth of a sharp rock or snag had eaten down her length”), a shrinking island, and lessening food (“The oatmeal, too, is much less than it was this morning”); the rat-trap of object hostility closes. Even the willows are “symbols of the forces that are against us” and “[t]heir very ordinariness, I felt, masked what was malignant and hostile to us.”

The willows are “symbols” for another world adjoining ours, for the “creatures” that appear in absence, these “things about us,” says the Swede, “that make for disorder, disintegration, destruction, our destruction.” These elementals are not benign representatives of nature, powers we can bond with or invoke, but “creatures” of a negativity that we cannot reckon with or alchemise into positivity. Part of their malignity lies in their indifference: “these beings who are now about us have absolutely nothing to do with mankind, and it is mere chance that their space happens just at this spot to touch our own.” “We” are of no concern, except to attract unwanted and hostile attention.

The point at which these “beings” “touch” us, finally, is the sacrifice, the victim who must die to propitiate the dark forces, and this is a role which Millar has taken on for us. He is now the one who distracts these beings from us, and who suffers death, virtually, by them. The work re-awakens and placates these forces of negativity. This is not only a death by drowning, but visible are “how the skin and flesh were indented with small hollows, beautifully formed, and exactly similar in shape and kind to the sand-funnels that we had found all over the island.” We assume the victim has been “trampled” or fallen upon by these creatures, left only with “Their awful mark!,” a mark of absence.

In this work the point of sacrifice is re-animated in the simulation of death, through the casting process that absents Millar to recreate him as the sacrifice. The act of simulation allows us to touch on this other space, to touch this force of awe and destruction that operates through, in the case of the art work, a quasi-industrial process. Here “destruction”, an uncanny haunting, is enacted through a doubling of the artist and work, paired with Blackwood’s story and its absent character. The transformatory negation, even its ritual aspect, lies first in the process which Millar underwent to cast himself as the victim. This is his ritual, which generates and encrypts itself within the artwork. A labour is at work in the transformation of the artist into a simulacral body, a figuration of *dead* labour. Our ritual depends, in part, on the story itself, becoming a part of the narrative of *The Willows* as we encounter the victim in the receding island of the gallery space. It also comes in a mirroring of destruction at the hands of these abstract forces, these forces that come into touching distance of our world. While I certainly would not want to literally allegorise these “forces”, they gain resonance with the “creative destruction” of the abstract forces stilled and unleashed in a period of global financial crisis.



The casting process for *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man (The Willows)* (2011)

Of course, for Blackwood it is nature that is the agent, at once mystical, awe-ful, and destructive. While Blackwood – true to his own occultism, as a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn – was trying to invoke “signs and proofs of other powers that lie hidden in us all”, in *The Willows* his mystical humanism finds its own limit. The “powers” are no longer those awesome but affirmative “other” powers that lie hidden in us, instead they are terrifying powers from outside that negate and destroy us. In his critique of occultism Adorno remarks that “reborn animism denies the alienation of which it is itself proof and product, and concocts surrogates for non-existent experience.”[xvii] Blackwood’s animism at once tries to reclaim our alienated powers and attests more directly to the fact we are the mercy of our own alienated powers. It is not that we are alienated from Nature and need to reclaim it, but that Nature is alienated from us, and turns to destroy us. What Millar’s work does is concoct a surrogate for this experience of “non-existence”, rather than a non-existent experience. There is nothing here to be reclaimed and salvaged in an affirmative occultism, only a redoubling that haunts us with a malign and perpetual absence.

Certainly we are now familiar with nature become “unnatural”, with the now ineliminable crossing-over between the human and nature as we ourselves have become “geological agents” of the new time of the anthropocene – the period of human-induced global warming.[xviii] The “savage animism” invoked by Blackwood, and re-invoked by Millar, is no longer wholly “alien”, but remains destructive. It takes the form of our alienation; the menace of objectified labour attacks us, especially in the results of what fuelled that labour – oil. This was the sacrifice required by the machines of constant capital that have left us as appendages, as variable capital, and now threatens to sacrifice the possibility of our presence on earth. Again Adorno notes how occultism detects, although

mistranslates, “the knowledge that society, by virtually excluding the possibility of spontaneous change, is gravitating towards total catastrophe.”[xix] And yet Millar’s work, in its whimsy and levity, touches upon this knowledge: objects turned hostile, or even worse whimsical, toying with us.

Neither gods nor monsters; instead, very little or nothing is done for us or with us. The resemblances and sympathies invoked here suggest powers of “our destruction”, removed from the comfort of the occult as affirmation. The “ego” is dislodged or jolted, rather than being disbanded into an inflated form. We are not even provided with the reassurance that it was “our” power that unleashed this catastrophe, that having lost everything we retain power over this loss. Instead, we are now in “sympathy” or “resemblance” with the artist as sacrificial victim, encrypted labour, and absence.

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- [i] Jeremy Millar, Press Release for ‘Resemblances, Sympathies, and Other Acts’ Exhibition, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 26 March – 7 May 2011.
- [ii] See Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010; 2012).
- [iii] Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature volume two*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p.307.
- [iv] T.J. Clark, ‘Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art’, in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), pp.47-63, p.55.
- [v] T.J. Clark, ‘Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art’, p.58.
- [vi] I’m thinking here largely of Deleuzian currents in contemporary theory, such as the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit and the more theoretical interests in the “spiritual” or “mystical” Deleuze, such as the special issue “Spiritual Politics After Deleuze”, ed. Joshua Delpech-Ramey and Paul A. Harris, *SubStance* issue 121 (39.1) (2010). These can also be connected with certain forms of “Chaos magic”, especially the “use” of H. P. Lovecraft’s work to “activate” magical forms, see Erik Davis “Calling Cthulhu: H P Lovecraft’s Magick Realism”, in *Book of Lies*, ed. Richard Metzger (New York: The Disinformation Company, 2003), pp.138-148.
- [vii] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), p.240.
- [viii] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.239.
- [ix] Adorno, *Notes to Literature volume two*, p.218.
- [x] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp.239.
- [xi] Evan Calder Williams, “Hostile Object Theory”, *Mute* 2011, 1 February 2011 <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/hostile-object-theory>
- [xii] T.J. Clark, “Modernism, Postmodernism, and Steam”, *October* 100 (2002): 154-174, p.172.
- [xiii] Marx in T.J. Clark, “Modernism, Postmodernism, and Steam”, p.161.
- [xiv] Edgar Allan Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” [1845], <http://www.eapoe.org/works/tales/vldmard.htm>
- [xv] Evan Calder Williams, “Hostile Object Theory”.
- [xvi] Algernon Blackwood, “The Willows” [1907], Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11438/pg11438.html>.
- [xvii] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.239.
- [xviii] Mike Davis, “Living on the Ice Shelf”, *TomDispatch.com* (2008) <http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/174949>.
- [xix] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.241

Gods and Monsters Image Essay
Caryn Coleman and Tom Trevatt

1

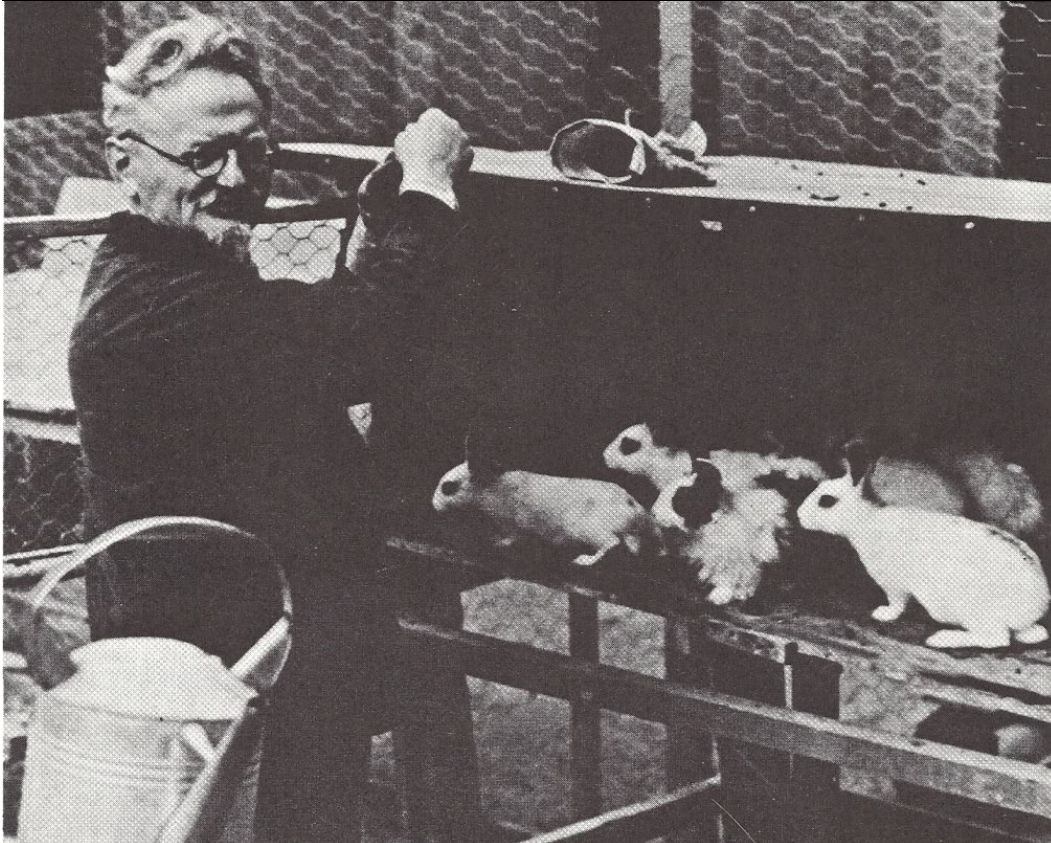


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- 1 Underwater explosion
- 2 Destroy all Monsters
- 3 The Thing
- 4 Trotsky's Rabbits
- 5 Huge Rabbit
- 6 Big Brother

Cry Me a River: Darren Banks' I'm Sure if there were a Monster in the Midlands we would have seen it on the Telly
Caryn Coleman

Sweeping aerial shots, panoramic images of rivers and lakes, and close-ups that push outward towards barren landscapes, Darren Banks' *I'm sure if there were a monster in the midlands we would have seen it on the telly* shows nearly every possible way of looking and experiencing the forest as a literal outsider. It is an examination of non-places, obscure in their absence of the human, begging the questions: What lurks beneath? Who is hiding in the shadows? Why is this nothingness so frightful? In this world abandoned by people, *I'm sure if...* becomes a cinematic spectral space in its depiction of the world without us but a site where our fears are still very much present.

The conglomeration of numerous outdoor scenes from horror movies in *I'm sure if there were a monster in the midlands we would have seen it on the telly* establishes a singular, large-scale, atmospheric landscape; a filmic version of Frankenstein's monster through sourcing the benign body parts from *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971), *The Burning* (1981), *Antichrist* (2009), and *The Wicker Man* (1973) amongst nearly twenty others. Further referencing horror history, Banks gleans the title from the hospital sequence in John Landis' *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) in which the doctor refuses the boy's claims that a wolf has attacked him saying that if it were true then it would be on television. Banks therefore positions our culture's submissive reliance on media sources to collectively prove/disprove facts and fictions above our ability to trust our inherent knowledge of the world. Allegorically this gets to the heart of "man" in that desire to rely on our instincts while maintaining to control the sleeping animal/monster buried within each of us (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and George A. Romero's *Dead* series).

However, any literal representation of the "monster" is denied in Banks' version. The "telly" is not proving to us that it exists. Instead, the figure of the "monster" is implied strictly through the landscape and through the omission of any human presence or any

significant action. These multiple and disparate landscapes are at once peaceful and foreboding, familiar (through the recognition of films) and strange (a world for us, but not with us). Therefore, while we don't see anything or anyone we can still sense that something is amiss. Whom or what can we trust? Visualizing this liminal boundary between a place of sanctuary and terror through the manipulation of media sources (and Banks does this throughout his body of work) he establishes a productive tension. This tension works precisely because the concealed yet explicit absence constructed through television, film, and music ultimately becomes a revelation of the unrepresented.

I'm sure if there were a monster in the midlands we would have seen it on the telly subscribes to influential producer Val Lewton's theory that the simplest suggestion of horror onscreen will ignite the audience's imagination to conjure up something far more horrific than could ever be physically represented. Think of Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People* and Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*. Like any good old-fashioned horror narrative, Banks' video relies on editorial selection, suggestion, and sound to cultivate the necessary and desired feeling of dread within the viewers. This visual journey through the "midlands" is a guided one where the framework Banks employs allows us to be privy to this world, experiencing it through his exacting means, but ultimately at a safe distance.



image still courtesy of the artist and Workplace Gallery

See the video here: <http://incognitumhactenus.com/2012/03/10/dbanks-monster>

Monsters, Marvels, Mystery, Morbidity, Melancholy

Allen S. Weiss

with *Bundle* by Ronald Gonzalez

Aberration. The monstrous embodies an active principle, perturbing all categories.

Bizarrierie. The logic of monsters is one of particulars, not essences.

Catastrophe. Monsters manifest the plasticity of the imagination and the cataclysms of the flesh.

Desublimation. What the unformed is to the sublime, the deformed is to monsters.

Ephemera. Some monsters exist for but a split-second in our most solipsistic phantasms.

Formlessness. Decomposition and putrefaction constitute our monstrous destiny.

Grotesquerie. Monsters manifest material incompleteness, categorical ambiguity, metaphysical instability.

Hybridization. Monsters result from the fusion and confusion of ontological categories.

Idiosyncrasy. The aesthetic domain exists without any regulatory a priori whatsoever.

Joint. A monster will be remembered for the shock it produces, breaking all chains of association.

Kaddish. The point-of-view of the dead establishes a realm of ineluctable memento mori.

Ludic. In the psychic laboratory of the imagination, monsters are a major source of creativity.

Mutation. Monsters may, under certain circumstances, generate entire classes of beings.

Nocturnal. The reason of sleep, a third of our lives, breeds monsters.

Otherworldliness. The often sacred nature of monsters provokes iconoclasm.

Pandemonium. Monsters are avatars of chance, impurity, indetermination, heterodoxy.

Quandary. Monsters are animated paradoxes, conflating species, genders, genres.

Rarity. Monsters exist in margins, on thresholds, in gaps, beyond limits.

Singularities. Monsters are sui generis, outside of all taxonomy.

Teratology. The totality of rhetorical tropes and figures doubles as a catalogue of monstrous types.

Unrepresentability. The cutting knife of montage creates impossible anatomies.

Vexation. The abominable, the chaotic, the disfigured evoke disquietude and worse.

Wonderment. Monsters are indicators of epistemic shifts, dislocating old epistemologies.

Xenophobia. Monsters symbolize alterity and difference in extremis.

Yonder. Erratic deviation from or towards a dystopic elsewhere is the emblem of monstrosity.

Zero. Rationality would destroy all monsters, without which, however, the imagination would stagnate



Notes on Contributors

Darren Banks

Incorporating found and self-made film footage into sculpture and installation, Darren Banks (born 1978, England) explores horror, the domestic, science fiction, defunct technologies, creation, and the unknown. Recent exhibitions include *Defective Science* at Sala Dogana, Palazzo Ducale (Genova); *ROTATE* at Workplace Gallery, The Contemporary Art Society (London); *Omnia Mea Mecum* Porto, Kotti Shop (Berlin); *Translate/Transcribe*, Central House of Artists (Moscow); *Mural newspaper* at Abrons Court (New York); and *Hello World* at Embassy Gallery (Edinburgh). Forthcoming shows include *File Transfer Protocol* curated by Pil and Galia Kollektiv, hosted online by the Salamanca Group, Haifa Museum of Art, (Israeli); *The Shape*, generator projects, Dundee. Banks received his MA Fine Art at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 2005. He lives and works in Midlands.

Caryn Coleman

Caryn Coleman is an independent curator and writer living in Brooklyn whose curatorial practice explores the intersection of film and visual art with an obsessive focus on horror cinema's influence on contemporary artists. This is the basis for her online writing project *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* and upcoming exhibition programming *Contagious Allegories: horror cinema and contemporary art* at the Vincent Price Art Museum in Los Angeles (2013) and *The Art of Fear* artist film screening at Nitehawk Cinema in Brooklyn. She is currently the Curator for the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts 'Art & Law' Residency program. Coleman received her MFA in Curating with distinction from Goldsmiths College in London.
thegirlwhoknewtoomuch.com

Ronald Gonzalez

Born in Binghamton, NY 1952. Since the mid seventies Ronald Gonzalez has worked from his garage studio in upstate New York. He works primarily in a series with steel armatures, time worn objects, and detritus from his surroundings. Gonzalez received his BA from the State University of New York 1982, where he currently teaches as Professor of Sculpture since 1999. He has also taught as an Artist in Residence at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1993, and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 1996, as well as residencies at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, New York 1998, Sculpture Space, Utica, New York 1989, John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan in 1988, and Provincetown Arts Work Center, Provincetown, Massachusetts 1998. He has received grants from the Pollock Krasner Foundation, 1986 & 1998, The Adolph & Esther Gottlieb Foundation Fellowship 1999, New York State Council of the Arts grants 1988 & 1989, and New York State Foundation for the Arts project grants 1993 & 1996.

His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, District of Columbia. DeCordova Museum & Sculpture Park, Lincoln, Massachusetts. Savanna College of Art & Design, Savannah, Georgia. Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York. Fisher Art Gallery, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Allan Stone Gallery, New York, New York. Atrium Gallery, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut. The Hudson Walker Gallery of Art, Provincetown, Massachusetts. Selected Group Exhibitions include, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, New York. Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Spoleto Festival, Charleston, South Carolina. Turchin Center for the Arts, Boone, North Carolina. Gallery 24, Berlin, Germany. Cavin Morris Gallery, New York, New York. Alternative Museum, New York, New York. Institute Cultural Peruano Norte Americano, Lima, Peru. Art Omi, Ghent, New York. John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Muse De Arte Modern, Buenos Aires, Argentina. East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, East Hampton, New York. Newhouse Gallery, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, New York.

Mark Fisher

Mark Fisher is the author of *Capitalist Realism* (Zer0 2009) and of the forthcoming *Ghosts of my Life* (Zer0 2012). He writes regularly for *Film Quarterly*, *Sight and Sound* and *The Wire*. He teaches at Goldsmiths; University of London, University of East London and the City Literary Institute. He is also K-Punk <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/>

Jeremy Millar

Jeremy Millar is an artist and writer living in Whitstable and tutor in art criticism at the Royal College of Art, London. He has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad including Tramway, Glasgow; NGCA, Sunderland; CCA, Vilnius; Rooseum, Malmö; Bloomberg Space, London; and the Metropole Galleries, Folkestone. Recent exhibitions and screenings include 'Plum Tree Blossom', commissioned by Inverleith House, Edinburgh, to complement works by John Cage and Merce Cunningham; the Vigeland Museum in Oslo; Sleeper in Edinburgh; Tate Modern, London; National Maritime Museum, London; David Roberts Art Foundation, London; Tate St Ives; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Ethnographic Museum, Krakow; SE8, London; HICA, Inverness-shire; Plymouth Arts Centre; and Baltic, Gateshead.

Dr Benjamin Noys

Dr Benjamin Noys is a writer and lecturer at the University of Chichester. His research traverses the field of critical theory, and particularly its intersections with cultural production. Currently he is working on the question of negativity in contemporary theory, and particularly its implications for political practice. His future work is focused on temporality, forms of value, and the anthropology of the subject. Noys also has a critical interest in avant-garde aesthetics and the problem of transgression in art, theory, and cultural politics. He is a corresponding editor of *Historical Materialism*, and a member of the Editorial boards of *Film-Philosophy* and *S*. He also directs the Theory Research Group (<http://theoryresearchgroup.blogspot.com/>), an interdisciplinary group devoted to presenting work in contemporary theory, at the University of Chichester. Recent publications include *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), *The Culture of Death* (London and New York: Berg, 2005) and *George Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London and Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000).

Dave Tompkins

Dave Tompkins' first book, *How To Wreck A Nice Beach*, is now available in paperback. It has been called a "mega-pill of mule-choking insights." Amazon named it Entertainment Book of 2010. Tompkins has contributed to *Grantland*, *Pitchfork*, *Oxford American*, *The Believer*, *The Wire*, and *Village Voice*. He is currently researching bass sub-frequencies and Sustained Decay in South Florida. Born in North Carolina, he now lives in Brooklyn. Audio mixes and more on the vocoder can be found at howtowreckanicebeach.com

Tom Trevatt

Tom Trevatt is a curator, writer and artist based in London. His research is focused on recent post-continental thought, specifically around developments in Speculative Realism and the zombie. Siting these in relation to curatorial and art practice as beyond the human, his work operates in the strange, monstrous juncture between thought and artwork. Recent exhibitions include *The Lewton Bus* at Vitrine Gallery London, *The Rise and Fall of Matter* at Collective/David Roberts Art Foundation, London and *The Accidents of Form* at LoBe, Berlin. He is currently organising a series of symposia in Paris, London and Limousin, France to explore research around Speculative Realism and art. He is on the programming committee for Treignac Projet, France, holds a Research Lab position at David Roberts Art Foundation and is starting his PhD in Curating this year.

<http://theexhibitionarycomplex.tumblr.com/>

Gilda Williams

Based in London since 1994, New York-born contemporary art critic and curator Gilda Williams is a Lecturer on the MFA in Curating programme, Goldsmiths College, University of London. Williams is a London correspondent for *Artforum* magazine and author of *The Gothic* (MIT/Whitechapel), 2007. From 1994-2005, Williams was Editor and Commissioning Editor (from 1997) for contemporary art for Phaidon Press, London. There she edited and commissioned some 50 monographs in the 'Contemporary Artists' series as well as numerous art-historical anthologies in the 'Themes and Movement' series.

She is currently completing her art history PhD on defining the Gothic in contemporary art (submission Mar 2012). In her dissertation Williams researches the panoply of meanings which the term 'Gothic' has held from the Renaissance to the present day, across art, architecture, literature and film. She identifies in the Gothic aesthetic a visual language invented in the late 18th century to speak of the present as a haunted time, under the grip of history rather than endlessly projected into the future. In this context Williams defines the Gothic as the Enlightenment's and, later, Modernism's most extreme aesthetic Other, and re-reads Andy Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series, Louise Bourgeois's *Cells*, and Tacita Dean's film installations *Palast*, *Boots* and *Teignmouth Electron* in these Gothic terms.

Her website www.gildawilliams.com launches on 2 Apr 2012.

Allen S. Weiss

Allen S. Weiss is a writer, translator, curator and playwright, and is the author and editor of over forty books in the fields of performance theory, landscape architecture,

gastronomy, sound art and experimental theater, including *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Wesleyan University Press), *Varieties of Audio Mimesis: Musical Evocations of Landscape* (Errant Bodies Press), and *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* (State University of New York Press). He directed *Theater of the Ears* (a play for electronic marionette and taped voice based on the writings of Valère Novarina), and *Danse Macabre* (a marionette theater for the dolls of Michel Nedjar), as well as *Glissando*, a Hörspiel for the Klangkunst program at Deutschlandradio Kultur Berlin. He recently published his first novel, *Le Livre bouffon* (Le Seuil), and is now working on the second volume of his gastronomic autobiography, *Métaphysique de la miette*. He teaches in the Departments of Performance Studies and Cinema Studies at New York University.

Mike Kelley 1954 – 2012



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