**Gothic as the first avant-gard art**

Maria Antónia Lima

Universidade de Évora / CEAUL

**antonialima@telepac.pt**

If vanguard means an anti-conventional passion for change and renewal in every art form, the Gothic can be considered the first avant-garde art in the modern sense of the term. Many modern art movements have much in common with the Gothic: the same interest for the collapse of traditional values of authoritarian systems, the desire to transgress and escape from the conventional processes of representation, a curiosity for the irrational and perverse impulses inherited from the primitive man, etc. By recreating horror and violence, the arts were always able to expose the problems of a civilization deprived of its most solid values. Both gothic and avant-garde artists reflect on the disasters of their age, representing those catastrophes to reactivate emotions and awaken consciousness to new and multiple aspects of reality that were understood in a passive and linear way. Across its history, the Gothic has also been an anti-realistic protest, a rebellion of the imagination, an aesthetic of excess. It has deeply developed an anti-conventional vision of reality and defended many forms of transgression of aesthetic conventions and the inversion of accepted categories, searching for the dionisiac force in the dark underground river beneath the surface of human life. As Lovecraft noticed, “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear”. Fear and terror were always at the origin of ancient myths. There is a thread of dark imagery or ideas that runs through much contemporary art. Some contemporary artists like Mike Kelley, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin or Douglas Gordon produce their art works not only as expressions of profound transformations in art practices, but also as manifestations of contemporary fears. Typographic, performative and poetic experimentation can be very original, the dissolution of art object, the primacy of concept, text art and new media can be very creative, but horror still connects us to our primal emotions and desires. Some of the most innovative works of contemporary art are often gothic art.