A Goth Reflection: Self-Fashioning and Popular Culture

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Justyna Kociatkiewicz, who showed me the power of scholarly accomplishment and, time after time, affirmed my faith in the relevance of curiosity and exploration.

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By writing this book I have learned a lot about research, creation, and their technicalities. However, what was most precious, and occasionally dumbfounding, about that process was that, wherever it was taking me, I experienced kindness, support, and understanding. I can hardly imagine a possibility for returning all the good energy that has found its way into this project. Still, in a humble effort to do so, I am offering my heartfelt thanks to: Dr. Patrycja Poniatowska, who selflessly devoted endless hours to nurture this book into being, and shared an inexhaustible supply of delicious food with its author; Prof. Tomasz Sikora, for his professional insight and inspiring feedback; the Authorities of the Institute of English Studies at the University of Wrocław, as well as everyone at the Department of American Literature and Culture, for their patience and understanding when dealing with my tight schedules – especially Prof. Mariusz Marszalski, for his supportive attitude to my time management and for running our department meetings which regularly boosted my creativity; Prof. Dominika Ferens, Prof. Zofia Kolbuszewska, and Dr. hab. Katarzyna Nowak-McNeice, for their unswaying enthusiasm for this project, discussions, and invaluable practical guidance; Prof. Ewa Kębłowska-Ławniczak, for precious academic advice; Dr. hab. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak, for generosity in sharing her knowledge and experience; Dr. Tomasz Z. Majkowski, for the ongoing pop-cultural brainstorm which he has been willing to co-create with me for years, and for the countless occasions when he did not hesitate to offer help; Dr. Katarzyna Wasylak, for her brilliant comments on *Wet Moon*; all the wonderfully creative and kind Game Studies people whom I have met so far; Elżbieta Cesarska and Małgorzata Szawerna, for their empathy in the face of my poor administrative and organizational skills; everyone at Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, for their part in the materialization of this book; everyone who has ever contributed to my RPG experience; my family, who have proved their heroism by living for four years in the immediate proximity of someone writing a book – in particular: my husband, Michał, and my son, Wojtek, for bearing with me daily; my mother, Saturnina, who literally guided us all through that challenging experience; my father, Jan, for believing in me; and, finally, our dogs, Jotun and Luka, for keeping the werewolf spirit alive and dragging me away from the computer and into the wild.

INTRODUCTION

A Goth Reflection

Catherine Spooner's 2006 *Contemporary Gothic* starts with her contemplation of a set of postcards advertised as "Gothic" and offering a sufficient cross section of periods and styles to provoke the author's reflection on the eclecticism, connectivity, and commercial impact of that notion in the 21st-century culture (7–8). In the course of her progress through such diverse realms as literature, cinema, fashion, sculpture, music, animation or toy-making, Spooner devotes a noticeable part of her attention to the development, conceptualizations and further media- and pop-culture-based appropriations of the Goth subculture as a prominent facet of the Gothic aesthetics in the last decades and at the turn of the millennium. Brought up in that context, the movement becomes not only a relatively recent product of the much longer and broader tradition but also a relevant node in the network of Gothic phenomena, actively contributing to the convention's resonance with changing and intermingling socio-cultural discourses. Moreover, partly due to the impressive flexibility of the Gothic convention that, as repeatedly demonstrated by Spooner, has been keeping it up to date with a variety of cultural needs and demands since the 18th century, the Goth/ic distinction can be fluid and not always easy to sustain.

Simultaneously, however, the Goth movement has established its stand-alone position through a set of characteristics – mostly connected with body image, sexuality, cultural literacies, and intertextual self-awareness – that both contribute to the Gothic convention and interact with other cultural phenomena. The connectivity and visibility of Goth tropes in cultural contexts not overtly related to the Gothic may be symptomatic of other processes apart from the boom of the "dark" aesthetic observed by, among others, Spooner or Alexandra Warwick in "Feeling Gothicky?" since the 1990s. Spooner's cross-sectional perspective presented in *Contemporary Gothic* effectively paves the way for confronting the significance of the Goth exposure to various media of popular culture. Her subsequent book, *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (2017) continues to explore the cultural

consequences of the growingly distant departures of the Gothic from its conceptual core as emergent in the academic tradition of Gothic studies.

Spooner's "semiotic and discursive analysis of texts and cultural artefacts," which aims to "sho[w] how images of Goth circulate in popular culture and how meanings accrue to them" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 18), demarcates, to a large extent, my own perspective on the subculture. However, while her discussion revolves around the significance of Goth semiosis for the Gothic convention (18), my interest focuses on a consideration of the Goth as a more independent cultural sign in the dynamic and unpredictable environment of popular culture. In that respect, my project zooms in on just one stage of Spooner's reasoning in *Post-Millenial Gothic*, namely, her claim that the growingly affirmative media depictions of Goths shift their cultural signification from sinister outsiders to icons of "toleran[ce], creativ[ity], self-expressi[on], articula[cy]" and communality (21). Such a transformation, combined with the simultaneous popularization of subcultural figures is relevant in Spooner's broader discussion of what she defines as the 21st-century popularization of "celebratory" (22) or "happy" Gothic indicated in her book's title. Understandably, the Gothic convention remains a relevant background context in my own analysis, which, however, focuses rather on the consequences of the Goth figure's semiotic emancipation.

Specifically, due to their spectacular and cross-sectional employment of such diverse identity-forming factors as physicality, socialization, or fiction, I see Goth tropes as culturally productive icons of self-fashioning. Turning to Mike Featherstone's "aesthetization of everyday life" (Featherstone in Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 29) and Pierre Bourdieu's category of "taste" (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 30; Bourdieu, *Distinction* 5–6), Spooner stresses "the increasing prominence of Goth subculture as a lifestyle choice in Western culture" (32) and as an "informing context" for the consumption of the Gothic aesthetic (32). Tracking down its examples in such immediately consumption-oriented texts as commercials, design, and British "lifestyle television" (31), she argues for the Gothic to "push bourgeois ideologies of individual expression and self-improvement to their limits, simultaneously confirming these ideologies while throwing their assumptions into sharp relief" (32). Thus, the popularization of both the Gothic and the Goth as consumables challenges the commercialization of individualism on a conceptual level, by "produc[ing] moments of difficulty or discomfort within the seamless manufacture of lifestyle, complicating easy judgments in the production and transmission of taste" (48). Simultaneously, Spooner's analysis suggests that Goth tropes function also as icons of overdrawn self-styling, especially in gender-specific "Goth comedy." As she shows, men's investments in both subcultural and conventionally feminine modifications of appearance requiring make up and fancy clothes become, in such shows, sources of self-aware humor when "male Goths are demystified, their lofty poses brought down to earth. They are transformed from an object of fear to an object of laughter, located in an uneasy space between ridicule and heroism" (145–146). Such metaconsciousness,

observable also in other dimensions of the Goth presence in the media – from the subculture's self-presentations to its fictionalizations – may offer space for critical insights not only into the commercialization of identity projects, but also into the very strategies of carrying them out.

My intention in this book is, therefore, to argue for a critical capacity of Goth tropes to evoke questions about identity projects involving interactions between audiences and texts of culture. Philosophies of self-fashioning offer an accurate framework for such an analysis, as they are able to contain a whole spectrum of factors affecting both the identities of fictionalized Goth figures and, potentially, consumers of popular culture. Among such factors are: identity-shaping potential of physicality, from appearance to somatic or performative practices; negotiation of identity following the mainstream–margin rhetoric; individual positioning within a minority group, cultural niche or discourse community; and identity-building potential of fiction, whether generated by a personal narrative or imagery coming from texts of culture.

Originally, I had intended for this book to approximate, via the study of the Goth as a spectacular conceptualization of self-styling, a more general dynamics between self-fashioning concepts and popular culture, with a special emphasis on its growingly anticipated and prominent participatory dimensions. However, I soon realized that an exploration of that subject would become a thematic quadruple-decker requiring a synchronized analysis of the theories of self-fashioning, their applicability to the Goth phenomenon, the incorporation of Goth self-fashioning strategies into the semiotic, narrative and aesthetic repositories of popular culture, and, finally, the possible broader applications of the self-fashioning logic in the contemporary media-based culture. Each of those four themes is broad and complex enough to inspire at least one separate volume. That is why I have eventually decided to design this book as an insight into the bonds between the first three areas, relatively easy to integrate around self-fashioning as a theoretical framework of the analysis, a set of specific practices, and finally a motif disseminated throughout texts of culture. The fourth area, focused on the potential further effects of such dissemination, both departs from the immediate Goth-related subject matter and calls for additional critical perspectives to address the possible dynamics between the continuously transforming factor of audience activity and self-fashioning. Thus, while those issues are probed as the prospective directions of further research in the Conclusion, the gist of the discussion presented hereby remains limited to Goth self-fashioning and its more immediate cultural impact.

The popularity of Goth figures and attributes in the first two decades of the 21st century ranges from texts of culture embracing the "dark" aesthetics – as illustrated, among others, by the growing visibility of "dark romance" or "dark erotica" shelves in bookshops – to singular references in narratives otherwise gravitating toward other conventions. Examples of the latter are Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008) and its most recognizable film adaptation by David Fincher

(2011) featuring a Gothicized Rooney Mara as Lisbeth Salander; or Tom Kapinos's TV show *Californication* (2007–2014), where Madeleine Martin plays Hank Moody's angsty daughter, Rebecca. Goth icons, conventionally associated first of all with young adults, have also impacted the realm of children's culture. Its involvement with Gothic themes can be multilayered and challenging, as exemplified by Chris Riddell's *Goth Girl* book series (2013–2017), whose protagonist is described by Josh Lacey as "ha[ving] a touch of Siouxsie Sioux," while the narratives themselves verge rather toward literary Gothic intertextuality (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 107–108). It may also be more superficial yet still relying on intertextual and meta-narrative humor, as in the case of Monster High (2010, ongoing) – a transmedial hit from Mattel.[1] Apart from the dolls, which remain its core product, the franchise has expanded onto cartoons, novels, a movie, music records, and a whole lot of merchandise.[2] The success of Monster High seems to have reinforced a wave of Goth(ic) toy designs, for instance Chi Chi Love Vampire from Simba – a stuffed doggie wearing a Goth-style dress and provided with a pink, coffin-shaped carrier bag – or stationery decorations, for instance The Creepers Family notebook line by Hamelin (2011).[3]

Apart from such mass-produced items, also a more niche-oriented market of toys targeted at grown-ups has been developing and combining commercial activity with subversive aesthetics. The Living Dead Dolls, discussed by Spooner as a successful example of such a fusion (*Contemporary Gothic* 146–148), has remained a flourishing business throughout its presence on the market since 1998. Similar brands relying on the Gothicization of trademark attributes of childhood are, among others, Skelanimals – "adorable little animals who have met an untimely end – mostly due to their own reckless and ill-advised behavior" (Skelanimals, "Information"); or Teddy Scares: plushies mysteriously transformed once they had been thrown out by their child owners (Teddy, "Information").

The Goth, in the role of both an aesthetic framework for marketable goods and a target community of their consumers, also attracts critical attention directed at cultural conceptualizations of youth subcultures and their relation with commercializing practices. For example, researchers interested in Goth culture vary in their readings of Emily the Strange – a character designed to advertise a variety of products – whom Carol Siegel perceives as a Goth caricature disconnected from the subcultural movement (11). Lauren D. Goodlad and Michael Bibby, on the other hand, interpret Emily as a legitimate element of the Goth convention, reflecting its economic and cultural flexibility (31–32). For Spooner, Emily is, first and foremost, an example of Goth visual and emotional semiotics (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 49, 112).

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[1] Preceded by the Bratz doll series from MGA Entertainment (2001–), engaged in a series of court trials against Mattel.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the Monster High franchise see Spooner's *Post-Millennial Gothic* (103, 107–108).

[3] This list partly overlaps with and is expanded by Spooner's discussion of various texts and products employing Goth figures in *Post-Millennial Gothic*.

The Californian company Hot Topic, specialized in "subcultural" and "geeky" designs of clothes and accessories, in turn, appears in various texts of culture as an icon of "safe" rebellion reduced to fashion choices, as in Aurelio Voltaire's *What Is Goth?* (70). The label's appropriation as a symbol of "fake" and superficial fascination with the cultural underground has become sufficiently characteristic in American culture to have received a satirical comment in *South Park*. In episode 14 of season 12, "The Ungroundable," the "genuine" Goths need to destroy the store to stop a "vampire kid" craze from spreading.

The above examples reflect criticism against those commercial employments of the Goth that can easily be read as aimed specifically at and possibly feeding on the identity construction of teenage consumers. Simultaneously, however, the subculture itself has become a noticeable trope in the realm of more generalized commercials. Goth figures have advertised cosmetics, cars, snacks and beverages, electronic equipment, insurance policies and service companies.[4] In 2014, a commercial of a German maintenance store Hornbach, in which a rejected "dark" teenager's father redecorates their house to give her emotional support, provoked discussion among YouTube users and received several press mentions (for instance Rosenfeld) as an especially insightful and thought-provoking take on the subcultural theme ("Hornbach"). In most cases, though, the way of handling the Goth trope in advertising relies on its immediate picturesqueness and danger-, deviation- or angst-related stereotypes that the commercials reinforce, but also challenge. Tracking down the cultural emergence of a "happy Goth" icon (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 33), Spooner observes that "all the Goths in this new [21st-century] breed of ads are smiling" (32) – a characteristic which obviously gains narrative relevance when juxtaposed with the more conventional images of the subculture.

The above inevitably selective survey of various Goth-inspired appearances, in addition to the multiplicity of their presentations in music, fiction and broadly understood media narratives, is not intended as a step toward a comprehensive topology of the subculture's appropriations. It does, however, confirm the presence of multiple cultural circumstances in which Goth icons both influence and are influenced by surprisingly diverse socio-cultural phenomena and processes. Thus, it is curiosity about the possible discursive effects and conceptual products of such interactions that has become a major impulse for the creation of this book. The question about the possible reasons for the overall rise of the Gothic convention's popularity and visibility around the millennial turn and in the first decades of the 21st century keeps attracting scholarly attention and has so far received a number of answers. Steven Bruhm, for instance, perceives it as an inheritance of Freudian psychoanalysis and the tension it introduced into the previously idealized and harmonious concepts of family and human self (264, 267–268). Also Warwick follows the psychoanalytical

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[4] A compilation of Goth-themed commercials up to 2012 can be found, among others, in Miranda Yardley's "Goth TV 2: Commercial Break."

track to claim that the Freudian impact on Western culture has exceeded the limits of such a dismantling factor by generating an actual demand for "trauma" perceived as a welcome or even necessary identity fulfillment (11–12). Taking into consideration Lacanian thought, in turn, Gary Farnell argues for a close affinity between the Gothic convention and philosophical premises of postmodernism built around the impossibility of interacting with reality isolated from human cognition by the symbolic system of language. According to Farnell's "Theorizing the Gothic for the Twenty-First Century," the Gothic is a convention dealing with approaches to and manifestations of the unspeakable, inexpressible Real through the dynamics of sublimation and abjection. Thus, Gothic aesthetics, though dating back to the 18th century, seems strikingly well equipped to resonate with contemporary preoccupations.

Another phenomenon potentially contributing to a Gothicization of the present is the observable regularity with which the convention escalates at the turn of the century, or, on the most recent occasion, the millennium (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 21–22). The prominence of fear and anxiety as a subject of both philosophical and sociological research on the Western culture of the late 20th and early 21st century seems to confirm its susceptibility to various forms of Gothic aesthetics. Authors such as Brian Massumi, Barry Glassner, Jason Colavito, or Frank Furedi have been exploring the constructions and appropriations of fear in the most contemporary discourses and the ways they reify otherness, sustain low-level sense of risk, or preach lack of secure life zones. Moreover, as the socio-cultural environment shaped by such factors is frequently assumed to have a special effect on young people and new generations, it is not surprising that motifs connected with the Goth subculture – commonly, while not necessarily correctly, identified as a youth movement – have received some spotlight in media-based entertainment.

The Goth cultural visibility is confirmed by Spooner's claim that "characteristically Gothic narrative patterns [have been] working themselves free of the texts in which we are most accustomed to recognize them and replicating themselves across culture" (*Contemporary Gothic* 21). Goth figures, defined to a large extent by their special relationships with media and texts of culture that provide material for their self-fashioning practices, are undergoing a similar emancipation. The subcultural aura of Goth characters and attributes may bring to mind first of all individualistic agency and resistance commonly ascribed to self-fashioning, and especially inspirational for the Goth iconography of the 1990s. Simultaneously, the Goth affinity with broadly understood texts of culture implies complex practices of media consumption and appropriation in identity projects – a phenomenon characteristic of the environment which I tentatively call reflective of a post-participatory culture paradigm.

Ricardo Basbaum employs the term "post-participatory" to describe the cultural environment generated by the "'participatory condition' of contemporary society" which he connects with the "de-centr[alization of] the artistic gesture and add[ition of] a new role into the art system or circuit: that of the active participator, a figure of otherness who would not only become more and more relevant for art processes but

would also decisively influence the shift from critical to curatorial practices at the end of the twentieth century" (91). As one of the main consequences of this development he indicates the recognition of practices aimed at predesigning and shaping such a participatory audience – "an expected spectator production process" – as an important part of artistic activity (93). Basbaum underlines the imperative for such creative efforts to counterweigh the inevitable factors of art commercialization (93–94), "instrumentalisation, and other forms of manipulative appropriation" (95).

Basbaum's essay, entitled "Post-Participatory Participation," refers to the processes observable, first and foremost, in contemporary conceptual art and partly localized in the specific socio-cultural reality of 1990s' Brazil. My own employment of the expression "post-participatory culture" is, in turn, intended to bridge his characterization of factors influencing the late-20th-century creativity with the pop-culture-centered notions of "participatory" and "convergence culture" as popularized by Henry Jenkins. Both terms are aimed at giving prominence to active media audience practices (Jenkins, *Convergence* 3). The latter notion additionally highlights the importance of networking and transmediality for such processes: "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2). "Convergence," therefore, "does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others" (3).

The claim merely anticipated by this book – and introduced as the upcoming next step in my exploration of interactions between popular culture and self-fashioning – is that the ongoing reconsiderations and negotiations of the text's status within the author–text–audience triangle bring the growing prominence and complexity of texts' employment in identity-formation processes responsive to self-fashioning strategies, as well as in debates revolving around identity politics. This phenomenon is accompanied by the growth of narrative solutions and tropes which result from the texts' meta-awareness and anticipation of their functions as resources for identity-forming practices. Examples of such practices, affecting both audiences and authors, include: premises of role-modelling and identification underlying the postulates of representation and inclusiveness within texts of culture; various employments and renderings of the mainstream–margin, conformity–rebellion, or fakery–authenticity rhetorics in self-definitions revolving around particular texts of culture or modes of text production and reception; networking and "pop cosmopolitanism" (Jenkins, *Fans* 152–172) relying on discourse communities (Swales 21–32); individual and collective policies of sensitivity and self-expression affecting aesthetic and narrative solutions; or somatic experience derived from interactions with the text.

What I, therefore, hope to achieve by adding to that network the perspective of self-fashioning is to highlight the ever-growing preoccupation with the management of identities in and around popular culture. An actual exploration of the connections

between the processes listed above, self-fashioning strategies, and the specific case study of the Goth aesthetics exceeds the manageable scope of this book. Nevertheless, it takes a preliminary step toward such a consideration by tracing the interactions between the Goth as a cultural artifact and concepts of self-fashioning. As argued more thoroughly in the Conclusion, the textual impact of Goth tropes may be perceived in terms of a cultural introspection musing upon self-fashioning as an identity paradigm and its transformations in contemporary culture.

While the connections of the Goth with self-fashioning are relatively easy to observe, and have already received some critical attention, the connections between self-fashioning and media audiences require clarification. My claim is that one – though by no means exclusive or all-embracing – way to theorize about some fan practices is to consider them in terms of a strive to optimally customize texts of culture for employment in individual or collective identity projects. However, the centralization and normalization of the presence, visibility and activity of participatory audiences in popular culture, dislocating the margin–mainstream dialectic typical of earlier media fan initiatives, has led to the growth of what could be called a paradigm of post-participatory culture in which audience involvement and identification with texts of culture is anticipated, encouraged or even provoked and monitored by producers and media platforms. Although such anticipation may prove productive, especially in terms of narrative forms and text structures, from a more socially oriented perspective it can be interpreted as an imprint of the limiting "flexible personality," defined by Brian Holmes as a model conceptualization of a citizen in the paradigm of globalized capitalism. Holmes traces the roots of "flexible personality" back to the socio-cultural rebellion of the 1960s from which it inherits "an entire set of very positive images, spontaneity, creativity, cooperativity, mobility, peer relations, appreciation of difference, openness to present experience." Still, he further argues that the legacy of those origins has been appropriated to form an "intersection of social power with intimate moral dispositions and erotic drives." What is especially important in the context of media entertainment, "[t]he configuration of the flexible personality is a new form of social control, in which culture has an important role to play. It is a distorted form of the artistic revolt against authoritarianism and standardization." The post-participatory cultural environment, therefore, grows out of a blurry grey zone between self-fashioning – whose connections with the cultural revolution started in the 1960s are confirmed, among others, in the works of Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – and "flexible personality" that, according to Holmes, effectively infiltrates Western culture.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first one I introduce a theoretical network that not only affirms the relevance of self-fashioning in the further discussion but also addresses exemplary criticism of self-fashioning philosophies. The overall idea of identity as a project to be individually designed, managed and carried out, and, therefore, perceived as a dynamic process rather than a fixed entity attracts various theoretical approaches, not all employing the actual notion of

self-fashioning. Moreover, they do not always make the effort to stay aware of or coherent with one another. This book does not seek to offer an in-depth exploration of self-fashioning as an abstract concept but rather to consider its paradigmatic potential in the realm of popular culture. That is why the theoretical chapter does not formulate a rounded definition of self-fashioning. Instead, it highlights three particular approaches to identity projects which both reflect major aspects of identity addressed by self-fashioning and resonate with the cultural impact of the Goth. The first approach, Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, is focused on the significance of the physical appearance and corporeal sensation as identity-building measures. The second approach, founded on Foucault's technologies of the self, deals mostly with mental but also physical work and self-discipline in identity-formation processes, and especially the internalization of ideas recognized as subjective truths of the self. The third approach, involving Stephen Greenblatt's actual conceptualization of self-fashioning, addresses political dimensions of identity projects understood not so much as particular socio-political representations but rather as more generic modes of managing normativity and power.

Those three perspectives revolving around physicality, individual ethics, and political potential of an identity project subsequently organize the analysis of Goth-themed texts in the remaining two parts of the book. The said logical structure is in Chapter 1 complemented by two critical contexts: biopolitical criticism of self-fashioned identity projects as insular and susceptible to mechanisms of social manipulation; and the more ethically oriented criticism of self-fashioning as an egocentric practice framed by counterproductive dependence on fear and pleasure. Thus, Part I maps out a network of conceptual tools and challenges offered by self-fashioning and shaping its further interactions with both non-fiction and fiction employing Goth identities.

Part I is followed by Interlude 1, which introduces the selection of source materials to be analyzed in Part II. The said selection includes five American texts – four official publications written by self-identified Goth authors and one unpublished Goth manifesto archived online. The interlude specifies the criteria of texts' selection, elaborating on their American origin and contexts as factors not only cementing the corpus analyzed in this book but also increasing the potential impact of the discussed processes on other participatory practices demarcated in the Conclusion.

Part II itself is composed of two chapters approaching the introduced Goth self-presentations from three self-fashioning-related angles specified in Part I. Chapter 2, dealing with the depictions of corporeal Goth practices, argues that they fluidly merge representational and experiential dimensions. It also considers Goth performativity with regard to Foucauldian technologies and refers to Deleuze's conceptualization of masochism to elaborate on the frequently highlighted overlaps between Goth and BDSM phenomena. Those theoretical concepts are used for addressing the oscillation of Goth semiosis between pleasure, pain, morbidity, and power. The subject of power is explored from two further angles in Chapter 3, which addresses the

mainstream–subculture polarity in Goth-connected discourses, as well as their mixed employment of various texts of culture in the construction of Goth identity. Both of those processes are referred to the Greenblattian strategies of negation and submission in individual self-fashioning framed by external sources of power and authority. Thus, the chapters collected in Part II co-create a spectrum of insights into the discursive takes on self-fashioning practices more and less pronounced in the non-fictional texts contributing to the overall conceptualization of the Goth in the media and collective imagination.

Interlude 2 marks the shift of the analysis from Goth self-presentations to Goth tropes in texts of culture. Goth motifs are widespread, variously related to the sub-cultural movement itself, and introduced in different forms: narrative, visual or intermedial, and paratextual ones. Therefore, the overall aim of the discussion included in Part III is to signal the extensiveness and diversity of thematic tendencies and aesthetic forms characterizing the Goth as a fiction-building material. That is why the selection of texts analyzed in the further chapters excludes those iconic for the move-ment itself to provide a survey of less direct or predictable employments of the Goth. Accordingly, the interlude briefly acknowledges several texts particularly significant for the subculture as either "insider" artifacts created by Goth authors for Goth audi-ences or artifacts embraced by the subculture as especially inspirational and close to its spirit. Subsequently, it moves to presenting three conceptual nodes organizing the chapters included in Part III – narrative and aesthetic employments of Goth somaes-thetics and appearance; the internal work connected with identity formation of teen characters in texts aimed at the young adult audience; and the mainstream–under-ground polarity as a carrier of aesthetized resistance in a series of role-playing games (RPGs) that can be seen as a Goth-themed generational artifact.

In Part III, the last three chapters of the book contain an analysis of fictional material, while the Conclusion brings all the stages of reasoning together and points to its further significance in the planned continuation of this research project. Chap-ter 4 considers four exemplary depictions of corporeal self-styling in which Goth aesthetics shifts from a strongly specific attribute of politicized underground identity to a less determinate marker of self-fashioning efforts whose effectiveness is limited by, among others, corporeality itself, to a cluster of stereotypes, to an index of mon-strosity, seemingly disconnected from its subcultural origin yet residually carrying some among its meanings outside their original context. In Chapter 5, Goth tropes active in three narratives of growing up become tools enabling ethical considerations of self-fashioning and especially its implications for the subject's interactions with others and society in general. Chapter 6, finally, tracks down the appropriation, ro-manticization, and eventual dispersal of the aura of subcultural resistance attached to Goth references in a series of RPGs originally created in the 1990s yet rebooted in the 2000s. Thus, it paves the way for a reflection on the impact of the recent decades' changes in the political dynamics of popular culture on self-fashioning, and possibly the other way around.

The Conclusion continues that subject in terms of the changing political and cultural functions of self-expression with the use of media and texts of culture. Intersectionally affected in the last decades by processes contributing to the rise of "flexible personality," but also the growth of participatory culture, self-expression has been shifting from an emancipatory individual practice to a precondition anticipated by media logic in commercial as well as discursive dimensions. In light of that development, the insight into the Goth tropes' self-reflective attachment to particular self-fashioning strategies may prove helpful as a step toward a broader consideration of self-fashioning as a tool for understanding the "post-participatory" culture.

PART I

SELF-FASHIONING AND THEORY

CHAPTER 1

Conceptualizations of Self-Fashioning

The first aim of this chapter is to sketch a network of theoretical perspectives co-creating a conceptualization of self-fashioning helpful in the further exploration of Goth tropes. The second aim is to consider that conceptualization in reference to selected critical contexts which problematize political and ethical aspects of self-fashioning-oriented philosophies. Thus, a cross-sectional context will be established in which Goth iconography will further be interpreted as a cultural phenomenon capable of addressing controversies around self-fashioning and approximating the broader issue of its interactions with popular culture.

The selection of self-fashioning concepts especially well-suited for the discussion of Goth imprints on texts of culture comprises three interconnected dimensions. The first one, focused on modeling physical appearance and corporeal experience, is approached through Shusterman's representational and experiential somaesthetics. The second dimension, dealing with the internal work and responsibility implicated by an individually undertaken identity project, is guided by Foucauldian technologies of the self, as well as the concepts of a true self and self-awareness signaled by Greenblatt (and in Chapter 5 complemented by Charles Taylor's ethics of authenticity). The third highlighted dimension of self-fashioning is political – specifically, it involves Greenblattian strategies of submission and negation in managing power relations between the individual identity and normative pressures.

Despite its generalized and theoretical character, this survey of ideas seems relatable to many aspects of 21st-century culture. It is also my focus on the relevance of self-fashioning in the context of popular culture rather than contemporary philosophy that requires an affirmation of the term's interdisciplinary character. Therefore, this chapter opens by sketching a conceptualization of self-fashioning – a node of concepts rather than one, uniform definition – that matches the needs of an analysis of narrative tropes and icons that, in turn, feed on ideas, corporeal practices, and socio-political dynamics affecting identity projects associated with the Goth sub-

culture. Such cross-sectionality of the investigated cultural phenomenon coincides with the rather extensive scope of contexts applicable to the notion of self-fashioning. That is why I start by situating the latter both in the theoretical network adapted to the demands of this exploration and in a broader narrative of Western culture's conceptual crisis. The key authors whose work guides the positioning of self-fashioning on a continuum between philosophy and texts of culture are Greenblatt and Foucault – both exploring the issues of identity construction in terms of philosophical traditions, textual practice and political dynamics of power relations. Next to the trajectory linking philosophy, politics and culture, another continuum framing this discussion is demarcated by fixedness versus fluidity and thus addressing the relevance of labels, icons and stereotypes. Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of immanence, rhizome and nomadism are added to the picture. Those notions, along with Foucauldian "technologies of the self," prove useful also in handling the third major axis guiding this exploration of Goth iconography, namely, one linking physicality and abstraction in identity projects. This chapter's introduction of the tools intended to blow up hierarchical structures paves the way for Foucault's and Deleuze's philosophical takes on masochism – both focused on engaging corporeality and imagination in a dynamics exorcising normative identity patterns.

Conceptual agendas of the remaining two authors prominent in this chapter and the subsequent discussion, namely, Shusterman and Taylor, clearly stand apart from constructivist investments of thinkers such as Foucault or Deleuze and Guattari. As reflected in this chapter, both the author of somaesthetics and the author of the ethics of authenticity happen to direct active criticism against the Foucauldian view of the self. Therefore, their inclusion in the basic theoretical toolbox for this analysis may seem to disrupt its theoretical coherence. Still, such disruption is welcome because one of my driving goals is to signal and map out the multidirectedness of the identity project as an idea, of the Goth tropes' cultural impact, and of the mutual connections between self-fashioning and texts of culture. Shusterman's somaesthetics offers a cross-sectional approach to the body in self-fashioning and distinguishes between its representational and experiential aspects. By doing so, it not only helps to nuance Goth constructions but also to connect them to broader cultural employments of the body in identity formation. Finally, it establishes a specific improvement-oriented model of such employment, which some Goth tropes come to challenge. Taylor's views, rooted in Christian ethics, enable, in turn, a confrontation with nihilism sometimes ascribed to self-fashioning, and, moreover, mitigate the postulates of more radical self-fashioning ethics in a consideration of texts constructed and functioning as young adult fiction. All in all, the ways in which the inclusion of Shusterman and Taylor in the theoretical background of this book expands and diversifies the range of discursive applications of self-fashioning and its Goth realizations seems to me worth risking the conceptual dissonance it may imply.

As has already been emphasized, self-fashioning is a complex and fuzzy notion, especially when it merges with other terms such as self-styling, technologies of the

self, nomadic subject or somaesthetics. Thus, instead of striving for an all-embracing definition of the concept, I elaborate on those of its aspects that seem most relevant for exploring the sphere of interactions between the overall idea of the identity project and texts of culture, which remain the final destination of the presented analysis. That is why its ultimate frame is not so much the question of how such texts and the semiotic networks they create may function in individual or collective self-fashioning, but rather the question of how the fact that textuality, narrative and fictionality are prominent factors in self-fashioning may affect texts of culture.

Somaesthetics

The following conceptualization of self-fashioning involves philosophical and historical background, specific practices, the positioning of identity projects in the context of culturally conditioned power relations, and a generalized interpretation of the notion's political significance. Further analysis will demonstrate the relevance of all those aspects for the exploration of Goth tropes, yet such an investigation would hardly be complete without the recognition of the visual factor constituting one of the basic components of Goth self-fashioning. Foucault does focus on the "aesthetics of existence" (Gros 530) – an idea traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche and further to ancient philosophy. Still, due to its links with the creative effort of the subject (Milchman and Rosenberg 57), self-fashioning can be seen as "artisanal rather than 'artistic'" (Gros 531). A similar perspective is adopted by Shusterman in his cross-sectional theory of somaesthetics. He, however, comes up with a separate category of representational somaesthetics to deal with the matter of physical appearance.

Shusterman defines the overall concept of somaesthetics "as concerned with the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning" (*Body* 1). The aesthetic factor is complex, as it "has the dual role of emphasizing the soma's perceptual role (whose embodied intentionality contradicts the body–mind dichotomy) and its aesthetic uses both in stylizing one's self and in appreciating the aesthetic qualities of other selves and things" (*Body* 1–2). Shusterman's study is relevant in this chapter not only due to its declared subject matter of somaesthetics, but also its methodological background. Acknowledging Foucault's controversial trailblazing research (*Body* 15), Shusterman scrutinizes the French philosopher's thought in terms of his own theoretical postulates about somaesthetics (*Body* 19). The latter, however, adopting "a clear pragmatic orientation – something that the individual can directly translate into a discipline of improved somatic practice" (*Body* 22–23), offer rather limited acknowledgment of the cultural and semiotic dimension of self-fashioning that is crucial for this book.

Foucault is appreciated for his "doubly bold initiative: to renew the ancient idea of philosophy as a special way of life and to insist on its distinctly somatic and aes-

thetic expression" (Shusterman, *Body* 15), as well as the way his work demonstrates the political prominence of the somatic sphere (21–22). Simultaneously, however, Shusterman motivates his criticism of Foucault with an intention of expanding the postulates of self-fashioning beyond what he sees as limited, individualized apotheosis of substance abuse and BDSM culture resulting from Foucault's personal struggles (9, 30). The proponent of somaesthetics depicts the said preoccupation with sadomasochism (hereinafter referred to as S/M) as counterproductive in light of the declared liberatory character of Foucault's philosophy: "Foucault's S/M program deserves our careful critical attention not so much as a perverse transgression of our culture's values but as an explicit, intensified expression of deeply problematic tendencies that historically subtend those values and practices they generate" (Shusterman, *Body* 45). Two among such "tendencies" are an excessive focus on "superficial, artificial self-posturing" (46) and insufficient appreciation of the human body's sophisticated sensory awareness (10). The focus of this chapter hardly allows discursive space for a more elaborate polemics with Shusterman's overall arguments supporting the above claims, yet the discrepancy between the perspectives of both philosophers requires a commentary in order to minimize the risk of contradiction within the presented conceptualization of self-fashioning.

Two factors that position Shusterman's reading of Foucault at a margin rather than the center of this conceptualization are the already mentioned "pragmatic orientation" of somaesthetics and the related issue of excessive, in my view, attention that the author of the somaesthetic discipline attaches to Foucault's personal sphere. Shusterman's focus on the immediate psycho-physical applications of self-fashioning may explain his limited recognition of the conceptual complexity of S/M in the cultural and semiotic dimension. He interprets S/M as an "eroticizing affirmation of painful enslavement" (*Body* 33) expressed through "old-fashioned images of discipline" and devoted to "a narrowly masculinist sexuality focused on violence" in which "the polyvalent power of eros is reduced to an erotics of dominational power that seems to leave no place for the somatics of loving tenderness that surely plays […] a worthy role in erotic culture of both East and West" (34). As demonstrated throughout this book, such a vision of S/M hardly acknowledges its semiotic potential traceable in Goth tropes.[6]

The innovative character of somaesthetics as a discipline focused on personal practice, not sheer theorization of self-fashioning (Shusterman, *Body* 29), may explain the way Shusterman turns to biographical facts and personal testimonies of

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[6] Siegel, for instance, poses Goth inspirations with S/M aesthetics in a rebellious opposition to the ideal of "emotional intimacy" (3–4, 9, 71–72) to which the "loving tenderness" mentioned by Shusterman is likely to subscribe. Simultaneously, she argues for an alternative employment of S/M attributes in the punk subculture, where the factors of violence and forceful dominance are, indeed, crucial (52). While Siegel's exploration of Goth connections to S/M is further challenged and criticized (Spooner, "Goth Culture" 354, 357), it remains a valid confirmation of the functional flexibility of S/M that evades fixed reading.

Foucault, which is the second problematic aspect of his critique. The attention devoted by Shusterman to Foucault's personal practices privileges analysis of specific, contextualized samples of self-fashioning over the structural and theoretical framework of the Foucauldian philosophy of identity. As it is the latter that remains more significant for my own conceptualization of self-fashioning, which is also preoccupied with textual mediations rather than immediate practice, Shusterman's criticism seems to be of limited relevance for the survey presented in this chapter. Simultaneously, the acknowledgment of a background connection between his somaesthetic proposition and Foucault's work seems sufficient for a safe incorporation of both authors into this discussion.

The most important contribution of somaesthetics to the presented conceptual scope of self-fashioning is connected with its "representational" aspect, as it addresses the issue of external appearance, which plays a vital role in the Goth iconography. The functioning of the said category in the somaesthetic framework is influenced by the moral and political controversy surrounding the subject of physical presentability as an investment. Shusterman joins the frequently voiced criticism of the disproportionate aesthetic interest in physicality, generating artificial, oppressive standards profitable for the capitalist economy (*Body* 6). He acknowledges the gravity of such problems as the resultant objectification and "standardiz[ation]" (28) of human corporeality that, according to the Frankfurt School critics, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, fuel fascism (Shusterman, *Body* 27–28). Not addressing the anti-fascist potential of Foucault's self-fashioning, Shusterman introduces "the representational/experiential distinction […] useful in defending somaesthetics from charges that neglect its interior, experienced depth" (28). Thus, he counters the suggested prevalence of superficial interest in human physicality (26) with a call for an elaboration of "experiential" somaesthetics. While underappreciated or altogether ignored, it offers potential mitigation of the negative aspects of the preoccupation with appearance because it "clearly refuses to exteriorize the body as an alienated thing distinct from the active spirit of human experience" (28). From that perspective, the representational category does not seem to develop any productive aspects on its own, and remains a background against which the value of its experiential counterpart is best revealed.

However, the said division forms a spectrum, not a binary opposition: "most somaesthetic practices have both representational and experiential dimensions (and rewards), because there is a basic complementarity between representation and experience, outer and inner. How we look influences how we feel and vice versa" (Shusterman, *Body* 26). The immediate experiential factor in the said relation is largely outside the scope of this book, unless textualized in the selected source materials. Still, its bidirectional link with physical appearance, whether as its cause or effect, proves important for various depictions of Goth tropes. Moreover, even though Shusterman disapproves of what he sees as exaggerated cultural preoccupation with individual looks, he does not entirely erase that aspect of identity from the scope of productive self-fashioning. He defends the frequently challenged intersubjective

potential of investments in physical appearance by claiming that while it "may turn into the narcissism of pleasing others simply to please one's pride of self […] such distorting temptations of pride are present in even the most antihedonistic, body-scorning ethical forms" (*Body* 41). Finally, thanks to the open channel between the internal and external aspects of self-fashioning,[7] representational aesthetics in a proper somaesthetic context can be seen as partial in "the artful reshaping of our somatic form and functioning, not simply to make us stronger and more perceptive for our own sensual satisfaction but also to render us more sensitive to the needs of others and more capable of responding to them with effectively willed action" (*Body* 43). The quoted excerpt comes from a broader discussion of relations between aesthetics and ethics in Shusterman's somaesthetic project rather than an explicit commentary on the issue of external appearance. Still, it forms a discursive connection between self-fashioning and the ideal of empathetic sensitivity – a combination of unquestionable importance in Goth iconography. Thus, despite methodological and theoretical discrepancies between somaesthetics and the Foucauldian perspective dominant in this book, Shusterman's handling of the factor of external appearance offers a useful input into the presented analysis. Simultaneously, however, it is Foucault's technologies of the self that add to the potential range of roles performed by both physicality and reception of texts in self-fashioning.

Technologies of the Self

Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg depict the Foucauldian approach to self-fashioning as a strategy of counteracting the aftermath of the Nietzschean "death of God," and the subsequent "death of man" (46, 51) understood as a "historically contingent form of the subject" (46). Foucault's own work investigates the subject's moral self-definition (54) and its connections with power/knowledge (55). However, Milchman and Rosenberg highlight the significance of a subtle conceptual shift in his approach to the issue, reflected by the notion of "subjectivation":

> While *assujettissement* [translated, among others, as subjectification] pertains to how one is produced as a subject through the exercise of power/knowledge, including the modalities of resistance through which that exercise can be modified or attenuated, *subjectivation* pertains to the relation of the individual to him/herself; to the multiple ways in which a self can be constructed on the basis of what one takes to be the truth. (55)

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[7] It is clear at this point that despite incorporating Foucault's work into the scope of somaesthetics, Shusterman does not embrace the "ethics of immanence" in the Foucauldian or Deleuzean understanding. Thus, his own discourse employs a dialectics of surface and depth, or exterior and interior, much as he counts the erasure of the body–mind (or spirit) polarity among the major goals of somaesthetics (*Body* ix, xii, 1).

The localization of the said "truth" proves to be crucial for the interpretation of technologies of the self as an answer to the Nietzschean crisis of metaphysics for which the 20th-century Western culture was not ready (51). What is uprooted as a consequence of that development is the culturally dominant line of subjectivation relying on the religious paradigm. The traditional identity model, undermined by the "death of God," "entails a renunciation of self" and "leads to a quest to *discover* one's true self" (56), established through the "truth" located in "the law, the moral code, the Book or the Text" (55) and ascribed "authority […] purportedly beyond question" (56).

The subjectivation inspired by Foucault's exploration of Greek and Roman approaches to identity derives "truth […] from the subject's own practices of freedom, from a choice" and requires an individual generation of selfhood (Milchman and Rosenberg 56). Thus, Milchman and Rosenberg picture Foucauldian self-fashioning as an answer to the post-Nietzschean challenge faced by metaphysics and a possible remedy to the already mentioned metaphysical sentiment. The specific technologies of the self engaged in the process, and relevant for the conceptualization of self-fashioning in this book due to their connectivity with both text and body, are embedded in a broader idea of the "care of self" (*epimeleia heautou*). Foucault perceives it as central to the Mediterranean cultural legacy (*Hermeneutics* 8) and argues for the impact of "care of self" on the entirety of the Western philosophy up to the 20th century throughout the series of lectures collected in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (9–13). He characterizes the "care of self" as affecting the individual's interactions with other people and the environment, forming individual perception and self-awareness, and offering a range of specific techniques for modeling and reshaping the individual identity (10–11).

Two such techniques, *meletē* and *gumnazein*, seem especially worth highlighting in the context of self-fashioning as an interpretative framework for the iconization of Goth aesthetics. Foucault locates the basic difference between them in that "*gumnazein* generally designates more a sort of test 'in real life,' a way of confronting the thing, as you confront an adversary, in order to find out if you can resist him or be the stronger, whereas the *meletan* [verb form] is a sort of mental exercise, rather, an exercise 'in thought'" (*Hermeneutics* 356). However, he simultaneously underlines the closeness and correlation of both terms as "means to practice and train" (84, see also 356, 425–426) various aspects of identity, eventually brought together in the emergent transformed subject. In my exploration of self-fashioning, *gumnazein* is introduced mostly to acknowledge the not always obvious relevance of self-control and perseverance in Goth identity projects. Foucault sees *gumnazein* as organized around the poles of "abstinence" and "tests" (*Hermeneutics* 426), the former aimed at reinforcing "courage […] underst[ood] as resistance to external events," and the latter – "the ability to […] limit, regulate and master all the internal impulses, the impulses of one's self" (427). Such attributes – or the exercises in self-discipline they imply – may not appear central or even connectable to Goth icons, yet they do resonate with the discourses of subcultural self-presentation.

Meletē, in turn, as a more intellectual and simulationist kind of practice, is relevant for the purpose of this project mainly because it establishes, between the subject and the text they absorb, a unique relationship which will prove helpful in referring Goth tropes to other phenomena of participatory (and post-participatory) culture. Foucault defines *meletē* as "the work of thought on itself" (*Hermeneutics* 426), or "on the subject himself" (357–358), triggered by the absorption of text:

> First, *meletan* is to perform an exercise of appropriation, the appropriation of a thought. With regard to a given text, it certainly does not involve trying to [think about] what it meant. It does not develop in the direction of exegesis at all. The *meditatio* involves, rather, appropriating [a thought] and being so profoundly convinced of it that we both believe it to be true and can also repeat it constantly and immediately whenever the need or opportunity to do so arises. It involves then ensuring that this truth is engraved in the mind in such a way that it is recalled immediately the need arises, […] consequently making it a principle of action. It is an appropriation that consists in ensuring that, from this true thing, we become the subject who thinks the truth, and, from this subject who thinks the truth, we become a subject who acts properly. This is the direction taken by this exercise of *meditatio*. Second, the *meditatio*, and this is its other aspect, consists in making a sort of experiment, an experiment of identification. What I mean is that the meditation involves not so much thinking about the thing itself as practicing the thing we are thinking about. (357, bracketed comments added by the editors)

While the relations between particular aspects of self-fashioning introduced in this survey, Goth tropes, which remain the focal point of this book, and participatory phenomena of the contemporary pop culture can be highly specific, *meletē* brings those spheres of culture together.[8] Both Goth subculture and various audience and fan practices may potentially be considered in terms of immediate identity projects in which texts of culture are internalized as beacons of subjective truth. However, as the identification and analysis of such cases, clearly requiring an approach supported by psychology, anthropology or social studies, evades the scope of this text-oriented project, *meletē*-like self-discipline and internalization of texts or truths will further be examined as a theme scrutinized within Goth iconography. The next section incorporates the physical and mental self-styling practices characteristic of the said iconography into a framework directly addressing the factor of power and politics.

Self-Fashioning

The immediate origin of the term "self-fashioning" affirms its text-oriented dimension through the works of Greenblatt, who introduced it into literary criticism as part of his new historicist project. The latter bridges literary, cultural and historical analysis in order to "trac[k] the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture, flowing back and forth between margins and center, passing from zones designated as art to zones apparently indifferent or hostile to art, pressing up from below to

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[8] For an exemplary application of *meletē* and *gumnazein* in the field of video games, see my text "Gra w autokreację."

transform exalted spheres and down from on high to colonize the low" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 13). An overall new historicist stance toward the study of culture, the interactions of texts with their environment and audiences, and also the conceptualization of aesthetics, adequately frames this book's interest in the functioning of Goth tropes. The approaches to self-styling discussed in the previous sections and connected with, respectively, the internalization of the absorbed texts and the incorporation of physicality into the process of identity formation also find reflection in the Greenblattian project. Catherine Gallagher and Greenblatt underline the importance of the physical factor for new historicism in general (17) and list it among the problems evoked by that critical approach:

> In the larger perspective of cultural text, representations similarly cease to have a settled relationship of symbolic distance from matter and particularly from human bodies. The way bodies are understood to function, the difference between men and women, the nature of the passions, the experience of illness, the border line between life and death, are all closely bound up with particular cultural representations but they cannot simply be reduced to those representations. The body functions as a kind of a "spoiler," always baffling or exceeding the ways it is represented. (15)

In light of the above premise, it is the factor of self-awareness that promises an effective mode of handling corporeality in self-fashioning, as confirmed by its further consideration with reference to Goth tropes.

My understanding of self-fashioning as a node bringing several conceptual systems together resonates with the premises of new historicism, which, as underlined by Gallagher and Greenblatt, "is not a coherent, closeknit school in which one might be enrolled or from which one might be expelled" (2). Adopting a reversed approach of considering the new historicist impact on the study of literature rather than a prescriptive one that would require listing theoretical guidelines before putting them to work in particular cultural contexts, the authors limit the movement's core significance to:

> four specific transformations that it helped to bring about: (1) *the recasting of discussions about "art" into discussions of "representations"*; (2) the shift from materialist explanations of historical phenomena to investigations of the *history of the human body and the human subject*; (3) the discovery of unexpected discursive contexts for literary works *by pursuing their "supplements"* rather than their overt thematics; (4) the gradual replacement of "ideology critique" with discourse analysis. (17, emphasis added)

All four points are unquestionably relevant for this book, especially as historical factors shaping contemporary literary and cultural studies. Still, new historicism's eponymous interest in the past, or more specifically, the tensions between the past and the present, encourages detailed, close-focus analysis of one text at a time. This project, instead, aims to track Goth tropes throughout a variety of sources, identifying the icons themselves as carriers of historical and cultural context and devoting attention to open cultural processes that remain in progress and evade easy periodic or otherwise comprehensive interpretation.

The relative freshness of Goth history, which may be contained within, more or less, the last four decades, appears strikingly brief as compared to the periods crucial

for the formation and exercise of new historicist perspectives, such as the Renaissance or even the 19th century. However, this fact by no means disqualifies Goth iconography from an investigation underpinned by pursuits which Gallagher and Greenblatt indicate as crucial for their approach to history. Not only do they seek "to delve as deeply as possible into the creative matrices of particular historical cultures and at the same time […] to understand how certain products of these cultures could seem to possess a certain independence" (16), but also claim that:

[t]his characteristically double vision of the art of the past – at once immersed in its time and place and yet somehow pulling out and away – is deeply related to our own understanding of our own aesthetic experience […] [W]e do not experience works of art – or indeed any significant textual trace of the past – as confirmation of what we already know. In a meaningful encounter with a text that reaches us powerfully, we feel at once pulled out of our own world and plunged back with double force into it. (17)

The closeness of the entirety of the Goth trope history to the processes driving contemporary popular culture may limit the productivity of analyzing particular stages of Goth appropriation in retrospect, even though one of the foundational operations carried out in this book is acknowledging period-specific factors influencing Goth iconization. That is why, while this study is indebted to new historicist postulates and premises about culture, the employment of self-fashioning functioning as a stand-alone concept seems more responsive to the present- and future-oriented aspects of the presented analysis.

Analogously, one of my motivations to bring together several approaches to self-fashioning comes from the need to mitigate the strongly historical context in which the notion is used by Greenblatt himself in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* and which remains its underlined feature when considered in terms of new historicism. Linking self-fashioning to "the achievement of […] a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving," Greenblatt points specifically to the Renaissance period as one of "an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable artful process" (2). He further reinforces the relevance of the historical context for the analyzed identity projects by locating their core in the execution of period-specific demands understood, after Clifford Geertz, as "control mechanisms, the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment" (3–4). What Greenblatt emphasizes as the most characteristic of self-fashioning in the reality of 16th-century England is an oscillation between "an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self" and "a distorted image of the authority," labeled overtly as the "threatening Other […] discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed." As a result, "self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien," and "what is produced in this encounter partakes of both the authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence […] any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss" (9).

Thus, Greenblatt's exploration of self-fashioning is submerged deeply in the context of the Renaissance culture, represented by texts of several prominent writers of the period. Simultaneously, however, centralizing the functions of literary texts in identity projects pursued by their authors, it provides a useful context for my analysis. Though this book is devoted to a cross-sectional cultural trope rather than specific, extraordinary individuals, it benefits from the new historicist approach to literary works as "focal point[s] for converging lines of force," allowing an "interpret[ation of] their symbolic structures with those perceivable in the careers of their authors and in the larger social world as constituting a single, complex process of self-fashioning" (Greenblatt 5–6). In terms of the processes taking place within Goth iconography, suspended between the support for individual identity projects and the metacommentary on such projects' appropriation, two factors identified by Greenblatt in his 16th-century sources are especially relevant. One of them is the unique type of self-awareness, identified in the self-fashioning of Thomas More:

his life seems nothing less than this: the invention of a disturbingly unfamiliar *form of consciousness, tense, ironic, witty, poised between engagement and detachment, and above all, fully aware of its own status as an invention* […] Indeed, a distinction between text and lived reality […] is precisely abrogated by More's mode of existence. For one consequence of life lived as histrionic improvisation is that the category of the real merges with that of the fictive; the historical More is a narrative fiction. To make a part of one's own, to live one's life as a character thrust into a play, *constantly renewing oneself extemporaneously and forever aware of one's own unreality* – such was More's condition, such, one might say, his project. (31, emphasis added)

In spite of their precise historical context, the emphasized aspects of self-reflection accompanying an identity project that involves textual self-fashioning seem strikingly accurate when applied to both the fictional and non-fictional constructions of the Goth explored throughout this book.[9] More's metaconsciousness and fluid relationship with text and fiction is generated, first of all, by his unique personality and the status of a gifted author (Greenblatt 21–22, 31, 33). Nevertheless, it bears structural resemblance to the far more generalized current cultural environment of active text reception, metacommunicative channels infiltrating texts and interactions between producers and consumers, affirmation of and support for emotion-based identification with texts and their employment in the construction of individual as well as communal identities.

The second important aspect of Greenblatt's analysis, in the discussed case dealing with the poetry of Thomas Wyatt, is the interplay between two specific strategies developed in the process of self-fashioning in order to face and handle pressures of the external power, namely "submission" and "negation" (127). The former employs the act of opening up to the disciplining "authority" as a trigger of "self-knowledge" (Greenblatt 125–126), while the intention of the latter "is to take control of one's

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[9] For my consideration of a different connection between the self-awareness discussed by Greenblatt and the active reception of a text of culture – specifically, a video game – see "Gra w autokreację" and "'Czy ja tak brzmię?' Autokreacja i immunizacja w serii *Mass Effect*."

life by finding within oneself a sustaining center" (129) through a refusal to partici-
pate in power games. Those two strategies address different sources of power and are
rendered through different texts, "submission" being a response to the authority of
God in Wyatt's translation of psalms and "negation" being directed at the manipula-
tive power of the court in his satires. Thus, not only is the specific historical context
essential for the adequate conceptualization of the discussed form of self-fashioning,
but also the relativity of its criteria needs to be taken into account. Still, as Green-
blatt claims, "the two sets of poems [the psalms and satires] […] represent alternative
and even competing modes of self-fashioning," which, however, "self-consciously give
voice to a 'true' self, stripped of falsification and corruption" (127). Therefore, the
flexibility of "submission" and "negation" encourages their consideration in light of
contemporary cultural experience. The interconnection of those two processes seems
especially useful in exploring what is often depicted as a paradoxical or even hypo-
critical aspect of subcultures in general, including the Goth – namely, the declarative
yet often unviable rejections of the "mainstream." Sarah Thornton's groundbreaking
conceptualization of that notion highlights its ambiguity and fluidity that make the
despised normativity adaptable to particular discursive practices so as to identify sub-
cultural capital against it (92–115).[10] Simultaneously, consumption – whether of
purchasable props or texts of culture – remains an unavoidable, or even prominent
part of a subcultural identity, as illustrated by the Goth examples discussed in further
chapters. Still, the Goth phenomenon's self-awareness results in an intentional use
of "submission" strategies in addressing what Holmes calls the paradigm of "flexible
personality."

Thus, the application of Greenblatt's self-fashioning in contemporary con-
texts signaled above is by no means intended to insert equality marks between the
16th-century religious dedication and the late-20th-century devotion to cultural
consumption;[11] or the early-Renaissance British court and the current environment
of commercialized media. Still, the very structure of self-fashioning mechanisms
based on submission and negation seems worth considering as a perspective of an
insight into the Goth iconization. Together with the previously mentioned factor of
self-awareness involved in identity projects, those strategies constitute tangible tools
emergent from Greenblatt's historically oriented argument.

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[10] Thornton's analysis relies heavily on both the specific time and localization of her field work,
which makes her underline differences between the conceptualization and significance of the notion of
mainstream as a point of reference in British and American approaches to popular culture (109–110).
Still, while her main intention is to problematize the functioning of the discussed term in theoretical
works (92–93, 114), its overall impact on identity-building dichotomies in subcultural discourses (in-
sider–casual; independent–commercial; true–fake; authentic–poser; underground–mainstream) is suffi-
cient to be recognized as a crucial factor in self-fashioning strategies.

[11] It is, however, to be noted that interpretations of contemporary fandom phenomena and con-
sumption of media entertainment in general as para/post-religious practices have been made (see for
instance a critical discussion of that tendency in Cornel Sandvoss's book (61–63). Matt Hills, in turn,
offers a reading of fan practices in terms of "neoreligiosity" (117–130).

Rhizomatic Network

As has already been mentioned, the driving goal of Foucault's philosophy pointed out by Milchman and Rosenberg is an urge to prevent and counteract fascism (50–51). The latter is generated by the "death of God," which has caused the rise of disrupted "metaphysical need, and […] the ascetic ideal" (Milchman and Rosenberg 50). An exploration of repercussions affecting identity-formation processes can be counted among the major themes touched on by Deleuze and Guattari. Their thought shares with that of Foucault something that Frédéric Gros labels as an "ethics of immanence." He argues that practices of self-fashioning inspired by ancient philosophy focus on building "the immanence of the self to the self," namely, "a stable and full relationship of the self to the self that can be thought […] in the juridico-political form of the full and entire ownership of the self" (Gros 532–533). Thus, an "ethics of immanence" develops, based on "the idea of inserting an order into one's life, but an immanent order neither sustained by transcendent values nor externally conditioned by social norms" (Gros 530). Deleuze and Guattari's seminal *Anti-Oedipus* becomes inscribed into a similar ethical framework by Foucault himself when he identifies the book's major theme as an "art of living counter to all forms of fascism, whether already present or impending" ("Preface" xiii). Moreover, he claims that "being anti-oedipal has become a life style, a way of thinking and living" (xiii), thus bringing together a dialectics of self-fashioning and an affirmation of immanence implied by the concept of anti-oedipalism.

The immediate significance of Oedipus in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual system is, unsurprisingly, most prominent in their critique of psychoanalysis in which they turn against "the analytic imperialism of the Oedipus complex" (*Anti-Oedipus* 23). Its dominance in both scholarly and therapeutic dimensions of psychoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 53) is contrasted with "the productive unconscious" (24), perceived by the authors as a force "that all the Oedipuses crush and repress: desiring-production – the machines of desire that […] constitute the Real in itself" (52–53). The taming and neutralization of such creativity by squeezing it into an artificial system of oedipal interpretation (24, 53–54) is challenged and undermined throughout *Anti-Oedipus* for the reasons of both political and identity-connected significance. As summed up by Mark Seem, one of the book's translators:

> Depression [induced by internalized oedipalization] and Oedipus are agencies of the State, agencies of paranoia, agencies of power, long before being delegated to the family. Oedipus is the figure of power as such, just as neurosis is the result of power on individuals. Oedipus is everywhere. […] it robs us of power, *it* is what teaches us to desire our own repression. Everybody has been oedipalized and neuroticized at home, at school, at work. Everybody wants to be a fascist. Deleuze and Guattari want to know how these beliefs succeed in taking hold of a body, thereby silencing the productive machines of the libido. They also want to know how the opposite situation is brought about, where a body successfully wards off the effects of power. (xx)

Thus, what makes Deleuze and Guattari's work relevant for the discussion of self-fashioning, and especially its Foucauldian depiction, is the emergent alternative

approach to identity, based on the pursuit of release from the oedipal – and (micro) fascist – regime "through the forging of a collective subjectivity, a nonfascist subject-anti-Oedipus" (Seem xxii–xxiii). The intersubjective aspect of that process makes an important addition to the facets of self-fashioning acknowledged so far, as confirmed by Seem's claim that "such a reversal must be governed by a collective political process, and not by professionals and experts" (xxii). As demonstrated further in this book, similar attitudes and ideas may affect the subcultural discourses involved in the construction of Goth tropes.

The Deleuzoguattarian thought constitutes a context for the introduction of self-fashioning presented in this chapter rather than its axis. Still, the flexibility and connectivity of their conceptual work forms a broader theoretical framework in which the conflict between Oedipus and "the productive unconscious" becomes an approximation of a more general collision of forces. Other similar approximations draw on, respectively, botanical and political imagery as they contrast static and hierarchical figures of the tree and the State with their dynamic and decentering counterparts: the rhizome and the nomad tribe. Thus, the latter two also need to be mentioned to complete the spectrum of references framing the ethics of self-fashioning.

"Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order," claim Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand* 7), consequently imagining the rhizomatic structure as "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system […] without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states" (21). They also ascribe to it attributes sustaining continual decentralizing dynamics that works against petrification:

> Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. (9)

As a result, even the contrast between the rhizome and the tree is far from binary: "There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome. The coordinates are determined not by theoretical analyses implying universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities. A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch" (15). As confirmed throughout the presented analysis, it is precisely such dynamics, evading, blowing up, incorporating or animating fixed, hierarchical structures that can be identified in the cultural functioning of labels, stereotypes and clichés connected with the Goth movement, as well as more theoretical conceptualizations of its relationship with the market of entertainment.

The possibly most tangible aspect of the rhizome's importance for the analysis of relations between identity projects, Goth tropes, and texts of culture is connected with the interdisciplinary multidirectionality: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes con-

nections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand* 7). Such an approach to iconography is unquestionably helpful when dealing with the spectrum of factors affecting, in one way or another, Goth cultural work.

The two dimensions of the Deleuzoguattarian discourse mentioned above – its relevance for identity formation and as a methodological strategy – are brought together by Brian Massumi in his foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*, which he calls "a positive exercise in the affirmative 'nomad' thought called for in *Anti-Oedipus*" ("Translator's Foreword" xi). In light of the already mentioned challenge to the "oedipal imperialism" and the postulate of rhizomatic dispersal, nomadism attaches a political and operational dimension to the decentralizing approach to the subject. Furthermore, it poses such a subject against the concept of a stable, interiorized identity which, as Massumi argues, is also a trigger for "representational thought" that, in turn, sustains the limiting, tree-shaped, and oppressively State-conformed intellectual system (xi–xii). Meaning, significance and understanding are, in terms of the "nomad thought," generated by the changing dynamics of temporary contexts and intersubjective situations in which the given idea or phenomenon occurs rather than by its inherent components and qualities (xii). In an introductory definition of the rudimental difference between nomadic and State structures, Deleuze and Guattari make use of a comparison between two games, chess and go:

> Chess pieces are coded; they have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive. […] Each is like a subject of the statement endowed with a relative power, and these relative powers combine in a subject of enunciation, that is, the chess player or the game's form of interiority. Go pieces, in contrast, […] are elements of a nonsubjectified machine assemblage with no intrinsic properties, only situational ones. […] Within their milieu of interiority, chess pieces entertain biunivocal relations with one another, and with the adversary's pieces: their functioning is structural. On the other hand, a Go piece has only a milieu of exteriority, or extrinsic relations with nebulas or constellations, according to which it fulfills functions of insertion or situation, such as bordering, encircling, shattering […] [W]hat is proper to Go is […] pure strategy, whereas chess is a semiology. Finally, the space is not at all the same: in chess, it is a question of arranging a closed space for oneself […] In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space […] The "smooth" space of Go, as against the "striated" space of chess. The *nomas* of Go against the State of chess, *nomas* against *polis*. The difference is that chess codes and decodes space, whereas Go proceeds altogether differently, territorializing or deterritorializing it […]. (352–353)

Once again, it is the functional aspect of the nomadic strive toward semiotic emptiness and structural dynamics that is especially important because of its usefulness in capturing the specificity of the cultural conceptualization of the Goth. According to Massumi, "[r]ather than analyzing the world into discrete components, reducing their manyness to the One of identity, and ordering them by rank, it [the nomad thought] sums up a set of disparate circumstances in a shattering blow. It synthesizes a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering

their potential for future rearranging" ("Translator's Foreword" xiii). Thus, the three interrelated concepts of immanence, rhizome, and nomadism are included in this introductory survey because they offer help in mapping out a network combining self-fashioning strategies, Goth tropes, and their semiotic dispersal.

What is especially significant about those tropes is that they can not only reflect the self-fashioning strategies discussed so far, but also facilitate reflection *on* those strategies and their work in the socio-cultural reality of the 21st century. The immediate potential for such cultural self-awareness to generate tools for addressing those consequences, especially in the area of production and circulation of texts of culture, will be the subject of this project's next stage. For the needs of this book, two exemplary critical challenges to self-fashioning are discussed in the next section. One such challenge confronts self-fashioning with an emotional spectrum of pleasure and fear providing a broader context for the stereotypes and iconizations of the Goth figure that subsequently become reappropriated by Goth-inspired tropes. The other area of criticism, connected with biopolitical interpretations of self-fashioning, faces the self-reflective potential of Goth tropes with a demand to handle the aspects of identity formation most affected by consumption.

Self-Fashioning and Politics

Establishing a cross-sectional yet functionally coherent theoretical framework for the analysis of Goth iconography depends on the exploration of self-fashioning as a notion. Equally important in this endeavor is, however, also a consideration of controversy surrounding the emergence of self-fashioning philosophies in the specific historical and cultural context. Identity conceptualizations influenced by the output of Foucault, Greenblatt, Deleuze and Guattari, though traceable back to Nietzsche, have come to be perceived as one among the aftermaths of the challenge posed by the theoretical turn toward grand narratives (Lyotard 31–41). The said challenge has been neither universal nor uniform enough to constitute a specific confrontational force, yet its legacy, in combination with the coming of the Internet era and transformations of the geopolitical scene, is frequently discussed in terms of a crisis. Therefore, self-fashioning has been subjected to scrutiny especially with reference to its political and ethical potential. As argued by Jerrold J. Abrams in "Aesthetics of Self-Fashioning and Cosmopolitanism: Foucault and Rorty on the Art of Living," those two factors sometimes overlap in contemporary philosophical debates. Still, in this chapter, they delineate two spheres of criticism: one centered around biopolitical ambivalence of self-fashioning; and the other dealing with its relation toward an emotional horizon stretching from fear to pleasure.

The situation of self-fashioning in terms of biopolitics is complicated, among others, by a common tendency to seek coherence within the complex corpus of Fou-

cault's writings, and consequently to interpret his relatively late exploration of "the care of the self" as a quest for an ultimate remedy to the oppression generated by systems of power. Such an interpretation, while not ungrounded, may overemphasize the "rebelliousness" and contesting character of self-fashioning, and its affirmation of individualism. The overall political potential of the discussed approach to identity projects evades simple polarization. Both Shusterman, in his reference to Foucault's "alternative body practices" (*Body* 29), and Abrams, when he puts technologies of the self in a broader context of Foucault's exploration of power, depict self-fashioning as a means of personal agency against the identity-shaping governmentality. Still, as emphasized by Gros, the character of its subversion should not fall into a binary opposition between the singular and the collective because "the individual and the community, their interests and their rights, are complementary opposites: a complicity of contraries" (544). The understanding of self-fashioning not so much as an anti-systemic force, but rather a mode of local distancing from, navigation through, or negotiation and deconstruction of biopolitical power is also supported by the critical reception of Greenblatt's work.[12] His conceptualization of identity as a project, based on the analysis of More's persona in relation to *Utopia*, acknowledges "that complex, self-conscious, theatrical accommodation to the world which we recognize as a characteristic mode of modern individuality" (37). And while, according to Greenblatt, that factor undergoes critical scrutiny, once identified and addressed, it is not eliminated, but remains a point of reference for *Utopia*'s intellectual experiment (37). The relatively low priority of actually resisting the power which affects identity is further highlighted by Claire Colebrook when she claims that "power would be merely one motif among others, within Greenblatt's general theory of the self as performance, rather than a radical theoretical method" (63).

The political ambiguity of self-fashioning – an umbrella term in which practices of resistance mix together with those of subordination or apparent escapism – finds reflection in Greenblatt's definition of "power" as confirmed by "the ability to impose one's fictions upon the world" (13). Similarly, biopolitics in general is theorized as a double-faced phenomenon. The critical practice of underlining its negative – oppressive, marginalizing or otherwise limiting – aspects has reached an established position. Such an approach is exemplified in the realm of literary and cultural studies by specific, problem-oriented analyses informed by feminism, postcolonialism, etc. Simultaneously, however, a steady theoretical interest in the productivity of biopolitics can also be observed. Roberto Esposito argues for stepping beyond the binary dialectics encoded in the very notion of biopolitics due to the lack of internal coherence between the factors of "life" and "politics" ("Community"). The dominance of the conceptual negativity attached to the notion may be linked with the 20th-century ex-

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[12] I have presented a similar interpretation of Greenblatt's self-fashioning, including the reference to Colebrook, in "Gra w autokreację."

perience of "thanatopolitics," embodying biopolitical forces of destruction embraced by Nazism (Esposito, *Terms* 130; Community). Still, as Esposito claims, "the only source of political legitimacy nowadays appears to be that of preservation and implementation of life. It is precisely in this context that the necessity of an affirmative biopolitics reappears with a new urgency. It would be something like a horizon of sense where life would not be an object anymore, but in some way a subject of politics" ("Community").

Esposito's suggested path toward this goal leads through an analysis of the immunity–community dynamics ("Community"), an issue elaborated upon in the Conclusion, as it foreshadows further research on self-fashioning in participatory culture. Still, narrative appropriations of subcultural dialectics attached to the Goth movement also invite politically motivated criticism of self-fashioning as collaborative and submissive to the system and its governmentality strategies. Abrams goes as far as to visualize the general logic of such political controversies in the form of two philosophical camps, "self-fashioners and cosmopolitans," the latter being "focused alternatively on the problems of globalized justice, the importance of spreading democracy, globalized cosmopolitanism, communicative deliberation in the public sphere, and critical approaches to unjust background conditions." As a consequence, they accuse the former of embracing an "ethics [that] is elitist, not at all democratic," yet claimed "to be a natural outcome of the very democracy the cosmopolitans have helped to champion and bring about." Abrams further argues for the apparent character of this paradox, caused by the blurring of boundaries between private and public domains. He concludes that "democracy, as the politics of social experiment, creates and unites all the various linguistic and somatic technologies of the self. And within democracy these various technologies can be put to maximal use, and thereby create new fusions, say, between somatic and discursive technologies of the self." However, as indicated by Holmes's concept of "flexible personality," and its modification into "flexible subjectivity" proposed by Suely Rolnik ("Avoiding"), the process of integrating individual identity projects and political activity is not uniform or unidirectional. Moreover, its interpretation as a promise of realizing the democratic ideal is counterbalanced by its interpretation as a symptom of civic policies' ultimate crisis.

Holmes and Rolnik scrutinize the mechanisms and factors affecting individual identity in the globalized reality dominated, according to Rolnik, by "neoliberalism," in which

the strategy of subjectivation, of relation with the other and of cultural creation takes on essential importance, because it holds a central role in the very principle that governs the contemporary version of capitalism. For this regime feeds primarily on subjective forces, and especially on those of knowledge and creation, to the point where it has recently been described as "cultural" or "cognitive" capitalism. ("Geopolitics")

Both authors trace the rise of the "flexibility" paradigm back to the 1960s and 1970s, linking its emergence with a gradual systemic appropriation of the originally subversive activism generated by the cultural revolution and the rise of identity pol-

itics. Rolnik sums up this process as "the instrumentalization of the counter-culture generation's micropolitics" ("Avoiding"). Holmes's definition of "flexible personality" adds to the picture the factor of the phenomenon's emotional impact: "If you feel close to the counter-culture of the sixties–seventies, then you can say that these are our creations, but caught in the distorting mirror of a new hegemony." Holmes closes his discussion with a declaration of faith in the prospects of challenging the new status quo through a combination of intellectual, communal and creative efforts, while Rolnik argues for the micropolitical potential of art ("Geopolitics"). Nevertheless, she consequently underlines the duplicity of "politics of creation." One form of this politics can – not unlike Rosi Braidotti's "nomadic subject"[13] – make its practitioner "participate in the emergence of a consistent cartography of oneself and the world, which bears the imprint of otherness" (Rolnik, "Avoiding"). The other possibility, however, is that

instead of listening, creation can result from a refusal to listen to chaos and the effects of otherness on our body. In this case, the cartography is created through the consumption of ready-made ideas and images. The intention here is to rapidly reconstitute an easily recognizable territory under the illusion of silencing the turbulence provoked by the Other's existence. What is produced, then, is an aerobic subjectivity with an acritical plasticity, adequate to the mobility required by cognitive capitalism. (Rolnik, "Avoiding")

The split signaled by Rolnik proves its relevance in the context of self-fashioning as a factor in the iconization of Goth subculture, whose cultural dialectic oscillates between countercultural rebellion and pop-cultural remix fueled by the consumption and processing of multiple texts. Therefore, guided by the critical insights into the biopolitical ambivalence of identity projects in contemporary culture, the analysis of each case study explored in this project will remain alert to appropriations of self-fashioning tools and concepts before delving into the exploration of their functioning in the given source material. Thus, while the overall mapping of self-fashioning in this chapter strives for coherence, it also recognizes the notion's potential for duplicity. It is slightly reminiscent of the "laceration" which Esposito identifies in democracy as "a technology [*tecníca*], an ensemble of rules designed to distribute power [*potere*] in a way that is proportionate to the will of the electorate. But it's for this very reason that it explodes, or implodes, as soon as it is filled up with a substance that it cannot contain without changing into something radically different" (*Terms* 109). Similarly, self-fashioning strategies may mutate and generate politically ambiguous processes when appropriated by particular cultural phenomena, while simultaneously continuing to offer guidelines for tracking down and evading appropriation.

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[13] While Rolnik does not turn to Deleuze and Guattari at this particular point, the output of the two French philosophers, and especially their conceptualizations of macro- and micropolitics, provide a general framework for her analyses, analogically to the concepts of rhizome and nomadism that Braidotti builds upon. Rolnik was involved in direct collaboration with Deleuze and Guattari, as both translator and co-author of *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (2008) that she published together with Guattari.

Self-Fashioning and Ethics

The above reflection on political criticism around self-fashioning has signaled some of the reasons for the ethical interest in emotions conventionally attached to the discussed identity philosophies – especially the sensation of pleasure, easy to interpret as a key to both centralization of individual egoism and commodification of the human subject. While the directly political dimension of that connection is unquestionable, it does not cover the whole range of criticism directed at the relevance of personal sensations in self-fashioning. Therefore, I have chosen to distinguish that perspective as the other important phenomenon connected with the cultural impact of identity projects. Discussing the already mentioned bidirectional "politics of creation," Rolnik distinguishes the "micropolitics of desire" ("Avoiding"). That, clearly Deleuzean, perspective reveals the location of a discursive controversy around self-fashioning in its bonds with pleasure – a concept that, as noted by Foucault, the Western thought has traditionally treated with suspicion (*Use* 16). Conceptual recuperation of pleasure appears in some key texts on self-fashioning – for instance in Foucault (*Use*), Milchman and Rosenberg (57), or in Shusterman's *Body Consciousness* (41–43). Still, it faces accusations on account of both susceptibility to consumerism and individualism isolating the subject from others.

Taylor, for instance, in his proposition of an "ethics of authencity," problematizes "individualism" as "centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (*Ethics* 4). Altogether, he seems to recognize the ethical and cultural potential of identity projects, as he conceptualizes "authenticity" as the leading "contemporary ideal" (16). However, at the heart of his ethical proposal is a postulate to put individual identity formation in an intersubjective context. The latter is constituted by: "(i) openness to the horizons of significance" (66) – a hierarchy of values "which help define the *respects* in which self-making is significant" (39–40); and "(ii) a self-definition in dialogue" (66). That is why he perceives Foucault's approach to authenticity as "deviant" due to its "attemp[t] to delegitimate horizons of significance" (66) and its focus on "the amoralism of creativity, while forgetting […] its dialogical setting, which binds us to others" (67). The concept of pleasure is not mentioned directly as a factor of deformation within identity projects. Still, Taylor's postulate is intended to counteract what he argues to be a misconception of "self-fulfilment without regard […] to demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations" (35).

A more complex but still ambiguous employment of pleasure in the context of identity formation is offered by Richard Rorty, who identifies and subsequently problematizes a dichotomy between "'moralists' and 'aesthetes'" in the Western culture. While "moralists" proclaim "liv[ing] for others," "aesthetes" pursue "the ironist's desire for autonomy, for a kind of perfection which has nothing to do with his relations

to other people"(142).[14] Rorty decentralizes the said binary opposition by inscribing the identity project into a continuum between "autonomy" and "cruelty" in order to argue that the latter can be prevented "not by warning us against social injustice but by warning us against the tendencies to cruelty inherent in searches for autonomy" (144). Rorty argues as follows:

> One of the unfortunate consequences of the popularity of the moral-aesthetic distinction is a confusion of the quest for autonomy with a need for relaxation and for pleasure. This confusion is easy for those who are not ironists, and who do not understand what it is like to be an ironist – people who have never had any doubts about the final vocabulary they employ. These people – the metaphysicians – assume that books which do not supply means to the ends typically formulated in that vocabulary must be, if not immoral or useless, suitable only for private projects. Yet the only private project they can envisage is the pursuit of pleasure. They assume that a book which does supply such pleasure cannot be a serious work of philosophy, and cannot carry a "moral message." (143–144)

Rorty's attitude toward aestheticism and "private projects," both clearly describable within the framework of self-fashioning, is altogether supportive. Nevertheless, the position of "pleasure" in his reasoning remains ambivalent as, rather than contribute to the ethical productivity of the "aesthetic," it is depicted as, at best, unobtrusive.

Thus, even those critical explorations of identity-related issues that do step beyond the conventional distrust or condemnation of desire and pleasure may still testify to the ambivalent conceptualization of the latter. The iconography of Goth subculture is likely to attract considerations in terms of decadence and rebellion influencing young people's formative experience. The problematization of pleasure propelled by critical approaches to self-fashioning may, therefore, gain special significance, especially when placed on a continuum with another emotion-related construct crucial for the Goth aesthetics, namely, fear.

Fear has been investigated as especially influential in contemporary culture from a number of analytical perspectives focusing on both its dominant discourses and employments in identity formation. A significant part of such research deals with the specificity of the most recent period – sometimes dated back to the middle of the 20th century, and sometimes to the 1980s, 1990s, or 2001 – as centralizing various forms of fear and anxiety in cultural and social experience. Analyses of fear are espe-

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[14] Rorty's understanding of "ironist" resembles the criticism aimed by Taylor at "deconstruction" (*Ethics* 67), as it refers to a thinker rejecting the existence of "an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities" (Rorty xv). Still, instead of attacking such a stance, Rorty in fact defends "ironism" against accusations of its anti--communal undertone and, in fact, sees it as a harbinger of a "postmetaphysical culture" (xv–xvi). Interestingly, however, he does perceive Foucault's "ironism" as radical to the point of counter-productivity in terms of community-oriented solutions: "The sort of autonomy which self-creating ironists like Nietzsche, Derrida, or Foucault seek is not the sort of thing that *could* ever be embodied in social institutions. Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation, and which a few actually do. The desire to be autonomous is not relevant to the liberal's desire to avoid cruelty and pain – a desire which Foucault shared, even though he was unwilling to express it in those terms" (65).

cially relevant for the American pop-cultural tropes – Goth icons included – and their subsequent globalization. In his study of the horror genre in the U.S.-centered Western culture, Jason Colavito distinguishes the 1990s and 2000s as marked by "horror of helplessness" (18). It is shown as a consequence of the long-term scientific contribution to undermining the "[o]nly two areas […] still left open for human exceptionalism: The mystery of consciousness and the possibility of free will" (354). Colavito proceeds to discuss scientific counterevidence to both those concepts (355–356) and notes, next to the resultant rise of existential anxiety, another prominent source of fear in the radicalization of Christian as well as Islamic teachings against "secularism" (357–358). Coupled with the rise of anxiety in the face of the unpredictability of terrorist attacks and the uncontrollable political forces (359–361), those factors reinforce a "widespread attitude of helplessness" (361).

Peter N. Stearns makes a claim about the modern American society being poorly trained for facing danger (22) and points to three background processes that can be linked with the prominence of fear in the social experience of 1990s and 2000s U.S. Chronologically, the most advanced of those processes is located in 20th-century children's psychology, promoting the reduction of exposure to fear as preferable to "overcom[ing] fear with courage" (21). According to Stearns, it led to a generational susceptibility to various anxieties throughout the 1990s, as well as exaggerated caution after the World Trade Center attacks in 2001 (18–19, 22). The second fear-inducing process is the continuous dominance of conflict, violence and volatile balance in the international affairs involving the U.S. throughout the second half of the 20th century, or more specifically, since its engagement in World War Two (22). Finally, the historian points to the marketability of fear discovered in the 1970s and 1980s when shared objects of social anxiety started to be employed in the promotion of particular products or policies (22–23). Stearns acknowledges the medialization of the early-21st-century cultural and social environment as a prominent factor in the propagation of fear-related discourses and points to Barry Glassner's *The Culture of Fear* as an exemplary argument cementing the link between the contemporary centralization of fear and the power of media. Still, he also emphasizes the need for putting it in the already mentioned historical context (23).

That a unique contribution to the cultural significance of fear can, indeed, be ascribed to the current media epoch is confirmed by Massumi's affect-oriented approach to the topic. In "Fear (The Spectrum Said)" he analyzes the impact of mass media in a historically specific moment of the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks. He identifies TV as "a perceptual focal point for the perceptual mass coordination of affect" (33) and interprets the consequences of such a function of the medium as serving a "governmentality" that "has molded itself to *threat*" (35). Emphasizing the insubstantial and suspended character of the latter (35–36), he further traces the psychological and semiological process leading to the emancipation of fear as self-referential (41–44) and its eventual establishment as a "nonphenomenal background of existence," (44) or, to put it more bluntly, "a way of life" sustained by the American political mechanisms

(47). In "Everywhere You Want to Be" Massumi shifts the focus of argumentation supporting a similar claim from particular historical circumstances toward the structure and logic of the television, which he calls "the despecification of intellectual content" (24). As a result of that process, the exact origins and details of the presented, often fear-inducing messages become less relevant than the perpetuation of the affect attached to them, boiling down to the spread of "an effect without a cause" (26). Massumi moves on to consider political consequences of such gaps between fear and its sources (26–30), pointing, however, to the "low-level fear" (24) as their precondition. Its consequences strike at the construction of identity by establishing a common "possibility of being the mediatized human victim we all are in different ways: signs of subjectivity in capitalist crisis. The self […] is a syndrome, one with a range of emotional cripplings […] as its symptoms" (24–25). Thus, the historically conditioned medialization, the cultural relevance of fear, and the individual identity are brought together in Massumi's politically oriented analysis of late-20th-century capitalism, and especially its impact on the American reality.

Taylor's broader discussion of philosophical and cultural processes affecting the conditions of identity formation in Western culture offers, in turn, a relevant background for a consideration of the crossing points between pleasure, fear and critique of self-fashioning. In *A Secular Age* Taylor refutes what he calls the "narrative" (573, 575) of the "death of God" (560) in contemporary Western culture. According to him, the overall shift of Western culture from its pre-modern, fundamentally religious origins to non-religious modernity (543) has been given a form of a "story of courageous adulthood, to be attained through a renunciation of the more 'childish' comforts of meaning and beatitude" (565). Those "comforts" are provided by the religious worldview, which affirms the existence of a bigger picture for human life experience, but also reveals itself as "emanat[ing] from a childish lack of courage" (561). Accordingly, "[t]he entire ethical stance of moderns supposes and follows on from the death of God (and of course, of the meaningful cosmos)" (588). Thus, it affirms "the imaginative courage to face the void, and to be energized by it to the creation of meaning. Nietzsche and his followers are crucial protagonists of this spin on immanence" (589). The fact that the explorers of self-fashioning, Foucault being the most prominent one, can be counted among such "followers" reinforces the relevance of the cultural environment in which "self-authorization" has been centralized as "a tremendously widespread narrative nowadays" (588).

Taylor refers briefly to the ambivalent impact of the "death of God" as he contrasts Nietzsche's enthusiasm for its liberatory potential with the more typical dialectics of spiritual crisis and "traumatic loss" used for addressing the issue (587). Further argument for the significance of such a polarization can be found in in the work of Leslie Fiedler, who brings it into the geo-historically specific context of American literature by investigating reasons for the prominence of the Gothic in the literary and cultural imagination of the New World. Arguing for the legacy of the Enlightenment to be the foundation of Americanness (37), Fiedler characterizes the spirit of

the period as follows: "The effect of the growing awareness (an awareness, to be sure, at first shared by only a handful of advanced thinkers) of this cosmic catastrophe [the crisis of Christian religion] was double: a sense of exhilaration and a spasm of terror" (36). The former corresponds with the overall affirmation of freedom as central to the developing American culture (36). The latter, in turn, can be identified in the aura of rebellion attached to the growth of the New World's myth: "There is, indeed, something blasphemous in the very act by which America was established, a gesture of defiance" (37). The cultural anxiety implied by that violation finds more tangible sources in the violence of racial relations, the challenges posed by the wilderness, and the "guilt of a revolutionist who feels himself a patricide" (27). According to Fiedler, all those factors contribute to the fascination with the Gothic genre, and especially the way it handles the ambivalence of the leading American ideals: "How could one tell where the American dream ended and the Faustian nightmare began; they held in common the hope of breaking through all limits and restraints, of reaching a place of total freedom where one could with impunity deny the Fall, live as if innocence rather than guilt were the birthright of all men" (143). Thus, Fiedler's specific insight into the literary inspirations of the U.S. culture can be inscribed into a broader paradox of the "death of God," which establishes a crossing point of pleasure and fear – a combination relevant for critiques of both self-fashioning and of the Goth movement.

Whether considered as a general philosophical attitude or applied to more specific contexts such as the presented discussion of American literature, the affirmation of the Nietzschean stance raises controversies because of the persistent imperative to perceive the "death of God" as fearful. Even when accepted, the postulate of existential "courage" emphasized by Taylor – and exercised in Foucauldian technologies of the self – implicates a challenge that can be hard to take, collectively or individually. Moreover, even when successfully embraced – as Fiedler's analysis of American imagination might suggest – it is likely to keep generating anxiety due to the sheer radicality and scale of the required change. Hence, self-fashioning reliant on the work of Foucault together with its Nietzschean legacy is susceptible to two kinds of criticism. Firstly, it may be interpreted as a nihilistic reinforcement of an explicitly destructive and harmful aspect of (post)modernity, serving as a distraction from the key problems of the globalized world without offering any actual solutions. Such accusations are summed up, among others, in Abrams's already mentioned analysis. Secondly, the philosophical focus on the identity project may bring to mind a defensive or adaptive mechanism founded upon the intentional search for pleasure in the underlying sense of fear triggered by the crisis, which in such a case is not denied but morbidly appropriated as an object of devious affirmation. As demonstrated further in this book, it is the latter line of criticism that proves especially relevant for Goth tropes.

However, as argued by Milchman and Rosenberg, neither Nietzsche nor Foucault evaded the perception of the "death of God" in terms of a broad-scale "crisis." On the contrary – their views on the formation of identity were underpinned by both philosophers' efforts to mitigate the potential negative impact of the anti-metaphysical

turn that they both took part in (44–45). Moreover, a twofold argument against the blind celebration of pleasure can be based on Milchman and Rosenberg's insight into the reconceptualization of two notions – art and ascesis – demanded by Foucauldian self-fashioning. They turn to Timothy Leary's differentiation between the 20th-century perception of art as a provider of pleasure and the ancient Greek understanding of artistry and beauty as, first and foremost, highlighting the usefulness of the artisan object as well as the effort, skill and hard work involved in its creation (Milchman and Rosenberg 57). It is, as they argue, the ongoing process of self-improvement that seems to be the source of value in Foucauldian self-fashioning (58) and not a hedonistic pleasure brought by the execution of individual will. The redefinition of ascesis, in turn, abandons the conventional connotations with the rejection of earthly joys in the name of transcendental values and may even imply intensification of pleasure as a goal of self-disciplinary practices (58–59), yet similarly as in the case of references to art it emphasizes first and foremost the tools and techniques by means of which the individual works on their identity to transform in accordance with their overall design (58–59).

The above insight into the contrastive approaches to the ethics of self-fashioning may serve as a final illustration of the complexity of ways in which identity projects can be theorized and investigated. This chapter has established a network of concepts particularly resonant with the upcoming analysis of self-fashioning strategies influencing the Goth cultural presence. The discussion started from the identification of corporeal, individual ethics, and power relations as three dimensions of self-fashioning especially relevant for Goth tropes. It subsequently expanded the conceptual context of self-fashioning in order to signal the structural logic of this book. The further discussion strives to reflect the rhizomatically open, dynamic, and inconclusive character of Goth motifs' functioning in popular culture. Accordingly, the last part of the chapter signaled political and ethical challenges to self-fashioning premises, whose criticism happens to interact with Goth tropes. The chapters included in Part II offer a preliminary approximation of interactions between self-fashioning strategies and textualized Goth identity projects.

INTERLUDE 1

Introduction to Goth Self-Presentations

While Part I has mapped out the theoretical framework for addressing the exchanges between self-fashioning and the Goth, the remaining two parts apply that framework in analyzing two respective kinds of source materials. The insight into fictional Goth figures, tropes or aesthetic solutions revolving around identity formation, presented in Part III, is preceded by a transitory exploration of more direct textualizations of the Goth phenomenon. Specifically, the materials analyzed in Part II are Goth self-presentations, that is, texts declaring an "inside" view and experience of the subculture. What inevitably follows that criterion are questions of socio-cultural authenticity, adequateness and entitlement to representation in the texts selected for analysis.

The factors of geographical location, class stratification, or the scale of active subcultural involvement are not only relevant but also susceptible to questioning, criticism and negotiation, especially in investigations focused on the real-life Goth movement. Still, for an analysis driven by the concept of self-fashioning, attempts at establishing some fixed demands for subcultural authenticity that the discussed source materials should meet seem less relevant than the ways those materials construct and employ the Goth as a discursive referent in textual identity projects. Thus, in the narrative and iconographic focus of this book, the issues of authenticity and representativeness, while not ignored, are considered mostly as dialectic components in cultural conceptualizations of the Goth, and not a set of preliminary criteria for the selection of source materials.

A potentially problematic consequence of such a research perspective is the lack of definitive boundaries that would regulate the inclusiveness of this study by mitigating the pressure for it to consider every single situation in which the label of the "Goth" is brought up. However, as already clarified, my primary goal is not to produce an exhaustive typology of the said label but to see how self-fashioning strategies and concepts work in Goth iconography in order to consider the potential contribution of the latter to the exploration of contemporary popular culture's interaction

with philosophies of identity. Therefore, I do not aim to hunt for "authentic" versus "commercial" or "fake" Goth voices, but rather comment on how the ongoing interplay between both discursive ends produces an aesthetic perspective founded upon self-reflection.

Out of the above considerations emerge five texts that Part II of this book puts in the analytic spotlight: *The Autumn Cemetary Text* by Lloyd Warren Ravlin III a.k.a. September (1996, original spelling), *The Goth Bible* by Nancy Kilpatrick (2004), *What Is Goth?* by Voltaire (2004), *Goth Craft: The Magickal Side of Dark Culture* by Raven Digitalis (2007), and *Gothic Charm School: An Essential Guide for Goths and Those Who Love Them* by Jilian Venters (2009). This list is far from exhaustive, yet it offers a cross section of Goth self-representations linked by the overall textual character and functions, temporal and spatial orientation, as well as intertextual references. As a result, the presented survey reflects the subtle diversity of individual authors' approaches to the largely overlapping topics that revolve around Goth self-fashioning.

As already mentioned, the listed texts declare to voice insiders' conceptualizations of the subculture and address both Goth and non-Goth readers, the latter including those susceptible to moral panic and disinformation. As argued by Spooner, the Columbine High School massacre, apart from triggering various forms of anti-Goth reactions, mobilized the subculture itself to "address the mainstream in order to dispel these myths, thus resulting in an unprecedented level of cultural visibility" ("Goth" 355). Indeed, self-defensive motivations do seem relevant to the Goth "spokespersons" introduced in Part II. For instance, in a Fox News video material from 22 October 2005, Voltaire's book is suggested to have earned him the position of a "Goth" expert interviewed with regard to the alleged connection between the subculture and the murder committed on 15 October 2005 by Scott Dyleski ("Voltaire on Camera"). Kilpatrick, in turn, emphasizes how relieving it was for her to have shifted from a publication design intended to pacify public anxieties to one targeting the subculture itself (xv). Still, she takes care to address and dismiss some common preconceptions about Goths, such as the labels of Satanism (2–3) or suicidal tendencies (8–9), while affirming others, for instance the contempt for high-school physical education and the social hierarchy related to it (169). Digitalis locates the focus of his text in the exploration of overlaps between the Goth and neo-pagan spirituality yet still acknowledges a need "to include some information dispelling many stereotypes and misunderstandings" (3). Ravlin's text – possibly the most "underground" in this selection – reverses its discursive perspective by instructing Goths how to handle some manifestations of criticism directed at their subculture instead of addressing potential non-Goth readers directly (Cemetery, Epistle).[16]

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[16] Archived online, *The Autumn Cemetary* is divided into seven hyperlinked sections: "night," "mirror," "candle," "crucifix," "grimoire," "ankh," and "cemetery." Each section is further divided into subsections with their own titles. To facilitate the navigation through the text, I document each reference with the section title first and then the first word of the given subsection title.

The fact that even the above introductory survey includes references to specific and highly contextualized events connected with media depictions of Dyleski and the Columbine shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, signals the potential impact of locality on the iconization of the Goth. That is why, despite the unquestionable importance of the European Romanticism and Gothic heritage, the role of European musical scenes in the emergence of the Goth, and the globalized character of the movement, the texts selected for immediate analysis are of U.S. origin. Their American context is especially relevant for the fictionalized Goth tropes discussed in Part III, and their potential connectivity with broader phenomena of popular and participatory culture. The geopolitical diversification – and not always harmonious interactions – of audience activities in various parts of the world will play an important role in my planned continuation of the post-participatory paradigm analysis. Nevertheless, the discursive impact of both American cultural practices and their theorizations on the conceptualizations of the dynamics between authors, texts and audiences is unquestionable. Therefore, this book – as opening my investigation of the crossing points between self-fashioning and cultural participation – revolves around American source materials, their socio-cultural contexts, and selected theoretical perspectives.

The texts discussed in Part II and Part III share, therefore, references to several geography-influenced factors of self-fashioning. The most prominent among such attributes are: the retrospective positioning of the Goth against cultural and political repercussions of the hippy movement and the Summer of Love; the semiotics of American suburban culture and school socialization as carriers of normative discourses of optimism and success; and the role of American religiosity in dealing with moral panics and depictions of the Goth in media of mass information. Minor symptoms of Americanness in the analyzed texts include also the exoticization of Europe, fetishization of British English and accent, emphasis on experiences of spatial isolation, and influences of regional socio-cultural dynamics. The overall significance of the geopolitical factor in discussing the Goth is confirmed by Spooner's analysis of *Goth Cruise*, Jeanie Finlay's documentary on the coexistence of Goth and regular passengers during a recreational sea journey (2009). As Spooner observes, the American iconization of the subculture is far more reliant on the mainstream–underground polarity and the concept of resistance to normative pressures than its British counterpart (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 34–35). This very difference will prove relevant both for the Goth tropes analyzed in Part III and the planned further exploration of post-participatory narratives.

The geographical localization sketched above implies also the relevance of the temporal factor in the selection of source materials. It covers a decade between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, the only exception being Venters's book from 2009, which, however, originates from a blog run by the author since 1998 ("First Ever"). The selected period is characterized by the Goth exposure to the growing interest of popular culture and mainstream media, the subculture's intensified introspection

aimed at capturing its uniqueness as a cultural and social phenomenon, and the beginning wave of its academic explorations. The latter has resulted in the publication of, among others, Paul Hodkinson's *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (2002), Spooner's *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (2004), *Goth: Undead Subculture* edited by Goodlad and Bibby (2007), *Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality and Style* by Dunja Brill (2008), as well as more clearly America-focused *Goth's Dark Empire* by Siegel (2005), or Amy C. Wilkins's *Wannabes, Goths and Christians: The Boundaries of Sex, Style and Status* (2008). The further impact of the subcultural theme on the scholarly output is confirmed, for instance, by Marcel Danesi's *Geeks, Goths and Gangstas: Youth Culture and the Evolution of Modern Society* (2010) that confronts subcultural identities with the generations of digital natives; Micah L. Issit's *Goths: A Guide to an American Subculture* (2011) that, as a part of the Greenwood "Guides to Subcultures and Countercultures" series, takes an educational stance; or *Goth Music: From Sound to Subculture* by Isabella van Elferen and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2016). All in all, the arc between 1996 and 2007 drawn by my basic selection of Goth self-presentations can be seen as formative in terms of canonic imagery contributing to the subculture's further pop-cultural iconization and discursive self-awareness.

Because even an exploration of such a highly constructed and intertextual phenomenon as Goth tropes needs to set off from a relatively stable ground, the introduced voices of self-presentation function in my analysis as "primary" material in terms of both chronology and their self-proclaimed closeness to the subcultural interior. Nevertheless, the conceptualizations of the Goth emergent from those texts employ a spectrum of discursive strategies based on intertextuality, playing on icons and stereotypes, and narrative self-consciousness. Therefore, the unfolding discussion refers their discursive framework to the chosen self-fashioning strategies.

PART II

GOTH SELF-FASHIONING

CHAPTER 2

Fashioning Goth Embodied Experience

This chapter focuses on the embodied aspects of the Goth, from appearance and body modification, to dance and other types of socialized performance, to sexual practices and erotic sensations. Its guiding goal is to show how those dimensions of body-oriented subcultural aesthetics lend themselves to interpretation through the lenses of, respectively, Shusterman's representational and experiential somaesthetics, Foucault's technologies of the self, and Deleuze's reading of masochism as a technique of identity formation. All three perspectives add up to reveal a characteristic ability of Goth discourses to reconcile apparent polarities and contradictions. The chapter shows the fluidity of shifts between representational and experiential somaesthetic angles in Goth self-presentations and demonstrates their simultaneous affirmation and regulation of pleasure – practices which together provide a means of addressing cultural fears. Finally, it sets the issue of the Goth affinity with BDSM in the context of conceptual bonds between sex and death. All in all, the parallels between the Deleuzean logic of masochism and the discursive strategies of Goth self-presentations prove helpful in structuring the flexibility of corporeal self-fashioning practices tracked down throughout the chapter.

Between Representational and Experiential Somaesthetics

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Shusterman's concept of somaesthetics – while not entirely in tune with this book's rhizomatic conceptualization of Goth self-fashioning[17] –

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[17] Shusterman's postulate of self-fashioning as a philosophical practice framed by the pursuit of "good life" and aimed to harmonize one's physical and mental faculties in the process of personal growth

offers a coherent formula for addressing some of its corporeal aspects. However, as this section is intended to show, the Goth somatic dimension seems to dislocate the categories of the representational and experiential that frame the somaesthetic continuum. Goth self-styling enables an insight not only into mutual infiltrations of representational and experiential somaesthetics, but also into a paradox implicit in Shusterman's explication of self-fashioning:

> Life poses an artistic project in calling for creative self-expression and aesthetic self-fashioning – the desire to make ourselves into something fulfilling, interesting, attractive, admirable, yet somehow true to what we are. The selves we both inherit and create are not merely embodied but also inescapably cultural […] [T]he art of self-fashioning calls for the achievement and expression of the individual's own style […] authentic, aesthetic self-expression […] If the modern institution of sacrilized, autonomous art has reached some kind of end, today's aesthetic energies seem powerfully refocused on the art of living. In our new age of multiple, *marketed lifestyles* that sadly seem to foster *as much conformism as creativity*, the concept of *individual style* needs more attention. (*Performing* 10–11, emphasis added)

The binaries of creativity and conformity or individual and marketed self-styling coincide with Shusterman's ambivalence toward the postmodern cultural environment characterized by a "somatic turn" resulting from

the need to find and cultivate a stable point of personal reference in a rapidly changing and increasingly baffling world. In the postmodern lifeworld of intercontinental commuting and multicultural exchange, the environments and language games through which one's identity is shaped *are too diverse and shifting* to afford us a firm sense of self. As marriage and family ties prove increasingly vulnerable, our network of personal relationships seems likewise *too fragile and fragmented* to supply a stable identity. But throughout this confusing postmodern flux, our bodies are always with us […] By providing a needed ground for our personal identity, the body warrants our care to preserve it. (*Performing* 162, emphasis added)

Thus, Shusterman subscribes to the narrative of identity crisis and polarizes the philosophy of somatic self-fashioning against it, as reflected by his premise of counterproductive excess emphasized in the quotation above. Simultaneously, however, he recognizes the connection of self-fashioning with the multilevel de-essentializing turn from Freudian psychoanalysis to the cultural death of God, to the devaluation of rationalism (*Performing* 162–163) that has been a major factor shaping the "postmodern lifeworld." Unlike Foucault, or Deleuze and Guattari, Shusterman does not seem to devote much attention to dismantling or circumventing the emergent paradox of modern self-fashioning rendered as a counteraction to the conditions of its own making. Instead, he chooses to sustain a fundamentally dichotomic character of self-styling philosophy by drawing an arch from the Nietzschean and post-Emersonian postulate to "cease to be our ordinary selves so as to become our higher selves" (212) toward resistance against the applicable normative pressures: "One reason to insist on being oneself in transforming oneself is to guard against self-transformation into an already given, standardized model of the higher self" (214).

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paradoxically seems to sustain a polarizing vision in which the somatic sphere is mastered and employed in service of the mentally controlled identity project (*Performing* 166).

Shusterman turns to Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of "body culture" (*Performing* 159) to criticize its commercialization, objectification, and unification (160–161). Understandably, a continuity can be identified between such impositions of power and the alertness of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* against fascism underlying cultural preoccupation with physicality (Shusterman, *Performing* 160; Horkheimer and Adorno 193–196). Thus, Shusterman's depiction of the relationship between somatic self-fashioning and contemporary socio-cultural environment resonates with Holmes's call to action against the "flexible personality's" illusion of freedom, generated by commercialized applications of individualism. Accordingly, the somaesthetic paradigm addresses the body as, on the one hand, a culturally perceived "organizing center, where things are brought together and organically conserved" (Shusterman, *Performing* 148) and, on the other, "a product of social conformity (to acquire certain socially endorsed and well-advertised body forms) but also as the result of heightened individualism" (157). Such a split reinforces the binaries of the conventional versus the individual and of conformist versus creative that Shusterman sustains in his attitude toward the functioning of self-fashioning in the postmodern condition despite the fact that he acknowledges the constructedness and flexibility of concepts such as authenticity (84–85), identity (162), and even body itself.

The impact of the said ambivalence on somaesthetics can be identified in the discursive contrast between its representational and experiential branch. Shusterman includes them in a single somaesthetic continuum and emphasizes their mutual dependence as well as infiltration (*Performing* 143, 152). Still, his argumentation gravitates toward an appeal "to privilege the experiential forms of somaesthetics" (151–152) as "a promising path towards a better public" (153). The reason for a special affirmation of the experiential is that – while the author recognizes the potential diversity of somaesthetic practices (142) – in the course of his discussion of the "somatic turn" the presence of representational self-styling in culture is largely identified with the economically and politically conditioned phenomena in whose criticism he joins Horkheimer and Adorno. In order to counterweigh the commercialization and philosophical reductionism culturally imposed on physicality (161), he seeks to disentangle "experiential from representational practices" (159).[18]

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[18] Writing *Performing Live*, published in 2000 and based on his research conducted in the 1990s, Shusterman may have underestimated the marketability of experiential somaesthetics, confirmed by the contemporary popularity of various commercially available forms of instruction in self-improvement through somatic experience, from martial arts to meditation, to mindfulness training, to a variety of psychological or coaching-related techniques. Still, it is to be noted that the growth of such services is accounted for in Holmes's 2002 critique. Commenting on a satirical performance of Hank Hardy Unruh from an activist group The Yes Men, in which Unruh presents "the Management Leisure Suit […] conceived to transmit pleasing information through implanted body-chips when things were going well in the distant factory," Holmes asks: "Could one possibly imagine a better image of the style-conscious, tech-savvy, nomadic and hedonistic modern manager, connected directly into flows of information, able and compelled to respond to any fluctuation, but enjoying his life at the same time – profiting lavishly

An additional reason for Shusterman's focus on experiential somaesthetics is that he defines it as not only contributing to its practitioner's mastery over their faculties and overall performance but also their existential satisfaction and fulfillment. "If philosophy is concerned with the pursuit of happiness and better living, then somaesthetics' concern with the body as the locus and medium of our pleasures clearly deserves more philosophical attention. Even the joys and stimulations of pure thought are […] embodied, and thus can be intensified or more acutely savored through improved somatic awareness and discipline," claims the author (*Performing* 140). It is the said centralization of pleasure that seems, in turn, responsible for the affinity between somaesthetics and the postmodern condition. Investigating the "somaesthetic turn" in contemporary culture, Shusterman argues: "Hedonism may have always been with us, but it has become more outspoken in secular postmodernity, where 'having fun' often seems to be among one's highest duties. Not only a rich source of pleasure, the body is also the medium that conditions all affective experience; so the somatic turn forms part of our culture's aesthetic turn" (163). Thus, the overall conceptualization of somaesthetics in cultural practice and theoretical reflection seems to a large extent inscribable into the broader current of self-fashioning discourses, yet its implicit paradoxes remain unresolved.

As a result, a consideration of the Goth somaesthetic potential seems productive as a way of both recognizing the weight of physicality in self-fashioning and gaining insight into a grey zone demarcated by three somaesthetic binaries. The first one deals with the body, depicted in contradicting terms of the sole stable carrier of identity (Shusterman, *Performing* 148) and simultaneously a "multimedia conglomerate" (145). As Shusterman elaborates:

the media revolution so transformed the notions of medium and reality that our body […] now gets elevated, as our central medium, to the status of the constructor and locus of the real […] Once reality is seen as a construction, the media that construct it can no longer be disdained […] the body comes to seem as immediate so as to occlude its old mediatic image [created by Plato]. Nonetheless, the somatic constructor of reality is itself also continuously constructed through other varieties of media and mediations […] So even if the media revolution emancipates the soma by recognizing its constructing power and its openness to construction, it also presents the further task of discriminating what, with respect to the body, should be constructed […]. (*Performing* 144)

Therefore, the already discussed opposition of individual "creativity" in self-fashioning versus "conformity" to the constructions of and manipulations with body image on the part of the mass media is brought into the picture. Shusterman focuses on the paradox of bodily fixedness and mediality to pose somaesthetic self-fashioning as a countermeasure to mass practices of identity construction subordinated to the interest of particular power relations. He appeals that "the media's intrinsic control over our external body image […] be monitored for techniques and messages that misguide or oppress our sense of bodily self. This is a crucial task for media culture

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from his stock options, always up in the air between vocation and vacation, with unlimited pleasure and technological control right at his fingertips?"

critique" (149). Nonetheless, cultural practice is also sensitive to the conflicted conceptualization of corporeality, as highlighted by Spooner:

> This is the paradox of the body in contemporary Gothic: on the one hand it is simply one more feature in the procession of simulacra: endlessly repeated, endlessly manipulable. On the other its physicality is more present than ever before, as in the face of a decorporealized, information society we endlessly, obsessively assert that it breathes, that it dreams, that it feels pain. (*Contemporary Gothic* 86)

Thus, she points to the Gothic convention as an environment supporting critical confrontation with the dilemmas of identity and mediality in the postmodern soma.[19]

Shusterman's concept of the body as a zone of negotiation between individual identity and the forces of politics and economy is also implicit in the second somaesthetic polarization, namely the contrast between its experiential and representational variant. As already signaled, the latter becomes, in a way, scapegoated in the refutation of the criticism of "body culture," so that the former, experience-oriented type of bodily self-fashioning can be argued to be all the more relevant. As a result, the premise about the interconnectedness and mutual complementation of representational and experiential somaesthetics is counterpointed by their discursive polarization. It seems, therefore, all the more relevant that Goth somaesthetics emergent from the subcultural self-presentations discussed below not only exemplifies the correlation of representation and experience but also balances Shusterman's one-sided depiction of the former. While his references to representational somaesthetics and its specific socio-cultural work focus most of all on examples of promoting and reinforcing normative, oppressive bodily standards, the possibility of alternative, or differently motivated, representational projects remains underexplored. Simultaneously, some theorizations of the Goth (for example, Siegel, Goodlad and Bibby, Brill) and its constructions in the source materials analyzed below depict the subcultural self-fashioning as driven if not by actual rebellion then by a search to embrace marginalized or abject aesthetic forms. Actually, the process of Goth self-definition sometimes employs negative identification against phenomena that Shusterman underlines as trademarks of representational oppression, such as physical fitness or healthy appearance. As already noticed, Siegel reads such tendencies of the Goth through the lens of Deleuzoguattarian anti-fascism – an interpretative move that for other scholars is too far-fetched yet seems worth considering in confrontation with Shusterman's rendering of representational somaesthetics.

Definitely, Goth is an aesthetic self-consciously preoccupied with its complex relation to the "mainstream" of capitalist culture manifested, among others, in the consumeristic pleasures of the body and materiality. Thus, the third polarity is introduced – one, however, which deals not so much with Shusterman's conceptualization of somaesthetics as the functioning of pleasure in the postmodern and post-capitalist conceptual environment. Shusterman perceives the centralization of pleasure as a supportive circumstance for his project rather than an object of criticism. Still, by

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[19] An extensive insight into the textualization of the body in horror and Gothic conventions is also offered by Judith Halberstam in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995).

addressing the problematic status of representational somaesthetics, he sets limits to the affirmation of pleasure, for instance when he objects to "advertising that system-atically suggests that pleasure, success and happiness belong only to the young, thin, and beautiful of certain races" (*Performing* 151). The paradox of sensual delight being, on the one hand, in tune with the philosophies of self-fashioning, but on the other an icon of commodity culture, is exposed by the Goth approach as a representation-al and experiential somaesthetic project. As underlined by scholars as well as Goth texts themselves, a part of the subculture's investment in alternative aesthetics is set against the paradigm of obligatory happiness that Shusterman refers to in the already quoted remark about the "duty" of "having fun." It also objects to the consequences of normalizing certain manifestations of positivity to the point where they may be perceived as oppressive or inducing double standards. Simultaneously, however, the Goth embraces some self-fashioning strategies resonant with the pleasure-centralizing paradigm, which Shusterman links with postmodern culture. Paradoxically, "having fun" is countered in selected declarative dimensions of Goth self-fashioning, yet it is affirmed on a deeper, conceptual level of self-styling. Thus, the subculture reveals its potential as a partly critical meta-discourse symbolically attacking the erasure of death and (existential) suffering while benefiting from the same mechanisms of pleas-ure centralization that may induce such erasures.

Thus, Goth somaesthetics seems to offer varying degrees of self-aware cultural insight into the paradoxes of physical self-styling. It is spectacularly illustrated by the Goth appropriations of death as affirming embodied individualism on one level, while on another being repressed and erased as a source of anxiety caused by the cor-poreal limits of existence. Moreover, with a consideration of Shusterman's bias toward experiential somaesthetics, the Goth phenomenon may be interpreted as a strong example of "alternative" representational practice, or an embodiment of the mutual bonds between the representational, the experiential, and the textual. The subsequent sections of this chapter focus on the ways in which Goth self-presentations enter the somaesthetic "grey zones" between physical materiality and moldability, representa-tional and experiential somaesthetics, and finally the consumerist and rebellious di-mensions of pleasure.

Goth Body – Fixed and Fluid

Discussing subcultural body modification and arguing for its connection with tribal practices – a claim relevant for the Wiccan framework of his book – Digi-talis seems to share Shusterman's criticism of uniformity attached to bodily so-maesthetics. Shusterman complains about the media-supported emergence of "a tedious homogeneity of standardized looks, achieved through surgery if not successfully through cosmetics and bodysculpting exercises" (*Performing* 151).

Digitalis, in turn, argues for "mainstream" modes of physical transformation, such as "plastic surgery, fake tans, and the like […] designed to make a person appear to have been born naturally 'beautiful,'" to "disempowe[r] a person by allowing others' opinions to determine the person's worth and view of personal beauty" (135). Simultaneously, he posits Goth practices against that background, emphasizing corporeal plasticity as crucial for their uniqueness: "[o]ur type of body modification is different: it's not meant to look natural by any stretch of the imagination, but is a form of artistic creativity using the human body as the canvas" (135). Thus, bodily fluidity develops a bond with art making – a combination that, to Digitalis (115), seems very helpful in defining the Goth phenomenon.

Indeed, all source texts brought up in this chapter pay attention to clothes, cosmetics, hairstyles, and various other forms of body decoration, while Voltaire's *What Is Goth?* incorporates also technical details of constructing Goth looks. Still, his photographic accounts of two "makeovers," one dealing with makeup (58–61) and the other with hairstyle (62–65), emphasize both the transformative dimension of subcultural appearance and the relative character of such transformation. Detailed comments on particular steps of makeup application are intertwined with jokes on the Goth aesthetics ("Powder is used to give a nice matte, pale, just-risen-from-the-grave pallor") and concluded with a reassuring appeal: "remember, Mom, under all of that wacky makeup she's still your daughter!" (58).

The semiotic susceptibility of physical appearance is spectacularly illustrated, and structured, by the surveys of Goth types that are independently carried out by Voltaire, Kilpatrick, Digitalis, and numerous other explorers of the subculture.[20] On the one hand, such typologies testify to the discursive and aesthetic diversity meeting the demands of "fashion as body politic" (Kilpatrick 37) and, moreover, demonstrating the fusion of appearance, attitude and behavior in the generation of particular icons. On the other hand, the very existence of the categorization impulse observable among the subcultural commentators, not to mention the repeatability or at least similarity of certain types from one survey to another, suggests patterns framing the declared "creativity" of physical self-styling.

The typologies that Voltaire, Digitalis and Kilpatrick include in their books, highlighting the links between visuality, performativity and cultural semiotics, are largely similar. Among them, Voltaire's triple take on the Goth icons stands out due to the diversity of the used characterization modes. The first survey highlights varying musical and cultural tastes within the movement and presents each subcultural representative – "Romantigoth," "Deathrocker," "Cybergoth," "Rivet-Head," "Ethergoth," "Candygoth," "Goth-A-Billy" and "Vampyre" – in terms of, among others, their humorously depicted "Likes," "Advantages," and "Downfall[s]" (*What Is Goth* 4–9).

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[20] Such surveys have also become an iconic trope in numerous online materials dealing with the subculture, from animations and videos presenting Goth history and fashion to memes, parodic trivia.

The second one, focused entirely on the "Goth Looks," includes caricatures commenting on the conventional weak points that particular fashion choices are supposed to mask, for instance body size, thinning hair or poor eyesight (17–21). The third scrutiny of the Goth appearance, dealing with only four, possibly most characteristic stylizations (Romantigoth, Deathrocker, Cybergoth and Rivet-Head), embraces the discourse of natural sciences to present the "anatomy" of each type. Voltaire provides particular elements of the models' appearance with descriptive comments incorporating references to fashion, social status, politics and emotional burden. For example, the Romantigoth's makeup is described as "elaborate designs of an era long past (i.e. the '80s)," her necklace – as "granny's missing heirlooms," and her purse as containing "sixteen years of pent-up angst" (54). The Deathrocker wears "big, black boots for stomping out happiness," while among the indispensable external characteristics of a Rivet-Head, that is, an enthusiast of industrial music, there are "the piercing gaze of a soldier looking toward a dark future in which machines rule the Earth," as well as "clenched […] fist[s]" ready to hit, respectively, "communist hippie" and "capitalist yuppie scum on the dance floor" (57). Thus, the images provided with the explanatory, handbook-style comments, offer parodic deconstructions of subcultural self-fashioning but also illustrate the semiotic investment of particular attributes, hyperbolizing their interpretative potential. Moreover, the direct employment of affective and emotional categories in the formation and decoding of the stylizations reinforces the somaesthetic dimension of the icons.

Apart from the usually humorous and distanced handling of the iconic Goth figures, however, the subcultural self-presentations may also subscribe to more tangibly regulatory attitudes toward self-styling. It is visible, for instance, in the approval of subcultural look demands, expressed by Digitalis and Venters, or in Voltaire's recommendations connected with physical imperfections. Digitalis describes "a darksider club" as a place where "individuals of all body types, ages, flesh tones, and stylistic tendencies embrace fashions of the past, present, and even future." However, he simultaneously shows understanding for the possible selectiveness of such locales: "barring anyone who doesn't look out of the ordinary from entering […] may seem pretentious and segregative, but […] if someone in tan khakis and a baseball cap entered the realm of a hundred dancing darklings, […] [it might] bring down the vibe as a whole" (158). Also Venters addresses to a casual trespasser a whole list of limiting guidelines that not only deal with politeness, but also specify demands for somaesthetic self-control:

> Try to dress to blend in. Black or dark clothing, if you please, and no sneakers, baseball caps, or bad attempts at extravagant eyeliner and black lipstick. A plain dress or a shirt and trousers in black or deep jewel tones are just fine. No, you won't be as elaborately dressed as many of the club attendees, but you're just visiting and trying not to stick out, so don't worry about it […] Don't be surprised if people stare or are obviously whispering about you, and don't get belligerent about it either […] Will you attract whispers and stares even if you […] dress to blend in? Maybe, maybe not. If you carry yourself in a manner that shows you're comfortable with what you've decided to wear and with the surroundings, then probably not. But if you seem nervous, wary, or disapproving, of course there will be odd glances cast

your way. People will wonder why you seem uneasy and may themselves be a little wary about striking up a conversation with you. (Chapter 2, Brief [21])[22]

While the above excerpts focus on insider–outsider interactions, and thus may be seen as discursive manifestations of subcultural difference rather than somaesthetics per se, the regulatory surveillance that they indicate affects Goth self-fashioning, too. In a section entitled "Do You Have to Be Spooky Every Day?" Venters confronts the subcultural appeal to authenticity that may result in attempts to subordinate all aspects of life to an imaginary Goth standard. Venters challenges and dismisses "the *Real Goth* nonsense" by psychologizing it as a symptom of low self-esteem (Chapter 1, Do), but Aytakk stresses the problematic significance of the perfect subcultural look in the context of online communication:

[T]his gets to the point that kids think Goth is mostly (or heaven forbid only) about the fashion. Then they assume you must be dressed to the nines all the time because their favourite youtubers and models always are in their videos and photos. And thats what Goth is about.

Doing it 24/7 (or at least portraying it that way) can sometimes be detrimental […] It can set a standard that is unattainable because for the most part its impractical for living in a mainstream world […] It can also set a bad precedent for kids entering the goth subculture. They see their favourite social media celebrities doing it 24/7 and assume that is how it must be done to be done right. The reality is we all have down time. But in the age of social media people cherry pick what they want to show the world so of course they focus on the highlights. ("Public Image," original grammar and punctuation)

Thus, the very ideal of somaesthetic creativity may generate pressure on the body being fashioned, as the above Goth introspections suggest. Simultaneously, in accordance with the paradox of physical fluidity and fixedness, corporeality itself produces limitations to the ways it is molded, which poses another challenge for the subcultural self-awareness to confront.

While the dominantly satirical tone of Voltaire's book enables it to take liberties with various stereotypes, the issue of body size in Goth self-styling is handled in a way that may be seen as problematic, especially since it takes place in the section devoted to female Goth types. Commenting on a "Blood Sausage" look, Voltaire encourages plus-size women to work on their self-styling in accordance with the author-dictated aesthetic sense which suggests the existence of proper and improper choices: "Embracing aesthetics the mainstream flatly rejects, the Goth scene has long afforded ladies of generous proportions an opportunity to be beautiful and glamorous. That,

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[21] Similarly as in the case of Ravlin's text, for the sake of clarity I document each reference to *Gothic Charm School*'s e-book version with the chapter number first, and the first word of the given subsection title next.

[22] A similar, though perhaps more mitigated advice comes from Aytakk, an Australian Goth activist and scene commentator writing for the Belfry Network. In an entry on dress codes, pretty much in line with the already presented Goth voices, he writes: "If you do attend a goth club and people pick at your attire, consider this. Are they picking to be helpful or are they just being a jerk? If someone tells you what you are wearing looks cheap and tacky when cheap and tacky is the look you are going for, then its [sic!] likely just a matter of personal taste. Some people are trying to be helpful but their method isn't good and comes across as condescending and rude" ("Code").

however, does not mean that latex is your unconditional friend! […] Consider flowing velvet gowns instead. You're big, you're beautiful – work it with dignity" (*What Is Goth* 21). The resultant combination of body affirmation and body shaming fails to effectively strike a balance in the author's somewhat opinionated approach to female physicality. However, similarly judgmental comments are a more general characteristic of Voltaire's parodic style, including, "The 'Maybe if I Get Enough Extensions and Stick a Bunch of Stuff on My Face, No One Will Notice What a Big Dork I Am' Look" among the male stylizations.

Other Goth authors also address the issue of material limits of the body's transformability, though Kilpatrick and Venters seem to be more affirmative about it, while Aytakk's display of body positivity stands in striking contrast to the criticism expressed by Voltaire. Characterizing the "Diva" category in her survey of subcultural types, Kilpatrick affirms the premise of the aesthetic alternative being open to physical diversity:

> Goth is a wonderful door through which larger women, and older women, who often are the first rejected […] can wander freely without fear of any more rejection than most women suffer, and quite a bit of tender gentlemanly response coming their way. Plus-size and senior goth gurrls – and boiz! – can wear romantic outfits made of satin, velvet, and lace, dye their hair black as night, and empty a bottle of eye-liner onto their lids and not feel like a freak. (21)

Still, it is worth noting that her selection of exemplary fashion options for "Divas" remains in line with what Voltaire points to as "dignified," and she contends that the preliminary inclusion in such a group can pose a challenge (21). Venters, in turn, focuses on the issue of age – which, of course, includes, but is not limited to, the sphere of physical appearance. Though she locates the main source of challenges for subculturalists past their twenties in the common conviction that "there's a 'use-by' date on being a Goth" (Chapter 1, Age), she still comes up with some instructions for aged subcultural beginners. Her first piece of advice is "[a]ge-appropriate looks," as "[b]eing a Goth of a certain age means that you probably know the difference between what is an appropriate outfit for a night club and what is an appropriate outfit for work" (Chapter 1, Age). Thus, the embodied aspects of identity generate subcultural claims to somaesthetic self-awareness which can, as exemplified above, both impose limitations and reinforce the expression of the subcultural alternative through the flexibility of its aesthetic standards. Aytakk's argument goes even further when he depicts the diversity of body shapes as more than a testing ground for communal tolerance standards:

> Lets also cover when people are deemed to be "inappropriately dressed for their size." You know the sort of comments like if a fat person is wearing PVC and someone says they look like a stuffed sausage […] If they are comfortable in it (and it falls within dress code if one exists) that's all that matters. Hell when people look like that I don't think it looks bad at all […] Personally I prefer flaws and imperfections – something we don't see enough of in my opinion. ("Say Hello," original punctuation)

His last sentence may be seen as shifting the perspective from identity politics toward a more specific mission of the Goth to appreciate things culturally erased or passed over – an issue elaborated upon further in this chapter.

As illustrated by the above insight into several conceptualizations of physical self-fashioning, Goth discourses are capable of containing, and addressing, the Gothic paradox of bodily fixedness and fluidity. This, in turn, testifies to the possibility for both aspects of the body to be acknowledged and to actively work within one coherent phenomenon founded on self-styling practice.

Representation and Experience
in Goth Self-Fashioning

As already signaled, the depictions of self-fashioning practices offered by the Goth authors may serve as a case in point with regard to the mutual complementation and dependence of representational and experiential somaesthetics. They seem to face a similar problem as the one highlighted by Shusterman – namely, the dominance of superficial visuality over more complex and subtle aspects of self-styling. Therefore, several definitions of Goth identity give prominence to its internalized dimensions. Simultaneously, however, the engagement of materiality – be it in the form of the human body, or a variety of personal items mentioned below – in constructing experience is regularly underlined. The subcultural somaesthetics also turns to performance as yet another dimension of self-fashioning. Shusterman depicts "performative somaesthetics" as "group[ing] methodologies that focus primarily on building strength, health, or skill […] But to the extent that such performance-oriented practices aim either at external exhibition or at one's inner feeling of power, they might be assimilated into the representational or experiential categories" (*Performing* 143). In the Goth self-presentations, performance- and performativity-oriented phenomena seem to infiltrate each other and, brought together with the sphere of appearance, produce a tool for capturing subtle aspects of the subcultural "feel." Thus, what Shusterman understands as experiential somaesthetics based on shaping individual reception, may, in the discussed examples, occasionally shift into verbalized – and externalized – displays of linguistic performativity. Still, the abovementioned nuances of Goth somaesthetic practices tend to reveal the richness of the buffer zone between the representational and the experiential without undermining the sovereignty of those dimensions in the process.

The mutual infiltration of the representational and experiential inspires some among the basic definitions of the Goth. The first page of Kilpatrick's *Bible* declares that "goth is a state of mind" and the author further affirms that "while through fashion and music it has been visible, […] what goth *really* encompasses is the silver they [members of the movement] keep hidden" (3). Digitalis is even more focused on the perceptional sensitivity shaping individual experience when he argues: "Goth, then, boils down to philosophy, to ideas expressed in numerous forms of art. To be Gothic is to think, feel, act, and behave as a dark artist […] In the end, and above all

else, Goth is not something someone *does*. It is something someone *is*" (13). Ravlin, the earliest among the voices brought up hereby, elaborates on such intangible yet cementing qualities of the movement as follows: "We hold in common one aesthetic […] Now, that's nothing solid, nothing you can poke or tickle, but it's a single aesthetic which is large enough to accommodate anyone who consents to join the Gothic Scene. The centerpiece to the aesthetic is a philosophy: we will all die, yet all is suffused with the beauty of our Heart" (Mirror, Main). Moreover, both Ravlin and Kilpatrick (42) consider possible discrepancies between subcultural looks and belonging to conclude that the former not always results in the latter.

While the emphasis on the invisible may resonate with Shusterman's appeal to use experiential somaesthetics as a counterbalance to representational excess, internalized subcultural experience is also depicted as stimulated by material objects used for self-styling or establishing a broader aesthetic environment. Probably most often discussed in that context is the significance of black clothes and accessories. On the one hand, the Goth authors confront that issue as a part of mainstream stereotype and claim that the single color choice is neither obligatory in the subculture nor necessary to capture its spirit (Ravlin, Mirror, Large; Kilpatrick 38–41; Digitalis 12; Venters, Chapter 1, Do). On the other hand, though, they do affirm the somaesthetic impact of blackness. Kilpatrick's respondents from the global Goth community come up with various explanations of their attachment to that color, from symbolic to utterly pragmatic, one of them using an experiential description: "[Black] […] gives me power and self-confidence, and this beautiful dark feeling" (36). Digitalis's Wiccan lens, in turn, adds somatic and, further, ritual significance to most basic tasks connected with representational self-styling: "Clothing influences us whether we know it or not. As a prime example, some people have a tendency to slip into depression when wearing black, while others find it very healing and centering" (116). The psychological weight of such an argument notwithstanding, it reflects the experiential factor in the bridge his book builds between Goth self-fashioning and the neo-pagan magic:

something as simple as washing the laundry seems like an ordinary, mundane act, but […] can be transformed into a meaningful act of instant magic […] [S]ee each piece of clothing as carrying a different ailment that you wish to remove from your life […] Even simply envisioning sadness or anger surrounding the clothes is sufficient […] Luckily for us Goth types, we don't usually need to separate darks from lights and are afforded the luxury of doing a single load of wash! Dark colors help trap and secure energy, so it's convenient for us to perform instant magick of this type. (117)

In a similar vein, he describes magical properties of makeup (119) and encourages the reader to "allow [their] inner artist time to accentuate [their] form. Present [their] body as a spiritual creation […] fancify it and allow [their] inner self to manifest externally!" (121). Also the act of hairdressing is given an identity-shaping aspect: "Hair is the most easily changeable piece of the body – what better way to express one's own changing emotional state of being than through a mutable physical medium?" (131). As Digitalis further claims, "Our emotions are constantly and continually changing. A primary causal factor is the individual's surrounding stimuli and

the mind's reaction to it. On a larger scale, human emotions change both monthly and yearly, in tune with the lunar and solar cycles. We may choose to alter our hair drastically or subtly in accordance with these tides" (133). Thus, the cause-effect link between representational and experiential somaesthetic practice, with the looks being a product and reflection of individual creativity, is loosened and shifts toward a more simultaneous, double result of experiencing the world. Moreover, the author inscribes such processes into a broader framework evocative of self-fashioning philosophies: "By actively putting intention behind each and every *mundane* activity that we perform, we discipline ourselves to our intent to manifest our desires, not to mention the fact that turning the ordinary into the extraordinary keeps life interesting and magickal" (120).

Ravlin, in turn, does not dwell on the specific significance of particular material items in the Goth identity construction yet comes up with a whole list confirming the overall relevance of accessories:

> I have found these items to be of undeniable use to Ours: any brand of cloves […], unused razor blades, broken mirror, dead blossoms, black lipstick, black eyeliner, black fingernail polish, white face, palest foundation, black velvet, black lace gloves, crucifixes […], black & red tarot, candles, wine glasses, two penpals, scars, a hypodermic needle, black velvet on the walls and windowpane, a grimoire […], a tape player or cd player or both, paintings done by oneself, a pet spider in a glass container (feed it or suffer my wrath), black cigarette lighter, many long stemmed matches, silver jewelry […]. (Mirror, Large)

What is worth underlining is that the above collection does not differentiate between cosmetics, other usable objects, trinkets and decorations, not to mention the living creature.[23] Personal appearance, expression and perception of adequately ornamented space, seem to blend into one, forming a dense background for the interactions of representational, experiential and performative somaesthetics.

Voltaire's interpretation of subcultural self-styling leans even further toward the significance of performative identity, and offers a more wholesome example of the connectivity between various dimensions of self-fashioning: "if you are going to go to the trouble of dressing in turn-of-the-century garb replete with fake fangs, cape, and walking stick, you are going to have to go the extra mile and dress your name up as well" (38). It is a way of introducing a parodic "Gothic Name Generator," suggested as a practical aid in coining a nickname to match the stylized looks. Based on a "title – name – occupation – subjects" scheme, the generator produces results such as "Empress Demona, Defenestrater of the Bats" (38). The "aristocratic" point of reference locks together physical, perceptual and performative aspects of the Goth,[24]

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[23] Further in the same section, Ravlin appeals to his readers to carefully consider keeping animals and is far from treating them like mere props, as the quoted passage might suggest.

[24] As the term "performativity" is responsive to a broad scope of theorizations, the fact that I abstain from specifying it at this point requires explanation. Shusterman's category of performative somaesthetics is inspired by the immediate sense of the word "performance," referring to an act of somatic practice. Still, it may, in my view, be safely expanded to include elements of linguistic performativity

as the author extends it also to social interaction: "if you are going to fit in with the Gothic crowd, you will need to think like an arrogant aristocrat condescending to address the peasants around you […] Add a British accent for extra points" (31). Thus, in Voltaire's overdrawn characterization of the Goth, textuality and linguistic performativity merge with corporeality not only as a passive object of decoration but also a factor actively involved in the "aristocratic" act.

While Voltaire's satirical improvisation lays bare the interconnected-yet-multifarious systems of Goth self-fashioning, Digitalis turns to a fictionalized narrative that brings them together and employs it in a multilayer depiction of subcultural experience:

> A waning Mother Moon makes a striking appearance in the speckled sky, entrancing your gaze. Not looking away, *you take three deep Inhalations*, knowing the energy she gives is free for all who seek the ways of old […] Eye to eye with yourself in the mirror, *you feel your face readying for detailed adornment* […] With a small, clever smear down the side of the face, *your makeup* is gorgeous; *it feels right* and is complete.
>
> The weather is nice, and *your apparel portrays your personality* […] The pulsing beat [of the music at the club] brings a slight smile on your face. Deep-toned vocals drown out some of the crowd's chattering. *The bass permeates your being*, vibrating the flesh […] [A fellow club goer], like many of the attendees, has come this night seeking personal therapy by mingling with like-minded people […] Your eyes slowly close while *your body becomes a piece of moving art*. The rhythm takes your breath while the driving vocals nearly bring a tear to your eye. "Mmmmm," you think to yourself. "*This is home*." (156–157, emphasis added)

In the quoted excerpt, representational and experiential aspects smoothly infiltrate each other and, moreover, expand onto the elements of performativity connected with overall socialization as well actual dancing performance. Perhaps such an escalation of somaesthetic practices is a major reason why Goth authors attach a lot of significance to club outings and the collective reception of music, which tend to be depicted as culminations of the subcultural lifestyle.

Indeed, as Venters puts it, virtually restating in two sentences the core of Digitalis's elaborate fictionalized passage, "The most common social activity for Goths is going out to the local Goth club (with the social activity of *getting ready* to go out to the local Goth club coming in at a close second). Gathering together in gloom-shrouded clubs dressed in dark finery and swirling around a dance floor to a morbid tune is the skeleton that the Goth subculture is built upon" (Chapter 9, Manners On). Digitalis further cements the bond between the self-fashioning dimensions of image, experience and performance by claiming that "[t]he club is a temple" (158). He attaches its sanctification to the experiential uniqueness of "[t]he act of dancing" in which

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derived from John Langshaw Austin's speech act theory and applied to the processes of identity formation by Judith Butler; and even broader performative frameworks coined with regard to social relations by Erving Goffman; or Richard Schechner's possibly most inclusive approach to performance, extending from ritual to politics to art. As all those theoretical backgrounds may be relevant with reference to Goth practices, keeping the term's definition open and adjustable to particular contexts seems to be an optimal solution.

"[t]he physical vehicle becomes a conduit for the energy of the music" (161) and its spiritual investment (163). Thus, "[t]he *real* dance is internal, in the mind, in the soul" (163), yet it is also a physical response to the reception of external stimuli (165). Simultaneously, its performative character is underlined by the existence of "Gothic dancing styles include[ing] twirls, swoops, swirls, bows, kicks, grasps, waves, and other dramatic moves" (163).

It is such iconic patterns that, on the one hand, confirm the overall relevance of dancing for the Goth, while, on the other, attract indispensable parody, mostly from within the subculture itself. Analyzing the motion patterns observed among club goers, classifying them under humorous names and sharing with broader audiences in the form of half-serious instructions has become a characteristic Goth practice. Kilpatrick, for instance, acknowledges an online "How to Dance Gothic" guide by Kai MacTane and Ann Killpack (110–111), according to the GothPunk.com(muni-ty) website dated back to 1998,[25] while more recent examples include a 2016 "How Goths Dance" video from a prominent subcultural vlogger Black Friday. Unsurprisingly, Voltaire contributes to the dance-guide tradition in a manner similar to his way of handling Goth makeovers. Several sets of actual movement sequences present-ed in *What Is Goth?* are enveloped in ironic, diminishing commentary, manifested, among others, in their names, such as "Who Spilled a Coke on the Dance Floor?," "Pulling the Evil Taffy," or "Punch the Hobbit!" (42–49). Moreover, the experiential and performative aspects of the dancefloor self-styling are, perhaps somewhat arbi-trarily, posed in an anticlimactic contrast against each other: "one might dance to express hidden turmoil, to unleash inner demons, to liberate one's vampiric spirit like a dark whirlwind enveloping the room! In other words… to hook up with girls (or be hooked up)" (40).

Thus, the survey of interactions between representational and experiential as-pects of Goth somaesthetics presented in this section demonstrates the complexity of those two spheres' interconnection and helps to vent the paradoxical tension of their simultaneous complementation and contrast in Shusterman's discourse. As shown in the analyzed subcultural self-presentations, appearance can be interpreted as both reflecting and forming internal self-identification. Moreover, the inside–outside and cause–effect divisions can be dismissed in situations when self-fashioning is inter-twined with the process of perceiving and absorbing something – for instance music. Finally, performative aspects of self-styling, while inscribable into the representation-al–experiential spectrum, may gain special prominence by configuring looks, behav-ior, language, semiotics and individual perception in astonishing combinations.

If one were to look for a reconciliation of the occasionally uncoordinated or even self-contradictory workings of somaesthetics emergent from the above picture of Goth self-fashioning, Shusterman's insight into a seemingly unrelated phenomenon of American country music and culture might prove useful. Arguing for its affinity

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[25] In the currently accessible version, the guide is attributed to Kai MacTane and Antigone.

with hip hop, the author highlights a subcultural dimension that is easily expandable onto the Goth and consists in the centralization of "deeply embodied and unashamed expression of strong feeling. This aesthetic not only generates […] distinctive dance cultures but finds expression in […] artful lifestyles, replete with special modes of fashion, grooming, and behavior, along with characteristic idioms of posture, movement and speech" (*Performing* 8). The way Shusterman sees it, the emotionality that brings all those factors together has a power of mitigating the paradoxical status of the country phenomenon, which "wins acceptance of its pure authenticity despite recognized evidence to the contrary" (84). It is possible thanks to a premise adopted from William James, namely that "credence comes through emotion" (Shusterman, *Performing* 84), which, in turn, implies that the experience offered by country music authenticates itself "not by factual demonstration but by emotional conviction: pathos proving that the song comes so directly from the heart that no falseness is possible" (85). That Goth self-fashioning occasionally employs a similar logic is confirmed, for example, by the rhetorics of Voltaire's commentary. His strong expressions and satirical tone might, at times, be perceived as brutally critical of the subculture or operating with stereotypes in offensive ways (for instance in the already-discussed characterizations of Goth types, or in a free rhetorical turn to homosexuality (31)). Simultaneously, however, they firmly represent an insider Goth voice, legitimized not only by the author's subcultural investment and capital but also the sheer passion for the Goth aesthetic that he declares and illustrates with his self-fashioning as a "professional Goth" (xv).[26]

For Shusterman, the key factor turning evocation of feelings into a force capable of relieving internal paradoxes of the somaesthetics involved in the culture of country music is

[a] somewhat circular mechanism of emotional satisfaction and reinforcement. The habitual desire for enjoyable emotion and its proven past arousal in country music tend to reinforce the emotional suggestiveness of the music, creating in the target listener an anticipatory tension to emote at the hearing of a country song: an anticipation, tension, or tendency that in realizing itself reinforces still further the emotional liveliness of country music. This circularity is best understood not as a vitiating logical fallacy but as a psychological fact of habitual conditioning and reinforcement […] [C]ountry exploits the psychological mechanism wherein perception of greater authenticity in […] country music combines with a strong emotional longing for the pure and authentic, thereby generating a seductive sense of authenticity *tout court* – pure and simple. (*Performing* 86–87)

While the "anticipatory tension to emote" does seem to underlie a significant aspect of Goth clubbing experience as narrated by Digitalis or explained by Venters, its possible psychological repercussions are not a subject of this book. However, what such a conceptualization of experiential somaesthetics both highlights and complicates is the function of pleasure in subcultural self-fashioning.

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[26] More on the institution of the "professional Goth" in Chapter 3.

Goth Critique and Celebration of Pleasure

As signaled in Chapter 1, connections between pleasure and philosophies of self-fashioning are complicated, which is why the discussion presented hereby calls for a narrower understanding of pleasure. Specifically, this section revolves around the functions of pleasure in consumption-oriented culture, represented especially by appropriated and commercialized aspects of representational somaesthetics. The Goth is frequently ascribed an ambivalent relationship with consumption, as it relies on a variety of material products and entertainment practices, while building its aesthetics around concepts and phenomena commonly seen as detrimental to post-capitalistic sensitivity, such as negative emotions or mortality awareness.

Ravlin's already-quoted take on the core of Goth "philosophy" depicts the unavoidability of death as a filter for perceiving the world and adopting a cross-sectional aesthetic stance. Also Digitalis, who founds the core idea of his book on the affinities between the Goth and neo-paganism – though he argues strongly against pejorative connotations of darkness in both those cases (2) – explores the relevance of mortality in the Goth. "In modern Western culture," he writes, "[…] [d]eath is pushed aside, away from the eyes of the masses. It is crammed in nursing homes, generally apart from the rest of society. People are no longer exposed to the reality of this transition and therefore pay it little mind. Aging goes unacknowledged and death itself is denied […] Death is portrayed as romantic and the concept both idealized and de-emotionalized" (Digitalis 265). Thus, the subculture is ascribed a balancing function: "Goths subtly, and often unconsciously, remind others that life is but a temporary experience" (264–265). Marginality and aesthetic sensitivity overlap in the above accounts, offering a peek into the subcultural logic capable of forging an object of cultural repression into a source of enjoyment. Kilpatrick depicts the mortality focus of the Goth in more radical terms that, in turn, resonate with Siegel's insistence on the subculture's anti-systemic character (Siegel 2, 7–9, 25):

> Most goths are goth because of a refined sensitivity to life, and an ability to view and tolerate the shadowy elements that much of society is busy ignoring, like death […] Goths know that death is a sad business […] When anyone takes on the grim business of shouldering the shadow for those who refuse to bear their own portion of the darker part of life, it's no wonder the pain of such an endeavor can feel unbearable at times. Personifying the elements that much of the mainstream is trying to avoid means rejection. (Kilpatrick 7–8)

Controversy around the Goth relationship with death has resulted in one major stereotype about the subculture's sinister and dangerous character, confronted and refuted by Voltaire (81, 89), Digitalis (2–3, 11–12), Kilpatrick (2–7), and Venters (Chapter 2, Common; Chapter 4, How to; Chapter 5, No, You). The other influential stereotype, closely related to the former one, deals with the more broadly understood "negativity," including sociopathic dejection, self-destructive tendencies, and openness to variously defined evil. While Siegel does not hesitate to construe the

trademark Goth display of unhappiness as a conscious act of war against norma-
tive optimism (25), the subcultural authors add other aspects to that "spoilsport"
dimension of self-fashioning. Venters and Digitalis (11) explain that sadness is not
obligatory, and depression – not taken lightly in Goth culture. Moreover, Digitalis
complicates the significance of negative emotions by elaborating on their psycholog-
ical and spiritual functions (96–106). He argues that Goth "philosophy embraces
introspective sadness as a natural emotion and seeks to understand humanity and its
motivations" (13). A still more confrontational attitude is taken by Voltaire when he
argues that the subculture faces aggression not so much because of its iconic pessi-
mism as its more general symbolic strike at civilizational hypocrisy:

> In our two-dimensional society […] everyone is expected to be unrealistically good all of the time;
> still, we all secretly know that hidden deep inside […] lurk dark thoughts, murderous urges, and taboo
> fantasies […] It seems that many mundanes fear these feelings and spend most of their time trying to
> keep them hidden from the rest of the world […] Hence, when a Goth appears before them, that Goth
> becomes the incarnation of their fears, a manifestation of their own insecurities, a symbol of the fright-
> ening unknown. (76–77)

Simultaneously, as in the case of other Goth characteristics, Voltaire acknow-
ledges the pragmatic usefulness of negativity as a somaesthetic tool: "In Gothic world,
it is very attractive to be perceived as a tortured soul living in a state of unceasing
anguish" (30), however, Goths "aren't really sad all of the time; this is primarily just
an act that empowers them with an air of mystery" (86).

Thus, subcultural self-fashioning driven by the embrace and affirmation of
death, difficult emotions or moral taboos, sometimes comes together with criticism
aimed at icons of standardized representational somaesthetics mentioned by Shuster-
man. Kilpatrick (169) and Voltaire (79) emphasize, for instance, Goth contempt
for physical fitness, while Digitalis criticizes body improvements (see the previous
section). As implied by the discussed examples, such rejection of conventional joys
and affirmative practices may itself become a source of pleasure, be it connected with
aesthetic experience or subcultural capital generated through effective self-fashioning.
Still, following the significance of pleasure in somaesthetics, and broader self-styling
philosophies, Goth self-presentations also tend to elaborate on subcultural practices
aimed directly at various kinds of sensual satisfaction.

Some of them, rather predictably, derive from the obvious areas of somatic de-
light, such as sex and consumption of stimulants. Ravlin gives a rather concise expres-
sion of approval of erotic self-awareness and sovereignty extending from any form of
consensual practice to abstinence (Candle, Candelabrum). Digitalis and Kilpatrick,
in turn, elaborate on the Goth embrace of forbidden pleasures. The author of *Goth
Craft* sets the subcultural use of sensation enhancers against the background of their
ritual and religious origins, thus balancing the entertaining benefits of stimulants
against an argued need for purpose and control in their application (166–176). He
also stresses its practical aspect: "For most clubgoers, alcohol, if used moderately, pro-
vides 'mental lubrication' and an opportunity to relax and unwind. Some people feel

they need it to enjoy themselves more in public outings, as inhibitions are lessened and anxiety wanes" (176). Both Digitalis (176) and Kilpatrick (121–130) depict the Goth subculture as not very transgressive in its enjoyment of chemicals. Erotica seems far more prominent, as Kilpatrick claims: "Goth is a sexy business, a flirty subculture. Almost all goth boiz and gurrls exude a kind of sultry eroticism tinged with danger" (135). Digitalis acknowledges Goth openness to multiplicity of sexual identifications (185–194) and devotes special attention to BDSM practices (182–184). Simultaneously, however, he criticizes the common lack of awareness and reflection in the pursuit of transgressive pleasures (146, 166, 176).

Still, despite the declared Goth distance toward stimulants, some of them do seem loaded with special semiotic or aesthetic significance. According to Kilpatrick, "the consensus is almost 100 percent that there is nothing quite as romantic and evocative as the scent of cloves wafting through the air as one enters the dark domain of a goth club" (129–130). She also devotes a lot of attention to absinth as a Goth inspiration, or even "obsess[ion]," triggered by the liquid's "infamous history" (127), elaborate consumption method, and reputation (128). Pleasure-inducing substances and practices – often provided with some form of metaphoric or cultural significance – are, therefore, acknowledged as present, and sometimes prominent, in the subcultural experience. What, however, is striking – especially in Kilpatrick's multifarious survey of Goth self-fashioning techniques – is that such predictable pursuits of consumerist delight may be seen as a part of a broader somaesthetic attitude toward different areas of life – from cooking (149–150) and tea drinking (169–171), to house decorations (148–149),[27] to gardening (171–174), to sightseeing (182–203), to car selection (150), to stylizing Goth parents' children (143–146). All those areas may provide channels for manifestation and experience of Goth aesthetics through customization of everyday actions, consumables or material objects. Some undertakings – for instance graveyard picnics (Kilpatrick 179–181) or children upbringing (see also Venters Chapter 3, How To, Goth) – additionally reinforce the aura of subcultural controversy.[28]

As demonstrated in this section, Goth somaesthetics makes delight and fear infiltrate each other in astounding ways, putting on display the paradox of simultaneous affirmation and rejection of pleasure. Death and disintegrating existential emotions are marked as objects of anxiety or repression in the cultural paradigm formed by the

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[27] Prominent examples of Goth investments in interior decorations are Voltaire's publication *Paint It Black: A Guide to Gothic Homemaking* (2005), followed by his YouTube series "Gothic Homemaking" (2016–present).

[28] While such controversy most often derives from the predictable impact of non-normative aesthetic solutions on the "mainstream," Venters also points to Goth somaesthetics itself as potentially abusive when rendered through the stylization of dependents: "It's all well and good to dress them [children] in clothes that say '*babybat*' and give them fuzzy toy monsters to hug, but don't feel betrayed if they like Disney cartoons and sports too. Remember that children are separate people with their own (frequently strongly expressed) likes and dislikes" (Chapter 3, Goth).

"death of God" combined with the capitalistic insistence on production and consumption. Simultaneously, they become appropriated by subcultural self-fashioning, and turned into sources of somaesthetic pleasure. Such pleasure can be granted by both representation expanding from physical appearance to stylization of everyday life sceneries and fashioning of experience connected with a sense of transgression, or participation in an alternative aesthetic order. Goth self-presentations bring together the seemingly contrastive practices of affirming some pleasure pursuits while rejecting those that may strive at erasing uncomfortable aspects of reality. Thus, by binding its somaesthetic core with sources of cultural fear, the Goth is established as a meta-product of pleasure philosophy. In the next section, I turn to the BDSM aesthetics, as the possibly most intense way of self-reflective reconciliation of pleasure and pain, in order to explore the potential broader significance of Goth semiotic appropriations for the way the subcultural aesthetics processes self-fashioning.

Masochism, Sadism, and Self-Fashioning

If one does not take into account explicit, though variably significant, overlaps between Goth and BDSM aesthetics, the probably most prominent connection of S/M and self-fashioning philosophies comes from interpretative reflections on the works and biography of Foucault. His technologies of the self, and the overall preoccupation with self-styling, are sometimes brought together with erotic practices in a somewhat forensic manner. While the philosopher's published comments on S/M phenomena and communities are available, they come mostly from interviews or press essays and other half-formal exchanges, not the immediate corpus of his scholarly texts. Still, their impact – and resonance with the broader scope of Foucault's thought dealing with power and subjectivation – has proved sufficient to encourage a number of authors to address S/M in terms of his philosophy. Shusterman, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, seeks to interpret Foucault's erotic inclinations as revealing internal contradictions in his thought and posing a limit to its usefulness for the somaesthetic project. James Miller, in turn, takes a virtually opposite stance in his *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, by locating S/M at the heart of Foucault's philosophical pursuits and self-formation.

The other reflection on sadism and masochism that proves relevant for my consideration of the BDSM aesthetic in Goth self-fashioning comes from *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* – Deleuze's commentary on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Its affinity with self-fashioning is filtered through the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis, which in broader terms remains outside the methodological scope of this book. Nevertheless, Deleuze's analysis is helpful in solidifying ties between (sado)masochism and the formation of identity inscribed in broader Foucauldian premises.

The major philosophical and identity-related concepts crucial for those ties are experiential "pain-pleasure," "erotization" (and theatricalization) of power, and what may be called a Deleuzean deterritorialization (Siegel 16), or – closer to Miller's perspective – de-hierarchization of the body. Another issue relevant for S/M, especially on symbolic and performative levels, is the function of discipline. I choose to discuss it in this section, as discipline is connected with Foucault's technologies of the self. The elements of Goth aesthetic most relatable to S/M practices, even in a sheer semiotic dimension, expose the possibly controversial aspect of self-fashioning philosophy, culturally associated with transgression and morally suspicious affirmation of pleasure. Therefore, it all the more invites a consideration with regard to the ongoing training of self-scrutiny and self-improvement that Foucault links with ascetic practices, as well as *meletē* and *gumnazein* exercises introduced in Chapter 1.

Even though the potential, postulated and actual correlations of S/M with self-fashioning constitute a challenging field for investigation, its main task in this specific project is relatively limited. Firstly, it is to refer the overall logic of such connections to the unquestionable visibility of references to BDSM aesthetic and culture in Goth self-presentations. Secondly, it is to sketch a map of connotations available to the artifacts of such aesthetic. As demonstrated below, self-fashioning relies to a large extent on individual somaesthetic and mental experience – and neither the subcultural voices analyzed in this chapter nor works of fiction discussed in Part III enable a reliable insight into that sphere. Therefore, instead of arguing for an in-depth connection between the Goth and the philosophical implications of S/M, this section merely tracks down those self-fashioning-related concepts that may be highlighted by the presence of BDSM motifs in the Goth aesthetic and, together with it, further induced into texts of culture.

Pain/Pleasure, Death and Self-Destruction

The conceptual relevance of S/M for the core sense of self-fashioning tracked down from Nietzsche to Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari boils down to enabling shifts from identity models fixed by normalizing forces to an ongoing and fluid process of individual design. As the establishment of those normalizing forces is a part of the life-focused biopolitics, death becomes expelled from normative cultural experience, and in the eyes of Foucault, inspired by his philosophical predecessors, including Marquis de Sade, becomes a rebellious sphere of effective escape from biopolitics (Miller 241–242). Thus, the Goth attachment to all things morbid can be perceived as a semiotic manifestation of not only immediate reactions to American cult of optimism (Voltaire x, 15, 76–77, 82–83), but also broader cultural sensitivity induced by the self-fashioning philosophy.

In Miller's further account, death is joined by sex as the Other to the civilizational developments of the last few centuries. Despite being an object of major moral and socio-cultural preoccupation, "the status of sex was as essentially contested as the meaning of death […] the work of Sade and his followers suggested that the effort to evade death and regulate sex had created, through a kind of reflux motion, a strange and disturbing new alliance between eros and thanatos" (242). Therefore, the links between the Goth focus on death and Goth erotica – interpreted by Siegel as the self-destructive acceptance of dangers attached to sexual explorations (7, 9) – resonate also with the self-fashioning logic based on Miller's commentary. "Enjoy your body; it's only your toy for so long," encourages Ravlin (Candle, Candelabrum).

The precise structure of the overlap between sex and death in the sphere of civilizational undoing can be clarified via the pain/pleasure logic of S/M, which Miller incorporates into the post-Nietzschean approaches to identity developed by Deleuze as well as Foucault. The civilizational exclusion of death spread from dying to killing and, by extension, causing destruction or pain; in combination with the rise of biopolitics, that process resulted in "the renunciation of violence and cruelty among the subjects of civilized society" (Miller 217). The said novelty produced an inner conflict between internalized normalizing models and individual tendencies to be measured against and tamed by them:

> Stifling its cruel and murderous impulses, the human being became a subject of civilized reason and morality. But the organism's cruel impulses did not, for all that, disappear altogether.
>
> What otherwise might be inexplicable – namely, the pleasure human beings have clearly learned to feel in taking pains to rule themselves – Nietzsche explained through the survival of internalized cruelty, and the paradoxical convergence of pleasure and pain that characterizes it. (Miller 217)

In S/M performative practices such factors of self-destruction fueled by the inner polarization of identity become externalized again, acted out in a controlled, frequently playful environment, and thus rendered powerless as regulatory mechanisms. In the Nietzschean view, an act of self-aware secondary recapturing of the self-aggression imprinted in the modern subject is necessary for releasing vital creativity on which the self-fashioning of identity relies (Miller 218). "[T]he shattering transmutation of pain into pleasure produced by masochistic eroticism" can be perceived as a major example of such a process (Miller 197).

Indeed, Deleuze interprets masochistic experience in psychoanalytical terms as an alternative identity-forming process which involves "an invalidating disavowal of the father" (*Masochism* 68) and, what follows, normative socialization. Therefore, it is the "mother-image" (identified in Sacher-Masoch's dominatrix characters) who becomes "invest[ed] […] with the symbolic power of the law" (76) and can be affirmed as the sole guide to the crystallizing self. What is especially significant is the way in which such "investment" is accomplished, namely, through "the masochistic contract" (76). Deleuze emphasizes the latter as an element distinguishing the logic of masochism and marking its uniqueness (75–76). When contrasted with the logic of sadism, "contractual" thinking reveals its potential as an alternative to externally imposed rules:

Sade thinks in terms of "institutions," Masoch in terms of "the contract." The contract presupposes in principle the free consent of the contracting parties and determines between them a system of reciprocal rights and duties; it cannot affect a third party and is valid for a limited period. Institutions, by contrast, determine a long-term state of affairs which is both involuntary and inalienable; it establishes a power or an authority which takes effect against a third party. [25] In short, the specific impulse underlying the contract is toward the creation of a law, even if in the end the law should take over and impose its authority upon the contract itself; whereas the corresponding impulse at work in the case of the institution is toward the degradation of all laws and the establishment of a superior power that sets itself above them. (76–77)

In the above interpretation, the sadistic logic is not to be merely equated with the normative identity formation; on the contrary – it strives to transgress norms through "an exaltation of the father who is beyond all laws" (60). However, it is the local and temporary rule-setting ascribed to the masochistic subject that seems to resonate with the individualized and fluid process of self-fashioning.

Two further features of masochism that additionally affirm its relevance in the context of Goth self-styling are subversive complicity and incorporation of fiction. According to Deleuze, the former suggests an exorcising power of externalization: "The element of contempt in the submission of the masochist has often been emphasized: his apparent obedience conceals a criticism and a provocation. He simply attacks the law on another flank. […] We all know ways of twisting the law by excess of zeal" (88). Such ambivalence toward rules resembles tensions in Goth discourses, generated by the combination of alternative aesthetic or lifestyle-related choices and declared conflict-avoiding attitudes. As Spooner puts it, commenting on the importance of savoir-vivre in the contemporary constructions of the Goth movement and narrative tropes it inspires, "[r]esistance to the norm can only be achieved by working *with* the dominant culture rather than aggressively against it" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 96). The lack of confrontational potential can additionally be explained by the masochistic subject's reliance on fiction: "He[29] does not believe in negating or destroying the world nor in idealizing it: what he does is to disavow and thus to suspend it, in order to secure an ideal which is itself suspended in fantasy. He questions the validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality, an operation which is perfectly in line with the judicial [contractual] spirit of masochism" (Deleuze, *Masochism* 32–33). Thus, masochistic tools for dealing with limitations of the self operate "mythically, dialectically and in the imaginary" (35). As "[t]he masochistic use of fantasy […] consists in neutralizing the real and containing the ideal within the fantasy" (73), it seems to clarify the logic of some Goth engagements with fiction, be it creation of nicknames, the club ritual, or other examples of performative fantasy discussed throughout this book.

Still, the process of "expelling" the father to forge an alternative pattern of identity formation does involve an unquestionable element of creative eradication within

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[29] Deleuze's analysis of masochism and sadism in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* is strictly conditioned by his reading of Masoch's and Sade's texts, which also means specifically imposed gender identities, the sadistic and masochistic subjects conceptualized as male and their respective partners as female.

the subject who: "ensures that he will be beaten; […] what is beaten, humiliated and ridiculed in him is the image and the likeness of the father, and the possibility of the father's aggressive return. *It is not a child but a father that is being beaten*. The masochist thus liberates himself in preparation for a rebirth in which the father will have no part" (Deleuze, *Masochism* 66). Such an operation involves, therefore, an act of annihilation, which is, however, contained by a paradigm where "[d]estruction is merely the reverse of creation and change, disorder is another form of order, and the decomposition of death is equally the composition of life" (27). Deleuze contrasts that paradigm with "pure negation as a totalizing Idea," which resonates particularly with the logic of sadism (27–31). The involvement of annihilating forces in Goth self-fashioning seems largely limited to their "partial" variant preferred by masochism. It might be illustrated with the way Digitalis opts for what might be called controlled and creative uses of self-destruction. He encourages the treatment of tattooing (144) and piercing as a spiritual experience: "As the needle enters your flesh, focus not on the pain but on your intent. Put yourself in a light trance. The rush of adrenaline will help project your intent directly into your body and weave into existence the essence of your miniature rite of passage" (139). He also emphasizes a distinction between self-harm as a magical practice and a result of psychological dysfunctionality (140), and acknowledges scarification and suspension in terms of their aboriginal or spiritual significance rather than aesthetic or entertaining qualities (141–142).

Thus, the masochistic oscillation between pain and pleasure, as well as destruction and creation, might throw some light on the ambivalent, predominantly controlled and self-consciously ironized aesthetic flirts of Goth self-presentations with death, suffering and rebellion. Still, as Miller underlines with regard to Foucault's philosophical thought, the S/M-based logic of self-fashioning needs more than a simple transgression, lest it fall into fascism, whether on the scale of a social system or individual mental structure (243–244). The combination of sex and death can become a powerful factor of symbolic unwinding but should aim to release something other than simple "lust for domination." One way to achieve it is through the concept of "bodies and pleasures" (244), which points to two operations pursued by masochism: exploration of the performativity/theatricality of power – to exorcise its internal workings; and the physical deterritorialization – seeing as the imposition of a hierarchy onto body elements is a potential starting point for fascism.

Miller follows the words of Lawrence Stone in interpreting the overall premise of Foucault's work as based on a shift in the framing of the cultural input brought by the Age of Reason from the categories of progress to those of "control, domination and punishment," traceable back to de Sade's imaginary (Stone qtd. in Miller 235–236). The element of fiction, already discussed with regard to its relevance in masochism, is acknowledged also in a more general dimension of the work on power in self-fashioning. Both Nietzsche and Foucault elaborate on the spectacular dimension of pre-modern executions, which they perceive as helpful in "experiencing, if only *vicariously*, pleasures otherwise routinely forbidden" (Miller 216, emphasis added). Moreover, a broader

"capacity to fantasize" is pointed to as a way for an individual to develop their uniqueness. Though usually repressed and unacknowledged, it constitutes "the granite from which each of us must carve the statue we will call our 'self'" (223).

Thus, the often explicit fictionality underlying BDSM practices becomes all the more relevant as both fueling the pursuit of self-fashioning and – on the performative level – exorcising normative strategies of disempowerment.[30] Miller depicts Foucault's reflections as stimulated by the "fantasy environments" (260) of the sexual underground in San Francisco (261). Among the major sources of Foucault's inspiration, Miller lists the overall "theatricality of S/M, which permitted players to act out a variety of roles in a variety of different scenes and settings" (263). The specific examples of such locations include, unsurprisingly, "[w]elcoming dungeons filled with whips, chains, and cells," and "[t]he menu of masochistic possibilities [...] from solitary confinement in a coffin to public humiliation on a cross" (260). While Miller interprets the standard "dungeon" location as connoting "prison as the cozy habitat of the sexual outlaw" (260), its Gothic connotations also deserve acknowledgment. Thus, the kind of fiction-induced imagery that constitutes a prominent engine of Goth self-fashioning simultaneously belongs to a set of trademark auxiliary imaginaries supporting the BDSM self-fashioning. The gist of the latter is located in the general factor of performativity loosening the normative confines of fixed identity and power relations attached to it. That effect can be achieved thanks to the available anonymity of sexual encounters, in combination with their already mentioned "theatricality." Such flexibility, in turn, allows the "reenact[ment of] fantasies of domination and debasement otherwise experienced as involuntary" (266) while keeping their participants in control of their situations, mutual relationships, momentary identity choices, and the overall boundaries of the experience (263, 265–266).

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[30] As in the case of theoretical speculations upon the Goth subculture, a distinction is to be made between such declarative postulates inspired by BDSM practices and the ethnographic insights into the actual functioning of BDSM communities. The complexity of interactions between those two dimensions is depicted and explored by Margot Weiss, who in *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality* confronts the subversive conceptualizations of BDSM inspired by Foucault with the complex social entanglements of the San Francisco BDSM communities. Acknowledging the conceptual importance of "the radical alterity of the BDSM practice," she, nevertheless, balances it against the "socioeconomi[c]" dimension of sex (6). As a result, Weiss warns her readers that "[i]magin[ing] sm sex as a break from social relations is to accept a logic that cordons sexuality off from the social real, variously imagined as capitalism, social norms, or the regulatory ideals that produce intelligible subjectivity. This creates the deep irony of a community organized around explicit codes of conduct and techniques, but whose very rules enable community members to imagine themselves, and their sex, as free from social regulations" (6). She moves on to investigating the fluidity of connections between BDSM practices and capitalism and "reveal[ing their] supplementary relationship [...]: the ways in which community and capitalism depend on while also exceeding each other" (8). It is the philosophical and conceptual potential encoded in BDSM as a cultural phenomenon rather than the lived realization of such potential that provides a relevant context for my discussion of Goth self-fashioning. Nevertheless, the dynamics of communal practice, while not explored in this book, is – in the case of both BDSM and Goth culture – to be acknowledged as a vital, if not the main, dimension of those phenomena, which may complicate or verify their semiotic range.

Thus, according to Foucault, "S&M […] differs from social power. What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited" (Foucault, "Sex" 169). BDSM, in turn, is far from "a reproduction, inside the erotic relationship, of the structures of power. It is an acting-out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure" (169; see also Miller 263).

The Goth self-presentations discussed throughout this book develop a similar kind of metaconsciousness directed at the relativity, movability and regulation of subcultural boundaries, for instance in terms of the depth, coherence and continuity of individual investment in the Goth self. Such identity-destabilizing experiments also imply some sort of preliminary communal credence. Indeed, the relevance of trust within BDSM is made explicit through the movement's contractual character (Miller 265), already considered in terms of Deleuze's perspective. Goth commentaries, in turn, occasionally postulate a need for subcultural solidarity. Ravlin's *Autumn Cemetary* makes prominent appeals to kindness: from centralizing the relevance of "love and mercy" (Candle, Candelabrum) for the very existence of the Goth community, to delineating the right subcultural "[a]ttitude [which] is not cruel or meanspirited. It's genteel, ethereal, compassionate, quiet, and austere" (Mirror, Smaller). Ravlin also argues for the importance of protecting the community's internal bonds (Night, First) and instructs his readers to "set a precedent of realizing that those over fifteen remain worthwhile of respect" in the subcultural environment (Candle, Tendering elder). Moreover, he offers underage readers advice "on surviving parents," recommending appreciation of their support yet also providing a list of self-help manuals and child protection institutions for young Goths facing domestic problems. Also in that context the importance of "trust" is underlined: "Trust and be loyal to those who are loyal to you. If someone is truly kind and gentle, they're to be honored. If someone uses you, they may not have meant to, but exercise both caution and compassion. Someone out there can be trusted, but it may not be anyone close by you" (Candle, Candelabrum).

In Kilpatrick's book, incorporating voices of many people active on the Goth scene, the issue of cementing the community on various levels is brought up on several occasions. Comtesse deSpair, the author of a newsletter called *Morbid Fact du Jour* (an initiative still active in 2018), highlights the importance of successful networking: "It's very gratifying when you stumble upon people who share a dark worldview, with whom you can be honest about your interests without having to worry about the white coats coming with a straitjacket. It's a great feeling to find kinship with others when you've been told you're an aberration" (qtd. in Kilpatrick 160). Mike Mercer, British musical journalist and author of, among others, *Gothic Rock Black Book* (1988) and *Hex Files: The Goth Bible* (1997) mentions feedback from individuals who "lived somewhere that had no scene whatsoever" and, therefore, became members of the subcultural community thanks to his writings (qtd. in Kilpatrick 114). Similar motivations are declared by the interviewed publishers of Goth zines such as *The City*

Morgue or *Hymni Nocturnalès* who see their magazines as outlets for the communal creativity of "any fan of lunar inspiration" (222).

Venters, in turn, dedicates a prominent part of *Gothic Charm School* to practices intended to improve the subculture's social functioning. While her discussion of manners and etiquette includes detailed advice for mainstreamers and subculturalists handling interactions with each other, sections such as "Goths and Romance," "Socializing, Cliques and Gossip," or "Dance the Ghost with Me: Music and Gothy Club and Concert Etiquette" clearly focus on the Goth environment per se. Readers are instructed in "Etiquette for and About Crushes," as well as "Flirting and Dating" and dealing with the termination of relationships (Chapter 6). The author also argues for "striv[ing] to be polite to people even if you don't like them," "being circumspect around gossip," and understanding "the difference between snarkiness and cattiness" (Chapter 7). Addressing those areas of socialization, she responds to the communal characteristics of the Goth movement: relatively narrow social circles, especially in terms of the "local scene," as well as the inevitability and impact of "gossip," and the sarcasm-driven conversation style, both emphasized also by Voltaire (31). Moreover, Venters's book gives a critical explanation of the observed Goth inclinations to form hermetic groups, and gives tips on handling the close, but not always entirely controlled, overlaps between Goth and fetish/BDSM movements (Chapter 6).

Thus, the well-being of the subculture as an environment of fulfilling experience is something to be actively nurtured, and the interpersonal aspects of Goth self-fashioning seem especially effective in encouraging individual self-improvement. What follows is the notion of discipline emergent as a crossing point of BDSM, self-fashioning philosophy, and the Goth even though it refers to three intertwined yet not always harmonized semantic fields. As explained by Margot Weiss, the "discipline" sometimes signaled by the "D" in "BDSM" (another relevant connotation being "dominant") can be described as "formal" and is directly connected with performative practices and behaviors, mostly spanking to induce erotic pleasure (viii). In her reconsideration of the subversive potential ascribed to BDSM by Foucault-influenced theories, Weiss also evokes the "disciplinary" character of power structures. Building on voices of Jon McKenzie and Emily Martin, she argues for the Foucauldian perspective to be obsolete in the contemporary reality of "flexible capitalism" (22, 140–141), where Deleuzean "control" seems more adequate because "[d]iscipline is about limiting and regulating bodies; control is flexible and modulated, generative" (246, note 11). As a consequence, Weiss construes BDSM as "ambivalent" rather than rebellious in its relationship with the normative social reality of capitalism (142) and questions the desubjectifying effects of S/M practices. She locates the main impact of the latter on identity in "technique and knowledge of the body, which have everything to do with self-mastery and community production" (140). Indeed, it is that third dimension of self-directed "discipline" that seems especially effective in bringing together BDSM, Foucauldian and Goth self-styling.

While Weiss argues for an overall compliance of the actual S/M practice with Foucault's "technique of the self" (11), especially in terms of dynamics between community- and individuality-building aspects of "self-mastery" (64, 76, 79), Miller highlights two more particular factors that highlight the role of discipline in cementing Foucauldian self-fashioning with BDSM. One of them is a principle of cruelty, traced back to Nietzsche as a precondition to self-fashioning (238). According to Miller, Foucault encourages us to "be cruel," among others, "in [our] quest for the truth, ruthless in [our] honesty, savage in [our] irreverence" (237). Such an understanding of "cruelty," indicating determination and consequence in a self-fashioner's interactions with the outside world is suggestive of the already mentioned factor of courage in the Foucauldian approach to self-fashioning rooted in Greek and Roman traditions. A factor of more internally oriented self-discipline is, in turn, made prominent in the concept of "homosexual ascesis" that seems to bridge the overall Nietzschean approach to identity with the ancient technologies of the self. Revolving around the non-normative sexuality as a sphere for the "exploration of 'bodies and pleasures,'" the control- or discipline-driven aspect of self-fashioning practice "simultaneously affirms the possibility, and denies the likelihood, of an indentifiable 'self' emerging as a sort of existential 'work.'" Thus, it gives prominence to the process of "becoming" (258), already indicated as crucial in Nietzschean self-fashioning (and further expanded by Deleuze, for example in *Difference and Repetition*, or together with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*).

Both overlapping spectra of discipline designated above – one extending from the practitioner's metaconsciousness to communal relations and the other from intellectual process to symbolic gesture – can be tracked down in Goth self-presentations. Ravlin illustrates the importance of the individual–communal axis in self-fashioning by arguing that

the Goth Scene exists on a personal and an interpersonal level, our personal Scene being the secret properties and props we possess that keep us from losing ourselves in the pleasures of our dramatic melancholia […] [W]e in the Scene must be imperfect mirrors to one another. Individuality need be squelched to the extent that it interferes with the Scene, even to the solipsist depths of Memory and Faith. (Cemetery, Syllabus)

The already mentioned dimension of social interactions in which self-discipline seems crucial is etiquette: "We are seeking a certain order, not only gentle but genteel, so we should be polite to one another. This means treating others as if we were waiting on them […] More than polite, we must be tolerant. […] [C]onsider treating people a tad more gently and with respect" (Candle, Flickerdim). The participation in the Goth movement is constructed as stimulating the strive toward self-improvement: "Behave with noblesse oblige and others will respond to you with respect" (Mirror, Smaller). Also Venters's advice, though focused first of all on the art of social interactions, turns to a more individual dimension of self-discipline when discussing "[t]he difference between self-confidence and self-absorption." Defining the former as a daring "to go forth and become the person you want to be," and the latter as a premise

"that everyone you talk to wants to be you or wants to hear about you" (Chapter 7, Difference), the author addresses a problematic side effect of the courage inscribed in the Foucauldian ethic of self-fashioning. Moreover, she reinforces the immediate connection between the individual and communal sphere by warning her readers that "self-absorption is where a lot of the negative clichés about Goth personality traits spring from. […] While mere silly twaddle, these negative clichés are pervasive and you need to be aware of them and be vigilant that you don't slide down into their grimy clutches" (Chapter 7, Difference).

Digitalis, in turn, locates the demand for self-discipline first of all in the highly individual, not to say intimate, sphere of magical practice that he does combine, but not fully identify, with Goth self-fashioning: "The Craft requires […] contemplation, meditation, reflection, humility, and dedication. […] If we choose to advance in the ways of the Witch, we must have absolute awareness of our effects on others and ourselves. We must have full accountability for our actions, and we must be willing to face the depths of our souls, even if portions are dark, tainted, or broken" (56). He also highlights the importance of "self-discipline" in the face of the fluidity of neo-pagan practices (88) and proclaims the need "for full recognition of our emotions and how we utilize them" (97). The detachment from, channeling, and interpretation of difficult feelings (94–95, 97, 104–107) evokes the discipline of self-fashioning and, moreover, bridges neo-pagan practice with the Goth: "we [Goths] are more than willing to face reality and embrace all parts of the emotional spectrum. The same can be said for Dark Witches, those who utilize the darker emotions for means of spiritual progression" (95).

As for more externally oriented aspects of disciplined self-fashioning work, Digitalis, similarly to Venters, offers advice on handling reactions of the general public to the unusual appearance of "Dark Pagans" and insists that "[o]ne key to looking different is *being nice*" (91) because "[i]f you dress differently, you will be stared at […] It's an unavoidable side effect of eccentricity and must be accepted as part of the bargain" (92). Thus, the self-fashioner's courage becomes a source not only of determination in relations with the outside world, but also of self-control. Courage as such is, moreover, implied in the way Digitalis deals with an incompatibility of neo-paganism and Christian dogmas: "I cannot grasp the concept that Satan […] is underhandedly controlling the entirety of our [Witch] lifestyles without us even realizing it. This view comes from a place of fear. […] Fear tactics are not part of the Craft" (51). Thus, the implicit courage – to the extent one chooses to identify it with the rejection of fear – manifests itself as a simultaneously disciplining and stimulating factor in Digitalis's text.

Kilpatrick offers another voice to affirm the importance of courage without, however, erasing fear from the realm of Goth self-presentation. The very motto of *The Goth Bible* assures "every goth roving the planet, and everyone who respects darkness" that "[their] value has and always will lie in the courage of [their] being." Still, the introductory depiction of the subculture insists, among others, that "[t]o be goth is to constantly be paranoid of being consumed by the culture at large" (14). Perhaps

it is due to such acknowledgments of Goth volatility as the one signaled above that Kilpatrick argues for the subtle uniqueness of the subculture's relationship with discipline in its purely performative dimension inscribed in BDSM.

Even though, as illustrated by this section, overlaps between Goth and BDSM aesthetics, performativity and communities are easy to notice, the commentaries they provoke are far from unanimous. Digitalis constructs a sexual–non-sexual continuum of fetishism that enables him to look for commonalities between the Goth, BDSM and neo-paganism (25), but otherwise chooses to explain the details of BDSM philosophy in a stand-alone section (182–185). Venters limits her discussion of parallels between Goth and BDSM cultures to etiquette tips dealing with the possible misunderstandings caused by the frequently apparent character of their similarities which may lead "fetishists" to be superimposing in interactions with Goths, who, in return, may prove unnecessarily prudish and judgmental (Chapter 7, Subcultural). As already mentioned, the diversity of opinions on the Goth–BDSM overlaps is even more prominent in academic commentaries: Siegel's claim about the importance of S/M for the Goth movement as a source of its subversiveness is challenged and undermined by Paul Hodkinson and by Spooner who elaborate on discrepancies between the subculture's semiotic production and actual communal practices. Brill, in *Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality and Style*, criticizes Siegel in a similar manner (34), confirming the subculture's affinity with and openness to BDSM culture (9–10) yet simultaneously interpreting Goth employments of the sadomasochistic aesthetic as vastly marketing-driven (161), abusive toward women, and reinforcing gender stereotypes (161–162, 164, 168).

Apart from acknowledging both movements' mutual infiltration (137–138), Kilpatrick, in turn, emphasizes a detail that the other accounts overlook: "Goths for some reason seem to have more fun with these activities than traditional fetishists. […] Pure fetishists are appalled by such behavior, but it goes with what goth is about; they take the 'play' in fetish play seriously" (138). Quoting Fred H. Berger, the creator of a photography-based Goth-BDSM magazine *Propaganda* (17), who claims that "[t]he only constant is change" in the relations between the two, she stresses the overall relevance of "the goth experimental nature" (138). Thus, the humor ascribed by Kilpatrick to Goth renderings of S/M may be interpreted as signaling the metaconsciousness of the subcultural "becoming" that Foucault suggests to constitute a valid part of the self-styling ascesis – the "authentic" Goth identity will never emerge from that process, but is always there to be pursued.

Kilpatrick makes one more claim that, while not necessarily generalizable, may reveal the complexity of connections between Goth and S/M-driven self-fashioning. Namely, she challenges the desexualizng aspect of Goth BDSM, emphasizing that "goths like their fetish play mixed with sex. This is a fetish purist's nightmare – fetish is erotic, but not necessarily sexual […] But for goths, who by their nature blur lines, fetish without sex is like a night without moonlight" (138–139). The dilemma of desexualizing pleasure through degenitalized erotic play (Miller 263) is also addressed

by Weiss. She argues that the unquestionable deterritorialization of erotic pleasure is – even in Foucault's own vision – followed not so much by the desubjectification as rather "subjectification" achieved through "pleasure of the rules: not pleasure in rules externally imposed by fiat, but pleasure in inhabiting, embodying, cultivating, elaborating, and individualizing the rules" (99).

The said dilemma is, in a way, applicable also to the Goth self-fashioning. A question might be posed, of whether the overlaps between BDSM and Goth phenomena eroticize the latter or perhaps rather de-eroticize the former. While, given the inherent fluidity and ambivalence of both movements, such phrasing bears the marks of a false alternative, it does seem to affirm the overall affinity between the Goth self-fashioning rhetoric and the logic of masochism as interpreted by Deleuze. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Goth self-representations handle corporeality in a highly self-aware manner. It acknowledges physical limitations of identity transformation and the possibility of reconceptualizing them as the body's own agency to be respected rather than fought. Such respect can be ascribed to the simultaneous ironization and affirmation of embodied experience, performativity and visual metamorphoses engaged in subcultural identity projects. This double discourse – along with other minor tensions and discrepancies between particular texts' approaches to physicality – constructs Goth identity projects as perseverant yet accepting their own conditioning, limitedness, and temporariness. Thus, especially in the context of its communality, Goth self-fashioning seems open to contractual regulation of its functionality within the subcultural environment, in its interactions with the outside world, and finally in intersubjective relations. It also validates the relevance of momentary, imagination-supported effects, simultaneously revealing the significance of discipline and self-monitoring in identity pursuits. Finally, the complex network of connections between pleasure, fear, and pain, which unfolds in the presented insights into Goth self-fashioning generates opportunities for subversive compliance. The next chapter further elaborates on the subcultural self-presentations' strategies of dealing with power.

CHAPTER 3

Fashioning Goth Cultural Impact

This chapter moves on from the body-related aspects of Goth self-fashioning to those reliant on the discourses of power and to the involvement of texts in the practices of identity formation demonstrated in the five already introduced self-presentations of the subculture. The reasoning continues to highlight flexibility and self-conscious in-betweenness of the analyzed texts' approaches to mainstream and normativity, authenticity, consumption, and participation in the media-based culture. The patterns emergent from those insights are framed by Greenblatt's strategies of submission and negation, and the logical continuity of the analyses included in Part II enables, at the end of this chapter, an identification of several discursive attributes of subcultural self-fashioning, which will further prove relevant for fictionalized Goth tropes.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Thornton problematizes the concept of "mainstream" employed in social studies as an object of negative identification among subcultural youths. She argues against a tendency to reify "mainstream" as an objectively detectable socio-cultural phenomenon and to reinforce the polarized, contrastive mode of subcultural identification ("*us-versus-them*"), eagerly embraced by informants (92). Moreover, she points to the active contribution of academic texts to the construction of "the chimera of a negative mainstream" fed on scholars' own "inconsistent fantasies" (93). Thornton, therefore, dedicates a vast part of her book to highlighting the relevance of the notion as a discursive tool comprising a variety of changeable practices, attributes or values that are rejected or criticized in the group's self-narrative yet often difficult to identify outside it (105–106). Still, her analysis confirms the crucial importance of the mainstream–underground spectrum for the basic definition of most subcultural phenomena, even though it simultaneously demonstrates that the continuum can function differently in detached descriptions than immediate practices.

While Thornton's claims are related to a specific research project carried out in the early 1990s Britain, J. Patrick Williams provides similar observations on the sub-

cultural significance of "mainstream" with a broader context in his 2011 *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*, conceived of, among others, as a generalized survey of nomenclature employed in theorizing subcultural movements (12). Williams recognizes the relative and largely constructed character of the discussed term, which he compares to a subcultural "straw man" (9). It is not, however, a step toward a depreciation of "mainstream," but rather toward depicting "mainstream and subculture […] as dialectically related" (9). Despite its elusiveness, the concept remains "real" in its function of a negative referent in the process of "alternative" self-definitions (132). Indeed, Williams's claim that the "boundaries between the subculture and the mainstream are not concrete, but are negotiated by individuals and groups through an ongoing process of (re)classifying certain tastes and behaviors" (9–10) is confirmed by both academic explorations of the Goth and its self-presentations discussed further in this chapter.

The approaches to the mainstream–underground polarity adopted by theorizations of the Goth reconcile a diversity of interpretative directions with a shared understanding of the said polarity as discursive and flexible. Goodlad and Bibby sketch a sinusoidal pattern of Goth popularity in mainstream media, which confirms the authors' guiding postulate that the subculture is "undead." By that they mean that the bouts of popularization and commercialization experienced by various aspects of the Goth throughout the 1980s, 90s and in the 21st century may affect, but not effectively "defuse" it in the way John Clarke, and after that Dick Hebdige, use the word to claim neutralization and disintegration of a subculture once it goes mainstream (Goodlad and Bibby 7, 9, 11). Moreover, Goodlad and Bibby identify the mainstream – understood in terms of market economy – as intrinsic to the Goth phenomenon (15). What, according to the authors, emerges from the ambivalence of the subculture's relationship with consumption is the Freudian "*unheimlich*. Though it strives to be alien to and subversive of bourgeois conventions, goth's uncanny otherness is always an otherness from within" (15). As far as more tangible specifications of the said "otherness" are concerned, Goodlad and Bibby point, on the one hand, to artistry, understood after Walter Benjamin as a site of authenticity and uniqueness: "Goths, we might say, negotiate the ever more pervasive commodifying effects of advanced capitalism by positing themselves and their subculture as works of art" (19). On the other hand, they stress "the subculture's resistance toward normative masculinity" (19) which gets close to actual subversion even if its motivation does not have to be explicitly political. A similar claim is made by Brill, who points to a "fantasy or *ideology of genderlessness*" as cohesive for the subcultural identity versus "the ignorant mainstream" (37). Simultaneously, however, she puts the said fantasy through a rigorous verification by analyzing the gender dynamics of Goth community practices. All in all, Goodlad and Bibby identify within the Goth cultural impact a dimension that they call the "mainstream alternative." This phrase is intended "to describe the ways in which elements of goth's style operate outside of the subculture as signifiers of countercultural possibility" and "continue to attract

those who, while not avowedly goth, seek the special cachet of a subcultural style" (27). The fact that they emphasize the observed tendency of Goth attributes and their signification to bleed into broader cultural environment is of utmost importance, as the processes and products of the "mainstream alternative" phenomenon become triggers of cultural self-awareness.

While Goodlad and Bibby see the position of the subculture toward the mainstream as a disturbing yet ambiguous Gothic double of normative consumption, Siegel does not hesitate to offer the possibly most radically politicized interpretation of the Goth phenomenon. She sees it as, first of all, a site of "resistance" through Foucauldian and Deleuzoguattarian practices of somatic experience, aimed against "mainstream American values, as constructed by corporate advertising and the rhetoric of political conservatism." Thus, "mainstream" becomes connected with "acquiring corporately produced or marketed consumer goods […] as well as […] creat[ing] a specific appearance associated by advertisers with health, youth, and success. What passes for success here depends upon disciplining desire in the Foucauldian sense, or territorializing it, as Deleuze would have it, so that it serves the goals of consumer capitalism in corporate America" (2). As already mentioned, the methodology of analysis presented in *Goth's Dark Empire* is criticized by Spooner and Hodkinson. The former questions the effectiveness of Siegel's "attemp[ted] participant observation and textual analysis" (354). The latter spots and comments on specific weak points of "textual analysis […] where it is used as the primary means of understanding the meaning and significance of a living, breathing youth culture" (264). Two among Hodkinson's charges invite a comment also with regard to the oscillation of my own analysis between the subculture as a social movement and the body of texts connected with it. The problems that he identifies in Siegel's work deal with the representativeness of texts selected as sources of data about the investigated community, and with the academic researcher's privileged position in imposing their preferred theoretical framework on the analysis outcomes (264–265). The text-oriented focus of this book reflects my concession that basing conclusions about a collective social identity on interpretative insights into selected works of fiction is risky in terms of both methodology and power relations. Simultaneously, however, I find Siegel's theorization productive not so much as an exploration of the Goth subculture, but rather as a testimony to the semiotic impact of Goth tropes in the sphere of cultural production. Thus, it is with an intention to explore the aesthetic and narrative layer of discourses of Goth self-fashioning rather than the subculture itself that I turn to Siegel's analysis, as well as some voices of Goth self-presentation, hopefully without an immediate risk of passing self-entitled theoretical judgments about lifestyle choices of actual people.

All in all, authors confronted with a need to position the Goth on the mainstream–underground axis seem to opt for a "third-way" solution such as the one provided by Goodlad and Bibby. Danesi considers the changes in the subculture's relationship with

normative lifestyles in the context of a more general claim that "we are in the throes of a paradigm shift" which undermines "the assumption that they [the youth] feel alienated from the mainstream" (59). Consequently, he argues Goths to "have become more of a parallel culture than a subculture, living in parallel with the mainstream one. They work for institutions in the mainstream society, but live culturally apart from it" (128). While what seems to contribute to the coherence of the alternative culture conceptualized this way is its cross-generational character (128), Danesi argues for a gradation of Goth detachment. He suggests that "in previous eras a punk and a goth was someone who removed himself or herself completely from the mainstream," while today "they are engaging in pure lifestyle choices, while still participating in the mainstream form of social life" (223). Danesi's perspective, seeking mostly to pin down transformations of attitudes toward subcultures demonstrated by 21st-century young generations, collides with the analyzed Goth self-presentations. The latter depict teenage experience as a relatively minor, and by no means the most interesting, part of the Goth phenomenon. Danesi also devotes less interpretative attention to the possible cultural impact of the proclaimed "parallelism" than Goodlad and Bibby do when they argue for a somewhat similar relation between the Goth and mainstream models of consumption.

Danesi's emphasis of Goth "parallelism" toward the mainstream does not, however, stop the author from pinpointing the subculture's critical character, whose most significant source he locates – similarly to Siegel, as well as some Goth voices presented in Chapter 2 – in its embrace of morbidity, "defying the death-denying belief system of mainstream culture and the hypocrisy it generates" (131–132). What enables Danesi to combine the escapist quality that he ascribes to the Goth (110) with the counter-mainstream one is the factor of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque that he sees as a general characteristic of subcultures emergent after the fall of the overtly political hippie movement (110), and the Goth in particular (129). Spooner highlights yet another aspect of the mainstream–underground, or in this case mainstream–margin, polarity – one perhaps especially relevant for the self-awareness of Goth-oriented cultural analyses such as the one presented in this book. Namely, she tracks down the shift of the Goth from the margins to the center of both scholarly and media attention, connected with the generational change in the academia, the rise of millennial anxieties, and the Columbine shootings – all three factors brought together at the end of the 20th century ("Goth Culture" 353–355).

The mainstream–underground polarity bridges the iconic aspects of the Goth subculture with some self-fashioning strategies. Greenblatt's exploration of the search for the "true self" in an ambiguous relation of dependence on and resistance to dominant systems of social power seems compliant with the complexity and ambivalence of the Goth constructions of the "mainstream." The participatory practices of cultural consumption as well as the intense and vivid connection of the Goth to texts of culture invites an interpretation reliant on Greenblatt's category of textual self-awareness as well as the strategies of submission and negation.

Goth Mainstreams and Goth Selves

According to Thornton, who supports her claim mostly with references to texts on popular music, "the consensus in North America is that the mainstream is a cluster of subcultures," as "[t]he size, ethnic diversity and proliferation of local, regional and niche media in the United States weaken […] [its] myth" (109–110). Still, all five American voices of Goth self-presentation rely heavily on the mainstream concept even though they handle its constructedness in different manners.

In Voltaire's *What Is Goth?* the category provides an axis for conceptualizing Goth on several levels, from a broader socio-historical context of the subculture to a specification of its political significance, to gentle self-irony. The general relevance of the center–margin division oversteps the boundaries of the immediate subcultural perspective as Voltaire discusses the evolution of the generalized notion of the "goth-ic" through the ages to sum it up as follows: "the bottom line is that 'gothic' equals 'bad, dark, weird, and reviled by the mainstream'" (13). In the author's account of his teenage discovery of the subculture, such an exclusion factor resonates with the pressure of normative gender patterns and establishes the subcultural zone as reversing power relations: "a romantic world where the jocks were the jerks and the 'fags' got the girls, where the rules had been redefined in our favor, where we could be dark and mysterious and sexy and complicated, where we could be heroes, where we could be… well, not dorks" (ix).

However, while the above depiction may point to social popularity as the dominant factor in the positioning of the Goth against mainstream, two further issues involved in the characterization of the latter are active aggression and double standards. While not highlighted throughout the book, the negativity toward "any deviation from the norm" is suggested as a trigger for "mainstream folks" to actively harass Goths (79). *What Is Goth?* does not give a detailed specification of the said "norm," or mainstream itself, yet the particular applications of those concepts – as in the case of gender stereotypes – employ them as more than purely dialectic tools. The subjectivity of conceptualizing the subculture, emphasized by Voltaire (94), may be the reason for the lack of comprehensive definitions, yet the author does suggest that "[t]he underlying philosophy of Goth is that our society is predominantly hypocritical. […] because Goths are often people who were victims of some kind of abuse […] at the hands of these very same self-righteous folk [exemplary citizens]." Resultant from that premise is the explanation of Goth transgressive tendencies as quests for a "truth" in things rejected by cultural standards (15).

A spectacular, if simplified, illustration of the way *What Is Goth?* constructs the relationship between the subculture and mainstream is the chapter on the contrast between "spooky" and "creepy" – two words that, from the mainstream perspective are nearly synonymous, but, according to Voltaire, represent very different connotations when seen through a Goth lens. Thus, "spooky" is presented as appreciative

of the subcultural decorum, an adjective to describe the "dark, mysterious, sexy, and cool (and largely based on the fictious)" (83). "Creepy," in turn, signifies disturbing rather than pleasing features of the "mainstream," connected with its promoted standards:

> The mundane world is a place that endeavors to maintain a bright, cheery, and optimistic appearance. Just under the surface, however, there are truly dark and very real forces at play that put to shame anything a Goth could come up with! There is nothing "spooky" about the denizens of the "normal" world; however, their phony, perky happiness (induced by drowning themselves in antidepressants), their insidious duplicity, and their holier-than-thou self-righteous stances are nothing short of "creepy,"

claims Voltaire (82–83). The most significant factor in his conceptualization of the mainstream versus the subculture is, therefore, an idealistic reversal in which the Goth externalizes evil and "darkness," preserving some kind of internal innocence, while the normative society does the opposite.

The implicit polarization of the mainstream as negative and the subculture as positive is mitigated by the humorous and self-aware tone of the whole book, as well as the already mentioned acknowledgment of subjectivity and flexibility in interpreting the Goth. Voltaire mentions an uneasy but aesthetically productive exchange between the movement and popular culture (22). The author's tongue-in-cheek tone does not, however, stop him from employing the concept of mainstream in the formulation of serious postulates about the Goth movement. As indicated in the further analysis of the way the book handles more specific themes, that process takes place at the occasional risk of reifying mainstream in an array of accusations of oppression and double standards.

Digitalis depicts the subculture in terms of a broader evolutionary dialectic which links the globalized cultural and social reality at the dawn of the third millennium with the process of "people […] one by one, awakening to the diversity around them […] increasingly disinterested in the ordinary and mundane" (1). The most general conceptualization of mainstream in his book seems affected by a twofold factor of spiritual development on the one hand and social critique on the other. Calling for harmony and mutual support between Goths and Pagans, the author pictures both movements as different but complementary manifestations of "consciousness" and argues: "Individuals like us have taken into our own hands to spread diversity and freedom to the masses, even in the face of judgment. […] We are the people of the New Tide" (94). Against this, somewhat messianic, image of the subcultural identities, mainstream is pictured as "chains of the status quo" resulting in "monotony" (1), and sustaining a social structure cemented by "media, money and television" (108).

It is, therefore, understandable that the motif of a "true self," in the spirit of Greenblatt's reading of Wyatt, expressed beyond or against normative social mechanisms, is highlighted throughout *Goth Craft*. Still, while Greenblatt interprets Wyatt's poetry as a means of negotiating the space for identity with normative social structures or constructing such space through rejection and seclusion, Digitalis gives a more specific location and a more communal character to subcultural lifestyles

challenging the mainstream. Discussing particular characteristics of the Goth, Digitalis underlines the lack of specific prescriptions or a minimum of demands to be met (15–16), as "Goth […] boils down to philosophy, to ideas expressed in numerous forms of art" (13). Simultaneously, however, the book sustains a differentiation between proper and fake employments of Goth aesthetics and attributes – the latter brought together under a label of "NotGoths […] who believe themselves to be dark and spooky but have no real knowledge of the subculture" (34). The main reason for identifying and criticizing the NotGoth category is that it implies a reduction of the Goth from a lifestyle or "philosophy" to external appearance, or, on the contrary, using the shock value of the aesthetic as a vent for aggression and negativity (34–35). A significant factor in the identification of such undesirable practices is age. Common conceptualizations of the Goth functioning across media images, popular opinion and some among scholarly analyses often depict it, first of all, as a youth movement. Digitalis, however, points to teenage angst and rebelliousness as negative identification of what the subculture is not really about and argues for that aspect of the Goth to be only one of its facets, albeit largely responsible for stereotypes. Regardless of an inevitable ageist potential of the "oldschooler"–"newschooler" axis (17), the author does acknowledge the presence of young generations as a part of the subculture, yet not without underlining a need for their education and prospective individual development within the community (17–18, 33, 35).

All in all, *Goth Craft* confirms the relevance of the mainstream as a concept for Goths to identify against, yet, while in Voltaire's book it is constructed predominantly as an object of mockery or serious moral accusations, Digitalis chooses a more balanced interpretation of the polarity. Not only does he argue that the "alternative" position can be beneficial for those who adopt it since it works "as a natural filtration process against people who would end up causing harm in the long run" (91), but also points to its productivity in the broader social spectrum. Thanks to the visibility of subcultural outsiders, the comfort zones of contemporary society are productively challenged, and the author asks the said outsiders to embrace the marginality of their position: "We don't fit in with the rest of society, plain and simple […] frankly, we are freaks […] As Goths and Pagans, we are a minority […] This, too, is something we must accept and adapt to" (108). Thus, while the category of mainstream highlights the limited and superficial character of the ordinary, it is never challenged as an enemy to be dealt with.

The subcultural rendering of the mainstream proves equally complex in *The Autumn Cemetary*. In 1996, Ravlin perceives mainstreaming as a tangible threat to the subculture: "Goth also faces self destruction in the form of popularization; various other musical communities gamble for our clothing while we're vanishing on the cross, becoming all ghost, unseen but for what we're called by faceless monsters that think they're Ours [belonging to the subculture] but aren't" (Night, Fourth, original punctuation). In the broader picture, the sense of spiritual privilege over non-Goths

becomes prominent as the text encourages the reader to "pity them […] The masses could arise into angellic [sic!] companies but remain as they are" (Candle, Flicker-dim). Simultaneously, there is a distinct manifestation of the normative that Ravlin points to as actively conflicted with the subculture, namely, "Casuals," against whose "banality" the Goth identifies itself (Night, Second).

However, it is striking that the Casuals are defined not in terms of an identity but rather a stance, a performative or discursive position: "Casuals don't exist outside of moments and attitudes; that is, no one is a Casual unless they oppose the Gothic Scene, in its aesthetic or populace" (Cemetery, Epistle). Moreover, similarly to Digi-talis, Ravlin suggests that, distinguished by their awareness, Goths should identify with a spiritual commitment to the rest of the society (Candle, Tendering Sacred). Despite the unquestionable affirmation of the subcultural lifestyle and community, *The Autumn Cemetary* recommends pragmatic limitations of self-expression within the broader society: "if you must obey your boss [and follow a non-Goth work code] lest you starve and die: do not starve and die," (Candle, Candelabrum). Also the inter-nal dynamics of the subculture itself undergoes a scrutiny which relieves the polariz-ing tension between mainstream and underground. Ravlin sharply criticizes excessive attachment of the community to the maintenance of an internal hierarchy. Aimed "to winnow out the dilettante and forge emotional strength in the serious neophyte […] [i]t also works to annoy the fuck out of any potentially wonderful people who might otherwise be invaluable but decide instead that we're bloated ticks. Stop annoying people! Behave," appeals the author (Candle, Flickerdim). His own characterization of the Goth subscribes to the paradoxical combination of subcultural purism and respect for individualism. The section of *The Autumn Cemetary* devoted to music lists "intrinsic Gothic bands which are not corrupted by the taint of despicable musics [sic!]," yet it is closed with the following instruction: "Avoid: Heavy Metal, NIN [Nine Inch Nails], Type-O Negative, Marilyn Manson, Death Metal. Unless you like them, then partake as you see fit – enjoy. Play loud & long" (Cemetery, Songs).

Thus, while the mainstream–Goth dynamics may be seen as hyperbolized by the lofty style and spiritually loaded metaphors characteristic of Ravlin's text, it is simultaneously taken beyond rigid, tangible standards of behavior, or even outwardly de-essentialized. Such a phenomenon in a relatively early Goth self-presentation is all the more significant when juxtaposed with the construction of mainstream in Kilpatrick's *The Goth Bible*. While its cross-sectional scope inevitably diversifies the functioning of the notion, mainstream as a point of reference remains, more often than not, depicted in a pejorative manner.

In her very first take on the definition of the Goth, Kilpatrick lists "flapping your latex wings in the face of convention and secretly giggling at the notion that your very existence upsets the mainstream" (2) among definitive experiences of the subculture. When she moves on to discrediting the stereotypical association of the Goth with Satanism, "the mainstream […] in […] [whose] collective eyes you can read the let-

ters C-U-L-T" (2) remains unspecified, but is granted an implied social character. Subsequently, the center–margin tension becomes psychologized: "goth is part of the struggle for true independence within the homogenized collective psyche, and individuals are always at odds with the conventional" (8). Simultaneously, when the author points to the "underground" character of the Goth as the factor that "has kept it alive, despite bits and pieces of debris hurled into the darkness" (4), mainstream becomes closer to a cultural category. Indeed, the interactions of the latter with Goth aesthetic and artistic practices are described using a language of abuse: "mainstream, seeking to entertain, excite and expand itself, will always uncover and eat the edge" (5), and is likely to "gra[b] an image to exploit" (4). Waves of general interest in the subculture are seen as mostly destructive, yet temporary. Nevertheless, as Kilpatrick suggests, the sense of pressure on the part of the normative generates not only discomfort, but also a paradoxical sense of an exclusion-based identity: "To be goth is to be rejected by the mainstream, to be outside the collective. […] The mainstream does not understand goth, and it never will. At best it is envious. At worst, it tries to destroy what is unknowable. And yet goth remains, and grows" (14–15).

The Goth Bible elaborates on the already signaled issue of balancing subculturalism against professional career, and the subject of child-raising. In both cases, the mainstream is depicted as the central entity to struggle against, negotiate with, prove one's value to, and whose acceptance can occasionally be won (144–147). While those explorations serve to specify socio-cultural contexts in which the center–margin dynamic becomes tangible, the impact of its more generalized, discursive dimension is revealed in the numerous examples of artistic practices connected with the subculture. Simultaneously, however, such approximations complicate the polarization of the mainstream against the Goth. For instance, writers interviewed by Kilpatrick as representatives of the community – if not through their lifestyles then their fiction, or both – emphasize the role of the mainstream–underground clash in their careers. Still, one of them complains about the sense of alienation experienced during fantasy and science-fiction conventions, thus locating the source of exclusion not so much in normative readership as in an alternative cultural niche (218–219).

Kilpatrick's insights into the realm of music also bring about a dissolution of the negativity aura surrounding the notion of the mainstream. Not only is the impact of various, not always underground kinds of music on the Goth sensitivity recognized (79), but also the very issue of popularity becomes freed from possible pejorative connotations by Mike Mercer, interviewed by Kilpatrick in *The Goth Bible*. Mercer does not hesitate to list a number of bands whose fame has spread beyond the Goth niche without any harm to their art or status (Kilpatrick 108). Moreover, he points to a counterproductive aspect of subcultural identity that discourages some musicians from effective development: "To many it seems there is an insurmountable hurdle to overcome for goth to become popular on a large scale again, which is rubbish" (116). The apparently monolithic nature of the mainstream concept becomes problematized not only when Kilpatrick's presentation of the Goth movement zooms in on its

specific aspects, but also in the way she builds a clear link between the experience of active pressure to "conform and be normal" with the teen Goth category, depicted, as is the case with the two previously discussed authors, as only a part of the phenomenon (23).

All in all, the constructions and discursive applications of the mainstream–underground polarity in the Goth self-presentations not only confirm its flexibility and relativity, but also expose both of its poles to critical scrutiny. They show the discursive capability of the Goth to develop reflective distance to the concepts it identifies both with and against.

Goth Cultural Participation – Negation and Submission

Visual and somaesthetic practices may constitute a spectacular illustration of the mainstream–underground dialectic in the discourse of self-fashioning attached to the Goth, as partly demonstrated in Chapter 2. It is further confirmed by the fact that several Goth self-presentations – including Ravlin's, Killpatrick's, or Trystan L. Bass's *This Is Corp Goth* blog – address the issue of reconciling subcultural identity and professional position. The impact of center–margin polarities on the employment of media and medialized texts of culture in Goth self-fashioning may be seen as comparably profound in terms of the subculture's iconization. Next to "alternative" appearance, the "niche" cultural interests combined with contempt for trendy popular music and media entertainment generate an easily recognizable stereotype of Goth, as well as other "underground" movements.

For instance, in "Brain Drain," an episode of the Disney cartoon *Fineas and Ferb*, a teen-Goth-inspired character, Vanessa Doofenschmirtz, and her emo-style boyfriend, Johnny, go to a party organized at a junkyard, where they blend in with a stereotypically alternative-looking crowd, described by Vanessa as "freaks" and "punks." The climactic moment takes place when Vanessa's father shows up and accidentally improvises an absurd song "There's a Platypus Controlling Me" that the subcultural audience immediately interprets as a song about "whatever is keeping you down," that is "corporations," "government," "media," "your teachers," "parents" and the "society" itself. Thus, the episode constructs a generic youth subculture model, condensing mixed attributes of visual style, the central role of live-performed music, the unspecified anti-system attitude, and a DIY appropriation of media technologies (the strategically located cameras let the party-goers observe particular parts of the junkyard on their phones).

The mainstream-versus-niche modes of employing or interacting with media and texts not only constitute an important dimension of Goth self-fashioning but also bridge it with other, explicitly media- and technology-oriented phenomena. The

practices of media fandoms have inspired – though not confined – the lens of participatory culture for interpreting and theorizing upon the relations between texts and audiences. It is not my purpose in this analysis to search for a theoretical common ground that would enable a complete interpretation of the Goth in terms of participatory culture, or an incorporation of the latter into the pre-existent apparatus of subcultural studies. Both perspectives and areas of research have their own histories, subculture-focused scholarship being strongly connected with the growth of social sciences and cultural studies, while the participatory-culture paradigm combines those foundations with media studies. Both come across similar issues, from generation gap and generational transformations to political aspects of popular culture, yet they approach them from different angles. Finally, both have developed self-awareness about the fact that many researchers contributing to their development have personal histories of the oscillation between academic distance and practical engagement in the analyzed cultural practices. All those factors, together with a range of more specific ones that would require a stand-alone discussion, suggest that the diversity of investigation modes and goals reflected by the two scholarly perspectives enriches rather than obfuscates reflection upon contemporary culture.

While an actual exploration of the potential for theoretical, methodological or thematic exchanges between the two academic discourses might undoubtedly be productive, my attempt at bringing them together in this book grows out of a more specific, subject-oriented motivation. Namely, it provides my analysis of self-fashioning tools inscribed in the cultural iconization of the Goth with a broader context suggesting their possible correspondence with processes affecting the contemporary production and functioning of texts of culture.

Occasional cross-pollination between fandom- and Goth-related research can be identified in analyses of specific cultural practices or phenomena, as exemplified by Robert Markley's "Geek/Goth: Remediation and Nostalgia in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*" or Maria Mellins's "Fashioning a Morbid Identity: Female Vampire Fans and Subcultural Style." A more general confirmation of the potential connectivity of subcultural and participatory media experience on a structural level of critical perspective is provided by the musings of Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito and danah boyd on the transformations of participatory culture in the first two decades of the 21st century, as presented in *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce and Politics*. The authors identify a major reason for bringing together "fandom, geek culture" and "various subcultural identities" in a discussion on participatory culture, pointing to the fact that "these groups were among early adopters and adapters of new media" (193). The logic of such engagements can be perceived as counteracting "various forms of culture that limit access to the means of cultural production and circulation, that fragment and isolate the public rather than providing opportunities to create and share culture, and that construct hierarchies that make it difficult for many to exert any meaningful influence over the

core decisions that impact their lives" (194). This conceptualization of participatory culture is reliant on the specific phenomena that all three authors have been exploring in their respective research domains, namely, media fandom, video games and mobile devices, online communities and IT geekdom (11–15, 22). Still, it possesses a prominent generic dimension, responsive to a variety of cultural practices. Even though "new media," and especially the Internet, remain a focal point of the book, they are perceived as tools supporting communal activity (23, 197). What the authors pursue in such activity "is not about creating a particular state of society, but about collectively engaging in an aspirational project that constantly challenges us to expand opportunities for meaningful participation" (195).

The relevance of Goth imprints on the dimensions of cultural production that inspire such postulates seems confirmed by a number of parallels between the issues highlighted by the subcultural self-presentations and the challenges that Jenkins, Ito and boyd identify as crucial for the cultural transformations they have been investigating. Specifically, those challenges cover balancing an "underground" past against fragmentized, "mainstream" present (193–194); reconciling individualism with group practices (194); handling the political ambivalence of consumption practices (19, 156–159, 195); and – what may prove especially important with regard to the cultural impact of self-fashioning strategies – confronting the paradox of "visibility" connected with the digital turn:

> Many of the practices we're identifying are historically resilient practices inflected by today's media in new ways. Yet, there is an important twist brought about by social media in particular. Through these new media contexts, we can observe a set of practices that, more often than not, were historically difficult to identify and track. […] This visibility is […] why it's often hard to untangle participatory culture from new media. On the one hand, this new visibility increases the impact of participatory practices, expanding their reach and scope, and accelerating their circulation. On the other, this new visibility leaves these groups and practices more susceptible to surveillance by governmental and corporate bodies that might wish to limit or regulate participation towards their own ends. (197)

As the self-awareness of Goth icons and tropes tends to revolve around a similar paradox, it may serve as a tool for exploring what proves to be a broader realm of cultural experience, while the Goth focus on actual self-fashioning promises effectiveness in addressing the aspect of visibility per se.

That the process of drifting from cultural margins to the center, already addressed in the subcultural context, is expanded onto participatory culture in general is hardly surprising. In *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* Jenkins reflects on the term's evolution since its original application for "contrasting participation with spectatorship" (11) in the context of media fandom that embraced "a clear tension between their [fans'] culture and that of the commercial industries from which they took their raw materials" (12). In the course of time, the rise of other cultural practices supported by digital media made fandom "one among many different kinds of communities that had been struggling throughout the twentieth century to gain greater access

to the means of cultural production and circulation" (13). Simultaneously, as all three authors observe in a conclusive commentary on the said shift, "mainstreaming […] makes it harder to identify what's transformative about participatory culture," and therefore blurs its specificity (193). As clarified by the hitherto discussion, similar concerns about the definition and impact of the Goth are prominent. Goth philosophies presented so far may not highlight "struggle" for empowerment as a priority. However, their reliance on mainstream texts and goods to consume, appropriate, transform and subvert is undoubtedly relevant for the movement's cultural potential as a source of political controversy similar to the one surrounding participatory culture. Also, as exemplified by the reflections of Digitalis and Ravlin on Goth flexibility, an exploration of the subcultural output may constitute a relevant insight into the collectivity–individual continuum, centralized by the authors of *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*. The proximity of Goth and fandom participatory practices finds confirmation in Spooner's claim that the subculture "produces a bewildering range of artifacts from music, clothes, and accessories to *fanzines, blogs*, and *websites*; objects such as ornaments or *cult collectible figurines; representations in films, novels*, and *TV programs*; '*fan' art, fiction* and *poetry*" ("Goth" 352, emphasis added).

Thus, the affinity between the historical or socio-cultural practices, academic explorations, and the ways of generating aesthetic tropes encourages a consideration of the Goth subculture as a potential source of insight into the cultural significance of participatory culture. What is more, icons and tropes produced by both phenomena become themselves objects of further semiotic appropriation, paving the way for a secondary self-reflectivity of participants and texts of culture. The Goth self-presentations discussed in this chapter offer an introduction to the analysis of the subculture's overlap with fan practices in the way they employ the strategies of negation and submission to handle its relationship with cultural media.

Williams both highlights and problematizes the spectrum framed by "resistance and assimilation" in studying subcultures. He warns against "seeing subcultures as homogenous social objects that exist on a continuum [between resistance and assimilation]" (*Subcultural Theory* 12). As a full identification with one or the other is impossible for any person, whether subcultural or not (11–12), he argues for approaching subcultural practices through the lens of strategies developed for handling the relation to "mainstream" by particular individuals in specific contexts (12). Thus, self-fashioning through "submission" and "negation" analyzed by Greenblatt, whose specific relevance for the logic of participatory culture is further discussed in the Conclusion, gets an additional affirmation from subcultural phenomena.

Moreover, Goth-oriented research points to three specific areas that represent especially effective fusions of the movement with identity-oriented practices characteristic of participatory culture; namely, carnivalesque aspirations, DIY pursuits, and interactions with official media. As already mentioned, Danesi groups Goths and geeks together as subscribing to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque logic of commentary rather than the overt resistance to the normative,

an intentional escape from the mainstream through specific lifestyle choices that stand out visibly from those of the mainstream. This kind of rebellion is […] enacted through technology. The geeks use their hacking abilities and often their sarcastic wit to attack human conduct and social institutions. The goths use a different form of irony – indirect mockery of the social order through a Gothic code of dress and lifestyle. (110)

The issue of "technology" employment seems more blurred in the case of the Goth movement than the communities overtly centered around and driven by the IT sector. Still, notwithstanding the postulate on the part of Jenkins, Ito and boyd to avoid overrating technological tools when conceptualizing participatory culture, the relevance of technical devices for the subculture's aesthetic output is confirmed not only by its embrace of digital tools, but also the broader practice of creating and customizing items.

According to Siegel, the Goth means of counteracting "mainstream" are "two modes of expression that Deleuze sees as crucial to successful existence: the production of carefully hand-crafted visual styles and the cultivation of new eroticisms" (2). Even though they both seem connected, first and foremost, with somaesthetic self-fashioning discussed in the previous chapter, the emphasis on "craft" is relevant also with reference to the creation of artwork or usable objects. It is in that realm that the dynamic of "submission" and "negation" seems especially spectacular. It informs the movement's relation to economic circulation as conceptualized by Hodkinson, whose sociological study presented in *Goth: Identity, Style, and Subculture* reconciles Goth propensity to indulge in material pleasures with the subculture's niche identity. "Hodkinson recognizes that consumption of goods does much to define Goths," yet also "insists that the Goth scene has not been co-opted by corporate commercialism," claims Siegel, concluding that "[i]n Hodkinson's view, it is Goth that appropriates capitalism of its participants" (19). For her, it is the appreciation of the insider "craftsmanship" that becomes crucial for the Goth movement's inherent resistance that she postulates, inscribing the subcultural creativity into Deleuze and Guattari's anti-State interpretation of the "artisan" (Siegel 19).

For Hodkinson himself, however, the participatory dimension of Goth economy seems definitely more significant than its possible rebelliousness in a specific political dimension:

[E]ven if we were to leave aside the non-subcultural producers […], the internal infrastructure of the goth scene could not somehow be regarded as occupying an authentic position outside or in opposition to consumerism. Indeed, from a certain point of view, the importance of DIY entrepreneurs to the goth scene could be seen as entirely consistent with the most neo-liberal of political agendas, most notably perhaps the encouragement of enterprise in the dogma and policies of the right-wing British and American governments in the 1980s and 1990s. (121)

That observation does not stop him from affirming and exemplifying the existence, and, indeed, robustness of the said "internal infrastructure" that he explored and partook in during his fieldwork (115–117). Hodkinson interprets the observed productivity and active attitudes of many Goths, both individual amateurs and those

who developed professionalized enterprises, as driven mostly by a will to contribute to the "scene's" collective good (117, 121–122). He also points out that the sub-cultural appreciativeness of such dedication could sometimes act against the norma-tive economy: "So strongly held was the ideology of voluntary commitment to the subculture's well-being that many goths […] found the idea of making significant fi-nancial or other personal rewards from organizational or creative activities somewhat distasteful" (127). Still, balancing the cases of "commercial success of entrepreneurs" (121) against the said dedication, he acknowledges a possibility for the subculture to generate a market, including full-time jobs, and perceives it as a cementing factor for the subculture rather than a threat to its identity (121–122). Focusing, in turn, on Goths as buyers, Hodkinson acknowledges a spectrum of practices involving the selection of both niche and more commercial producers. The customers' attitude to the purchased products extended from "the selective, creative appropriation of goods from non-specialist sources" to "the rather less active purchase and use of more pre-packaged, subcultural items" (132).

Thus, his insight into the sphere of subcultural creation and distribution of material objects exemplifies the interplay of submission to the "capitalist system which penetrates all elements of Western societies" (137) with its negation in the form of developing economic niches and transformative strategies of consumption. It is the latter aspect of Goth participation in the market that, in light of this book's focus on textual artifacts, brings the political impact of the subculture close to that of fan culture. Its activities have, among others, resulted in the creation of the Or-ganization for Transformative Works as a communal effort to consolidate and valid-ate those aspects of participatory consumption that have been regarded as resisting market rules and violating copyrights (Jenkins, Ito and boyd 148–149; "What We Believe"). Moreover, Hodkinson's discussion of the internal controversies around the issue of financial profit from insider activities, as well as the dominance of the community-dedicated involvement in the 1980s and 1990s, bears similarities to Jenkins, Ito and boyd's observations in the realm of participatory culture, from its specific, U.S.-based media context (148–149, 153) to its expanded and generalized dimension (132–164). In the case of both the Goth movement and participatory culture, the interplay of submission and negation with regard to the official modes of production and consumption manifests affinity with the self-fashioning logic. Moreover, as Hodkinson claims, "[t]he creativity exhibited when objects are used in ways not envisaged by producers and marketers, alongside the general levels of effort, thought and knowledge involved in their selection and use, are legitimate grounds for investigation, whether or not the latter represent any realistic threat to dominant ideology as a whole" (133).

Accordingly, the next section aims to track down the participatory approaches to media and texts of culture in Goth self-presentations, and consider them in terms of a more general submission–negation dynamic with regard to normativity.

Goth Participation and Popular Media

At least three out of five authors of the subcultural self-presentations discussed in this book can safely be perceived as pursuing various realizations of a "professional Goth," to borrow Voltaire's phrase (xv). Thus, a niche for the texts they produce can be found in Hodkinson's analysis of the movement's economic entanglements. Simultaneously, *What Is Goth?*, *The Goth Bible*, *Goth Craft*, and *The Autumn Cemetary* differ in their authors' self-positioning toward the media market, the extent of their interest in texts of culture as a factor of self-fashioning, and the overall manner of handling the issue of power relations within and around the subculture. Venters's *Gothic Charm School* – though itself an outcome of the author's activity as a blogger – seems less preoccupied with the media by comparison, so in this section it remains outside the immediate spotlight. The order in which I discuss the four sources in this section reflects a shift from Voltaire's self-declared embrace of the economic productivity of the Goth, as well as his bonds with media fandom, to Ravlin's obscurity in the said dimensions, combined, however, with an elaborate discussion of the Goth embeddedness in various media.

Voltaire's art and activities beyond *What Is Goth?* bridge in a spectacular manner the realms of the subculture and fandom-centered participatory culture, and he personally stays in touch with the fantasy and science-fiction community by regularly visiting conventions (for instance Dragon Con). He also embraces those bonds in his art, as confirmed by a filk[30] album *Bitrektual* (2012), devoted to two trademark franchises of media-driven participatory culture – *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. Intertextual references to pop-cultural fandom are also present in Voltaire's comic book *Oh My Goth!*

What Is Goth? does not elaborate on the connections between Goth and fandom worlds yet reveals the complexity of their foundation by testifying to the importance of "mainstream" economy and media in Voltaire's subcultural career. He highlights the significance of the shift in the social attitudes that he observed upon moving from New Jersey to New York: "I had instantly gone from being a social pariah to being the center of attention – and I liked it" (x). In the subsequent discussion of his artistic development in which "goth" evolved from "an issue of personal taste" to "a word that would professionally define [him]" (xv), the standardized industry is depicted as enabling at first and as limiting at more advanced stages of the career. On the one hand, it offers the emergent "professional Goth" opportunities for monetizing and honing his technical skills as an animator (x–xi). On the other hand, the factor of economic risks connected with the niche character of the Goth aesthetics drives him to a point where sticking to the subcultural style reduces prospects of material success

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[30] Fanlore, an online encyclopedia of fandom-related terms and phenomena, decodes filk as "science-fiction folk music," and depicts it as the musical branch of fandom communal activities ("Filk").

(xv–xvi). Thus, despite satirical humor aimed at its mundane predictability, mainstream is presented mostly as a source of normative structure and potential backup that Goth enterprises inhabit.

The element of "submission," traceable in such depiction of the media industry, is reinforced by Voltaire's emphasis on the central role of television – contrasted with "mainstream American radio" of the 1980s – in his earliest exposure to the formative British Goth music and style (viii–ix). The focus on the media reception, combined with the expressly transmedial character of the author's own artistic output that includes animation, music, visual arts, and performance (xiv–xv), reinforces the affinity between the subcultural background of *What Is Goth?* and the participatory culture environment.

As far as more general engagements of texts of culture in Goth self-fashioning are concerned, Voltaire sketches out a canon of hypertext surrounding the subculture. Its cultural and historical roots include the etymology of "Gothic" as a term, the writings of Horace Walpole, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe and Bram Stoker, early cinema, and rock music of the 1970s (12–13). The relevance of such fictional contexts, even as they are not immediate constituents of identity, is revealed in the chapter discussing Goth self-dramatization:

if you are going to play at being an eighteenth-century noble, having a knack for the dramatic is pretty much mandatory. It's a little difficult to pull off a séance in your mother's attic if she's constantly calling up for you to take out the thrash […] [E]ven the most devastating affront to your persona can be remedied with the right reply:

"Oh, that madwoman downstairs? Yes, she seems to think I am her son, Bernard. The poor lad died a horrifyingly violent death, crushed by a wayward catapult during the Peloponnesian wars […]"

[…] If that doesn't work, you can always quickly staple the back of your hand to your forehead and recite "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. (30)

Though clearly parodic, the quoted passage does hint at a logic of incorporating fiction into self-styling in a way close to the one captured by Greenblatt, especially when applied with the goal of handling the pressure of the ineradicable normative order.

Voltaire's personal account resonates with the picture of Goth "professionalization" generated not only by the already discussed analysis of Hodkinson, but also Kilpatrick's *Bible*, which provides a broader scope of subcultural businesses around the world (29–69). The commercial factor in her depiction of the subculture is embraced on the level of both overall self-styling, which "is not a low-maintenance lifestyle" (29, 45), and production of material goods. In her survey of Goth, Goth-oriented and Goth-attracting producers, Kilpatrick confirms the subcultural origins or dedication of many such businesses (33, 56–59). Simultaneously, however, she acknowledges their economic growth and impact (46–48) without explicitly arguing for any non-profit agenda. Moreover, the overall reliance of the Goth on material accessories makes *The Goth Bible* acknowledge the importance of sustenance and, consequently, money making for the movement in general. The subchapter on "Working Goths" at-

tributes to the subculture a relatively high economic as well as cultural capital, stress-ing the availability of profitable and prestigious occupations to its members (146–147). John J. Coughlin, quoted by Kilpatrick as a webmaster animating a community "balancing work life with a gothic lifestyle" (146), names the "technology field" and "art/fashion" (147) as professions popular among Goths. His observations appear to correspond with Goodlad and Bibby's emphasis on Goth affinities with intellectual-ism and education (13–14). He also pays attention to the controversial issue of rec-onciling alternative identity with corporation culture (147), offering on his website advice on "Corporate Goth Survival Strategies" (qtd. in Kilpatrick 146) that put into practice the strategies of submission and negation in dealing with normative mores.

Coughlin's views on the stereotypical contradiction between marginalizing and cultivating the dominant principles of the social world echo the self-fashioning am-bivalence discussed in Chapter 1:

> Back in the eighties […] we had a romantic notion of living this underground lifestyle but as we got older, reality set in, and we began to search for ways to be ourselves and enjoy what the "mundane world" has to offer. If I hear the "sell-out" accusation, which is rare, I just shrug it off. I know I am being me, and that while I may compromise to some extent to keep a steady job, I never once sacrificed my self-identity […] Those of us who need to dress more corporate know that ultimately what makes one "goth" is not the clothing or the paraphernalia, but rather a certain disposition. We may like to express ourselves throughout our clothing, but when you take it away, we are no less goth, and when that is the case, we were not gothic to begin with! (qtd. in Kilpatrick 147)

While the above argument is rooted in a polarizing dialectic of internal authenti-city versus external appearances, it also seems to embrace the concept of subjective truth generated through the Foucauldian technologies of the self. Simultaneously, the remark on the "'sell-out' accusation" addresses another sphere of negotiation between individual identity and collective imperative that affects the Goth and is identified not between the cultural margin and center, but within the subcultural spectrum. Kilpatrick, along with Ravlin, quoted in the previous section, underlines problematic aspects of the insider hierarchies based on subcultural capital: "While goths tend to be individualistic and feel rejected by the mainstream, at the same time the urgency to belong to a tribe […] means that trying to 'fit' can take precedence over other drives" (15). Exclusions and social conflicts revolving around the subjective formulations of the "true" Goth are criticized both by Ravlin and Mercer, who complains that "it is envy which eats into the goth scene more than anything, with elitists holding court, and people being branded not fit to be in one clique or another" (qtd. in Kilpatrick 115). Simultaneously, however, Kilpatrick comes up with several examples of the sub-culture's metaconscious handling of that phenomenon in ways that ironize but also iconize and accept it as a part of what the movement is about. She mentions practices of attributing "Goth Points" in thematic communities on the internet and elaborates on R. Hunter Gough's game *Gother Than Thou*. The game is intended as "a satire of the gothic lifestyle" (16) and, according to its author, attracts "goths, wannabe goths, former goths, and goth haters" (Gough qtd. in Kilpatrick 16). That scope of target

users reflects, in a way, the workings of a combined submission-negation strategy traceable in such parodic endeavors that simultaneously validate and challenge the subcultural identity.

Gother Than Thou is also an explicit example of connections between the Goth and media-oriented participatory culture, as acknowledged by its author's claim that the *Vampire: The Masquerade* RPG (discussed in Part III) "got a huge number of goths into games, and an even larger number of gamers into being goth" (qtd. in Kilpatrick 17). Indeed, the chapter of *The Goth Bible* entitled "When Goths Relax" highlights "Surfing the Dark Side of the Internet," "Virtual Gaming," "Dark RPGs," and "Relaxing with a Comix" (157–169) among types of entertainment resonant with the subcultural experience. Contrastively, a one-paragraph claim insists that "Goth and sports would not seem to be on the same team" (169). The comic books listed by Kilpatrick as especially relevant for Goth aesthetics include those emergent directly from the movement, such as *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* by Jhonen Vasquez, Voltaire's works, *Writhe and Shine* by Robert Tritthardt, or *GloomCookie* by Serena Valentino and Ted Naifeh (167–169), as well as titles with a broader impact on the comics culture, for example Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, or *The Crow* by John O'Barr (166–167, 169).

The graphic narrative medium seems the least controversial point of overlap between media fandom and the Goth, as the feedback on the other types of entertainment collected by Kilpatrick from her subcultural interviewees is mixed and occasionally turns to stereotypical criticism directed against geek pastimes. The importance of web communities and practices for the movement is not denied (and finds confirmation, among others, from Hodkinson or Goodlad and Bibby), and several games, both digital and tabletop, are recognized as attractive (161–165). Still, some of Kilpatrick's respondents associate computer-mediated interaction or fantasy roleplay with addiction, escapism, immaturity and losing time (161–162, 165–166). The reinforcement of the mainstream geek icon is offered, for instance, by an interviewee's comment: "if I get hit on by one more teenage boy who thinks he's a vampire (eternal acne, how sad would that be?), I'll scream" (165). Similar stereotypes echo in fictionalized depictions of the relations between both communities. For example, one of the subcultural characters in Valentino's *GloomCookie* is strongly annoyed by the *Vampire* larp game taking place at the local Goth club, and the characters with an affinity to both role-playing and Goth communities are depicted as rather low-ranking in the latter (Valentino and Naifeh).

Thus, the direct references to the most recognizable attributes of media-oriented participatory culture give an ambivalent picture of its connections with the Goth. Still, Kilpatrick's characterization of the subculture's material artifacts reveals a zone of intertextual, transmedial and semiotic appropriations of texts of culture, that, in turn, seems symptomatic for and largely approved by the movement. The author turns to the repository of literary and cinematic icons to define and explain the "cybergoth" look and fashion accessories, shifting from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* to William Gibson's

Neuromancer, to *Star Trek*, to *Johnny Mnemonic*, to *The Matrix* (35–36). In the context of Kilpatrick's emphasis on an active and semiotically aware attitude of Goths to their articles of clothing (36–37), such visual employments of fictional references become a part of a more complex self-fashioning process. A confirmation of the drift of signs from texts of culture to an even more tangible sphere of Goth self-fashioning is offered by a discussion of a company specialized in contact lens models whose designs are named after vampiric icons – Anne Rice's characters from *The Vampire Chronicles*, the *Lost Boys* movie and the *Forever Knight* TV show – or allude to music bands such as Marilyn Manson and Alien Vampires (49).[31]

Finally, the more or less transformative engagements with texts notwithstanding, Kilpatrick's book, in a similar way to most other explorations of the Goth movement, testifies to the general importance of art as a background for the subculture. The realm of literary practice overlaps with it both in the persons of practicing profes-

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[31] A more complex and controversial example of a Goth-wise appropriation and reframing of a text of culture is constituted by the history of Michael Machat's Vampire wine, presented by Kilpatrick through the brand owner's personal account. Linking his inspiration to market such a product with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and sustaining an uncanny aura around his narrative, Machat describes his struggle to get hold of Romanian wine (qtd. in Kilpatrick 122–125), and the eventual success when – as his company's official website puts it – "From the soil and roots of the legendary Count Dracula, Vampire had arisen and the true blood of the vine was born" ("Our Story"). The literary investment in the brand, combined with the emphasis on "a ton of goth-positive response to his wine" (Kilpatrick 125), stands in striking contrast with the depiction of the difficulties faced by Machat in his explorations of the Romanian wine market. From discussing the initial obstacle in the form of the Communist Bloc and its counter-profit economy (122, 124), the Vampire wine owner moves to an exoticizing description of his 1991 trip to the country where "they had no street lights," wolf howls rang out along the way, people "were still afraid to talk to Americans," and the "wine left for the domestic market remained undrinkable by western standards" (124). Furthermore, he also finds out that most wine producers did not like or even comprehend the "Vampire wine" concept (124–125): "Romanians had no appreciation for the western world's notion of a vampire […] They had a different understanding of vampires, and convincing them that the idea would work was surprisingly not simple" ("Our Story"). While the quest to provide Goth-inclined Americans with a taste of Transylvania was eventually accomplished, Machat's story makes it clear that his quality standards had to go down because the local manufacturer of the best product "was too proud of his wine to let me [Machat] call it Vampire Wine" (qtd. in Kilpatrick 125). Thus, the prevalence of semiotic significance drawn from fiction, and characteristic of the Goth aesthetics, may in this case be seen as an act of epistemic violence executed through a judgmental conceptualization of a foreign country. Its impact is reinforced by the Vampire wine website's following reflection: "Over two decades have passed since that first production of Vampire wine in Transylvania, and we are proud to say it has been a wonderful journey of making our wines the best that they can be. Along the way, both Michael and Lisa's [the company owners] palates matured. They began demanding better and better wine for their Vampire Brand. So in 2007, the Machat family uprooted their connections in Transylvania and moved their wine production to California where they reside" ("Our Story").

Thus, the abandonment of the product's exotic origin becomes connected with the company's overall progress and "maturation" whose consequence was a replacement of the hunt for a Transylvanian aura with the focus on quality. In light of that development, the reluctance of the Romanian producers to be marketed under a vampiric label may imply both lack of attachment to Dracula's semiotic impact and resistance to the subordination it demanded.

sional writers who, including Kilpatrick herself, are also active Goths (xv, 215–220), and the richness of references to classic and contemporary authors in the characterization of the Goth aesthetic (2, 207–220). Other branches of art and cultural history are also recognized as relevant contexts or objects of subcultural interests (175–176, 224). Kilpatrick focuses also on the impact of mixed-media and visual arts on the Goth, listing many artists and highlighting the output of Edward Gorey, Sir Simon Marsden, and Tim Burton as especially influential (225–231).

The focus on texts of culture in general as the main food for Goth thought is, unsurprisingly, shared by Digitalis, who – being a practicing DJ himself – argues for the centrality of music in the subcultural phenomenon. He grants it the status of "possibly the most spiritual aspect of the Goth scene as a whole," especially when collectively absorbed on the dancefloor (160). He also highlights such a mode of sharing music as a channel for metacommentary: "It's especially humiliating and giddily fun when the DJ plays a cheesy and entirely non-Goth song at the end of his or her set, forcing the clubbers to leave with Gothic grins upon their white-powdered faces. It reassures that Goth isn't always perpetually dreary and that humor – especially the ability to laugh at oneself – is a necessity, even for those with the darkest of inclinations" (159). While not elaborated upon, the author's emphasis on the DJ's role as a trigger of such reflection corresponds with the prominence of that figure in the studies on remix that complete the theoretical spectrum of the research on fan practices as a spectacular manifestation of the "remix culture" postulated by Lev Manovich ("What").[32]

Digitalis's perspective of the Goth brings together his first-hand experience as a DJ and as a Wiccan priest. Consequently, due to its spiritual component, *Goth Craft* takes some liberties with the fact-oriented presentations of the subculture predominant in Voltaire or Kilpatrick's texts. Introducing the issue of vampirism in Goth identity, Digitalis takes an ambivalent discursive position suggesting that, next to the commonly acknowledged folk beliefs and cultural fictions constructing the presence of vampirism in the collective awareness, there exist dimensions of the phenomenon about which he "refuse[s] to present any information that potentially could put certain individuals in harm's way" (259). He meticulously separates "vamp lifestylers" and "role-players" centered specifically around the already mentioned (and to be discussed later) *World of Darkness* game series from "real vampyres" (261–262). The former two categories, as Digitalis underlines, "are happy to embellish their love for all things vampire, but are quick to make the distinction between fiction and reality" (262). The latter category, in turn, can be divided into "sanguinarians" who literally consume blood and "psi-vamps" who absorb other creatures' vitality without material mediation (262–263). While the author joins Voltaire (24–25) and Kilpatrick (245) in acknowledging the existence of stand-alone vampiric subcultures that are likely to

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[32] Other relevant discussions of the remix culture can be found, among others, in Aram Sinnreich's *Mashed Up: Music, Technology and the Rise of Configurable Culture*, or Zizi Papacharissi's "Conclusion: A Networked Self" (304–318).

overlap but not actually merge with the Goth, he never questions or problematizes the main defining feature of "real vampires," namely, "that they experience an energy deficiency that must be restored through energetic exchange" (261). In his account, the participatory appropriation of fiction via specific media – such as RPGs – runs parallel to the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction on a more fundamental level. Thus, as the above scrutiny of the ways in which the Goth may engage the concept of a vampire suggests, the submission-negation strategy in Goth self-fashioning works not only with regard to normative limitations, but also the incorporation of the non-normative.

A possibly unique application of submission on a paradigmatic level is offered by Ravlin's overt appeal:

> Also remember, Ours depend on the mercy and forbearance of other human beings, especially those who hold power. Do not oppose power, do not aggrandize powerful people. Avoid, if necessary. Leave, if you can. Appease and flatter, but do not confront. So long as there is love and so long as there is mercy, there can exist a Gothic Scene. Encourage both love and mercy. Soon there will be others to assist you, if there aren't already. The Hearted will not long be alone. (Candle, Candelabrum)

The visionary tone aside, the affirmation of Goth helplessness in the face of the consensus reality and the emphasis on "love and mercy" in the above quote resonate with Siegel's exploration of the subculture's connection to the 1960s counterculture and hippie movement. As argued by Siegel, the conceptualization of the hippie era as a symbol of wasted political force and "empty rhetoric of peace and love chanted until it became meaningless, chanted until it engendered soulless commercial pop" (54) was an important factor in the development of the punk movement, which, in turn, became a springboard for the Goth evolution (52–54). A similar, though not as accusatory, sentiment reverberates in Holmes's and Rolnik's assessments of the countercultural heritage of the 1960s and 70s, and their appropriation by capitalism (see Chapter 1). Simultaneously, Siegel, supported by Gavin Baddeley's *Goth Chic: A Connoisseur's Guide to Dark Culture*, traces the origins of the Goth back to what she calls "the darkness of that other sixties" (56). By that she means an uncanny aspect of the hippie-centered cultural shift, dropped from the stereotypical image of the "flower power" period yet undeniably identifiable in the anxieties accompanying American politics (55), as well as the trademark countercultural investment with "psychedelia" which "had always been a bit more of a nightmare than a fantasy trip into a peaceable kingdom" (54).

Regardless of the possible subjective bias which, according to both Hodkinson and Spooner, may constitute a weak point of Siegel's argument, the semiotic link to the hippie legacy that it constructs offers a relevant context for Ravlin's appeal. His message develops an aura of preemptive self-awareness when juxtaposed with the stereotypical idealistic joy of the 1960s, the Gothic potential of the hippie phenomenon, and the volatile concept of subcultural resistance that the Goth attitude disengages. Ravlin's declaration of vulnerability and the depiction of emotional support as a precondition to the existence of the subculture does not refer to broader

countercultural history. Still, it links his exploration of the Goth with the perception of the submissive stance as a source of possibilities rather than a token of the movement's downfall.

Such an explicit departure from confrontation in *The Autumn Cemetary* is accompanied by its extensive employment of texts of culture in the process of defining and characterizing the subculture. Ravlin underlines the importance of multiform literacy as an aspect of Goth acculturation and continues with a list of iconic writers: "Poppy Z Brite, Storm Constantine, Tanith Lee, Anne Rice, and Neil Gaiman" (Candle, Waxskin). He also devotes a section called "Syllabus of Stygia" to a survey of recommended readings – from non-fiction to literary classics to contemporary fiction, to poetry and comics. While, apart from affirming general openness to aesthetic impact, Ravlin does not specify any aspects of interaction with texts of culture that would correspond with trademark participatory practices directly, he does acknowledge *Vampire: The Masquerade* as a factor in his early memories of Goth-related social experiences (Cemetery, Story). He also highlights the creative potential of audiences, reception and the communality of cultural production with regard to the historical development of the subculture: "you can argue that punk became goth or new romance became goth til you're blue in the face, but the fact remains that the music did not become anything – the people behind the music and the people listening to the music decided to do something new. When this new thing began to find a name is when these people started to converge on deathrock first and gothic later" (Night, Fourth).

The ongoing interplay of submission to and negation of normative standards – whether concerning identity construction in general, or specific practices such as production, consumption and processing of texts of culture – finds complex yet tangible reflection in the cross-over between the Goth and phenomena of media-oriented participatory culture. The logic of these self-fashioning strategies can be identified in a variety of interactions with texts – from developing broad-scope literacy and embracing media content as a guiding light toward subcultural aesthetics, to the appropriation of textual icons, to Goth-oriented adaptations of characteristic participatory phenomena or media, such as games, to self-aware exchanges and tensions between Goth and geek communities.

As shown in this chapter, Goth conceptualizations of the subculture's economic dimension involving both production and consumption of goods sustain the discursive flexibility and connectivity revealed with regard to the functions of corporeality in self-fashioning. Just as they accept the physical conditioning of identity projects, the analyzed self-presentations acknowledge the subcultural entanglements with the niche and mainstream economy, especially with regard to consumption, which can also be extrapolated onto the Goth status of an active media audience and consumers of culture. Thus, the discussed depictions of those factors and more general employments of the mainstream–underground rhetoric are characterized, first and foremost, by two discursive strategies traceable back to Greenblatt's conceptualization of

self-fashioning, namely, the submission–negation dynamics and the self-awareness focused on the identity-creating practices. The analyzed conceptualizations of the Goth employ the interplay of these two strategies to reconcile socio-cultural criticism voiced from a self-declared alternative position with an ironic distance toward the conventional factor of idealistic resistance expected from a subcultural identity. Such conceptual flexibility encourages, in turn, multiple narrative and aesthetic employments of Goth tropes in texts of culture. As shown in further chapters, three angles of self-fashioning pursuits emergent from the analysis of Goth self-presentations – physicality, internal work, and political positioning – affect also the subculture's fictional depictions.

INTERLUDE 2

Self-Fashioning Strategies
in the Fictionalization of Goth Figures

So far, my analysis has been focused on the self-fashioning strategies traceable in the self-presentations of American Goth culture, and, through them, made available for further incorporation into the construction of Goth figures as cultural signs. As shown in previous chapters, the workings of fiction, imagination and fantasy are directly identifiable within philosophies of self-fashioning. Greenblatt, for instance, points to fiction as a factor in ironic self-awareness, Foucauldian techniques of the self enable the distillation of personal truth from internalized or visualized fiction, while Deleuze's reading of *Venus in Furs* offers insight into the overall reliance of BDSM on fantasy and literary fiction. The next part of the book, in turn, considers exemplary cases of Goth self-fashioning as they undergo fictionalization in texts of culture that vary in their proximity and connections to the subculture itself. The aim of the survey presented in the upcoming chapters is to show how particular self-fashioning strategies may reinforce the discursive functions of Goth motifs. Therefore, the main criterion in choosing the texts for analysis has been their responsivity to three among the major aspects of self-fashioning: somaesthetic self-styling, discipline-related technologies of the self, and self-aware, dialogical relationship with systems of power. Other criteria that have affected my selection of texts include their Americanness, their relative remoteness from the Goth scene, and the representation of different media and genres.

Even though the Goth movement's global scale and European roots are often emphasized, the influence of American perspectives on the subcultural self-presentations discussed in the previous chapters is easy to notice, for instance in the references to the scene itself, the broader social reality, culture and history, or specific events, such as the Columbine High School massacre. Therefore, limiting the scope of fictional sources to those that share the American context with the discussed Goth

voices constitutes a safe and justified solution, as the relative uniformity of the texts' background facilitates highlighting the transformations of self-fashioning as the main point of the unfolding analysis. Moreover, as already mentioned, the American scope is also sustained due to its formative impact on the discourses of and around participatory culture, which will be centralized in the planned continuation of this project.

The other two criteria of texts' selection contribute, by contrast, to their diversification. Chapters 2 and 3 have been devoted to Goth-themed non-fiction introducing the subculture to implied readers with different preliminary levels of competence, but in most cases pointing to Goths themselves as a part of the texts' target audience. Still, such literature, which might be called overtly educational, is by no means the only text form growing from the subculture and offering introspective commentary. There is also a variety of fictional texts focused directly on the exploration of the Goth community, many of them taking the form of comics or graphic novels. Investigating the bonds and interactions between the non-fictional and fictional types of textual self-styling in the constructions of subcultural identity might offer precious insight into Goth self-fashioning strategies. Moreover, it might be the only logical next step in the reasoning established by the previous chapters. Still, the driving goal of this study, namely, to sketch a textual network of mutual impact between Goth self-fashioning and popular culture, makes the current discussion preliminary, cross-sectional, and aimed, first and foremost, to demarcate a broader logical design that would invite further, more meticulous, elaboration. That is why I have decided to leave out fictionalized but otherwise strongly subculture-oriented texts, in some cases strikingly close to the already discussed non-fictional coverage, and focus on the Goth-influenced tropes collaborating with other aesthetic and narrative conventions.

Thus, among the titles that undoubtedly deserve further attention but get only "honorable mentions" in this book, there is Voltaire's *Oh My Goth!* (2002) – a satirical graphic novel aimed at the Goth community and originating from stand-alone strips that the author used to advertise his early music shows on the scene (Voltaire *Oh*, inside back cover). It introduces many of the claims he later employs in *What Is Goth?* Also Tritthardt's webcomic *Writhe and Shine* is so closely connected to the communal dimension of the Goth scene (and especially its New Orleans locality) that Kilpatrick uses its episodes in *The Goth Bible* to illustrate nuances of the subculture (67, 83, 125) and interviews the author about the proximity of his work to the real-life experience (168–169). *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* (1995–1997) by Vasquez, which uses fiction to take moral transgression and rebellion against society to the extreme, has become a classic icon of subcultural investment, mentioned as such by Kilpatrick (107, 167), Siegel (96), Anna Powell in "Gothic Graphic Novel and Comics" entry for *The Handbook of the Gothic* (142), and Laurie N. Taylor in her analysis of the Gothic comics' aesthetic (198). Powell refers also to Gaiman's *Sandman* (1989–1996) (142) – a graphic novel which, while not framed directly by the exploration of the cultural underground, is frequently brought up as a subcultural milestone (e.g. Kilpatrick 166–167). It also functions as a token of Goth identity in

the construction of fictional characters, for instance in *Fat Vampire: A Never Coming of Age Story* by Adam Rex (2010), or in Barry Lyga's *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* (2006). In its follow-up, *Goth Girl Rising* (2009), one of the key channels for the protagonist's self-healing becomes her one-sided correspondence with Gaiman.[33] The *GloomCookie* series, created by Valentino and Naifeh, and continued by Valentino in collaboration with a number of other artists (2001–2008), is yet another Goth comic book that combines communal commentary with fantasy. It offers an overt Goth meta-narrative focused on characters co-creating a local "scene" and develops a number of self-reflective icons overlapping with those emergent from the subcultural presentations discussed in Part II – for example particular types of Goths, or the community dynamics and hierarchy. Those motifs are intertwined with fantastic threads, and the story of subcultural self-fashioning transforms into a dark fairy tale. A slightly similar employment of fantastic elements might be ascribed to Emily Autumn's *The Asylum for Wayward Victorian Girls* (2009). In that novel, the autobiographic narrative of the author – a Goth-related musician – is infiltrated by a Victorian fantasy that seems to realize, with Gothic excess, the deviation-based bio-political agenda explored by Foucault.

As even the above survey of texts excluded from the scope of the further analysis reflects the relevance of intertextuality, as well as intermediality and transmediality, for the Goth-themed fiction, it seems all the more important to signal the impact of those factors on the cultural functioning of Goth tropes. According to Spooner, the contemporary Goth presence in popular culture, emancipated from its Gothic origins, manifests itself via multiple channels such as "films, music lyrics, album artwork, promotional videos, comics and latterly through websites and social media platforms such as Pintrest." All in all, for non-subcultural audiences, Goth tropes are first of all visualized (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 67). Taking into account the said media variety, the selection of works to be scrutinized in Part III includes tabletop RPG rule-books, graphic novels, literary fiction, and a movie. This cross section, while selective and limited, is sufficient to signal the spread of a semiotic network underlying the distribution of subcultural imagery. Thus, the discussion of particular texts is centered around their employment of self-fashioning strategies rather than specific media or genre classifications.

Chapter 4, whose title – "The Goth Flesh" – reflects its somaesthetic angle, is founded on a paradox. While it deals with the seemingly most tangible subcultural attributes – those connected with physical appearance and bodily sensations – simultaneously tracks down a growing gap between them and subcultural identity. The emancipation of the body, suggested by the said gap, is accompanied in the analysis by the prominence of the selected texts' intermediality. *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart*

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[33] See also Spooner's reading of the *Sandman* Death as a fictional prototype of the "Perky Goth" character model centralized in the 21st-century pop culture together with the "happy Gothic" paradigm (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 24, 77, 114).

by Poppy Z. Brite (1998) is a novel retelling O'Barr's cult graphic novel, *The Crow*; Sophie Campbell's[34] *Wet Moon* series is a graphic novel itself; and *Beastly* (2011) is Daniel Barnz's cinematic adaptation of a novel by Alex Flinn.

The bonds of *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart* with the Goth movement are rather clear and function on the level of the book's contents as well as its status as a cultural artifact. Brite is an icon of the American subcultural scene of the 1990s, and the derivative status of the story itself further reinforces its communal significance. The book uses the narrative frame of O'Barr's graphic novel, whose significance for the Goth community is undebatable, though controversial. Brite's retelling additionally intensifies the exploration of somaesthetic self-fashioning by bringing together the themes of the subcultural community, transsexuality, BDSM, artistic photography and transphobic violence. As a result, the importance of physicality for identity formation and disruption is investigated in several dimensions, all of which involve the body as plastic material.

Campbell builds her graphic novel *Wet Moon* around the communal and individual lives of a group of art college students and their friends, most of whom make use of various forms of physical self-styling and somaesthetics. Many of those practices – from the composition of outfits to tattooing, to BDSM – seem to share a lot with the Goth self-fashioning discussed in the previous chapters yet rarely contribute to representations or pursuits of well-defined identity projects. On the contrary, the series seems to be driven, among others, by the issues of identity's dispersal, fluidity, and limited susceptibility to the subject's conscious control. Those themes are explored in a broad spectrum of physical diversity acknowledging factors of race, gender, age, sexuality, health and disability. The resultant complexity of self-fashioning problematizes the boundaries between resistance and surrender, pain and pleasure, fear and courage. In *Wet Moon*'s decentralized and multidirectional approach to identity, functions of the body are accordingly fluid. Somaesthetic self-fashioning is suggested to not always work as a controllable project, cleanly molded by the subject's pursuits, intuitions, or even desires. The series highlights the multidirectionality and volatility of such identity-shaping processes; the flesh – with its forms, surfaces, feelings, strengths and weaknesses – becomes as easily their part as their initiator or disruptor. In the messy somaesthetic experience of the characters, subcultural attributes are largely deprived of their direct semiotic power of meaning-making, or activate extralinguistic, micropolitical dimensions that avoid clear classification.

While *Wet Moon* still revolves, in its ambiguous ways, around subcultural self-fashioning with strong Goth(ic) elements, the last text discussed in Chapter 4 presents an even looser and more fragmentary employment of references to Goth aesthetic and physicality. *Beastly* by Flinn (2007), which I discuss together with Barnz's

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[34] The first six volumes of the series were originally published with the author's previous name, Ross Campbell, on the covers. The seventh volume, published in 2018, has been published under her current name, Sophie Campbell. The author started using this name after a sex reassignment procedure.

cinematic adaptation (2011), retells *Beauty and the Beast* as an American high school narrative. The novel uses the Goth stylization in a way rather predictable for a young adult school story, explored in detail in Chapter 5. The subcultural reference functions as a label to classify a female student who stands low in popularity ranks, and is commonly perceived as an embodiment of uncoolness. She turns out to be a powerful, long-living witch and decides to teach the richest and coolest boy at school a lesson by turning him into a beast until the curse is lifted with a kiss. Thus, the Goth character falls into the pattern of an empowered freak, while her maturity and overall advantage over the teen crowd are reinforced by the fact that her look is just a strategic choice to entice the kids' shallow judgments. The movie preserves the witch's Goth attire, but also employs the subcultural attributes in another way, far more prominent in terms of somaesthetics. While in the novel the protagonist changes into a furry creature reminiscent of the trademark Disney Beast, Barnz's visualization breaks away from that predictable trope. The cursed Kyle has no animalistic features but is covered in tattoos, scars and unnatural piercings – a combination that, together with the dark-fairy-tale convention of the whole narrative, evokes the Goth aesthetic. Its recognition in the movie's imagery might bring the reception of the plot closer to the frame of a high school social drama with the elements of the "makeover" trope which, as argued by Spooner, often involves a normative resocialization of a character gone awry (*Contemporary Gothic* 121–122; *Post-Millennial Gothic* 100). The replacement of conventional monstrosity with subcultural somaesthetics exposes it to a double defamiliarization. The Goth self-presentations discussed in the previous chapters leave no doubt about the variously motivated standing out as a major point of subcultural self-styling, clearly responsive to Bourdieu's understanding of distinction (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 6). The movie, however, forces such somaesthetic experience upon the unwilling character as a punishment.

Thus, *Beastly*'s fragmentary references to the Goth – never actually acknowledged as such in the movie itself – may be ascribed multiple functions, variably linked with the subculture as a broader issue. The theme of school culture smoothly incorporates the marginal employment of the "alternative" look, reconciling two apparently contrastive scenarios – the "freak's" normalization and the "freak's" triumph (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 103–104), for Kyle and Kendra the witch respectively. On the aesthetic level, Kyle's Goth(ish) look signals stigmatization, suffering and non-human status, all of which seem to fall into the "subculture as deviation" interpretative pattern discussed in Chapter 6. Simultaneously, however, the familiar fairy-tale Beast being replaced by a product of magically enhanced subcultural stylization has an unquestionable impact on the movie's visual layer. The latter can be perceived as appealing to the subcultural codification of Goth attributes as markers of rebellious beauty, initiation, or romanticized suffering. Thus, the various cultural and theoretical readings of Goth self-styling discussed throughout this book are implicitly brought together by a text that does not actually declare itself to be preoccupied with the subcultural theme, and are left to the viewer's individual sensitivities.

Chapter 5, labeled as dealing with an "apprentice Goth" mode, adds to subculturalism a perspective of internal work aimed at individual self-improvement in which Goth attributes signify a stage in the process. It is especially characteristic of texts aimed at young adults or featuring teen characters. Two factors seem especially highlighted in such protagonists' internal work: social relations, including the peer pressure and the generation gap, and the incorporation of variously conceptualized fiction in the identity formation. Still, as the functioning of those two themes in young adult novels shows, the "just-a-phase" stereotype may have various contexts and applications, oscillating between positive and negative depictions.[35]

The three texts analyzed under the "apprentice Goth" umbrella have been selected to sketch a spectrum of approaches to the ethics of intersubjectivity in subcultural self-fashioning. Francesca Lia Block's hippie *Dangerous Angels* (a collection of her Weetzie Bat books) laces its predominantly hippie-wise aesthetic with a subtle and understated Gothicization of Witch Baby. The novels' poetic style, immersed in magical realism and blurring the boundaries between narrative metaphor, fantasy and the characters' experience, is an important contribution to the overall counter-culturalism of the Weetzie series. Thus, while the Goth aesthetic does not break any rigid ontological boundaries, it certainly expands the narrative's sensitivity to the nuances of identity development, and provides an additional channel of communication with others.

Sweetblood by Pete Hautman (2003) treats the encounters of its teen protagonist, Lucy Szabo, with the dark subculture as a measuring stick for her internal growth in which the Goth shifts its status from a liberating and rebellious vent for the girl's frustration caused by her chronic disease to a disappointingly shallow pose that ceases to satisfy the pursuits of her maturing identity. As in Lyga's texts, Lucy's Goth inclinations have a semi-therapeutic function; they are, however, more explicitly depicted as a provisional and imperfect solution to the girl's problems that isolates her from the

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[35] In Lyga's already mentioned books, *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* and *Goth Girl Rising*, the fiction-fed aspect of subcultural identity creation – highlighted especially through the references to Gaiman's *Sandman* and the general importance of comic book culture for the protagonists – bears features of a coping mechanism. The "Goth girl," Kyra, struggles with the traumatizing impact of her mother's death, but while her progress eventually takes her into a "post-Goth" phase, only some aspects of the subcultural experience are criticized or rejected in the process. *Fat Vampire: A Never Coming of Age Story* by Rex highlights, in turn, the difficulty and unreliability of self-fashioning practices by contrasting *Bildung*-oriented quests of two characters, Doug and Sejal. The novel's references to Goth self-styling are split into a largely conventional high-school dark culture with which Sejal interacts, but does not fully subscribe to, and the vampire self-styling that Doug embraces, having actually been turned into the blood-sucking monster. The girl's progress seems fueled by her growing recognition of self-mastery as a means of departure from the intertextual and simulacrous existential environment of postmodernity. Doug's efforts, in turn, end in shifting the proportions between internalization of fiction and identity development, so that the latter falls victim to the former. As a result, the protagonist surrenders to and disintegrates under the impact of fictionalization. Given its metaconscious humor and intertextuality rooted in the dialectic of geek culture and media fandom, the novel might be seen as satirizing the text-related self-fashioning characteristics of such communities.

care and support of her loved ones and puts her in physical danger. Understanding those drawbacks and keeping the internal "darkness" at bay becomes the protagonist's groundbreaking achievement, which means that her progress basically follows a pattern of isolation–resocialization that Spooner traces back to the 1980s popular culture addressed to young audiences (103–104, 122).

The third text might be seen as challenging the overall inclusion of socialization among the worthwhile pursuits of a developing subject, whether the Goth factor supports the effectiveness of that process, as in the Weetzie novels, or complicates it, as in *Sweetblood*. The Courtney Crumrin comics series (2002–2014) by Naifeh – the co-creator of *GloomCookie*, often listed among trademark Goth artists – is aimed at younger readers (7+, according to the publisher's rating). It revolves around the tween protagonist's evolving self-definition and self-mastery as a witch, as well as the intersubjective aspects of her identity's development. The Goth investment of the series on the narrative level is implicit but telling. The motif of informal youth groups with a subcultural shadowing is absent, yet Courtney's sense of loneliness, isolation and being different is accompanied by Goth-like details of her appearance, which may be symptomatic of the semiotic bond between the subculture and (teenage) identity crisis. Simultaneously, Naifeh's work itself can be – and has been – approached as an artifact of Goth art, for instance by Taylor's "Making Nightmares into New Fairytales: Goth Comics as Children's Literature." A significant part of the protagonist's internal work is concentrated around the issue of selfishness and intersubjective bonds. Still, the ultimate consolidation of Courtney's self-fashioning connected with her magical powers results in the eradication of the witch community to which she belongs, and a magical rearrangement of reality.

Thus, the series exceeds the limits of – or perhaps brings together – two further teen-Goth tropes identified by Spooner as more characteristic of the 1990s popular culture. One such trope is that of an "outsider" character depicted in a way affirming non-conformism against normalization: "in contemporary teen Gothic marginalization is often celebrated" (*Contemporary Gothic* 104). The other trope, overlapping with the more general cultural demonization of the teenager figure, deals with a transgressive Gothicized character whose disruption of social order breaks out of control. Spooner identifies that trope first of all as affecting the depiction of "'bad' media witches" in such texts as *The Craft* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (102, 122), or monstrous teenagers, as in *Ginger Snaps* (2000) (107). While the conventional narrative employment of such characters requires them to be stopped or destroyed, Courtney's identity project remains unchallenged, together with its disruptive consequences, even though intersubjective factors do modify it in the process. In terms of a more directly subcultural rhetorics, Courtney's growth may be seen as illustrative of Greenblatt's understanding of power as rendered through the imposition of individual fiction.

Finally, Chapter 6 is devoted to a "political Goth," using subcultural struggles with the mainstream to convey politically invested critiques which, however, do not necessarily revolve around essentialized or clearly defined agendas, but may

focus on the meta-level of political positioning. Therefore, the concept related with self-fashioning that appears helpful in exploring such fictionalizations is Greenblattian self-awareness rendered through the combination of negation and submission. It resonates with the changeable proportions of political investment understood as a condition to deal with and a calling to act upon.[36] The dynamic relationship between subcultural rebellion and political metaconsciousness is exemplified by the transformations of the RPG universe, which some researchers depict as the first game to overtly capitalize on the mainstream–subculture tensions and political agendas. In the 1990s, an American publisher of RPGs, White Wolf Studio, released a series of games co-creating a single fictional universe labeled as *World of Darkness* (one of the games, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, has already been mentioned among Goth cultural artifacts). The games revolve around classical Gothic monster tropes (including vampires, werewolves, wielders of magic, ghosts and faerie creatures) in the modern setting, which the authors give a clearly subcultural underpinning of the "Gothic Punk" aesthetic. As the players role-play the already mentioned supernatural creatures who form secret communities under the surface of the human society, the discursive polarity of mainstream–underground constitutes an implicit yet significant drive of the games' dynamics.

It affects both the fictional dimension of *World of Darkness* and its sociocultural distribution – as argued by Paul Mason, "Vampire and its successors took role-playing out of its core constituency (which could perhaps be pithily, if unkindly, be described as Lord of the Rings-reading social inadequates) and established an alternative fief – in this case that of undead-obsessed 'goths'" (9). Indeed, Jaakko Stenros and Tanja Sihvonen emphasize that "The *Vampire* creators and the audience they attracted presented themselves as 'alternative' in every sense of the word." Thus, I read the *World of Darkness* series as a fantasy about subcultural capital becoming a source of actual empowerment – a fantasy consistent with the cultural experience of the 1990s as the last decade of discursive struggle between "flexible capitalism" and countercultural rebellion. The franchise has, however, been undergoing significant transformations since 2004, when the process of reinventing the *World of Darkness* universe began, leading to the creation of its 21st-century version currently labeled as *Chronicles of Darkness*. The directions and kinds of change noticeable in the process of rewriting the games' narrative set-up point to prioritizing self-awareness and survival over rebellion and revolution. Thus, they reinforce negation and submission as factors

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[36] For instance, in *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* the radical aberrations of social behavior are combined with a satire aimed at the subcultural socialization, and wrapped in an ironic, self-aware commentary that de-essentializes political tensions. Also in Autumn's *The Asylum for Wayward Victorian Girls*, the mutual infiltration of the autobiographic and fantastic narrative streams may be interpreted as politicizing the contemporary autobiographic experience, yet simultaneously reliant on phantasmagorical imagery and unstable ontology. As a result, submission to and negation of the oppressive power mechanisms enter into a complex interplay that shifts from the subject's self-fashioning to disintegration.

collaborating in the identity-formation process in order to provoke meta-reflection rather than resistance.

A similar picture of Goth tropes fictionalized and perpetuated in popular culture emerges from the entirety of the analysis presented in Part III, signaling a broader dynamics within the semiosis of subcultural self-fashioning. Employments subscribing to its politically subversive potential overlap with metaconscious monitoring of rebellion and resistance as identity-shaping factors. Subcultural investments become anchored in time when they measure stages of individual development or mark the turning cultural periods; they may also be released from any confines of rationality as they make fictions and fantasies tangible within the sphere of identity. Its physical and somatic aspects are shown as driving or reinforcing self-fashioning projects, but also as capable of disrupting or dispersing them. All in all, the presented survey of Goth tropes, while far from representative, is sufficient to signal the complexity and expanse of the ways the logical structures of self-fashioning come to inform and are appropriated by pop-cultural discourses. Simultaneously, it reveals critical self-awareness and insightfulness that unfolds in the multifarious fictionalizations of self-fashioning philosophies. What emerges from that complicated network is a suggestion of self-fashioning as a foundation for a cultural paradigm that, however, is continuously scrutinized, challenged and tested by the very same culture that it has come to frame.

PART III

SELF-FASHIONING IN GOTH TROPES

CHAPTER 4

Goth Flesh
(*The Crow: The Lazarus Heart,*
Wet Moon, Beastly)

The somaesthetic aspect of Goth self-fashioning may be the most spectacular one because of its reliance on material props, physical appearance, and corporeality in general – things that are, in most cases, easy to visualize or employ as world- and character-building elements in a text of culture. Still, as shown below, such tangibility may also facilitate fragmentation of self-styling as a trope, for instance by loading its selected attributes with additional, biopolitical significance, problematizing their formative potential, or isolating them, together with the physicality to which they are attached, from other dimensions of the Goth. In Brite's *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart*, Goth self-styling is used for mapping out a more complex issue of institutional trans- and homophobia. Campbell's graphic novel *Wet Moon*, in turn, involves cases of somaesthetic self-fashioning which clearly draw from the Goth subcultural legacy yet seem insufficient as means of managing the characters' identities, among others due to the disruptive potential of corporeality itself which is depicted more as a dynamic factor affecting the self than a material surrendering to the self's designs. Finally, in the cinematic adaptation of *Beastly* – Flinn's retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* – Goth-inspired somaesthetics functions in parallel as a part of the broader trope of a high-school narrative, and in separation from it. The latter employment of the subcultural aesthetics encourages speculation on the growing discrepancy between Goth attributes functioning in popular culture and the tropes they originate from.

The Crow: The Lazarus Heart – Goth Flesh at Work

As already mentioned, Brite's[37] 1990s books are counted among the artifacts of the American Goth culture. Similarly to the *World of Darkness* games – though possibly targeting a slightly different audience – Brite's novels firmly embrace a romanticized opposition between subculture and hypocritical suburban mainstream. Dormant in the motif of the generation gap, the polarity is all the more prominent when it overlaps with the theme of queerness, as exemplified by *Lost Souls* (1992), or *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart* (1998). Such thematic combinations constitute a prolific background for BDSM motifs. Siegel offers a Deleuzoguattarian interpretation of *Lost Souls*, *Drawing Blood* and *Exquisite Corpse* as Goth artifacts of subversive erotica based on the deterritorialization of the male masochist body (72–92). Katarzyna Ancuta uses Freudian psychoanalysis to argue for a subversive and subcultural employment of the gaze in *Drawing Blood* (1993). The object of my current interest is *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart* – a queer and distinctly Goth retelling of O'Barr's cult classic with ambivalent connections to the dark subculture. Brite's version of the story not only brings closely together the themes of Goth stylization, queerness and BDSM, but also plays with remediation in a way that may be argued to reinforce the potential of *The Crow* as a subcultural artifact.

The closeness of ties between the Goth body, political resistance, and self-fashioned identity is reflected in the network of connections between the five leading characters. The plot revolves around a paranoid, transphobic serial killer, Goth twins who become his victims, a police detective involved in the investigation (a closeted gay man struggling to survive in the homophobic system), and the twins' lover, a BDSM-inspired photographer who is falsely accused of one of the murders and – like O'Barr's original hero – returns from the dead to avenge all injustice. The relevance of representational somaesthetics is increased by the prominence of visual factors and corporeal surfaces in that network – the twins' Goth outfits, the killer's obsession with cross-dressing and genderfluid individuals, whom he perceives as members of an inhuman conspiracy, the artistic BDSM photographs, the gory arrangements of mutilated bodies that the killer is leaving behind. All those elements are complemented, and cemented, by sensual descriptions that narrate the sphere of somatic experience and its impact on the characters.

The way visual representation intertwines with self-fashioning and power relations in the content of the novel resonates with the remediation of *The Crow* as a cultural artifact. In the original (1981), O'Barr uses contrastive graphic styles: delicate line drawings, pencil sketches and soft watercolors are reserved for the flashbacks from the protagonist's happy past, depicting romantic moments between him

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[37] After a sex reassignment procedure, the author has changed his name to Billy Martin, though "Poppy Z. Brite" has remained his penname for some time.

and his girlfriend. The current events follow the hero's return from the grave and his progressing revenge, which boils down to interrogating and killing off all individuals somehow involved in the gang assault in which the woman was gang-raped and the couple brutally murdered. That timeline, full of dynamic and violent action intertwining with intense scenes of the protagonist's suffering, is depicted in heavily inked, black-and-white cadres. The interplay between those visual styles nuances the otherwise simple plot, as well as highlights the somaesthetic potential of such attributes as makeup, black leather outfits, or self-harm, as they come to characterize the transition from the subtly sketched, tender lover to the sharply outlined, merciless and tormented undead avenger.[38]

As already mentioned, the said employment of subcultural attributes has not won a universal approval of the Goth community, and the figure of the Crow himself has developed an ambivalent status of a fake Goth icon. Ravlin accuses O'Barr's work of using Goth aesthetic to propagate scenes of mindless cruelty (Cemetery, Syllabus), while, as Venters suggests, the Crow's outfit and makeup have come to signify mainstream appropriation of overdrawn subcultural visuals without regard for their possible origin, context or significance (Chapter 5, Why Friends). Briefly speaking, it is the representational explicitness of *The Crow* – especially since the graphic novel's cinematic adaptation (1994) – that problematizes its status as a Goth artifact. The remediation employed in *The Lazarus Heart* – retelling sequential art as a literary narrative which revolves around visuality – offers a way to mitigate the controversial intensity of direct representation.

The subcultural investment of the story is further reinforced by the mainstream–margin axis, which the narrative sustains to a large extent through the somaesthetic and flesh-focused themes. The already mentioned combinations of Goth self-styling, BDSM, and gory mutilation work, first and foremost, to escalate the dynamics of difference relevant both for the insider perspective of marginalized identities and the normative mechanisms of the mainstream.

The twins, Benjamin and Luke-turned-Lucrece, having spent their childhood as social outcasts in a small Louisiana town, move to New Orleans, where they embrace their "freak" status with self-awareness and begin to express it by means of the Goth aesthetic. A retrospective look at their hometown community assembles all major points of criticism directed by Goth voices at the mainstream society. It is shown as intolerant, close-minded, sustaining Ku Klux Klan (KKK) bonds, and aggressively suspicious toward outsiders (26–27). As a result, the twins soon embrace otherness as the core of their identities, fantasizing about the "identical fairy brothers, changelings left for human children and taken to be raised by a kindly old woman [their aunt] in a house full of riddles and dust and fat scuttling spiders" (31–32), and adapting

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[38] Lauren M. E. Goodlad observes similar duality and mutual infiltration of tenderness and brutality in the narrative layer of *The Crow* and argues that it conveys the main character's androgyny (94–102).

marginality as a drive of their own actions: "We're both freaks […] We're nothing like these others […] And that's our power" (31).

Benjamin and Lucas's social experience is not unique – the backstory of another murder victim, a teen who has chosen the life of a homeless bohemian over "the gray shroud of suburban despair," reinforces the premise of hypocrisy inseparable from normative values. Molested inside the four walls of his family home and helpless in light of his mother's "denial as thick as the Max Factor she caked on her face every morning to try to look twenty-five instead of fifty," he becomes a cross-dressing sex worker (103). The most spectacular incarnation of the mainstream's duplicity proves to be the prosecutor wrongly accusing Jared the photographer of murder. The lawyer, religious and family-oriented in his court speeches, implicitly supports the racist political agenda and is secretly fond of extramarital sex with women of color (235–236, 241).

Therefore, having identified themselves against the normative society, the twins develop elaborate somaesthetic practices largely in line with those discussed in Chapter 2, and smoothly combining subcultural, gender and sexual factors. Described from the perspective of their future lover, they "loo[k] like some fetish freak's vision of Jonathan and Mina Harker, an unlikely juxtaposition of the prim and perverse" (82). Ben and Lucrece apply material self-fashioning not only to their appearance but also immediate surroundings. Juggling with kitsch aesthetic and low-cost materials, they create a Goth home space on "the second story of the old warehouse – the refuse of a city turned into impossible elegance, garbage molded into the most unlikely opulence" (90–91). Goth cultural artifacts – Gaiman's *Sandman*, or references to Nick Cave, and Black Tape for a Blue Girl (a band sometimes linked with BDSM culture) – further bridge the representational dimension of the characters' subcultural self-styling with the experiential one.

The siblings, theatrically inclined since childhood, employ also performative somaesthetics – not only to indulge in the trademark Gothic by reciting Poe's "The Raven" (84), but also to manipulate erotic tension. As Jared, aware of his own growing desire, follows their conversation designed to introduce him to Lucrece's transsexuality, he observes: "*There are strings everywhere* […] *not just on the end of my dick.* This scene was something the pair had rehearsed over and over again, […] perfected in privacy and practice" (96–97). Advanced in somaesthetic practices, Lucrece eventually achieves a spectacular union of body modification, somatic experience and spiritual awareness when a crow-shaped scarification intended as emotional self-therapy provides her with the power to communicate with the supernatural forces involved in Jared's resurrection (78–79).

Apart from being marginalized and othered by the majority, the characters also actively sustain an aura of elitism and competence measured with "authenticity." When they first meet, Ben, Lucrece and Jared effectively establish a platform of understanding through their shared contempt for the artistic event they have come to see (81–83, 85). In the privacy of their home, the twins move on to testing Jared to verify his artistic as well as erotic potential (93–96). Indeed, that the quality of his

art relies on its "authenticity" is confirmed by a subcultural visitor to Jared's exhibition who appreciates the artist for not being "another bullshit wanna-be taking fetish snapshots for the lookieloo norms" (121–122). It is in a photo session featuring Benjamin and Lucrece that Jared works somaesthetic magic, effectively employing Goth and BDSM aesthetics to stretch and challenge gender-based identity factors (119).

The process of challenging boundaries and definitions works not only in the representational, but also experiential dimension: "By the end of the first shoot […] Lucrece was nauseous, dizzy, and less certain of her tenuous identity than she'd been in years" (29). In accordance with Spooner's postulated paradox of the Gothic body as simultaneously material and virtual, the descriptions of the session's visual outcomes highlight the mediality of flesh. It is constructed through the subjective perception of the models, the particular props and poses, the work of the camera and technical effects, the interpretative context formed by the intertextual titles of particular works, and the perception of a specific viewer – all those elements wrapped in the narrative which constitutes the sole guide of the reader's imagination in the effort of visualizing the described picture:

> This one was titled *The Pleasures of Teirêsias* and was the first that he'd [the killer] encountered with only a single figure, or what he at first *mistook* for a single figure. He leaned close and could see that it was in fact a double exposure, with two bodies occupying the same space. He thought perhaps there was a male body superimposed over a female, but it was hard to be sure. Both forms were draped with strips of raw meat and the viscera of slaughtered animals, and the figures stood in a dark slick of blood that had run down their naked bodies and pooled about their bare feet. Only their faces were clear, unblurred by the photographer's trick, their two heads, male and female, turned in profile to the left and right, respectively. And he realized something else then. All the photographs so far had shown the same couple, a boy and a girl whose features were so perfectly matched that they had to be brother and sister, maybe twins. (123)

The images of Benjamin and Lucrece are modified by the visual processing merging two silhouettes into one, the gory props, and the intertextual filter of the allusion to the sex-changing character from Greek mythology. The resultant picture is presented to the reader already aware of the dissociative influence of the photo session on the models. Moreover, the description's focalizer is the serial killer, whose visit to the exhibition is a part of his delusional research on the global conspiracy of transsexuals. With so many interpretative layers affecting the ways it is perceived by particular subjects, the Goth flesh becomes plastic, medialized, and susceptible to dynamically changing signification. This process is taken to the grotesque extreme by the killer, who dissects his victims and arranges their bodies into messages. Simultaneously, the radical somaesthetic practices of the protagonists are taking place in a strongly emphasized political context of the normative–non-normative power play.

The rhetoric of being different is not the sole domain of the subculturalists – the mainstream society employs it all the more effectively to separate the deviant from the normal. The normative discourse reaches its peak during the police investigation after Benjamin's death, the resultant accusation of Jared, and the court trial in which both Jared and Lucrece give their testimonies in front of the jury. Reductionist refer-

ences to "normalcy," "nature" and religious morality are perpetuated, creating a discursive, argument-proof wall with which the alternative identities of both characters collide.

Normativity as the main, or more adequately, the only working criterion applied by the institutions of law, becomes obvious when the officers interrogating Jared use against him stereotypical misconceptions about BDSM practice:

> We've seen those pictures you take. That's some pretty twisted shit, Mr. Poe. It looks to me like you have a real hard-on for hurting people […] So how's it gonna look to a jury, hmmm? Normal guys who don't like to fuck other men up the ass, who don't get their jollies taking obscene pictures of boys dressed up like women? […] You can't tell us you'd never hurt Benny, can you, Jared? Because you hurt him on a regular basis. Isn't that right? Every time you fucked him you hurt him. Benny *wanted* you to hurt him… (165)

At that point Jared realizes that the judgment he is about to face is far less about the crime than about the alien and disturbing lifestyle embodied by the twins and himself – a suspicion confirmed later by one of the involved policemen (175). When Lucrece is about to testify in the courtroom, Jared warns her publically that her words will be irrelevant and will be deformed to serve the goals of the normative discourse (219). Indeed, the prosecutor, known for his political connections with Christian Coalition and, indirectly, KKK (217), keeps provoking the witness in order to undermine her credibility. The sensationistic aura of their exchange is reinforced when Lucrece loses control and offends the lawyer, a fact which he smoothly incorporates into the rhetorical strategy, emphasizing in front of the jury that the he is being attacked by "a confirmed sodomite" (224).

Indeed, the performance factor during the trial is highlighted from its very beginning, in a way subscribing to what Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls the "freak discourse" that involves the projection of the given culture's identity issues on "exceptional bodies" (2). The prosecutor does not hesitate to use the spectacularity of the individuals involved in the trial: "the transsexual sister pleading for the life of the accused homosexual murderer of her cross-dressing twin," as the media put it (178). He makes the normal–freak polarity work to his benefit by "giving the jury time to take a good look at Lucrece," who tones down the subcultural attributes of her appearance for the occasion, and "strain[s] to pass as normal for a lot of norm motherfuckers who had already made up their narrow minds about her" (218). Thus, the court proceedings turn into a spectacular collision of the subcultural margin with the normative mainstream, from which the latter emerges unswaying and triumphant.

The extreme experiences of Jared and Lucrece with the normative discourses of gender, sexuality, and morality hyperbolize the less pronounced but permanent tensions in the heteronormative society, affecting the struggles of those gay characters who choose to function within the mainstream instead of embracing their marginal status. The main representative of that group is Frank Gray, the policeman who lives in the closet. He does it to avoid oppression on the part of the institution he belongs to – oppression which, apart from impacting one's career, can be life-threatening. He

realized that danger during an exceptionally difficult intervention, when other police-men ostracized him and his partner because she was a lesbian. When a colleague comments on the incident, "smil[ing] with the reaffirmation that he was speaking to one of his own, someone who understood that sometimes sacrifices had to be made for the sake of maintaining a greater purity," Frank is too scared to protest (68). In fact, his entire career is framed with fear-induced silence and pretence (49–50, 66–68), and eventually meets an abrupt end when Frank dies, blackmailed into a trap set by the serial killer.

The life in the closet requires from Gray certain self-fashioning practices, which, however, are reduced to generating a persona polarized against his actual subjectivity. It relies on the fluency in sexist remarks and homophobic language, passivity in the face of discrimination, and performative gestures of straightness (50). Moreover, his "machismo" is described as "just another part of his uniform […] as easy to put on and take off again as his hat and shoes" (50). The relevance of performativity in those practices might suggest that Frank is an accomplished self-fashioner, yet they drive him toward an identity crisis rather than the other way around: "sometimes he would catch a glimpse of his thin face in the bathroom mirror or a store window and there would be only the mask, no vestige left of the man hiding underneath […] There was a ballooning sense that he was somehow slipping out of himself, that the man he saw reflected had already consumed the *real* Frank Gray" (50–51).

While Frank's self-fashioning prioritizes normativity as its leading principle, a different – and more drastic – case of an identity project dependent on external factors, including bodies of others, is constituted by the serial killer. "The man who wears the names of rivers," (108) as he uses several aliases inspired by various watercourses, seems to pursue an identity model conditioned entirely by external influences. The original one is spectacularly extreme: the man's delusional mission, eventually leading him to multiple murders, is triggered in his childhood, when he gets hit by a lightning (265). Symbolically stripped of his identity, he embraces an irreversible internal change: "the lightning had left something inside him, something small and hard inside his head, and he *couldn't* remember his name. He knew other things, though. New things the lightning had wanted him to know. But not his name. That was part of the cost, his name" (266). The killer's agenda, driven by a conspiracy theory depicting transsexuals as conspirators against humankind, seems to be nothing more than a figment of his disturbed imagination. However, a suggestion of an external influence is created when his family's acquaintance senses an evil presence within the boy and recommends an exorcism (266). Whatever the origin of his transformation, the killer perceives it as independent from his own will, his identity completely enslaved by the external circumstances:

he is no longer like other men […] some part of his fearful work has changed him forever and he can never return to the simple, painless life he lived before. Sometimes the knowing of this hurts him so badly that he sits alone in a dark room for hours and cries for the loss of himself. It is a terrible thing, he knows, to have had so little say in the course of his own life, to have had so many things decided for him

before he was even born. To be a soldier in an army of light and blood so secret that there can never be any acknowledgment of his achievements or failures […]. (108)

Still, next to the intellectual construct driving the murderer is a more somatically rooted factor of his obsession with transsexual and Goth somaesthetic. Visiting Jared's exhibition entailed immersing himself in a crowd that he finds deeply disturbing: "androgynous bodies in latex and leather and fishnet stockings. Faces painted white as skulls, eyes as dark as empty sockets. Bits of metal and bone protruding from lips and eyebrows, jewelry like the debris of an industrial accident" (120). In the killer's imagination, the subcultural style appears to be a waking-world foreshadowing of a Lovecraftian corporeal nightmare that he sees in his sleep:

> The writhing bodies of the creatures in Their truest form, Their primary aspect, cling to every wall and rooftop, Their smooth and sexless bodies white as bone beneath the night sky, the wet red holes between Their legs like the beaked jaws of squid or octopi. In the dream Their voices have joined together into a single, hideous wail and Their black and swollen eyes watch jealously as he passes above Them. (109–110)

Thus, while he does not apply prominent somaesthetic practices to his own body, the physical fashioning of others – specifically Goths and transsexuals – remains crucial for his identity project, even if he does not actually recognize his own part in it. He also appropriates the corpses of his victims in a sort of a twisted self-fashioning practice, as he believes their arrangements to communicate his invincibility and vigilance to the inhuman conspiracy. The intention to scare his imaginary opponent (17, 21) is a major impulse for him to paint the street red with blood and suspend body parts like decorations, leave a corpse in a bath (17), or relocate a victim's genitals from crotch to mouth (20).

The murderer becomes convinced that Jared's art contains hidden information about the conspiracy. Especially in one work, Benjamin's distinctive portrait called "The Raven," "[t]hey had shown something far truer of Their nature than all of his experiments could ever hope to reveal" (130). Because he leaves the exhibition convinced that now the monsters are after him (130), his further crimes become even more loaded with self-expression. He leaves a fragment of Poe's "The Raven" next to the massacred Benjamin – partly to frame Jared, but first and foremost "to show Them that he was not the fool they'd mistaken him for, that They had given him the clue that in time would be their downfall" (130–131). The killer also paints a line from "The Raven" on a park fountain which he uses to dispose of another body, dropping its fragments, "almost like one of those 3-D puzzles" (199), into the water.

Turning into a warped kind of somaesthetic practice, the interactions with his victims seem to keep the killer's identity together, reaffirming his sense of purpose, accomplishment, and, occasionally, pleasure. He feels that the media accounts of the crime scenes underappreciate his skill and diligence in dealing with the bodies (202), and feels envy when Benjamin's murder is ascribed to Jared (135–136). When he becomes anxious about his actions and quest, it is "the meticulous, familiar ritual of […] vivisection" that helps him regain consistency (137). Finally, while he concep-

tualizes his actions mostly in terms of duty and research, he comes to enjoy dominating over Lucrece, and, enraged by her telepathic probe, rapes her – an act that he has so far held in contempt as a symptom of both weakness and gullibility needed to fall for the monstrous transsexuals' seduction. It is, therefore, not so much indulgence as, again, a need of self-expression that makes him commit the non-consensual sexual act: "It has nothing to do with desire, nothing to do with anything as base as lust. This will be a message to Them that he will not be violated again, that to violate him is to invite the rape of Their own" (277–278).[39]

Thus, the killer's identity project constitutes a paradoxical combination of extreme subjectivity generating his sense of uniqueness, and appropriation of external factors, especially the bodies of others, in acts of what might be labeled as "negative" somaesthetics. His nemesis, the undead Jared, is, in turn, taking internally generated somaesthetics to the extreme. Though Jared's resurrection is supernatural, it turns out that the mystical crow which guides him has been summoned by his raging emotions after Benjamin's death (74–75). In terms of somaesthetic self-fashioning, the reanimating power of feelings might be seen as an overdrawn and materialized variant of emotional authentication which Shusterman ascribes to the country music culture. The identity-forming power of such authentication is taken to the extreme both in the experiential and representational aspect as Jared's body, cut and sewn before the funeral, first grows back together (4–6), developing a self-fixing ability (36–37), and subsequently, in the course of his revenge's progress, becomes growingly devastated yet unable to die.

While Jared did not practice Goth self-styling when he was alive (125), as the undead he conforms to the Goth decorum: he is wearing a "black latex coat" (254), and covers his face with a Mardi Gras mask, which becomes Benjamin's token: "Now his eyes fill the space meant for Benny's, his own eyes like last night's fire that only needs to be stirred, that only needs a little tinder to become an inferno again. There's nothing else in his face any more alive than this mask, nothing else but his eyes worth showing, so he leaves it on" (100). Thus, he becomes an embodiment of vengeance, no other aspects of his identity relevant. On the inside, he experiences "[h]urt so big and heavy it can only cripple him or drive him on. 'Is that *all* there is to keep me moving?' […] *The loss and the anger*, he thinks, fingering the words like bullets" (141). The strength of emotional impact which causes the supernatural transformation of Jared's body continues to reveal itself as the avenger collects subsequent physical damage, from minor cuts to multiple shot wounds, including one that removes a part of his skull (247). When the crow spirit is killed (301), and Jared himself shot in vital places, he remains unable to either conclude his vengeance or die. The ultimate reso-

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[39] The discrepancy between the killer's somatic experience and the way he incorporates it into his identity project is reinforced by the intertextual aspect of the rape scene. It invites reference to William Shakespeare's poem "The Rape of Lucrece," in which the rapist, Tarquin, struggles with contradicting impulses and hesitation before succumbing to his sexual drive.

lution is brought by another supernatural intervention, which finally leads to eliminating the killer and puts all three victims – Benjamin, Jared, and Lucrece – at peace.

All in all, *The Lazarus Heart* not only depicts subcultural and Gothicized bodies as plastic and moldable in the processes of individual self-fashioning, but takes those features to the extreme by turning such bodies into the matter for the killer's own creativity. Simultaneously, the plasticity and changeability of Goth flesh is hyperbolically political, reacting to homo- and transphobic normativity. Subcultural identity projects are firmly cemented by the mainstream–margin dynamics which the novel seems to romanticize and demonize at the same time. A noticeably different take on that issue is offered by the text discussed in the next section. The *Wet Moon* series by Campbell offers a post-2000 insight into the functioning of the Goth aesthetic, freeing it from political polarities, but simultaneously raising a number of questions about its identity-forming potential.

Wet Moon – Post-Goth Flesh

Both the time frames and the setting of Campbell's work promise complications in the way it constructs and employs Goth somaesthetic practices.[40] The narrative zooms in on the student community of an art-focused college in Wet Moon, Florida, and takes place in the 2000s – most probably around the middle of the decade, as suggested by the fictional premiere of the last Harry Potter novel, depicted in volume 5, *Where All Stars Fail to Burn* (72–75).[41] On the one hand, the series' cultural reality seems closer to the one affecting the already mentioned *Chronicles of Darkness* – deprived of a clearly defined mainstream–resistance binary, fluid rather than fixed, intertextual and multiform. It offers few reliable identity patterns and seems to adopt self-fashioning as the characters' default condition, symbolically reflected by the omnipresence of tattoos, piercings, carefully composed outfits, elaborate hairstyles, and artifacts referring to media culture. On the other hand, the Southern setting evokes stereotypes of socio-political and moral conservatism, the like of which received drastic criticism in Brite's novel.

The immediate community co-created by the main characters of the comics generates a social bubble of redefined norms: inclusive, open to racial and sexual diversity, affirmative of a broad spectrum of body shapes and ability forms. It brings together characters varying in material status and coming from African American, Asian American, Jewish, and other, unspecified backgrounds. Straight, gay, bisexual

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[40] The presentation of particular *Wet Moon* characters in this section owes credit to Katarzyna Wasylak, who contributed a lot of insight during our conversations about Campbell's graphic novel.

[41] According to Wikipedia ("Harry"), J. K. Rowling announced the title *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* at the turn of 2006 and 2007. Campbell uses a fictional title, *Harry Potter and the Pillar of Shadows*, which may suggest that the action is set before Rowling's announcement.

and more fluidly queer preferences overlap and mix freely – which, however, does not mean that sexuality loses relevance. Cutting is approached not so much in terms of a problem that needs addressing, as a private practice not to be judged (*Unseen* 53–54; *Where* 109). Ailments, physical deformities and other limitations of somatic ability are noticeable and addressed in various ways.

None of that, however, means that the students and their friends function in a total utopia of tolerance and inclusivity; it is rather that the main narrative rarely confronts them with the normative or discriminatory factors. Such factors, however, still reside on the margins of the plot and exert mostly inconspicuous yet sometimes profound influence on the characters' lives. The most immediate manifestation of prejudice is simultaneously a ridiculous one – a café customer has a homophobic outburst, demanding that the staff banish a homosexual character from the place she wants for herself (*Drowned* 99). However, when the young people who develop or experiment with non-straight sexualities face the challenge of breaking the news to their families, it is not depicted as a comic experience. Cleo is anxious (*Drowned* 93–94); Glen is saddened by his parents' indifference (142); Audrey and her family become estranged, which deprives her of basic material stability (*Yesterday* 99–101, 124–125). What is more, the members of the non-normative bubble themselves are not impervious to various forms of prejudice. Penny, the half-sister of Cleo, the series' protagonist, represents biphobic behavior when she argues that "'Bi' girls are jus' confused" (*Where* 20); also one of Cleo's closest friends, Trilby, who does not manifest political or ideological displays of homophobia, becomes "weirded out" by the romantic affair that grows between Cleo and their shared high-school friend, Mara (*Drowned* 121). Mara, in turn, is very blunt as she claims that the disability of the local fortune heiress, Fern, has been caused by her being "inbred or somethin'" (*Unseen* 160). One of Cleo's roommates annoys the other with anti-Semitic jokes (*Drowned* 17). Beth, Audrey's girlfriend, can be sexist, intolerant, and aggressive (*Where* 51–55). The oversensitive and insecure Cleo has a history of high-school bullying and nastiness aimed at some of her classmates, including Mara (*Further* 27–28, 216–217; *Drowned* 71). Moreover, in the sixth volume of the series, *Yesterday's Gone*, the group's accommodation of otherness is put to the test when Trilby falls victim to a brutal knife attack and ends up unconscious and marred at the hospital. Apart from being shocked by the display of violence, and worried for Trilby's health, Cleo, Mara, Audrey and Martin – the victim's boyfriend – feel anxiety about the upcoming confrontation with the girl's post-traumatic self. "Things'll be good when you wake up… Just… don't be different. I'm so scared when you wake up, you'll be different. Jus' be *you*, even if we still don't get along," pleads Mara (*Yesterday* 87), expressing the fear shared by other characters (107, 129, 139).

Thus, rather than create an impression of a utopia, the fact that the narrative zooms in on the internal functioning of the college community instead of its confrontations with the mainstream brings to light the complexities and intersections of normative and non-normative lifestyles. The porousness of the "alternative" is

spectacularly illustrated by the functioning of subcultural elements in the characters' self-fashioning. Their artistic and otherwise creative pursuits – Cleo is an aspiring writer, Trilby draws comics, Mara is into filming, Martin studies digital design, Glen is a costume maker – make them susceptible to a broad spectrum of somaesthetic practices, including those characteristic of subcultural self-fashioning. Most of such initiatives, as well as the students' creative output, appeal to Goth aesthetics supported by the broader employment of the Gothic, observable on the level of the narrative structure as well as in numerous visual and intertextual details.

While the core of the plot is kept in a slice-of-life convention focusing on everyday conversations and unremarkable daily events in the protagonists' intertwining lives, its slow-paced flow is occasionally interrupted by manifestations of the uncanny. Cleo is annoyed and freaked out by mysterious inscriptions saying "Cleo eats it" which she and her friends occasionally come across all over the campus (*Feeble* 11, 16, 24, 121–122, 127–128; *Unseen* 20–21, 34, 45; *Further* 68). There is a strangely discolored part of the floor in Cleo's bedroom (133–134), which she has taken over after an unexplained disappearance of its former inhabitant named Chloe (*Feeble* 129–130). A local cat seems to know something about that discolored circle (*Further* 204), and one night a monstrously transformed figure of Fern emerges from it to silently face the dumbfounded Cleo (*Where* 98–102). None of those Gothic-flavored events are further explicated or receive closure.

Tangible Gothic icons are also brought up when the characters discuss their cultural tastes: Mara and Cleo talk about the *Living Dead* (*Feeble* 102); Cleo and Myrtle warm up to each other while talking about Mary Shelley, classic Gothic monsters (*Unseen* 29–30), *Twin Peaks* (70) and slashers (*Drowned* 41); Mara seeks inspiration in "those old Mummy movies" (*Drowned* 35). As for more immediate Goth references, many characters listen to various types of "dark" music. Logos of real-life bands representing Goth, emo, industrial, metal and other scenes can be observed on the protagonists' bedroom walls, t-shirts, bags and other items of everyday use. The series pays a special tribute to an American Goth/deathrock band Bella Morte by not only quoting its lyrics as mottos (*Feeble* 28, 135; *Drowned* 121), but also incorporating its concert into the plot (*Further* 54–61). The characters' musical investments combined with the already mentioned somaesthetic attributes such as piercings or tattoos, develop a form of "enunciative productivity" (Fiske 37–38), which suggests that subcultural belonging is an important factor of self-fashioning in *Wet Moon*. It is brought up in several characterizations of Cleo: Martin comments that her new hairstyle gives her a "punky" look (*Unseen* 23); Myrtle teases her for being "emo" when they compare their musical tastes (*Drowned* 42); and Mara considers handing some of her Goth outfits down to Cleo "since she's still kind of into that shit" (164). Predictably, Cleo herself reacts to such classifications with reluctance or denial.

What is, however, characteristic about the subcultural references in *Wet Moon* are their semiotic functions, and the language the characters use when they talk about

somaesthetic practices. To Trilby, for instance, subcultures prove useful mostly in de-scribing physical appearance, and moreover, she depicts them as a background for highlighting the individuality of Martin, whose self-fashioning is the least pronounced among the protagonists: "Actually I guess it'd be cool if he went [to a concert] in jus' his like, normal t-shirt an' jeans or whatever. He'll be so unique in this big crowd of stupid mopey goths an' old metal guys with trenchcoats an' emo-punk losers" (*Further* 32). Thus, the underground aesthetics becomes reduced to icons of contempt-deserving, shallow attitudes contrastive to Martin's unpretentious personality.

Simultaneously, the characters speak about their own somaesthetic transforma-tions using a normalizing rhetoric, based on the simple aesthetic opposition of beauty and ugliness. Clothing articles are often called "cute" (*Feeble* 17, 42; *Unseen* 105); when Cleo prepares for a "Back to Ghoul" event at the local punk/Goth club, The House of Usher, she "fe[els] obliged to really dress up and look *nice*" (*Unseen* 61, emphasis added). Cleo expresses her fascination with Zia, who has lost her arm in a car accident, by calling her "cool" (*Unseen* 88). Fern, in turn, is "sweet" (*Unseen* 109), "nice" (110), and her disfigured arm is "cute" (160), though, as a future writer, Cleo is also capable of a more eloquent – and Gothic – description of the mysterious heiress: "she's like beautiful darkness incarnate, gentle shadows given flesh" (143). When Cleo and Trilby get inked, what matters most to them is "be[ing] hot" (*Unseen* 124) and "look[ing] good" (*Further* 19). In the course of the series, Mara drops her Goth self-styling – a decision which, as the reader learns from her confessional blog, means to her more than a simple fashion choice, as it is connected with her in-depth self-scrutiny. Still, the comments she gets from her friends communicate only that Trilby "always hated that look," while Cleo "liked it" because it made Mara "cute" though her post-Goth version is "cuter" (*Drowned* 31). Mara herself, however, also employs superficial aesthetic criteria when she reflects on the probably most radical part of her self-fashioning: "I used to have lots of piercings because I thought they would make me pretty. Didn't work" (*Drowned* 79).

Thus, the subcultural aspects of self-fashioning, and the conscious generation of an "alternative" social and aesthetic reality are definitely echoed by the *Wet Moon* ser-ies. Still, they remain volatile, fragmentary, and insufficient for framing accomplished identity projects of the main characters. Their self-fashioning seems complex and hard to control, dispersed and sometimes taken over by the somatic sphere, which works faster than the consciously articulated identity designs, which is why the protagonists happen to do things they cannot understand or explain. Their pursuits are depicted as open, possibly rhizomatic processes even though they are individualized. Particular characters differ in the degrees of control, determination, self-awareness, and strat-egies they apply to their self-fashioning, and still none of them seems to reach a point of accomplishment. Such difficulties are discussed below based on the examples of four characters with the most obvious connections to Goth aesthetic: Cleo and Fern, whose identities seem especially unstable, as well as Mara and Trilby, who, in turn, put a lot of effort into pursuing more-or-less specified models of selfhood.

As signaled by her word choices mentioned above, Cleo's self-stylization may seem focused on superficial representative somaesthetics. Insecure about her body shape (*Unseen* 110–111) – though not determined enough to get fit (*Further* 26) – she claims being "jealous of everyone's looks" (*Drowned* 13) and is constantly critical of her appearance or turns to others for approval (*Unseen* 79–80, 118, 143). While Cleo dedicates a lot of attention to composing outfits for various occasions (*Feeble* 61; *Unseen* 143), she does not seem to ascribe to her fashion statements any coherent agenda of rebellion. Actually, preparing for her first job, she is lacking a dress code that would solve her "what to wear" problem (*Drowned* 91). Importantly, however, her current confusion about handling her image is contrasted with the high-school memories in which her self-fashioning appears intentionally rebellious. By breaking the school dress codes, Cleo used to provoke persecution on account of a comfortably unspecified accusation of "[in]appropriate attire" (*Unseen* 5–7) – an addition to her other misbehaviors such as bullying or destroying school property (*Further* 94–95).

Her transformation from an "evil" high-school Cleo (*Further* 27) to an acceptance-hungry Cleo reflects the girl's hiatus between the traumatizing past and the formless present. It is even more prominent in the sphere of experiential somaesthetics, which constantly challenges the frames of her identity and questions its controllability. As eventually revealed in the last volume, *Morning Cold*, the protagonist's misbehavior at school was intentional, as it used to end in mildly erotic encounters with the headmaster. He asked her to perform a sequence of movements which she now seems to compulsively repeat from time to time (*Morning*; *Unseen* 8, 132; *Feeble* 87–88; *Where* 119–120). Thus, Cleo remains conditioned by that ambivalent somatic factor testifying to her victimization at the age of 15, but also likely to bring her comfort in stressful situations, as she does not perceive the memory of her relationship with the headmaster as traumatizing, though she recognizes the abuse (*Morning*). Simultaneously, throughout the series, the girl is recovering from a recent heartbreak, the metaphor being accompanied by her physical heart condition (*Unseen* 16). The unfortunate romance has given her memories of a prematurely ended pregnancy (*Drowned* 138, 156), and violent psychosomatic reactions to the sight of her ex-boyfriend (*Feeble* 45–46). Those issues do not let her effectively move on until the very end of the story when, motivated to stand up to the task of supporting Trilby after the assault,[42] Cleo eventually exorcises her trauma by confronting her ex-boyfriend and saying to him "There are way worse things than you" (*Morning*).

Whether in relation to that experience or not, Cleo undergoes a shift of sexual preferences, facing a whole range of questions about the impact of bisexuality on identity, and ending up torn between two female partners, Myrtle and Mara. Her relationship with Myrtle develops in a more or less standard, or even cliché, fashion – they collide with each other on the college stairs (*Feeble* 149–151), start to spend

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[42] Adding to Cleo's stress after that act of violence is the fact that it was Myrtle, her own then-girlfriend, who attacked Trilby.

time together, talking a lot and engaging in growingly private topics, and affection slowly grows. The romantic tension between Cleo and Mara, in turn, comes as a surprise to both girls, who share a history of a rather bumpy friendship, as the nerdy Mara sometimes used to find herself at the receiving end of Cleo's malice at high school. At the beginning of their first year in college, the bond between them seems to weaken rather than evolve, until Mara spontaneously kisses Cleo when helping her out after an unpleasant incident (*Drowned* 69–73). While their romance continues after that, it occurs mostly through similar episodes of somatic bonding (*Drowned* 89, 147–148). In a moment of foreshadowing, they both use the toilet and are talking to each other on the phone, becoming what Cleo calls "pee-pal[s]" (*Drowned* 23). Their connection firmly evades – or perhaps gets ahead of – their conceptualizing powers, as illustrated by the girls' attempt to discuss their first kiss: "it don't have to be somethin', ok?" declares Mara, to which Cleo replies: "but… it's *not* nothing… it can't not… be nothin'… it's something" (*Drowned* 88). Eventually, when Mara, faced with the prospect of another relationship, decides to withdraw, it is because she "need[s] somethin' more… *definite* than whatever it is [they]'re doing" (*Morning*). Described as "very sensitive" (*Drowned* 57), Cleo gives another proof of her somatic conditioning when she reacts to the news about Trilby first by fainting (*Yesterday* 43) and later by losing her hair, which turns grey as it is growing back (69, 93).

The impression of Cleo's identity being fluid and difficult to tame through self-fashioning is created by the permeability of boundaries: those between the past and the present, the experiential and the logocentric, and finally those framing and directing her own will. Regardless of her likeability, the girl's friends complain that she is "bratty" (*Unseen* 16) and acceptance-hungry (*Further* 26), which produces a paradox of her excessive fixation on the external feedback combined with an "everyone hates me" attitude (*Drowned* 70). Cleo often hesitates, regrets her decisions, and gives up easily on her attempt to lose weight – a pursuit requiring focused effort (*Unseen* 100–101). Commenting on how the girl has changed since high school, Trilby calls her current persona an "anti-Cleo" (*Further* 27), which may suggest that still more time is needed for the protagonist to embrace an accomplished identity project. Both the experiential and representational somaesthetics engaged in her self-fashioning make the process untidy, difficult to grasp, and not showing signs of a definite direction, apart from the final prioritization of the need to help Trilby throughout the crisis. Though the Goth-like aesthetics is clearly relevant in Cleo's case, it is also insufficient to contain the complexity of her identity formation.

Indeterminacy, in Cleo's self-fashioning linked with her existential hesitance, seems even more externalized in the case of Fern – possibly the most mysterious *Wet Moon* character, whose Goth-like attributes only add to her overall uncanny aura. Apart from her horrifying apparition in Cleo's room, there are other inexplicable things about Fern: she is shown naked in a swamp at night (*Feeble* 92–93; *Where* 112; *Morning*), and spends a lot of time hanging by her ankles in a bat-like pose (*Unseen* 148). When drunk, she makes off-side remarks about unspecified "psychic powe[r]s,

[being] upside down" and "the m[oo]n" (*Yesterday* 23). All those elements suggest that what holds her reality together involves some sort of a supernatural force. The resultant fragmentation of Fern's identity strongly manifests in her physicality: apart from having an underdeveloped arm, she is hairless, lacks teeth (*Further* 226; *Yesterday* 22–23), and has survived a major health crisis thanks to an organ transplant (*Yesterday* 8–9). Thus, she seems especially strongly conditioned by her physicality, and also most involved in somaesthetic self-fashioning, from prosthetic teeth to applied eyelashes, to wigs (*Yesterday* 22), to a corset piercing, a partial head harness and other BDSM accessories (*Feeble* 74–75).

Whether Fern's somaesthetics is simply a major factor in her self-fashioning or a product of some chthonic power, it is undoubtedly appreciated by the Wet Moon college community. Upon showing up at The House of Usher in a very revealing bondage outfit, she immediately becomes an object of Cleo and Trilby's fascination (74–75) though it is hard to determine to what extent Fern realizes or makes intentional use of her effect on others. When both girls visit Fern's residence for the first time, they are disappointed to see her wearing casual clothes (*Unseen* 159), and she performs all her uncanny practices in solitude. Nevertheless, residing in an old plantation house as the sole heiress of an impressive lineage, she becomes a Goth Southern Belle – suggestive of mesmerizing beauty, family degeneration, and monstrosity. To Fern herself, that situation appears to be imprisoning: she dreams of joining the regular life of her peers (*Yesterday* 22), and clearly longs for connection yet seems stuck in her mysterious and complex identity. During her birthday party Fern comes undone in front of her love interest, Cleo's sister.[43] Frustrated, and driven by alcohol, she removes all her prosthetic extensions and becomes an embodiment of unhappiness (*Yesterday* 23). All in all, the girl is certainly conditioned by the lack of control over her physicality, the burden of her social status, and the possible bonds with the supernatural. The combination of those factors limits the effectiveness of her self-fashioning, including its Goth qualities, even more spectacularly than Cleo's transitional insecurity.

Another character in transition is Mara, who approaches her identity issues in a more confrontational manner even though she has no specific self-fashioning design. While in the past she probably followed the pattern discussed by Wilkins (25, 27), and had turned from a high-school know-it-all (*Unseen* 3) to a rebellious Goth girl, after joining the college community she turns against the Goth self-fashioning itself. Among the four *Wet Moon* characters discussed in this section, she is the one most self-reflective as far as the formation of identity is concerned. Aware of being in a transitional phase when the earlier self-styling no longer works, but something new has yet to emerge, she is also frustrated and angry: "I don't know who I am anymore […] everybody started to change real quick except for me" (*Further* 86). Feeling disconnected from the transformations and pursuits of her hitherto friends, she becomes

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[43] The last volume of the series suggests that Fern's feelings may be reciprocated (*Morning*).

a bit misanthropic (*Further* 245) yet also realizes that she needs time to define herself anew (157). Thus, though Mara seems confused and intuitive in her identity project, she is willing to take responsibility for it – a significant aspect of any self-fashioning concept.

While her Goth stylization quickly becomes a thing of the past, Mara is the only character whose anti-social behavior seems to match her alternative appearance. Vengeful and aggressive to the point of physical violence (*Feeble* 66, 72; *Unseen* 167), she can also be painfully straightforward (*Unseen* 102), and soon makes herself known as "hat[ing] everyone" (*Further* 149). While in the Goth self-presentations such an attitude is discussed as a harmful stereotype rather than an acknowledged agenda, it does add non-normative behavior to the "subcultural" somaesthetic shared by the college community. Still, Mara's actual, identity-building rebellion starts only when she realizes that the "dark" stylization is not helping her, and begins to question her habits connected with the subcultural belonging.

Initially, Mara does not take well an opinion that her appearance is "dour," "desperate" and "clingy" (*Further* 40), yet she later reconsiders it and begins to un-Goth her image (*Further* 43, 80, 86; *Drowned* 164). However, her transformation expands from the immediately tangible representational somaesthetics into the experiential sphere. She goes back to sport practice (*Further* 157, 245) and is trying to give up smoking, a habit which she, as suggested, picked up in high school under Cleo's influence (12–13). Thus, Mara's tentative first steps toward a more accomplished self-fashioning effort seem to have an ascetic undertone, and an element of courage, as she tests her self-acceptance by posing naked for her friend's photography project (*Drowned* 35; *Where* 59–61, 65–66). "I'm scarier as my regular self than anything I could dress up as," writes Mara, explaining on her blog why she does not approve of the Halloween fun (*Drowned* 57). Thus, it is her self-aware decision to face the challenge of managing her identity that proves effective in breaking her existential impasse even though it does not offer any definitive solution. The Goth self-fashioning that Mara is leaving behind as limiting and imposing a persona she no longer identifies with plays, therefore, a slightly similar role in the girl's progress as in the case of Lucy from *Sweetblood* discussed in Chapter 5. Still, the problematic impact of the "dark" style is depicted as highly individual and a side effect rather than the source of Mara's transitional confusion. She also begins to impulsively display signs of romantic affection directed at Cleo, which, as already mentioned, both girls find hard to analyze but recognize as a relevant formative experience. Mara's abandonment of Goth self-styling is, first and foremost, a marker of a renewed, active interest in her identity project, which makes the girl question the existent, ready-made schemes and open up to something new. The productivity of that direction seems confirmed by the series' resolution: the girl leaves the remnants of the toxic past behind by breaking up with Cleo and develops a loving relationship enabled by her own courage, as it involves the author of both the nude photographs and the harsh comments that had provoked Mara's transformation (*Morning*).

While Cleo and Fern are affected first of all by the disruptive factors in their identities, and Mara generates just the right amount of self-fashioning awareness to dynamically embrace change as it comes, Trilby may be seen a bit as a victim of her own identity agendas. An unquestionable example of strong-willed self-discipline, she resists mainstream eating habits by turning to the conviction-based vegan diet (*Further* 155). Her dedication to sport practice gets close to an addiction (*Further* 26), and she has impressed Mara by easily getting rid of her smoking habit (*Drowned* 35). Simultaneously, however, her strong-mindedness and energetic attitude contribute to the impression that Trilby can also be petty, opinionated, and prejudiced. Cleo complains about her friend's subliminal homophobia and finds her sense of humor to involve malice (*Drowned* 121; *Further* 145).

Trilby's self-fashioning seems also too rigorous for her own vulnerability and social insecurity. With her shaved head, pink fringe, pierced ears, nose and tongue, she is very clearly involved in the subcultural somaesthetic. When, however, she gets a tattoo, she chooses one referring to *Star Trek* – her guilty pleasure, as Trilby is convinced that acknowledging it would irreversibly damage her reputation (*Further* 20–21, 27). The tension between the "Goth" and "geek" seems, however, to exist mostly in her head. Confused by her own decision to have her potential soft spot inked on her skin for display, Trilby is so terrified at the thought of being disclosed as a Trekkie that she eventually admits it in an emotional public outburst (*Further* 134–135). That development does not, however, seem to affect her social relations. Simultaneously, she affirms her attachment to geek culture in many other ways. She drags the reluctant Cleo and Mara to a comics convention and makes Cleo cosplay a video-game character (52, 192). Trilby does not hide her detailed knowledge of superhero comics (*Further* 190) and makes a mock-serious confession of her ambition to become a masked crime fighter (*Drowned* 130). She also uses Klingon for affectionate pillow talk with Martin (*Where* 123, 127). Thus, it turns out that not only a hesitant, but also a clearly defined self-fashioning agenda may surprise its practitioner with unexpected results and contradictory pursuits.

The extent to which a somaesthetic design can be verified by the flesh itself is, however, fully revealed when Trilby – for the better part of the series depicted as an outstandingly coherent, energetic and definitely the fittest character – is seriously wounded in Myrtle's sneak attack. The knife literally fragments the victim's body, ruining her facial features, causing internal damage, and turning her from an activity volcano to a comatose, bed-ridden figure (*Yesterday* 48). As already mentioned, she simultaneously becomes a crack in the other characters' reality, both as an object of their anxiety and a manifestation of a more general crisis. One of Trilby's friends formulates it as follows: "I feel awful about every part a' this but I can't stop thinkin' about the Bernardes [Trilby's adoptive parents], like their daughter's been – their whole family's been irreparably changed by some bad… person who decided to do this" (*Yesterday* 107). Thus, Trilby's example highlights the vulnerability and unpredictability even of crystalized self-fashioning pursuits. Her recovery period is

a spectacular illustration of that instability, as it makes the girl reconsider or abandon several hitherto trademarks of her identity project. Trilby's physical mobility is limited by the healing wounds and the probably permanent ostomy bag; she becomes timid, emotionally unbalanced, and easily scared; she also puts her relationship with Martin on hiatus, dyes her hair black, confesses being a Trekkie to Cleo, and, finally, decides to abandon her diet. Trying to deal with the enormity of Myrtle's impact on her life, Trilby reflects: "she made everything about me change. And I can't be changed back" (*Morning*).

Wet Moon recognizes links between Goth aesthetics and its subcultural dimensions in the somaesthetic practices of particular characters, yet it also relativizes them. Such relativization is partly connected with the series' post-millennial world lacking a clear mainstream–underground polarity, yet it also results from the emancipation of the somatic and physical sphere in the self-fashioning process. Cleo's conditioning, Fern's uncanny frailty, Mara's confinement and subsequent emancipation through the body,[44] Trilby's unpredictable metamorphosis – all those phenomena point to the potential bidirectionality of the corporeal factor in an identity project. The body may be approached as "canvas" to decorate, or as matter to form, but it also influences and modifies the self on its own accord, which can, among others, set limits to the coherence of Goth-like self-styling. The next, and final, text of culture discussed in this chapter takes the separation of such somaesthetics even further from both its subcultural context and the subject's control by ingraining the Goth in the flesh only.

Beastly – Goth in the Flesh

The previous sections of this chapter show various types and intensities of connection between physicality and other aspects of the subculture in fictional renderings of the Goth aesthetic. *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart* politicizes Goth bodies, subordinating them to the forces of majority–minority dynamics; in *Wet Moon* neither body politics nor somaesthetics in general are sufficient means of handling self-fashioning projects, and particular attributes of subcultural aesthetic become growingly detached from semiotic "packages" facilitating the formation of identity. The case of *Beastly* takes the fragmentation of Goth semiosis even further, as revealed especially in the dialog between the original novel by Flinn and its cinematic adaptation by Barnz.

Both texts differently play out Goth stereotypes in high-school culture, creating contrastive employments of the subculture-inspired imagery and its semiotic emancipation. As already mentioned, *Beastly* retells the main plot of *Beauty and the Beast*, setting it in the environment of contemporary New York teenagers. It adapts the fairy tale's key characters to the modernized setting: the Beast is Kyle – a rich and popular,

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[44] The confinement–emancipation arch may be all the more relevant with regard to Mara's African American background – an issue which, however, would require a separate exploration.

jock-like student from an elitist private school; Beauty is an inconspicuous, nerdy bookworm named Lindy; her irresponsible father is not a merchant but a substance addict who easily gets into trouble.

The specific circumstances of the Beast's monstrous transformation differ between the story versions, yet *Beastly* seems to follow the example of Disney in the specification of the magic-wielding initiator of the spell. In both cases the Beast is punished for humiliating an ugly character who subsequently turns out to be a powerful magician. Flinn's *Beastly* is the opening novel of the so-called Kendra Chronicles – a series of narratives linked by the presence of Kendra, a witch who cannot die and shows up in various circumstances to help people and pursue her own destiny. It is between her and Kyle that the spectrum of Goth appropriations in somaesthetic characterization develops.

Kendra intervenes in Kyle's life to teach him a lesson about surface and inner beauty. In order to do so, she fashions herself in a way that will guarantee contempt of the snobbish school crowd: as a Goth. Seeing her for the first time, Kyle describes Kendra as "this Goth freak sitting in the back. She was a fat chick, dressed in the kind of flowing black clothes you usually only see on witches or terrorists […] and her hair was green. Obviously a cry for help" (4). The quote brings together a whole array of stereotypes and icons discussed with regard to the subculture throughout this book. "Goth freak" suggests social isolation and violation of visual standards; the girl's size resonates with the relative openness of Goth self-fashioning to the diversity of body shapes. From the hyperbolically judgmental perspective narrated in the novel, it may label the subculture as a shelter community for losers. The "terrorist" reference, apart from its possible racism, brings to mind the post-Columbine stereotype of the sociopathic Goth murderer. The summing up of Kendra's appearance as "a cry for help" activates the deviation-based understanding of the subcultural practice appealing to the maladjusted individuals in need of compensating for their poor prospects of success in life. The lack of economic capital is also suggested when Kyle criticizes the girl's evening outfit, which he describes as "a black and purple dress that look[s] like a costume for *Harry Potter Goes to the Prom*" (29). "Around here people buy *new* dresses for a dance," he comments hearing Kendra's explanation that what she is wearing is family heritage (30). Thus, further two Goth-connected, though differently situated, attributes are added: the geek correlation implicit in the *Harry Potter* reference and the attraction to old things, which is not so much an external stereotype as a part of subcultural self-presentation.

All in all, under the explicit employment of the Goth appearance as a marker of "ugliness" and failure, the subcultural icon signifies powerlessness. The moment Kendra confronts Kyle to use magic on him, she changes in his eyes: her facial features become more attractive, and she "reveal[s] that she [is] a hot – though green-haired – babe" (37). By the end of the story, as she meets the protagonist for the last time in the full glory of her witch self, Kendra looks "beautiful […] her hair flying purple and green and black around her face, her robes black" (289). The references to subcultural self-styling disappear from her characterization altogether. Thus, the novel

makes a focused use of the Goth trope, and especially its representational somaesthetic aspect, to address and criticize some stereotypical phenomena of high-school culture, such as bullying and superficial popularity contests, and activate the overall aura of the character's non-conformism. The latter, however, is supported by Kendra's supernatural identity, which distances her from the full-blown engagement in the school power plays and puts her in a privileged position from which she can test Kyle and evaluate his behavior.

As a result, the boy, whose sense of superiority is easy to provoke (5, 22–24, 29, 38–39), receives from Kendra monstrous appearance to "know what it is like […] to be as ugly on the outside as on the inside" (37). She also gives him a limited time to reverse the magical effect with a kiss of true love (49–50). Kyle's metamorphosis follows the tradition of the Beast's animalistic image that can be traced back to Jean Cocteau's black-and-white dramatization of the fairy tale from 1946 (Majkowski and Zarzycka 600). Kyle becomes "an animal – not quite wolf or bear or gorilla or dog, but some horrible species that walk[s] upright, that was almost human, yet not. Fangs gr[ow] from [his] mouth, [his] fingers [a]re clawed, and hair gr[ows] from every pore" (Flinn 47). Though the transformation makes him nothing but miserable, it also brings a new kind of powerfulness: animal instincts, natural weapons, and physical prowess – all of which prove helpful in the final part of the story, when he needs to save Lindy from an attacker (263–269). Whether because of that, or simply to stay in line with the well-established visualization of the Beast, Flinn's novel does not, therefore, apply any attributes of subcultural somaesthetics to Kyle's appearance. Barnz's cinematic adaptation, however, proves far more experimental in that respect.

Strikingly, while the movie does draw from the Goth aesthetic in the depiction of both Kendra, and, as argued below, the "beastly" Kyle, it avoids making any overt reference to the subculture. The suggestion of Kendra's otherness is constructed through the offensive nicknames of a "voodoo tatted slut," "flesh eater," "self-mutilated tatted frankenskank," or more explicitly, "an ugly cow," yet she is never directly labeled as a Goth. Her outfits – while clearly standing out in the school crowd – are gracefully displayed on the petite figure of Mary-Kate Olsen, and have an aura of designer clothes rather than DIY products that might imply their owner's questionable material status. Preserving "dark" attributes such as elaborate makeup, or blackness, Kendra's image brings to mind what Spooner calls "the high-street appropriation of Goth style" (*Contemporary Gothic* 134) prominent in the world of fashion at the end of the 1990s (130). Thus, the film sustains certain visual effects traceable back to Goth style, yet the subculture itself is not overtly employed as a semiotic artifact. Still, its implicit relevance manifests itself in the visualization of the enchanted Kyle, which breaks away from the tradition of furry Beasts.[45]

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[45] Other examples of such approaches to the character can be found in Fabrizio Costa's *La bella e la bestia* (2014), which I discuss elsewhere together with Tomasz Z. Majkowski (Majkowski and Zarzycka 602), or Sheri Cooper Landsman and Jennifer Levin's TV series *Beauty and the Beast* (2012–2016).

Instead of following the Cocteau/Disney icon of a lion-bull-bear hybrid in fancy clothes, Barnz's Beast keeps his human body, which, however, becomes hairless and heavily modified by tattoos, scarifications, and silvery metal incrustations that, though magically induced, resemble piercings. Some of those modifications look like open wounds or uneven, badly scarred tissue – though they do not seem to hurt, and medical examination excludes any type of disease. Thus, while Kyle's physical change exceeds the boundaries of predictable somaesthetic practice, its overall visual effect is strongly reliant on "alternative" standards of Goth-inspired aesthetic rather than straightforward "ugliness" guaranteed by the monstrosity of the furry Beast icon. One potential effect of such a visual choice may be an understated activation of high school stereotypes polarizing popular jocks against nerdy losers, with the Goth as an especially spectacular icon of the latter. In accordance with the demands of the telling-to-showing transposition crucial in adaptations from text to performative media (Hutcheon 38–40), it is possible to interpret Kyle's Gothicization as visualizing the "revenge of the nerds" trope underpinning the textual version of *Beastly*.

In the novel, the social opposition is established mostly via Kyle's subjective descriptions of Kendra and comments about the pleasure of "kick[ing] the nerds, mak[ing] them cry, then kick[ing] them some more" (30). The movie, in turn, simply visualizes the work of what in the book Kendra defines as "Retribution. Poetic justice. Just deserts. Comeuppance" (36) and lets the image speak for itself. The school king of jocks is turned into a freak as "self-mutilated" and "tatted" as the "ugly cow" whom he tried to humiliate. Still, the conceptual absence of the Goth subculture as an icon of school rejects in the movie may weaken the clarity and impact of such irony. Moreover, if the main point of Kyle's change were to put him in the shoes of those at the bottom of the popularity rankings, modifying his physicality with incurable acne, some unburnable extra pounds, or other common "imperfections" might have been just as effective.

Therefore, another reason for the creation of the "Goth" Beast is worth considering – namely, a cultural demand for reinventing that character's image in the subsequent retellings and adaptations of the fairy tale. As argued elsewhere, an important cultural aspect of *Beauty and the Beast* has for a long time been connected with codification, exploration and redefinitions of desire both of and for the Other. Implicit and understated in Cocteau's groundbreaking dramatization, the theme of the Beast's monstrous attractiveness has, in the course of time, been gradually brought to full light, as the Gothic thrill of beauty in monstrosity proved its significance as a narrative resource (Majkowski and Zarzycka 600–602). The appropriation of Goth-like aesthetics offers an effective way of reconciling the character's disturbing Otherness with the dark charm of his romantic inner torment, and possibly highlighting the erotic potential of such a combination. The latter seems confirmed when Kyle becomes an object of the camera's gaze (Mulvey 835, 843–844), which contemplates his shirtless figure in situations that do not demand nudity, and despite the presumption that the boy is appalled and devastated by his appearance.

Thus, the transmediated narrative of *Beastly* develops a whole spectrum of ways in which Goth somaesthetics may be appropriated as a trope. It includes Goth physical attributes as an icon of stereotypes and concepts attached to the subculture itself, looser sartorial inspirations helpful in marking Kendra's creepy aura, and Kyle's body modifications, whose potential semiosis is ingrained in the flesh only. As the "beastly" changes result from an externally imposed curse and are intended as punishment, their somasthetic dimension is complicated. On the one hand, enforced on Kyle against his will, they cease to be self-fashioning practices. On the other hand, Kendra's supernatural privilege allows her to declare – in the movie as well as in the book – that the change in the boy's appearance is a manifestation of his inner qualities (40). Thus, the identity-related dimension of the subcultural aesthetics is redefined yet also preserved as a relevant background for the appropriated physical modifications. Simultaneously, they become an independent visual solution which does not exceed the corporeal dimension and is detached from the subcultural context, while still implicitly drawing from its attractiveness. In light of the prominence of Goth investments in self-fashioning, Kyle's transformation can be interpreted as a fight-fire-with-fire reaction to his preliminary fixation on the normative representational somaesthetics. His affirmation of standardized "beauty," inscribable into Adorno and Horkheimer's critique, is depicted in the movie as well as the book narrative as discriminatory, harmful and plainly stupid. The movie's visual strategy, however, additionally positions it against an overdrawn version of subcultural self-styling in line with the Gothic as an aesthetic of excess. The clash of Kyle's images may, therefore, imply a cautionary narrative in which narcissistic attachment to one's looks eventually unleashes far more radical self-styling that the story context constructs as attractive-yet-monstrous. Such an interpretation resonates with the cultural function of the Gothic as a hyperbolization of "individual expression and self-improvement" embraced by the middle class (Spooner, *Post-Millennial Gothic* 32, see also Introduction).

The diversity of Goth tropes and their echoes in *Beastly* constitutes a micro-scale sample of forms that the tropes and icons based on the subcultural somaesthetics may adopt in texts of culture, as confirmed by the survey presented in this chapter. As a broader analysis of Goth presences in contemporary popular culture would likely show, they may vary in the levels of directness, intensity, and self-awareness, and may include subculture-related stereotypes, intertextual clichés and nodes activating relevant connotations, as well as purely aesthetic icons and solutions. What, however, they all seem to share – and what the somaesthetic dimension of Goth tropes captures and embodies in the most tangible manner – is affiliation with the idea of a self-fashioned identity. Whether philosophical concepts of self-fashioning are introduced and explored as narrative themes or linger in particular appropriations as inconspicuous, residual contexts, they may serve as exemplary markers of a self-fashioning paradigm and its cultural reifications.

CHAPTER 5

Apprentice Goth (*Sweetblood, Dangerous Angels, Courtney Crumrin*)

This chapter elaborates on the employments of Goth references in fictionalizations of teenage formative experience – a topic foreshadowed by the exploration of Goth somaesthetics. The young adult focus in the texts of culture discussed hereby highlights, first and foremost, ethically invested strategies of self-fashioning. While the identity projects of teenage protagonists can be argued to incorporate elements of Foucauldian technologies, their individuality is balanced by intersubjective contexts. The fundamental logic of such balancing processes seems responsive to Charles Taylor's postulates of the ethics of authenticity, yet it may also challenge those postulates. The Goth factor plays different roles in the reconciliation of individual self-fashioning reliant on some form of an internalized truth, often rooted in fiction, with the character's intersubjective entanglements.

In the possibly most common scenario, rooted in negative stereotypes of the Goth, the "Goth phase" is a measuring stick for the protagonist's development, providing false "truths" and illusory solutions to be reconsidered as the character takes on their responsibility toward other people. Such a shift is symbolically marked by the external self-styling giving way to internal development, which is not identified as a form of self-fashioning: "Teen makeovers […] offer the opportunity to make a 'better' self, implicitly a more normal self, feeding into a mainstream ethic of self-improvement, the fashion imperative becoming glossed with a moral one" (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 122). The overall relevance of that trope is recognized, but also complicated, in Hautman's *Sweetblood*. The growth of its protagonist is reflected by the gradual mitigation and processing of fictions internalized as personal truth, regulation of self-destructive "ascetic" practices, and the establishment of a Taylorian "horizon of significance" to consider intersubjective relations. The remaining two texts, in turn, challenge the pattern outlined above. Block's *Dangerous*

Angels first highlights the ethical importance of the Goth-like Witch Baby's presence in a happiness-driven environment, and the way she stimulates the self-development of other characters. Only then does the series move on to designating the internal work that the character herself needs to do in order to bring her "darkness," sensitivity, and self-destructive tendencies together in a coherent and balanced identity project tested in an intersubjective context. Thus, the character's pain-oriented inclinations and "dark" self-fashioning, alternative even in her bohemian patchwork family, are depicted not as a springboard for but rather the actual drive of her self-development.

Simultaneously, *Dangerous Angels* tackles the issue of projecting one's self-fashioning onto others and thus reveals intersubjective identity projects to be asymmetrical. Naifeh's *Courtney Crumrin*, in turn, differentiates between communal and intersubjective factors as a criterion of self-fashioning. While Courtney's relations with others play a vital role in her quest for self-mastery, its completion is followed by the protagonist's rejection of the communal. As argued in the analysis of all three texts, the spectrum of ethical approaches traceable in the progress of their protagonists may be seen as a result of the ethics of authenticity interacting with the cultural appropriation of the Goth figure.

As already signaled, in American popular culture as well as other public discourses such as media coverage, pedagogy or ethics, the Goth subculture has been referred to or depicted as a coherent and recognizable trope. One may point to a number of factors responsible for its prominence: from the susceptibility to the phenomenon of moral panic, to the relevance in the dynamics of high-school informal groups, to commercial attractiveness recognized by industries targeting young adults (Jagodzinski 175), and finally, the rebellious potential cooperating with the demonization of the teenager in general (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 103, 107; Jagodzinski 235). As claimed by Philip Jenkins and Daniel Maier-Kathin, the phenomenon of moral panics has been a characteristic element of American social history and a recognizable factor in the media (88–89). The authors focus on the specific example of the Satanism panic and fear of the occult, which peaked in the U.S. in the 1980s, but had been evolving since the ultimate crisis of the WASP social and cultural model in the 1960s (89, 99–100). Exposing the political conditioning of the moral panic dialectics (97–101), they analyze the replacement of the right-wing political discourse of resistance against liberal and diversity-oriented developments in the post-1960s U.S. with a threat-based dialectic of Satanic conspiracies secretly manipulating various aspects of the public domain.

The said manoeuver seems to illustrate Theodore Chiricos's claim about the phenomenon of moral panic as a realization of the "'negative' function of ideology" through "displacement of attention from one issue to another" (106). The tendency to construct teenagers as both vulnerable and dangerous (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 91, 103, 105–107), and thus especially susceptible to spiritual and moral threats masked by various aspects of youth culture (Jenkins and Maier-Kathin 91), has provided a solid ground for the Goth figure to have been stigmatized and includ-

ed in the range of the "Satanic teen" stereotypes. Moreover, the media coverage of the Columbine shootings has inspired the construction of a distinctive link between that icon and the dangers connected with the dynamics of informal groups in the American high-school environment (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 109–111). As Spooner puts it, "Harris's and Klebold's crimes caught the public imagination at least partly because they reproduced the outsider's revenge against the wholesome American world of jocks and cheerleaders that had been routinely fictionalized in Hollywood cinema for decades" (110–111).

As far as the media interest and public attention is concerned, one consequence of the 1999 tragedy was an especially intense though misguided stigmatization of Goths (Williams, *Subcultural Theory* 107–108). Another consequence was an unprecedented wave of attention to the school pecking order and the problem of bullying, pointed to by some of the more detailed insights into the Columbine massacre as a major factor motivating the culprits' actions (Brown qtd. in Siegel 32; Williams, *Subcultural Theory* 108). The connection between the implicit violence of informal power relations at schools, the resultant outbursts of uncontrolled frustration, and the Goth icon – whether its actual extension to the Columbine shooters was justified or not – have turned the latter into a sinister replacement of the "geek" type.[46]

The prominence and multifaceted significance of the Goth as a trope in American popular culture is further reinforced by the already mentioned aura of danger or monstrosity. In her analysis of the Canadian cult horror film *Ginger Snaps* (2001), Bianca Nielsen links the significance of Gothic aesthetics for conceptualizations of puberty experience with the uncontrolled physiological and physical transformations as well as the feelings of marginalization or rebellious maladjustment. For Jan Jagodzinski, in turn, Gothicized or monstrous young-adult characters constitute a reflection of a social fear against the growingly empowered category of the uncanny "teen" Other toward the grown-ups as the conventionally dominant and norm-dictating social group (235). One way or another, the Goth stereotype has inspired the development of a trope which, whether reinforced, parodied or subverted, oscillates within a spectrum reaching from affirmations of anti-system rebellion, through signs of social maladjustment, to manifestations of actual threat (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 107–111). However, as Spooner argues in *Post-Millennial Gothic*, the 21st-century pop culture is taking a new approach to the subculture by developing the "Goth girl" character trope, which functions on both visual and narrative levels. The attributes of such a character model, presented as "attractive, quirky, intelligent and sensitive but troubled" (99), as well as "at odds with her immediate community" (100), can easily be referred to all three protagonists discussed in this chapter.

As reflected by the above survey of the Goth involvements in discourses concerning young adults, a major criterion of moral judgment about such subcultural

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[46] The depiction of "Goths" as far more deadly successors of "nerds" can be found, among others, in Michael John Burke Jr's text "The Changing Face of Gangs."

figures revolves around their social and interpersonal relations. While the generation gap, peer pressure, school cultures and subcultural capital may be especially stressed aspects of that issue, it is also easy to inscribe into the broader ethical concerns around philosophies of self-fashioning. Overtly political categories of the individual–collective spectrum seem less influential in the construction of subcultural stereotypes in "teen Gothic" than moral categories of egocentrism and interpersonal sensitivity. Still, both those perspectives, smoothly bridged by Taylor's ethics of authenticity, prove useful in the exploration of the "apprentice Goth's" cultural functions.

Taylor distinguishes between authenticity as a complete "moral ideal" (*Ethics* 15–16), and authenticity as an affirmation of egocentrism isolating the subject from people, as well as the sense of responsibility for the broader world. The latter understanding of the term has been shaped by three major problematic experiences of the modern culture. The first one is excessive individualism whose "dark side […] is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (4). The second problem is the dominance of "instrumental reason," that is, a principle of optimal effectiveness that has replaced former criteria of reality organization: "once the creatures that surround us lose the significance that accrued to their place in the chain of being, they are open to being treated as raw materials or instruments for our projects" (5). The third problem is the "alienation from the public sphere" informed by what Taylor, after Alexis de Tocqueville, calls "soft despotism." Its specification as a political rule preserving "democratic forms" yet reliant on "the atomism of the self-absorbed individual" (9) to reduce the actual impact of civic activity invites an analogy with Foucault's pastoral governmentality. Taylor argues for the above three factors to co-create the postulate of "self-fulfilment" which he formulates as follows: "everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfilment. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him- or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its content" (14). While the author criticizes the dominance of "trivialized and self-indulgent forms" in which the said postulate functions in the modern culture, he simultaneously underscores the potential of authenticity to become a full-blown "moral ideal" of "being true to oneself" (15). Declaring a need for "a work of retrieval" to activate that potential, Taylor defines the complete ideal of authenticity as balancing "(i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality" against "(i) openness to horizons of significance […] and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue" (66). In other words, he argues for inscribing individual choices into broader moral or social contexts standing for "demands of any kind emanating from some thing more or other than human desires or aspirations" (35).

Taylor's ethics of authenticity seeks to reconcile the morally and politically invested socialization reinforcing the sense of citizenship, support for collective goals

(118) and relevance of bonds, with the appreciation of individual pursuits facilitated and encouraged by the contemporary culture. In order to do so, it locates implied dialogicality also in seemingly solitary pursuits such as religious contemplation or artistic creation (34–35). The three texts of culture analyzed below offer three different commentaries on the authenticity ideal by approaching it through the Goth-specific "technologies" of self-discipline and internalization of fiction.

Sweetblood: From Goth to Growth

Hautman's *Sweetblood* is an American young adult novel from 2003 which may be argued to follow the Taylorian argument by making a distinction between subcultural self-fashioning and the identity project's ethical aspects generated by the dynamic between egocentrism and intersubjective orientation. The protagonist's Goth inclinations are located in the former realm of self-induced isolation and pursuit of misunderstood authenticity. Lucy Szabo, a white, middle-class teenager with diabetes, thinks of herself as a "freak" and an "undead": a vampire protoplast, who is kept alive only by modern medicine; she interprets symptoms of vampirism as those of uncured disease (Hautman 9, 15–16, 28–29, 32). Driven by her sense of isolation, the girl turns away from her parents, school environment, and society in general to embrace subcultural violations of mainstream standards. The vampiric concepts internalized by Lucy not only deform her social relations but also make her susceptible to potentially sinister manipulation. As she gets involved with an Internet community of vampire enthusiasts, Lucy attracts the attention of Wayne Smith, a middle-aged man animating the local Goth community and recruiting his young lovers from it. The girl's self-fashioning experiments gradually unleash her self-destructive tendencies, until she faces a bout of ketoacidosis and the risk of freezing to death in the snow (160–161). Surviving the near-death experience provides Lucy with a new distance toward her own life, helps her identify herself independently from the vampire fiction, and makes her see Goth pursuits as shallow and pathetic. Nevertheless, her turn toward subculturalism seems justified by the need to cope with the pressure of the psycho-physical regime imposed by diabetes. While Lucy's Goth/vampiric self-fashioning involves a destructive somatic aspect of rebelling against the medical discipline through risky behaviors, it simultaneously provides her with tools to confront and process the problem. As a result, Goth references become attributes of the protagonist's threshold experience which confronted her with an alternative between self-destruction and self-improvement.

The novel's numerous references to the Goth aesthetics and subculture appear in two categories: Lucy's appearance and self-presentation and the presentation of the local Goth community as a social group. In both cases those references are usually ironized and focus mostly on showing how little the subculture has to offer to

a self-aware and intelligent individual. Throughout the novel, Lucy fashions herself in the somaesthetic mode and through her ironic narrative aimed at both society and the speaker herself. Generally, Lucy seems to embrace and actually find delight in her presumably controversial social status, as reflected by the label she gives herself: "the Evil Bloodsucking Witch Bitch of Seward High [Lucy's school]" (40). Still, having come back to school after a diabetes-connected incident, she offers a bitter comment: "Who wants to be around someone who could keel over and die at any moment? Why should they waste a precious moment on a surly black-leather goth/not-goth freak when they could be laughing and smiling and having fun with their perky-healthy friends?" (168–169). While on many occasions the "freak" role seems to satisfy Lucy in a grim way, she recognizes its connection with the sickness that she has not effectively come to terms with. Neither does she affirm the Goth style that she pursues:

> Let me be perfectly clear about one thing: I am not goth. I am Lucy Sweetblood Szabo, and just because I like to dress black and have an unhealthy interest in bloodsucking demons doesn't mean I am some goth fashion junkie who listens to Sisters of Mercy and sleeps with peroxide-soaked sponges to make her face whiter, and has so many buckles, chains, and piercings that she jingles when she walks. Well, maybe I jingle a little. But I'm just me, and anybody who goths me is in big trouble. (45)

However, instead of providing her with a safe distance toward the reality of social appearances, the protagonist's refusal to belong makes her susceptible to the manipulation of Wayne, who is well phrased in the subcultural discourses and knows how to handle the girl's cynicism. When she denies being Goth, he answers: "Ah, but you *are*. It's part of the goth mythology that one is not truly goth until they are not-goth. You've heard the jokes: I'm so goth I'm dead. I'm so goth I died and didn't notice. I'm so goth I'm not goth? Well. I'm so not-goth I'm goth, and so are you. But lifestyling isn't reality. Reality is money and pain. And pleasure" (150). On the one hand, Wayne may be accused of denigrating the subculture as an identity project. On the other hand, however, by referring to the humorous gradation of the Goth identity, Wayne uses Lucy's denial to both reinforce her inclusion in the countercultural community that he animates and suggest the existence of a special bond between himself and the girl.

What makes Lucy susceptible to the charm of the subcultural trap is not only her diabetes-based fascination with vampires, but also her rebellious attitude. It is expressed mostly through the omnipresent sarcasm and irony of her narrative voice, but can also be defined in terms of a "desire to be subversive," which, according to Debra Ferreday, fuels many online activities, including those of vampire self-fashioners (112). That the Goth movement as presented in the novel does not offer any specific set of ideals or "program," and is focused first of all on the appearance, props and possibly party-based lifestyle corresponds with some conceptualizations of the actual subculture discussed in Part II. The connection of the Goth movement with the middle-class youth, advanced cultural and literary competence, and interest in cultural as well as economic consumption reinforce Hautman's image- and performance-focused interpretation of the subculture, underpinned by what Ferreday calls a "fantasy of subversion" set on a satisfactory sense of doing something transgressive (112). In

Sweetblood such a pursuit is spectacularly reflected by the idea of a "Bizarro Halloween," explained to Lucy as follows: "for us [Goths], life is a costume party three-hundred sixty-four days a year, right? So on Halloween, we cover up the tattoos, yank the piercings, and wear khakis and pastels […] You must have something like that in your closet. Something your mother bought you" (122). Indeed, it is her mother's approval of Lucy's appearance before the party that make her sure she looks appropriately mainstream for the occasion (137). The "Bizarro party" illustrates the "fantasy of subversion" by exposing the importance of the contempt for the mainstream loosely defined in terms of fashion and possibly music choices (143), but otherwise largely unspecified. The concept of dressing up as mainstreamers creates, for one night, a micro-scale "ghost world of abnormal ordinaries" (141) which offers Lucy both the twisted fun of recognizing the caricature non-Goth versions of her underground friends (141–143) and the anxiety caused by abandoning the subcultural familiarity:

> Everybody is kind of stiff and tentative, and I know how they feel. I, in my corduroys and cowboy boots, am as uncomfortable as the rest of them. I feel naked without my makeup.
> The strangest thing of all is the way everybody keeps *smiling*. And *laughing*. But their smiles and laughs do not have a happy, relaxed sound. They are more like the coughs and twitches and grimaces of discomfort, embarrassment, confusion, awkwardness. (142–143)

The fact that the party participants put themselves through all those discomforts reveals their demand not so much for manifesting their "difference" with some rebellious or subversive intention as for reveling in the said difference. They do it in an elitist group recognizing the irony of the fake "normality" and using its unpleasant experience as a confirmation of the desired otherness.

The object of the subcultural rejection is reflected by a collection of stereotypically mainstream clothing items and labels (122) or overly enthusiastic behaviors (142–143), all of which allude to American middle-class lifestyle and values. Still, those props and attributes fail to provide the protagonist with an actual insight into the sources of her dissatisfaction with the normative society. Paradoxically, while the Goth participants of the "Bizarro Halloween" create campy versions of a football player (140–141), a Christian enthusiast (142) or a cheerleader (143), Lucy is equally merciless in pinpointing the movement's own predictability. When she enters a subcultural party for the first time, she characterizes the appearance of its members as following a "Standard Goth" pattern, including "at least one Very Unique […] Feature" and relying on "the Official Goth Color Guide" (84). Thus, the subcultural pecking order inspires Lucy even before she starts to be manipulated by Wayne. Not only does she distance herself from the Goth "label" in the ways discussed above, but, distinguished by her diabetic-as-vampire theory, she also regards her fellow vampire enthusiasts with contempt (38). Therefore, Wayne's attempt to seduce the girl is almost successful when it manages to balance her position as the man's chosen soulmate against her independent sense of uniqueness as illustrated by Lucy's fantasy: "I am the Queen of the Damned, sitting beside Draconius [Wayne's nickname] the Vampire King as he deals with his subjects" (153). The royal titles used by Lucy highlight her fascination with the sense

of belonging – and enjoying the highest status – within an elitist community which, as suggested by the reference to Rice's novel, has a shared cultural code.

As a consequence, an important part of Lucy's development is connected with the deconstruction of the subculture's uncanny aura and attractive mysteriousness. Her metamorphosis is marked by the hair color change from black to its natural blond (176–177), and denigration of the previously attractive lifestyle of the Wayne-centered Goth community (175). Superficially attractive for a rebellious and intellectually active young person, the Goth movement is depicted as threatening mostly in terms of providing a potential connection between a naïve teenager and an abuser looking for victims. Simultaneously, the subculture is effectively reduced to a façade to cover up the boredom and misery of people not creative or self-assured enough to take control over their lives (175).

The novel follows Lucy's identity transformation from the Gothic vampire girl nicknamed "Sweetblood" to the self-aware and balanced individual confessing: "[I am s]till Skeeter [nickname used by Lucy's childhood friend and future boyfriend], still Lucy, still Sweetblood, still all of them" (180). The reader, however, is never acquainted with the specific circumstances in which she developed either her vampire theory or the subsequent fascination with the Goth, so the possible productivity of the non-Goth-to-Goth metamorphosis remains understated. Moreover, Hautman's narrative challenges the predictable ways of addressing the subject of tensions between teen informal groups, and the broader issue of otherness. While Lucy and other members of the dark subculture do manifest their difference from and dislike for what they regard as mainstream, they do not face any actual form of prejudice, rejection or intolerance on the part of the majority. The protagonist's sarcastic accounts of her functioning in the school environment reveal that she is regularly approached by another diabetic girl, "insufferably cheerful and disciplined and friendly" (21), who attempts to socialize with her, much to Lucy's contempt. Having her school lunch alone seems to be Lucy's own choice (24–25); she is also the one to claim that the staff at school perceive her as mentally unstable, while the school counselor denies it (34–35). What is more, Lucy's long-term friend Mark, who, as the ending suggests, is likely to eventually become her boyfriend, has many attributes of an iconic "jock," from his good looks in the making (7), to his interest in sports (59), to the trademark "letter jacket," which Lucy borrows for the "Bizarro party" (140–141). However, one major "jock" feature he misses entirely is the sense of superiority toward otherness. If he disapproves of his friend's self-fashioning choices, he signals it only with a well-meaning and charmingly ignorant confession: "You know, Lucy, I liked you a lot better before you got all punk" (8). Throughout the story, Mark is depicted as supportive (6, 60), sincere (8, 112–114) and protective toward the girl (111, 163–164), contrary to Dylan – Lucy's romantic interest who, acting on Wayne's orders, introduces her into the Goth community (145–146), but is not a reliable friend (128, 156–157).

All in all, the Goth trope plays an ambivalent role in the protagonist's growth leading to the eventual embrace and affirmation of her multi-layer identity. On the

one hand, the new, self-aware Lucy has turned blond and is on her way to getting a "jock" boyfriend, which brings *Sweetblood* close to the already mentioned pre-1990s "makeover" tradition in American school drama (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 122; *Post-Milennial Gothic* 100). On the other hand, though, Hautman's novel seems to erase the actual polarity between normative values and the resistance against them by depicting the Goth rebellion as functioning to a large extent in a void, as it is not antagonized or threatened by the mainstream in any way. Still, Lucy's subcultural experience proves unquestionably relevant because it grants her precious knowledge with regard to identity management as the practice of self-fashioning becomes separated from its particular Goth context and turns into a generic strategy. The overall process of her development seems to meet Taylorian postulates of the authenticity ideal, as it combines acknowledgment of her individuality and self-exploration with the gradual appreciation of an interpersonal "horizon of significance." Still, as Lucy reaches that stage, she is overcome by remorse: "When you die and then come back, the people who are there when you wake up are the people who love you. And that is why I am miserable. Because they are the people I hurt the most" (167). The groundbreaking advice which helps the girl move on from that realization comes from Antoinette, who – as a life-worn tattoo artist – is an expert in human changeability. When Lucy complains about her self-acceptance issues, Antoinette does not hesitate to argue for a dynamic conceptualization of identity:

> "My problem is I am who I am."
> "No you aren't. […] Every morning you check the mirror to see who you are. And every morning you see somebody new. You don't like what you see? Change. You've done it before. […]"
> "But I'm always the same person inside."
> "I sure hope that's not true. Are you the same person today as that stupid little twit who spent Halloween night guzzling port wine with that middle-age cradle-robbing nut-job Wayne Smith?" (173)

While Lucy eventually realizes that there can be more than one self-truth to embrace, the particular significance to her experiments with the vampire "truth" is connected with the way her identity is challenged by the experience of sickness. Diabetes destabilizes the girl's self-perception not only due to the medically defined health risks, but also because it estranges her from her own body which becomes a source of discipline and a judgment. It is through the employment of Gothic imagination that Lucy manages to address and negotiate that aspect of her identity. Although the dominant Gothic trope in *Sweetblood* is undoubtedly connected with the vampiric discourse, it merges with another similar motif, namely, the Gothicized disease. The uncanny dimension of Lucy's illness is built up throughout the novel, which starts with the girl's monolog defamiliarizing the bodily fluid that further becomes the key referent of both diabetes and vampirism:

> Blood is my friend. Without it my cells shrivel. Without it I die.
> At night, alone with myself, I hear it rushing through arteries and veins, platelets tumbling in a soup of plasma and glucose through slick, twisty tubes, lining up to enter narrow capillaries, delivering oxygen and fuel, seeking idle insulin. It is a low-pitched sound: wind passing through woodlands.

I hear a higher pitched sound too: A demon dentist drilling, rising and falling but never stopping. It is the sound of my thoughts.

Alone, at night, with myself, the low sound and the high sound become music. If I lie perfectly still and quiet the concert separates me from my body. Eyes closed, I float above myself, supported on a cloud of song. (1)

The above quote echoes the most direct Freudian concept of the uncanny as something familiar and alien at the same time, once when Lucy emancipates a part of her own organism and distances herself from it by calling it a "friend"; and twice, when she throws that distance between herself and her organism as a whole. The distance grows and gains an undertone of active rejection or exclusion when the girl positions herself as passive toward the objective agency of her body projected onto an external object – the sugar-measuring device: "Every time I feed it a warm red droplet, it judges me mercilessly. I've been good or I've been bad. Perfect or flawed. Virtuous or wicked. Saintly or sinful. Black or white" (72). The creation of a link between the disease symptoms reflected by the abnormal test results and the condition of being evil or imperfect can be inscribed into a prominent Gothic trope perceived by Ruth Bienstock Anolik as a reaction to the forces of normativity:

Figures of authority are thus empowered to determine (diagnose) human identity on the basis of socially/politically/aesthetically/medically mandated criteria. In a society that dehumanizes deviation, this diagnosis amounts to diagnosing deviance as inhuman, as monstrous. The non-normative human is thus transformed (through a process of diagnosis) into a demon. (6)

Lucy's diabetic-as-a-vampire theory constitutes an even more explicit example othering monstrosity, especially since in the final part of the novel, the protagonist's status of an "undead" approximates a state in which, as Farah Mendlesohn puts it, "the reader is expected to suspend faith, not in reality, but in metaphor, to allow metaphor to be concrete" (195). In the middle of the night, coming back from the "Bizarro" party, Lucy develops symptoms of ketoacidosis – a severe diabetic condition. When, in her deteriorating state, the protagonist observes a random household, her first-person narrative starts to blur the distinction between the account of actual events and the imagery inspired by her previous visualization of the diabetic vampire predecessor:

The lights are on; the curtains are open. A woman sits at a table drinking from a purple mug. Why is she awake? *I stop and watch her through the window*. […] She sips her tea again; I can almost taste it *I am so thirsty*. What if she looked out the window and saw me standing there? *Would she invite me in*? […] I do not exist. *I am not real* to this woman. I am not part of her world. *I am thirsty and I am invisible*. (159, emphasis added)

The vampire discourse underlying the emphasized fragments of the above quote shifts from a background motif to the status of Lucy's subjective reality and self-perception right before she loses consciousness: "This is not the twenty-first century, it is two hundred years ago. Transylvania. I can hear the wolves howling. The peasants will find me here in the bright cold morning, my eyes frozen […] I will have become something different. Tomorrow, perhaps, I will rise from my coffin and demand their

blood" (161). Lucy's actual ontological status in the human–monster opposition is not effectively challenged, yet the narrative becomes temporarily subordinated to her self-fashioning technology. The effects of processing the vampire fiction into her internal self-truth become excessive and spill into the external reality, generating a liminal moment, likely to bring Lucy self-destruction, yet eventually offering a way to self-mastery. Employing the Goth self-fashioning to embrace the "demonizing" potential of sickness, the protagonist gradually comes to terms with it, which, however, the novel depicts as a risky enterprise.

Dangerous Angels: Taming the Goth

Sweetblood may offer a comprehensive verification of Goth self-fashioning as a maturation strategy in a paradigm distinguishing between normalization and subversion. Block's series of Weetzie Bat novels collected in *Dangerous Angels* ignores that iconic polarity to focus more closely on problematic aspects of intersubjectivity in self-fashioning. Lucy's identity project oscillates between the authentic and the fake, whether in intersubjective relations or self-reflection, whereas the main challenge faced by Block's heroine, Witch Baby, revolves around the negotiation of boundaries imposed on individual identity practices to prevent her and other characters from appropriating one another in their self-fashioning pursuits. The dark aesthetic distinguishing Witch Baby accentuates her uniqueness and the dynamic connection between internal and external self-fashioning yet does not imply any specific subcultural community. Fluidity of boundaries is inscribed in the novels' overall aesthetic and narrative style, commonly classified as magical realism (Lesesne and Chance 9). According to Chris Richards, such fluidity affects also the stories' Los Angeles localization which, enjoying "a currency in popular discourse as the antithesis of tradition, the place where the future happens first" (191), erases conventional polarities between mainstream and underground. Therefore, the Goth-like self-fashioning gains complexity and relevance as a marker of the character's individual uniqueness as well as a non-verbal channel of communication and emotional exchange.

Emergent from Block's undulating narrative flow constructed in a flamboyant and poetic style, my reading of Witch Baby as a Goth-like character is unquestionably just one of interpretative possibilities. Still, what makes it worth pursuing is the multichannel responsivity of her characterization to a number of external as well as internal self-fashioning practices typical of the Goth self-presentations discussed in Part II. Witch Baby's "darkness" is conveyed through her fairy-tale-like origin story, her physical appearance and material objects relevant in her descriptions, her behavior observed by other characters, and finally her internal struggles to forge her self-destructive and compulsive ultra-sensitivity into a productive and controlled technology of the self. Such a complex approach to identity is successful in mark-

ing Witch Baby as an outsider in a community constructed specifically so as not to "privilege biological paternity, heterosexuality, or monoculturalism" (Richards 150). Witch Baby was born because her father – the partner of the series' major protagonist, Weetzie Bat – was too overwhelmed by existential anxiety to face the prospect of having a child. "There are way too many babies. And diseases. And nuclear accidents. And Crazy psychos. We can't have a baby," he argued (33), personifying Massumi's postulate of media-induced fear as he confessed "I wish I could stop listening to the news" (36). When Weetzie pursued her procreative plan and got impregnated by a gay couple who were her closest friends, her estranged partner moved away for some time and had a one-night stand with a mysterious magician, Vixanne (46–47). While he soon reunited with Weetzie, her child's fathers, and the infant herself, it turned out that his casual erotic adventure had resulted in the witch's pregnancy. That is how Witch Baby was dumped on Weetzie's family:

> Inside the basket was a newborn baby with purple, tilty eyes and pouty lips. There were a Ken doll and a Barbie doll with chopped-off hair in the basket, too, and Weetzie took one look at the baby and knew who it was.
> "It is the witch baby," she said. (48)

The fairy-tale-like status of a foundling and the family's debate over the girl's fate in light of her "evil" origin (48–49) find a lasting reflection in the "witch baby" phrase. It quickly pushes its way from a casual nickname to the character's self-definition and, as suggested by Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L. F. Nilsen, stimulates her future self-search (40).

The character's otherness is further reinforced by the descriptions of her physicality and behavior, which frequently evoke Goth-like aesthetic. Witch Baby's depictions in the text oscillate between appreciation and alienation: she is called "beautiful" on more than one occasion (69, 173), one character describes her as "a skinny, boyish, young Sophia Loren hiding under a head full of tangles" (283), yet the narrative compares her also to "a tree spirit crouched in the darkness" (99) and "a strange animal with glowing purple eyes" (172). As she gets rid of her hair in an attempt at coping with her frustration, both qualities are brought together: "When her scalp was completely bald, Witch Baby, with her deep-set, luminous, jacaranda-blossom-colored eyes, looked as if she had drifted down from some other planet. But Witch Baby did not see her eerie, fairy, genie, mood-witch beauty, the beauty of twilight and rainstorms" (93). Indeed, Witch Baby's appearance is presented as imperfect (163), and her own – mostly critical – point of view brings out the Gothic potential at her looks. Examining the reflection of her "messy nest of hair, […] pale, skinny body, knobby, skinned knees and feet with curling toes," the character, going through her first unrequited love experience, concludes: "No wonder Raphael doesn't love me […] I am *a baby witch*" (92, emphasis added). Devastated by the news of her best friend's departure, she comments, "I must look like *a beastly beast* with a cracked teacup for a heart" (258, emphasis added). The monstrous connotations are joined by a variety of Goth-like items and accessories that the girl collects in the course of the story:

"black cowboy-boot roller skates" (80), "black high-top sneakers covered with rubber bugs" (105), or a "bat-shaped backpack (135). Two artifacts especially important for Witch Baby's self-development are "a pair of multicolored wings" (173), ritually made by her half-sister, Cherokee, to help the girl through a crisis, and "a skeleton charm bracelet" which Weetzie gives to Witch Baby when the latter sets off for New York on her own (276). Thus, the Gothic qualities in the girl's appearance are not actually ascribed to any strong self-fashioning actions on her part, but rather suggested to originate directly from her physicality, raw emotions, and the way she is seen by other people.

Indeed, for a better part of the series the girl is characterized mostly through her actions, interactions, and the impact she has on others. It is an approach which reveals relatively little about Witch Baby's possible identity project, offering mostly fragmentary samples of her sensitivities. It is only in the penultimate part of the series, *Missing Angel Juan*, that the character takes over as the main narrator and protagonist, getting an opportunity to deal with her identity-related struggles and developing a better insight into her self-fashioning practices and their intersubjective context.

Witch Baby is, from the very beginning, depicted as difficult to interact with. As a little child, she is unruly and does all sorts of annoying mischief (50–51) – a habit which accompanies her also later, especially when she is upset (92, 119). She is not above an occasional act of thievery (88, 96), which gains a distinctly transgressive character when she decides to take a magical artifact that its owner, a Native American visionary named Coyote, expressly refuses to share because it is dangerous (212–213). Her taboo-breaking behaviors expand from the spiritual to the social sphere. As a young girl, she willfully joins Weetzie's gay friends, Dirk and Duck, as they visit Duck's family, and outs them in front of their mother (110). It leads to a major crisis (110–113), but eventually enables a family reconciliation (114). To get her father's attention, Witch Baby "pull[s] on the leg of […] [his] baggy trousers with her teeth" (126), and to get noticed by Dirk, Duck and his mother, the girl keeps "whistling, growling, doing cartwheels, flips and imitations of Rubber Chicken [a toy] and Charlie Chaplin and throw[s] pebbles" (106). Left at home without the grown-ups' supervision for a few weeks, "[o]ne day, Witch Baby went into the backyard, took off all her clothes and began to roll around in the wet earth. She smeared mud everywhere, clumped handfuls into her hair, stuffed it in her ears, up her nostrils and even ate some. She slid around on her belly through the mud. Then she slid into the garden shed and lay there in the dark without moving" (163).

Thus, the character's transgressive behavior goes beyond immediate communication with other people, as it is often suggested to derive from her internal chaos rather than controlled interaction strategies. It is especially visible in Witch Baby's defensive reactions to affection, and in other situations in which she becomes the object of someone else's attention (78–79, 129–130). Particularly upset after a romantic rejection, she became hard to bear even for her patient family: "Witch Baby was wild, snarled, tangled and angry. Everyone got more and more frustrated with her. When

they tried to grab her, even for a hug, she would wriggle away, her body quick-slippery as fish. She never cried but she always wanted to cry" (92). Indeed, what seems to foreshadow and perhaps initiate Witch Baby's more coordinated identity project are her two roundabout ways of handling emotions: "the pain game" (261) and withdrawal.

"The pain game" is described as follows:

> The walls on Witch Baby's side of the room were covered with newspaper clippings – nuclear accidents, violence, poverty and disease. Every night, before she went to bed, Witch Baby cut out three articles or pictures with a pair of toenail scissors and taped them on the wall […] If Witch Baby didn't cut out three articles, she knew she would lie awake, watching the darkness break up into grainy dots around her head like an enlarged newspaper photo. (77–78)

In retrospect, Witch Baby explains that the "pain game's" objective was to collect "[p]ictures of all the pain [she] could find. […] The only way [she] used to be able to stand being in this world was to hold it in [her] hands, in front of [her] eyes. That way [she] thought – it can't get [her] or something" (261). On the one hand, Witch Baby's sensitivity inspiring her protective ritual is depicted as a burden and a potential threat. Her father recognizes its connection to his own Massumian anxiety (76), while her mother insists that she needs to ward it off (146). On the other hand, however, the girl's openness to the reality of suffering is also depicted as a source of her uniqueness when her father confesses: "I remembered the way I'd seen the world when I was young. I'd seen the smoke and the pain in the streets, heard the roaring under the earth, felt the rage beneath the surface of everything, most people pretending it wasn't there. Only those who are so shaken or so brave can wear it in their eyes. The way you wear it in your eyes" (132).

Witch Baby's sensitivity is not limited to "the pain game" – she uses photography to capture the beauty of sadness and pain in her everyday surroundings (141–142); she also accompanies Coyote as he helplessly witnesses an act of environmental destruction (96). Unsurprisingly, it is also Coyote who appears to understand Witch Baby's mysterious act of seclusion when she covers her body with soil and isolates herself from the world: "No wonder Witch Baby is burying herself in the mud […] There is dirt everywhere, real filth […] The earth Witch Baby is burying herself in is purer than what surrounds us […] Maybe she feels it will protect her. Maybe she is growing up in it like a plant" (167).

Gradually, the girl's transgressions and obsession with suffering turn out to reinforce her intersubjective bonds. Not only does she realize that "her own sadness [i]s only a small piece of the puzzle of pain that ma[kes] up the globe" (154), but also gets appreciative testimonies from other people whom she forces to challenge their comfort zones. Vixanne, who mostly follows her own advice to escape from the existential "pain" and "evil" (147), appreciates Witch Baby's affinity with suffering enough to change her own attitude when she reassures her troubled daughter: "Remember to look in the eye. That's what you taught me […] Look at your own darkness'" (275). Weetzie develops an even more complex self-reflection as she comes to terms with the

girl's uniqueness: "you face things, Witch Baby. And you help us face things. We can learn from you. I can't stand when someone I love is sad, so I try to take it away without just letting it be. I get so caught up in being good and sweet and taking care of everyone that sometimes I don't admit when people are really in pain […] But I think you can help me learn to not be afraid, my black lamb baby witch" (149–150). Using the Lacanian interpretative framework, Karen Coats locates the importance of Witch Baby's attachment to suffering in the fact that it makes Weetzie realize her own reliance on "a failed ethics of the Imaginary" (157) based on the repression of the Real for the sake of the embraced values (155). In terms of Taylorian ethics of authenticity guiding the self-fashioning practice, the same problem is rooted in the "trivialized and self-indulgent" version of the identity project, replacing intersubjectivity with an operative view of other people.

Simultaneously, such generalizing theorizations of Witch Baby's interactions with her family bear significant consequences for her arguable connection with Goth self-fashioning. On the one hand, the impact she has on Vixanne, and especially on Weetzie, whose self-identification extensively employs the semiotic potential of cuteness (Block 3–4, 276), seems to be a perfect realization of the Goth "mission" suggested by Digitalis – to confront people with the beauty of sadness and death. On the other hand, it exposes the problem of self-fashioning boundaries and the imposition of one's identity project on others, which in light of the Goth-specific preoccupations may be especially toxic. What makes Witch Baby's intersubjective relationships particularly difficult is the fact that her ultra-sensitivity goes hand in hand with her dysfunctional self-expression. As a result, she manifests tendencies toward instinctual self-discipline which, when not contained by a consciously practiced technology of the self, may become excessive and harmful.

The novels depict numerous situations in which Witch Baby withholds her spontaneous reactions, especially in emotionally loaded situations: as a kid, she "never cried about anything. Sometimes tears gathered, thick and seething salt in her chest, but she kept them there" (77). She also stops herself from active participation in joyous events such as a family picnic (74–75), the revelation of a surprise gift she prepared for her father (85), or her own birthday party (171–172). While such moments often reinforce her sense of alienation, Witch Baby's best chances to break out of them lie in someone else's initiative (172). Unable to find comfort in a moment of crisis, she sums up her ambivalence about both happiness and interactions with other people: "In a way I want Weetzie to lift me up into the light again. But more I want to sink back into the darkness were I came from" (263). Simultaneously, withdrawn and emotional as she is, the girl finds a vent for her feelings in aggression and self-destructive acts. She destroys her precious percussion set in rage and hurts herself in the process (90), ruins her half-sister's hair out of jealousy, and later shaves her own head (92–93). She sleeps on the street when she runs from home to find Vixanne (143); and when her boyfriend decides to leave the city, she has another self-destructive

outburst as she tears their shared photographs into pieces, "shredding [her]self" in the process (260).

The connection between Witch Baby's appearance, behavior, interpersonal bonds, and her continuous identity crisis are easy to identify throughout the whole series. In the penultimate novel, *Missing Angel Juan*, all those factors eventually become combined through the character's internal work relying on mental as well as physical self-discipline and distillation of fictional concepts into an internal truth. Earlier, the protagonist's searching attitude is inspired mostly by her estrangement from the Weetzie-centered family. Witch Baby, often disconnected and lost, muses a lot about her "belong[ing]" (73, 78, 93–95, 121) and – similarly to the twins from Brite's novel – fantasizes about her otherness, implied not only by her "witch" background but also her personality: "Sometimes I feel like I come from another planet. Planet of the Witch Babies where the sky is purple, the stars are cameras [photography is her hobby], the flowers are drums [her other hobby] and all the boys look like Angel Juan" (266). Her descriptions develop into a rich imagery of suffering as her heart is compared to "a giant bee sting" (90) or "a teacup covered with hairline cracks" (258), and her sensations to "a necklace of thorns [which] had suddenly wrapped around her, pricking into her flesh" (126–127). Before Witch Baby sets on her actual identity quest, she discovers two ways of handling herself: playing music and staying in the company of her boyfriend, Angel Juan. Still, both those solutions prove fallible. Music is something she can generate on her own, but the process is volatile and dependent on her emotional state (122–123). Relying on Angel Juan, whom Witch Baby describes as "the first person that made [her] feel like [she] belonged – like [she] wasn't just some freaky pain-gobbling goblin nobody understood" (260), brings spectacular results (124, 265), but makes his decision to move to New York all the more devastating.

Soon after Angel Juan's departure, Witch Baby sets on a quest initially focused on finding him in New York, but gradually turning into a quest for self-knowledge needed to keep her identity from overwhelming him with the burden of her dependence. During her stay in the city, the girl gradually develops an insight similar to the one she earlier evoked in Weetzie – namely that, as Coats puts it, "you have to honor the otherness of the other" (157). However, in order to achieve it, Witch Baby needs to consolidate her own self-fashioning, which had so far revolved rather chaotically around pain and withdrawal, and incorporate those factors into more elaborate technologies of the self.

The realization of her excessive attachment to Angel Juan and its possible consequences comes to the protagonist through diverse imagery generated by the novel's employment of magical realism. From an encounter with a street drug addict, after which she pictures her own emotional attachment as a dependency (332), to a dream vision of a creature stalking Angel Juan (343), to the confrontation with the main antagonist, whose status sways between a real murderer and an embodiment of Witch

Baby's possessiveness (340, 347, 360), the girl navigates toward the understanding of her own impact on another human being. Moreover, she is able to employ that insight in the formulation of her own identity project: "It just means you've got to do whatever you have to do for you alone. You've got to believe in your magic and face right up to the mean nasty part of yourself that wants to keep the one you love locked up in a place in you where no one else can touch them or even see them" (357).

Indeed, Witch Baby has some experience with internalizing identity-forming fictions, starting from her name and her fairy-tale origin. The second novel of the series, *Witch Baby*, revolves around the concept of the girl being a genie (82–83). She contributes to the happiness or self-improvement of other characters (149–151), simultaneously looking for her own place, and eventually finding it inside a symbolic "globe lamp" which reflects the interconnectedness of living creatures (83, 153–154). In the third novel, *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys*, Witch Baby has an episode of what might be recognized as actual *meletē* and *gumnazein* practices involving both mental absorption of an imagined situation and physical training. When, as already mentioned, she isolates herself in darkness, covered with soil, her internal monolog suggests an identity-altering aspect of that experience: "*I am a seed in the slippery, silent, blind, breathless dark. I have no nose or mouth, ears or eyes to see. Just a skin of satin black and a secret green dream deep inside*" (164). The girl seems to actively employ her body and mind in an experiment, which, however, is potentially destructive as she almost entirely gives up on food. It is only in *Missing Angel Juan* that Witch Baby starts to learn control over her self-technologies. Internalization of a fantastic identity is validated at the beginning of her quest, as Weetzie tells her: "[Y]ou're a genie. Your own genie. Just believe in that" (263). Thus, she encourages Witch Baby to both embrace her imaginary self and employ it in the work of self-fashioning guided by her individual goals. Indeed, in the ultimate confrontation with Angel Juan's kidnapper, the girl's most effective weapon seem to be simply her wishes (360). Bridging the external with the internal, and the real with the fantastic, she gradually constructs her truth, following the advice given by the specter of her dead grandfather: "We both believe in monsters. But all the ghosts and demons are you. And all the angels and genies are you. […] Inside you. No one can take them away" (343). Accordingly, the problem of the murderous opponent, Cake, is resolved when Witch Baby reflects: "Maybe Cake is me. The part that wants to keep Angel Juan locked in my life" (359), and subsequently masters her desire. Moreover, that process turns out to have an intersubjective dimension, as Angel Juan suggests: "He was our fear […] My fear of love and yours of being alone. But we don't need him anymore" (368).

However, the protagonist's quest achieves closure only after a challenging process of adjustment during which she gradually realizes the importance of self-mastery in confrontation with death. While Witch Baby's Goth-like aura remains rather implicit and fragmentary throughout the series, in *Missing Angel Juan* death-related themes, metaphors and imagery become prominent in her characterization. "[I]f anybody knows about being haunted it's me" (275), declares Witch Baby near the book's be-

ginning, and, indeed, soon after arriving in New York, she meets the ghost of Charlie Bat – Weetzie's father who died because of his drug addiction. Charlie becomes her guide and companion during her urban quest for self-knowledge. The girl's imagination revolves around death to reflect the sense of finality around Angel Juan's disappearance (270, 277). She also shows a heightened sensitivity to death premonitions, noticing an aura of absence around Charlie in one of his last photos (268–269), and fantasizing about a train-ride experience: "This is the darkness roaring around me that seems like it will never end. This is what it might be like to be dead" (320). Still, it is the ghost that gives Witch Baby's morbidity a broader relevance in terms of her identity project. Dwelling on the border between the girl's imagination and external reality, his presence testifies to the power of the self-truth whose construction may employ internalized fiction. Embracing the identities of a genie, and of Cake, Witch Baby develops agency over herself, while her acceptance of the ghost's company offers an implicit lesson in intersubjectivity. By the end of the protagonist's quest, Charlie finds his peace, and has Witch Baby to thank for it: "You made me see how I was […] clutching? Onto Weetzie. Onto you so you couldn't do what you had to do. Clutching on life. […] I saw you learning how to let go" (363). In parallel to highlighting the importance of self-control and skillfully handled withdrawal in stopping one's identity from invading others' space of growth, Charlie recommends an alternative, self-sufficient outlet for the surplus of sensitivity: "Take your pictures, play your drums. I should have kept writing my plays" (363). Thus, he both evokes and seems to shed a new light on the Taylorian postulate of dialogicality.

Arguing against the search for individual authenticity to become fuel for isolating egocentrism, Taylor underlines the implicit significance of intersubjectivity not only for "our identity being formed by the people we love" (34), but also for the seemingly individual creativity: "In the case of the solitary artist, the work itself is addressed to a future audience, perhaps still to be created by the work itself." "The very form of a work of art shows its character as *addressed*," he continues, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "super-addressee" (35; 127, note 26). While Taylor's argument moves from the individual self toward the acknowledgment of others as a special horizon of significance for an identity project (35), Witch Baby's quest leads her in the reverse direction. She needs to shift from dependence on Angel Juan to self-containment, which, partly sustained by artistic expression, keeps her "dark" identity at bay. It does not actually seem to challenge Taylor's overall view of intersubjectivity's regulatory function, as he stresses that "[w]e need relationships to fulfil but not to define ourselves" (34). Indeed, it is the power of self-definition that Witch Baby needs to master for her self-fashioning not to overwhelm other people. The reversed perspective of the acknowledgment of others in an identity project, does, however, resonate with some aspects of Goth-like self-fashioning discussed in the subcultural self-presentations.

On the one hand, practices such as the anti-mainstream identification or the formation of subcultural hierarchies which may feed hasty and shallow judgments on

non-Goths and not-good-enough-Goths seem to subscribe to the isolating and ego-centric self-expression that Taylor depicts as a false pursuit of authenticity. It is those problematic aspects of the discourses of Goth self-fashioning that *Sweetblood* makes most prominent. On the other hand, however, be it through Voltaire's ironic humor, Ravlin's visionary mysticism, Digitalis's spiritual teaching, Venters's instructions in etiquette, or Kilpatrick's practical advice how to organize a graveyard picnic without upsetting anyone (181), the subculture's meta-aware discourse addresses at least some of the potential drawbacks of the Goth impact on other people. For instance Digitalis, as mentioned in the previous chapters, encourages Goths to accept the fact that their appearance will attract general attention, and inscribes the subculture's aesthetic in a broader socio-cultural context; Venters stresses the importance of mutual respect in both Goth–non-Goth and Goth–Goth relations; Ravlin suggests the shared co-creation of the scene to be more important than excessive displays of individuality; and Voltaire produces his characteristic voice by mixing affirmation of and distance from the trademark Goth "drama." The subcultural discourses employed by those authors seem, therefore, to address the complexity and nuances of intersubjectivity in identity projects based on simultaneous "difference" from the presumable majority and affinity with fellow "darksiders."

As far as identity projects are concerned, Witch Baby's story unfolding in the *Dangerous Angels* collection seems to pick up where *Sweetblood* leaves off: the discovery of control over self-expression and self-fashioning. *Missing Angel Juan*, as the last stage of the protagonist's identity quest included in the collection, explores some paths leading toward self-mastery, and reveals the intersubjective relevance of balanced self-fashioning. While Block's novels do not narrate a specifically Goth experience, they definitely investigate challenges connected with the active modulation of an identity project revolving around the individually formulated truth. Witch Baby breaks out of the comfort zone of individual spontaneity and grows to recognize the need to master a specific type of self-discipline to channel her emotions and regulate her identity's intersubjective connections. Thus, her experience seems to combine the Taylorian authenticity ideal as a dialogical project with Foucauldian emphasis on technologies of the self.

The protagonist's eventual ability to take control over her identity-related problems is depicted as the internalization of fantastic creatures: a genie, Cake the monster, and, arguably, the angelic conceptualization of Angel Juan's calming influence. Those internalizing processes might be subscribed to Foucault's mental exercise: *meletē*. Witch Baby's possible involvement in *gumnazein* – the more literal kind of exercise focused on the body – highlights the difficulty of striking balance between two frequently contrasted, though not mutually exclusive, aspects of self-fashioning practices: ascesis and indulgence. A spectacular insight into the challenges connected with the development of self-mastery is granted by Witch Baby's swaying attitude to food and eating. Block's Weetzie Bat stories, sometimes criticized as thoughtlessly

affirmative of consumerism (Richards 150), include many sensuous descriptions of food. Unsurprisingly, then, its refusal soon becomes one of Witch Baby's ways of constructing her difference: when she goes on the run to find Vixanne, she packs only some sweets and ends up hungry (142); she intentionally deprives herself of nutrition during her earth-covered reclusion (165–167); and she subordinates her food intake to the demands of her New York investigation (335).

The link between Witch Baby's physical and emotional hunger becomes growingly clear already in her early childhood when she is said to have been devouring food constantly, without, however, putting on weight (50). Later, as she isolates herself in the garden hovel, the girl's half-sister and her boyfriend are almost successful in tempting Witch Baby outside with the promise of delicious party treats, yet she resists it until the appearance of Angel Juan (171–172). The boundary between the girl's ascetic and self-destructive tendencies becomes blurred as her fast is clearly a part of a self-fashioning experiment which threatens to go too far. The double nature of her deprivation is confirmed again as she comments on her own reflection: "Pinchy and hungry-looking […] I am searching for love" (292–293). It is also the sense of hunger that becomes for Witch Baby a means of intersubjective connection as she empathetically shares it with a scavenging woman (311–312).

The character's complex relation with the lack or refusal of food does not make her immune to its sensual pleasures and excessive consumption. Importantly, however, her eating practices seem even more effective than her starvation episodes in illustrating the rise of self-supervision in handling bodily needs. When she sets off to find her biological mother and becomes seriously hungry upon arriving at Vixanne's place, the girl entirely surrenders to the external circumstances and lets herself be fed with "rock candy and divinity fudge," as well as "Cokes, which aren't allowed at the cottage [Weetzie's house]" until she "feels sick and bloated from all the sugar" (145). The pattern of swinging from hunger to excess of food is repeated twice in New York, yet each time Witch Baby is depicted as far more active in first resisting, and later appreciating the meals. When the investigation leads her to a café in Harlem, she initially stands up to both the café worker and Charlie's ghost who insist that she should try some food. Still, she momentarily gives up in a rather spectacular manner, and eventually enjoys "the best breakfast [she's] ever had" (301). The girl has similar objections before entering an Indian restaurant, as she "do[es] not feel like eating," yet, urged by Charlie, she has "saffron-yellow vegetable curry with candy-glossy chutney, rice and lentil-bread" and gets overwhelmed by the sensual impression. "The food is so hot it scalds the taste right out of my mouth but it's so good I keep eating to get the taste back," she confesses (316) and admits that the meal makes her "sort of high" (317).

Both cases bring together Witch Baby's ascetic tendencies and sensitivity to pleasure, signaling the unbalanced progress of her identity project, as – contrary to the situation at Vixanne's – she makes active decisions when shifting from one state to the other, and monitors her experience while doing so. The interaction with the ghost

of Charlie Bat helps her to further exercise self-awareness in the very process of eating, as the specter, entirely cut off from sensual pleasure, asks the girl:

> "How does it taste?"
> "Good."
> "I mean really how does it taste?"
> […] "Seaweed, sesame, spinach, carrot, radish sprouts."
> "Witch Baby, remember I'll never get to eat another thing."
> "Okay okay." I close my eyes to get the tastes better. "The avocado's silky and the rice is sweetish – that might be pink sugar or something. The ginger's got like a tang. The horseradish burns right through my nostrils to my brain." (307)

The self-monitoring directed at the act of eating and its connections with both restraint and indulgence becomes directly involved in Witch Baby's identity project during her final confrontation with Cake. When he offers her a snack, the girl falls into the familiar pattern of refusal and acceptance (348). Eventually, she accepts a meal described as both luscious and taboo-breaking:

> He starts scooping and mixing and whirring until he has made this amazing thick frosty snowy whipped-cream-topped vanilla milk shake. He puts it in a tall parfait glass, plops on one of those *poison red candied cherries Weetzie won't let us eat*, sinks in a straw and sets it on the counter. Then he presses raw meat unto a patty and slaps that onto the sizzling grill. I haven't eaten a hamburger in a long time *because noone at my house is into meat anymore* but that meat smells pounceable. I feel dizzy. (348, emphasis added)

The girl's self-awareness in surrendering to the pleasure brought by the transgressive food resonates with a broader awareness of the intentional exposure to danger. As she is eating, and observing Cake's actions, Witch Baby realizes: "This is how people die. This is how kids are murdered. This is how you lose your mind and then your body and maybe this is how you lose your soul" (349). The fact that she puts herself willingly into the risky situation and opens up to the monster's ensnarement is reminiscent of Witch Baby's earlier self-destructive impulses, yet she monitors herself all the while and remains focused on the one driving goal of saving her boyfriend. The way she interchangeably employs the acts of self-control and "letting go" in that process are suggestive of a still unbalanced but progressing development of a more advanced practice of self-discipline.

The stories of both Lucy Szabo and Witch Baby explore identities fashioned by means of overtly Goth or Goth-like imagination and sensitivity, while the formative processes their teenage protagonists go through address different aspects of Taylor's authenticity ideal. Sweetblood's breakthrough moment comes with the discovery of intersubjectivity as a relevant point of reference in her identity project, as well as the realization of her agency in self-definition. Witch Baby, in turn, though from the beginning submerged in interpersonal relations which both transform and are transformed by her identity, needs to work out the ways of handling its boundaries to meet the demands of dialogical intersubjectivity. By contrast, the third young adult character discussed in this chapter, Naifeh's Courtney Crumrin, seems to engage with the Taylorian ideal to raise relevant questions about its applicability.

Courtney Crumrin: Unleashed Self-Fashioning

The Courtney Crumrin series, published between 2002 and 2014, is a multi-volume comic addressed to young audiences. In her 2008 essay, "Making Nightmares into New Fairytales: Goth Comics as Children's Literature," Laurie N. Taylor characterizes the cycle as a representative of a unique Gothic aesthetics in the realm of comic book art and discusses its subversive aspects in terms of the construction of female and child characters (198, 201–203). By doing so, she implicitly reinforces a non-main-stream positioning of Naifeh's work, which does not overtly engage with subcultural themes on the level of plot and character construction. Nevertheless, Courtney's story seems to offer a relevant rounding contribution to the identity-oriented quests of Lucy Szabo and Witch Baby because its supernatural and fantastic aspects – most prominent among the three – produce a challenge to the Taylorian intersubjectivity. Courtney partly shares with the previous two protagonists the experience of learning to steer her identity project and its intersubjective dimensions. However, when her systematic growth toward an authentic selfhood puts her at odds with her community, it is the latter that the girl turns against for the sake of the former. While Witch Baby's self-fashioning explores Taylorian postulates in terms of containing an identity rather than opening it to others, Courtney's case demands an even broader scrutiny of intersubjectivity as divisible into three overlapping yet separate components: implicit dialogicality of one's own pursuits, relations with particular individuals, and relations with the community. As Naifeh's work suggests, the practice of self-fashioning may set those three in a mutual dynamic, which adds complexity to their potential collisions. The tensions between the three kinds of intersubjective experience are made prominent by the story's supernatural elements.

One such factor is magic, which becomes the crucial source of Courtney's internal truth, driving her from passive and self-centered isolation to meaningful agency. Apart from its righteous status in the Gothic fantasy narrative, magic can be ascribed a metaphorical dimension in which it becomes a conceptualization of existential empowerment drawn from the fully embraced authenticity ideal. Upon discussing the origins of the contemporary individualism in the Western culture, Taylor points to its solipsistic aspect enforced by the "loss of magic" and the "disenchantment of the world" following the rationalistic questioning of previously fixed orders of values and explanations, whose shared nature used to provide "elements of the world" with "their individual meanings independent from humans" (3). For Courtney, magic becomes a link with a bigger picture, and a demanding stimulant of internal work, yet it also empowers her to stand by and reconnect with her identity project when it is threatened.

The other significant supernatural element are Night Things – folklore-inspired faeries: the insight into their precarious position in the human-dominated world broadens Courtney's awareness of her responsibilities and enables her to develop

critical distance toward two other communities that define her. Thus, her identity project cannot be reduced to a simple ego spree, even as it verifies her communal investments. Courtney needs to handle three kinds of communal responsibility: toward the society of ordinary humans, the society of magicians, and the vanishing realm of the Night Things – each community narrower and more invested in the supernatural than the previous one.

The depiction of the non-initiated mainstream society bears overdrawn marks of the culture of "narcissism," such as materialism, egoism, detachment from the past (Taylor, *Ethics* 4–5), instrumental treatment of others and privileging professional success over interpersonal bonds (16–17). Initially the main source of Courtney's estrangement, it subsequently becomes reduced to the function of a dispersed background environment, which always eventually frames her life but quickly ceases to determine it. The protagonist's agency puts her in a comfortable position from which she can play along with the mainstream on her own terms and does not need to fight it. Courtney's attitude toward the human world, represented mostly by her shallow and clueless parents and peers, does not seem to change, even after her self-development process has been completed. While she gradually recognizes the wrongness of abusing her superior position as a witch and manipulating commoners to her liking, she remains detached from them and does not come up with any explicit way of getting involved in the "ordinary world" more than necessary.

The society of magic practitioners is apparently closer to the authenticity ideal due to their recognition of both individual originality and communal strength, as well as respect for the heritage of the past from which they gain literal magical power. Simultaneously, however, the magic community turns out to be misguided by what Taylor labels as "instrumental reason" – a premise which proclaims the moral obligation to employ human faculties in the improvement of human existence (104) but which actually justifies "domination and control" (105). On the one hand, by interacting with the coven and gradually discovering its internal dynamic, Courtney executes her own "citizenship" in a relevant public sphere. On the other hand, it is against the wizard community – theoretically her rightful sphere of belonging – that she eventually rises in self-defense, which, however, expands upon the broader horizon of significance constituted by her sense of justice and responsibility. While the coven strives to deprive the girl of her magical identity, it is a fate that eventually meets all its members, which leaves Courtney as the sole remaining magic wielder. That turn of events makes her identity project all the more prominent, as throughout the series the reader witnesses her initiation into magic, her internal work needed to fully embrace the supernatural empowerment, and finally her stand-alone survival. In terms of challenges and dilemmas potentially attached to self-fashioning, Courtney's experience summons Henry David Thoreau's leading postulate of civil disobedience, namely, the limited character of individual responsibility toward any public sphere if a serious conflict occurs between it and the very core of one's internal truth (Thoreau 774–775, 779, 781).

Finally, the community of faeries – determined and confined by the past, erased from the contemporary world, and fully supernatural – becomes the object of Courtney's loyalty, as it offers an alternative to the despicable mortal society, both the magical and the non-magical one. The bond with Night Things, rendered through individual friendships, as well as more general interactions with the faerie realm, makes it easier for the girl to notice the abuse and hunger for power that drives the witch community, and to embrace her own responsibility. Moreover, attached to a vanishing magical reality, Night Things can be seen as an object of nostalgia for a dissolving realm of authenticity, as – according to Courtney's great-uncle, Aloysius – "the Night Things are not creatures of deceit. That is the realm of men" (*Twilight*[47]). The girl's prevailing identification with the ideals that she embraces through interpersonal bonds and the affinity with the faerie does not entirely break away from Taylor's notion of the authenticity ideal. On the literal level of the storyworld, she dismisses the more "natural" options of attachment to the human communities, but still bonds her loyalty with a tangible group of creatures. On a more metaphorical level, Courtney's choice to be driven by supernatural impulses rather than by immediate communal bonds may still be inscribed in the framework of abstracted dialogicality. Still, confronted with two societies generating human characters, the protagonist's loyalty to the Night Things and her individual magic eventually prevails over her other commitments, and thus raises questions about handling Taylor's authenticity ideal in an identity project. Specifically, it highlights the possible dissonance between tangible intersubjectivity which directly involves other subjects and a more implicit dialogicality which remains individual and detached from immediate interactions.

Courtney's appearance includes details that can be traced back to a subcultural repertoire and that co-create a rather inconspicuous picture of a pre-teen with angsty tendencies. The girl's outfit is composed of a plain black dress with three big buttons, striped t-shirt and socks,[48] black sneakers and a barrette – generic one in the first volume, and bat-shaped from the second volume on. Throughout the six parts of the series, she undergoes few external changes, her clothes oscillating between a fixed bedtime outfit, a dark duffel coat for outdoor excursions, and the already described casual look, which gets a more flouncy skirt model in the last two volumes. Apart from the characteristic, though far from fancy, clothing, Courtney's distinctive visual attribute is the lack of a clearly marked nose – it takes the main heroine one step further away from realism than other characters, and iconizes her features. The graphic design of the protagonist herself and the comic's cadres in general resonates with Spooner's list of visual distinctions of "the twenty-first-century Gothic style," including "intensive chiaroscuro; […] intricate detailing; and emphasis on line," and "distorted

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[47] The first edition of the Courtney Crumrin series, which I refer to in this book, has no pagination, except for the fourth volume, *Monstrous Holiday*. The remaining volumes are cited in the text only by their respective titles.

[48] Spooner highlights stripes as an iconic attribute of the contemporary "Goth girl" trope, originating from the visual style established by Tim Burton (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 58–60).

proportions" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 49). Simultaneously, however, Courtney's rela-
tively modest visual presentation, allowing only limited, not to say circumstantial,
connections with the subculture, may be indicative of still another potential attribute
of the "Goth girl" trope, namely that she "is not required to grow up. Her girlhood
– and therefore her Goth style and identity – can be prolonged indefinitely" (100).
As Courtney's example suggests, such a character can also linger in a chrysalis form
indexing a girl on the very threshold of puberty.

What Courtney shares with the other two protagonists discussed in this chapter
is a recurrent sense of estrangement from the mainstream society – especially her
parents and peers – as well as loneliness and longing for connection. Still, instead of
being driven toward a subcultural community, like Lucy, or a significant other, like
Witch Baby, Courtney engages most intensely in interactions with supernatural crea-
tures. She gets deeply attached to Skarrow, an escapee from the faerie (*Coven*), empa-
thizes with the human-induced suffering of the marginalized Night Things (*Coven*;
Twilight; *Final*) and with a werewolf unhappily in love with a human (*Monstrous*
25, 51–52). When depressed, she almost gives her life on a plate to a teenage vam-
pire (*Monstrous* 103) yet eventually finds reassurance in the company of Aloysius's
shapeshifting brother, Wilberforce, who returns to the human world after several
decades spent in the faerie realm (*Final*). Other than that, her crucial formative yet
also complex and difficult bonding experience is the one with Uncle Aloysius himself,
who, however, is a powerful magician with additional supernatural influences in his
lineage (*Monstrous* 83; *The Witch*). In the penultimate volume, *The Witch Next Door*,
Courtney starts to form her first peer friendship depicted in the story. She gets close
to Holly – a human girl whose taste in fashion makes her look like "a refugee […]
from gloom-land" in the eyes of other school children, which suggests a possibility
of a Goth-like connection between both characters. Their acquaintance is, however,
effectively terminated by the intervening coven community.

As compared to Sweetblood and Witch Baby, Courtney's existential dread re-
volves to a large extent around the problematization of feelings, especially love. While
Lucy discovers the power of interpersonal attachment, and Witch Baby learns to
keep it in check, Naifeh's protagonist struggles to embrace the complexities of factors
affecting relationships. Witnessing the passivity of Skarrow's longtime protector who
fails to act when the faerie falls victim to the coven's intrigue (*Coven*), and later the de-
cision of Magda, the werewolf's lover, not to follow her heart (*Monstrous* 60–61) puts
Courtney in an emotional crisis: "Turns out love isn't enough after all. It doesn't make
men out of animals, or turn cowards into heroes, or make spoilt little girls grow up!
All things considered, love is pretty worthless. I don't see why anyone bothers with
it" (*Monstrous* 62). Next, she meets Wolfgang the vampire, who puts her realization
in a clearly generational context by suggesting that "seal[ing] it [the heart] to stop the
pain" is a part of growing up (*Monstrous* 74). Courtney reacts to such a perspective
with a sense of utter defeat and a temporary refusal to carry on as "losing shouldn't
take that long" (105). Thus, her existential dilemmas seem underpinned with ideal-

ism appealing to Goth-like sensitivity yet simultaneously depict it as an insufficient foundation of an identity project.

While Lucy employs a supernatural metaphor to address a specific problem in her life, and the magical imagery of Witch Baby's narrative helps her conceptualize difficult internal processes, Courtney's loyalty to her personal truth requires tangible supernatural support, which comes in the form of magic practice. Its gradual discovery and initiation into the process of becoming a witch constitute the basic source of the protagonist's agency and authentication. First of all, the discovery of the supernatural is a breakthrough moment for Courtney as it gives her effective and immediate solutions to problems that would otherwise reinforce her sense of helplessness. For instance, in the first part of the series, *Courtney Crumrin and the Night Things*, she uses a spell to overpower the local goblin and thus gain faeries' help in dealing with Alicia, the leader of school bullies. In the same volume, magic helps Courtney take control over an uncomfortable situation. Her parents force a babysitting chore upon her to gain favor with a local rich family, yet as the girl discovers her ward to be a changeling, she manages to win his obedience and turn the tedious task into an easy way to make regular money. In the second volume, *Courtney Crumrin and the Coven of Mystics*, she develops enough self-assurance as a practitioner of magic to strike a deal with a murderous monster and literally execute an adult wizard in revenge for Skarrow's death. Thus, the scale of her agency rapidly grows and prepares her to face virtually any challenge, including the coven's eventual attack on her magic.

The exploration of the supernatural quickly becomes Courtney's major occupation and provides the girl with an axis of internal development, confronting her with several basic demands of an identity project. Having fallen victim to a doppelganger which aims to replace her by generating a perfectly socialized version of Courtney, the girl realizes how important the authenticity ideal is to her even when it gives her a sense of estrangement. Eventually, she deals with the creature not by means of straightforward magical power, but rather the power coming from self-acceptance: "I'm rude, bad-tempered, and basically, I don't like people. Maybe that makes me a jerk, but it sure beats what you are […] A phony" (*Night*). Still, Courtney simultaneously grows to understand that magical empowerment requires also a steady growth of self-discipline and responsibility toward others. As her story unfolds, the protagonist needs to face the consequences of her particular spells and choices as well as their indirect impact on her environment.

Such confrontations may be immediate, as is the case with one of Courtney's first spells designed to make her commonly likeable – besieged by schoolmates talking to her all at once and eager to please her, the girl reflects: "'Be careful what you wish for.' Very clever object lesson" (*Night*). Her other, more significant decisions need time to reveal their full-blown consequences – a process which is employed as a narrative pattern in the fifth volume of the series, *The Witch Next Door*. As Holly is getting to know her new neighborhood of Hillsborough, she comes across people suffering from the long-term repercussions of their conflicts with Courtney, hitherto depicted from her

perspective as episodic. Tormented by the Night Things acting on the witch's order, Alicia the bully develops a nervous illness that also breaks the heart of her girlfriend and ruins their chance to elope together. The curse which Courtney cast on her one-time suitor because he had been snobbish and aggressive when temporarily infatuated with her under a spell's influence makes him collect continuous abuse from everyone he meets. The most spectacular escalation of consequences takes place at the end of the volume when Courtney is made to run from Hillsborough because the magical community has eventually realized that she killed one of its members. Simultaneously, that moment illustrates the prominence of the gap which has developed between the communal standards of behavior and the heroine's own – based on her objection to the victimization of Skarrow. While Courtney is capable of acknowledging her mistakes and even taking blame for bad decisions, she can also stand by her choice. "You summoned Rawhead and Bloody Bones to murder a coven marshal!" exclaims her teacher and protector, Calpurnia Crisp, as she urges the girl to escape, and her only retort is "Yeah, but he was a huge jerk!" (*Witch*). Thus, a morally controversial decision, clearly at odds with the binding laws but resulting from the character's individual conviction is not immediately condemned, and in the long run proves to be a turning point for Courtney's identity project. What, however, distinguishes her resistance from a full-blown application of civil disobedience is that the girl neither hopes for nor succeeds in politicizing her act and inspiring communal change. The conflict remains framed by the corrupted society on the one pole and the rebellious individual on the other – only the latter turns out to be supernaturally empowered to effectively stop the former from further dangerous maneuvers.

Regardless of the extreme situation mentioned above, there are several occasions for the heroine to actually embrace her personal responsibilities as well as confront her ego. On the one hand, it is upon introducing Holly to the supernatural that the protagonist starts to muse upon the responsibility of handling the relationship with someone whom she has personally initiated into magic (*Witch*). On the other hand, the supernatural power may also have an equalizing effect. When Courtney enters the coven's youth community, socialization is as problematic for her as in the regular school environment. What, however, makes the experience different, and more challenging, is that among other magical children, the girl finds it impossible to ward off her alienation with a sense of superiority and has to confront her own imperfection: "These coven children were every bit as heartless and foolish as all the other kids of Hillsborough. But their reckless curiosity about witchcraft seemed all too familiar. Seeing the wicked gleam in Blake's [classmate's] eye… was like looking into a mirror" (*Twilight*). Indeed, under the demanding supervision of Ms. Crisp, Courtney grows to understand that her magical power cannot effectively enable her to cut off from her social situatedness because "when you turn your back on the world, you can get bitten on the ass" (*Coven*).

Thus, the overall depiction of the supernatural empowerment's function in the character's identity project is somewhat ambivalent. Throughout the series, it stimu-

lates and guides Courtney's growth toward agency and self-awareness, while during the final conflict with the coven the girl's magical identity proves too strong to be erased for good by other mages' intervention. "All sorcerers have a secret power. It don't come from no book but up from the deepest part o'ya. It's more powerful than anythin' outta books. Cause it's yours," Courtney hears from an elderly witch, and, indeed, it turns out that what cannot be annihilated is the supernatural intensity of the protagonist's tentative attempts at composing poems. Reading the rather angsty rhymes from her forgotten diary, Courtney gets back in touch with her powers and is able to consciously channel them through words on the page in order to attack the coven (*Final*). Therefore, the actual fuel for the girl's self is not the fixed identity of a witch, or even any specific supernatural power made tangible through particular spells, but rather the individual creative process – dynamic, provisional and imperfect as it may be. Moreover, Courtney's story includes situations showing the limitedness of magic as an axis of self-fashioning.

It is revealed that the ancestors of the coven community obtained their supernatural skills from a local woman with faerie blood in her veins. "Two and a half centuries ago, my great, great grandmother gave magic to the people of Hillsborough, so they would survive […] It's clear to me that you need it no longer," declares Aloysius upon learning that his fellow wizards are planning to start abusing their powers (*Final*). Indeed, together with the Dreadful Duchess, one of the most powerful Night Things, he deprives the coven members of their magical awareness and effectively erases their community. This, in turn, leaves Courtney, who has already lost and regained her magic, as "The only witch in Hillsborough" (*Final*). Magic itself is not, therefore, entirely internalized by its practitioners and can be unreliable as a foundation of identity; moreover, it happens to remain passive and neutral until willfully employed. As Courtney tells Holly, who is following her footsteps in enchanting other students, "If that's what you want to do with witchcraft, I can't stop you" (*Witch*). As Courtney finds out, the supernatural empowerment can actually be a handicap in developing interpersonal relations: it makes her "the scariest thing in the neighborhood" (*Twilight*), and, what is worse, deprives her of emotional support when she needs it most. When the dejected girl steps onto a path of self-destruction and exposes herself to the vampire, her uncle, convinced that "she's certainly more than a match for some cheeky vampire brat" (94), fails to reach out to her in time. All in all, however, Courtney's involvement with magic is crucial for her internal work and self-formation, both as a stimulator of her agency and as a source of challenges to overcome – especially in the area of interpersonal and communal responsibilities.

As already signaled, it is in her interactions with the ordinary human society – reduced mostly to the children of Hillsborough's well-off inhabitants and the Crumrin parents – that Courtney gets closest to a teenage Goth stereotype. Critical, sarcastic, simultaneously stressing and despising her outsider status, she relocates the core of her pursuits and interests to a sphere conventionally ascribed to fantasy. Throughout the series, Mrs. and Mr. Crumrin are depicted as shallow, materialistic wannabies,

awkwardly trying, and failing, to climb the social ladder. They base their overall interest in their daughter on a rather vague notion of the modern-day youth – as reflected by the insecure question from Courtney's father upon seeing her confusion about her birthday gift: "You want them, don't you? All the kids want braces…" (*Twilight*). The gap between the girl and her parents often serves as a metonymic reflection of her distance from – and more often than not contempt of – all things mundane. In the first part of the series, Courtney approaches her mother and father as specimens whose observation provides "distraction," yet she also has a general impression that "adults occup[y] themselves with inexplicable activities" (*Night*), which reinforces her isolation.

Mr. and Mrs. Crumrin happen to be neglectful with regard to their child's complicated personality and lack empathy as she is going through a difficult period of adaptation in Hillsborough (*Night*), yet they are not completely indifferent about their problematic bonds with Courtney. In *The Twilight Kingdom* the girl's conversation with her father reflects fundamental disconnectedness which seems to block any actual attempt at improving their communication:

"Sometimes I think we have not been taking good care of you, honey. I think about all the things I'd promised myself I'd give you. […] You know, a big house. Pretty clothes. I'd always wanted to get you a nice car when you were old enough. We've tried to be good parents, but sometimes I look at you and think 'What's wrong? What aren't we giving you?'"
"I don't know, pop. I don't really need anything."
"Yes you do. And I wish we could give it to you. I really do.'"

While the quoted dialog may serve as a confirmation of the Crumrins' blinding materialism, it also shows a paradigmatic gap between them and Courtney. The said gap proves unbridgeable even when her mother, determined to find some clue to her daughter's personality, tries reading her diary and the most relevant thing she discovers is Courtney's attachment to Aloysius. The only episode of apparent bonding between Mrs. Crumrin and the protagonist is, in the context of her whole story, a testimony of failure. With her magical identity torn away from her by the coven, Courtney is so distraught – though she cannot identify the reason for that feeling – that she both attracts her mother's attention and surrenders to her ill-matched helpful gesture: "Usually, Courtney would rather rub sand in her eyes than go shopping with her mother […] But today […] She just couldn't see the point of resisting anymore" (*Final*). Magical practice and powers – the most tangible source of the heroine's difference – cannot, therefore, be blamed for the generation gap in the Crumrin family, and their removal is hardly transformative. As the girl reflects on emotional bonds in general, she confesses: "I don't think I feel one way or the other about my folks. Not really. They're just these… people" (*Monstrous* 73).

Contrary to the cases of Lucy Szabo, who shifts from being annoyed by her parents' awkward expressions of care to appreciating their love, or Witch Baby, who bonds with others by noticing their individual burdens, Courtney's self-mastery mostly enables her to marginalize the impact of her everyday social environment.

Undoubtedly, her growing self-awareness and self-responsibility in the treatment of others are relevant when it comes to realizing and controlling her privilege as a witch – and as a white, socially mobile citizen, which she realizes upon visiting her childhood district (*Twilight*). Moreover, Courtney's conflict with the Hillsborough coven is incorporated into a bigger intrigue designed to let wizards overtly dominate the common human society. Therefore, her resistance contributes to the ultimate protection of ordinary mortals even though it is driven mostly by Courtney's personal reasons, such as the emotional involvement in Skarrow's case. All in all, it is difficult to identify a noticeable transformation of the girl's attitude that would be especially dedicated to non-magical humans. The suggestion of an improvement in the quality of her life by the end of the story's last volume is generated not by Courtney's investment in a connection with her family but by a magical intervention. While she remains dependent on her parents' abrupt decision to leave Hillsborough, their minds, in turn, become magically modified to perceive Wilberforce as their son. Thus, it is less through socialization than the manipulation of Dreadful Duchess and Aloysius – as well as thanks to her own firm grasp of her identity as a witch – that Courtney deals with her estrangement in the reality of ordinary humans.

The protagonist's interaction with the magically initiated community is far more dramatic, due to the strikingly bigger impact of the wizards' actions on the societies of humans and Night Things, as well as the more specific relevance of the coven community as a potential horizon of significance in Courtney's own identity project. It is the discovery of magic that pushes her toward Uncle Aloysius. Their relationship is by no means simple – it shifts from Courtney's growing attachment, which verges on desperation when, scared for the wizard's safety, she exclaims: "He's all I've got" (*Coven*); to her gradual disappointment in what she sees as the elderly man's misanthropy and lack of faith in love (*Monstrous* 43, 72, 108–109); to their mutual antagonism when Aloysius cooperates with the coven to capture Courtney (*Final*). Eventually, however, the elderly wizard saves the girl's life by rejecting the prolongation of his own (*Monstrous* 116, 118), strives to protect her against being victimized by the coven, and makes her reconnect with her lost witch identity (*Final*). Courtney's attitude toward her great uncle oscillates between fear, admiration, faith in his powerfulness, pity, rejection, realization of his fallibility, and recognition of his sacrifice. By going through that spectrum of feelings and exchanges, she gains a better insight not only into Aloysius himself but also her own choices and responsibilities. However, none of it prepares her for the actual socialization in the magical community because she quickly discovers her uncle's long-term and self-induced isolation which results from the fact that his bonds with the faerie realm prevail over those with any kind of human society (*Coven*; *Final*).

The school environment formed by the magical families' youth proves relevant to Courtney, first by challenging her sense of uniqueness and later by offering an actual peer community. Her conflict with the adult society of magic wielders, however, systematically escalates until the ultimate confrontation. The girl's first full-blown expo-

sure to the Hillsborough wizards takes place when they fall into an angry-mob mode to make Aloysius stop protecting Skarrow – the Night Thing they misguidedly hold responsible for using a dark spell on one of the witches (*Coven*). As Courtney witnesses the exchange between her uncle and the enraged crowd, "her opinion of witch society [is] dropping by the second." Aloysius's subsequent comment underlines the predictability of problems generated by the magical public sphere: "They may be witches, but they're still people. Stupid, self-absorbed, reactionary people" (*Coven*). Similarly to Courtney's personal experience, the very affiliation with supernatural powers does not imply any specific unifying standards of communal functioning or philosophy that all wizards would share. As a result, a major discrepancy and polarization is gradually revealed within the coven between the Crumrins and many other families. Its axis is the emergent split between knowledge as a stand-alone goal and as a generator of power.

Aloysius underappreciates the connection between those two factors when he appeals to his fellow magicians; "Is it power that binds us? The pursuit of power? I think not. For we do not interfere in the affairs of the larger world, or seek mastery over lesser peoples. What is it then? I suggest that it is knowledge. It is knowledge that binds us; shared wisdom from ages past, and new wisdom that we should all seek to embrace. Wisdom is our legacy; our refuge from the world of the ignorant and the foolish" (*Coven*). However, it turns out that the idea of magic as a "refuge" is not universally recognized in the coven; what is more, such a paradigm has come to provoke active rebellion. As observed by Calpurnia Crisp, witches "[a]re most powerful beings on Earth, and they're dying of boredom. […] They want the world as their plaything" (*Final*). The opponents of Aloysius's isolationist doctrine come up with counterarguments that do step beyond simple power hunger: "We have a duty to use magic for the betterment of mankind. And we can hardly do that from our comfortable little borough" (*Final*). This claim may be perceived as an appeal to morality made to justify expansion – a tactic exposed and refuted in Taylor's comments on the machinations of the "instrumental reason." Still, the plotters also seem to have more solid reasons for criticizing the hitherto methods of executing the doctrine: "Those men [Crumrin and his supporters] conspired to keep us all prisoner in this little town forever. The punishment for escape was death, as you well know" (*Final*). The moral privilege of Aloysius's perspective is, nevertheless, suggested by a small-scale reality check. When the coven is overtaken by the temporarily triumphant plotters, they immediately enslave one of the local Night Things and force him to do basic chores (*Final*). Together with the implied message of several conversations among the putsch leaders, it confirms that, regardless of any argument they might use, their actual goal is the subordination of the remaining two societies – those of the faeries and ordinary humans. Simultaneously, however, the coven's actions against Courtney personally are backed up by the evidence confirming her violations of various coven laws, including the crime of murder (*Twilight*).

Thus, considered in the Taylorian framework, Courtney's self-fashioning experience zooms in on the possible demand of challenging social and ethical norms as a part

of the authenticity pursuit – a demand that Taylor acknowledges yet also counter-weighs by postulating the intersubjectivity and specified "horizons" of an identity project (*Ethics* 66). In harmony with his argument, the way the protagonist disregards the laws of the coven and ultimately proceeds to embrace and protect her witch self illustrates the importance of balance between individual expression and interaction with the collective. What, however, complicates her realization of the "authenticity ideal" is the eventual destruction of the magical community, as well as the focus of Courtney's dialogicality on the supernatural. In the long run, those aspects of the girl's identity formation can be seen as its potential self-destruction mechanisms, as postulated by Greenblatt (9). Courtney's consistent loyalty to her own ideals reflected by the Night Things is sustained through her self-affirmation and affirmation of her individual power. In the series' finale, her self-fashioning project is both triumphant and convincingly accomplished, but it may break out of control in future.

As argued throughout this chapter, figures of Goth or Goth-like teenagers prove useful in explorations of individual control over identity formation, and especially the issues of authenticity, conformism, interpersonal bonds, or socialization. Well-suited to index style-oriented self-fashioning, subcultural characters easily form stereotypical tropes yet also facilitate more complex insights into the technologies of the self at work. All three examples discussed above point to different problems that a pursuer of an identity project is likely to encounter, but manage to do so without condemning self-fashioning practices altogether. *Sweetblood* sets limits to the usefulness of fiction in formulating a subjective truth, and to the place of subcultural belonging on an intersubjective horizon of significance. Witch Baby's story in *Dangerous Angels*, in turn, focuses on negotiating the limits of the self-fashioned identity so as not to oper-ationalize other subjects and recognize their sovereignty. *Courtney Crumrin*, finally, scrutinizes the very concept of intersubjectivity in an identity project. It dwells on the potential relevance of the difference between immediate socialization and more ab-stract dialogicality in the process of formulating and manifesting the subject's truth. As a consequence, it addresses the possibility of privileging individual self-fashioning over its communal context.

Tracing the trajectory of the "Goth girl" trope from its literary Gothic origins to the contemporary popular culture, Spooner stresses its political potential, especially in the context of gender. In accordance with her interpretation, all three protag-onists analyzed in this chapter can be seen as "figure[s] of resistance to patriarch-al narratives," who turn to self-fashioning strategies of embracing agency in their lives (*Post-Milennial Gothic* 110–111). The next chapter is fully devoted to the Goth trope's political potential.

CHAPTER 6

Political Goth
(*World of Darkness,*
Chronicles of Darkness)

The intermediality of tropes discussed so far tentatively maps out the variety of forms and conventions which Goth aesthetic may bring together. Possibly, the main drawback of this approach is the inevitable lack of space needed to consider in detail the potential impact of particular media represented by the analyzed texts on the depictions of self-fashioning practices. Still, in the case of *World of Darkness* (WoD) and its successor, *Chronicles of Darkness* (CoD), some elaboration on the specificity of the analog RPG seems indispensable. The medium expressly activates the audience and, by engaging them in the act of role-playing a fictional character, exposes them to an experience close to self-fashioning, if only for the needs of the game. As I argue elsewhere with regard to digital gameplay, parallels between the player's relationship with their character or avatar and acts of actual self-fashioning are limited and should be drawn with caution.[49] Similarities between some acts undertaken in both kinds of practice – such as the internalization of fiction, self-aware oscillation between different frames of identity performance, or the involvement in somaesthetics – are hard to ignore. Still, the temptation to interpret acts of such role-playing as immediate examples of self-fashioning in which the player adopts and performs a fictional identity is justified on rarer occasions than might be expected. Game scholars emphasize that an act of identification with the character is not, actually, necessary to effectively participate in the game (Stenros and Sihvonen; Pohjola 81, 84).

Thus, my discussion of the White Wolf games requires a clear recognition of their medium's complexity. An RPG presumes the active participation of its user and,

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[49] Interactions between self-fashioning and video games are subjects of my two essays in Polish: "Gra w autokreację" and "Czy ja tak brzmię? Autokreacja i immunizacja w serii *Mass Effect*."

simultaneously, regulates that participation by means of the player's character, which is a composite of narrative fiction and mechanical interface enabling interaction with the game's mechanics. Thus, the potential interactions of the in-game persona with the identity of the player are complicated. The specificity of the RPG as a medium may be said to generate three major spheres for the potential employment of self-fashioning. The first sphere – and the only one that this chapter explores in detail – is contained by the game's narrative and includes attributes and practices available to the fictional characters who will be concretized through the players' involvement but remain in the zone of narrative potentiality generated by the game rulebook. In other words, it deals with the things the players' characters can do, be and relate to as they form, explore and express their identities. The second and third sphere shift from the textual space of the rulebook to the performative and experiential dimensions activated by the specific act of playing the game. They remain outside the scope of this discussion, because its focus remains on the aestheticization of self-fashioning-related motifs, and the way it resonates in the construction of specific gameworlds with the analogical process of appropriating and aestheticizing the Goth subcultural connotations. Nevertheless, the left-out performative and experiential aspects of the games invite further exploration of the RPG medium in terms of self-fashioning, which would, however, require stand-alone research.

A part of such research potential deals with the employment of the role-played character in broader identity projects – analogically to the Goth investments in vampirism. As already mentioned, exemplary analyses of vampiric fiction used in personal self-fashioning are offered by Ferreday (110–119) and Mellins. In game studies, the subject of possible relations and dynamics between the player and the character they role-play is discussed, among others by Sarah Lynne Bowman, who identifies nine ways of positioning role-played characters toward the player's own identity so that "[t]he enactment of these personas chang[es] the role-players' understanding of themselves and the world around them" (5). Other authors exploring the player-character dynamics in analog RPGs include Mike Pohjola, who problematizes the functioning of character-triggered immersion in the game (81–96). Also Petri Lankoski and Simo Järvelä turn from the concept of immersion to "embodied cognition" in their insight into the psychology of role-playing. Ari-Pekka Lappi, in turn, scrutinizes the process of the character's in-game interpretation that tends to divert from its preliminary, predesigned version (97–106).[50]

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[50] The dynamics of connections between the player and their character/avatar is also a major study subject in video-game scholarship, not directly related to the subject of this section but worth acknowledging as closely related to and often overlapping with research focused on analog RPGs (Aarseth "Just"). Numerous explorations of interactions between the player and their character – perceived as a conglomerate of fiction, game mechanics, and the player's somatic engagement – include, among others, Rune Klevjer's phenomenological approach ("Enter the Avatar: The Phenomenology of Prosthetic Telepresence in Computer Games"), Daniel Vella's semiotic analysis ("A Structural Model for Player-characters as Semiotic Constructs"), or Henrik Smed Nielsen's employment of somaesthetics (*Playing Computer Games: Somatic*

The third factor in the game-related self-fashioning may come from the way the given individual positions themselves toward the game and forms their identity as a player, be it for the sake of the specific gameplay experience or as an element of a broader communal experience revolving around RPG as a social activity. As I argue elsewhere with regard to digital games, the very act of exposing oneself to the simultaneous stimulation and regulation of one's activity as a player may inspire acts of self-fashioning (Zarzycka "Gra"). While their intentionality, scale or durability constitute an issue to be explored in a stand-alone project, the very relevance of identity formation as a part of the play experience is confirmed by the prominence of that topic in both analog and digital game studies. Most early academic insights into RPG concentrated on characterizing the games as an overall social, cultural and artistic phenomenon, as reflected, among others, by Gary A. Fine's *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (1983) and Daniel Mackay's *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art* (2001). Simultaneously, however, analytical interest in players' approaches to the act of playing emerged as another important focus of RPG theorizations, attracting the attention of game practitioners as well as researchers. It resulted in the identification and subsequent modifications of three basic modes of play, sometimes labeled as the Threefold Model and its subsequent transformations – Three Way Model (Pohjola 83) or the Big Model (White 36). The attitudes it highlights are gamism, dramatism and simulationism, which emphasize, respectively, gameplay tasks, narrative investment in the game's fiction, and the internal coherence of actions and events within the game. Among the main contributors to the development of this typology are John Kim ("More," 1998), Ron Edwards (1999), and Petter Bøckman (2002). The further evolution and impact of the three original categories have been traced by, among others, Kim ("Evolution," 2005), Pohjola (2004), J. Tuomas Harviainen (2009) or William J. White (2016).[51]

Experience and Experience of the Somatic). Hanna Roine focuses primarily on the narrative aspect of playing in "How You Emerge from This Game is up to You: Agency, Positioning and Narrativity in *The Mass Effect Trilogy*," while Esther MacCallum-Stewart discusses the political investments of player-character relationships in "Take That, Bitches! Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives." Kristine Jorgensen analyzes player informants' approaches to their avatars ("'I'm Overburdened!' An Empirical Study of the Player, the Avatar, and the Gameworld"). Peter Bayliss, in "Beings in the Game-World: Characters, Avatars and Players," and Luca Papale in "Beyond Identification: Defining the Relationships between Player and Avatar" categorize the kinds of relationships between players and their characters. Amanda Lange discusses the moral aspects of the player–avatar interaction in "You're Just Gonna Be Nice: How Players Engage with Moral Choice Systems." Emma Westcott uses performance theory to depict the said interaction in terms of a puppet–puppeteer connection in "The Player Character as Performing Object." Tom Apperley and Justin Clemens consider the biopolitical impact of the player-character dynamics in "The Biopolitics of Gaming: Avatar-Player Self-Reflexivity in Assassin's Creed III." Annika Waern bridges analog and digital RPG by exploring players' emotional involvement in "'I'm in Love with Someone that Doesn't Exist!' Bleed in the Context of a Computer Game."

   [51] Analyses and systematizations of players' attitudes to the act of playing have also been widespread with regard to digital games. Karen Tanenbaum and Joshua Tanenbaum present a spectrum of such typologies in "Commitment to Meaning: A Reframing of Agency in Games" (2009).

The self-fashioning potential connected with the very act of playing a game is confirmed by the availability of game style labels, often expressed in identity-related terms, as one can be called or call themselves a gamist, a dramatist, a simulationist, etc. Moreover, those identifications have originated from players' own communal pursuits – mostly the activity of a UseNet community rec.games.frp.advocacy (Kim "Evolution") and The Forge: The Internet Home for Independent Role-Playing Games (White 36–39). However, as specified at the beginning of this chapter, the immediate scope of my analysis is limited to one zone of the possible overlaps between self-fashioning strategies and RPG, namely, the narrative and fictional layer of the game, textualized in the rulebooks. This discussion is devoted to the functioning of the Goth aesthetics in such texts, and to the ways they employ subcultural self-fashioning in the worldbuilding,[52] as well as plot and character design. As David Jara puts it, RPGs "present us from the beginning with an intrinsic theoretical dilemma: the fact that a 'proper', fixed, 'main text' is unavailable. Indeed, the actual role-playing game narratives only emerge within the game session itself and exist ephemerally within its

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[52] The way fiction functions in and is constructed by an RPG rulebook is efficiently grasped by the concept of the storyworld. Originating from the area of transmedial storytelling where it marks the shift of fiction creators' and audience's focus from the development of a specific plot to the narrative potential of its setting. Marie-Laure Ryan defines storyworld "through a static component that precedes the story and a dynamic component that captures the unfolding of the events" (364). Two other terms that frame a spectrum useful to position fiction in an RPG rulebook are Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca's "transmedial world" and Espen Aarseth's "cybertext" and "ergodicity." As Klastrup and Tosca put it, "[t]ransmedial worlds are abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms" (409). The main purpose of an RPG rulebook is to establish such an "abstract content system" so that the players may use it for generating their own game plots and protagonists. What is different is that the "actualization" of such fictions is mostly limited to the game sessions. While a session might be argued to meet at least some major demands of a transmedial experience, it may and usually does involve a variety of auxiliary media, such as scenario scripts, character sheets, sometimes artistic visualizations, handcrafted props, etc., but rarely uses full-blown trans- or intermediality. That is why Espen Aarseth's concept of "cybertext" is useful in defining the RPG rulebook's treatment of fiction, while his "ergodic process" points to some characteristics of the player's part in co-creating that fiction. Aarseth introduces those two terms to pinpoint a fundamental difference between the postmodern perception of literary texts as "games" offering space for the reader to play with meanings and texts that are "game worlds" on the level of their "logical structure" (*Cybertext* 4) – such as, among others, games designed to be explored by the player. "Cybertext," therefore, "focuses on the mechanical organization of the text, by positing the intricacies of the medium as an integral part of the literary exchange." The other crucial feature of "cybertext" is that "it also centers attention on the consumer, or user, of the text." The latter, apart from doing the imaginative and mental work of any addressee of fiction, "also performs in an extranoematic sense. During the cybertextual process, the user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of 'reading' do not account for." Aarseth labels that kind of interaction with the text as "ergodic literature," where "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1). An RPG rulebook definitely manifests "cybertextual" features, as it is designed to serve as a mere foundation for a more complex activity of collective fiction building that involves script writing, game mechanics, and improvised role-playing. Thus, the creation of fiction based on the game rulebook steps beyond "traversing" the text but simultaneously remains contained within the single design of the RPG as a comprehensive medium.

boundaries" (40). Such volatile narratives can take shape thanks to two pre-existent approximations of the fiction created during the game: the rulebook, which provides the overall fictional and mechanical game environment, and the specific scenario, which predesigns the particular plot to be pursued and elaborated during the game (40). Thus, among those three textual and narrative layers of an RPG, the rulebook is the most tangible one and provides the generated fiction with a structural dimension in which, with regard to WoD, I locate the appropriation of self-fashioning strategies. As a part of the gameworld especially prominent in the original games from the 1990s, the appropriated self-fashioning practices and strategies may possibly reach out to the actual player through the specific plots and gameplay sessions. Thus, they might, perhaps, be extrapolated onto the sphere of the player's individual practices and experience brought by the act of play, yet in this chapter I do not aspire to pose any postulates with regard to the experiential dimension of RPGs.

This chapter discusses subcultural self-fashioning mechanisms which, inscribed in the structure and logic of WoD and CoD gameworlds, affect players' characters. In the original games, some among the major world- and character-building factors can be traced back to the generic components of subcultural capital identified and explored in Thornton's adaptation of Bourdieu's capital theory. The overlaps between Gothic monstrosity and subcultural rhetorics in WoD literally empower the alternative against the mainstream, thus replacing the subcultural capital with the "supernatural" one. The construction of player characters responds not only to the basic condition of subcultural capital, namely, positioning oneself against the mainstream, but also two main concep-tualizations of such positioning in the history of social studies. The first mode depicts subculture in terms of a deviation from the norm or compensation for not meeting its standards, as exemplified by the works of American scholars – Howard Becker, Robert Merton and Albert Cohen (Williams, "Youth" 573–574). The other mode interprets subculture in terms of political rebellion against the system, as exemplified by the activ-ity of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and especially Stuart Hall or Dick Hebdidge (Williams, "Youth" 375). Other aspects of subcultural capital employed as the gameworld's conceptual framework include the "fantasy of classless-ness" (Thornton 12), "a buffer against social ageing" (102), and "knowledge one cannot learn in school" (13). The fictionalization of the cultural underground machinery in the medium offering entertainment in the form of recreational role-playing may be seen as a symptom of the countercultural paradigm being appropriated and commercialized in the reality of "flexible capitalism." However, the fusion of subculture and fiction in RPGs constitutes also a generationally conditioned (and undoubtedly class-influenced) renegotiation of sociopolitical engagement.

As implied by Bowman, RPG itself can be counted among subcultural phenom-ena affected by growing popularization:

The subcultural practice of role-playing games emerged […] [among others] from several cul-tural shifts inherent to American life in the latter half of the twentieth century. These shifts include culture-wide paradigm shifts regarding diversity, religion, and alternative lifestyles; an increased interest

in the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and horror; a heightened sense of cynicism and self-awareness characteristic of Generation X; and the large-scale technological advances characteristic of the computer and information age. (1)

Focusing on the generational dimension of those transformations, Bowman reads the WoD games as a unique artifact shaped by the sensitivities of "Generation X," consisting of "hyperconscious individuals [who] perceived the degradation of the world around them in terms of the greed, corruption, and destruction of the environment brought on by the 'mentality of excess' of the Baby Boomers" (20–21). Thus, a continuity is established between American countercultural agendas and the WoD fiction. Bowman depicts it not as capitalizing on the anti-systemic ideals but rather forming a new, generationally adjusted channel for their expression and negotiation in the face, one might add, of disappointments brought by the limited effectiveness of the original cultural revolution of the 1960s:

> Gen Xers […] became painfully aware of their own participation in the negative developments of the modern world, such as the exploitation and oppression of marginalized social groups. The guilt inspired by such awareness found outlets in popular culture, as Gen Xers felt compelled to expose their deeper issues in a confessional manner […] Role-playing games such as White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1991) surged in popularity during the nineties and in the early part of the twenty-first century, thematically exploring this sense of hyperawareness and critique of power, consumption, and greed. *Vampire*, along with the other games in the World of Darkness, presented a fight against the overwhelming sense of "evil" and self-interest that have become prevalent in the modern world. (21)

What is important, the cultural impact of such politically and idealistically invested attitudes seems singularly attached to the historical moment from which WoD originates. Authors such as Bowman, Mason, or Stenros and Sihvonen highlight the emergence of White Wolf's games as a major step in RPG's journey toward the status of an accomplished and multiform cultural phenomenon irreducible to its subcultural affinities. Indeed, CoD – the games' remake targeted at the 21st-century audience – abandon the most spectacular employments of subcultural capital, redefining the gameworld as "modern Gothic" (VtR[53] 14). This transformation centralizes the uncanny by highlighting local settings and the volatility of human understanding of the world; it also replaces the focus on distinct idealistic agendas driving the supernatural communities with the problematization of the supernatural creatures' identities.

Thus, while the operation of positioning oneself against the normative vision of reality remains a relevant axis of the player character's experience, it is more likely to signify negotiation of their identity in an unstable and ontologically fluid world than their solidified resistance. Risky situations and struggles against threats, deadly enemies or rivals are, understandably, an indispensable part of action provided by most RPG scenarios, however, White Wolf productions have been perceived as tackling the issue

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[53] The references to the game rulebooks discussed in this chapter need to differentiate between the titles of particular WoD books and their CoD equivalents. Additionally, two editions of the WoD *Werewolf* game are quoted: the second edition from 1998 and the third edition from 2000. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, the parenthetical references use abbreviations listed at the end of this chapter (206).

of survival also on a more existential plain of identity formation. With regard to the original WoD, Bowman interprets the games' "narrative of personal horror" as "resonating strongly with the moral concerns and sense of guilt experienced by the Gen Xers" (22). She seeks parallels between the characters' need of keeping their monstrosity at bay in order to preserve their identities and the generational frustration caused by a sense of unpreventable co-participation in the unfair socio-political system. In CoD, the struggle for identity survival seems more dispersed, and the potential empowerment granted by the self-fashioning strategies available to the characters enables not so much rebellion against the existing order as sustainment of a balanced identity. It is a challenging task in the face of the ontological uncertainty experienced by the supernatural communities, as well as the general fluidity and relativity of insights into reality's many dimensions. As argued and exemplified below, both WoD and CoD's approaches to identity survival subscribe, in their respective ways, to Greenblattian self-fashioning rendered through submission and negation, but differ in their treatment of subcultural capital.

The Rebellious *World of Darkness*

The major games comprising the original WoD include *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1991), *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* (1992), *Mage: The Ascension* (1993), *Wraith: The Oblivion* (1994), and *Changeling: The Dreaming* (1995).[54] Each of them offers an introductory description of their shared setting, labeled as "Gothic-Punk." This is how it is presented to the reader[55] in *Vampire*, the first oeuvre of the series:[56]

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[54] This discussion of both WoD and CoD focuses on four major games (dealing with vampires, werewolves, mages, and changelings), as in the 1990s they formed the core of the gameworld and later developed immediate equivalents in its post-2004 edition. Both the 1990s and the 2000s universes include also other games, dealing for instance with demons, mummies, or humans fighting against supernatural threat, which have not been taken into account for the sake of this chapter's brevity. The "canonic" rulebooks of the original WoD include also *Wraith: The Oblivion* (1994), eliminated from the scope of my analysis due to its slight compositional differences as compared to the remaining games (for instance the lack of clearly specified character types available to the player), as well as its relatively low contribution to WoD's overall popularity. *Wraith* was found to be controversial due to its exceptionally sensitive matter – a problem which escalated when an extension addressing the Holocaust was published (Zarzycka, *Socialized Fiction* 59). The game has, however, continued to receive both producers' and players' attention; it also has an equivalent in CoD – *Geist: The Sin Eaters* (2009).

[55] In most cases, a person getting acquainted with an RPG rulebook might simultaneously be perceived as a potential or actual player as such texts are not often read for their own sake. Still, because such stand-alone readings still happen, or at least are entirely possible, and – more importantly – because the source material for this discussion is limited to the rulebook text, with only marginal considerations of its further role in the gameplay experience, I stick to the label of the reader rather than player or reader/player.

[56] The quoted fragment comes from the game's second edition (1997). Particular editions of each game differ in their narrative and structural layers but pertain to the same overall vision of the gameworld. The edition of each game rulebook analyzed in this chapter is indicated in the Works Cited section.

The Gothic aspect describes the ambiance and institutions of mortal society […] Architecture has a menacing gothic flavor to it; in fact, some skyscrapers in this world might be girded with gargoyles. The Punk describes the way people live – the gangs rule the streets and organized crime dominates the underworld […] Rock, punk and rap are even more of an escape and release, and rebellion is codified in styles of dress and speech. All in all, the world is more corrupt, more decadent and less humane than any suburbanite would like to believe. (29)

The description builds up the general atmosphere of the game environment through rather cursory references to several different aspects of reality – architecture, social structure, art, individual somaesthetics and ethical evaluation. Their common denominator is the appropriation of subcultural discourse and especially the mainstream–underground polarity. It is used not only to increase the sense of danger connected with the common lawbreaking and violence but also to give an ontological dimension to appearance, behavior, and taste in music as tools of creating an "alternative" attitude. The final reference to the "suburban" sensitivities invokes a stereotype of the American middle-class culture's narrowmindedness and naiveté, which the gameworld itself is suggested to undermine.

The suggestion of subversion is further reinforced as the particular rulebooks establish the perspectives of their respective supernatural communities toward the society of ordinary humans. Even though the Gothic monsters form marginal fractions at the outskirts of the human society, and are bound by rules of secrecy not to reveal the existence of their communities,[57] the names they give to mortals are sometimes contemptuous, and in most cases suggestive of human limitations. Vampires, for obvious and explicitly objectifying reasons, refer to them as "vessels" (VtM 55); mages informally call them "mundanes" (MtAs 11). Werewolves describe mortals in derogatory slang metaphors of "the flock" and "sheep" (WtA 27), while changelings use words such as "sot," "sot-head" or "sot-brain" as rather offensive nicknames for ordinary humans (CtD 9). Thus, the expressions employed in the rulebooks polarize a uniform, conventional and largely ignorant mainstream of the mortal society against the initiated communities of Gothic creatures aware of the complexities of the world.

Moreover, the characterizations of the monstrous societies further reinforce the subcultural undertone of their positioning in the gameworld by playing with the paradigms of deviance and resistance, which have influenced the growth of theoretical reflection on alternative cultural movements. Williams traces the paradigm of deviance back to the beginnings of the American subcultural studies, which he

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[57] Masquerade – the first of the six fundamental laws of the vampire community – forbids vampires "to reveal [their] true nature to those not of the Blood" (VtM 36). A similar commandment is included in Litany – werewolves' song of laws (WtA 34). Mages need to be very careful when countering the rules of the consensual reality based on the dominant scientific worldview (MtAs 16–17, 38–41, 52–53) because acts of magic expose their practitioners to "Paradox" – the detrimental impact of "[a]n anomalous state of reality caused when a mage disrupts the momentum of reality with her own magical power" (9). Changelings' laws, the Escheat, also stress the importance of keeping humans unaware of the faerie (CtD 79).

connects with the development of the Chicago School sociology. Inspired by the early-20th-century studies of urban crime and poverty carried out, among others, by Frederic Thrasher or Paul Cressey, the "subculture concept became useful in explaining social pathologies" (Williams, "Youth" 574) – a tendency still influential in American criminology (575).[58] Possibly more sympathetic toward subcultures yet still sustaining the deviance paradigm was research building on Robert Merton's "strain theory," which "posit[ed] that disjunctures between the cultural goals of a society and the ability of its members to achieve those goals cause[s] psychological strain for individuals" (Williams, "Youth" 574). Reactions to such overwhelming conditions included, as argued by other sociologists, "creat[ion of] new alternative subcultural frames of reference" (574).

The paradigm of resistance, framed by the class-oriented rhetorics, derives, in turn, from the British cultural studies shaped in the 1970s by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (575). Invested in the Marxism-inspired approach to culture, and relying on semiotics in the analyses of the source material, British theorists such as Clarke or Hebdidge, reconceptualized subcultures "as sites of resistance to cultural hegemony – the struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat for cultural and social power" (576). Williams highlights, first and foremost, the historical relevance of the deviance- and resistance-oriented research directions, as well as their contribution to the further development of subcultural studies (577). Still, they simultaneously reflect broader cultural codifications of the subculture phenomenon, which resonate with the construction of WoD's supernatural creatures.

Vampires take their deviance to a basic existential level by perpetuating "The Riddle" of their moral experience, namely that "to prevent the occurrence of greater atrocities, one must commit evil deeds of a lesser nature. The proverb is: *monsters we are lest monsters we become*" (VtM 55). Thus, the "personal horror" of player characters is designed to revolve around handling their deviance by protecting their connection with the normative "humanity," constantly threatened by the monstrous part of the vampire identity known as "The Beast" (12). Two other leading themes of *Vampire*, which Bowman identifies as "the basic survival" (120) and the "theme of political machinations […] reminiscent of Machiavelli's *The Prince*" (122), do not seem to facilitate the employment of the resistance paradigm. Rather than encourage an ideal-driven struggle with the system, they suggest the focus on individual gains and progress in the complicated network of the supernatural society. And still, the game does offer space and tools for embracing iconic resistance, as one of the seven vampire clans to which player characters may belong, known by the name of Brujah,

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[58] It is to be underlined that deviance was not always conceptualized as overtly negative. For instance, in his seminal *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1963) Howard S. Becker flatly refutes the understanding of deviance in terms of sickness (5–7) and, moving deviance from the realm of a subject's characteristics to the realm of social interaction, defines it as "the product of a transaction that takes place between some social group and one who is viewed by that group as a rule-breaker" (10).

is almost completely composed of rebels of one kind or another, forever searching for the ultimate expression of their individuality. The Brujah are punks, skinheads, bikers, death-rockers, freaks, socialists and anarchists […] the only thing that unites them is their desire to overthrow the social system, be it vampiric or mortal, and replace it with one of their own making (or with nothing at all). (VtM 126)

Thus, while the game seems to centralize subtle power plays, it also creates at least one vent for overt political rebellion.

Werewolves, the trademark tragic hybrids in the classical Gothic convention, seem far less bothered with their deviance than the vampires – perhaps because they perceive it not as a monstrosity but a natural force: "We're born with a portion of the world's soul in our bodies. That's where our power comes from – we *are* nature. We're spirits made flesh. We're creatures of the two worlds – man and beast, flesh and spirit" (WtA Revised 7). This, in turn, reinforces the impact of the resistance paradigm in the game: werewolves, as a species, are dedicated to the protection of Gaia – "Mother Earth, Mother Nature […] the entire universe" (12) – from the destructive forces which, though supernatural, make use of the profit-oriented, capitalistic constitution of the modern world to increase their power through business, corporations, and industry. Thus, the rulebook conceptualization of werewolves employs, among other things, variously realized and gradably intense but generally unquestioned environmentalism. In addition, four out of thirteen lycanthrope tribes available to the player character are built around social and ethnic identities often connected with marginalization: Black Furies are an all-female tribe "practic[ing] feminism with a vengeance" (WtA Revised 68); Bone Gnawers, "[a]lways the underdogs […] helping the 'common man' triumph despite impossible odds" (70), gather street-living and poverty-stricken outcasts of city populations. Uktena are of Native American origin yet recruit members from among ethnic minorities in general: "as the most multicultural tribe, they've also inherited many of the legacies of the dispossessed" (88), while Wendigo are an exclusively Native American tribe dedicated to the preservation of its ancient heritage and territories from the impact of other cultures (90). Thus, the construction of the player character is open to more than one form of not only marginalization, but also active challenge to the normative world order. Such possibilities, while potentially exposed to investigations in the direction of cultural appropriation, become illustrative of Spooner's claim about the prominence of "the assimilative monster" in the 21st-century popular culture. As she argues, the popularity of monsters to empathize or integrate with – both processes constituting relevant contexts for the player-character relationship – "is a direct result of the gains in feminism, civil rights and gay liberation since the 1960s and tolerance of alternative lifestyle choice is an extension of that process" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 186).

In the case of mages, deviance and resistance symbolically merge into one in the name "Reality Deviants," given to the practitioners of magic by the Technocracy (MtAs 49) – the current winners in "The Ascension War," which is "an ongoing conflict between mage factions, with the future of reality as the prize" (8). The normative explication of the world, based on scientific and technological progress and shared by

the overwhelming majority of humans, is secretly modeled and sustained by Technocrats, "whose magick, based on scientific principle, conforms and shapes modern reality" (7). Guarding their hold of human worldviews, Technocracy strives to eliminate the Traditions – rival groups of mages to which player characters belong, and which sustain their own paradigms, alternative to the technocratic one.

Therefore, the label of "Reality Deviants" reflects both the non-normative status of most mages and their active struggle to overthrow the existent world order. Similarly as in the case of vampire clans and werewolf tribes, some of the Traditions additionally make use of subversive, marginalized or subcultural identities. Cult of Ecstasy pursue transcendence through intense sensations and believe that "only by transcending every barrier […] can you truly reach beyond your own inner walls" (98). Dreamspeakers "stan[d] for the dispossessed, or those whose cultures have been overthrown like the land itself" (100) and cultivate indigenous approaches to spirituality, rooted in numerous tribal cultures. The Hollow Ones, finally, draw inspiration directly from Goth subculturalism, "the Roaring Twenties," and "Romantic poets." Their further characterization is clearly reminiscent of the Goth self-presentations discussed in the previous chapters: "Hollow Ones realize that the modern world sucks, so they wrap themselves in the trappings of a more romantic time – a time when you could compose sonatas and end up buried alive. These Darklings mirror their own sense of displacement in their fixation with tragedy. Loners from the start, they set themselves further apart with eccentric dress and sarcastic manner" (112).

Like mages, changelings – as the incarnations of faeries in the human reality (CtD 8) – might be argued to embody resistance through the deviance at the very core of their identities:

> In an era when science threatens magic, reducing it to a series of physiochemical reactions or a mechanical progression of causes and effects, changelings proclaim the reality of the inexplicable. […] The children of the Dreaming, by their very existence, break the rules and shatter the conventions of everyday life. Their lives testify to the fact that what is does not have to be […] Powerful forces exist that oppose any change to the status quo. Dreams are subversive, for they contradict the world as we know it. Changelings, even the most traditional ones, act as revolutionaries and rebels, undermining the stark determinism of modern life. (CtD 52)

Still, what mitigates, in their case, the aura of politicized rebellion is the predominantly nostalgic undertone of changelings' existence, testifying to the loss of faerie realms that have been cut off from the human world (CtD 51). Moreover, their presence has an altogether supportive influence on the humankind:

> Changelings radiate hope in a world buried in drabness. The embodiments of creativity and the power to dream, these remnants of the fae protect and nurture those fading shreds of wonder and imagination that still remain. Without them, reality would collapse under the weight of its own Banality, disbelieving in anything that could not be seen or touched or experienced by the physical senses. (52)

Though *Changeling*'s nostalgic romanticism is by all means susceptible to political readings, it does not appeal to the resistance paradigm as explicitly as the rebelliousness of the other supernatural species.

All in all, while the bonds between all the attributes of deviance or rebellion and the rhetoric of subculturalism are equally strong, an additional factor reinforcing the overall relevance of WoD's underground affiliations are the aesthetic and paratextual layer of the rulebooks. As Jara underlines, "the rulebook […] features a variety of framing elements […] [that] can be said to have a *double function* by marking *two artifacts*: the rulebook proper and the textual interface produced during play" (46). Thus, details such as illustrations and other graphic elements, font choices, or intertextual networking realized via motto-like quotations or texts of culture recommended to players reach out from the textual dimension of the game system to the acts of gameplay experience and character performance.

Many supernatural characters in *Vampire: The Masquerade* are illustrative of Spooner's identification of a broader pop-cultural "convention of costuming vampires as Goths" (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 90) whose emergence she locates "in the 1990s, echoing the increasing visibility of Goth aesthetics in pre-millenial culture" (91). Visual depictions of the WoD vampires include such props as black hide rocker jackets, latex outfits, crosses in various shapes, dark glasses, tattoos, and other attributes alluding first of all to the Goth aesthetic. Clearly Goth-fashioned characters occasionally appear also in other games (MtAs 112; CtD 103, 232). Turning to Haiko Wandhoff's discussion of illustrative art, Jara perceives an RPG rulebook's front-cover design as aimed to precede the text itself in conveying its subject matter (Jara 48). The said concept might be extended also onto in-book pictures, which support visualizations of the gameworld and characters in specific employments of the game. In the second editions of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1997) and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* (1998), an even more explicit bond between the games and the cultural "underground" comes from their numerous references to music. The sample scopes of the first 50 pages of both rulebooks contain, in their second edition, motto-like quotes of song lyrics coming from such icons of the Goth movement as The Cure (VtM 25; WtA 32), Joy Division (VtM 26), and Sisters of Mercy (WtA 29), as well as other "dark" favorites – Tom Waits (WtA 21) and Dead Can Dance (31). Apart from that, the list contains – next to the classics: The Rolling Stones (VtM 31), The Who (31), and Metallica (WtA 24) – an array of new-wave-, punk-, hardcore- and hip-hop-inspired groups: Minor Threat (VtM 26), Big Black (27), Fear (31), Circle Jerks (34), Ice-T (41), Dead Kennedys (43), Swans (45), Killing Joke (WtA 30), Oingo Boingo (35), and Public Enemy (35). Such paratextual reinforcement of the gameworld's rebellious subculturalism may be argued to reach beyond the immediate context of the books' content. Jara locates RPG rulebooks' paratextual and "framing" aspects which affect the reader's conceptualization of the game in that they "imply reductions of the imagined world," "create expectations concerning the playing of the game," and "affect the interpretation players make of diegetic events" (52). Thus, while marginal in the overall structures of the texts they belong to, the abovementioned employments of subcultural artifacts may be seen as a part of that process.

Such tangible yet minor appropriations of subcultural attributes in the WoD games correspond with structural solutions on the level of both gameplay and narrative. Thornton's *Club Cultures* elaborates on various aspects of "subcultural capital," reliant on and largely compatible with Bourdieu's exploration of "cultural capital." The latter term refers to the type of "power" granted to the individual by their "educational qualifications" manifest "in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; […] in the form of cultural goods," and the "institutional recognition" (Bourdieu, "Forms" 242–243). Reworking the notion of "cultural capital" to capture the specificity of subculture, Thornton defines "subcultural capital" as "confer[ring] status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder" (11), which indicates the functionality of such "capital" first and foremost within the specific communal framework. Two among the term's further characteristics, namely "a fantasy of classlessness" (12) and "extra-curricular […] knowledge one cannot learn in school" (13), are especially relevant for the functioning of the player characters in WoD.

As Thornton puts it, "[s]ubcultural capitals fuel rebellion against, or rather escape from, the trappings of parental class" (12) thanks to the alternative communal dynamics and areas of competence that enable detachment from the limitations of identity connected with the individual's overall social background. A similar effect of release from social petrification is likely to affect the gameworld characters as they shift from their existence in the ordinary human society to the elaborate hierarchies of the secret supernatural communities. *Vampire*, which, as already mentioned, focuses, among others, on political advancement, establishes a rather clear hierarchy between both social realities: "On one level, the world of the vampire is the world of mortals. A vampire moves in the world of mortals much as a nobleman moves in the forest of beasts while hunting. Just as the noble has his castles and courts, however, so the vampire has a world of his own, where he may consort with his own kind" (VtM 15). Moreover, though the supernatural community organization is described as "paralleling mortal society in both function and form" (15), the particular character's status and agency in both realities may be different.

Such discrepancies have a chance to become even more spectacular in *Werewolf* or *Mage*, which underline the importance of groups recognized as marginal in the human society. Lycanthropes strongly rely on wolf-inspired domination instincts that imply clear chains of command established by means functional exclusively in the werewolf community (WtA Revised 40–42). Thus, while the power structures among werewolves tend to be both determining and dynamic, they are also largely independent from human hierarchies, so characters may experience status shifts as they navigate between the two realities. The society of mages is less intensely determined by a single hierarchy, though particular fractions sometimes develop their own orders. It does, however, possess an official system of "Ranks and Titles," which are determined by "a mage's relative enlightenment" (MtAs 46). Thus, status seems even more susceptible to a character's individual agency than in the case of the highly competitive

werewolves and is controlled by the supernatural and spiritual criteria having little to do with those relevant in the ordinary society.

The supernatural community's organization in *Changeling* is, perhaps, most striking, as it draws not so much from a "fantasy of classlessness," as a nostalgia for a historically specific social order – "14th century feudalism" (CtD 74). Having awakened to the faerie world, a character steps into a complicated network of aristocratic privilege, class-induced commitments, alliances and dependencies, which closely follows political solutions typical of the human society of the medieval Europe (74–78). As a consequence, changeling characters' social positioning among their human contemporaries is contrasted with a much more advanced hierarchy which, however, can offer a rewarding sense of belonging, purpose, and identity. Paradoxically, *Changeling* is simultaneously founded upon yet another class-related aspect of subcultural capital: "a buffer against social ageing – not against the dread of getting older, but of resigning oneself to one's position in a highly stratified society" (Thornton 102). Indeed, age constitutes an important factor in the individual as well as communal identity of changelings, as it determines their affinity with "Glamour" – the supernatural energy sustaining the faerie (CtD 8). The said bond is crucial for changelings' existence, and in the course of time it tends to weaken due to the lasting exposure of their minds to "Banality – mortal disbelief" (8). Many of the faerie creatures, instead of "pass[ing] peacefully into the Summerlands of old age," surrender to the normative human paradigm (64) and gradually let it absorb their supernatural identities (212). The experience of time-induced change, particularly problematic for the faerie creatures (63–66), may, therefore, be regarded as an embodied realization of "social ageing," as the very fact of being a changeling is an act of resistance against the petrified human reality.

Thus, what particular supernatural communities of WoD share is the exposure of characters to social hierarchies alternative to those generated by the human "mainstream." Those alternatives can hardly be argued to fully realize the "fantasy of classlessness," as they tend to generate their own, frequently demanding and ruthless power structures. However, by doing so, they intensify the experience of abandoning or cutting off from the human social order. Moreover, as the above survey of the supernatural communities exemplifies, the act of stepping into one of them, be it as a creature or a knowledgeable human, always means access to yet another dimension reinforcing "supernatural capital," that is, unique kinds of competence, entirely different from those achievable by ordinary means (Thornton 13). While Thornton's claim that "subcultural capital […] has long defined itself as extra-curricular" (13) may suggest a possibly self-declared character and limited impact of such competence, the insider knowledge in WoD is unquestionably empowering. Expanding from the nuances of the secret politics to an increased awareness of reality's volatile or multilayer character, to the familiarity with other worlds, to the powers enabling survival in and navigation through those worlds' threats and complexities, it grants characters agency. Combined with other obvious perks of becoming a supernatural

creature – physical prowess, magical control over mind and matter, broadened aware-
ness of the world and the self – the "subcultural" education of the Gothic creatures
means tangible advantage over the human "mainstream."

To sum up, the implicit yet active employment of subcultural aesthetics and para-
texts, as well as deviance- and resistance-driven paradigms of difference, gives grounds
for conceptualizing the original WoD games' reliance on the mainstream–underground
rhetoric. Game characters' experience of entering into or belonging in the hidden
supernatural communities may be subtly modeled by the workings of "subcultural cap-
ital" incorporated into the construction of the gameworld's social structures. Simulta-
neously, however, the tangibility and centralization of the powers attached to characters'
non-human identities forge their "subcultural capital" into what might be relabeled as
"supernatural capital." It could be defined as an impressive range of agency, granted
by both individual and collective attributes of the Gothic creatures, but deriving addi-
tional impetus from the "anti-mainstream" identification. A particular relevance of the
Goth movement for all those implicit subcultural investments of WoD is additionally
enhanced by the historical impact ascribed to the games as they are sometimes argued
to have reshaped the target audience community by shifting their appeal from conven-
tionally "geek" to "dark." Thus, the game series offers a continuum of the subcultural
self-fashioning potential bringing together the incorporation of self-fashioning strat-
egies into the construction of the gameworld, the in-game prominence of the player
character's identity transformations, and the possible semiotic relevance of the partici-
pation in the game for the player's own self-styling.

The Insecure *Chronicles of Darkness*

The transformation of White Wolf's universe from WoD to CoD is not radical. The
gameworld is still home to a disturbingly overdrawn version of the contemporary
human society (VtR 14) unaware of the supernatural communities. The latter, in
turn, continue to look down upon it from their marginal yet empowered positions
(MtAw 14) reached by overcoming the limitations of ordinary human identity. The
major source of vampires' angst, largely responsible for the original game series' fame
as appealing to Goth and otherwise "fringe" audiences, remains connected with the
"unanswerable riddle: 'A Beast I am lest a Beast I become'" (VtR 16). Subcultural
and more recognizably Goth imagery – for instance outfit details, tattoos, occasional
BDSM references – is still scattered around numerous illustrations (e.g. *The World of
Darkness* inlay cover page, 53, 66; VtR 81, 88, 126, 166, 201), and the "Sources and
Inspiration" section in *Vampire: The Requiem* explicitly recommends Goth music (17).

Still, the subcultural logic is gone from the gameworld's construction, arguably
replaced with a more overall turn to classic preoccupations of the literary and cultural
Gothic. Talking about the responsivity of the Gothic to "contemporary ideas," David

Punter lists among such preoccupations "phantoms," "spectres," "the uncanny" (2), and "boundaries" (8). Further characterizing the convention, he argues that:

what Gothic and much contemporary criticism and cultural commentary share is indeed an overreaching, even a sublime, *awareness* of mutability, an understanding of the ways in which history itself, and certainly narratives of history, are not stable, do not constitute a rock onto which we might cling – indeed, as Gothic has always sought to demonstrate to us, there are no such rocks, there is no sure foundation. (3)

The impact of the Gothic, as Punter understands it, upon the underlying structure of CoD is confirmed by Jara's analysis of the cover design of *The World of Darkness: Storytelling System Rulebook* (2004) – the publication introducing the revamped version of White Wolf's universe. Considering the work of paratext in the book's cover, Jara shows how its visual details signal what may be expected from the game itself (48). His reading is dominated by impressions of insecurity, fallibility of senses, and existential confusion – all of which correspond with Punter's specification of the Gothic.

The game's titular phrase, *World of Darkness*, "already conveys an ominous feeling, a certain uneasiness that relies heavily on the general association that is made between darkness and the fear of the unknown" (Jara 47). In combination with the cover illustration, this impression is "transformed into definite suspense by the almost topical motif of the lone figure in the dark alleyway" (Jara 47). The picture reveals game setting as "a familiar one" (47) – a small piece of contemporary urban landscape – and yet makes it the source of anxiety, thus engaging the Gothic uncanny. Jo Collins and John Jervis define the uncanny as a specifically modern concept, an aftereffect of the rationalistic paradigm in which:

The "supernatural," as a category, comes to contrast with the "natural", as the realm of the "real," object of empirical knowledge. The uncanny arises out of the supposedly and necessarily *empty* character of the supernatural as a category; it is not so much that the uncanny *fills* this category (with ghosts, *revenants* etc.) – though it may do this readily enough – as that it suggests a fundamental *indecision*, an obscurity or uncertainty, at the heart of our ontology, our sense of time, place, and history, both personal and cultural. And this uncertainty is both unsettling, even potentially terrifying, yet also intriguing, fascinating. Far from being "abnormal," it seems to testify to something fundamentally alienated and dislocated that is pervasive within the modern experience and the modern construction of selfhood. (2)

Discussing the contribution of media technologies detaching sound and picture from their immediate sources to the growth of the uncanny (5–6), they distinguish photography as "conveying the spectrality of self as image, image *of* the body yet separate from it" (5). Indeed, it is the confusing effect produced by the visual part of the cover that Jara interprets as a signal that

menace is not of a natural kind […] This feeling is conveyed by the blurred and "shaky" nature of the image which resembles a badly taken picture. Within it, the objects appear to lack definite borders, giving almost the impression of "seeing double." It is precisely this idea that is further reinforced by the typographical form of the title itself […] whose letters appear to be shifted and slightly displaced. Indeed, what appears at first almost like a printing mistake is yet another indicator of the "otherness" of the "world" presented by the game, giving the idea of an underlying, "hidden" reality. (47)

The challenge to ontological foundations – a factor that Punter highlights as crucial for the contemporary appeal of the Gothic convention – is reflected by the book's very surface.

Actually, the publication of *The World of Darkness* as a stand-alone text signals a new development in the conceptualization of the gameworld. The 1990s WoD series was constituted by a number of gamebooks dedicated to particular supernatural communities and therefore offered specific and well-defined knowledge about various dimensions of the game's deceitful reality. The 2000s rendition starts, by contrast, with *The World of Darkness* as the "core," generic rulebook using the perspective of ordinary humans as a focalizer introducing readers to the supernatural. As a result, they experience a growing but elusive realization that the game reality is not to be taken for granted and its stability depends in reverse proportions on the given individual's awareness of their surroundings. Thus, the uncanny aspect of the setting is given more prominence than in the original games, where the ontological hesitation soon shifts into the discovery of an alternative framework offered by the given supernatural community. Accordingly, the rebellious "Gothic-Punk" is replaced in the worldbuilding with the "modern Gothic" – a factor depicted as follows:

> It's a place very much like our world, sharing the same history, culture and geography. Superficially, most people in this fictional world live the same lives we do. They eat the same food, wear the same clothes, and waste time watching the same stupid TV shows. And yet, in the World of Darkness, shadows are deeper, nights are darker, fog is thicker […] In our world, there are urban legends. In the World of Darkness, there are urban legends whispered into the ears of autistic children by invisible spiders. In the world you're about to enter, the horrors and nightmares of legend aren't just scary bedtime stories – they're real, even though most people don't realize it […] *Maybe the character you create will uncover some secrets of his shadowed world. Maybe he'll become one of those secrets.* (17–18, emphasis added)

Next to the perspective of joining the monster team – the defining experience of the 1990s games – the perspective of exploring the unknown is suggested as a legitimate direction of the gameplay development. *The World of Darkness* rulebook functions mostly as a gateway to the gameworld and is connectible with the subsequent games enabling players to step into the particular supernatural communities – *Vampire: The Requiem* (2004), *Werewolf: The Forsaken* (2005), *Mage: The Awakening* (2005), and *Changeling: The Lost* (2007), to name just the ones most relevant for this discussion. Still, the primary depiction of the setting remains dominated by the Gothic anxiety and is fully capable of containing game experience framed by the very interaction with the unknown.

The game's "theme" ("dark mystery"), "mood" ("dread") and "atmosphere" ("threatening symbolism") (*The World of Darkness* 22–23) further reinforce the importance of hesitation and ambivalence in the CoD series. As a consequence, the original games' coherent visions of the conflicts, goals, and pursuits nurtured by the supernatural societies change into more open-ended constructions giving primacy to localized experience. In the core book it is labeled as "a sense of place" and explained as follows: "[t]he advantage to playing a game of contemporary horror is that it can

take place in your own backyard, literally. You can populate your hometown with all manner of secret terrors, imagining how the local convenience store clerk might really be the thrall of a supernatural creature" (22–23). Such localized perspective privileges fragmentary knowledge and situated actions, which may be helpful in preserving the factor of the unknown also in the game experience embracing the "monsters" point of view.

Not burdened with their predecessor's mission of redefining the RPG culture,[59] CoD seem to generate a more moldable environment. A part of its flexibility comes from the logic of an anxiety-inducing ontological instability (*The World of Darkness* 22) which has replaced the logic of subcultural/supernatural self-fashioning characteristic of the "Gothic-Punk." The default susceptibility of the RPG medium to individual creative undertakings of particular players ensures the continuous possibility of exploring subcultural and resistance-oriented aspects of characters' identities in the 2000s games. However, the strategies of self-fashioning suggested to characters by the underlying structure of the CoD universe seem subordinated to survival achievable by sustaining a balanced identity in the unstable world. The following insight into the transformed versions of two exemplary supernatural communities – werewolves and changelings – shows how the Greenblattian strategies of "submission" and "negation" prove useful in such processes.

The werewolves of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, also known as Garou, can be characterized as determined warriors of Mother Gaia, acting almost as embodiments of its elemental powers and therefore well-attuned to Umbra, the spiritual realm. As highlighted by the following quote from the game's third, revised edition (2000) – the last one before the reinvention of the whole WoD universe:

> We [werewolves] are spirits of the hunt, embodiments of emotion, bearers of ancient meaning and truth. Our breaths are religion. Our actions are timeless. We fight today as we did millennia ago. We bleed as we did millennia ago. Today we are born anew. We are not tired; we are hungry. We are oppressed, and we rage. We live our passions. Our struggle is that of life itself. We keep meaning in the world. Now is the hour of the spirit, the moment of our dawn. We are lords of the unseen kingdom. This is our home, taken from us. (WtA Revised 220)

The defining experience for the Garou kind is the awareness of living at the time of the Apocalypse. This awareness makes their overall mental setup and sense of destiny rather clear. While the Apocalypse has a mystical origin connected with the destruction of harmony between the primal powers of "mad chaos," "perfect order," and "entropic decay" (WtA 42), the game design merges it smoothly with contemporary environmental issues. Interpreting "The Prophecy of the Phoenix," treated by the Garou as the key warning against the approaching doom, a werewolf comments:

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[59] The 1990s White Wolf publications not only attracted "cooler" players than the mostly *Dungeons-and-Dragons*-influenced games of the previous decade by offering darker fiction but also declared a revolutionary intention with regard to the mechanics and gameplay solutions. They introduced a "storytelling system" minimizing the factor of dice rolling and other numerical operations in order to sustain the flow of the narrative and its drama (Mason 9).

That the Prophecy is upon us […] there can be no doubt. […] I tell you now that before this decade dies, this millennium ends, we shall see the first glimpses of the seventh Sign. Already we have seen mass extinction, overpopulation, and the endless disasters of the humans. […] They are destroying Mother's every organ; now she shakes in agony and rage, vomiting ashes into the sky […] These are indeed the last days. The time of prophecy is upon us. Act now we must, for we have no time left for words. (WtA 17)

Also the game's 2000 edition underlines the importance of generational experience: "We've got an impossible task ahead of us. […] Somehow we have to make the world strong enough to survive the Apocalypse. We might all die in the process — it's a very real possibility. And it has to be done in *our* lifetime — no more waiting for our children to fix the planet" (WtA Revised 14).

The above quotes seem to support Bowman's reading of the original WoD games as reflective of Generation X's frustration with its entanglements in undesirable global processes (21–22). The extratextual connections of *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* are further reinforced by the specification of the enemies of the Garou. The main source of evil, the Wyrm, is unquestionably supernatural: "[g]od, demon, monster-spawner, personification of decay" (WtA 44). Its agents, however, include – apart from spirits, monsters and even some werewolves – Pentex Inc.: "[o]ne of the largest corporations in the Gothic-Punk world […] This monolithic holding company controls countless subsidiaries and produces a staggering variety of products […] holds virtual monopolies in certain industries and possesses significant market shares in most others. Pentex is a leader in the global economy. In provides jobs for countless people around the world" (WtA 47). Through Pentex, the human society, economy, and politics become incorporated into the supernatural war; simultaneously, the corporate enemy is depicted as distinctly twisted and confusing in a way responsive to the reality of late capitalism:

Not all of Pentex's actions are evil, nor are all of its agents tools of the Wyrm. Most of its employees and many of its managers are ordinary people going about ordinary jobs. However, many of these "ordinary" jobs do have ulterior purposes unbeknownst to the workers who perform them. The contrast between Pentex's often innocent employees and the vileness of the corporation itself has led more than one Garou to a moral quandary. (47)

Thus, the game outlines a rather clear conflict axis positing player characters against the forces of destruction which combine apocalyptic impact and supernatural spectacularity with everyday routine susceptible, as illustrated by the above quote, to what might, after Hanna Arendt, be called the "banality of evil."

Next to the gameworld's negative depiction of corporation as a dominant attribute of global economy is a similar approach to the scientific paradigm. Apart from the Wyrm-related threats, werewolves need to avoid danger caused by an independent human initiative known as "Developmental Neogenetics Amalgameted." It is another corporate organization, driven by the will of "bettering the world" through scientific pursuit unlimited by any ethical restraints (49). The 2000 edition of *Werewolf* makes a bold generalization by including in the category of "antagonists" both "gov-

ernments" and "corporations." The latter are described as "indifferent or accidental antagonists to the Garou" (286), which, however, does not translate into any positive quality, as "[a]t best they're dupes. At worst, they're greedy opportunists" (287).

An anti-systemic stance, while variously realized and not always equally prominent in the game experience, is, therefore, inseparable from the clearly laid out axis of conflict polarizing the Garou world. In terms of the Greenblattian strategies of dealing with authority, it might suggest the obvious "negation" of the ways of the human majority, as they are likely to pave the way for the ultimate evil. A character discovering their lycanthropic self may, undoubtedly, use it as a "sustaining center" (Greenblatt 129) for an alternative identity model. Simultaneously, however, embracing the Garou identity implies at least one prominent act of "submission" to the unchallenged authority of Gaia. Hence, the major part of "self-knowledge" stimulated, in Greenblatt's reading of Wyatt (125–126), by such an opening of the self comes from the acceptance of an already established system of traditions and values nurtured by the werewolf society. In the case of the game's version reinvented for needs of CoD, however, a werewolf's situation seems more complicated.

The very title of the rulebook, *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, reflects a major change in the existential condition shared by the werewolf characters, here called the Uratha. The supernatural species started its existence with a clear mission to support Father Wolf, a powerful spirit destined "to keep the two worlds [material and spiritual] in check." This positioning made werewolves "shepherds of human, animal and spirit. They culled any herd, tribe or pack that got too large or too dangerous, playing the role of first among predators" (23). When, however, Father Wolf became ineffective, they turned against him, instinctively perceiving him as "the alpha [who] must be replaced." The patricide not only uprooted werewolves from their natural niche in the world order, but also destroyed the harmony between matter and spirit, irreversibly driving their respective domains away from each other. The Uratha stick to their original task but are now left on their own, with very little support: "We destroyed the greatest thing we ever had because it had to be done. We keep the spirit world in check and spirits can't stand us for it […] We are the wolves who hunt in both worlds" (23). Indeed, the immaterial world of The Shadow is depicted as more perilous than its 1990s version – not only because "it is a reflection of the world itself, and it reflects the world's darker nature" but also due to a specific dislike directed by its native inhabitants at werewolves, whom they perceive as "what stand[s] between spirits and the expression of their desires" (36). That is why, instead of an all-determining threat that simultaneously defines the dominant task faced by player characters, the title of the reinvented *Werewolf* game highlights the sense of abandonment.

Indeed, though the Uratha remain creatures conditioned by a mission, in comparison to the well-defined struggle against the Apocalypse, it seems more complex and ambiguous. As already mentioned, the CoD privilege local focus over global schemes, and the Uratha respond particularly well to such a design as they "are territorial creatures, more comfortable on their home turf than anywhere else and re-

luctant to travel" (WtF 218). The limited setting gives background to plots whose "over-arching theme," as declared by the rulebook, "is to hunt or be hunted. Werewolves are not passive creatures. Their instincts compel them to hunt. A werewolf pack aggressively searches out potential threats to its territory, seizing the initiative and actively hunting down its prey — or it will be hunted in turn" (16). On the one hand, the declared locality, while in sync with the overall "modern gothic" setup of the gameworld, might suggest a narrow and possibly monotonous scope of storytelling possibilities. On the other hand, however, it corresponds with the game's horror-oriented convention, fueled by the sense of uncertainty – about the things going on beyond the territory, the kinds of upcoming challenges, or the shifting predator-victim status of players' characters.

Two factors significantly contributing to the ambiguity of the Uratha's situation are the diversity of potential threats, and the sinister depiction of the spiritual world. While the dangers in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* can, in most cases, be traced back to one ultimate source of evil, the Wyrm, the Forsaken face a longer list of problems, at least two among which seem equally serious. "At the heart of Forsaken myth lies a sense of responsibility for the dangerous threat of the Shadow," claims the rulebook (224). Still, the specific forms of such "threat" are unpredictable because the immaterial world, which is driven by the rule of animism giving spiritual manifestations to creatures, objects, places, and even ideas (14, 265–267, 279–281), may spawn a virtually infinite multiplicity of beings shaped by various phenomena in the physical domain (224). The largely negative attitude of The Shadow creatures is not, however, the only line of conflict deriving from the Uratha's legendary origins.

The patricide divided the werewolf kind itself, splitting it into the stigmatized Forsaken and the more powerful "Pure Tribes" – a fraction which did not take part in Father Wolf's murder, and has become a fierce enemy of those who did (24). According to the rulebook's drama-related recommendations, the internal conflict dividing the lycanthropes relies heavily on the uncanny effect of "the alien thought process and cultural values that can lurk behind the eyes of someone who looks perfectly normal." More specifically, "[t]hey look like other werewolves and even act like them, but their values and outlook on the world are utterly different," wherefore, "[t]he Pure are to the Forsaken what werewolves are to other humans; they are a frightening predator with the power of a beast, the intelligence of a human, and the combined cruelty of both" (224). What further complicates the situation is the largely instinctual competition among the Uratha themselves: "Nearby werewolf packs aren't friends and neighbors – they're potential rivals, always eyeing the pack's territory as a potential annex to their own" (224). Thus, the game offers a variety of challenges requiring different modes of action and types of involvement, from deadly animosity to diplomacy, to intra-species power play.

None of the above is to suggest that the 1990s game is significantly more limited, especially since the very design of an RPG as a medium reliant on players' individual input enables creative processing of schematic rulebook solutions. What,

however, makes the multiplicity of potential conflicts in *Werewolf: The Forsaken* relevant is the way it is framed by the game's dramatic emphasis on "horror revolv[ing] around the concept of loss: of territory, of people, of balance and of control" (223). Though the players' characters are the conventional Gothic monsters (223), the rulebook still insists on scaring them by means of a dispersed sense of danger reminiscent of the unspecific anxiety that Massumi claims to characterize much of the contemporary experience. The list of answers in the section "What Do Werewolves Fear?" includes "Themselves" (due to the inherent bestiality and its potential consequences) (223); "Other Werewolves," "Spirits" (224); "Humans" (mostly due to their sheer dominance in numbers) (225–226); and finally, "The Unknown," as the rulebook encourages leaving some threats without clarification (226). While each of the above challenges is tangible and in most cases well-defined, together they seem to cover a broad spectrum of reality dimensions affecting an individual and therefore capable of generating anxiety. The operations of "negation" and "submission," when referred to the generic experience of the Uratha, additionally highlight that aspect of identity formation and locate it in the sphere of survival.

The abandonment of the human social framework following the discovery of one's werewolf identity seems as unavoidable as in the case of the Garou experience, yet the identity-shaping impact of that "negation" is mitigated by the lack of the clear mainstream–subculture divisions typical of the original WoD. A more significant confrontation with authority, defining the whole Uratha kind, seems to date back to its very origins and the moment of the legendary patricide, which might be interpreted as resulting from simultaneous "submission" and "negation." As declared by the rulebook's legend, werewolves were pushed to the murderous decision by their pack instinct focused on the optimal fulfillment of the task assigned to Father Wolf and his descendants. Paradoxically, embracing the authority of their role in the universe has led the Uratha not only to the single and spectacular act of negating and destroying the authority personified by Father Wolf as their leader, but also a continuous negation of the external voices questioning their righteous mission. The patricide shattered the world structure (23); the Pure Tribes gave the killers and their inheritors the label of the Forsaken to stress "the loss of […] the state of grace werewolves enjoyed at the dawn of the world" (18); and the inhabitants of the Shadow "resent these bastard half-flesh wolves' power over the spirit world" (25). Thus, the Uratha's continuous attachment to the role of balance-keepers and watchers of the boundaries between the material and immaterial realm seems largely subjective and preserved in spite of the lasting resistance. The original authority of mystical destiny, which werewolves embraced at the very beginning, has been internalized by the Forsaken and turned into a "sustaining center" of their collective identity, nurtured through the negation of critical voices.

The paradoxical experience of submission implicating negation – and thus the transformation of the fixed external authority into an internalized identity project pursued without affirmation from the world – adds to the overall prominence of

"loss" as well as the instability characteristic of the "modern gothic." From the perspective of individual characters, the impact of such experience may be mitigated by the process of introduction into the Uratha society, largely reminiscent of the one known from the 1990s game. Upon discovering their lycanthropic identity, a character still steps into a hierarchical and complex network of the werewolf culture, politics and history against which they need to identify themselves. However, the ambivalence inscribed into the very logic of the Forsaken's world appears to render the entirety of their experience in terms of survival rather than resistance. For the 1990s Garou, life is full of threats and the struggle for survival in the face of the Apocalypse may seem hopeless by definition, yet it is simultaneously driven by their unswayed dedication to a higher cause. The Uratha also do pursue their mission as protectors of the inter-world balance; however, their ambivalent part in the original destruction of that balance and the complicated transformation of their predestined role in the universe seem to make simple survival a more prominent aspect of their efforts. More importantly, it functions not only on the literal level of physical self-preservation – unquestionably a crucial trigger of action in both *Werewolf* games – but also on an ontological level of self-definition. An analysis of the degree to which characters actively fashion themselves as the Forsaken during the game remains outside the scope of this discussion. Nevertheless, the changes in the gameworld logic as compared to the 1990s version undoubtedly facilitate the problematization of werewolves' identity and highlight the complexity of ways in which positioning toward authority can be used in an identity project.

A possibly even more spectacular shift from resistance to survival may be noticed in the transformation of *Changeling*, once again reflected in the games' full titles. *Changeling: The Dreaming* highlights the importance of the precious faerie realm powered by the force of human creativity and in need of protection from Banality. *Changeling: The Lost*, in turn, emphasizes the liminal and insecure condition of characters to be role-played. An especially relevant factor responsible for that change, and simultaneously loaded with generational significance, is the redefinition of the impact and function of the supernatural world – a transformation similar to, yet more radical, than the one affecting the spiritual domain in *Werewolf* games.

As already mentioned, the realm of the Dreaming, "[c]reated by the dreams, creativity, fears and hopes of mortals" (CtD 47), can be regarded in terms of both subcultural resistance and marginalization. Negatively influenced by the rationalistic paradigm whose growth the rulebook dates back to the 14th century (55), the Dreaming has become fragile, precious and largely disconnected from humans. It has been the changelings' task to "struggle to keep the fragments of the Dreaming alive" (56). Moreover, the definition of Banality, the force responsible for the estrangement and annihilation of the faerie magic, has a strong air of romantic rebellion:

Banality is disbelief, pure and simple – disbelief in what people cannot see and hear, disbelief in magic, monsters and faeries. Disbelief in the extraordinary. It deliberately cuts off the mind from any-

thing that might challenge preconceived notions. It is the stamping-out of individuality and childish whim, which kills creativity and denies that anything exists beyond what is evident and explainable. (42)

Unsurprisingly, the faerie world is also depicted as a shelter from the oppressive mainstream:

> With Banality a constant threat to their physical essence, changelings have great need for places to which they can retreat. They also crave mental respite from the rigors of the mundane world, which threatens to eat away at their personalities at every turn. They must have some place that is tied to the Dreaming, a site that allows them to be what they truly are without hiding behind the mortal masks they wear in public. (42)

Thus, in light of the broader logic of the "supernatural capital" ruling WoD, the experience of the Dreaming may be regarded in terms of a subcultural fantasy of escapism and resistance rolled into one.

In *Changeling: The Lost*, the supernatural domain is known simply as Faerie, or Arcadia (20), which, on the one hand, invites intertextual references to established literary and cultural traditions, and on the other – contrary to the 1990s Dreaming – reveals little about the actual nature of the realm. On the contrary: the unreliability of its descriptions is underlined to illustrate the maddening effect of Faerie on human minds: "Perhaps everything that is 'known' about Arcadia is merely the fevered visions of those who have lost the ability to discern reality from fantasy and truth from dream" (20). The faerie-land depictions in both games share kaleidoscopic diversity and chaotic changeability (CtD 47–49; CtL 20). In the case of the Dreaming they are connected with the realm's sensitivity to "stories, tall tales, legends, myths, childhood playthings, imaginary companions, hopes and dreams. It also incorporates fears, monstrous horrors and the darkest imaginings of humankind" (CtD 35), and reacts to the proximity of the mortal realm. The description of the faerie land's overall structure reinforces its dependence on human creativity: "If the Near Dreaming [closest to the human world] is a story and the Far Dreaming a myth, the Deep Dreaming is the embodiment of dreams themselves" (49). The chaos of Faerie, in turn, seems connected not so much to the humankind as to the gameworld's adaptation of the feudal influence:

> Faerie's "natural" laws are not those of science, of spirit or even of magic as mortals can comprehend it, but a complexly woven tapestry of agreements and loopholes with no rhyme or reason intelligible to the human mind. The inhabitants thereof are bound, and bind themselves, in constantly shifting strata of power and manipulation that not only determines social structure and hierarchy within the sentient population but shifts the very nature of truth as well […] These creatures' ability to enforce their own will on the world around them is manifested in the form of oathsworn Contracts – some ancient, some newly uttered – with which they can change the very nature of reality, binding time and fate to their whim. (CtL 20–21)

Thus, the reason–imagination polarity, useful in inspiring romantic rebellion and responsible for the world logic in *Changeling: The Dreaming*, is replaced with an alienating and destabilizing principle of solipsistic subjectivity, which redefines Faerie

as generated and sustained entirely through ongoing plays of Greenblattian power. By extension, the realm might be interpreted in terms of a self-fashioning hell, as it "tears away at both the body and the sanity of any but the native inhabitants, who are themselves rumored to be nothing more than manifestations of the land itself – immune to, or perhaps merely symptoms of, its reality-shredding power. They are Faerie, and the land is Faerie" (20). An actual exploration of the relationship between identity and its volatile environment would, however, be of limited usefulness as the changelings themselves – including players' characters – are not of the Faerie origin.

The 1990s game defines a changeling as "A fae who has taken on mortal form in order to survive on Earth" (CtD 8) after the human reality and the Dreaming had become estranged (55–56). As a result, the Banality-generating "mainstream" reality is depicted as an oppressive threat, while the faerie realm becomes an object of protection and longing. In the 2007 version, a changeling is, by contrast, "A human who has been gradually changed by her durance in Arcadia, becoming partly fae herself" (CtL 12), but managed to go back from Faerie to the mortal world (25–26). Such a definition draws directly from the most traditional understanding of the word "changeling" in European folklore[60] and the literary trope of "the stolen child" (CtL 22), popularized, among others, by W. B. Yeats's famous poem under the same title (Yeats 14–15). By focusing on the mortal victims of faerie kidnappings, it also changes the ontological positioning of characters for whom the human world remains the source of their forever-lost origins. Even though the rulebook does not presume all changelings to be nostalgic about their human identities (13), the experience of being cut off from one's past remains a prominent game theme (26). Furthermore, the generic power relations between Faerie and the ordinary world are rearranged: the supernatural realm loses its dependency on humans, and is no longer threatened by Banality (the concept does not appear in the rulebook at all). Moreover, it takes over the function of an active aggressor. For millennia, fae creatures have been raiding the world of mortals (22–23) and collecting human victims who, having survived in Arcadia, become changelings.

What counters the subcultural resistance logic even more explicitly is the implied legitimization of regulatory mechanisms developed by human societies as a means of self-defense against the faerie threat. On the one hand, the game overtly stresses the political investments of such mechanisms as partial in generating systems of power:

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[60] For instance, *The World Guide to Gnomes, Fairies, Elves, and Other Little People* by Thomas Keightley (1880) includes "changeling" stories from Scandinavia (124), Germany (227), and Scotland (355, 393), each narrating a similar story of a human baby being swapped for a faerie impostor and taken away. What is, however, to be noted, in such narratives the very term "changeling" usually describes such an impostor, not the missing human child. *Changeling: The Lost* sticks to the traditional storyline but attaches the term itself to the Faerie-exposed human, and introduces another name, "fetch," for the proxy creature that sometimes replaces the victim of the supernatural kidnappers (CtL 27–28).

Throughout history and almost without exception, each culture has had at least one version of monstrous beings that haunt the shadows of their moonless nights, waiting for the opportunity to snatch misbehaving children or lure unsuspecting travelers to their deaths – or worse.

Modern scholars profess that these "kidnapper" legends all have a common root: humanity's need for cautionary tales, that each of these creatures was invented by parents or society elders to proscribe harmful behaviors through the use of a menacing and mysterious enforcer […] Since the desire to encourage conformation to acceptable behavior standards is universal, it is understandable that each society developed mythological figures that punish those who behave inappropriately. Similarly, since certain human experiences (death, slavery, separation from one's friends and family) are almost unequivocally seen as the most severe retributions possible, it is not surprising that the creators of these myths used them as the punishments inflicted by the kidnappers for misbehavior. By foisting the responsibility for punishment off on some mysterious outside force, those in control both circumvented rebellion against their own authority and removed themselves from the position of enforcer. The identity of the "kidnapper" might vary, but the message remains the same: conform and be safe, deviate and be removed from the game by something beyond our control. (22)

On the other hand, the fact that the supernatural danger is real provides justification for the practices clearly aimed to suppress individualism as their overall impact shifts from oppression to survival.

While *Changeling: The Dreaming* mourns childlike sensitivity and resists the petrification of "social ageing," its 2007 rendition is focused on "the quest to find one's way home" (CtL 13). The latter may mean different things but, all in all, suggests a need for stabilization after the exposure to the extreme ontological chaos of the supernatural realm which entirely misses objective reality. Changelings' demand for some sort of anchoring is furthered by their state of being doubly "lost" – as ex-humans in Arcadia and as runaways from the magical realm who, though disconnected from the rest of humankind, do what they can to function on the outskirts of its society. In doing so, they face the preliminary challenge on the very level of reality perception:

When a changeling at last finds his way home, to a world of concrete and certainty, he carries with him a spark of Faerie that rebels against the rational order of this world. A changeling's life, then, is a constant, unending struggle between sanity and madness, between truth and deception. The concept of Morality as it applies to mortals is replaced by the concept of Clarity, representing the character's ability to distinguish the solidity of the mortal world from Faerie and to reconcile the two disparate halves of his nature. (CtL 75)

Thus, "finding one's way home" becomes a task of survival in an ontologically unstable environment generated by both external factors and a changeling's own mental condition. In light of Greenblattian self-fashioning, it may not come as a surprise that an especially effective form of anchoring changelings' volatile identities is provided by the power dynamics of their liminal community. Arcadia runaways come up with their own communal organization and politics, based on "tolerance for both eccentricity and dysfunction" connected with the adjustment issues (39). Simultaneously, however, they generate complicated, court-like hierarchies: "The many offices provide a welcome motivation for the Lost. By chasing one's ambition toward a ministry, knighthood or even the […] throne – and by serving that office once

acquired – a changeling finds a new potential place in the world […] As a result, the intrigues and offices […] are first and foremost in many a changeling's struggles to find a new place to call home" (39).

Similarly to the werewolf games, *Changeling: The Dreaming* and *Changeling: The Lost* share cultural inspirations, aesthetic solutions and major narrative tropes yet differ in the gameworld logic. Both faerie-themed rulebooks postulate balance in handling a character's identity: changelings are always threatened by annihilation if they exceedingly indulge one aspect of their hybrid selves. The 1990s changelings can be destroyed both by Banality and "Bedlam – A kind of madness that falls upon changelings who stray too far from the mortal world" (CtD 8). The focus of the "millennial" changelings on the preservation of balance is made even more prominent by the consequences of the exposure to Faerie; it is also depicted more directly in terms of individual choices:

> To ignore his human side is devastating to a changeling's Clarity. He begins to lose any sense of what is real and what is merely the discontented grumblings and terrified shrieks of his wounded soul. Delusions, hallucinations, depression, compulsions, phobias and psychosomatic ailments all wait down that road, greedily anticipating the arrival of a changeling who eschews the mortal world too greatly. Considering the dangers that await those who have immersed themselves solely in fae matters, the logical reaction would seem to be to err in the other direction. The other extreme, however, is, if anything, more dangerous. While low-Clarity changelings are in danger of losing their sanity, those who eschew the fae world entirely put themselves in danger of withdrawal-like symptoms as their fae-side slowly starves. (CtL 26)

As already mentioned, the very existence of changelings, who negate the Banality of the overdrawn rationalistic paradigm and readily submit to both the power of imagination and the feudal faerie hierarchies, is constructed by the 1990s rulebook in terms of resistance inscribable into subcultural logic. The Lost, in turn, might be said to negate the authority of their fae guardians by leaving Arcadia and choosing the difficult status of a changeling suspended between realities. Still, the volatility and ambiguity of the "modern gothic" setting in general, and the Faerie in particular, denies them even that one fixed point in their identity projects because the supernatural beings sometimes simply let changelings go. Even if the given character has a clear experience of resisting or outwitting their fae owner, they cannot be sure if it was not a part of some masterplan:

> Was the escape truly an escape, or was it all, just as everything else in Faerie, something other than what it seemed?
> No changeling, of course, can ever truly know. […] But for those who have any inkling of the complex and manipulative nature of the True Fae, the question does eventually arise, adding one more layer of doubt and fear to their existence in the mortal world. (26)

In the conditions of such ontological destabilization, the suggested tendency of changelings to engage in power plays seems all the more dictated by the demands of survival, and so does the entirety of their identity-sustaining pursuits.

As shown in this chapter, the emergence of the WoD games reflects a historically conditioned reaction to flexible capitalism: the idea of subcultural resistance becomes

appropriated as food for entertainment, yet it is also reified and romanticized. By changing the "subcultural" into "supernatural" capital, the games develop a paradoxical relationship with the relativization of the mainstream–underground opposition. On the one hand, the fictional component activating the "subcultural" empowerment may be interpreted as reflecting cultural submission to flexible capitalism and admission that subcultural "resistance" is ineffective unless supported by supernatural powers. On the other hand, the elaborate incorporation of subcultural logic into the experience of functioning as a supernatural creature stokes up "resistance" as a cultural artifact, even if shaped by a specific generation's frustration with the "failure" of the countercultural revolution.

The gameworld's subsequent transformation is, in turn, informed by a shift from rebelliousness to self-awareness concentrated, first and foremost, on the constitution and survival of identity in unstable ontological conditions, often failing to give characters reliable guidance. The combined strategies of negating certain authorities and submitting to others become means of navigating through the complex reality rather than subscribing to a specific greater cause. The primacy of open-ended survival is signaled by the modified game titles. *Vampire: The Masquerade*, the Masquerade signaling vampires' active attitude in hiding their existence from the human majority (VtM 14–15), is replaced by *Vampire: The Requiem* – the term highlighting the unnatural and isolated state of the vampiric existence (VtR 20–21). *Werewolf* drops the reference to the single, overwhelming threat of the Apocalypse in order to emphasize the dislocation of the Forsaken werewolf warriors. In *Mage: The Ascension*, magicians compete on the path to enlightenment through different paradigms, and the Traditions struggle to undermine the dominance of Technocracy in the efforts of leading the entire humankind to the Ascension. The declared theme of *Mage: The Awakening* is "Power corrupts," and mages themselves are suggested to have disturbed the original world structure through their hubristic activities (15). The titular shift from Ascension to Awakening gives symbolic primacy to enhanced awareness of the complexities and invisible dimensions of reality – "like realizing all at once that everything you thought you knew is wrong" (MtAw 30) – over controlled development of that state toward the ultimate enlightenment. Understandably, the two aspects of the mage experience are not mutually exclusive, yet the very change of emphasis reflected in the game titles seems synchronized with WoD's overall gravitation away from "Gothic-Punk" rebellion and toward the "modern gothic" uncertainty. The metamorphosis of *Changeling: The Dreaming* into *Changeling: The Lost* follows the same logical pattern, highlighting, together with the remaining games, a move from subcultural identity projects to more laid-back reflection on subjectivation complexities.

Abbreviations for the *World of Darkness* and *Chronicles of Darkness* RPG Rulebooks

CoD – *Chronicles of Darkness* (game series)
CtD – *Changeling: The Dreaming* (WoD game, 1995)
CtL – *Changeling: The Lost* (CoD game, 2007)
MtAs – *Mage: The Ascension* (WoD game, 1993)
MtAw – *Mage: The Awakening* (CoD game, 2005)
VtM – *Vampire: The Masquerade* (WoD game, 1997)
VtR – *Vampire: The Requiem* (CoD game, 2004)
WoD – *World of Darkness* (game series)
WtA – *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, 2nd edition (WoD game, 1998)
WtA Revised – *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, revised edition (WoD game, 2000)
WtF – *Werewolf: The Forsaken* (CoD game)

To avoid confusion with the name of the 1990s game series, the CoD core rule-book, *The World of Darkness*,[61] is left without abbreviation.

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[61] In its latest edition, not analyzed in this book, this publication has been renamed as *Chronicles of Darkness*.

CONCLUSION

Goth Tropes
and a Self-Fashioning Paradigm

While Part I established the theoretical framework of this book, Part II aimed to show the dynamics between selected self-fashioning strategies and conceptualizations of the Goth subculture. Once it showed how self-fashioning is ingrained in Goth self-presentations, Part III tracked down several ways in which fictionalizations and iconizations of Goth figures can further carry the imprints of self-fashioning and make them subjects of cultural scrutiny. It might be far-fetched to argue for a coherent meta-awareness intrinsic to Goth tropes in the handling of self-fashioning themes, yet in the analyzed case studies these concerns were not only exemplified but also problematized. The controllability of somaesthetics was considered in terms of political pressures, body emancipation, as well as exhaustion and flattening of semiotic enunciation. Processes of formulating and sustaining subjective truths of identity projects were weighed against ethical requirements of intersubjectivity and communality. Political polarities of mainstream–margin and normativity–subversion were challenged or brought to the limits of meaningfulness.

Another outcome of the analysis in Parts II and III is the demonstration of the multifarious relevance of texts in self-fashioning practices and, more importantly, vice versa. Goth self-presentations highlight indirect self-fashioning through writing, though my discussion of those texts has not been focused on the ways their authors constitute their individual personas, but rather on how they foster the communal subcultural identity they declare to share. Some of the works discussed in Part III may also be interpreted as contributing to that broader textual project of collective self-fashioning. Simultaneously, it is also those texts' own internal logic and positioning toward their audiences that is shaped by self-fashioning strategies underpinning Goth tropes.

Thus, Goth self-fashioning may be argued to occupy a transitional position between text and the discourse community gathered around it. The way it is defined by John Swales, "discourse community"[62] does revolve around written text anyway (24). Still, enumerating the key characteristics of a discourse community, Swales focuses on the communal dynamics, interactions, and communication within as well as outside the group rather than on the actual interaction between texts and humans. He addresses the latter issue by emphasizing a community's "discoursal expectations," which determine "the appropriacy of topics, the form, function and positioning of discoursal elements, and the role texts play in the operation of a discourse community" (26). Nicole Emmelhainz, in her text on the discourse community gathered around the *Weird Tales* magazine, and therefore historically relevant for the growth of media-based participatory culture, emphasizes interactions and exchanges as an underappreciated stimulus of literary productivity. Still, she also places texts generated by that, clearly literature-oriented, discourse community at the receiving end of its practices: "Texts composed for a specific discourse community must […] adhere to established conventions […] that demonstrate knowledge of what the community wants and expects from its members' writing" (52).

In the analysis of the gradual formulation and further distribution of Goth tropes, self-fashioning might, perhaps, be counted among such "expectations," yet due to its specificity it assigns a more active role to texts themselves. Text may be directly engaged in the self-fashioning practice of its author, but it may also influence other people's identification with the given depiction of the Goth. Simultaneously, by including self-fashioning and other identity-forming strategies among its themes, the text may both construct itself through them and metaconsciously comment on the practices of the discourse communities it interacts with.

Goth self-fashioning has become the subject of this book not only because it forms a particularly complex bond with texts of culture but also because the formation of similar bonds between texts and communities may be counted as a part of a broader phenomenon in popular culture, especially its participatory dimensions. Commenting on the functions of the Gothic in "popular entertainment," Spooner stresses its recognition as "a particular kind of cultural capital, imbued with literary and historical knowledge" shared by the cultural consumers (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 42). In that, Goth tropes, inevitably participating in the Gothic potential, approximate other audience practices. For instance, the somaesthetic strategies engaged by Goth tropes can easily be referred to such phenomena as cosplay or larp, especially since, as argued by Spooner, Gothic inspirations in fashion are often constructed as "a form of sartorial escapism" into "fantasy dress-up" (79).

Potentially, though that possibility calls for separate, in-depth research, somaesthetic aspects can also be identified in postulates of representation and inclusiveness

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[62] A concept which seems better-suited in this particular context than Stanley Fish's "interpretive community" as it readily includes the author as well as recipients.

that are growingly prominent in both audience- and producer/author-initiated discourses in the realm of popular culture. Conceptualizations of internal work connected with the incorporation of texts in identity projects, development of subjective truths, and self-discipline can be useful in exploring various fan activities focused on individual relationships between audiences and texts of culture. Those factors seem relevant also in more communally oriented metafandom processes, including the formulation and execution of agendas concerning the politics of identity and sensitivity. Seeking even indirect analogies between the Goth phenomenon – characterized in this book as well as in scholarship in general as strongly bound with the white middle-class normativity and revolving around cultural capital – and underprivileged political voices is, undoubtedly, risky and potentially harmful to both parties concerned. Still, Spooner's insight into the 21th-century conceptualizations of the Goth identifies a discursive process employing such parallels and, by extension, signposting them as a relevant object of investigative efforts. The said process is traced back to the 2007 death of a British Goth teenager, Sophie Lancaster, fatally beaten due to her subcultural appearance. Sympathetic responses of the British media, combined with the activist initiative of the girl's family, have contributed to the rise of a rhetoric depicting the subculture as susceptible to prejudice-induced aggression and discrimination (*Post-Millennial Gothic* 74–77). As Spooner argues, the cultural work of Goth tropes develops "an increasingly politicized context, as twenty-first-century subcultures have become mobilized around a series of campaigns to defend the right to alternative lifestyles" (92). In the participatory cultural environment, such tendencies resonate with numerous phenomena adapting discrimination-focused discourses to the needs of audience communities. Various influences of self-fashioning logic can be identified in interactions between media producers and audiences, within audience communities stratified along political, geopolitical and social lines, and, finally, in the formation of the very texts affected by such complex power dynamics.

As declared in the Introduction, it is the latter issue that lies at the core of my interest in the possible influences of self-fashioning philosophies on popular culture and will further be explored in this book's continuation. Similarly to this Goth-focused study, the scope of the planned volume will not search for parallels in the operations of the subculture and other communal undertakings within participatory culture. Instead, with Goth tropes discussed in this book as my point of departure, I intend to argue that self-fashioning strategies are a structural factor in what I tentatively call a post-participatory paradigm in popular culture.

This book is devoted to a detailed analysis of the bonds between Goth tropes and self-fashioning. The next step would be to refer those tropes to the narrative formulas and textual practices affected by the growing formal recognition of the active audience as a co-participant in the production, reception and circulation of texts of culture – a media environment defined, for the purpose of this project, as post-participatory culture. It is with such a text-oriented interest in mind that I interpret the development, diversification and functioning of the Goth iconography as a signal of,

and a reaction to, the discursive dynamics between philosophies of self-fashioning and the subjectivation paradigm of the "flexible personality." Below is my preliminary attempt to position the Goth aesthetics within this exchange in a way that simultaneously refers to the issues discussed in this book and is symptomatic of their resonance with broader cultural tendencies.

What proves helpful in the said endeavor is a double application of Esposito's concept of immunization to Goth iconography. On the one hand, the incorporation of subcultural tropes into popular culture might be seen as a case of "negative immunization" of the mainstream self against the Goth Other. On the other hand, the work of Goth tropes can be viewed as a step toward "positive immunization" of self-fashioning-inspired cultural practices against the trap of "flexible personality." The analysis presented in this book has shown how the self-fashioning-based formation of identity becomes an object of scrutiny intrinsic to fictionalizations of the Goth and, simultaneously, how those fictionalizations themselves emerge from broader conceptualizations of the subculture to consolidate into tropes which could be regarded as semiotic packages. Thus, what emerges is a paradoxical yet potentially productive space of metaconscious reflection on self-fashioning practices within the framework of the "flexible personality" logic. This tentative reasoning definitely requires further insight and analysis before it can point to actual conclusions, yet, in light of the consideration of identities' coexistence offered by Esposito, it promises relevance for the "post-participatory" cultural experience.

Esposito's concept of immunization as a process of demarcating and securing the boundaries of an individual identity against external pressure and demands for openness may serve as an inspiration for strategies to confront the challenges of self-fashioning and the traps of its appropriations. His notion of community as a network of exchanges that the individual self needs to counteract not to lose its identity may be applied to more than one component of post-participatory culture, revealing the complexity of forces working in its domain. In a way, such complexity resonates with the paradoxical construction of *communitas* in Esposito's writings. On the one hand, it connotes the undoing of individual identity (*Communitas* 7–8, 137–138), and on the other – a mythicized, utopian ideal that has not only fueled the historical development of philosophy (15–16) but also sustains its significance today, at a time when a crisis haunts the political reality of states based on borders and immunization against otherness (135–136).

Thus, his understanding of community – as an ideal based on co-participation in multitude, blurring individual boundaries and embracing otherness (138) – may offer an insight into participatory practices in pop culture perceived as a provider of textual matter for self-fashioning. The practice of retelling and transforming texts to align them with the demands of collective or personal taste and variously motivated expectations (from therapeutic, emotional or psychological needs to overtly political claims regarding representation and diversity) can be translated into a striving for an

unreachable goal of making texts of culture "communal" in the sense of their plasticity and connectivity with the needs and expectations of particular recipients.

For Esposito, a necessary reaction to the pressure of community demands is immunization aimed at the protection of individual boundaries of the self. Immunization usually takes the form of a controlled introduction of "otherness" into the "system" (*Bíos* 46). Some textual manifestations of the post-participatory cultural paradigm can be viewed through the lens of immunizing processes acknowledging the pressure from the audience-as-Other. Producers' responses to and anticipation of the practices of active reception can impact text structures and contents or affect texts' distribution and media presence. The text-centered practices include not only various employments of metanarrative solutions and self-reflectiveness, some of which have earned distinct labels, such as "Easter eggs" ("What") or "fan service" ("Fan"), but also growingly noticeable acknowledgments of diversity, and representation postulates generated by audiences that combine media involvement with identity politics.[63] In the sphere of text distribution, actions aimed to "secure" texts from completely free drift in the audience domain include, among others, author–actor–producer exchanges with audiences via social media, or various solutions for pre- and post-production marketing, publicity and merchandise.

One application of the community-immunization arch is, therefore, connected with the identification and analysis of aesthetic and narrative phenomena "vaccinating" texts of culture against various forces generated by the post-participatory cultural environment. With reference to the Goth trope, an analogous process may be ascribed to works such as *Sweetblood* or *Beastly*. They employ the Goth to indicate a phase which remains subordinated to the characters' further personal development (*Sweetblood*) and to mark unleashed egocentrism in need of regulation (*Beastly*). Those examples might be considered in terms of Esposito's "negative immunization," aimed to isolate the self (of the normative socialization) from the uncontrolled influence of Otherness. *The Crow: The Lazarus Heart*, in turn, seems to embody radical rejection of the Other by killing off all major characters indexing non-normative and subcultural identities. It does so, however, in a metaconscious manner, siding with the non-normative characters, and thus highlights the thanatopolitical extreme

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[63] Such politically and socially oriented reception may, of course, be perceived as a part of a much broader and complex critical current, reaching from grassroots-level activists to academic scholars, yet its specific bonds with the realm of participatory media culture are worth mentioning. Political motivations for creating fan art and fan fiction have been analyzed by scholars virtually since the beginning of fan studies as a discipline (see, for example, works of Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon-Smith, or Francesca Coppa), to such an extent that their prominence in academic investigations became an object of theoretical criticism (see, for instance, Hills, Sandvoss, or James Hay and Nick Couldry). Among specific examples of political investments emergent from the activity of media audiences are the Internet portal *The Mary Sue*, dedicated to feminist and diversity-oriented reception of popular culture, or *Feminist Frequency*, an online initiative of Anita Sarkeesian ("About").

of negative immunization (see Chapter 1[64]). *Courtney Crumrin*, finally, signals the unpredictability of an "immunizing" process by making its logic implode in confrontation with the persistence of individual Otherness.

The "positive" end of the immunization spectrum, namely the one which enables the self to coexist with Otherness and open up to the needs of the community, thus entering a process of ongoing transformation, yet not erasure, of identity boundaries (Lemm 7–8), can, in turn, be traced in the metaconsciousness of Goth iconography. Self-irony and self-reflective intertextuality that have been characteristic of the Gothic virtually from the convention's beginnings predispose Goth tropes for dealing with mechanisms of iconization that may reify Goth self-fashioning and with appropriations that lock up Goth aesthetics in marketable stereotypes. Such clichés are sometimes spectacularly addressed in fictionalizations preserving an immediate status of Goth artifacts and functioning first and foremost in the subcultural context. Some titles representing that category have been mentioned in Interlude 2. Less explicit yet nonetheless relevant manifestations of textual self-awareness with regard to cultural appropriations of the Goth can also be located in the discussed source materials. Witch Baby's story in *Dangerous Angels* may be seen as a more general voice of countercultural introspection and self-criticism, highlighting the need to respect individual limits of a fellow subject. *Wet Moon*, in turn, shows subcultural awareness of the limits to Goth self-fashioning, and its entanglement in a network of normative and subversive factors. Finally, the history and character of the WoD/CoD gameworlds shows the active responsivity of Goth tropes to the broader political dynamics of the last decades.

The abovementioned self-awareness of Goth iconography functions, first of all, as a lens through which the "internalized and culturalized pattern of 'soft' coercion" that Holmes ascribes to the "flexible personality" can be identified. Secondly, in the immunization/community framework, it may serve as a buffer that, by enveloping the revealed manifestations of the "flexible personality" logic at work, secures the limits of their effectiveness and reincorporates them into the network of Goth aesthetics. Thus, fictionalizations of Goth self-fashioning can be perceived in terms of a breakthrough moment when immunization balances its own isolatory tendency. As put by Esposito:

> We know that immunization functions through the controlled incorporation of the communitarian "germ" that it wants to neutralize. But what if we were to reverse the operation? What if we tried to rethink community precisely by completing the process of immunization? At bottom a world without an outside, a world completely immunized – by definition doesn't have an inside. The culmination of a successful immunization can also be extended further as well so as to immunize it from itself: to reopen the breach, or the time, of community. ("Immunitarian Democracy" 16)

It may be argued that the dynamics of Goth iconography reconciles two, in a way opposite, processes of immunization. In the first one, the paradigm of "flexible

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[64] For a broader, stand-alone discussion of the operationalization of death in biopolitics see "Necropolitics" by Achille Mbembe.

personality" sustains its pop-cultural dominance by reifying and absorbing the icons of subcultural self-fashioning. The second immunization process, in turn, allows the self-fashioning philosophy informing post-participatory culture to sustain a model of subjectivization that, clearly connected yet not entirely succumbed to the normative "flexible personality," produces subjectivity capable of agency in the complex and seemingly controlled discursive environment.

In the former process, texts of culture invite identification as coherent entities seeking to fend off the appropriating pressure on the part of audiences that, especially when involved with political discourses of diversity and representation, can be interpreted as a communal Other. The latter process of "positive" immunization seems to be more evasive, yet it could be argued to generate texts of culture which, first and foremost, confront their recipients with questions about the functions of their practices and positioning as an audience in their own identity projects. Thus, in the fluid environment of post-participatory culture, the ambiguous immunizing practices of Goth iconography seem promisingly close to the process of flexible but regulated inclusion pointed to by Esposito as a step toward a redefinition of community. My close-reading of the Goth aesthetics through this lens has not meant to distinguish it as a unique phenomenon but rather to use it as a case study to identify symptoms of anticipated broader consequences of the post-participatory turn.

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A Goth Reflection: Self-Fashioning and Popular Culture

Summary

The book offers an analysis of relations between selected aspects of philosophies of self-fashioning and narrative, as well as aesthetic tropes inspired by media images of the Goth subculture. The formation of such tropes is discussed in regard to their interactions with discursive constructs of the Goth figure and to particular media contributing to its visibility in pop culture.

The emergent network of aesthetic and narrative roles played by references to the Goth movement in texts of culture enables a reflection on the forms of pop-cultural appropriations and processing of self-fashioning strategies and ideas. The planned continuation of the analysis initiated by this book will focus on the broader impact of such appropriations on the development and functioning of texts in the cultural paradigm assuming the active engagement of audiences, which often involves using medialized fiction in collective or individual identity projects.

The presented interpretation of motifs inspired by the Goth subculture can, therefore, be considered as a case study introducing and illustrating a broader issue of interactions between self-fashioning philosophies and popular culture, with a special emphasis on its participatory potential. In its theoretical dimension, for both conceptualizations and critiques of self-fashioning the book turns to thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt, Richard Shusterman, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Charles Taylor, Brian Holmes, and Suely Rolnik. The theoretical frames relevant for the discussion of the Goth culture and the subcultural discourses are provided by, respectively, Catherine Spooner and Sarah Thornton, as well as J. Patrick Williams. The depiction of the dynamics between authors, texts and the audience shifts from the perspective established by Henry Jenkins to Roberto Esposito's exploration of interactions between community (*communitas*) and immunization (*immunitas*).

For the sake of clarity, the presented reasoning has been divided into three parts. The first one specifies the further-discussed self-fashioning concepts and strategies, as well as addresses criticism aimed at the self-fashioning approaches to identity. The second part explores, in terms of the self-fashioning thought, several conceptualizations of the Goth movement emergent from texts written by its representatives (Raven Digitalis, Nancy Kilpatrick, Lloyd Warren Ravlin III, Jilian Venters, and Aurelio Voltaire among others). The analyzed materials, which strive to characterize the subculture for the needs of both its members and regular readers, facilitate tracking the influence of self-fashioning strategies on Goth self-presentations. The patterns identified on that basis enable the specification of tropes discussed in the book's third part, which is devoted to the functioning of the subculture's images in various fictionalized materials representing media such as literary fiction, comics, film, and role-playing games (RPG). The final reflection on the processes of appropriating and processing self-fashioning strategies so as to turn them into resources for the development of aesthetic and narrative motifs is inscribed into a broader participatory context of popular culture.

Gotycka refleksja:
Autokreacja i kultura popularna

Streszczenie

W książce analizowane są powiązania między wybranymi aspektami filozofii autokreacji (*self-fashioning*) a tropami estetycznymi i narracyjnymi inspirowanymi medialnymi wizerunkami subkultury gotyckiej. Omówione zostało kształtowanie się takich tropów w relacji z dyskursywnymi konstruktami postaci gota oraz poszczególnymi mediami przyczyniającymi się do jej widoczności w popkulturze.

Tak naszkicowana sieć ról estetycznych i narracyjnych odgrywanych przez odniesienia do ruchu gotyckiego w tekstach kultury służy refleksji nad sposobami popkulturowego zawłaszczania oraz przetwarzania strategii i idei autokreacyjnych. Planowana kontynuacja analizy zapoczątkowanej w niniejszej publikacji poświęcona będzie szerszemu wpływowi tego zjawiska na formowanie się i funkcjonowanie tekstów w paradygmacie kultury zakładającym aktywne zaangażowanie odbiorców, nierzadko z uwzględnieniem wykorzystania medialnej fikcji w zbiorowych i indywidualnych projektach tożsamościowych.

Prezentowaną interpretację motywów związanych z subkulturą gotycką można zatem uznać za studium przypadku wprowadzające i ilustrujące szersze zagadnienie interakcji między filozofiami autokreacyjnymi a popkulturą, ze szczególnym naciskiem na jej potencjał partycypacyjny. W wymiarze teoretycznym książka odwołuje się głównie do myśli takich autorów, jak Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt, Richard Shusterman, Gilles Deleuze i Félix Guattari, Charles Taylor, Brian Holmes oraz Suely Rolnik, zarówno w zakresie konceptualizacji, jak i krytyki myśli autokreacyjnej. Ramy pojęciowe dotyczące kultury gotyckiej i dyskursów subkulturowych pochodzą odpowiednio od Catherine Spooner oraz Sarah Thornton i J. Patricka Williamsa. Kwestie dynamiki między autorami, tekstami i odbiorcami przedstawione zostały najpierw w perspektywie zogniskowanej wokół badań Henry'ego Jenkinsa, a następnie na gruncie interakcji między wspólnotą (*communitas*) i immunizacją (*immunitas*), zgłębianych przez Roberto Esposito.

Wywód został podzielony na trzy części w celu zwiększenia jego przejrzystości. Pierwsza z nich na potrzeby dalszej analizy określa koncepcje i strategie autokreacji, a także odnosi się do krytyki wymierzonej w ten nurt filozofii tożsamości. W części drugiej omówione w kontekście myśli autokreacyjnej zostały konceptualizacje ruchu gotyckiego wyłaniające się z tekstów napisanych przez jego przedstawicieli (między innymi Raven Digitalis, Nancy Kilpatrick, Lloyd Warren Ravlin III, Jilian Venters i Aurelio Voltaire). Materiały te, podejmujące próby scharakteryzowania subkultury na potrzeby zarówno jej członków, jak i szerszego grona czytelników, ułatwiają prześledzenie wpływu strategii autokreacyjnych na gotyckie autoprezentacje. Zidentyfikowane w ten sposób prawidłowości stanowią podstawę określenia tropów omawianych w części trzeciej, która została poświęcona funkcjonowaniu wizerunków subkultury w różnych materiałach fabularnych, reprezentujących takie media, jak literatura, komiks, film i narracyjna gra fabularna (RPG). Końcowa refleksja nad procesami zawłaszczania i przetwarzania strategii autokreacyjnych, wykorzystywanych jako budulec motywów estetycznych i narracyjnych, została wpisana w szerszy kontekst partycypacyjny kultury popularnej.

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