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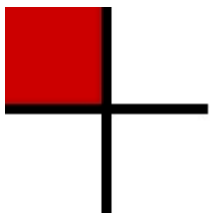
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Castles Made of Sand

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Beginnings

How does one begin? How does one begin something like this - this introduction, this journal – but also how does one begin in general? Should we start from scratch? Set out a profile, dig the foundations, lay them in concrete and steel? Starting with the cornerstone, lay bricks on top of a stable foundation then layer by layer build our construction, our edifice, our monument – an abode where weary travellers on the road to critical enlightenment can lay their heads to rest? Of course, before we build, we need a plan, so perhaps we should begin with the architect's blueprints – back to the drawing board. From there, maybe we can organize the whole project properly. Lay it all out in advance, a perfect form which we then only need to impose on unruly matter: timber, bricks, concrete, steel.

Of course, the problem is that we never really start at the beginning. We are always already thrown into a world not of our own making. We are not blank pages in a history book. We can only talk about history because we are already in the middle of it. In conceiving a project like *ephemera*, concerned with 'critical dialogues on organization', it is impossible to avoid starting with the wealth of publications, journals, conferences and discussion groups already concerned with critical perspectives on organization and related subjects like business and management. There is already a Critical Management Studies Workshop at the American Academy of Management. The last few years have also seen the establishment of the Critical Management Studies conference in the UK and a steady stream of books on management and organization with the word 'critical' in the title. Then there is the *Electronic Journal of Radical Organization Theory*, and *Tamara*, the electronic journal of 'critical postmodern organization science'. So *ephemera* does not enter an open field, an uncharted territory or smooth space. Instead we necessarily start our building project in the heavily zoned inner city of Academia. Should we erect ourselves a tower-block bang in the middle of the central business district, alongside the Trump tower and the *Academy of Management Review*? Or should we knock up a low rent ghetto and not worry about our ranking amongst the elite? A cheap downtown hotel with rooms to rent by the hour? Whatever we choose, our neighbours and neighbourhood will determine who visits us, and who chooses to stay - if only for a while - to engage in dialogue.

The key problem of positioning a critical journal in this way, is this need to take an oppositional stance. Indeed, this is a point that Gibson Burrell raises in the first paper in this issue. If we want to be critical, are we against organization? An anti-organization theory journal? Are we against management? Or, like in Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, are we like the People's Front of Judea, concerned with differentiating ourselves from the Judean People's Front, and any other available 'critical' perspectives? When does our inevitable critique of criticism cease to be valuable reflexivity and become unconscious political parody? Perhaps we want, as far as possible, to avoid a fixed position and become vagrants, sleeping rough on the streets of Academia. If we find ourselves in need of shelter, then perhaps we will just pitch a tent in the park, crack open a tin of special brew and shout at passers-by walking their dogs. Hopefully some of them will stop and listen for a while. With luck, and if we evade the attention of the bureaucrats and police for long enough, a few people will join us and help to build a chaotic shanty-town.

There are, of course, disadvantages with such an approach to urban non-planning. The streets will doubtless be open sewers. Cholera and dysentery will run riot with the rats. Perhaps worst of all, we might simply become a ghetto for the disaffected and angry – those that proper society has no use for, but the police like to keep contained. We are prepared to run this risk. As Anthony O'Shea's paper in this issue points out, any attempt to legislate the perfect Republic keeps us tied to the profane world of work, utility and organization. Whilst we may be cautious about rejecting this profane world out of hand, by rejecting the sacred the Republic is unable to deal with the accursed share that accrues in all societies. In this sense, there is a space in *ephemera* for excess and Bacchanalian revelry, though we fervently hope that it will be more than a safety valve to vent excess and in doing so leave the rest of the discipline undisturbed.

All of which brings us to the question of what we hope to achieve with *ephemera*. Ephemerality and constant change seem to be in fashion today. Academic fads change seemingly overnight. Business Process Re-engineering one day, Knowledge Management the next. Is all this ephemerality something worth celebrating? Shouldn't we rather condemn the built-in obsolescence of academic knowledge and try to find a more solid foundation for a critical engagement with contemporary capitalist society and organization? The academic knowledge-machine seems to have turned knowledge into a commodity that is subject to market forces. Academic knowledge becomes appropriated by the world of fetishised commodities, and is produced on a Fordist production line that keeps on moving so long as there are sufficient buyers. 'New' then alerts us to the new world where business and academia become one, joining their forces to produce progressive knowledge; knowledge that serves the ruling classes who can continue to live a comfortable life. In this 'new' world, knowledge is only produced if there is a buyer in the market, if consultants are able to sell it to the highest bidder. 'Critical' knowledge, too, has been hijacked by dominant discourses of this academic knowledge-machine. 'Critical' has become the new thing, a designer label that guarantees the authenticity and quality of the product on which it appears. None of your low price, inferior academic produce here. This is critical, designer thinking, guaranteed to impress.

This situation recalls Kafka's descriptions in *The Trial* of K.'s visit to a painter, who offers to sell him a picture. K., not wanting to be discourteous, and despite the fact that he was 'trembling with impatience to be out of that place', doesn't know how to refuse the canvas

of 'Wild Nature: A Heathscape'. Not wanting to offend the painter, K. ends up buying three, with the painter throwing in several more for free. The paintings are, of course, all identical.

But this co-optation of knowledge is not a new phenomenon. When Wilhelm von Humbolt set up the University of Berlin, and thereby provided the model that contemporary Higher Education has largely followed, the aim was the production of organized minds - organized along the model of the Prussian state. Truth and justice are principles and ideas that serve the 'Ideal' of the state, and remain the watchwords for much contemporary critical thinking. If academia thus serves the interests of regulation, then perhaps we should not marvel at its current prostitution in the service of global capitalism. The question remains, however, of the possibility of alternatives. Returning to the construction metaphor, in his paper Torkild Thanem, like Shelley's "traveller from an antique land", warns us of the futility of monument building. In Shelly's poem, King Ozymandias' fine works have crumbled into dust and been reclaimed by the desert. All that is left of his mighty civilisation are the words of a traveller who recalls the plaque on a broken, decapitated statue of the great king. In the same way, Thanem reminds us that the attempt to fix form and meaning in a monument for all time is futile. Not only will the monument be constantly re-interpreted in the light of changing social and spatial contexts, but the matter upon which the sculptor has imposed form has its own forces of expression that makes a simplistic hylomorphism untenable. Going back to our architect at the drawing board, whatever the blueprints show will need to be translated into material form by disciplined craftsmen directly engaged with their materials and tools. Whatever our intentions as editors/architects might be, we are dependent upon receiving contributions from others working with the conceptual tools, disciplinary conventions and 'worlds' that shaped them. The products of those endeavours will, in turn, meet with others in a process of interpretation that will again recreate *ephemera* and enable it to become what(ever) it will be.

For some time we toyed with the idea that we might write something like a 'manifesto' for our first editorial, an idea which has been taken far too seriously (by ourselves, first, but also by Burrell in his paper in this first issue). But there is some sense in which the last thing that we wanted to do was to write another manifesto - to set up another monument. And we have found ourselves caught again and again in this double-bind of wanting *ephemera* to be a celebration of the *ephemeral*, passing, transient, resistant to solidification, reification, massification, and on the other hand a realisation that we were building monuments whether we wanted to or not.

A manifesto against manifestos?

A manifest, or latent, anti-manifesto?

An anti-manifesto manifesto?

A festering anti-manifesto?

Ok then, something. Words, at least. What do we mean then by critique, dialogue and organization? Lets begin with critique...

Critique

Possibly critique is as good a place as any to begin an anti-manifesto, as any effort to codify and outline the rules or method of critique seems destined to failure. To lay out, or to know in advance, what critique should be, what it should or must involve, seems to compromise the very possibility of critique. To state the paradox bluntly: perhaps the first rule of critique is that all rules must be subjected to critique.

But we have already given some indication that there is something *oppositional* about critique. Critique challenges orthodoxies, questions power relations, disrupts the normal. Well yes, in part we insist on going against the grain. But at the same time, critique is not simply anarchism, or blind uncoordinated railing against everything that is. Critique, and more specifically doing serious critical work, involves implication or association with a community of critics and with a tradition - or better, traditions - of critical thought. There is something about being a critic which involves both isolation, and also being a part of a collective.

Perhaps one of the things that holds this community of critics together is the notion that there is something deeply troubling about the way that the world is organized at present, and some feeling that things might be, in whatever way, 'better'. Such sentiments are much maligned today, and many camps hold either that progress is impossible since history has ended, or worse, that plans for a better world will necessarily lead to catastrophe or holocaust. Certainly the experience of modernity has forced critics to revise some of their more extravagant claims about the possibility of simple global transformation in the name of 'the good'. But we should be clear in stating that whatever revisions need to be made of teleological conceptions of a liberated future, there is a sense in which we want to insist on the *possibility* of a different future, even if we do not know exactly what this new world may look like. So perhaps *ephemera* should set as one of its goals the imagination of possibilities of something radically different to the present.

When we speak of alternative practices, we are setting out our stall against dominant discourses on organization, but equally *ephemera* seeks to trouble currently existing critical discourses on organization. So we are not simply seeking to set up a self-satisfying, self-congratulatory community of transcendental critics, but hope to produce a space for the articulation of *alternative models of critique*. This will only become possible if we remain attuned to the need for a sympathetic engagement, one which is not just dismissive or oppositional, but which seeks to enter into *dialogue*.

Dialogue

ephemera began with dialogue - a series of dialogues. Discussions between the editors in assorted bars, cafés and reading groups set the scene for what we thought was missing from organization studies and how we might put together a forum for addressing those absences. *ephemera* also grew out of an ongoing dialogue with organization studies as a discipline constituted by books, journal articles, teaching notes, conference papers and,

perhaps most important of all, conversations in the bar after those papers had been delivered.

Of course, many of these dialogues precede our own involvement. They came out of discussions between cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, business, unions and governments etc. These dialogues drew boundaries around the discipline of organization studies and created a space within which this dialogue could exist. In this sense, dialogue never starts - it is always joined part-way through. *ephemera* joins the discussion on critical organization studies in a field of engagement already drawn out by AOM, APROS, BAM, CMS, EGOS, SCOS, *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *The Academy of Management Review*, *The Journal of Management Studies*, *Human Relations*, *Gender, Work & Organization* etc., etc. The list goes on and spirals out to connect to ongoing debates in other disciplines. Even where a start is imposed upon a dialogue, for example, when we switch on a tape-recorder to start an interview, we open with a question. The context, language and debates that are joined are at least minimally set out in advance. Dialogue is always inserted into the interstices between already existing discourses. It is between words: *dia*-logos.

This is one of the points that Burrell is alluding to when he claims in his article that “dialogue is a weapon of the powerful”. If the field of engagement is already drawn, then the status quo begins with the upper hand. There is no level field on which organized labour meets management. The terms of the negotiation are set out well in advance and take place within much wider ‘conversations’ about the future of the nation state, gender, globalisation and local politics. In a recent advertising campaign British Telecom assures us that ‘It’s good to talk’. Good for who? Almost certainly for BT and its shareholders, not to mention the burgeoning mobile telecommunications industry. The human relations school ‘revolutionised’ management by suggesting that management should talk to workers and take an interest in their lives and problems. To whose benefit? And what were the limits of those conversations? An assumption that problems begin, and should stop, outside the factory gate? A suggestion that management should engage labour in a discussion on the ideological validity of capitalist relations?

So, if we recognise these problems, what do we hope to achieve by encouraging further dialogue? Should we just remain silent, howl incoherently, or spit in the eye of the powerful? In an age in which the Information Technology revolution can look like an infinite extension of the incitement to discourse, do we really want to encourage *more* talk? We have to answer these questions with another: What are the conditions of possibility for a ‘critical dialogue’? At the very least, it would have to take the power relations implicit in any discourse seriously. But reflexivity needs time, so it might also encourage interruption. The promise of instant communication brought to us by email and the mobile phone makes it harder and harder to pause. Smooth communications with no interruptions, silences or distractions would seem to be the goal. For us though, these *breaks* are possibly the most important part of dialogue. One of the goals of *ephemera* might be to interrupt flows of communication. Cause hesitations that break the flows and divert them. Distract from the business at hand. Complicate dialogue.

When speed and constant acceleration are the norm, interruption can slow down the stream of ephemeral images, fashions and MTV sound-bites. With dialogue we hope to interrupt

and erupt, in between hopefully disrupting knee-jerk reflexes and creating a space for critical reflexion - not narcissistic naval-gazing but reflexion 'between' words, and between worlds.

Perhaps *ephemera discussion* will provide such interruptions, both by interrupting the working day with email, and by refusing to close-off an argument. By providing a space for discussion, we hope to continue the dialogues that the papers in this journal have engaged, and to extend them by raising further points, by making even more connections: and, and, and... In this sense, 'dialogue' is interjected between, and might interrupt, 'critique' and 'organization'.

Organization

In recent years there has been much effort to expand and develop the meaning of the word 'organization'. Probably the first move in this expansion was to question the way in which organization has so often been read simply as a noun, in the sense of 'an organization', or 'this or that organization'. In this usage, 'organization' stands in for the corporation, the business enterprise (or sometimes armies, hospitals, schools and prisons). This questioning has contributed to a new understanding of 'organization': it is not just the noun, monument, Tower of Babel and spatial structure; but a verb, process, fluid and smooth plane.

This shift is undeniably valuable and we do not want to cast doubt on the fact that organization is as much a process as a structure. It has informed our understanding that organization could be seen, if we were forced to give a minimal definition, as a general and specific tendency towards coding and recoding, to the sedimenting of territories, to the construction of assemblages. Thus we insist again that we want to critique, and have dialogue with, 'organization' in the *broadest* senses of that word.

But maybe it is not so important to ask what 'organization' *is*, but what it *does*. Other than engaging in melancholic dialogues about how we might define, fix and monumentalise 'organization', it might be more fruitful to engage with a choleric agenda for change and action: to go beyond interpretation and try to make a difference. So our complaint, if we can call it this, is that many contemporary notions of organization do not go far enough; they are not radical or critical enough. In this sense we want to detonate organization, fill it with dynamite and explode it. And in saying this we are not interested in promoting an idealism that is only interested in the organization of thought. We are *also* interested in what goes on in and around McDonalds.

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Enough of our ranting - to the issue at hand. All of the contributions to this first issue enact, or perform, in various ways, the kinds of things that we hope to achieve with *ephemera*. They are a better introduction to *ephemera* than any amount of editorial rambling. If there is a 'theme' to our first issue, then it is figuring out what *ephemera* is, or

could be, and working around the meaning of critique, dialogue and organization and their relationship as ‘critical dialogues on organization’. Unsurprisingly perhaps, we don’t find any final answers on this - although some potentially productive directions are suggested - and we see the meaning of these terms as a fundamental problematic for *ephemera* as an ongoing project.

Articles

In the first article in this issue, Gibson Burrell offers an extended reflection on the meaning of critique, dialogue and organization. In doing so he departs from what we have said on these issues in this editorial, and draws on his own research, which has made major contributions to critical understandings of organization. Burrell’s reflections are hardly tame and set the tone, in a way, for the mode of intervention we want to encourage. His paper is both an exposition and a critical questioning of these terms, laying out a position, or series of positions, which we hope to develop, extend and contest. He opens the labyrinth, with only a few warnings, and sees in its depths an invitation to radical thought and critical engagement.

Torkild Thanem’s article offers a powerful opening to thinking ‘ephemera’, through a contestation of the meaning of ‘monuments’ and the distinction between the monumental and the ephemeral. Thanem finds the limits, or ‘breaking points’, in commonsense understandings of the monumental and the monumentalised, and works to show the tensions inherent in any effort to stabilise meaning through time and space, and thereby resist the will to disorganization. He also poses questions to us, as editors of *ephemera*, which we are not at present in any position to answer. He finds, even in our efforts to openness and openings – to ephemerality – a tendency, or danger, that *ephemera* will become one more solid construction – a monument which denies its ‘falling apart’.

In our third article, Martin Parker considers some of the prohibitions of management and organization studies by engaging with, and toying with, ‘queer theory’. At first glance, this paper seems to have the most in common with the ‘critical management studies’ project, but by appropriating the work of Butler and Sedgwick to this field, Parker offers an opening into, and across, cultural studies and queer theory. He thereby suggests a model for the kind of deployment from ‘outside’ organization studies (and ‘outside’ organization) which we hope to see extended and radicalised in future issues of *ephemera*. Parker’s paper also takes a starkly and directly critical attitude to established power relations, an attitude that suggests directly how we might be working towards ‘fucking management’.

Anthony O’Shea’s article continues this questioning of boundaries and the delimitation of ‘organization’ through a discussion of Bataille’s work on Western thought’s ‘hatred of poetry’. He identifies and critically questions the way in which the poetic is banished from Plato’s Republic, and comments on the persistence of this banishment today. O’Shea thus draws attention to the carnal and visceral, to the experience of limitation (of ‘not being God’) and to the limits of the domain that is designated ‘profane’. In doing so he levels a challenge to the hatred of poetry in organization theory, and poses important questions about the organization of thought in the West.

Notes from the Field

In the second section of *ephemera*, ‘notes from the field’, we set out to present, on a regular basis, a collection of reflections on ‘practices of organizing’, again viewing ‘organization’ in the broadest possible sense. To kick-start ‘notes from the field’, we present an interview with Phil Lenton, a long-standing political activist and trade unionist, who is currently involved in organizing aid for Cuba. *ephemera* invited Lenton to reflect on his various organizational activities, both for the interest of these activities and to speak about his personal involvement and commitment to these causes. In doing so, this interview touches on a wide range of subjects, including the globalisation of solidarity, the current state of Marxism, alternative modes of workplace resistance and the future of collective political action.

In this issue, and in future ‘notes from the field’ we seek to question and disrupt the ease with which we often distinguish ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. This is clearly evident in our interview with Phil Lenton, who demonstrates ways in which one can act on, and in the light of, certain ‘theoretical’ understandings - here of globalisation, ‘new social movements’, transformations in the roles of trade unions and other political organizations. His organizational practice is not simply theoretical, but is a day-to-day necessity for explaining and acting on and in the world.

The idea of ‘notes from the field’ plays on a well established anthropological tradition that has been widely adopted by ethnographic approaches to studying organization. Such understandings of ‘the field’ often depend upon a spatial metaphor that constitutes ‘the field’ as something ‘out there’ which we, as students of organization, should visit, understand and from which we should report back to the academy through our written notes. It is not our intention, however, to leave this conception of ‘the field’ unquestioned. Rather we aim, to borrow Parker’s terminology, to ‘queer’ ‘the field’, to make it strange and a little alien. By problematising, complicating and queering ‘the field’ we intend to break out of the dualistic, spatial metaphor of core and periphery that traditionally structures ethnographic field-work in organizations; that separate subject and object by connecting them only through ‘observation’ - the distance and separation of a carefully, coolly appraising eye/I. Rather we seek to connect with ‘the field’ in as many ways as possible – to create the field through new engagements and prevent its reification as an external object.

One effect of this might be to make it untenable to simply reduce ‘the field’ to specific sites in business organizations, neatly and safely enclosed by protective hedgerows, demarcated by office-block walls, chain-link fences, organograms, personnel records, accountant’s ledgers, information systems and in-house journals. These ‘organizations’ never stand independent of their ‘outside’, which they are so careful to keep at bay. In this sense we do not see how organization can be studied independent of wider institutional and societal systems – global capitalism, the Third Way, the information revolution, *Big Brother*, CNN, Rupert Murdoch, the War on Drugs, the merging of politics and marketing, the extension of MBA-style education and the Harvard case study method across higher education.

But this recognition of contextual interdependency is not enough. Analysis, critique and interpretation are not simple, one-way transfers of information from a neutral inert object

to an active knowing subject. They are the meeting of force-fields. Disciplined organizational analysts equipped with research grants, tape-recorders and academic credentials encounter these 'other' fields at an interface that produces 'knowledge'. Fields are not 'outside', but are constitutive of insides and outsides. In 'notes from the field' we therefore hope to problematise the notion of the 'field', recognizing that by 'field' we refer to a number of things, including: academic fields or disciplines; agricultural fields, both in relation to urbanization, and to romanticised images of agricultural modes of production; discursive fields; battlefields; fields of vision, optical fields; the field as in a park or garden, manicured nature; the field as an uncharted territory, for example in anthropological or cartographic discourses; field as background (figure and field); the fields resulting from Enclosure and the manipulation of land; oil and gas fields; playing fields, for example hockey, rugby or football fields (bearing in mind the gendered nature of media representations of sport); gravitational fields.

Reviews

In the third section are two reviews, which continue the practice of twisting and perverting received wisdom. This is in evidence even in the selection of the media being reviewed. Christian De Cock reviews three contemporary business novels and André Spicer reviews the film *Fight Club*. Both reviews make clear statements about the importance of literary and cinematic media in the transfer and production of understandings of organization, moving away from simply producing infinitely more theoretical commentary on theoretical texts. While commentary on theory is essential to serious scholarly work, these two reviews have the merit of *also* commenting on other formats in which understandings of organization are produced, reproduced and consumed. In a second sense, neither of the reviews featured in this first issue of *ephemera* are conventional. Both are a little longer than might normally be expected of traditional book reviews, and both make substantive arguments in their own rights: De Cock on the role of literature in understanding and changing organization; Spicer on the possibilities of resistance to an increasingly disorganized capitalism where political activism sometimes seems restricted to a set of choices about consumption and lifestyle. Spicer's review also intersects with the oppositional conception of critique put forward in both this editorial and in Burrell's article. Whilst we have defended the place of an oppositional engagement with dominant discourses and models of critique, Spicer suggests that directly confrontational strategies might be doomed to failure. In their place he recommends a strategy that takes dominant liberal discourses seriously.

At the end of his review, De Cock asks "the perennial question: what are the implications for practice?" In doing so, he is not trying to devise a set of principles for teaching MBAs. Nor does he seek to use the texts he reviews to 'illustrate' principles by which we should conduct organizational analysis as 'critical scholars'. Rather, he asks a more fundamental question about writing strategies – what are the effects of fiction compared to philosophy, social and organizational theory? If we set the yardstick of 'success' as not merely interpreting the world but as changing it, then much of organization studies would be found wanting. De Cock argues that works of literature can, and have, done more to enable an effective engagement with the world than works of philosophy or social theory. From this point of view, *ephemera* could be said to be nowhere near as *avant-garde* as it might want to be. By perpetuating the traditional format of academic papers, notes from the field

and reviews, *ephemera* continues academic traditions of distance, reflection and objective interpretation that inform these categories and genres of writing. As Thanem, following Deleuze and Guattari, discusses in his paper, form and content are not so easily separable. However radical our purported message is, the medium by which it is presented may be limiting. If we take the arguments of O'Shea and De Cock seriously, perhaps we should be publishing poetry and fiction alongside more traditional academic materials. If we don't then our expression will remain confined to the profane, mundane work of utility and work. Of course, such contributions are welcomed.

So there you have it, the very first issue of *ephemera*. 'Long may it fester', writes Burrell, but we are not so sure. We are not sure how long anything like this can, or should, last. Perhaps, like the insect which bears its homonym, it will just live for a day, fuck about a bit and hopefully sow the seeds of something different. But if *ephemera* does fester for long enough then perhaps it will, like a carbuncle on the arse of Karl Marx, irritate the corpus of organization studies sufficiently to stimulate a reaction. Alternatively, pushing the metaphor a little further, it is not beyond hope that this festering, pestilent congregation of vapours might give birth to a whole colony of life-forms, some viral, some bacterial, some poisonous, but always mutating. If *ephemera* can continue as a festering colony, a war-zone, in this way – as a multiplicity – then we might have something to hope for: *ephemera* as transformation and transience, a paradoxical and auto-critical stance against organization and monumentalism.

And in case anyone still thinks that *ephemera* is an 'organization studies' journal, we should conclude by saying that our concern is not with what we can do *for*, or even *with*, organization studies, but with what we can do *to* organization studies.

discussion

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1(1) Editorial – Castles Made of Sand

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