



## It Appears that Certain Aphasiacs...

Campbell Jones, Chris Land and Steffen G. Böhm

University of Keele and University of Warwick, UK

It appears that certain aphasiacs, when shown various differently coloured skeins of wool on a table top, are consistently unable to arrange them into any coherent pattern; as though that simple rectangle were unable to serve in their case as a homogeneous and neutral space in which things could be placed so as to display at the same time the continuous order of their identities or differences as well as the semantic field of their denomination. Within this simple space in which things are normally arranged and given names, the aphasiac will create a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets; in one corner, they will place the lightest-coloured skeins, in another the red ones, somewhere else those that are softest in texture, in yet another place the longest, or those that have a tinge of purple or those that have been wound up into a ball. But no sooner have they been adumbrated than all these groupings dissolve again, for the field of identity that that sustains them, however limited it may be, is still too wide not to be unstable; and so the sick mind continues to infinity, creating groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing different criteria, frenziedly beginning all over again, becoming more and more disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

### 'Multiplicity'

There is more than one way to skin a cat, cook an egg, read a text, start a revolution. Particularly so here and now, as we sit down to introduce the pieces in this issue, we are confronted with multiplicity. There is more than one way of speaking about these pieces, more than one way of classifying our 'content'. Is this more than the fantasy of a heterotopia? Perhaps this is something that happens to the empiricist who takes their object seriously—one encounters the problem of interpretation, of the openness and possibility of reading. Often we read the world in one way, when we could read it equally well in another. 'Everything depends on the way things are put' as the philosopher says.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970), xviii.

2 Karl Marx, *Capital* (vol. 1), tr. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 566.

We could carve up the papers in this issue along the traditional lines, and hence divide the contributions into ‘articles’, ‘notes’, ‘reviews’ and ‘dialogue’. This will satisfy the needs of a table of contents, but this arbitrary division along the lines of form, which is already rather superficial (we were quite undecided about which items should be called articles and which notes) does little to help us understand the contents of the pieces. Or we could have extracted a ‘theme’ for the issue, something that brings all of the pieces together. And indeed we do see a surprising degree of overlap between all of the pieces. They fall together into rather a nice unity, although this unity is already *multiple*. It can be traced along a number of lines. So by way of introduction we will try to outline four possible ways that we could divide up the papers. Four strategies of division, none of which achieves totalisation, but each of which opens.

## Revolution

In the wake of the recent protests against the G8 at Genoa there has been a flurry of activity on the *ephemera* discussion group, and a palpable sense of new possibility. Far from the cynical and complacent ‘end-of-history’ postmodernism that characterised much of the last decade, for many people Genoa has given them a real sense of the possibility of change and of meaningful action: perhaps even of a new age of revolution. In his note from the field, Donald Hislop deals directly with these questions considering reactions to the violence that characterised the police response to the protests and the ways in which the activities of anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation protesters were portrayed in the popular media. Hislop contextualises these protests by positioning them in relation to the excesses of global capitalism, which are the central theme of Thomas Frank’s *One Market Under God*, reviewed in this issue by Warren Smith.

While Hislop deals with protest activities in the light of their possibilities for progressive change, De Cock, Fitchett and Farr, and Hinton and Schapper engage with the rhetoric of revolution surrounding the information age and the Internet. One of the important insights that postmodern culture appropriated from the *Situationiste Internationale* was the ease with which even the most radical gesture can be reappropriated and incorporated back into the spectacle: commodified and packaged for resale. In an advertisement that has recently graced our television screens, Amoy straight-to-wok noodles, are sold as ‘a Chinese revolution’ amid imagery from the Red Army. When revolution has become a convenience-food consumer choice, the possibility of speaking meaningfully about revolution cries out for interrogation. In their analysis of the advertising and marketing hype surrounding the *e*-revolution, De Cock, Fitchett and Farr do just that by analysing a series of e-commerce adverts that appeared in the pages of the *Financial Times* during the height of dotcom mania. In their contribution, Hinton and Schapper suggest that there is something more than meets the eye with the increasing popularity of revolutionary new techniques of electronic recruitment. Indeed, by considering the logic that underpins the apparent changes, they ask serious questions about the extent to which they are anything *but* revolutionary.

## Empiricism

Each of the papers in the issue is also ‘empirical’ in a way. From protest action to advertisements in the *Financial Times*, each of the papers engages with empirical material. But we should specify that the papers are all empirical *in a way*, because they all make some effort to enact an orientation towards ‘the empirical’ which differs significantly from the empiricism we are all too familiar with. Each of the papers seeks to avoid the somewhat reductive, vulgar, ‘abstracted’ empiricism which sees the task of empirical work as uncovering a singularity which pre-exists perception, or as the imposition of a pre-formed grid of decipherment onto a passive object.

Perhaps we could see signs in these papers of empiricism, but an empiricism which looks something like that which Deleuze describes as an expanded, superior or radical empiricism.<sup>3</sup> Here we are talking of something which follows in the reaction against various versions of empiricism and positivism, reactions which have of course taken a number of forms. A radical empiricism in this sense would not be an unreconstructed conception of the purity of unmediated sense-experience. For Deleuze, empiricism is not about reduction or ‘discovery’, but about expansion, production, creativity and difference. Hence, he equates empiricism with a radical plurality. ‘Empiricism is fundamentally linked to a logic—a logic of multiplicities’.<sup>4</sup>

## Representation (Form, Content...)

This radicalised empiricism is partly played out in the adoption of novel strategies of representation, with a number of the pieces in this issue taking on a mode of representation quite different from that dominant in academic work. Hinton and Schapper set out their paper out in two columns, each reflecting a distinct theoretical perspective, but both dealing with the same topic. Attila Bruni also deploys an alternative form of presentation, combining anthropological reportage and methodological reflexivity through a literary narrative, in the form of a ‘story’ of the research process. While presented in the form of a story, Bruni raises questions about the role and the function of the ethnographic researcher, of the relationship between academic research and business ‘knowledge production’, and the complicities of researchers. While making a number of serious substantive points, this story is also playful and reflects on its own grounds, as well as raising serious questions about the form of presentation so often adopted in academic writing.

---

3 Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, tr. Constantin Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); *Bergsonism*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone, 1988).

4 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. viii.

Bronwyn Boon offers reflections on the question of form in teaching. Her paper takes up the question of the forms of representation which are used in the classroom to consider the potential for alternative approaches to teaching and assessing students work in a critical organisation studies course. Like De Cock, Fitchett and Farr, Boon takes advantage of the electronic format of *ephemera* to include examples of students work that departs from the more conventional essay form to include painting, poetry and music. Although there is a positive potential in this approach to 'critical' classroom assessment, Boon ultimately remains ambivalent, and recognising the disciplinary operation and complicities of higher education asks whether our attempts to engage the critical faculties and creativity of students ultimately represents a further colonisation by the forces of organisation and work. Like Bruni, Boon's paper also enacts or 'performs' what it says, experimenting with its form of presentation at the same time as subjecting such experimentation to reflexive analysis.

These alternative modes of representation raise a series of questions about form and content, and their relations. In the same way that a new form of the commodity leaves the commodity-form itself intact, we must ask whether the adoption of a new or alternative form is necessarily a radical or innovative move? If we all wrote poems, painted pictures, or played jazz music, would this do anything more than enacting a new radical chic? To put it in the classical lexicon, is a new form equivalent with a radical newness of content? Could we not be equally radical *within* the confines of the old form, taking the classic academic tropes more seriously than is usually expected, and in doing so subverting them?

Perhaps we should not think that there is any one solution. Indeed we sincerely hope that there are no answers to these questions. There are many ways of engaging, many ways of writing, and many ways of intervening practically. If we proceed cautiously, and do not assume that we will achieve everything through the adoption of a new way of speaking, perhaps our very hope of speaking differently might materialise. Having said all of this, would excessive caution lead to paralysis?

## Dialogue

Several of the papers in this issue also participate, in one way or another, in dialogue. Most obviously, the roundtable discussion is the transcript of a dialogue which took place recently in Lyon between some of the major figures involved in expressing critical voices within the formalised institutions of management and organisation studies. Each of the speakers was invited to respond to a set of 'provocations', which posed questions about the meaning of critique in an effort to contribute to the radicalisation of organisation studies. Here we have the opportunity to see expressed, in this short exchange of views, a number of different conceptions of what critique involves.

The paper by Hislop also emerges directly out of dialogue, being stimulated by recent exchanges on the *ephemera* discussion list where there has been considerable debate about the merits of the actions of protestors at Genoa, and in particular with the use of physical violence on the part of some protestors. In his paper Hislop responds to these

discussions by casting the violence of (a minority of) protestors in the context of the violence that these protestors were responding to. Although the question of the merits of violent protest remains open, Hislop seeks to extend this dialogue by questioning the partiality of media representations, which focused almost exclusively on the violence of protestors, and contextualising this violence within a broader view of the antagonisms of late capitalism.

Dialogue appears too in the writing practices engaged by several of the papers, which try to avoid the common tendency toward academic antler-locking through the idea of dialogue. In his review Smith raises the problem of an all too prevalent infighting within academia. He identifies the way that academics' concern with carving out a career niche for themselves often leads them to be ever more inward-looking and to conducting ever more intra-disciplinary 'dialogue' at the expense of an engagement with the world outside. Similarly, Gordon argues in his review of Flyvbjerg's book *Making Social Science Matter* that science needs to move beyond the paradigmatic science wars that shape contemporary academic discourses and make a sustained effort to bridge the gap between *episteme* and *phronesis*, theory and practice. As way of an alternative to the self-referential and self-referencing paradigm wars Gordon discusses Flyvbjerg's concept of 'phronetic social science', which attempts to destruct theoretical Towers of Babel and take up problems that matter on the 'ground', the phronetic communities.

In their paper, Hinton and Schapper demonstrate that one can indeed go beyond academic infighting without disregarding theory, by presenting two distinct theoretical perspectives on the phenomenon of e-cruitment: one Foucauldian, one psychodynamic. Although there are basic points upon which these two modes of analysis might disagree, the authors prefer to connect their analyses through the form of a dialogue. Rather than delimiting their respective paradigms and thereby closing themselves off from alternative views, they prefer to engage with one another in a productive discussion, and emphasise where their discourses might meet, feed into, and supplement one another. Their watchword, perhaps – 'always connect'.

In a rather different take on the problem of academic infighting, De Cock, Fitcher and Farr borrow the idea of dialogue from Mikhail Bakhtin. Throughout their paper they play with the sign and myth systems of the New Economy to offer us a distinct reading of the ads that they study. At no point do they insist however that their reading of these advertisements is the only possible reading, or even the most productive one. Instead they accept that any piece of academic writing is inevitably tied to a specific time and space. As soon as it is taken up and read, its context has changed and a kind of on-going dialogue has been engaged. Very much in this spirit they leave the end of the paper open to the reader who can, should they so choose, go on to read/re-write the myth and sign system of the adverts for themselves. In an alternative take on contextualisation, Boon writes her text in the style of a letter, beginning with the offer to write a 'wee note from the field'. In this way the work appears as part of a direct dialogue with us, as the editors of *ephemera*, and as a continuation of a dialogue that she has been involved with in the classroom.

All three of these papers refuse absolute authority, and in doing so present themselves as moments in a dialogue, a continuing conversation in which they do not have the final

word, but also refuse to let this humility about their claims lead to inability to say anything. Which seems as good a point as any to follow their example and, rather than piling layer upon layer of authoritative editorial commentary onto this issue's papers, pass them over to you, the reader. Their fate is in your hands...

**discussion**

To discuss this article, email [ephemeraweb@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ephemeraweb@yahoogroups.com) using the following subject line:

*1(3) Editorial - It Appears that Certain Aphasiacs...*

To register with ephemera|discussion, visit <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/discussion>

To view the archive, visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ephemeraweb/messages>

The discussion archive is also searchable by keyword and/or contributor.