

# The Clarity of Darkness: Experiencing gothic anthropology

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## Abstract

There are many ways of writing ethnographies (see e.g. [Van Maanen, 1988; 1995](#)), taking the shape of realistic stories, confessions, dramatic ethnography, and many others. The authors of these accounts are rarely detached from their work and various elements of the anthropologic experience, e.g. the fieldnotes ([Jackson, 1995](#)) awake intense feelings in their authors.

The role of the anthropologist is one that inspired us to become self-reflective. Our previous experiences of field studies were more or less suffused by many and intense feelings, not only in regard to the field itself but also to our own role and the experience of doing field research in itself. [Van Maanen \(1995\)](#) recognizes the new heightened self-consciousness of the discipline. Our intention is to explore the experience of doing anthropologic studies, how we feel about being in the field, how the field influences us, what the label "anthropologist" may mean as an identity or as a way of self-presentation. We have carried out several explorations: we stood in places we explored at some point earlier, only this time holding up a poster saying that we were anthropologists. We observed how the place reacted to us, and what our place in the field felt like.

This self-conscious and self-reflective study is, in our view, one that can be depicted as gothic: spiritual, turned inward, dark, moody. It is the case of the anthropologist exploring him or herself in the role of the explorer. It is turning the gaze from the lit up outside to the obscure inside, to encounter the strangeness and the loneliness and address it.

We also believe that the solipsist and/or subjectivist self-reflective perspective in social sciences, or the perspective we label gothic, may offer interesting and worthwhile insights. Gothic science is: one more perspective borrowed from the arts, as many others before (functionalism, constructivism, postmodernism, etc.); a label already used by [Peter and Martina Pelzer \(1996\)](#) in their essay on contemporary subculture and music; a metaphor that we treat as an invitation to join in the conversation about science and being a scientist as seen inwards.

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# The Clarity of Darkness:

## Experiencing gothic anthropology

### Ethnography: The author and the genre

There are many ways of writing ethnographies. In his book *Tales of the Field* (1988), John Van Maanen depicts the most common ways that he calls tales: realist, confessional, and impressionist. The classical form of ethnographic writing takes the shape of realist tales, dispassionate third-person narratives. "On display are the comings and goings of members of the culture, theoretical coverage of certain features of the culture, and usually a hesitant account of why the work was undertaken in the first place" (p. 45). Realist tales are concerned about the authenticity of the representations. Confessional tales are increasingly popular and quite different from the detached realist narratives. Their specific qualities are "their highly personalized styles and their self-absorbed mandates" (p. 73). They are written in a sensitive way, embracing the feelings of the author who is "always close at hand in confessional tales" (p. 74). Impressionist tales are similar to impressionist paintings as their authors, too, "are [...] out to startle their audience" (p. 101). They do this through a choice of "words, metaphors, phrasings, imagery, and most critically, the expansive recall of fieldwork experience" (p.102). These narratives reconstruct the experience of being in the field, they read like novels and the standards by which they should be evaluated are not so much disciplinary as literary ones. Van Maanen presents also other forms of writing ethnography: critical tales, formal tales, literary tales, and jointly told tales. The critical tales are engaged politically. The formal tales are the works of specialists who aim at building, testing, generalizing and displaying theory. The literary tales may be written by non-anthropologists (e.g. journalists), but their main characteristic is that they explicitly borrow fiction-writing techniques. The jointly told tales are co-authored by the fieldworker and the native: the *other* thus acquires the possibility to write his or her story without the fieldworker's translation.

The different types of ethnography are more or less personalized ways of telling the story of the anthropologic experience. Realism--the most depersonalized form--has been the subject to much criticism, although it is by no means "dead" or completely passé. A discussion within the discipline concerning the inclusion of the researcher's emotions started in the 1960s and the 1970s. One of its consequences has been "the spread of a methodological self-consciousness and a concern for reflexivity that has not gone away" (Van Maanen, 1995: 8). Alternatives to the realist convention appeared and spread. Among the more emotional and personal ways of writing, there has emerged the self- or auto-ethnography, "in which the culture of the writer's own group is textualized" (p. 9). These narratives are often passionate and "explicitly judgmental" (p. 10), offering a "rather mannerly distinction between the researcher and the researched" (p. 10).

Other parts of the ethnographer's--or the anthropologist's--work has been described as being immersed in feelings, for example, the fieldnotes (Jackson, 1995). Jean Jackson has been interviewing fieldworkers about their fieldnotes. Her respondents "expressed strong and ambivalent feelings about their notes" (p. 37). In her interpretation these notes are liminal: betwixt and between the worlds the anthropologist lives in as well as the selves he or she assumes. In our view, they also reflect the liminality of the anthropologic experience as such, the indefiniteness of the role in between worlds and selves.

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## The role of the anthropologist

Fieldworkers represent themselves as "marginal natives" (Frielich, 1970) or "professional strangers" (Agar, 1980) who, as "self-reliant loners" (Lofland, 1974) or self-denying emissaries (Boon, 1982) bring forth a cultural account, an ethnography, from the social setting studies ([Van Maanen, 1988](#): 2).

The presentation of oneself and one's role in the field is often seen as important, especially in the non-realist ethnographies ([Van Maanen, 1988](#)). It is quite typical that the author dramatizes him- or herself within the text, problematizes him- or herself.

According to [Wojciech Burszta \(1996\)](#), the anthropologist is someone thriving on problematization. He or she is like a detective: he or she looks for traces to make sense of what he or she is interested in, but the anthropologist, contrary to Marlowe, will never be sure whether the enigma is solved. Nevertheless, this is this uncertainty that drives him or her to further explorations. Furthermore, the anthropologist reminds of the nomad, with an irresistible urge to move on, both geographically and intellectually. [Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges \(1992\)](#) speaks about the *anthropologic frame of mind*, a certain openness of the mind of the observer of social reality. On the one hand, it means the openness to new realities and meanings, and on the other --a constant need to problematize, a refusal to take anything for granted, to treat things as obvious and familiar. The researcher constantly experiences curiosity, preserves and ability to be surprised by what she or he observes, also if it is "just" the everyday world. [Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar \(1979/1986\)](#) see anthropology similarly, as they write about

the importance of bracketing our familiarity with the object of our studies. By this we mean that we regard it as instructive to apprehend as strange those aspects [of the studied phenomenon] which we are readily taken for granted (p.: 29).

[Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges \(1995\)](#) speaks of field research as of a "visit" to a place that is not the "natural" surroundings of the researcher. The people there speak another language, because they do different things, they have other experiences. The researcher is a "guest." In traditional anthropologic studies the situation is obvious for all parties. In organizational anthropology it often looks as if the outsider were "similar" to the participants of the studied organization: especially, if she or he speaks the same native language, if she or he lives in the same city, etc. Therefore misunderstandings and disappointments are common, and the researcher may experience the clash between the expectations coming from the field and the own motives and ideas.

Anthropology, in its symbolist version, can be a means of enhancing someone's (the actor's or the researcher's) perception and understanding of the phenomena to which it relates ([Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994](#)). The author adds that this has nothing to do with the occult, but means that it is a discourse whose main feature is dialogization. In her view, it is the conversation with the Other that intensifies the understanding. In our opinion, the enhancement may well be of spiritual nature (even if not necessarily occult, for that sake).

The route towards understanding can be at times painful. For example, [Ann Fisher \(1986\)](#) describes the special version of culture shock that female anthropologists might endure. Both men and women, and among them even the best fieldworkers, risk to experience some of the symptoms: depression, rejection of members of the studied culture, paranoid feelings that one is the object of contempt or dislike. These feelings may be of a marked intensity.

The role of the anthropologist is one that inspired us to become self-reflective. Our previous experiences of field studies were more or less suffused by many and intense feelings, not only in regard to the field itself but also to our own role and the experience of doing field research in itself.

[Van Maanen \(1995\)](#) recognizes the new heightened self-consciousness of the discipline. He entitled his reflections "The Ethnography of Ethnography." In a similar vein, we engaged in an anthropology of anthropology. Our intention is to explore the experience of doing anthropologic studies, how we feel about being in the field, how the field influences us, what the label "anthropologist" may mean as an identity or as a way of self-presentation. To do this we wanted to get out into the field, but concentrate on the relationship between ourselves (and our selves) and the surroundings rather than on the features of the field itself.

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## The anthropology of anthropology

We have conducted three field studies: we stood in places we explored at some point earlier, all of them institutions of higher education. We were holding up a poster saying that we were anthropologists. We observed how the place reacted to us, and what our place in the field felt like. We kept notes, which each of us wrote down alone directly after the experience. The product is a special version of "auto-ethnography" ([Van Maanen, 1995](#)): a narrative on ourselves not even as partial participants of a culture, but as the biased participants of the culture of professional outsiders.

The first place is SGGW (The Academy of Agriculture) in Warsaw. The date is October 1st, 1996. We are standing in front of a large old building accommodating the library and or MBA Center (one of us did not notice the sign of the latter), with a sheet of Bristol board where we have written in capital letters: *We are anthropologists of culture*. The day is sunny, it is close to noon, and we remain there for c:a 30 min. Our impressions differed somewhat. This is how one of us experienced this situation, according to her fieldnotes:

laughter and sunshine  
people pass by  
some fail to see us  
others share in  
our laughter  
some runsome walk  
a part of the world  
revolves around us  
while the rest of it  
continuesto diverge  
away>

The day is sunny and there are some passers by. Most of them are probably students. Two guys are unfolding a huge plastic sheet on the grass. Some of the passers by stop to look at the sign we hold up (white letters on black), or at least turn their heads. Some do not notice us at all. One guy takes a picture of us and we talk with him for a while. He's nice (his companion, a woman, says nothing but smiles all the time). Someone asks us: "so what?" referring to the sign we hold up. You answer: "so we're here." A guy says: "you have 15 seconds to explain!" as he runs by. You say: "We're anthropologists of culture." We drink Coke and I smoke a cigarette. We talk with each other and laugh. I concentrate on us and expect the surrounding world to do the same. I feel cheated when it doesn't. It's not very cold but my hands start to freeze. The time passes fast, however, due to my hands freezing, I'd like to go soon.

The other set fieldnotes contains the following description:

The decision taken to actually stand in public holding our sign, my spirits gradually fall as the nervousness begins to kick in. There is nothing in particular that makes me run away--the situation is not all that social, we are not going to hunt down anybody and ask questions, nor will we probably engage in too much conversation with the strangers. Still, perhaps because it's for real, and not just a joke, I feel like running away. Nevertheless, we proceed.

The first location we have chosen isn't too crowded, being located somewhat out of the way. [...] And as we unfold our sign, my nervousness suddenly leaves. Its traces remain for a few more seconds, but it's just that--traces. I try to concentrate on what's going on, recording the reactions of the passers-by. Most of them either ignore us, or perhaps smile and walk by. Somehow smiling is much better--the smiles are somehow warm, while being ignored is a definite sign of rejection, the indifference seemingly hostile. A few reactions are quite remarkable, though--one guy, after some general appreciative remark, was about to leave, but decided to come back and offered to take a photo of us. Great. He offers to send us a print, but I feel it's really not important whether he will--I'd like to get it, but it's the reaction that counts. Another person asks us whether we know some guy who's an anthropologist of culture as well. He walks away when we don't recognize the name, and for once I feel that perhaps our sign wasn't as outlandish as it seemed to us. Another guy says he gives us ten seconds to explain ourselves, but of course he doesn't expect us to. Finally, some girl asks us the pertinent "so what?" and the best we can come up is "so here we are." Nevertheless, I feel a very positive link towards the people who did respond, somehow feeding off their generosity in participating in our joke. After a while, though, when nothing more seems to be happening, we leave, as the boredom starts to set in.

This was our first exploration, and we were both expectant and nervous. The typical and perhaps even cult paranoia of the anthropologist is an experience of being watched by others, being instantly recognized as alien (but not as "anthropologist" as this is a non-role in most Fields) and regarded with hostility by the environment. We were now anthropologists that have come out of the closet, standing in the middle of the Field with a clear label. This was anthropologic paranoia *a rebours*: we were expecting everyone's attention to be turned on us.

We were accepting with gratefulness the signs of attention but perhaps most of all the signs we interpreted as welcoming of the aliens by the Field.

The second of our explorations took place on October 2nd, 1996, close to noon, in front of ATK, the Academy of Catholic Theology. We stood there for about forty minutes, holding up a sign saying that we were anthropologists of contemporaneity. The Academy is located at the outskirts of Warsaw. The fieldnotes by one of us contain the following narrative:

We stand close to the building, a little bit sideways from everybody else but in good vision. It's almost noon and the sun is shining. We hold up our sign that says: "We're anthropologists of contemporaneity," in black letters on a white sheet. You're wearing mirrorshades the first half an hour. At first some people--most likely, students, look at us, some smile, as they stand in groups. Then a woman approaches us, a representative for a group (as she says herself) to ask us who we are and what message we want to put forward. We answer that our only message is what's written on the sign. It's nice to talk to her. After a while another woman addresses us, to discuss the philosophy behind our statement. She wonders what we're exploring. Rather cool. A guy asks some question (?). A school boy (probably from the gymnasium located nearby) that has been standing in a group for a longer time (I didn't notice that) approaches us and asks: "and so what?", to which we answer "so we're anthropologists of contemporaneity" and he says: "and it's all? like I am ... [he quotes a name]." Someone comments from the distance (not to us but to their colleagues): "They are mental." Someone else (male) suggests, also addressing his group that we are "for the taking." A woman hands us a sheet of paper saying "I am a human being" and says: "This serves as an exchange of thoughts." Most people look at the sign, look at us, but just pass by or turn around. The teachers (priests) pretend not to see us. We're struck by the specificity of the place: one student addresses his teacher "God bless you" in order to start a conversation. The students are rather quiet, I don't see many of them smoking, they are dressed rather non-extravagantly (even if few are dressed conservatively). Most people who talk to us address me, so we speculate about the cause of this. You say that I might look more serious, while my hypothesis is that your dark glasses discourage people from talking to you. You take off the glasses. The next people who start talking to us address the both of us, but I answer first. Then we observe a scene: an older guy dressed like someone a janitor strolling around a few times, looking briefly at us. At one point he comes out together with a middle aged woman and looks as if he were persuading her about something. She answers (I can hear it): "No, it's out of the terrain." After some time she approaches us alone and, with what looks to me like faked nonchalance, asks what anthropologist means. We explain that it's a kind of a researcher. She seems satisfied and leaves. Then we leave.

I was glad to talk to the people who were curious about us. They all treated us seriously, they assumed that we have a message and a reason to be there. The sheet of paper with "I'm human" was my clear favorite. But I also felt that the place was somehow constrained, it felt closed to be there. The last scene, with the older man and the woman, made me paranoid (the typical paranoia of the anthropologist--to me, at least), I just assumed that they want to throw us out. Simultaneously, I was aware of the paranoia and didn't take it quite as

seriously (a clear instance of self-reflectivity and self-consciousness). Also, to me, as I was observing places in my role as anthropologist, I often felt as if I had it written on my front that I'm an anthropologist here (and of course, the role is so little known and so undefined, as well as somewhat weird, that to the general public it means more or less: she the outsider freak). This time we had the sign disclosing openly our presence and the identity of the presence. A few times it passed through my head that this indeed feels like the reversed anthropology: everyone knows we are observers and observe us. I didn't observe as much as I usually do when I study things. I concentrated on if they see us and how they perceive us most on the time.

You give me  
the sign  
with black letters  
on it  
The reality out there  
reflected away  
by your mirrorshades  
We talk to the people  
of another world  
so different from us  
but just as much childish  
and serious  
at once  
I felt welcome at that place.

The notes taken by the other of us read as follows:

[T]his is the main entrance, and there are lots of people around. My urge to run away is much weaker now than the last time, and this time I know it will run away when we unfold the sign. It's black on white this time, and we're the anthropologists of contemporaneity. Most people are gathered in tight groups or circles, talking. Some of them look at us, some of them smile. Soon enough, some guy approaches us, asking the meaning of our sign, and our purpose. We explain that we're exploring the culture and looking for reactions in ourselves and the other people. He suggests anthropology is some esoteric science (???-- I didn't hear his remark, I took that much from your response). Then a girl walks by, claiming to be a representative of a group and that she would like to know what we have to say. We say that it is all on the sign, and then you explain that we're researching culture. She says she doesn't want to get philosophical, having just finished a philosophy of law class. A group of schoolboys from a nearby school has been observing us for a while, and finally one of them asks what do we mean by our sign. We say that's it just that, and he wonders "just like I'm X [a name]?" then walks away. Another girl asks us what does "anthropologist" mean--you say it's a researcher of culture. Yet another gives us a sheet of paper with "I am human" on it, and says it's "the exchange of thoughts." One other guy approaches us with the question of our purpose, and gets the standard response. Finally some woman comes to us, pretending to just pass by, and asks us who are the anthropologists. She gets the same response as the people before. We both heard her talking to a

watchman a few minutes before, and saying something about not being able to do anything because it was out of grounds. You're pretty sure it was us she meant. Soon after that, we leave. We share the impression that the people here tended to look to philosophy for our grounds of being here, and the questions asked us carried a philosophical ground. They were all very nice, but I didn't feel the warmth that I did at SGGW--nobody seemed to think it might have been just a joke, or that we might not be serious about it, while most people at SGGW seemed to take that for granted. Once or twice I heard the word "research," not spoken to us, but still I got the impression that it was about us. I felt neutral here, perhaps participating in the conversation, but not in any emotional communication with these people--the girl giving us her sign being the possible exception; I find myself regretting she didn't stay to talk.

One of us concentrates here explicitly on her paranoia. She comes to a point of experiencing the reversal of the roles. This particular Field is very self-reflective, just as we are, and it rapidly embraces the role of studying us, playing the game we proposed it. Some groups of people do not (the teachers, the woman) and this is experienced by us as open rejection. In this study also our own roles became visible to us: we wonder why people are approaching one of us and not the other, and speculate on the way the Field categorizes us.

The third study took place on October 18th in front of ASP, the Academy of Arts in Warsaw, close to noon. We held a sign saying that we were anthropologists of culture. The study lasted for about half an hour. The notes taken by one of us say the following:

A place where I don't feel alien. We stand there with the black sign, saying "We're anthropologists of culture." People don't react so much to us there, they often pass by and smile, or say "Good day." We're no curiosity there, I feel a kind of belonging to the place. A woman says: "And I'm from the Jewish Theater and I welcome you to our pantomime. You'll get a special price." A man tries to sell us hair brushes. An older man inquired whether we have something to propose, like our art, or whatever. We say we don't, only the sign that we hold. Here most people are addressing the both of us. A man stops by and says: "That's a nice profession. You look nice." and then, turning back as he walks away: "You'd look nice even without the poster." My friend walks by with her friend. We say hello and we talk. She asks us about our "anthropology" and we explain that we've already been to two places and that they were all different. Nothing much happens, but I feel good here, it doesn't matter if we have the sign or if we don't. People are dressed in a way I like, they behave natural, the atmosphere is cool.

Now to the other set of notes:

Academy of Arts (ASP), the centre of Warsaw. Still, there's no front of the Academy where I would like to stand, and we end up a little out of the way. I feel like finding flaws in this place, people claim it's so cool that I am looking for ways to discredit it. Still, I like this place, I just don't want to admit it's "perfect" or "better." We have the white on black sign and we are the anthropologists of culture this time. I am nervous, expecting the people to write off our idea as old, boring, and like stuff they've seen and done lots of times before--a failed happening rather than any research project or joke. Still,



even if most people ignore us, they remain friendly and smiling. One of them says "hello" and walks by. The first person to approach us is some guy trying to sell hair brushes, and doesn't seem too disappointed that we don't buy any. One girl walks by smiling, then, as an afterthought, retraces a few steps back to us and asks us some standard question about what we're doing and gets a similarly standard response. Still, that was nice. A friend of yours comes by with her friend and we talk for a while (mostly you and your friend). Some older guy comes by and asks us about what we're planning to do, what we have to offer and who are we trying to find here. We explain that we're just looking at people and ourselves, not having any reaction in mind yet. Some woman answers our sign saying "And I'm from the Jewish Theatre." She then invites us to go see their pantomime, saying we'll get special deals on the tickets. I don't feel I belong here, but we don't stand out as sore thumbs the way we tend to in other surroundings. As we leave, I have just about managed to convince myself that while it's a nice place to visit every once a while, I wouldn't like to be here too often.

This Field divided us both in the respect of our experience of our roles and of our relationship to it. One of us felt she belonged there, and her experiences were mostly those of strengthening the emotional bonds to it. The other felt outside, but more by his own choice, not because of being rejected. We are no curiosity here, the role we carry is neither nonexistent nor alien here. Therefore we here experience something we have not thought of before--the Field's expectations on us (or The Role) such as we imagine them. This is a brief exploration of the possible socialization into the Field by the anthropologist: before we did not have this choice offered so directly, this time it feels like considering whether to stay or to go.

The explorations had to me (MK) also an underlying significance of relationship to the Field and of my identity. We chose the type of field by accident, but to me it was not so surprising that, for the first attempts to do such a study, that for me felt more threatening than a "normal" anthropologic observation, more exposed and more vulnerable, we chose a type of field that was not so far away from our own "home field," i.e. the academic reality. It was also a field not so distant from the "home field" of the role of the anthropologist. However, it was sufficiently divergent from both ourselves and the role as to seem interesting. At some point we considered standing in front of the Faculty of Anthropology of the Warsaw University but the idea repelled me as boring. Maybe we could still do that, but I would prefer it to happen after many studies of this kind conducted elsewhere. As we said before, we have been to all the places before, in the more standard anthropologic role, i.e. without wearing labels exposing our identity. The specificity of the Field we have chosen revealed to me more explicitly fragments of my mental map of the academic reality around me: the Academy of the Arts is clearly something of an ideal identity to me, one that I would like to embrace. The School of Agriculture is as far away from me as possible--I have no relationship to it in terms of my identity. I treat it with respect and expect the same. The MBA Center is a version of my identity that I do not want to embrace, it carries associations that I would like to avoid. Finally, the Academy of Theology is a strange place, that I view perhaps with some sense of superiority, but the possible bonds are both experienced by me as positive (the philosophic and religious themes) and negative (ideology and totalitarianism).

I (JK) had a quite different approach towards our explorations--being reticent towards entering any interaction with strangers of my own volition, I treated this project as a step

towards finding the middle ground between "normal" anthropologic research of the Peeping Tom variety and shutting myself off from the outside and still pretending to have an inkling of idea of what is happening out there. I liked the choice of the site of our explorations--but not because of any possible relations with our home turf, but rather because I expected a more imaginative approach towards our role than from the self-absorbed street crowd (we wanted to remain total strangers, i.e. not have to seek any permissions we would need to enter any institutional grounds with our research).

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## Through the Ages

The self-reflective approach we have adopted in our explorations brings to our minds the label "gothic." The concept has attracted us not only because we felt our field studies reflected what we perceived as its central issues, but also because the vagueness of the term and its ever-changing readings allows us not to feel framed by oppressive categorization. In fact, we consider this nebulous quality one of the important aspects of our own reading. Let us then take a look at the various meanings ascribed to the label throughout its history.

The first time this word begins to be used in a sense we find interesting is in the 17th century, when it describes the late medieval architecture, comparing it to the Germanic people called Goths, or rather to their "uncivilized lack of taste or education" ([Wake and Watkins, 1996](#)). At first its meaning is clearly derogatory, but it sticks nevertheless, and the demeaning connotation loses its force with the changing views of the Gothic architecture, which, used primarily for sacral constructions, "de-emphasized the solid mass of the church and gave it the light and lofty feeling of upward rising" ([Zurakowski, 1996](#)). It stressed the spiritual side of the aesthetics, giving "an overwhelming feeling of mysticism, the dominant spiritual and philosophical movement" (ibid.).

After the wave of criticism towards it and the domination of baroque style in architecture, gothic becomes discovered anew in the eighteenth century, which leads to the creation of another pretendent to the label "gothic"--namely the gothic novel. Starting with "The Castle of Otranto" by Horace Walpole in 1764, the genre grew, usually presenting "landscape[s] of vast dark forest with vegetation that bordered on excessive, concealed ruins with horrific rooms, monasteries and a forlorn character who excels at the melancholy" ([Potter, 1997](#)). Admired for the intensity of its images, or criticized for its sensationalism and melodramatism, the gothic novel not only laid foundations for the Romanticist movement, but also gave birth to some truly inspiring pieces of art, particularly Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," hailed by [Brian Aldiss \(1974/89\)](#) as the first science fiction story. [Umberto Eco \(1978/96\)](#) goes further, suggesting the genre as the source of the novel as it is known today. We would just like to point to some of its style and atmosphere, the legacy of which is "felt today in the portrayal of the alluring antagonist, whose evil characteristics appeal to ones sense of awe" ([Potter, 1997](#)). This subject seems particularly fit to our times--Norman Denzin actually writes about "the postmodern desire to see evil, while being repulsed by it," ([1991: 75](#)) which we see as the contemporary version of that very fascination with the forbidden, explored first by the gothic novel.

The term gothic has also been used to describe various authors dealing with the darker side of the aesthetic, ranging from Edgar Allan Poe to Bram Stoker to Howard Phillips Lovecraft.

These works often include spiritual and supernatural elements, concentrating however on creating an unsettling atmosphere rather than on describing such elements in all the detail. Such a reading of the term gothic takes us right into the present, when the concept got firmly attached to a musical style.

The contemporary subculture called Goths takes its roots in the late seventies, in the musical experiments of rock bands like *Joy Division*, *Siouxsie and the Banshees*, and *Bauhaus*, turning the anger of punk rock inwards, creating introverted, angst-ridden, bassy sound. At first, no REFERENCE to neither the medieval nor romantic gothic was intended. However, as the name caught, some of the new-found Goths became "a bit confused by the label and started to think that the label Goth was in some way connected with the Victorian Gothic revival and Gothic horror and because enough of them thought that eventually it became true" ([Wake and Watkins, 1996](#)). Taken at the surface level this led to a standard dress of [b]lack clothing (of velvet, silk and/or leather), fishnet stockings, torn lace and ripped jeans, together with pointed shoes or boots, Doc Martens and shapeless jumpers (...), [m]otifs of bats, spiders, crosses and ankhs" ([Watts, 1994](#): 44) as well as to the general impression "that Goths are uniformly arrogant, pretentious and self-indulgent" (ibid.). Some people who are drawn towards that label are, however, able to step back and have a laugh at themselves, like [A. Dominy-Cusraque \(1995\)](#), who defines gothic as

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One who is Attracted 2,  
    or  
    Something that is Indicative Of,  
                                a Dark Aesthetic.  
  
    This can B Applied 2 Any & All Things,  
    B  
    they  
    Serious,  
    Silly,  
                                or Both.  
    Tuberculosis  
    2 Rubber Bats,  
                                See?
```

In our explorations we see overtones of all these readings of the label, ranging from the spark of spiritual insight contained in the gothic architecture to the reflective gloominess of the gothic novel to the introverted aesthetic of the gothic rock.

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## Gothic anthropology: The clarity of darkness

Gothic anthropology we perceive as the turning of the gaze from the lit up outside to the obscure inside, to encounter the strangeness and the loneliness and address it.

Peter and Martina Pelzer in their essay *The Gothic experience: Gothic music as an example for role and function of contemporary subculture* ([1996](#)) concentrate primarily on contemporary music and 18<sup>th</sup> century Gothic literature. They also suggest the "Gothic" metaphor to explore the dark side of organizing. "Organization is a threatening fact taking away our personalities, sucking life out of our bodies and brains without touching the surface of our skin" (p. 19). They use the terms "scientific Gothic or the Gothic scientist" to represent

the visions of Jean Baudrillard, which "supply us with complete inversions of our usual beliefs, they represent the dark side of society's progress and especially a vision of the point of collapse" (p. 18). We believe that the metaphor can be used more extensively, to embrace the solipsist and/or subjectivist self-reflective perspective in social sciences. Gothic science as a perspective is: one more perspective borrowed from the arts, as many others before (functionalism, constructivism, postmodernism, etc.); a metaphor that we treat as an invitation to join in the conversation about science and being a scientist as seen inwards.

Gothic anthropology, the way we see it, is poetic, reflective and spiritual. By turning towards oneself, it does not forsake the field research, but rather concentrates on another dimension of experiencing the contemporaneity--through oneself, though not through participation. It brings forward the introverted feelings associated with any kind of fieldwork, rather than their expressions conveyed through interactions, or observed in others. It is, also, the dark side of anthropology, reflecting upon the uncommunicable, personal, and sublime--the sphere of withdrawal from the society rather than the participation in it.

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