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Fungal Intelligence and the Posthuman: Mycohuman Art, Entangled Theory, and Fungi in (Eco-)Gothic Narratives

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Abstract

Fungi have become paradigmatic for the wonders, the adaptability, and the resilience of the nonhuman in publications, ranging from Anna Tsing Lowenhaupt's anthropological analysis of the matsutake mushroom (2015) to Merlin Sheldrake's popular take on the 'world-making' capacity of fungi (2020). This article explores different conceptualisations of 'fungal intelligence' and the posthuman in art, (popular) science, and literature. It argues that fungi are invested with a utopian potential in the first two. In literary texts, however, encounters of the human and the fungal worlds and the concomitant creation of a fungal posthuman veer towards the gothic. In a three-step argument, the article moves from the world of contemporary art to the recent flurry of textual production about fungi in anthropology and (popular) science and the construction of fungal intelligence in many of these texts. Readings of Aliya Whiteley's The beauty (2018) and Silvia Garcia-Moreno's Mexican gothic (2020) are then used to scrutinise how the novels create a posthuman form of life, an 'other' intelligence that is depicted as threatening in its uncanny otherness. It is, as I will show, the monstrosity of the posthuman fungal other that both texts position as a new iteration of the classic gothic monster.

Keywords: *Contemporary art; Ecogothic fungi; Fungal intelligence; Mexican gothic; The beauty*

Fungi and/in the Anthropocene

In the face of the often-bleak cultural imaginings and scientific debates of humanity's (non)future in the Anthropocene, fungi have become almost metonymic for the miraculous resilience of the non-human, promising hope by way of their seemingly limitless adaptability to different climates and living conditions.[2] They have also become the site of artistic explorations of the posthuman in fungi-human interactions and metamorphoses. In this article, I will explore the position of fungi in current discussions of 'other' forms of intelligence, a 'fungal intelligence' that unsettles our androcentric understandings of the term intelligence and might consequently be used to complement current discussions of (generative) AI from a different angle. My starting point will be the world of arts, where "[f]ungi, especially mycelia, have become vital agents in some outstanding experiments, installation projects, and ongoing art interventions" (Rapp, 2019). I will then briefly sketch the utopian potential critics in cultural studies and popular science currently tend to ascribe to fungal intelligence and the mushroom world, and take the ecocritical question seriously whether, rather than talking and thinking *about* fungi, we should perhaps listen to them *do* the talking/thinking.

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[2] See, for example, Louis Schwartzberg's documentary *Fantastic Fungi* (Netflix, 2021) or articles like Somini Sengupta and Tomás Munita's "Unearthing the secret superpowers of fungus" (*New York Times*, 2022) and Alison Pouliot's "'The fungal awakening': How we came to love (and fear) fungi" (*Guardian*, 2023).

In the second half of this article, I will delve into the literary world of (uncanny) fungi, 'F.I.' and fungal (post)humans with two literary case studies that I would describe as 'fungal gothic', Aliya Whiteley's *The Beauty* (2018) and Silvia Garcia-Moreno's *Mexican Gothic* (2020). In both texts, a fungus takes control over the human mind and creates a posthuman form of life, an 'other', biological intelligence that is conceived of as threatening in its deviance from the human mind. However, Garcia-Moreno's symbiosis between fungus and human is dependent on a human host, and while the mushroom-creatures in *The Beauty* are more resolutely other, they remain voiceless despite the narrator-protagonist's attempt to articulate his own experience of community with a fungal companion. It is, as I will show, the monstrosity of the posthuman fungal other that both texts position as a new iteration of the classic gothic monster.

Making art with fungi

Fungi-based art is, not surprisingly, often grounded in both ecocritical thinking and an appreciation of the grotesque beauty of mycelial structures, but it also makes space for the potential of thinking through the ahuman and posthuman potentialities of fungi. The environmental art installations of British artist Kate Studley, for instance, are biodegradable and designed to evolve over the course of an exhibition, either in an exhibition space or in natural surroundings. Studley uses the non-fixedness of fungal structures as a source of inspiration, countering the notion that, "[b]ecause they are connected to rotting things and to death, [fungi] are often thought of as being less beautiful [than flowers or butterflies]" (David, 2020, n.p.). In an installation called "Designed to last forever, designed to last for minutes" (Studley, 2019, n.p.), for example, she uses fungal structures to ponder the permanence of art, allowing her artwork to be overgrown by grass and mushrooms and eventually to decompose. Closer to the uncanny, posthuman heart of this article is Slovenian artist Saša Spačal's intense engagement with what critic Regine Rapp has called 'mycohuman performance' (2019, *passim*). In a talk written for an interdisciplinary conference on 'Nonhuman Agents in Art, Culture and Theory' (Berlin, 2017), Spačal conceives of mycohuman relationships in terms of "the entanglement of mycorrhizal extensions that transgress both fungi and humans as species" (2017, n.p.). Her species-defying approach to posthuman fungal art can be witnessed in projects such as "Mycomythologies: Patterning" (2021), a "biotechnological installation which captures growing fungal landscapes contaminated by the human microbiome – bacteria, fungi and archaea derived from the blood, sweat and tears of the artist" (2021, n.p.). This consciously subjective, abject take on mycohuman interconnectedness resonates with the presence of abjection in this special issue's exploration of uncanny encounters with the posthuman and, from an ecocritical point of view, destabilises the superiority of the (male) human in the human-fungus interface by marking human interventions as 'contaminations'.

My third, brief example is New-York-based Japanese artist Saya Woolfalk, who creates a playful new mythology detailing an encounter of humans and the natural world in her ongoing project "The Empathics". Woolfalk traces the evolution of her posthuman species, whose genetic make-up combines human and plant genomes. Her narrative combines installations, paintings, illustrations, and narration, and will therefore also serve as my steppingstone into text-based explorations of the fungal-human posthuman. As part of Woolfalk's creation myth of the Empathics, her female protagonists encounter a burial site containing remains with a genetic mutation, envisioned as fungi-speckled bones in her artwork. The contact with these bones sparks the evolution of the imagined female community into hybrid creatures who are part plant, part human. Fungi are a crucial part of Woolfalk's visual repertory: the first room of the exhibition space in the Montclair Art Museum (New Jersey, USA), where "The Empathics" was shown in 2012, displayed a marble statue

overgrown with infestations reminiscent of fungi; the exhibition as well as further projects expanding on the Empathics was inspired by anthropological studies, showcasing fantastical skeletons, dioramas, and a computer guide mimicking the narratives provided in natural history museums. In later exhibits such as the 2021 *Lessons from the institute of empathy* (Seattle Art Museum, USA) some of the Empathics are shown with faces covered by embellished lace, a mycelial structure that enhances the otherness of the chimeric plant women, hiding their humanity behind a veil-like mask which emphasises their fungal hybridity. While fungi are only part of the Empathics' plant imagery, they are central to their creation. In an interview, Woolfalk stresses that the bones which spark the evolutionary metamorphosis have "a fungus on them, and the fungus stimulates their mutation" (Kramer, 2018, n.p.) The Empathics then found the Institute of Empathy and "invite people to begin to mutate and transform to become like the plant-humans of the future, to participate in this experience of interspecies hybridization" (*ibid.*). Woolfalk's plant-women are thus posthuman creatures, uncanny in their plant-enhanced humanity despite the artist's assurance that their 'plantness' serves to create a utopian posthumanist future. Her work is therefore at least related to what I would call the 'fungal gothic' in contemporary literature and culture, the exploration of encounters between human and fungi which, in the creation of a fungal posthuman, tend to veer towards the uncanny and the gothic much more explicitly than Woolfalk's work does. Before I turn to two case studies of fungal monstrosity, I want to briefly sketch out the potential currently ascribed to fungi in cultural, anthropological, and popular scientific discourse, where fungal intelligence and posthumanism are more often than not invested with utopian potential.

Thinking about fungi… or letting fungi do the thinking?

Fungi invite metaphorical and creative readings in their ambiguity. They are neither plant nor breathing organism, may look like small(ish) individuals to the human eye (if you think of a mushroom as the fungus's fruiting body) but can form extensive mycelial networks underground and spread widely via spores. Fungi's largely hidden, invisible expanse and ways of procreation may facilitate their construction as uncanny 'others' in an (eco-)gothic context, and their mycelial structures create mazes underground that are reminiscent of the labyrinthine gothic architecture that serves to entrap the heroine in many classic texts. They are, however, simultaneously theorised as an often-overlooked major player in Western thinking about the future and, perhaps, the evolution of what we now think of as human – and human intelligence – in the Anthropocene, with critics making a case for a utopian 'mycotopia' in which mushrooms can help us survive or evolve.[3] The term 'mycotopia' is not my own; with *In search of mycotopia: Citizen science, fungi, fanatics, and the untapped potential of mushrooms* (2021), journalist Doug Bierend – who also works in communications for *ecovative*, a tech start-up exploring the use of mycelium as a biodegradable alternative in clothing, packing, construction, and building – already gives away most of his agenda in the title. He begins his book by travelling various networks of fungi-aficionados, who try to emulate "the symbiotic, reciprocal ways of being exemplified by fungi themselves" (4) as an antidote to the destructive dynamics of neo-liberal capitalism, and ends it by locating the greatest potential of "fungal fellowship" in the utopian thought that it might help us in the process of "decentering ourselves and returning to [a] right relationship with nature" (277-78). Belying this fairly grandiose, pseudo-Romantic gesture, it is humans who are central to his book, not the 'fungal intelligence' that I have located in literary and cultural depictions of fungi earlier. Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing positions fungi differently. In her important microhistory *The mushroom at the end of the world* (2015),

[3] Recent publications not mentioned in this article include Aliya Whiteley's *The secret life of fungi: Discoveries from a hidden world* (2020) and Sara Rich's *Mushroom* (2023).

the matsutake mushroom is used to think through the 'possibility of life in capitalist ruins', the subtitle of her monograph.[4] Contextualising the mushroom as a commodity in the Anthropocene, Tsing eventually finds hope in the fungus's capability to regenerate and grow in seemingly uninhabitable places, ensuring its survival by what Tsing calls collaborating with the circumstances it encounters. "This book argues", she emphasises, "that staying alive – for every species – requites liveable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaboration, we all die" (28). By aligning the collaborative matsutake mushroom, which adapts to its surroundings, with the survival of humanity, Tsing gives greater agency to the fungal world.[5]

Merlin Sheldrake's bestselling *Entangled life: How fungi make our worlds, change our minds, and shape our futures* (2020) is essentially a manifesto of the power of the mushroom world and its fungal intelligence. The book was 2020's publishing sensation, combining popular accolades (*Sunday Times* bestseller, BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week) with scientific prizes like the Wainwright Prize for nature and conservation writing. While Sheldrake certainly shares Bierend's almost sectarian enthusiasm for the fungal world, as a biologist he also delineates current knowledge about fungal intelligence which he conceptualises in the context of networks and collective (or swarm) intelligence. For the human mind, he stresses, "[m]ycelial co-ordination is difficult to understand because there is no centre of control" (56). There is also no organic difference between the mycelial 'brain' of the fungus and its fruiting body, the mushroom, which is composed of hyphae (the cells of fungal matter that also create the mycelium) felted together: the body, the 'roots', the network of the fungus are, simultaneously, its decentralised centre, its brain. "Mycelium", in Sheldrake's words, "is polyphony in bodily form" (61), a transport network for water and nutrients, expanding quickly when the fungus detects a new source of sustenance. It is small wonder, then, that the mycelial network has more recently been explored in the context of network theory and communication and thus as a form of 'other' (fungal) intelligence – a 'natural' intelligence complementing this special issue's interest in artificial intelligence and the posthuman.

While this certainly sounds appealing to a scholar of literature and cultural studies like myself, opinion about the actual existence of fungal intelligence among biologists is far from uniform. If we define intelligence as information-processing and the concomitant ability to choose from different options, then "[m]any types of brainless organisms – plants, fungi, and slime moulds included – respond to their environments in flexible ways, solve problems and make decisions between alternative courses of action" (Sheldrake, 2020, 73).[6] Other attempts to 'prove' fungal intelligence include the infamous 'zombie fungus', *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, which infests ants (and other insects), takes over its host's nervous system, makes them climb to a spot favourable to fungal growth, stitches its host's feet in place and sprouts a fruiting body from which it distributes spores. *How* the fungus controls its hosts has not been explained conclusively, but for our uncanny, posthuman context, it is certainly hard to resist the temptation of attributing an 'other' intelligence to the fungus which, at least in M. R. Carey's post-apocalyptic novel *The girl with all the gifts* (2014) and Colm McCarthy's film adaptation of the book (2016) as well as in the wildly popular computer games *The last of us* (2013, 2020) and the recent HBO adaptation (2023–), causes the zombie

[4] For another anthropological exploration of the matsutake mushroom see Michael J. Hathaway's *What a mushroom lives for: Matsutake and the worlds they make* (2022), which sets out "to explore the particular world-making dynamics fungi carry out" (xx).
[5] See Kylie Crane's argument that fungi "do interesting things with categories of difference, collaboration, time and borders" (2021, 248).
[6] See also Steven Shaviro's delineation of the problem-solving skills of the slime mould in *Discognition* (esp. chapter 7, "Thinking Like a Slime Mold", 193-215).

apocalypse, but also creates fungal posthumans who are in the process of supplanting humanity as we know it.[7]

There is also an uncanny similarity between the fungal and the human when it comes to communication. The hyphae which form mycelial networks underground have been known for quite some time to send electrical impulses that allow different connected fungal networks to communicate with each other. These 'electrical impulses' as a means of mycelial communication sound surprisingly similar to a layperson's understanding of the workings of synapses in the human brain or the neural networks in AI systems, the electrical activity of fungi thus paralleling neurons. Current research seems to corroborate the existence of fungal intelligence. Working with the Unconventional Computing Laboratory at the university of Bristol, computer scientist Andrew Adamatzky compares different fungi by way of the patterns of electrical spikes they produce. He has found that fungi create clusters of electric activity that resemble words. The "champignon communicators" (in the words of Linda Geddes in the *Guardian*, 2022, n.p.) produce what could be identified as up to 50 different 'words'.[8] Fungi might be thus communicating with each other via waves of electrical activity, perhaps "comparable to wolves howling to maintain the integrity of the pack" (*ibid.*).[9] In "Fungal grey matter" (2021), an article detailing their findings, Adamatzky and co-author Irina Petrova enthusiastically describe fungi as "creatures of magic" with "pronounced protocognition abilities" (44). If we are looking for an 'other' form of intelligence, fungi are not a bad place to start, which might explain why they have played a major, if sinister, role in a considerable number of recent novels and films that explore the contact zones between the plant world and humanity.

Post-Apocalyptic Fungi: Aliya Whiteley, *The Beauty* (2018)

Whiteley's novella *The beauty* is set in a post-apocalyptic world in which a yellow fungus has killed all women with an infestation starting in their wombs and working its way outwards from there, leaving them with an uncurable yellow growth sprouting from all bodily orifices. The protagonists, a group of men who have retreated from what remains of civilisation, are trying to build an all-male society that, founded on grief and the impossibility of procreation, is doomed to imminent failure. Focaliser Nathan – the community's storyteller, whose task it is to fictionalise and mythologise their new lives to make them more bearable – finds new mushrooms in the graveyard, "clustering in soft wet shapes, yellow folds and rivulets, in the outlines of the women beneath the soil" (4), and is sucked into the ground in a perverted, reverse birth. He is taken hostage and cared for by a hybrid creature, undergoing an uncanny repetition of foetal development in the womb, and he quickly identifies the creature as female, a fungus-woman who seems to have sprouted from the corpse of one of the dead human women: "A thing. It is yellow and spongy and limbed, with a smooth round ball for a head. It is without eyes, without ears" (19). Despite his initial reaction of abject horror, Nathan soon acknowledges the fungus-woman as "alive like a person. Not an animal" (20) and surrenders himself to a sexual encounter that is both corporeal and a union of thoughts that defies verbalisation in its otherness. The creature – now named Bee – "implants strange images in [Nathan] of earthy darkness, of waiting, growing, moving to sunlight, opening, learning and expanding" (24), communicating in imagines planted directly into Nathan's mind. With Bee and a group of fungus women, collectively called 'the Beauty', Nathan moves back to his community, each fungus woman

[7] For an extended reading of *The girl with all the gifts* see Gruss (2022).
[8] For a preliminary summary of Adamatzky's experimental design and findings see Adamatzky 2018.
[9] Adamatzky is more cautious in his interpretation, conceding that fungi might also be "saying nothing" (Geddes, 2022, n.p.).

partnering with a man in what is depicted as an eerie combination of desire and co-dependence, but also as a symbiosis between human and (fungal) woman that Nathan tries to mythologise and consequently legitimise in the stories he tells the men in the evenings. Like Woolfalk's plant women, the Empathics, Whiteley's fungal women in *The beauty* are made comprehensible via an origin myth of the posthuman. In contrast to Woolfalk's colourful utopian outlook, however, the fungal women imagined by Whitelely defy (human) comprehension and articulation. The 'Beauty' are a personification (fungalisation?) of the fungal intelligence explored above, but they also remain uncanny in their abject and unbridgeable difference from the male humans. Their interaction with the men remains non-verbal (although Bee hums) and is strongly based on sexuality (at one point Nathan depicts the Beauty as a collective emanation of desire, "a wave of longing, of expectation that is so strong, so very strong" (87), and the fungal women also communicate and act as a collective (even though each of them is paired with a human partner), connected, perhaps, by a mycelial structure invisible to the human eye.

Communal life with the fungus women slowly begins to erode gender conventions as especially the younger men, who have started to forget about the precise calibrations of the gender binary they never experienced first-hand now that human women have been gone for years, start to wear dresses. Contact (and sex) with the Beauty eventually changes human (male) anatomy as well, a new form of posthumanism passed from the fungal women to the men: one of the young men, Thomas, becomes pregnant, an unprecedented event that is described as physically emasculating (his testicles and penis shrivel), a 'monstrous' pregnancy that leads to the 'monstrous birth' of a hybrid baby with yellow skin but human anatomy (including a vulva, thus perhaps promising a return to more androcentric procreation in the future). Thomas is also able to feed the baby, while his fungal partner develops a penis-like appendage that allows them to engage in a new kind of sexuality that is not so much other or fungal, however, than a mere reversal of the sexes that sticks to binary heteronormative parameters. The narrator reacts to the changed anatomy of his fellow men with the same visceral form of abjection as to his first encounter with Bee – "I am repulsed and excited" (79) – but eventually accepts hybrid baby Holly as deserving "her place in the world" (102). The novella puts forward a fungal intelligence that is communal and feminine, an uncanny posthuman entity that transgresses most readers' androcentric expectations. At the same time, it is finally hampered by a surprisingly conservative heteronormative stance that subverts the novella's innovative gist. The fungal intelligence of the Beauty remains silent and enigmatic, impenetrable to the human and, more specifically, the male gaze and words of the narrator. Rather than charting a truly posthuman future that originates in the Beauty's fungal otherness and their male partners' feminine challenge to heteronormative patterns, the novella eventually returns to a binary pattern of depicting the world. Despite the tentative acceptance of the hybrid baby, its origin in the species-defying fungal women and its 'unnatural' birth by man marks both the Beauty, Holly's father, and their posthuman offspring as monstrous in the tradition of Creed's monstrous-feminine.

Postcolonial Fungal Gothic: Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Mexican Gothic* (2020)

Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican gothic* looks like a classic twenty-first-century take on the female gothic at first sight, albeit one that takes into account a postcolonial point of view. Protagonist Noemí Taboada pays a visit to her newly-wed cousin Catalina, embarking on a tale which follows a clear gothic script: the cousin is a sickly (and allegedly mentally unstable) gothic heroine in peril; her new husband Virgil Doyle comes from a rich but decadent family of British colonisers who have made money by exploiting a Mexican silver mine (and their indigenous workers); and they live in a gothic mansion, High Place, "Victorian in construction" (22) but crumbling and eery. The Doyle

family is said to be suffering from a family curse (a streak of madness running through the family, a murder and a suicide), and they are clearly hiding a dark secret that unconventional but spoilt Noemí has to uncover in order to save her cousin, herself, and Francis Doyle, the man who becomes her love interest.

Mushrooms (often in combination with mould) appear early in the novel – in an "unappealing creamy white sauce" (29) Noemí does not want to eat, in High House's kitchen when it is cleaned by servants (40), sprouting by graves in the Doyles' private graveyard (41), in a mouldy oil-painting (53). Mushrooms also manifest in Noemí's nightmarish dreams as bulbous shapes (53) that cover her hands (think Woolfalk's overgrown statue), in "golden filaments", a mycelium covering "the wall like a netting" (54), and in her hallucinations of a woman – whom she later identifies as murder/suicide victim Ruth, Virgil's sister, whose dress is made of the same filament. Noemí eventually finds out that the Gothic mansion is infested by a mushroom, a seemingly sentient fungi intelligence that permeates the whole building (including the wallpaper), controlling its human inhabitants by spores and thus effectively instrumentalising them like the zombie fungus instrumentalises its ant hosts. In contrast to the relationship between zombie fungus and ant, however, the fictional relationship between sentient fungus and human host is at least partly symbiotic, comparable to the relationship of mycorrhizal fungi with trees, creating a posthuman other that, in contrast to Whiteley's fungal women, is at first sight indistinguishable from ordinary humans: "The fungus, it runs under the house, all the way to the cemetery and back. It's in the walls. Like a giant spider's web. In that web we can preserve memories, thoughts […]" (192). In its symbiosis with the ruthless Howard Doyle (the power-hungry founder of the now crumbling Doyle family line), Moreno-Garcia's fungus *becomes* the gothic monster: Howard abuses the indigenous entity in the same way that he has seized the silver mines on which the family's riches are based; he perverts the fungus's healing properties to ensure the longevity of his consciousness, which is stored in the fungal 'gloom' but remains dependent on the ready supply of male host bodies (he is about to take over that of his descendant Virgil) and, in true gothic vein, female sacrifice.

In contrast to the independent mycelial mind of the Beauty, the fungal intelligence in *Mexican gothic* is, essentially, human-based; because the "fungus by itself […] had no mind" (255), it 'needs' "a human mind that could serve as a vessel for memories, that could offer control" (257). While the Beauty are truly *other* creatures, then, the fungal monstrosity in *Mexican gothic* is based on the male (gothic) urge for power and transgression; and while contact with the fungal women leads to posthuman evolution in Whiteley's novella, both the fungus and the imperial, patriarchal system that has instrumentalised and fed it need to be destroyed in Moreno-Garia's novel. It is hardly surprising in this context that Howard Doyle's plan for immortality also requires (female) sacrifice – at the "*rotten core*" of the gloom is "*the corpse of a woman*" (198) that provides the fungus with the nourishment it needs, a "monstrous Virgin in a cathedral of mycelium" (255). The mycelial mind, the fungal intelligence which grants Howard longevity (as long as he finds willing male offspring to imprint his mind on) is based on a female corpse made monstrous, "furnished with the marrow and the bones and the neurons of a woman, made of stems and spores" (258). While the origin of Whiteley's fungal women is never explained other than locating them vaguely in an apocalyptic eco-catastrophe that has killed all women, Moreno-Garcia's fungus is a monster Noemí must kill before she can start life anew – she stabs Howard and burns both the fungus and the house it has infested. While the abject connection of fungus woman and pregnant man carries the potential of (post)human survival via the fungal intelligence of the Beauty, the fungal intelligence in *Mexican gothic* is merely another articulation of a patriarchal and colonial lust for power and control, and as such, it has to be contained, i.e., destroyed.

Some Concluding Hyphae

As I have shown, current artistic, anthropological and popular scientific explorations of fungal intelligence predominantly focus on the productivity of human interaction with the fungal world and, in some cases, attempt to understand fungi by letting them doing the talking and the thinking. Spačal, for example, expands species-bound conceptualisations of 'human' and 'fungal' and upends the human-fungus hierarchy by depicting the human microbiome as a contamination to the fungus rather than spores or hyphae changing and endangering the human body. Sara Woolfalk ascribes a utopian potential to her fungal plant women. This utopian take on the world of fungi is emphatically embraced by current (popular) science, where fungi and fungal intelligence are hailed for their world-making and world-saving capabilities. By contrast, my two literary case studies are discursively connected to other eco-gothic appropriations of mushrooms, spores, or mould. While not as staunchly part of the horror genre as those narratives taking their cue from the 'zombie fungus' (*The girl with all the gifts* or *the last of us*, to name but two examples), *The beauty* and *mexican gothic* undercut the eco-gothic potential of their monstrous fungi, which are used predominantly as a means to think through gender structures. The posthuman mycohumans (to borrow Spačal's term) engendered by an uncanny fungal intelligence become representations of the monstrous-feminine in *The beauty* and a neogothic iteration of the transgressive male in *Mexican gothic*. While the former is at least not contained – Nathan and his Beauty leave the community, trying to forge a new future for themselves – both texts instrumentalise fungal intelligence to signify gender anxieties rather than ecogothic concerns.

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