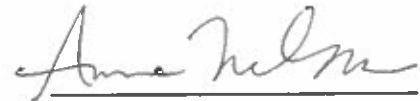


AUTOMATED ANXIETIES: THE TECHNOLOGICAL GOTHIC
A THESIS SUBMITTED ON THE ELEVENTH DAY OF MARCH 2019
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS
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FOR THE DEGREE
OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
BY
Joris Pieter Lindhout

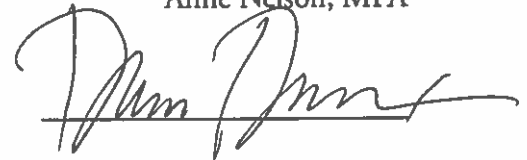
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Chapter 1: A Concise Introduction to the Term Gothic

When you think of the word Gothic you might think of a band like The Cure, a writer like Anne Rice, a television series like American Horror Story or perhaps a painting by Grant Wood. But before medieval times, the term was first used to describe different tribal groups which mainly originated in Northern Europe. They are credited with the destruction of the Roman empire and thus with starting the Dark Ages, which is generally seen as a time of great barbarity and cultural decline. In popular thought it forms the antithesis of the Roman empire.

The grandfather of art history, Giorgio Vasari (Italy, 1511-1574), adopted the term Gothic to describe a certain style of architecture¹. He deemed these pre-renaissance structures so abhorrent that they could only have been envisioned by the people responsible for, as he perceived it, the cultural hiatus Europe had suffered for a few hundred years: the Goths. Even though this was not exactly true, it stuck. It stuck to the extent that the term Gothic became synonymous with the term barbaric. In reality the Goths laid the foundations for contemporary European democracy².

A few hundred years later, around 1721, Robert Walpole had been elected as Great Britain's first prime minister³. The enlightenment was in full swing. The British empire was expanding rapidly. Neoclassicism was hot. Walpole's youngest son, Horace, was very busy designing his summer house⁴.

¹ Andeweg, Agnes, "Gothic: A Prolific Cultural Strategy," in *To Live In The South, One Has To Be A Scar Lover*, ed. Maaike Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout (The Hague: 1646, 2011), 12.

² Ibid.

³ Davenport-Hines, Richard Treadwell. *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin*, (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 117.

⁴ Ibid.

He didn't care much for the Mediterranean classical architecture; he felt that it lacked imagination. He felt uneasy in the transparency of the enlightenment and cherished the protective embrace of the shadow. His summer house was going to be a grand Gothic fortress in which he could roam endless hallways, up and down spiral staircases, until he got lost in his very own home, time and time again. He and his friends used the term Gothic as a *nom de guerre*; and the battle they fought was aimed at the idea that everything can be known and understood. In the words of Richard Hurd: "*What the modern age has gained in civility it has lost in poetic inspiration*"⁵. Hurd's writing was a major influence on Horace Walpole's first novel⁶: *The Castle of Otranto; a Gothic Story*⁷, one of the first Gothic novels ever written. It is an absurd and lyrical ghost story that relies heavily on suggestion, atmosphere and space. Gothic literature quickly became the dissident cousin of the enlightenment, quick to point out where rapidly developing sciences and a shrinking world were causing rifts in society.

However, Gothic literature must not be mistaken as anti-enlightenment; it was a catalyst for some important technological innovations. The Gutenberg press was the first⁸. It made reproducing text somewhat easy and cheap, and a new market of readers had to be found. People loved reading modern tales of terror. They loved it so much that a special illness was invented to describe a mental state that caused a person to become completely detached from reality by reading too many Gothic novels: *Lesewut*⁹. The infrastructure of the British Empire made it possible for these cheap books to be

⁵ Hurd, Richard. *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1999): Literary Theory Full-Text Database ; Literature Online Copyright (c) 1996-2010 ProQuest LLC. Web.

⁶ Davenport-Hines, Richard Treadwell. *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin*, (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 132-135.

⁷ Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto* (1996): Eighteenth-Century Fiction Full-Text Database ; Literature Online Copyright (c) 1996-2010 ProQuest LLC. Web.

⁸ An exact date is hard to give for the invention of the Gutenberg press, but it is first mentioned and described in the text of a lawsuit in 1439.

⁹ Andriopoulos, Stefan. *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2013), 98-100.

spread all over the world in no-time; enabling Gothic literature to spawn itself into all kinds of different sub-genres that dealt specifically with local issues and embedded local stylistic elements. The newest cultural trend was the Gothic revival.

In the words of art critic Mellisa Gronlund: “*the Gothic, in its barest bones, is a clash of the old and the new, weighted toward the former as it struggles with its own obsolescence*”¹⁰. Its strongest and most persistent quality is its tendency to obscure things rather than to reveal them. It uses fog and dusky darkness to show you that something is there and it scares you because it is impossible for you to know exactly what. Its aim is to make you aware of the shadows cast by the rapid onslaught of modernity¹¹.

¹⁰ Gronlund, Melissa. *Return of the Gothic: Digital Anxiety in the Domestic Sphere*. E-flux.com, 2014.

¹¹ Andeweg, Agnes, “*Gothic: A Prolific Cultural Strategy*,” in *To Live In The South, One Has To Be A Scar Lover*, ed. Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout (The Hague: 1646, 2011), 12.

Chapter 2: A Concise Historical Outline of the Way I Have Used *Gothicness* in my Work

I started using Gothic as a strategy in my work when I learned of the existence of Southern Gothic; a regionalized version of Gothic literature staged in the Southern United States, using its physical and social political landscape. Inspired by the coming together of a number of things that interested me, namely Gothic literature and the Southern States, I embarked upon a lengthy road trip throughout the region in 2010. The aim of the trip was to investigate to what extent Southern Gothic literature had contributed to the stereotypical image that exists of the Southern States as a hotbed of xenophobia, backwards thinking and the freedom to shoot anyone who sets foot on your property.

The 2011 exhibition that came out of this trip featured artists from the Southern States, like Greely Myatt, and artists from elsewhere, like Jeremiah Day or me, who were working with topics related to the Southern States. Through these different viewpoints from the outside as well as the inside, an image emerged of what the South is and how it is perceived. The format, or curatorial strategy, for the exhibition was based upon the way exhibitions are made in the many private museums I encountered all over the South. Where an exhibition strategy is normally designed around the spectator — to give them information in a useful and comprehensive way or to make sure they understand some kind of grand statement, or, with other words, to enlighten them — in these spaces the exhibits seemed to be designed around the objects themselves. Often one would get the impression that every object ever collected was part of the exhibition and that they were displayed in order of date of acquisition. Here, knowledge was shrouded in clutter. I would see a lot but gain hardly any insight, which, at that point, made total sense as a model for how the Gothic functions within the Southern States. In the exhibition, entitled *What the modern age has gained in civility it has lost in*

poetic inspiration, everything I had found was included as well. Artworks were displayed next to research material and between found objects. Successful works stood alongside works-in-progress or failed projects, like my attempt to grow Kudzu in the gallery and have it overtake the entire exhibition during the two months that it was up. The exhibition was a thoroughly documented attempt to understand a region through its connection to Gothic literature. And even though the show has its problematics and weaknesses, creating it transformed my artistic career and my personal life forever.



[Figure 01]

What the Modern Age Has Gained in Civility It Has Lost in Poetic Inspiration (installation view), 2011, at 1646 in The Hague, the Netherlands. Participating artists: Brad Benischek & Case Miller, Chris Cogan, Greely Myatt, Howard Finster, Jeremiah Day, Joris Lindhout, Michel Varisco, Paul Thomas, Ricky Needham, and Sanne Peper. Curated by Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout.
Photo: Johan Gustavsson.



[Figure 02]

What the Modern Age Has Gained in Civility It Has Lost in Poetic Inspiration (installation view), 2011, at 1646 in The Hague, the Netherlands. Participating artists: Brad Benischek & Case Miller, Chris Cogan, Greely Myatt, Howard Finster, Jeremiah Day, Joris Lindhout, Michel Varisco, Paul Thomas, Ricky Needham, and Sanne Peper. Curated by Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout.
Photo: Johan Gustavsson.

During the mild critical success of the Southern Gothic project, an invitation was issued to come to Brazil and be a part of the 2012 *Capacete* residency program, then located in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Through meetings with professor Daniel Serravalle de Sá, perhaps the only academic specialising in Gothic studies in Brazil, I realized that there is an actual Brazilian Gothic novel that plays an important role in the foundation of modern Brazilian national identity¹. And that is José de Alencar's *O Guarani: Romance Brasileiro* from 1857. De Alencar was a Portuguese Brazilian lawyer and a famous novelist. He was one of the most important exponents of Indianism², a form of Brazilian Romanticism that aimed to find an entity that could represent the newly created Brazilian nation. Due to heavy resentment from the indigenous Brazilians against the colonial project, this could not be a Portuguese man. Inspired by Rousseau and his 'Noble Savage' myth³, they decided on the Brazilian Indian.

O Guarani is the story of the 'noble savage' Peri and the Portuguese virgin Cecy. Dom Antônio de Mariz, one of the actual founders of Rio de Janeiro, settles in the area and has to defend his very Gothic fortress from a tribe of revenge seeking Natives for the murder of one of their own, and from a web of deceit and intrigue aimed at kidnapping his daughter. Peri comes to the rescue and at the end of the novel, when everyone has died in a massive explosion, he takes off with Cecy. Their offspring will be the Brazilian Adam and Eve; the first 'true' Brazilians.

Despite the obvious ethical problems with this novel, it has become the most famous and most often adapted work of *Indianism*. As such it got adapted to an Italian style opera entitled *Il*

¹ Serravalle de Sá, Daniel, "The Brazilian Forest: Gothic Imaginings," in *Brazilian Gothic Is Not For Beginners*, ed. Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout (Rio de Janeiro: Capacete Entretenimentos, 2012), 33-37.

² Ibid.

³ A noble savage is a person not yet corrupted by civilization. The term is attributed to Rousseau, although there is no trace of it in his writings.

*Guarany*⁴. Because of its international acclaim (it premiered in Italy), this opera formed a major catalyst in spreading the problematic ideas of Brazilian culture coming out of the *Indianism* movement. A group of cultural activists united as the *Antropofagia Movement*, with amongst them painter Tarsila do Amaral (Brasil, 1886-1973), who inspired Oswald de Andrade (Brasil, 1890-1964) to write his *Cannibal Manifesto*⁵. The movement proposed cultural cannibalism as a national identity for Brazil; meaning that Brazilian culture exists on the basis of mixing and appropriating from all the different cultures that make up the Brazilian demography.

As a part of my residency, I re-staged the opera *Il Guarany*, but re-wrote it in such a way that it contained all of the voices that pointed out its problems throughout history. The script became a study of how the Gothic, and its preference for shrouding things in shadows and obscuring rather than revealing, makes it a very suitable vessel for the expression of more unsavory feelings like xenophobia. Inspired by Hélio Oiticica's *Tropicalia*⁶ a large installation was constructed from things I found and encountered in Brazil. In the original script for the opera I replaced some of the stock Gothic characters with figures from Brazil's cultural history. This is, for instance, how I introduced Zé do Caixao⁷ (a kind of Nietzschean character invented by independent film maker José Majica Marins) into the story.

⁴ *Il Guarany*, composed by Antônio Carlos Gomes. Libretto by Antonio Scalvini and Carlo D'Ormeville, 1870.

⁵ Andrade, Oswald de. Translated by Leslie Bary. "*Cannibalist Manifesto*". *Latin American Literary Review*. (Pittsburgh: Dept. of Modern Languages, Carnegie-Mellon University, 1991), 38-47.

⁶ "*Tropicália*" is the title of a 1967 artwork by Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980).

⁷ José Majica Marins (1936) is a Brazilian underground film maker, mostly known for his alter ego *Zé do Caixao*, which loosely translates into *Coffin Joe*. *Zé* first showed up in the 1963 film *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* (by Marins) and has since become somewhat of fictional celebrity not unlike Victor Frankenstein's monster.



[Figure 03]

Brazilian Gothic Is Not for Beginners, 2012, at TENT in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Actors: Morwenna Marcus and João Evangelista. Production design and direction: Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout.
Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



[Figure 04]

Brazilian Gothic Is Not for Beginners, 2012, at TENT in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Actors: Morwenna Marcus and João Evangelista. Production design and direction: Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



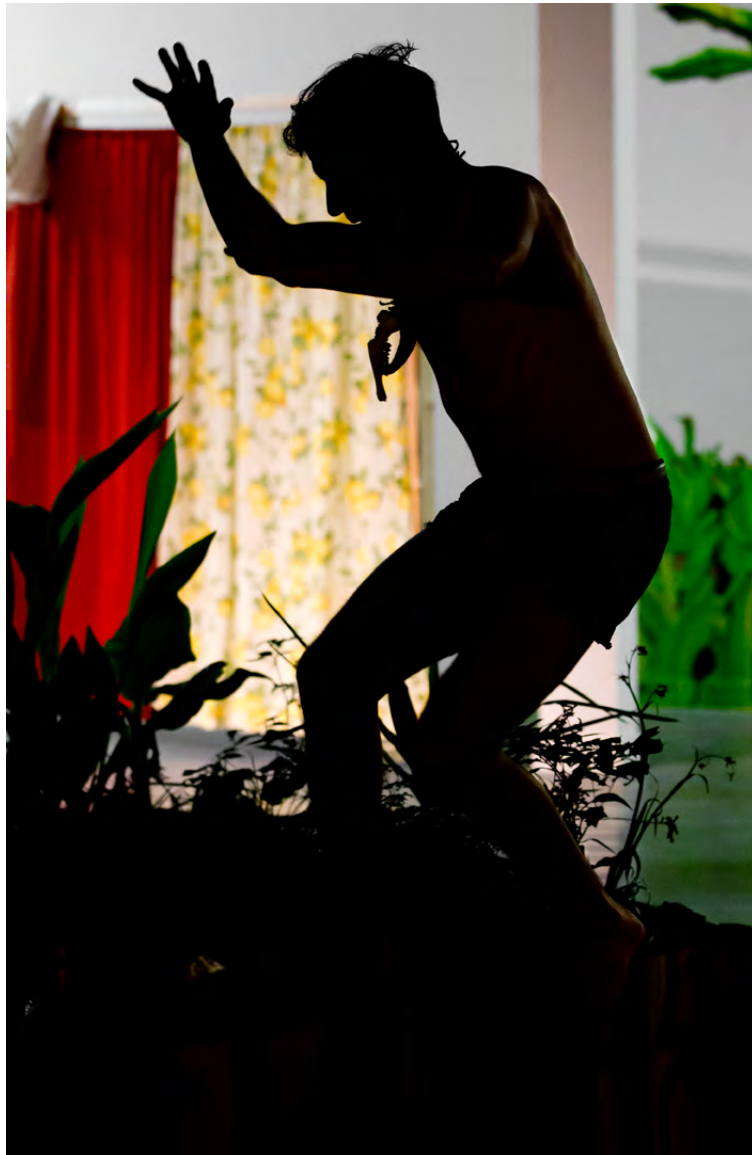
[Figure 05]

Brazilian Gothic Is Not for Beginners, 2012, at TENT in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Actors: Morwenna Marcus and João Evangelista. Production design and direction: Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



[Figure 06]

Brazilian Gothic Is Not for Beginners, 2012, at TENT in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Actors: Morwenna Marcus and João Evangelista. Production design and direction: Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



[Figure 07]

Brazilian Gothic Is Not for Beginners, 2012, at TENT in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Actors: Morwenna Marcus and João Evangelista. Production design and direction: Maaïke Gouwenberg & Joris Lindhout. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.

Having worked in different countries, dealing with issues that are not my own, digging into social histories and mining them to advance my own interest, I knew it was time to return home and start digging in my own backyard. And so I did. I dug and I dug and I dug. Nothing. It occurred to me that in the Netherlands we really do not like obscuring things. We are famous for our *doorzonwoningen*; houses with large windows front and back so that the sun, as well as the gazes of passersby, can reach into our personal space. I was able to dig up exactly one Gothic novel. And I figured, if I want to nurture this tradition in the Netherlands, I should write a follow up (bad copies and mirror images are also a thing in the Gothic universe). Luckily the novel I found is a good one. It's Louis Couperus' *The Silent Force*⁸ from 1900. It is staged in Indonesia, a former Dutch colony, and describes the end of colonial rule by using the downfall of a famous Dutch family as a metaphor. Members of the family start going insane due to their constant misinterpretation of Indonesian cultural signs. At the end of the novel the two youngest members of the family are put on a boat back to the Netherlands in an attempt to save them. And that is where my novel, entitled *Afgesloten* (2015), starts. The two brothers, who are of mixed Dutch and Indonesian blood, move to Amsterdam and successfully start their new lives. When one of the major water works, a dam that turned an entire ocean into a lake⁹, is completed the brothers are met with xenophobia. A very violent episode causes them to flee to New Orleans. That move might seem like a stretch, but it is in part based on the personal stories of members of the Holland Club in New Orleans. Club members are Dutch-Indonesians who were forced to leave Indonesia after its independence, but couldn't acclimate in the Netherlands (in their case due to the climate more than due to racism.) They eventually moved to New Orleans¹⁰.

⁸ Couperus, Louis, Beekman, E. M., and Beekman, Eric Montague. *The Hidden Force*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts, 1985. Print. Library of the Indies.

⁹ German artist Joseph Beuys attributed the assumed disappearance of the famous Dutch Light to the creation of this dam (*de Afsluitdijk*.) This claim is investigated in the 2003 documentary *Dutch Light* by Pieter-Rim de Kroon.

¹⁰ Marie Schuller, interviewed by Joris Lindhout at her house in Metaire, fall 2015.



[Figure 08]

Afgesloten (installation view), 2015, at Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Audiobook voice actor: Stijn van Erp.

Photo: Romy Finke.



[Figure 09]

Afgesloten (installation view), 2015, at Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Audiobook voice actor: Stijn van Erp.

Photo: Romy Finke.



[Figure 10]

Afgesloten (novella), 2015, published by Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Design: Anton Stuckardt. Proofreading: Olaf van Muijden.



[Figure 11]

Afgesloten (novella), 2015, published by Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Design: Anton Stuckardt. Proofreading: Olaf van Muijden.

There are many links between the landscape in the Netherlands and the landscape around New Orleans. To name but a few: both are part of a river delta, both are marked by battles against water, and both are scarred by heavy industry and development. In the Dutch city of Eindhoven, Joseph Beuys once did a performance to protect a swamp from being developed into a residential area¹¹. His idea was that swamps are like time machines; that they preserve ancient history, store life, mystery and what he calls “chemical change.”¹² Slowly a Gothic story started to form: what if oil, a dark goo containing within itself the essence of all life that once was, is sentient? What if oil is not so much a substance that we are abusing to realize the end of our current society, but using us for its own, perhaps somewhat sinister, plans? I spent the first part of my graduate studies developing these ideas into a script, a video and installation entitled *Tar* (2017).

¹¹ *Aktion im Moor*, Joseph Beuys, 1971. For the van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

¹² *The Shasan Aras Artist*, New York Times, October 18, 1979.



[Figure 12]

Tar (installation view), 2018, at Contemporary Arts Centre in New Orleans, United States.
Photo: Alex Marks.



[Figure 13]

Tar (film poster), 2018.



[Figure 14]

Tar (video still), 2018.

Actors: Charlie Tatum, Brooke Pickett, and Maggie McWilliams. Voiceover: Wes Joseph.



[Figure 15]

Tar (video still), 2018.

Actors: Charlie Tatum, Brooke Pickett, and Maggie McWilliams. Voiceover: Wes Joseph.



[Figure 16]

Tar (video still), 2018.

Actors: Joris Pieter Lindhout.

Chapter 3: A Historical Overview of the Relationship Between Modern Technology, Visual Arts and the Gothic

The Gothic and technology always have had a very intimate relationship. Technological developments have provided the Gothic with many a vessel to spread. Think for instance of early photography and cinema and their preference for the macabre. But, before that, the invention of the letterpress already had ensured Gothic's steady spread to all corners of the British Empire. On the other hand, new technologies have inspired fear in people and thus inspired stories by writers of the Gothic tale. As Marshall McLuhan would say: *the medium is the message*. The interest in the occult and the paranormal around the Fin de Siècle lays at the heart for the crossover between technology and the Gothic. Although Walter Benjamin saw spiritualism and occultism as the flip side of these developments¹, there is ample evidence that occultist studies of psychic clairvoyance and tele-vision played a constitutive role in the technological inventions and developments of the electrical television. Or as the spiritualist du Prel put it: "*Valuable time was lost because it was thought that occultism had nothing to do with technology, whereas in truth, it contains the very philosophy of technology.*"²

After discovering the electro-magnetic wave spectrum in 1888, Heinrich Hertz stated: "*It is thus certain that all space of which we have knowledge is not empty, but rather is*

¹ Andriopoulos, Stefan. *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2013), 143.

² Andriopoulos, Stefan. *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2013), 157.

*filled with ether, a substance capable of propagating waves.*³ Einstein's special theory of relativity (1905) denied the existence of ether, filing it under the spiritual and occult for a while. Spiritualists used it as a pseudo-scientific explanation for a variety of theories that described mental rays and odd vibrations that connected a transmitter and receiver by a psychosomatic band. Marconi's invention of the wireless telegraph (1896) served as irrefutable proof of this teleaesthetic band for many occultists. They went on to develop their ideas and provided both the language and the building blocks for what would later become the television. Ernst Kapp, a philosopher active in both the world of science and that of the occult, described mechanical devices as "*unconscious copies that imitate organisms or parts of organisms.*" Technology, he said, is "*organ projection*". Magic was "*nothing but things yet unknown natural science.*"⁴ So magical capabilities should be possible to be projected as technological copies. For instance: the wireless telegraph is a projection of telepathy. The X-ray a projection of clairvoyance. The one big occult project which remained was to make television possible.

In 1879 the president of the spiritualist Society for Psychical Research, William Crookes, invented the Crookes tube, an early cathode ray tube. His aim was to prove that radiation was the "*fourth state of matter*". That, obviously, wasn't proven (the idea of a fourth state of matter is rather alchemical) but the cathode ray tube went on to play a pivotal role in the process of transmitting images electronically.

³ Andriopoulos, Stefan. *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2013), 147.

⁴ Andriopoulos, Stefan. *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2013), 153.

When the television was finally a reality in the 1920s, Eugen Diesel (son of Rudolf Diesel, inventor of the famous Diesel engine) wrote two texts: *The Anxiety of the Engineer* and *The Uncanny of the Technological Age*, both from 1929. In them he describes the uncanny in relation to the television as “a sudden, ghostly appearance” which is apart from a “mechanical uncanny, instead rising directly from the machine itself”. It’s “an uncanny of the second kind... dissolving old measures of time and space... A whole new artificial world was coming into being... a world in which nothing would be certain, because material reality appeared only as a ghostly phantom on the screen...⁵”

⁵ Andriopoulos, Stefan. *Ghostly Apparitions. German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media*, (Cambridge: MIT press, 2013), 141.

Chapter 4: Visual Arts, Technology and the Gothic Today

In her article *Return of the Gothic: Digital Anxiety in the Domestic Sphere*¹ Melissa Gronlund argues that there is a current generation of artists that investigates our contemporary technological hauntings. The way in which the works of Mark Leckey, Ed Atkins, Shana Moulton, Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, and Laure Prouvost deal with a certain domestic disruption caused by digital technology, suggests a return of the Gothic as a way to wrestle with questions like: How has the internet affected our sense of self? Our interaction with others? The structures of family and kinship? How are we to deal with the ghostly appearances from machines that are capable of projecting all of our organs at once? Technology has given us immediacy and the power to be omnipresent. We are all each others ghosts, doomed to be both the haunted and the haunters at any given moment.

Hito Steyerl gets more ambitious in her *In Defense of the Poor Image*². Looking at our entire history of picture making and viewing as an economy of images she differentiates between rich and poor images. A rich image is a high resolution, original image that is expensive to display. Think for instance about 35mm cinema. A poor image on the other hand is “*a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped,*

¹ Gronlund, Melissa. *Return of the Gothic: Digital Anxiety in the Domestic Sphere*. E-flux.com, 2014.

² Steyerl, Hito. *In Defense of the Poor Image*. E-flux.com, 2009.

remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.” Digital technology has strongly influenced how we consume images and thus the role images play in our lives. As consumers we are also publishers and editors. By downloading and uploading content, we influence the quality of an image practically as well as conceptually. Overshared images decrease in value. “*Poor images are the contemporary Wretched of the Screen, the debris of audiovisual production, the trash that washes up on the digital economies’ shores.*” Steyerl’s language borrows heavily from the Gothic (ghosts, wretched) and it illustrates how our relationship to images is *gothifying*. No longer do we know where an image comes from, or care about its original intended meaning. Images are becoming increasingly obscure. They are digital follies: imitations built without structural knowledge of its original.

James Bridle goes even further, or perhaps deeper, in his book *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*³. The title is borrowed from an H.P. Lovecraft story (*The Call of Cthulhu*⁴). In it, Lovecraft describes that science will amass so much data “*that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.*” Which is exactly what Bridle argues: so much data is currently being collected and reported back to us that we can’t begin to make sense of it anymore. Knowledge is no longer really knowledge, facts are no longer facts. The only ‘beings’ that seems to be able to make sense of all this data are artificial intelligences (A.I.). Bridle gives Amazon warehouses as an example: their layouts are created by A.I. Books are dispersed amongst pans in between toys. No human would be able to find anything here. Order pickers wear headphones

³ Bridle, James. *New Dark Age, Technology and the End of the Future*. London: Verso, 2018.

⁴ Lovecraft, H.P. *The Call of Cthulhu*, in *The Colour out of Space and Others*. 3d Ed.]. ed. New York: Lancer, 1969.

instructing them where to find an item by A.I. And while doing that it is collecting more data on which products are popular and how long it takes the employees to grab them, updating the warehouse layout in real time. Here, humans are the fleshy machines controlled by self-learning algorithms that have become too complicated for anyone to be able to explain how exactly they work. And that goes against the first of Asimov's three laws of robotics⁵: when we no longer understand how a certain computer works, then how can we be sure it doesn't intend to harm us? Another example from Bridle's book pertains to image production. In an effort to appease the algorithm YouTube uses to determine what gets played through its autoplay function, some content providers have taken to using algorithms as generators in and of themselves. By measuring the success of previous videos, these pieces of software create and upload new videos generated from layered pre-made green screen animations. The results are strange at best and violent and disturbing in the worst cases. I can't think of a better example of Roland Barthes idea of the death of the author. In his 1967 essay *La mort de l'auteur*⁶ Barthes argues that to read a text through its author is to impose limits on its meaning. In this case there is no actual author any longer. Bridle shows that because ethics reside with the author, we can't completely 'kill them off.'

⁵ Asimov, Isaac. *I, Robot*. Bantam Hardcover ed. New York: Bantam, 2004.

⁶ Barthes, Roland., and Heath, Stephen. *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Chapter 5: Exposition of My Work in *PrtScn* • *SysRq* in Relation to the Topics Discussed

My thesis work breaks new personal ground in a number of ways. It is my first attempt to conceptually start from and practically include contemporary technology into my work. Since my studies in Interaction Design, I have been interested in tech and have made a living as a front- and backend web developer. In other words: I have used computers and coding as a way to make a living for a long time, but never have these skills or experiences made it into my art work. Besides that, or perhaps *because* of that, the objects in my thesis exhibition have come about through material investigation more so than through conceptual research. This is another major change from how I've worked previously. The works discussed earlier in this paper have a strong conceptual basis, and all decisions around material, display, medium, color, etcetera, were rooted heavily in those concepts. Even though I did start from a research plan - entitled *Digital Anxiety* (used in my Tulane University application), the free exploration of technique and material in Tulane's art department and Maker Space have been much more informative regarding the final form of my thesis pieces.

The first piece I finished during my graduate studies was the creature feature video installation *Tar*. In many ways it is a logical next step within my overarching Gothic research project. I started from the local context and circumstances I found myself in: the Southern States, and specifically Southern Louisiana and Eastern Texas. During my first visit in 2010 for the research trip into Southern Gothic literature, I was struck by the vast impact industrialization has had, and still has, on this part of the United States. I found a link with

literature in the Eco Horror genre for which the British writer J.G. Ballard¹ is somewhat of a forerunner. Most of his Eco Horror stories are staged in the United States. For example, in *Hello America*², everything East of the Rocky Mountains has turned into a desert due to global warming. *Tar* is an adaptation of the 1964 short story *The Black Gondolier* by Fritz Leiber. His story and my video propose oil as a sentient being which uses humanity for its own agenda while letting us believe we are using it for ours. The video is a creature feature, a sub-genre of cinema heavily rooted in North American culture. Filming and editing didn't lead to the results I was after. Since the work was going to be part of the exhibition *Constructing the Break*³, I was more or less forced to get creative with the material at hand. By cutting out all parts that didn't work in the video and re-creating them as physical objects, *Tar* was transformed into an installation. It was during this process that I learned about the many possibilities for form and meaning that were already hidden in materials and objects themselves.

From their incarnation, I have seen the pieces in my thesis exhibition as creatures. Conceptually I set out to create machines that embody the different forms of anxiety we experience through dealing with contemporary technologies like smart phones. Think of it as a digital and mechanical adaptation of David Cronenberg's 1979 film *The Brood*. Hal Raglan, a psychotherapist, has developed a new technique called *psychoplasms* which he uses on his patient Nola Carveth. As a result of his treatments, her traumas manifest themselves as little

¹ James Graham Ballard, 1930 - 2009. Born in Shanghai, worked and lived in the United Kingdom until his death.

² Ballard, J. G. *Hello America*. London: J. Cape, 1981.

³ *Constructing the Break*, curated by Allison Glenn in the summer of 2018 at the Contemporary Art Centre in New Orleans.

demons to which she gives birth through a series of newly grown external wombs. These creatures then deal with the sources of her traumas by killing all the people involved in them. Although not killers, the creatures in my exhibition are similar in that they are born from stresses and anxieties caused by digital technology. They are the newly grown organs that are trying to make our bodies and minds cope with the overwhelming immediacy of experience and information presented to us through contemporary digital technology.

Some of the creatures are using severed limbs as their own organs, others use technologies that mimic human organs. Peristaltic pumps, for instance, are pumping in the same way as our intestines do to move around digested bits of food. Peltier elements, when used in the wrong way, can make a machine sweat. I used a high-tech casting material called *HydroSpan 100*, used industrially to blow up casts many times their original size, to make a creature grow ears. They come across as mad scientific experiments gone wrong, not unlike the one conducted by the godfather of Gothic Tech: Victor Frankenstein. Another creature, consisting of dozens of computer fans and black carryout bags from the St. Claude corner store *Wagner's*, is more reminiscent of 'evil' technology as seen in *Hardware* (Stanley, 1990) or *The Matrix* (Lana & Lilly Wachowski, 1999). In these films the tech is aware of our presence and is trying to make it clear that it doesn't like to be watched. It would prefer to watch us without being seen. A third creature looks more like a strange toy, something to be found in Sid's room in *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995). Easter eggs, inside jokes in digital culture, can be found in a few of the creature-works. *The Utah Teapot* for instance, a primitive shape in 3D modelling software that is likened to the *Hello World!*⁴ program in software development. Or

⁴ In training, the first assignment that computer programmers get is to create a simple Hello World! program that does nothing else but printing that text to the screen.

the loading gif; an animated image displayed on websites during AJAX⁵ calls. It often takes the shape of a circle of dots rotating clockwise starting slow, building up speed, only to pause shortly at the end of the circle to forever start the next iteration until your content has loaded.

The creatures' embodiments of anxiety-related symptoms like cold sweat, panting, strumming, irritated bowels, and auditory hallucination are sometimes fascinating and at other times repulsive or comical. By porting⁶ these bodily phenomena to technology I invert what in our daily lives is somewhat of a catch 22. While we know that technology can be a cause of the aforementioned symptoms, we still use it because if we do not use it we will experience the same symptoms. We will feel left out and will be constantly wondering what we are missing and what things we do not know about. With my creatures I point at this absurd situation, albeit in a somewhat abstracted form. By incorporating sensors to make the work interactive and playing with the anticipation of the spectator, I emphasise the feeling that we control our technology while we have no clue as to how exactly it works. Giving feedback to the viewer through sound and light while the true purpose of the interactivity remains foggy, increases his or her feelings of anxiety: Why is it not listening to me?

I noticed while building these pieces and installing them for exhibition, that dealing with work that involves so much technology instills a certain form of nervousness and

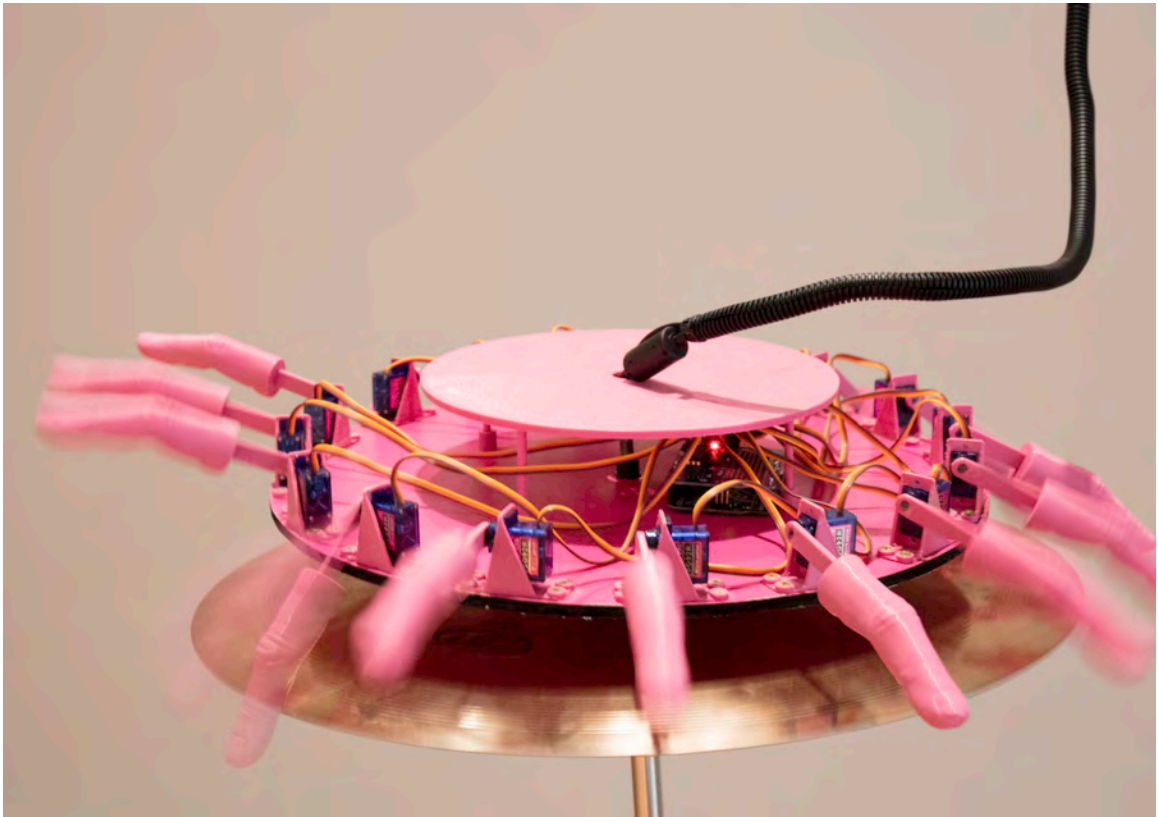
⁵ An abbreviation of Asynchronous Javascript And XML; a technology that makes it possible to send and receive data in the background of a web application.

⁶ In the tech world, porting is the process of adapting software for the purpose of achieving some form of execution in a computing environment that is different from the one that a given program was originally designed for.

anxiety in me as a maker. There are many things that can break, melt, burn, crack, blow out or just simply get disconnected. These pieces will not last long; whenever technology advances too much, some of the parts won't be made anymore. At some point they will become totally obsolete. It is interesting that Art has truly caught up with consumer products like cars and vacuum cleaners in this sense.

Finally, I want to discuss the collaborative piece I made with fellow graduate student Cora Lautze. The title of our exhibition, *PrtScn • SysRq*, is taken from a button on an old Windows PC in the digital fabrication room in the wood shop in the basement of the Art Department at Tulane University. We both spent a lot of time in that room; Lautze using the laser cutter to make her printing plates, and me using the 3D printer and scanner. *PrtScn • SysRq* is an abbreviation of Print Screen, System Required. It is an outdated button to make screen grabs, which only works when a system for that technology is in place (that's the System Required part.) Coming from very different angles, we are both interested in 'technology hacks' — ways to use machines for which they were not intended. In the hallway, outside the exhibition space, we created an installation with two iPhones that are eternally texting each other through technological means, using four servos and an Arduino. iMessage has a feature called predictive text. When it is enabled it tries to guess the word you are typing and gives you suggestions for the next word. These suggestions are generated through A.I. that learns from your texting behavior. In a way, the texts on each of these phones are portraits of us as individuals as understood by the same A.I. It is a computer system posing as its owner communicating with itself posing as another owner. This, of course, is also a link to James Bridle as it is an instance of tech replacing humans in what we used to think of as domains of the intellect: informal writing and communicating. We then filmed the screens of

the phones and used an old video mixer to combine these two streams on one screen, making the small iPhone screens available to a larger audience. We literally printed to multiple screens in our collaborative piece. But the exhibition itself is also a 'print screen' moment: as required by the University system we freeze a moment in time to share what we are working on with our assessors as well as the general public.



[Figure 17]

PrtScn • SysRq (installation view), 2019, at Carroll Gallery in New Orleans, United States.
Photo: Jonathan Traviesa.



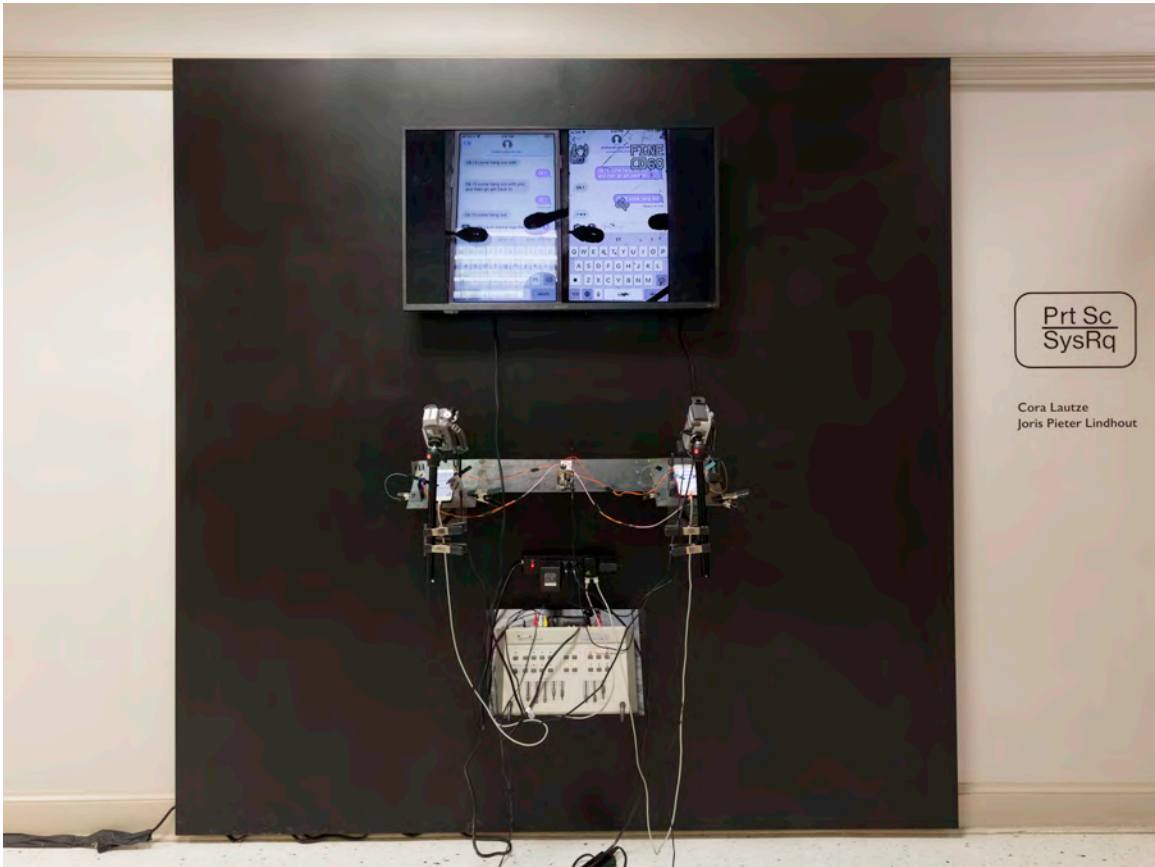
[Figure 18]

PrtScn • SysRq (installation view), 2019, at Carroll Gallery in New Orleans, United States.
Photo: Jonathan Travesia.



[Figure 19]

PrtScn • *SysRq* (installation view), 2019, at Carroll Gallery in New Orleans, United States.



[Figure 20]

PrtScn • SysRq (installation view), 2019, at Carroll Gallery in New Orleans, United States. In collaboration with Cora Lautze.

Photo: Jonathan Traviesa.

Chapter 6: Concluding

While I have explored many new possibilities conceptually as well as formally during my graduate studies at Tulane University, there is a strong link between the new and the old work. This link is provided by the overarching theme that I have been using as a sort of conceptual coat hanger since 2010: the Gothic. Initially I drew inspiration from Gothic literature but as the concept has been coopted within critical theory over the past decade and a half, I have slowly moved to using text of a more abstract and conceptual nature as references within my work. This has given me more room to be playful while creating pieces and increases the possibilities I have to embed my work within current tropes in contemporary art. I have used James Bridle and Hito Steyerl as important contemporary sources for this paper. They, like me, have practices that veer between artistic production and research of a more theoretical nature.

The work has become more *Cronenbergian* in nature; I have augmented machinery with body parts, which themselves have been created through technological means. All of the pieces have been alive in some form during the show: either through animation or through the inclusion of (seemingly) organic processes. When animation was a factor it was always using flaws in the utilized technology in order to illustrate similar flaws in the human body. For instance: I have used the jittering that takes place inside a Servo motor when it doesn't receive a stable wavelength to illustrate how bad nerves can make one unable to sit still. I have shown that the development of contemporary technology has been fuelled by the desire

to increase the capacities of our senses and organs to supernatural heights. I have also shown that today, in some cases, our bodies have started to be implemented as the organs of Artificial Intelligences such as the ones used by Amazon. The link between failing technology and the failing human body and/or brain is one that I will continue to explore.

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Biography

Joris Pieter Lindhout is a Dutch artist living and working in New Orleans. He holds a BA in Interaction Design and an MA in Visual Arts and is an alumnus of the post graduate program at the Jan van Eyck Academy in the Netherlands. His work has been shown in the Netherlands at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, BORZO Gallery Amsterdam, TENT Rotterdam, 1646 Den Haag, W139 Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch and BAK Utrecht. Internationally, he has shown his work in Norway, South Korea, Brazil, and the United States. He is the co-founder of the New Orleans-based international residency program Deltaworkers, and has received multiple grants from the Mondrian Foundation, a research and development grant from CBK Rotterdam, and a study grant from the Prince Bernhard Culture fund. His text-based pieces have been published in numerous international publications and magazines, and Lindhout has curated exhibitions at PARSE in New Orleans, Ellen de Bruijne Projects in Amsterdam, and IMPAKT festival in Utrecht.