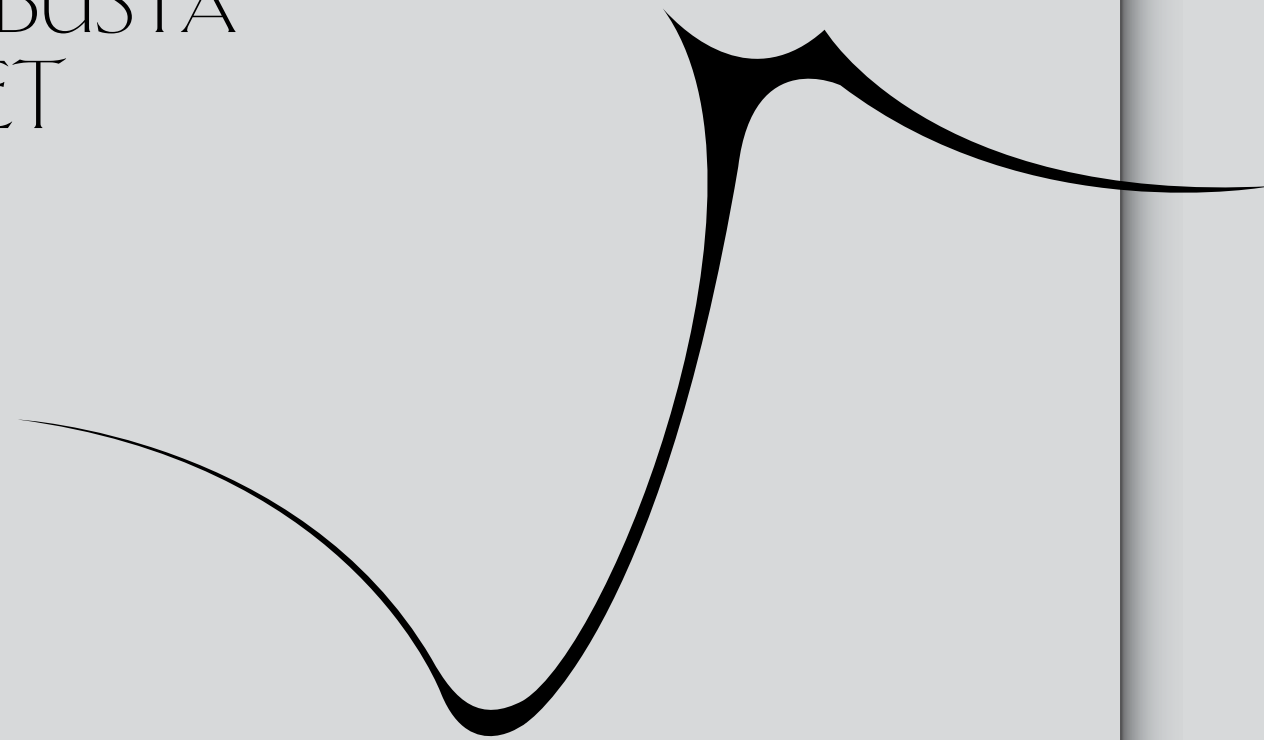


# TOWARDS A NEW GOTHIC BY CAROLINE BUSTA & LIL INTERNET



It is this latter sense of the Gothic that would inspire the Romantics, the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers who felt the Enlightenment's privileging of rational thought over intuition, as progressive as it may have been, also occluded some deeper truths. For the Romantics, Shakespeare's young Ophelia was the perfect muse: given no path forward by society other than madness, she found freedom in a premature death. The Romantics imagined each individual to carry a dark cathedral within, a shadow zone in which one could find refuge from an industrializing world.

As we reach 2020, a new "neo-Gothic" is emerging. Amid a proliferation of data and an unraveling of knowledge, the powers of nature and chaos feel both ecstatic and close. Perhaps it's a contemporary Ophelia that Swedish rapper Yung Lean gives us in his 2016 video for "Miami Ultras": wearing a long floral dress, Lean lays deathlike in the brush as if a natural part of it. Lean and his crew of self-described "SADBOYS" became Internet sensations by speaking to their peers: the disaffected, depressed and heavily medicated youth who've streamed Lean tens of millions of times over the past several years. Like Ophelia facing a world without a future, they too find comfort in madness, darkness, and romantic notions of death.

The contemporary New Gothic is more porous and less dogmatic than previous subcultural goth movements. The SADBOYS themselves exemplify, for instance, the particularly con-

flicted yet richly generative realm where goth and rap cultures overlap. If most rap has celebrated individual hubris and the Randian aspirations of consumer capitalism, Lean's lyrics and production do so too, but come saturated in melancholy and nihilism: "Broken glass in my hands, sister's twerking / Money on the floor and she nervous / Paint a picture like Van Gogh, I'm cursed man" ("Red Bottom Sky," 2017). The harshness recalls the underground horrorcore of early Three 6 Mafia and adjacent artists, rappers who grew up in low-income Memphis-area neighborhoods such as Frayser, Tennessee, and saw their communities ravaged by the effects of dumped industrial waste. How better to address the real-life monsters



Is it mere *Game of Thrones* afterglow that, as we close out this profoundly strange decade, references to a darker, colder, less plugged-in time are seemingly everywhere? In the mainstream, one could cite Madonna's "Dark Ballet" (her ode to Jean d'Arc featuring a persecuted Mykki Blanco burned at the stake) or Post Malone's "Circles," where the pop star appears on a barren English Isle, immolated in full armor in his own medieval end. Yet behind this Ren Faire pastiche, there seems to be a deeper psychological turn playing out: a growing mass-cultural desire for darkness, for interiority and privacy, even an embrace of chaos, the unknown or other instantiations of the divine.

Take, for instance, the wave of climate scientists that have shifted from a strategy of "resilience" to one of "relinquishment," a mode of "deep adaptation" that, rather than seeking to control what happens (expecting a return to "rational" order), accepts the radical restructuring that climate change is already bringing and advocates for the psychological preparation of letting go. It's been a little more than a year since James Bridle published his book *New Dark Age* (Verso), which argues that increasing technological complexity is inversely impacting our ability to make sense of the world. But "darkness" for Bridle isn't necessarily a place of dis-possession; it is also, he writes, "a place of freedom and possibility, a place of equality"—especially for those who are already precarious. "We have much to learn about unknowing," Bridle continues. "Uncertainty can be productive, even sublime."

In many ways, this productive darkness can be found anywhere outside of our illuminated screens. Darkness serves as an oppositional force, a strength that comes from beyond the financializing logic of data trackers, algorithms and digital nudges to become more visible, to get "verified" and maximally self-capitalize.

When, in 1550, Giorgio Vasari wrote Goths into the art historical canon, he placed them squarely outside it: "The Goths and other barbarous and outlandish peoples destroyed, together with Italy, all the finer arts." Vasari was speaking of the Visagoths' 5th-century sack of Rome, but also more generally of the Germanic tribe's affront to classical culture. For Vasari, the Goths symbolized the enemy of bourgeois norms and the chaotic force that brought about the 1,000-year period that was long called (albeit spuriously so) the "Dark Ages." But Vasari's account was only a partial telling of classicism's demise. By the late 4th century, the Roman Empire was, in fact, rife with corruption and blighted by famine. In taking Rome city, the Goths had revealed an outside regime to be already weak at its center.

Nevertheless, Vasari's use of "Gothic" stuck, and he imaginatively deployed it as a descriptor for the heavily ornamental aesthetic that prevailed just prior to his Renaissance time. Think: gargoyles and vaulted cathedral ceilings; the earthly remains of saints encased in glass-and-metal reliquaries; shards of sunlight filtered through the stained glass, animating the stone walls like LED club lighting. Gothic architecture wasn't about *reason*; it was about mysticism and the unknown. It was about the power of nature and of chaos.



that are the complicit factory owners and lobbyists—hidden behind smiles, suits and luxury sedans—than by creating monsters of your own? The occultism, violence and intoxication of horrorcore merely mirror the truth hidden by a delusional world.

In the 2010's, Three Six Mafia member Gangsta Boo would perform at GHE20GOTH1K, the NYC party, founded by DJ Venus X and fashion designer Shayne Oliver, which revolutionized the city's underground by projecting its street culture through a gothic lens. In their hands, hood fashionistas, queer nightlife denizens and the artist-precariat found common refuge in the city's still-extant industrial spaces; a roving dark commons, full of human complexity and free from the neoliberal demand to be, in all facets of life, a clean, coherent, visible "brand." In turn, GHE20GOTH1K (as well as NYC's ur-cold wave party, Wierd) spawned numerous cliques and even entire scenes, with their barbarous affront to the FitBit WeWork aesthetics bleeding out into mainstream culture.

There is an intelligence to the gothic that becomes particularly resonant in times like the present: times when capital is at war against nature, and information serves capital above all. In this New Rome, the gothic's theatrical, morbid romanticism is less fantastical than civilization's own delusions of endless growth. The gothic embraces the moribund because the planet is moribund; the gothic espouses the romantic, the magical, the chaotic, because the alternative—the reflexive, computational panopticon of quantified-everything—is destroying us. The New Gothic knows that *something* is wrong and shows it. In this space outside, something darkly beautiful emerges, shared whether alone or together. **K**

