



Organisational Gothic

Stream 3: Organization/Literature: Beyond Equivalence and Antimony

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The Monster Awakes

The Goths, like the Vandals and the Huns, were nomadic tribes who brought the classical era of European history to an end¹. Where the Greeks and Romans had established learning and order, these central European hordes swept in and celebrated a mobile form of anarchic violence. After them was a thousand year age of darkness, where the lamps of civilisation flickered in only a few places. No wonder the goths have a bad name.

This paper is a small attempt to rehabilitate the goths and the descendants who now claim their title. Since the eighteenth century, gothic has come to mean another form of darkness, and in its mobile transmutations, has celebrated various forms of disorder and transgression. In a wide variety of ways, gothic representations claim the dark sides of Western culture as their own. The seething desires of the unconscious, the night, the serial killer or sexual deviant, blood, loneliness, becoming animal or alien, the monstrous mob, the graveyard and the ruin. As several commentators have suggested (Botting 1996, Davenport-Hines 1997, Grunenbergs 1997), for more than two hundred years, gothic has taken contemporary fears and made them its own. In this paper, I propose to make visible the specific conjunction between gothic and representations of organisation. It seems to me that, over the last century and a half, we can trace a stream of imagery that presents the world of work in ways that are indebted to the gothic. In following a lineage that links Marx's conjunction between capital and the vampire, through Kafka's labyrinthine bureaucracy, to contemporary films that show power-crazed lunatics at the top of teetering corporate skyscrapers I am going to argue that this represents a powerful form of cultural critique through representation. Organisational gothic is, I believe, one way of resisting sanitised visions of a brave new world, and it has haunted the imagination of organisation for well over a century².

The point of this journey into arcana is to solicit certain forms of representation and conjoin them with a wider project of critiquing contemporary forms of market managerialism. It seems to me that accounting frauds, anti-corporate protests, movements for business ethics and social responsibility, and the growth of critical management studies all point to a sustained political and ethical suspicion of large scale forms of organising. What I want to add in this paper is a cultural dimension³, one based on an appreciation of the ways that gothic representations have become common ways of imagining our lives at work. I have explored this elsewhere in terms of the ubiquity of visions of the grey bureaucrat, the heartless corporation and the corrupt executive (Parker 2002b), but in this paper want to explore the genealogy of these ideas as an enduring and radical critique of the modern world. Towards the end of the paper I will also consider whether invoking the gothic is necessarily a critical move, and also the status of a cultural criticism of organisations more generally. There are some clear dangers in a romantic celebration of matters that are conventionally left outside the 'discipline', in the assumption that what critical organisation theory needs is more writing on science fiction, the Simpsons and office jokes. Unless the relations between supposedly cultural matters and material ones are clearly articulated, papers like this might be no more than baroque decorations, and not achieve their intent as minor gravediggers for market managerialism

Gothic

In perhaps its most consistent meaning, the gothic is that which diverges from Rome. If Rome represents the centre, order, visibility and civilisation then it is the Goths who seek something other. In architectural terms the label was first applied during the later renaissance as a derogatory one to buildings that departed from the golden age of symmetry and proportion. Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), an Italian painter, architect and writer, suggested that there 'arose new architects who after the manner of their barbarous nations erected buildings in that style which we call Gothic', while John Evelyn (1620-1706), an English diarist, wrote that 'ancient Greek and Roman architecture answered all the perfections required in a faultless and accomplished building' but the Goths and Vandals destroyed these and 'introduced in their stead a certain fantastical and licentious manner of building: congestions of heavy, dark, melancholy, monkish piles, without any just proportion, use or beauty' (both cited in Cram 1909). This seems rather a nice place to begin. A moment when the revived architecture of the ancient world was under an aesthetic threat that paralleled the bloody battles of the Rhine a millennium earlier.

But if the gothic was here employed as a negative term which served to celebrate certain classical virtues, its reincarnation in the middle of the eighteenth century eventually reversed the equation. By the time of John Ruskin's 1853 essay 'The Nature of Gothic', the 'fallen Roman, in the utmost impotence of his luxury, and insolence of his guilt' (1985: 80) has become the antithesis of virtue and authenticity. The corruption and sterility of neo-classicism provides the reason for an increasing celebration of the mediaeval, whether it be a conservative lament for feudalism or a radical celebration of craft guilds. Importantly, this later version of the gothic seems to begin at about the same time that notions of the 'sublime' and 'picturesque' become central to reorganising a relationship between the urban and the rural, the past and the present. The idea that wild and unruly nature was a source of beauty and awe would not have made much sense to those who spent their lives struggling with the earth, and in that regard it is hardly surprising that the educated and elite members of a newly stratified society began to valorise that which they had achieved some distance from. Tiring of the ordering that characterised neo-classical aesthetics, the rigid patterns of hedges and proper orders of column, the idea grows that yawning chasms, ruins and volcanoes could provoke reactions which were more than simply pleasing.

One hundred years before Ruskin, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) had provided the aesthetic rationale for willingly exposing oneself to the awe-fulness of nature. If smallness, delicacy, fragility, smoothness, sweetness and gradual variation were characteristics of the beautiful, then the sublime was characterised by vastness, darkness, danger, power, infinity and suddenness. It is because, Burke suggests, the latter list reminds us of our mortality and insignificance, that exposure to the sublime provokes such strong emotions. Salvator Rosa's (1615-73) images of the bay of Naples lit by Vesuvius and staggering Neapolitan landscapes populated by witches and bandits had already been brought back to Northern Europe as grand tour postcards. Withered trees, crags and storms began to establish a new grammar for extreme experiences that broadened the mind. By the middle of the eighteenth century Alexander Pope, Horace Walpole, William Kent and others had begun to establish irregularity and artifice as principles upon which nature could be represented in garden and architectural design

(Davenport-Hines 1998; Munro 2002). An increasing number of landscapes employed shell grottoes, hermits, obelisks, ruins and the sunken ditch or 'ha-ha' to stage an emotionally dramatic movement from one prospect to another. The melancholy of decay and sham mediaevalism also inspired the castellations and towers of gothic revival houses and follies. Apart from self-consciously harking back to a pre-industrial age, much of this aesthetic relied upon evoking a certain emotional intensity, rather than the serene timeless tidiness implied in neo-classicism. Indeed, one of Pope's engravings for his 1745 *Essay on Man* depicts a sea of derelict monuments, including a broken pediment inscribed 'Roma Aeterna' - eternal Rome. Rather than timeless order, it was now melancholy, mortality and insignificance that organised a new aesthetic.⁴

At the beginning of Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, a gigantic helmet falls into the castle courtyard and kills the only heir just prior to his marriage. The intricate events that follow provide much of the imagery of the haunted house that has been so central to gothic ever since - ghosts, prophecies, murder and lust. Whilst Walpole's rather camp playfulness began to make more formulaic in the writings of novelists like Ann Radcliffe, William Beckford and Matthew Lewis, it also feeds on some much darker forms of social criticism that emerge from the late eighteenth century onwards. Piranesi's prints of imaginary prison interiors (the *Carceri*), Goya's illustrations of the horrors of war, and the Marquis de Sade's incarcerated explorations of sexual desire and freedom all shared a deep pessimism (or realism) about the human condition. In many of these books we also find evil lurking in the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps the global institution of its time and 'widely regarded as [a] sinister machine of cruel controls' (Davenport-Hines 1998: 224). The Spanish Inquisition, the most famous of several inquisitions established to cleanse the church of heretics, began in 1478 but did not officially end until 1808. During that time, 323 362 people were tried for nameless sins by unknown accusers, tortured and burned by an organisation claiming to represent god's law on earth. The arrogance of order and the cruelties of power were all too clear to those Europeans who lived through religious wars and the age of revolutions. Those who wished to enjoy the sublime dramas of alpine scenery had also to deliberate on the murderous mobs of France. It is harder to be truly romantic about terror when it ceases to be a noble abstraction. Indeed, Burke himself, in his 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* seems to suggest that revolution was far from sublime but rather that France's 'monster of a constitution' had released 'attornies, agents, money-jobbers, speculators, and adventurers, composing an ignoble oligarchy founded upon the destruction of the crown, the church, the nobility, and the people' (cited in Botting 1996: 86).

So a darker gothic sensibility seems to part company from romanticism at around this time and terms that had been synonyms, the picturesque and the grotesque, are increasingly distinguished (Hollington 1984: 23). After all, there are two main forms of reaction to the sublime. One is to suggest that it opens the self to some form of transcendence. At its mildest, this might be the self improvement of the grand tour, or the celebration of heroic chivalry, but the excess of this move is towards the solitary wild genius who, through force of will and character, can look into the abyss and not be overwhelmed. This, I believe, is the heart of the romantic attitude which, in a certain way, 'solves' the problem of the sublime by embracing it. Faced with the storm, the romantic becomes the storm, and thereby becomes more fully themselves.

Ruskin's version of gothic as a wild Northern style which reflects the profusion of nature through the imperfect imagination of the free labourer is, in my sense, more romantic than gothic (1985: 84). Yet such a solution was rather too easy for goths who have since employed grotesquerie and the machineries of horror in a relentless manner, with escape being a less likely solution. Nineteenth century writers like Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson and Bram Stoker experiment with the drama of light and dark, but their moralising rarely suggests transcendence. Instead, human reason and power is exposed as hubris when faced with the monsters it creates or that lurk inside and outside beyond its control.

Fred Botting has suggested that the gothic is concerned with excess and transgression, the 'negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic'. He is also clear that the figures of the gothic have been mutable, reflecting the hopes and fears of the age that they grow from. So, the desolate mountain becomes the haunted house, which in turn becomes the labyrinthine city or factory. The evil aristocrat or monk becomes the mad scientist or Machiavellian capitalist (1996: 2). Now excess is certainly one form of transgression, but the element that interests me most in the gothic is inversion. It seems to be a genre which is continually concerned to celebrate that which is secreted away and oppose that which is deemed natural.

'It negates. It denies. It buries in shadow that which had been brightly lit, and brings into the light that which had been repressed.' (McGrath 1997: 156)

Yet, unlike more rational and transparent forms of critique, the gothic suggests no tidy solution. There is no way out of the haunted house, the vampire never really dies, and the skeletal hand will always reach out of the earth to grasp your ankle just as you think you have got away. But we shouldn't understand the monstrous merely in terms of golems, blood-suckers and doppelgangers as if modern gothic were merely about transgressive bodies. Rather, and I will expand on this below, the gothic is also a way to represent social relations and institutions. In the form that it has taken from the nineteenth century onwards, the gothic has been profoundly concerned to twist contemporary ideologies and show the darkness hiding in the light, to pursue a form of social criticism through cultural re-presentation.

Industrial Gothic

As I suggested above, the emergence of concepts like the 'sublime' and the 'picturesque' began to make nature into an object of a new form of aesthetic interest. However, in another sense it also began to secure a new aesthetic vocabulary within which urbanisation and industrialisation could be represented in an intelligible manner. The dramas of light and shade first explored by Salvator Rosa had been applied to industrial subjects by Joseph Wright of Derby (Hetherington 1997: 109), and it is easy enough to see how echoes of hell could be forged from the smoke and fire of William Blake's 'dark satanic mills'. In a sense then, one element of the emerging critique of industrialism was to connect the manufactory and the city to established ideas from Christian mythology (for examples, see Chapple 1970: 93). If Eden was the pastoral idyll, then the growing industrial towns were far from green and pleasant - *The Nether World* of George Gissing's 1889 novel. But, perhaps most importantly, they were founded on new social relationships which radically problematised an older order. Much of nineteenth century gothic takes key figures in this new landscape and plays with the ambivalences that they contain.

The three key texts that provide so much of this imagery can illustrate this well enough. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) are all novels set in the contemporary - told through letters, reports, diary entries and so on - but yet contain abnormalities that lurch through the text. In *Frankenstein*, the arrogance of science is exposed in a sorcerer's apprentice fable that illustrates hubris creating an external nemesis. In *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Stevenson reworks older stories of possession and were-wolves into a tale of scientifically induced nemesis from within. Finally, in *Dracula*, the forces of reason and civilisation are pitted against something entirely unworldly that merges anxieties about class, sexuality, religion, human and animal bodies and even death itself in one heady mix. There are, of course, plenty of other ways to read these stories, but the key theme I want to bring out is the massive tension they produce between their 'realism', being credible stories about modern people, and the eruption of horrific fantasy into the everyday. Of particular relevance here is the scientist or professional as a modern archetype who produces (Frankenstein), contains (Dr Jekyll) or counters (Van Helsing) threats to order. These books are populated by doctors, lawyers and scientists, the emergent Victorian middle classes whose orderings did so much to create the modern world⁵. Whether attacked by the disdainful aristocratic count or the 'stunted proletarian monster' Mr Hyde (Davenport-Hines 1998: 312), the position of the professional classes is far from secure. So, if eighteenth century gothic was mediaeval, nineteenth century gothic used similar aesthetic mechanisms in order to insist that the battle between science and superstition has not been settled, and perhaps never can be.

However, 'superstition' is too loose and pejorative a word in these contexts. What these novels establish is the possibility that a wide range of 'Others' could be deployed to interrogate the present. Merely taking these three novels as exemplars, we have oppositions between food/blood, scientist/aristocrat, Western Europe/Eastern Europe, science/alchemy, human/animal, life/death, day/night, Christianity/paganism, reproduction/consumption in which the former term (perhaps the 'settled' term) is exceeded or inverted by the latter term. I will say some more about this (rather structuralist) understanding of gothic towards the end of the paper. For now I just want to note the power of gothic imagery as way of condensing a certain moral censure. In summoning the image of Dracula, Frankenstein's monster or Mr Hyde, we can redescribe a person, thing or relation. Indeed, terms like 'vampyre' and 'blood sucker' had been used as derogatory alternatives to 'sharp', 'userer' and 'stockjobber' since the early eighteenth century at least (Davenport-Hines 1998: 239). So when Karl Marx, writing before Stoker, uses various rhetorical flourishes in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, *Grundrisse*, the inaugural address to the First International, and *Capital* to apply the metaphor of vampirism to capital and the bourgeois order he is relying on an already fairly well established convention.

'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.' (Marx 1976: 342).

Though there are clearly important economic issues being dramatised in quotes like this⁶, there is also an important rhetorical strategy at work here. In suggesting that capital is like a vampire, Marx (and also Engels) invert the ideology of capitalism by equating the putative vitality of capitalist production with the sickening consumption of the parasite. The moral economy of value that attached to the sort of classical economics that Marx despised is re-described in terms that force the reader into some

kind of imaginative leap. Whether they accept the implicit proposition that Marx makes is another matter, but the metaphorical strategy is clear enough -

‘some of the most gruesomely archaic echoes of fairy-tale, legend, myth and folklore crop up in the wholly unexpected environment of the modern factory system, stock exchange, and parliamentary chamber: ghosts, vampires, ghouls, werewolves, alchemists, and reanimated corpses continue to haunt the bourgeois world, for all its sober and sceptical virtues.’ (Baldick 1987: 121)

Yet these ideas and characters do not exhaust the gothic. Indeed, I would argue that they are merely the tip of an imaginative iceberg that throws a cold light on capitalism and work organisations. In nineteenth century gothic, it is all too often the city itself that plays this role - a grim city populated by institutions of various degrees of cruelty - prisons, workhouses, schools, factories and laboratories. Take Charles Dickens, for example, an author who might not be termed gothic in the conventional sense, but certainly continues what Hollington has termed ‘the grotesque tradition’ (1984). In many of his novels, he employs extreme characterisation and chiaroscuro description to present a moral economy in which the city and its denizens are polluted by money, whilst the simplicity and authenticity of the country lies beyond. In many of his novels, country folk are corrupted (*Great Expectations*) or easily hoodwinked (*Oliver Twist*) by the baleful influence of London, whilst Dickens continually expresses mock naivety about the motives of those populating various self-congratulatory yet cruel institutions. In *David Copperfield* (1850) he describes Murdstone and Grinby’s decaying and rat infested warehouse (1994a: 135), and the banks of the Thames in apocalyptic terms.

‘The clash and glare of sundry fiery Works upon the river-side arose by night to disturb everything except the heavy and unbroken smoke that poured out of their chimneys. Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among the old wooden piles, with a sticky substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year’s handbills offering rewards for drowned men fluttering above high watermark, led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb tide.’ (*op cit*: 555-556).

Later, in his *Bleak House* of 1853, travelling to the ‘iron country’ involves leaving ‘fresh green woods’ behind and entering somewhere with ‘coalpits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires and a heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke’ (1993: 695). Rouncewells’ factory is described in similar terms -

‘... a great perplexity of iron lying about, in every stage, and in a vast variety of shapes; in bars, in wedges, in sheets; in tanks, in boilers, in axles, in wheels, in cogs, in cranks, in rails; twisted and wrenched into eccentric and perverse forms, as separate parts of machinery; mountains of it broken up, and rusty in its age; distant furnaces of it glowing and bubbling in its youth; bright fireworks of it showering about, under the blows of the steam hammer; red-hot iron, white-hot iron, cold-black iron; an iron taste, an iron smell, and a Babel of iron sounds.’ (1993: 696)

And then, in Dickens’ most celebrated ‘industrial novel’, *Hard Times*, he portrays the pompous Josiah Bounderby, a factory owner who believed that mill work was ‘the lightest work there is, and it’s the best paid work there is’ whilst his ingrate workers desired ‘Turkey carpets on the floors’ and ‘to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon’ (1994b: 113). Yet Bounderby’s Coketown was ‘a town of machinery and

tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever' and factories which were 'vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness' (*op cit*: 19). Finally, in perhaps Dickens' clearest anti-bureaucratic satire, his *Little Dorrit* of 1857, we are introduced to the 'Circumlocution Office', an arm of government with the motto 'How not to do it.' Its particular expertise was in ensuring that any matters that were referred to it 'never reappeared in the light of day. Boards sat on them, secretaries minuted upon them, commissioners gabbled about them, clerks registered, entered, checked, and ticked them off, and they melted away.' (1994c: 106) In a series of bizarre conversations that prefigure Kafka, the novel's protagonist is passed from office to office, through endless corridors and piles of forms that ensure that nothing is ever done.

"May I enquire how I can obtain official information as to the real state of the case?"

"It is competent," said Mr. Barnacle, "to any member of the - Public," mentioning that obscure body with reluctance, as his natural enemy, "to memorialise the Circumlocution Department. Such formalities as are required to be observed in so doing, may be known on application to the proper branch of that Department."

"Which is the proper branch?"

"I must refer you," returned Mr Barnacle, ringing the bell, "to the Department itself for a formal answer to that inquiry." (*op cit*: 112)

But the 'industrial novel' is not, of course, limited to Dickens. Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 *North and South*, dramatises the ugly town of Milton in the northern county of Darkshire and its contrast with the rural idyll of Helstone in similar ways. The first intimation of Milton that Margaret Hale sees is a 'deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon' (1995: 60), and, in her new house, 'thick fog crept up to the very windows, and was driven into every open door in choking white wreaths of unwholesome mist' (66). She meets Thornton, a local industrialist whose 'mill loomed high (...) casting a shadow down from its many stories, which darkened the summer evening before its time' (159) whilst all around 'the chimneys smoked, the ceaseless roar and mighty beat, and dizzying whirl of machinery, struggled and strove perpetually' (407). In Emile Zola's *Germinal* of 1885, we find similar metaphors at work, though this time they are being used to describe a mine rather than a townscape. Village Two Hundred and Forty is surrounded by decaying factories, and the Le Voreux mine is the last major employer for its desperate citizenry. It is continually described as a monstrosity that swallows men. The pump of the mine is 'like the breath of an insatiable ogre (...) this god, crouching and replete, to whom ten thousand starving men were offering up their flesh' (1954: 80). The Company that runs the mine is set against the workers who wish to destroy it. Marx's name is often mentioned as a justification by these activists whilst the managers defensively argue that capital deserves rewards for its risks. The mental and physical suffering and disease caused by mining are described in hideous detail, and the lengthy winter strike that occupies most of the novel results in starvation, mob violence and the eventual destruction of the mine, which collapses into itself just as so many gothic mansions do at the end of the tale. 'The evil beast, crouching in its hollow, sated with human flesh, had drawn its last long heavy breath.(...) Soon the crater filled up and the place that

had been Le Voreux was a muddy lake, like those lakes beneath which lie evil cities destroyed by God.’ (*op cit*: 452-3)

It is important to reiterate that in Dickens, Gaskell and Zola the organisation is rarely treated as a problem in itself, though perhaps the ‘Circumlocution Office’ is the exception, but really only provides an occasional scene for broader complaints. Instead, the industrial and the urban are co-implicated as the causes of a degradation in both ethical sensibilities and aesthetic experience, and this is expressed through a developing imagery of the manufactory and the city as grotesque places populated by stunted characters. Clearly this emerging anti-aesthetic is shared by the classic gothic novels of Stevenson and Stoker (and Shelley, to a lesser extent) which all express a suspicion of the modern and, perhaps most importantly, employ a more or less explicit representational form of criticism. Just as empire and industry marched onwards to the future to the sound of a chorus of self-congratulatory approval, so did ‘gothic’s antagonism to the possibility of human progress’ (Davenport-Hines 1998: 276) provide a counterpoint, reminding readers that much darkness was also being manufactured by the industrial revolution.

Organisational Gothic

So it is not really until the early twentieth century that organisations in themselves begin to become represented as sites of darkness. Echoing the older image of the haunted house, we begin to see images of organisations as labyrinths with endless corridors and locked doors hiding evil secrets. Or, as the places where monsters are fabricated, and people themselves become monstrous. This is, in part, a shift from exteriors to interiors, from the dirty city street to the cramped office or nightmare factory. A good place as any to begin is with Max Weber’s deeply ambivalent description of the ‘conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all individuals who are born into this mechanism’ (1930: 181). This is the ‘iron cage’ (*op cit*) of bureaucratic administration in which the ‘professional bureaucrat is chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march.’ (in Gerth and Mills 1948: 228). Such mechanistic descriptions have echoed through twentieth century politics and culture, articulating an intimate combination of ruthless efficiency and moral impoverishment.

Perhaps with Piranesi’s *Carceri* in mind, the vocabulary of German expression in film from the 1920s onwards gives stunning visual illustration to Weber’s terrors. Given post-war inflation, unemployment and war reparations Davenport-Hines suggests that ‘All human institutions were thus discredited in Weimar Germany.(...) It was a ripe period for goths, although gothic could not be medieval and knightly in a period of sordid squabbles over percentages.’ (1998: 327) In Fritz Lang’s (1926) film *Metropolis* ‘the gloomy city is divided between a class of industrially roboticised human slaves forced to live a subterranean existence maintaining the awesome machines powering the city, and the rich who enjoy the luxuriously decadent pleasures of the world above’ (Botting 1996: 166) In *Metropolis* a key element of the imagery is that of workers being literally reduced to the appendages of giant machines.

‘Dressed from throat to ankle in dark blue, men walk to their shifts with hanging fists and hanging heads. Row upon row, they shuffle into elevators taking them

into the city's machine rooms. These machine rooms are places of roaring furnaces, heat-spitting walls, the odour of oil, and dark machines like crouching animals far below the streets.' (Tolliver and Coleman 2001: 44)

These industrial troglodytes are contrasted with the glorious indifference of the city above in which the suited managerial classes enjoy wood panelled offices. The towering masses of the cityscape are the new gothic castles and the monsters are now machines.

The visual imagery of *Metropolis*, as well as films like *A Nous La Liberté* (1932) and *Modern Times* (1936), may well reflect a Weberian diagnosis but there is another important influence too. As McGrath has argued, 'psychoanalysis has in this century fulfilled the traditional function of gothic literature' (1997: 156). After all, the expressionist film set is also a landscape of the mind in which the suspension of disbelief allows for fantasy to mutate everyday features of the modern so that they become threatening phantoms. In fantastic fiction, whether these are real terrors or imaginary ones is not particularly important. 'Freud's remarkable achievement is to have taken the props and passions of terror Gothic - hero-villain, heroine, terrible place, haunting - and to have relocated them inside the self.' (Edmundson, cited in Davenport-Hines 1998: 325). There is no better source for this than the fiction of Franz Kafka, particularly his posthumous novels *The Trial* (1925/1953) and *The Castle* (1926/1957). These, as well as some of his short stories - *In the Penal Colony* for example (1919/1988, see Burrell 1997: 146) - dramatise the ways in which people can be entrapped and constituted by the psychic prisons of organisation.

In both novels, the narrator is K - a bank manager in *The Trial* and a land surveyor in *The Castle*. The former tells the story of K's arrest, trial and eventual execution for a crime which is never specified, the latter of K's attempts to discover why he has been brought to a village beneath a towering castle to perform a task which no-one seems to want him to do. In each case, the ordered certainties of a slightly smug professional are gradually stripped away as the ruthless logic of the organisation - 'a rigid obedience to and execution of their duty' (Kafka 1957: 245) - exposes him to a series of increasingly bizarre humiliations, reminiscent of those experienced by supplicants to the 'Circumlocution Office'. K is often sweating in narrow corridors, waiting in passages and being interviewed in chambers at the top of narrow staircases, the victim of confusion or conspiracy which no-one understands completely.

'The ranks of officials in this judiciary system mounted endlessly, so that not even adepts could survey the hierarchy as a whole. And the proceedings of the courts were generally kept secret from subordinate officials, consequently they could hardly ever quite follow in their further progress the cases on which they had worked; any particular case thus appeared in their circle of jurisdiction often without knowing whence it came, and passed from it they knew not whither.' (1953: 133)

K's eventual assassins in *The Trial* are two 'pallid and plump' (*op cit*: 245) gentlemen in frock coats and top hats who bow politely but say nothing. They don't know why they have been sent to administer 'justice', any more than K does.

In Kafka's world, cruelty is a bureaucratic matter, and the affairs of little people like K are of no consequence to those who merely carry out orders. Even misunderstandings are orders, after all. From *The Castle* -

‘In such a large governmental office as the Count’s, it may occasionally happen that one department ordains this, another that; neither knows of the other, and though the supreme control is absolutely efficient, it comes by its nature too late, and so every now and then a trifling miscalculation arises.’ (1957: 62)

The person who is telling K this, the Superintendent, has a cabinet full of unfiled papers, and piles more papers in the shed. Yet, because ‘it is a working principle of the Head Bureau that the very possibility of error must be ruled out of account’ (*op cit*: 66) the ‘Control Officials’, and those who control them, rarely intervene in trivial matters. Indeed, even communicating with the Castle is a random matter, since there is so much important business to be transacted that the telephone is rarely answered by anyone with any knowledge of, or authority over, a particular case since it is randomly switched between extensions.

Kafka’s visions have since become archetypes, and the *Catch 22* type of organisational logic that he parodies has now made his name into an adjective. In an important sense, ‘Kafkaesque’ captures twentieth century organisational gothic very nicely indeed. Darkly fantastic representations of work and organisations can be found in ever greater numbers as the twentieth century develops, though as I have argued elsewhere (Parker 2002b: 134 *passim*) the century might better be divided into three periods. Up until the 1940s, adding to what we have covered already we could add Karel Capek’s 1922 play *R.U.R* - ‘Rossum’s Universal Robots’ which introduced the word ‘robot’ into English⁷, Yevgeny Zamayatin’s explicitly Taylorist ‘OneState’ of *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley’s 1932 *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s *1984* (1948). These visions variously dramatised the contrasts between industrial robber barons and mechanised worker slaves, the growth of scientific management and the bureaucratized violence of everyday life. Importantly, all are also darkly fantastic fictions of the future.

However, in the fifties and sixties, the dominant images of organisation are as harmless backdrops to various forms of drama or farce, and organisational gothic seems largely eclipsed⁸. Perhaps the contradictions of capitalism were no longer as stark or the industrialised agony of the killing fields of world war two was just too painful to consider, but the dominant message seems to be one of the organisation as a present day site for romance and upward social mobility⁹. Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast trilogy which spans this period (*Titus Groan* 1946, *Gormenghast* 1950 and *Titus Alone* 1959) is an important exception. Peake’s Dickensian characters inhabit a gigantic sprawling castle which is run according to ancient ritual instructions contained in dusty volumes containing -

‘... the activities to be performed hour by hour during the day by his lordship. The exact times; the garments to be worn for each occasion and the symbolic gestures to be used. Diagrams facing the left hand page gave particulars of the routes by which his lordship should approach the various scenes of operation. (...) Had he been of a fair skin, or had he been heavier than he was, had his eyes been green, blue or brown instead of black, then, automatically another set of archaic regulations would have appeared...’ (1968: 66)

Madness and bureaucracy become closely intertwined in a rambling story of intrigue and rebellion that, by the third novel, sees Titus the 77th Earl of Gormenghast escape to a city of strange and wonderful technological marvels, of shimmering metal and glass buildings. Yet this is also a city with smoking factory buildings, flying surveillance drones, a Kafkaesque court and prison system and, like *Metropolis*, an

entire culture of outcasts and fugitives beneath the city itself in the 'Under-River'. Whether the institutions are feudal or modern, it seems Titus can find no road to freedom, no place outside the sets of rules that constitute organised lives.

The Monster's Return

Gormenghast apart, it isn't really until the 1970s that organisational gothic begins to re-emerge in a more generalised sense. Grunenberg claims that contemporary gothic is driven by 'an increasing weariness about the alienating power of technology and its disastrous social consequences', and adds 'The Draculas of today are the greedy corporations, automation, corrupt parties and politicians who deliberately erode the foundations of the welfare state' (1997: 197). It is precisely the ubiquity of this demonology of the corporation that inspired me to trace some of the antecedents of contemporary gothic in the paper so far, and to explore the re-emergence of themes and images that I think had, to a large extent, been buried in the 1950s and 1960s. It seems to me that some very common motifs in fantastic fiction over the last three decades have been the figure of the corporate tycoon conspiring at the top of their skyscraper; the organisation as a place where monsters are spawned; or the visualisation of work as incarceration.

So when Dracula is relocated to London in *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1974) he is disguised as D.D. Denham, a reclusive property developer with a corporate tower who is secretly plotting to unleash a fatal virus upon the world. And when Damien, the anti-Christ, returns in *Omen 3: The Final Conflict* (1981) he is a thirty-something CEO of a huge multinational corporation, Thorn Industries, who lusts for control of the world. Pretty much the same figure of the corporate megalomaniac re-appears in *Superman III* (1983) as the evil billionaire Ross Webster; in *Freejack* (1992) at the top of the McCandless Corporation's skyscraper; in *Batman Returns* (1992) as the magnate Max Shreck (named after the actor who played the vampire *Nosferatu*); in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) as the media mogul, Elliot Carver, and so on. In all these examples, and many more, the image of the well dressed and dastardly chief executive looking out over the city from their tower is a powerful continuation of gothic and melodramatic imagery. Indeed, such ideas are now pastiched in comedy films like *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997), in which Dr Evil's henchman, Number Two, is portrayed as a corporate man with an eye-patch and a briefcase who has built Virtucon into a global business. After Dr Evil's rather old fashioned attempt to blackmail world governments with a nuclear device has failed, Number Two turns to him and says -

'I spent thirty years of my life turning this two bit evil empire into a world class multinational. I was going to have a cover story in Forbes. But you, like an idiot, wanted to take over the world. But you don't realise there is no world anymore - its only corporations.'¹⁰

A similar example can be found in the children's animation film *Monsters Inc* (2001) in which the crab-like Henry J Waterhouse, the CEO of Monsters Incorporated, ('We Scare Because We Care') is exposed as a Machiavellian plotter. 'I'll kidnap a thousand children before I let this company die, and I'll silence anyone who gets in my way.' It seems that the easiest stereotype for a scriptwriter who wants to construct a villain is to call upon wealth, class and gender and then embody them within the figure of the corporate executive. The melodramatic villain¹¹ no longer ties the

innocent victim to the railway tracks, but throws her from his corner office from the heights of the corporate tower.

A particularly prolific site for similar themes is science fiction. Very often these texts contain background references to some part of the state or the military-industrial complex that has, because of greed, ambition or paranoia, invested huge amounts of time and money in a conspiracy of money and power. Along these lines, films such as *THX 1138* (1970), *Soylent Green* (1973), *Outland* (1981), *Videodrome* (1982), *The Fly* (1986), *The Running Man* (1987), *They Live* (1988), *Total Recall* (1990) and many cyberpunk novels (for example Gibson 1986, Stephenson 1995) contain a host of references to corporate interests or shadowy state bureaucrats. In *Rollerball* (1975) for example, the hero 'Jonathan' is lectured by a senior corporate executive when he refuses to be retired from an exceptionally violent gladiatorial game which provides a circus for happy consumers. And, in a series of examples, the corporation produces or protects a monster of some kind which either rampages or rebels against its creators. Hence the Tyrell Corporation in *Blade Runner* (1982) in which the replicant kills the corporate executive through the Oedipal method of putting out his eyes; the Weyland-Yutani Corp ('Building Better Worlds') which wants an alien because, as the company's representative in *Aliens* (1986) explains, it would be 'worth millions to the bio-weapons division'; Cyberdyne Systems which has accidentally caused the war between humans and robots in the *Terminator* films; and Omni Consumer Products in the *Robocop* films which is moving into law enforcement through its 'Security Concepts Inc' division because 'shifts in the tax structure have created an ideal atmosphere for corporate growth.'

Indeed, this pervasive fog of organisational paranoia is constitutive of the many 'trust no-one' conspiracy narratives of the *X-Files* or films like *Conspiracy Theory* (1997), *The Game* (1997) and *Enemy of the State* (1998). Organisations, these texts repeatedly claim, are dark places where secrecy lurks behind closed doors and men in black are listening to every conversation (Parish and Parker 2001). In a reversal of much of the post second world war organisational consensus, but a return to the narratives of 1984 and *Brave New World*, 'the technocrats are now the bad guys and the good guys are the reactionaries' (Franklin 1990: 25). The individual becomes the site of resistance against organisations which are populated by utilitarian capitalists, power hungry careerists or monomaniacal research scientists. Surreal images of grey rows of desks, endless corridors and insane bosses abound in *Brazil* (1985) where torture and repression are bureaucratized through the 'Ministry of Information' ('The Truth Shall Make You Free'); *Joe and the Volcano* (1990) in which Tom Hank's character seeks salvation from a dehumanised job; and *Being John Malkovich* (1999), where our hero works on the 7 1/2th floor with a ceiling that makes him have to stoop continuously. In these films, expressionist gothic is used to visualise the distorted lifeworld of the corporation, and the haunted house has mutated into a Piranesian iron cage. Whether visually 'gothic' or not, organisations are the most ubiquitous villains nowadays - a law firm run by Satan in *The Devil's Advocate* (1997); a control freak media producer in *The Truman Show* (1998); manufacturers of weapons and toys in *Small Soldiers* (1998); the 'Denmark Corporation' in the latest remake of *Hamlet* (2000); and the Green Goblin in *Spider-Man* (2002), who is actually the CEO of Osborne Industries. Perhaps archetypally, in the cartoon series *The Simpsons* we have the etiolated Mr Burns, the evil capitalist who lives in a mansion with his fawning acolyte and plots against his employees and the residents of Springfield.

In the most general of terms, we seem to see a mutation of themes and visual images here from the last two hundred years of gothic, grotesque and melodramatic imagery. The evil villain twirling his moustache and plotting; the labyrinthine haunted house hiding secrets; the monster produced by mad science; the doppelganger who conceals hideous desires. All of these are now stock characters and settings, familiar to children and easily written into almost any piece of fantastic fiction. But, as this section has documented, the corporation is now often taken as their most credible site. Questions of motive are then simply assumed, because 'everybody knows' that corporations are motivational structures of greed, power and envy. So, at the very moment when global capitalism seems to be at its most triumphalist, and the ideology of market managerialism reaches down from the corporate tower into the crevices of the management of everyday life, careers, and relationship there is simultaneous, and largely unremarked, 'common sense' that claims exactly the opposite. In the final section, I will conclude by further exploring the idea that the gothic can be treated as a form of representational critique, and then relate this to some general ideas about the role of cultural criticism of organisations.

Gothic, Culture, Criticism

It is easy enough to claim that there is a powerful gothic sensibility that stalks our age. That gothic, in fashion terms, is the new black. Many authors have suggested as much, cataloguing 'horror, madness, monstrosity, death, disease, terror, evil, and weird sexuality' (Grunenberg 1997: 210) as these themes are played out in contemporary sub-cultures, fiction, film and art. I don't want to make any grand suggestions about why this might be the case, or even necessarily agree that it is particularly the case, but rather to note some continuities which seem to have a certain intensity at the present moment. As this essay has hopefully evidenced, gothic representations of industry and organisation have been a pervasive feature of Western societies¹² for at least 150 years. Of course (as any literary critical readers have probably already noted) my use of the word 'gothic' is not at all precise here, and in fact I am really referring to some family resemblances between horror, the grotesque, fantastic fiction and melodrama - all genres that employ distortion and myth in order to achieve dramatic effects. However, I'm not sure that this confusion, if it is one, matters that much because my key point is to argue that this monstrous collection of texts represents a lengthy form of cultural struggle against the hegemony of a brave new managed world. Following a cultural Marxism in the most general of terms, we can see these sort of expressions as instances of contestation which seek to redefine, or reframe, what words like work, organisation and management mean for a particular age. Not the only ones, because there are plenty of examples of cultural contestation that are clearly not primarily gothic (comedic portrayals of management as stupid¹³, or romantic accounts of the freedoms that lie outside the work organisation, for example), and plenty of struggles that are not primarily cultural (trade union recognition, or the anti-corporate protests, for example).

But what does it mean to suggest that 'organisational gothic' is an example of cultural struggle? It is obvious enough that explicit gothic metaphors have played an important role as an imaginative resource for re-description for at least the last century and a half. In referring to 'Frankenstein foods' to condemn genetic manipulation or describing people as 'Jekyll and Hyde' characters we are employing common clichés

that rely on a forced metaphorical exchange between two domains. So when Garrick and Clegg reframe knowledge management as the transfusion of vital fluids, they title their chapter 'Organisational Gothic'¹⁴ precisely to contrast the bright eyed utilitarianism of the knowledge managers with the seduction and coercion of the foul breathed vampire. For Garrick and Clegg, in the learning organisation the 'individual souls in the corporation that learn are those replenished by being sucked dry and recruited as brides and grooms to the new organisational Draculas' (2000: 154). Or when Pelzer and Pelzer assert that 'organisations create fear, dread, helplessness', that they are self-created prisons, a 'threatening fact taking away our personalities, sucking life out of our bodies and brains without touching the surface of our skin.' (1996: 19), they rely on the same melodramatic grammar. In structural terms, the collision between a signifier for some form of horror and another domain (in this case, the work organisation) causes the latter to be infected or, let us say, re-thought. A commonly accepted, perhaps hegemonic, image is articulated in a different form. Whether this is the city as hell, or the vampire metaphors in Marx, or Weber's organisation-machines, or the CEO being revealed as the devil, it is the same operation at work.

However, to describe this as necessarily a heroic form of poststructuralism, in which the former term (the 'settled' term) is exceeded or inverted by the latter term, is to de-historicise both words and the movements that might happen between them. When Kenneth Gergen wrote in 1992 about the differences between romantic, modernist and postmodernist versions of organisation, he doubtless would not have anticipated that the term 'postmodernism' (or 'post-modernism') would rapidly become a conventional way of celebrating post-Fordist economics, and not the endless unsettling that he anticipated. In the same manner, gothic imagery can itself become 'settled' or 'unsettling' depending on the context. Disorganising, revalorising closeted terms, soliciting the other, exceeding, inverting and queering are all operations given meaning by a particular context, not having some transcendental or immanent meaning in themselves (Parker 2002a). In a parallel fashion, there is a clear danger in treating gothic as it were necessarily always a great refusal which can and should be solicited by those who are excited by the romance of resistance¹⁵. Gothic ideas are the stuff of common cliché, and just as corporations can be described as the new Draculas, so can elected governments, or universities, or social workers. So can gothic be sold as a form of authenticity for middle class teenagers seeking community; or film makers seeking box office receipts; or nostalgics who wish to condemn versions of progress through science or urbanisation; or progressives who see the rural past as a haunt of irrational fears; or domesticators who wish to subdue the monsters from the Id; or libertarians who wish to release the wild creativity of human animals; or punk academics selling rebellion for money. The point is that, as Botting (1996) argues, the gothic is mutable, that it can be (and has been) employed for all these purposes and more. In suggesting that the gothic can function as a form of representational critique, I am noting its power to denaturalise at one moment, but must also note that it can itself naturalise as it becomes cliché, a metaphor that first shocks¹⁶ and then becomes an excuse for not thinking. A (post)Fordism of the intellect. Any colour you like, as long as it is black.

Nonetheless, there is something curiously powerful about this particular set of metaphors, because even whilst they decay into cliché they remain marked by such extremity. The images of horror, grotesquerie, fantasy and melodrama that have

littered this paper seem to have a certain parasitic power, since once you have reimagined the corporate tower as the haunted house, it is difficult to shake off that sense of unease. Not that there is then a clear morality tale that can be told. As Franco Moretti comments, an older literature of terror 'presents society - whether the feudal idyll of *Frankenstein* or the Victorian England of *Dracula* - as a great corporation: whoever breaks its bonds is done for.' (1983: 107) Nowadays, escaping from the great corporation might be just exactly what you need to do in order to survive. The message might be that you should stick to the path and stay out of the woods in case the wolf gets you, or that the wolf is already waiting for you at work. What fine teeth you have grandma! Or worse, that there is no escape, because you look in the mirror of the washroom at work through yellowing eyes to discover that your eyebrows are thickening. Moretti describes horror as a 'literature of dialectical relations, in which the opposites, instead of separating and entering into conflict, exist in function of one another, reinforce one other.' But this is not, he claims, the mere functioning of ideology - generating the mists that obscure monsters. 'The more a work frightens, the more it edifies. The more it humiliates, the more it uplifts. The more it hides, the more it gives the illusion of revealing. It is a fear one *needs*: the price one pays for coming contentedly to terms with a social body based on irrationality and menace. Who says it is escapist?' (Moretti 1983: 108)

And here is a curious twist. If we do not treat culture as escapism, as an epiphenomenon of structure, then it can become both a topic and a limited resource for critique. If we treat the gothic, and specifically gothic organisation, as being an element in this 'literature of dialectical relations', then we have a classical Frankfurt School position. Horkheimer suggested that it was only the dialectical method that could grasp historical embeddedness fully, and not fall into the positivist traps of traditional enquiry. Dialectics (in the sense developed by Hegel) explores the relation between opposing propositions in an argument, and hence the inter-connectedness of supposedly separate terms. In social terms it therefore presumes a relationality between things which suggests that individuals are produced inter-subjectively, and that individual and context, particularity and generality are necessarily made in conjunction. In philosophical and political terms, this adds up to a radical attack on any approach which assumes an escapist separation between the romantic subject and their object of enquiry, or between the knower and the known. These, Baldick suggests, are precisely the limitations of realism, and the only way in which the 'monstrous dynamics of the modern' (1987: 198) can be apprehended as happening beyond the surface of the everyday are through the historically embedded techniques of estrangement that gothic has employed with such regularity. The reason that 'realists' like Dickens, Marx, Zola and Weber turn to monstrous metaphors is precisely because the 'conjuring powers available in language' (Smith 2001: 51) can reveal through redescription, can unveil by veiling. At any given historical moment, the products of culture can label structural injustice in dramatic forms that can in turn provide resources to think about change.

Gothic criticism of organisations will not save us from the corporate beast, but it is a symptom of the times. Not just our times though, because it bears the imprints of other times too. Those critical of market managerialism may well do well to employ such metaphors in their own attempts to sponsor change, to be (for a time, for our time) new Goths who oppose the ordered majesty of a new Rome. As Ricardo Blaug (1999) has illustrated in his paper on the defeat of the well organised XXth Roman

legion by a swift and invisible Germanic tribe in AD 9, 'hierarchism' causes a form of blindness to other organisational forms. In a parallel way, we could suggest that too much reliance on structural struggles inspires a kind of blindness to cultural struggles, and the tactics that they might employ. Not that either can be separated, since they are dialectically related and co-produced, but it seems obvious enough that seeing things differently might be a precursor to doing things differently. Which is, in a conclusively anti-gothic spirit, to end with revolutionary romanticism and blindly hope that the dead hand of capital doesn't reach from the grave I am digging for it.

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² Kenneth Gergen has suggested a progression from romantic, to modern, to postmodern conceptions of organisation (1992). What this may miss is that all have also produced gothic spectres, but more of this later.

³ The idea of a 'cultural studies' of organisation is one that can be found elsewhere too. See some parts of Burrell (1997), as well as Hassard and Holliday (1998), Smith *et al* (2001), Rhodes (2002) and ten Bos (2003). I'm not going to justify this sort of approach here, but instead exemplify it, and hope that it seems persuasive.

⁴ A sentiment famously echoed in Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1818 poem *Ozymandias* - 'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!' On melancholy in particular, see ten Bos (2003).

⁵ And industrialism itself. Along these lines, Davenport-Hines (1998: 260-261) uses *Dracula* to extrapolate, in a rather confused manner, a morality tale about defensive monopoly capitalism and foreign ‘penetrative’ investment.

⁶ To which might be added the relation between economics and desire. For a vein of speculation which has employed an admixture of Marxism and psychoanalysis, see Moretti 1983; Baldick 1987; Gelder 1994; Brown 1997 and Godfrey *et al* 2002.

⁷ The Czech word *robota* means servitude, and a *robotnik* is a peasant.

⁸ Though, as Mark Jancovich has argued, there are examples of what he calls ‘Fordist fears’ in the science fiction and horror of the 1950s in which *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* plots dramatise the dehumanising effects of technology and organisation (1992: 62).

⁹ See Parker (2002b: 140-142) for more on this.

¹⁰ A speech given a similar spin in the sequel *The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999) in which Number Two suggests that ‘If we shift our resources away from evil empires and towards Starbuck’s, we can increase our profits five fold.’

¹¹ A villain with a pedigree in melodramatic theatre and literature throughout the nineteenth century. For example, Alec D’Urberville, from Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891). Alec is a typical moustached Victorian rake, a rich and morally corrupt seducer whose claim to the d’Urberville name is completely false.

¹² And perhaps not only ‘Western’. See Smith (2001) on occult capitalism in Nigeria.

¹³ Which certainly links to older notions of the grotesque, and the carnivalesque laughter that turns the world upside down (see Rhodes 2002).

¹⁴ The only other publication, to my knowledge, that uses this phrase directly, and hence the innocent victim of my textual vampirism.

¹⁵ It seems to me that Pelzer and Pelzer (1996), and Pelzer (2002) seem to fall into this trap. I do not think that gothic should be treated as another synonym for cultural postmodernism, or as only a vehicle for a politicised poststructural understanding of language. Which is not to say that it can’t play this function, just that it doesn’t necessarily do it all of the time

¹⁶ Smith (2001: 50) makes a connection between this and Brecht’s ‘alienation effect’. The point being that such an effect cannot rely on the same strategy every time if it is to shock an audience out of its existing state of consciousness.