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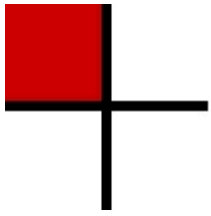
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Castles Made of Sand

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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

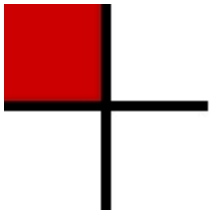
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To view the archive of discussion on this article visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ephemeraweb/messages>

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



ephemera: Critical Dialogues on Organization

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abstract

The paper argues that *ephemera* is likely to be a chimera consisting of three bestial parts. Taking each carnal piece in turn, it suggests ways in which critique, dialogues and organization might be understood and how reconciling their separate natures into one corporate identity will not be easy. It seeks to make the point that a celebration of those labyrinthine shambles where such beasts lurk, rather than of the straightforward bourgeois boulevards of typical academic theses, may be worth thinking about. Or possibly that 'thinking about' things is not visceral enough. It ends on a plea for *ephemera* to raise exhortations in its contributors.

This first electronic version of *ephemera* has been produced by its editors with some notion of a 'manifesto' in mind. This paper, however, is a personal 'take' on what 'critical dialogues on organization' might mean and should not be seen in any shape or form as a claim to represent the editorial policy of the journal. What I have done (and with profuse apologies) is to plunder previously published material mercilessly, in an effort to produce a very personal path through the labyrinth of terms and technicalities before us. It will not be to all tastes. So be warned.

For those undertaking any academic writing there is a real and present danger. It is not so much the constant fear of failure to complete or of the production of a complete turkey, (spectres which haunt almost all of us who have embarked upon that particular journey), that is so troublesome. It is the thorny question of 'Why don't we seek adventure in creative escape from the need to produce a straightforward thesis?' There is an argument which suggests that the English word 'thesis' comes from the same root as the name Theseus. The story of Theseus relates the son of the Greek King, Aegeus, being offered up as a sacrifice to King Minos of Crete. Theseus and Minos's daughter Ariadne fall in love and she offers him a ball of thread with which, once he has killed the Minotaur, he might find his way out of the labyrinth of Knossos. Having safely disposed of the monster deep in the darkness of the labyrinth, he reaches the light of understanding by following the line of argument allowed to him in retracing the thread. Thus he straightens out the turns and twists of the benighted shambles of a building in which he was placed. Ariadne had presented him with the means to find the light, but to do so he must first murder a being which was at least *half* human.

The Greeks' predilection for the straight line in their geometries of column and form reflects in part perhaps this concern for rendering visible that Other which prefers the

darkness. Even Euripides (1973) has the *Bacchae* conveniently acting in daylight so that they may be closely surveyed by the shepherd. The classical Greeks had a desire to produce public spaces in Athens in which not only is the speaker heard but is also seen and carefully observed. And as Nietzsche shows us, the Golden Age of Greece, both in sport and in debate, underlies much of the contemporary notion of 'civilization' which we promulgate in the West, yet it rests upon extreme violence of the body and of the tongue. For him, the effects of technocratic modernism with its baleful conclusion in 'the will to power' and murderous, anti-intellectual rationalism must be seen in terms of the genealogical roots within ancient Athens. And let us be clear here. Rationalism *can* be anti-intellectual in the sense that it seeks to degrade all talk of ethics, of aesthetics, of taste, of disputation and argument around qualitative matters. All is reduced to a quantitative calculus of ratiocination, of ratios and of rations, where the paring science of apportionment leads to the search for the right answer: the final solution. The Final Solution.

The typical academic paper becomes the task of killing the foul beast which inhabits the stinking pit of our minds by ratiocination and hence, all too often, apportioning blame and praise in cautious measured terms. Perhaps like Parsiphae we should love the beast rather than seeking to slay it. The written paper mayhap, should look like a monstrous machine for achieving impregnation by the beast. What, then, we might ask, is wrong with a complete turkey? What if it is the human in us which is the problem? Bearing this in mind (sic) what follows is more of a chimera, perhaps.

ephemera as chimera. *ephemera: critical dialogues on organization*. Critical. Dialogues. Organization. Three words in search of a home. Head, body and tail. Three attributes in search of a morphology. More words follow to emplace them firmly in the Marches. All along the watch towers. Disciplining. Diverting. Hemming in. Holding back.

Critical

In being social scientists, rather than let us say, management teachers in a stand-alone business school, perhaps we ought first to look at the ways in which the term 'Critique' has developed historically and then to look at how it had been used in our own discipline. The notions of critique and the adjective 'critical' themselves are a product of the Enlightenment (Connerton, 1976: 15). Although these terms were utilised in earlier disputatious inter-church rivalries, at the time of the Enlightenment the notions came into discourse at a demarcation line between Reason and revelation. Rather than referring to ways of settling the merits of differing revelations between religions, 'Critique' became seen as the tool of Reason in its anti-clericalist assault upon organized religion as a whole. After some time, however, the term changed meaning again and:

the activity of critique became first indirectly and then directly, political. In salons, clubs, lodges and coffee-houses a new moral authority, the public, found its earliest institutions. Critique became one of its slogans and an endless stream of books and essays included the words 'critique' or 'critical' in their title. (Connerton, 1976: 16)

By the last two decades of the 18th century it appeared to thinkers such as Kant as if all was Critique. Whatever they read or listened to, apparently it was about debunking, opposing and unveiling the forces of the old world. For Kant it was now possible to reflect upon the conditions for obtaining human knowledge outside of the religious straitjacket. Thus, Critique became partially about asking how we know anything and what subjective forces lie behind our claims to know. This we might call the *epistemological* dimension to Critique. For Hegel, however, Critique is about the constraints which human beings impose upon themselves in organizing their lives and asks how this distorts the real meaning of humanity. Critique in this sense is about the possibility of an end to illusion and to the alienation of human beings from themselves. In this view of Critique, the detailed criticism of human thought and life gives rise to a new social order in which there is less illusion. Indeed the goal is to strip away all illusion. This we might call the *social revolutionary* dimension to Critique which first crystallized around 1770. Thus when scholars talk of critique and of the critical thought and theorising based upon it, they draw necessarily on a long history of the impact of the Enlightenment - particularly, it must be noted, upon the German nation.

Critical Theory, of course, has become synonymous with the Frankfurt School and Habermas. For Alvesson and Willmott (1996) even Foucault is allowed entry because we are told he does not differ much from Adorno and Horkheimer! Crucial to this version of Critical Theory is a tendency to adopt a bifocal vision of history. The first field of vision is the established order in all its tenacity. The second field represents the goals of humanity which Habermas identifies as a 'deep seated anthropological interest' in emancipation. These fields bound our knowledge and are always in tension. When the Frankfurt School undertook its Transatlantic peregrinations before and after World War II the focus shifted but concentration on the unmasking of ideology and the revealing of truth remained. We also have to say that Habermas's defence of the Enlightenment project and of the triumph of Reason now have a dated ring to those who see Modernism as a problem rather than a solution to the future of humankind. Why does Critical Theory have so little time for postmodernism and why is the feeling mutual? Clearly it would be a foolish postmodernist who saw the ideas of Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer and Habermas as irrelevances for the 21st century but these writers certainly are not central to our vision of Critique. But it would also be a foolish Critical Theorist who saw poststructuralism as in the same camp.

Here we might wish to part company with some others in our discipline. As prefigured above, Alvesson and Willmott (1996: 5) have attempted to introduce an understanding of an history of Critical Theory into Organization Studies. They claim to borrow directly from Critical Theory, meaning the work of the Frankfurt School and Habermas which, as we have seen, in turn draw directly and deeply upon the well of German Idealism. For them (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: 12-13), Critical Theory seeks to scrutinize contemporary practices and institutions and we are given the examples of the rationality that accompanies globalizing capitalism, of phallocentrism, of the ideology of individualism and of the concentration of power in the hands of an elite. In place of these institutional forms, alternative, more democratic, arrangements are possible which can be attained by emancipatory intent. Their approach then has both an epistemological stance and a socio-revolutionary one and draws directly upon some sense of Critique, even if not in a fully fledged Idealist way, through which to illuminate our discipline. Again in Organization Studies, Thompson and McHugh (1995) draw upon the label 'Critique' but owe less to the

philosophical Idealists of the Enlightenment than to structuralist Marxian thought. We are told that their “starting point is obviously critique itself: the identification of the weaknesses, limitations and ideological functions of orthodoxy” (Thompson and McHugh, 1995: 17). In this task they refer to the need to be self-reflexive and to challenge pre-existing attitudes such as to gender. They talk of the need to see organizations as embedded in a socio-political context and in a history constituted by the totality of capitalist society. Third, they identify the need to have explanations which are multi-dimensional and multi-layered. Individualistic explanations are seen as not enough. Fourth, Thompson and McHugh talk of dialectics and contradiction in which Hegelian and Marxist notions of the dynamics of capitalist society are emphasised rather than any focus upon stasis and stability. Finally, for them, to be critical means a desiring and thence a search to understand wholesale social transformation through the empowering of a wider range of participants. Within Management Education, Grey and Mitev (1995: 74-76) seek to launch a polemical attack upon ‘management practice’ rather than to sustain it. For them, ‘critical research’ is best seen in negative terms both in celebrating its rejection of managerialism and in its desire to expose the shortcomings of management. Grey and Mitev (1995) invoke the tradition of Critical Theory and Post-Structuralism in this endeavour which is essentially a distillation of the view that ‘critical’ means oppositional. They follow Noam Chomsky’s (1969: 228) somewhat dated and certainly dubious assertion that, “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies”. Within Systems Theory and management in general, Mingers (1999) has also argued for a Critical Theory perspective. For him, the task of developing an undergraduate course which is based upon a critical understanding rests upon four critiques. These are the critique of rhetoric, the critique of tradition, the critique of authority and the critique of objectivity (Mingers, 1999: 16-17). Here there are resonances with Alvesson and Willmott, with Thompson and McHugh, with the Enlightenment tradition of political activism and with the oppositional stance of Grey and Mitev.

This short list of contributions which claim to be critical by no means exhausts the Critical Theory approach to Organization Studies and encourages us to look across the Atlantic. Thompson and McHugh draw heavily upon Benson (1977), for example, while, Alvesson and Willmott draw upon the work of Stan Deetz (1992) and John Jermier (1998), both of whom are American. Indeed, Jermier’s (1998) editorial to a Special Issue of the journal, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, gives yet another variant of the meaning of the term ‘critical’ with a certain hemispheric spin on it. So, all in all, the reader by now should have the beginnings of some sense of the orientation taken in all this type of work .

So what do I mean by ‘critical’? What do I want with Critical Theory? The need to define what might be taken from all of this background in social theory and organization theory becomes irresistible. The group of staff in Warwick who teach Organizational Behaviour (WOBS, 2000) see six strands identifiable within Critical Theory which are central to its defining argument. Of these six strands we accept and seek to develop the first four. We are much less happy with the last two. These first four strands are characterised here as:

The Political

This dimension to critique is perhaps the most central and refers to the concern for understanding the use and exercise of social power and ways in which political forces,

conceived very widely, shape, govern and even determine human life. Power becomes the key concept in analysis. Power, of course, is capable of being analysed in one or more of several different approaches. We are not committed to one view over any other but alongside radical perspectives which look at power as a structural issue we also see the relevance of Foucauldian approaches. Our aim is to more fully reveal and examine the exercise of power in organizational contexts. Without this goal of politicisation there can be no critique of a meaningful kind.

The Iconoclastic

Critique may be thought to involve some elements of iconoclasm where the aim is to break down the solidity of dominant imagery and icons. The presence of substantial and powerful sets of signifiers invites critique to investigate what it is that lies behind. In our field there are clearly potent symbols and imageries used in organizational life which need to be uncovered, unveiled and analysed. The notion of the leader, for example, is one such iconic notion which could be unmasked to show its role in the maintenance of the status quo. Other brazen images are also ready for demolition.

The Epistemological

Critique in this sense refers back to the Kantian tradition of asking ourselves to reflect back upon how and why we know something. Rarely do we stop to ask what bases our forms of knowledge rest upon. Critique is about asking what epistemological basis we have for scientific and everyday knowledge. It is essential to Critique to ask such foundational questions, for common sense and indeed the highly valorised practice of science itself, are seen as little more than epiphenomena of highly active political systems. They are based upon shallow, one-dimensional empiricism and the notion that the world is as it appears to us. To ask epistemological questions is to continually ask, as academics, upon what do we base our judgements and evaluations. Of course, it would be somewhat surprising if we did not then go on to ask why and how management make certain truth claims. The Panglossian meta-theory of 'all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds' has an obvious, fundamental conservatism locked within it. But it also, less obviously perhaps, encourages a shallow empiricism wherein what you see is what you get. 'Critique' here does not necessarily mean the encouragement of alternative searches for ontic depth but it does always imply, we believe, a suspicion of the superficial.

The Investigative

We see a tradition emanating from Critique which concerns the search to uncover and unearth what others may take for granted. This investigative approach comes from a concern to question the powerful and continually to bring onto the public agenda issues which ruling elites would seek to have unquestioned. In the early days of critique it was the life-styles of the clergy themselves which were investigated. Investigation concerned, and still concerns, the following up of leads through which we might deal with issues of deep human concern but which were and are often neglected because they are suppressed and excluded from the agenda. In more meaningful discussions of power, this is sometimes called giving consideration to the 'third face' of power (Lukes, 1974) - that which is most sedimented and hidden and not amenable to instant surface inspection.

These four strands then are the ones which might be seen as in keeping with the critical tradition. They have to be seen as interrelated and as intertwined in terms of their import and although they only form a partial expression of the tenets of Critical Theory, they still proffer a powerful way of approaching our discipline. As we have already indicated one might *not* go so far as to accept the fifth and sixth strands - for reasons which need to be explained at this juncture before we move on. We may want to differentiate the position *ephemera* wishes to take from that adopted by 'critical' organizational theorists such as Grey and Mitev, Alvesson and Willmott, and Mingers. Whilst one might seek to understand as best one can the German Idealist tradition and the context of the Enlightenment, neither a commitment to the Enlightenment values nor to the furtherance of the *Geisteswissenschaften* might appeal. Being a card carrying Habermasian is unappealing, possibly because one is unclear as to the mechanisms by which emancipation and the end to illusion will come about. The notion that a deeply entrenched ideology would be susceptible to collapse in the face of the revelation of truth offered by a scholarly elite sits uncomfortably with some. Empowerment of the masses suggests that it is within our power and our right to offer this benefaction. Thus, in the absence of the optimism of the Frankfurt School, perhaps it is open to us to reflect our pessimism and dystopianism concerning organizational solutions to the problems facing humanity in, through and around organizations.

Therefore, if one strips away these particular Critical Theory commitments to emancipation from ideology and sees thought in more relativistic terms, rather than as a duality of truth and ideology, we are left with something that you might find to be 'critical'. Namely, we are still committed to 'critique' as having an epistemological dimension and another based on socio-political change but are not wedded to the Critical Theory 'take' on the phenomenological basis of the former and 'end of ideology' basis of the latter. Because of this standpoint, the last two dimensions to Critical Theory are *not* very much in evidence in these musings.

The Revelatory

The fifth strand of Critical Theory is the notion that those theorists who profess it possess the key to unlocking alienation and repairing the separation of human beings from their potential. There is a fondly held belief that, by attacking illusion, there can be a concomitant demonstration of what is illusion and what is truth. This conception held sway for many decades but it is difficult in these postmodern times to hang on to what is itself an illusion that only a small group of intellectuals is in possession of the one and only Truth. This we find deeply problematic.

The Emancipatory

Similarly, there was the assumption often made that Critical Theory had the unfettered freedom of the human spirit as its ultimate objective. Many of us find this entirely laudable. But it is difficult to unravel the deleterious effects of any new organizational system of power from the supposed gains. In other words, we feel that systems of domination always involve control, even if they are couched and lived in terms of ultra-democratic and anarchist principles. Some powers are more equal than others, of course, but they are still political. Since power effects are everywhere, the myth of human liberty

is just that. Emancipation from something may almost certainly mean enslavement to its opposite. Emancipation always means enslavement for something or someone.

As stated above, we within WOBS are committed to the first four of these component strands but not to the last two. Thus, the stance adopted is to stress the *political* nature of organizational life, they are likely to be *iconoclastic* and debunking of conventional myths, they may well seek to *question what is knowledge* and how do we achieve it; and finally they scrutinise contemporary practices and institutions for how and why they operate as they do through *investigation*. What holds all four strands together is the fibre of *opposition*.

It is important to make clear that we are not optimistic about 'progress'. Indeed, we are deeply suspicious of the concept of progress at all. We see it, too, as myth - a comforting myth from which human optimism may spring 'eternal', or at least spring from the Enlightenment. We do not buy into the concept of Progress. It seeks to 'boil the carcass of the old order' and to engage in 'Negations' in an ongoing but ultimately doomed challenge to the present. We are anti-Panglossian and/but profoundly *pessimistic*. Non-paradoxically, it is a pessimism about which we may be very positive!

Caricatures are easily drawn and easily dismissed. But the sense of Critique here is one opposed to the orthodoxy in Organizational Behaviour. As there are serious scholars practising it, we must take the orthodoxy seriously. It is no use pretending otherwise. But from our recognition of the depth and breadth of academically located managerialism comes an energy and an enthusiasm to confront it. Opposition is energising and creative. Negations are positive. Contestation is life-affirming. Critique can even be fun.

Speaking now in a personal capacity, I believe that *ephemera* might contain material and have an orientation which is unlike the prevailing literature in the field with its implicit or explicit managerialism and unreconstructed scientism. *ephemera* will take the issues of power and gender seriously and highlight innovative material which would stimulate the serious student to think *about* their beliefs rather than with them. The material, in essence, questions 'common sense' understandings. A wide audience exists, I believe, for such an orientation. The ideological stance of much conventional literature, whether in the guise of 'managing change' books, of the plethora of 'Handy' management texts, of the strategic management area as a whole or of much of Human Resource Management, is sadly left unquestioned. There is room for, and a need for, literature which is self-reflexive and critical of the dominant orthodoxy.

So 'critical' is a contentious term and one which requires considerable reflection upon before embarking lightly on its utilisation. It would be surprising if the approach outlined above commanded widespread acceptance. What follows may be even more contentious.

Dialogues

What is said here is *deliberately* contentious. I do not believe that dialogues are necessarily a positive force. There are times and places where academic dialogue has deleterious impacts upon parties to the dialogue. But first let us see why dialogue has been valorised

so much as a notion. Disciplines within academia claim to be about dialogue but they are not. You may not wish to even contemplate let alone accept the notion that there are paradigmatic differences which separate scholars but at the level of paradigm workers there is little evidence of dialogue going on. Conversation and gossip possibly, but dialogue is eschewed. It is too threatening to those in positions of superiority. The crew of the Scientific Enterprise must be silent and keep no record of their own. The luxury of speech and record keeping is for officers. Otherwise those below decks can only expect to dance at the end of Sir Cloudsley Shovell's yardarm (Sobel, 1996) for their troubles. In what follows I draw heavily upon a piece entitled 'Linearity, Control and Death' (1998).

Manguel (1996: 42-43) tells of Ambrose, a cleric in the 5th century, who was said by that paleo-organization theorist, St. Augustine, to be an 'extraordinary reader'. What Ambrose did was to challenge the carnalized version of reading which was prevalent at the time. For as he scanned the page and sought out the meaning of the text, his voice was silent and his tongue was still. He *never* read aloud. The reader today sits, (which of course assumes the dressage of the chair which was not common in Western Europe before early Victorian times), with eyes scanning the page, tongue held still. Such forms of silent reading were not commonplace until the 10th century at the earliest. Prior to this, to sit in a library of the Middle East would have been to sit amidst a cacophonous din! Manguel gives other examples which predate Ambrose where extraordinary events reported on paper are read silently because of their impact; but it was not until the monasteries of the early Middle Ages begin to institute the regime of work and prayer and prayer and work (Noble, 1994) that silent reading becomes acceptable and as not rude and offensive. Before this, reading was an *oral* skill to be enjoyed by others as they listened, practising their aural skills. To read silently is to deprive others of both pleasure and access. As we are reading, left to right and top to bottom, we do not hear. We are expected to read authors in all their authority. It is how *they* see the world that is important. No-one is interested in our unspoken thoughts, unless of course we have the pips of the officer class marked upon us to give us access to the conch of articulation. Dialogue is about power. The articulation of Consciousness.

Apart from *The Lord of the Flies* (1985) where Piggy's essential glasses are smashed, the key sensory device today and in many places is the eye, for visual perception allows the focus to be upon an object world. In perspectival painting there is a unidirectional subject-object relation which is de-carnalized. The I is made up of the eye. The body then is pitted against the eye and there is a fetishization of the power of sight. Other organs of sense are downgraded and the emphasis is upon the optocentric. The emphasis is upon the world of appearance.

Of course, McLuhan (1962) produced a strong oversimplified account of the importance of writing made possible through the printing press. McLuhan argued that the greater the number of senses involved, the greater the chance the recipient of a message would be able to reproduce the experience of the sender. For him, the spoken word was the best of the possibilities for reproducing our mental states in others. The spoken word in a face to face interaction involves the full range of the human sensorium. Hearing is hotter than sight but the written word has achieved the status of a 'momentary diety'. Now whilst this impoverishment began with handwriting and manual copying, it accelerates tremendously with the development of the printing press. Thereafter, the McAdamised text allows the

reader to rush along; for the surface has been tidied up and cleared of ambiguity. It is unobstructed by the personal potholes of the transcriber. Readers of this visual uniformity learn to inhabit a world of strict, logical, explicit and literal patterns. They come to live by timetables and are punctual, by tables of weights and measures and are productive and by formal instruction and are expedient. The discovery of printing more than writing is the original sin which industrial civilisation is now heir to. It has created a world of closely regimented text, of the notion of the author, of a fixed point of view and of the concept of proprietary rights over ideas. Typographic Man is Organization Man. And Typographic Woman is Organization Woman.

McLuhan (1962: 76) goes on to argue that “perhaps the most significant of the gifts of typography to man is that of detachment and non-involvement”. Jay (1994: 67) suggests that the Greeks also possessed this ‘gift’ but that printing multiplied the number of its beneficiaries, including, most notably of course, René Descartes, whose campaign for a visually conceived cognitive project led to “the decay of dialogue” (Ong, 1958). But dialogue between speaker and the spoken to itself is not necessarily that which stands outside power. It is no momentary diet either. Conversation between two humans, steeped in power differentials happened even in the heyday of the auditory world. Consider just the power of ‘the audit’. As Sobel (1999: 242) shows, the trial of Galileo which took place in the spring of 1633 contained a most interesting dialogue. We are fortunate to have a careful recording of the trial and it shows how the accuser uses Latin and the third person in asking questions of the great astronomer. The defendant’s answers ring small and meek for they are in first person Italian. Thus:

Q. (in Latin) By what means and how long ago did he come to Rome?

A. (in Italian) I arrived in Rome the first Sunday of Lent, and I came in a litter.

This form of dialogue may be seen as highly unusual and as outside of the experience of most of us. In fact, to the contrary, one might wish to argue that it is not so unusual at all. Dialogue is a weapon of the powerful. Galileo has struggled long and hard not to come to undertake this process of inquisition. Once there, he knows that the range of punishments he faces are likely to be severe. But do not think that this is all because the dialogue is in the form of a trial. In everyday language and situations the use of formal and restricted codes, as pointed out by Basil Bernstein (1960), is central in accessing many political and educational resources. Most diplomacy, too, where stylized dialogue between representatives of States is highly prized, is about ‘forcing’ opponents to the negotiating table. The absence of someone to talk to is a source of great concern to the powerful. They seek named individuals to work upon and against. Where no leaders of the opposition are forthcoming there is a palpable sense of menace felt by the institutionally endowed. The cyber-terrorists using multiple, acephalous forms of organizing represent a refusal to engage in dialogue with the powerful. Dialogue occurs around the table and not in the street.

Let us not suppose then that dialogue is the highest form of human communication. The ideal speech situation envisaged by Habermas is a very interesting idea but its interest comes from its very unobtainability. Rather than seek out arenas of discourse where every nuance of power and salient of differentiation has been eradicated, the reality for the underclass may be the eschewal of all talk whatsoever. Silence may be preferable for the

powerless. Indeed, in the 1960's movie *Spartacus*, the eponymous hero refuses to answer to his name so that the Emperor cannot be sure of his death. The uncertainty arising from a lack of dialogue is a weapon of the powerless. Spartacus does not engage in intercourse with his oppressor. Except at the level of the hurling of sputum. Perhaps contributors to *ephemera* might wish to contemplate the expectoration of sputum as well as the espoused need to engage in discourse and dialogue. To spit in the eye is to use the mouth against the ocular. It is, however briefly, an attempt to undermine the present superiority of the seen over the spoken. One has Great Expectations about *ephemera*.

Organization

History is so important to us that I feel it important to talk briefly about the ways in which the concept of organization may be seen (in one view at least) to have developed. In this I shall be concentrating not on the organization of production, but on the production of organization. It has to be understood that this is NOT a unifying story. It is tale of many cities. Of avenues explored and then abandoned. Of cul de sacs which become open highways. Of brute force and ignorance. Of possibilities and potentials. It is, perhaps, only in understanding its genealogy that can one appreciate how contested 'organization' is as an idea. It is a section which is written in a way to try and suggest these lines of flight. It is meant to appear a little 'disorganized'.

Raymond Williams in *Keywords* describes the origin of the term 'Organization' as thus:

It is from the sense of *organ* as instrument or agency that *organize* and *organization* in their modern senses eventually developed, mainly from the late 18th century and early 19th century...*Organic* followed a different course and indeed by the 19th century could be used in contrast with *organized*. (Williams, 1983: 227; emphasis and the spelling of organization with a z in the original)

According to Williams (1983: 227), *organ* first appeared in English from the 13th century to signal a musical instrument; something like the modern organ, in this context appeared in the 14th century. Its immediate forerunner was the old French word, *organe*, derived from the Latin *organum* whose root word was *opyvov* in Ancient Greek. *Organon* meant an instrument or an engine or a tool. It could also refer to any being's form as an instrument for being and it could also be taken to mean bodily organs as instruments of sense (the eye as a seeing instrument, for example), to surgical instruments or machines of war. In Latin usage the focus came to be upon the last of these meanings as *organum* came to refer to engines of war. In late Medieval times, the meaning came back to concentrate upon church *organs* as instruments of praise to God (Cummings and Thanem, 1998). Within and after the Renaissance the complexities of meaning abound so let us pause here for a moment and reflect.

The search for ultimate origins is a difficult and fraught task. The degree zero of a term - its root - which Williams attempts to uncover can lead one back to positions which cannot be defended. The search for origin, the original, the mother term, the moment of conception is doomed to failure because of the complexities of phonemes and their linguistic transformations. The discovery of a written source does not mean that it is *the* source of the word. It merely means that due to some accident of storage or of ink

chemistry a piece of parchment or papyrus has survived longer than others. It does not mean that this older document is the founding source of the word. Nor does it mean that we can translate the term into the meanings that would have been attributed to it at the time. If 'meaning is use' as Wittgenstein would have us believe then there is no certainty that meaning can be accurately attributed today for yesterday's notions.

'The past is a foreign place. They do things differently there.'

If we are to concentrate upon histories it would be as well to remember Vico's strictures on the limitations of history: Do not search for origins. Do not dare to believe we see the world as those in the past did. Do not believe that the present is lying on the surface of the past for all to see its inevitability. Do not think that those who inhabit the past will see what we regard as the major issues of the day as their major issues. Do not hope that language has remained constant for it will not have done so.

Where to begin and what to consider? In the remainder of this section I will outline ways in which, historically, the concept of organization has been understood. This is not a unifying story, for it is, as one might expect, whispers of different uses. It is a tale of many cities.

Chaos and the Creation of Organization

The first thing to note is that chaos is not. In other words chaos was not the first thing that ever existed. We discover that, in the epic of Gilgamesh, legendary King of Uruk, in the Sumerian civilization of 4000BC, he was searching close to the abyss for what lay behind death and the grave. Life came before the void. Chaos was the end of the world not at its beginning. Two thousand years later, the Babylonian epic of Enuma Elish tells of the daily battles between Marduk, the hero and the sea-monster Tiamat. Here, somewhat typically, one finds a myth of creation mixed with a myth of victory over disorder (Grant, 1989: 103). One finds it later, and more famously, in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In these versions chaos predates everything. It is not the telos to which we are all hurtling in the future.

These are important differences. For it is a set of disputations which raises a crucial issue. Is Chaos associated with a heroic story of order arising out of disorder and triumphing over it? Or is it a necessary concept in a story about the creation of things even if post-creation they are in a state of disorganized disorder? In these creation myths we seem to face a choice: on one hand from Chaos comes materiality; on the other from Chaos comes organization. Perhaps chaos gives rise to both creation and order as in the Bible of the Old Testament. As in popular parlance the second is the dominant view. But what if order gives rise to Chaos as in the Sumerian version? Here we would have to allow the separation of Chaos from creation and associate it instead with the End.

In the *Theogony* there is, in the beginning, Chaos, the gaping void, the primordial abyss (Grant, 1989: 103). But we are not talking about the Grand Canyon here. Imagine a space so vast that we travel down in it in pitch blackness. There are no stars. There is no sense of movement. There is no wind in our hair. We have no hair. There is no head. No eyes. No sense of self. No thought. There is no-one. All is void. There is absolutely nothing. We are talking about travelling at speed down into a chasm while the butterflies wear away the sphere of steel in imperceptible strokes and when, at long, long last, the ball has

completely disappeared from friction (and yet when eternity has not yet begun), we have yet to begin to fall into the topmost rim of the abyss.

Chaos is a big concept.

Haridimos Tsoukas (1998) has written upon the links between chaos and organization recently and in an uncharacteristic elision equates chaos and disorganization. As usual, the footnotes are the most interesting part of the paper. Quoting favourably from Castoriadis (1987: 341) Tsoukas says disorganization “is a concept which strictly speaking makes no sense” for “all coherent discourse and all action would be impossible” (Tsoukas, 1998: 309). Later in the text “we, as sentient beings, have no choice but to organize our world and our actions in it. The interesting questions are how we do it; what we do it for? (1998: 292). Notice here the rhetorical appeal to ‘we’ as sentient beings whose language is central to disorganization. The first difficulty with such an approach is its *anthropocentrism*. There is little question that many humans would adopt an unthinking humanism to most questions but when one is dealing with philosophical issues of some import it behoves us perhaps to ‘get real’. In other words the nominalistic assumptions of Castoriadis and Tsoukas that we humans create the world through our language and there is nothing outside the text leaves the realist position unassailed. Might there not be disorganization in the real world which we puny humans attempt to stave off by fondly imagining that there is the order within it that we have given to it. Umberto Eco has argued precisely this point - the only thing which makes the world terrible is our doomed attempts to treat it as if there was some underlying order in it. Thus unlike Tsoukas perhaps we would want to hang on to the possibility that chaos as disorganization does exist but outside of our linguistic attempts to comprehend it. There must be room for the Other to organization. For without it we are forced into a Newspeak where good’s opposite is ungood and not downright evil. I want downright disorganization to exist as a concept even though in mentioning its name and in labelling it I begin to strangle its existence at birth. For Tsoukas and the mathematicians and physicists upon whom he has relied, do strangle the world of chaos. Chaos in their hands comes to mean unpredictability, surprises, novelty, non-linearity, disorder, messiness and noise. Chaos in this view becomes seen as ‘unstable aperiodic behaviour’ which is explicable by ‘dynamic systems theory’. Chaos is described in chaos theory by chaologists (*sic*) as “the behaviour of a system which is governed by deterministic laws but is so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to its extreme sensitivity to initial conditions” (Stewart, 1990).

But where does that leave any happy notion of nothingness - the nihilistic bottomless pit? What of “the classical Greek insight of *chaos* as the gaping void, the abyss, the *apeiron* from which cosmos - form - arises” (Tsoukas, 1998: 305, emphasis in original)? Even here one finds Castoriadis seeking a function for the void in that what chaos does is provide for the *ex nihilo* creation of new forms. From chaos comes order. And so we are presented with both in the form of chaosmos. Chaosmos gives us both creation and the void to give birth to it. Chaosmos makes life patterned yet indeterminate. Chaosmos gives the human mind a role in the infinite. And this last point is its very weakness. It privileges epistemology over ontology. The (Greek) human mind over the raw materiality of the universe(s). The microcosm over the macrocosm. As Terry Pratchett in the Discworld novels would put it, it privileges the observers in their brass bathospheres over what lies

beneath the rim. Put crudely, chaos becomes a product of those humans that have invented themselves.

Unsurprisingly, there are no cults of chaos “nor have they a place in developed or anthropomorphic mythology, since it is so difficult to imagine such lofty concepts” (Grant, 1989: 109). So chaos is rarely the starting point. Perhaps we should do a Martin Amis and imagine time in reverse. Perhaps the end of organization rather than its beginning is the way to conceptualise Chaos. Let us assume as the Sumerians did that we are moving in the direction of the formless void rather than away from it.

What would this say to us about organization?

Organizing in the Face of Chaos

Note the active tense here to suggest we are talking of a process not a fixed structure. The first history of the concept of organization should be one in which we deal with the formless void and its relationship to myths of creative *organizing*.

The unnameable is the beginning of heaven and earth. (the Tao Te Ching)

Indian, Chinese and Biblical approaches to the topic could be incorporated into an overview of the ways in which the formless void figures in human mythology. The equivalent of Chaos and disorganization might be sought in several civilizations. We must note however that the relative precision allowed by the Romance languages is absent in Chinese ideographs which are context dependent and more elusive. So too might the stories around the first forms of organization be useful ranging from ‘in the beginning was the word’ to Pratchett’s Discworld and the four elephants on the turtle’s back (Pratchett 1983). In the treatment of this topic we may well come across what we think of in the Occident as the structure/process debate, male/female principles and their role in the creation of organization, and animalistic imagery. We will also need perhaps to consider geometries in the sky and the ways in which astronomy was developed to produce animalistic deities in the heavens as control over destiny. Such configurations of forces take place in hydraulic societies. Japanese notions in Shintoism, *Yin* and *Yang* and the creation myths of Confucianism are also relevant here. So too are Islamic notions particularly that of the ‘zero-0’. To complete the overview would be impossible without some attention being addressed to Australian Aboriginal dream time and Sub-Saharan African notions. The danger of course would be that of superficiality and over-simplification, but in dealing with history we need to get geography into it somehow. Key sources here might be Michael Moorcock’s *Dancers at the end of time* and Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001* (the last chapter).

Organon and the Ancient Greek Contribution

A discussion might take place of the Greek Creation myths certainly, but it is important not to see Greece as the beginning of the story. The Greek philosophers approached these issues in different ways and whilst it is important to situate a discussion of Plato and Aristotle in this context we should not be blind to the role of mathematicians like Euclid in establishing an ordered universe for us. The tools as *organon* aspect also needs some detailed treatment. Moving on to the Roman approach to *organum* a discussion could be

developed of the Roman's approach insofar as it is different to that of the Greeks yet upon which so much of their culture was based.

***Organum* in the Medieval Church**

A treatment which would deal with St Augustine, Grosseteste and Bede, Occam's razor and the Cistercians would be useful in understanding the Western notion of organization. Focussing upon the concept of hierarchy, considerable attention could be paid to Grosseteste as a paleo-organization theorist. Francis Bacon's treatment of *Novum Organum* is essential by way of some consideration of the medieval cathedral organ.

***Organons* in the Renaissance**

Building upon the work of Dale (1997) it would be possible to look at 16th century Venice as the place where organization as we understand it today began to take further shape. Here we would perhaps find the rise of the individual reflected in mass-produced mirrors, the development of the anatomical urge, mass production of galleys and galleons within the Arsenale and the printing presses of the Gutenberg Galaxy.

Meanwhile, as Cummings and Thanem (1998) show, in the English tradition the word *organons* appears from the 16th century. The earliest use of *to organize* which is a phonetic rendition of organons, appears during the Renaissance and means, harking back to the Greek, 'to endow with organs'. Cummings and Thanem (1998: 6) claim this reference appears from 1413 and dries up all together around 1870. It dries up because it is replaced with a similarly derived word - the organism.

***L'organization* in the French Revolution**

Here the story becomes one of *l'organization*. The rise of rationalism at the foot of the guillotine brings Christianity into doubt. Anti-clericalism and the Encyclopaedists, Heilbron's material on St. Simon, Comte and Bichet, Diderot's tree of knowledge and so on could well be considered alongside the work of Figlio and Pickstone (see Hoskin, 1995). The story is one of *organicism* and the equation of the organic with a principle of organization found in non-living items. It represents a triumph of biologism. Also Hoskin and Macve's (1988) work on Whistler and Westpoint is relevant here to the French exportation of the concept of organization to the USA.

Organicism and the Pareto Circle

L.J. Henderson's role in the domination of American *organicism* borrowing from Pareto's Italian version (see, if you are interested, Barber, 1970) was of central importance to the development of organization theory. It is this meaning that Gareth Morgan takes to be the meaning of the *organic* metaphor. The Pareto Circle at Harvard with its possible Masonic connections consisted of Parsons, Merton, Barnard, Mayo and Rothlisberger with Whitehead thrown in for good measure. Their dedication to the 'Marx of the Bourgeoisie' - Pareto - has to be seen in the light of 1930s unrest and their patrician attitudes to social disorder. Why they were asked to undertake the Hawthorne studies when located 1000 miles away from Chicago's suburbs and there was very respectable sociology department already in Chicago itself seems a difficult question to answer. The dependence on the

organic metaphor comes from the influence of Pareto and is useful of course because of its emphasis on wholeness and the need for integration to ensure health and continued well being.

The Plane of Organization: Deleuze and Guattari.

The material on Deleuze and Guattari in which some consideration of the *plane of organization* is attempted would be very useful. The focus here could be on rhizomatic as opposed to arboreal metaphors but the weakness of Deleuze and Guattari in terms of using dualities should be emphasised.

Neo-Bergsonism and Self-Organization

Neo-Bergsonism has been characterised as Anti-Cartesianism, an emphasis on flow, process and Becoming, an emphasis on duration in structures, in a material movement *from* the external to the internal worlds (and a consequent anti-representationalism since that implies the reverse with the mind's role dominating) and the emphasis on self-creation. The focus within such a view is likely to be on self-organization. Take for example, Prigogine's brand of complexity theory with the notions of dissipative structures and self-organization. Autopoiesis and the work of the Chilean pair, Maturana and Varela might be identified and discussed in the light of their focus on a particular category of dissipative structures. These are massive networks of very complex feedback loops which are able to create, reproduce (perhaps that should be 'replicate' cf. Dale, 1997) and adapt themselves. These structures are able to "structurally couple themselves" to their environment and form extensive assemblages of such structures. This is what is meant by self-organization. History is built into these structures as an ontological grounding.

Chaos out of Organizing

The importance of the production of organizing could be highlighted rather than the organization of production. The work of the Cooperians as in *In the Realm of Organization* (Chia, 1998) might be subjected to some critique for its dualistic orientation *à la* Deleuze and Guattari. Chia claims that Cooper's concerns are a commitment to an epistemology of process-movement, process and becoming, a logic of otherness (the lost void, technologies of representation, especially writing as the agent of inscription) and the immanence of human organ senses in products.

However, in Zen it is stated that "attempting to define it means you fall into that net of words wherein nothing can be said" (Sardar and Abrams 1999: 167). Organization is the search for everything being said and this is what the Cooperians seem to attempt. To speak of the production of organization everywhere and at all times is to speak for all. Following on from this, the 'chaosmos' approach of Tsoukas and Castoriadas too might be subject to critique.

The emphasis on chaos being suppressed by the void is suggestive of a possible periodicity of the notion of organization. At times when (Western) humanity seeks to invent itself as the focus of the universe perhaps the notion does gain credence. The development of a search for order may intensify at times when humanity seeks to believe that it can control and understand the world through ratiocination. As Dale (1997) has shown the links

between organization and rationality are very clear after the Renaissance and the burgeoning development of the anatomical urge. The first, organization, is the endowment of organs in the human body and beyond. The second, ratiocination, is the allocation of portions through the human mind. Organized rationality thus, is the allocation of portions of meaning through 'insight' into the human body and the human mind. The intensification of the search for rationality leads more and more to the suppression of the possibility of chaos and the quest for good order. Hegel himself said as much in the famous dictum that "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" (1967: 10).

The apportionment of the base origin of 'organization' to Greece places these concerns in the Occident. What we know very little of, is the views in the East of chaos and organization. As Said (1978) has shown, the construction of the Orient as the Other means that we have the impudence to believe that there would be only one inscrutable oriental way to conceptualise chaos and disorganization- even though we know not what it would be. Where attention is paid to even some branches of Indian and Chinese philosophy (excluding all that beyond) the assertion of or search for Greek influence is strong. For example, it has been argued that the Nyaya school of Indian philosophy which emphasises rational reasoning and logic looks and feels very similar to Aristotelianism and that there may have been some mutual influencing. But generally speaking, we can find dualistic theories, materialistic ones and so on if we choose to use Hellenistic ideas to interpret those from the East. However there are penalties associated with this assumption of an Athenian (in distinction to a pan-Hellenistic) starting point. It ties us to far too many constraining threads of argumentation.

Beyond Histories of the 'Production of Organization'

What I have tried to do in this long section of annotated thoughts is to suggest that the history of organization as a concept is a rich one but there are no easy answers within it to any thing like a consensus view of truth. It is a contested terrain. The focus *ephemera* seeks on organization is to reflect this varied history from varied parts of the world in varied ways. Cooper (1998) has written on the distinctiveness between those perspectives which concentrate on the organization of production (and obviously include much of the sociology of industry, industrial relations and so on, but less obviously, the vast majority of the management sciences), and those which focus on the production of organization. Here the concern is to understand how human beings, their artefacts and their language come to be organized and demonstrate systematic patterns of regularity. In *ephemera* it is hoped that both sorts of interest in organization will be evidenced. Papers on how production is organized might stand alongside those which discuss how organization is produced in different historical and cultural contexts. And certainly not just by those who owe a cultural heritage to the Athenians!

I began with the myth of Theseus.

Let me end with it.

Closure and Openings

Theseus is etymologically connected to 'thesis', one might suggest and for most of us is associated with a linear argument with which to escape the benighted confines of the maze-like labyrinth (which itself is etymologically close to the name for lips – 'labia') Thus, Theseus is given the golden thread by Ariadne by which to free himself from the labyrinth once he has slain the unseen monster of the inescapable. Thereafter, the thread of the argument by which to straighten out the complex folds and pleats of a complicated world comes to us in the academic thesis. We can re-turn to the surface and allow others to see the enlightened argument which maps out the twists and turns of the subterranean. Today, the myth of Theseus whereby an Athenian subdues the spiralling labyrinth of the Cretans and its denizen is not without significance. The constraints of the labia are no more. Organization and rationality will straighten us out and provide the way through the underground passages of human fear.

But what about seeking out more shambles? More lips and less eyes? More labyrinths? More monstrosities? More irrationalities? More Bacchus? More Chimeras.

ephemera: critical dialogues on organization has a complex history of thought and counter-thought behind it as a set of terms, read in that particular order. What we mean by critical, by dialogues and by organization are all open to contestation. But we should not expect it to be any other way. *ephemera*, I earnestly hope, will not seek to straighten us out but to twist us and make us groan. There is a belief around at the moment which speaks of honouring the work of others. This is a worthy objective but too often it masks the need for real, visceral critique. Its good-intentioned liberal values are often seen as highly desirable. But I hope *ephemera* will spit in the faces of the powerful - and anyone else for that matter. As well as seeking to facilitate conversation and diplomatic treaty, one entreats that it will regularly retreat into the labyrinth and seek out the monstrous, not for execution but for wonderment.

It would be a real achievement if *ephemera* developed a reputation for being a chimera of the darkness. Benighted. Dark and dank in texture and feel. Foul not fragrant. Closed in. Closeted away. Yet open – as a wound.

Long may it fester.

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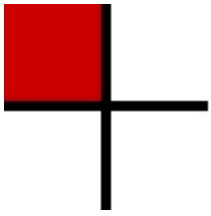
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All That Is Solid Melts Into Air? *ephemera* and the Monument

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abstract

Monuments are meant to last forever within a particular expressive and material form. It is this that enables monuments to commemorate and celebrate past events and communicate images and ideals in such a way that they influence how people think and what people do. Consequently, this enables monuments to shape the past, the present and the future. The problem is that monuments cannot last forever, at least they cannot within the forms initially assigned. Instead, people interpret monuments in an infinite number of different ways, and the matter with which monuments are created is driven by independent forces with the power to change any monumental form. In conclusion, the eternal is removed from the monument and replaced with the ephemeral. And if not even monuments can last forever, what can?

Three questions: What objective or intended function is it that informs the construction of monuments? Are monuments capable of fulfilling this function or objective? And finally, if only more briefly and in conclusion, what consequences may this have for the future research agenda of *ephemera*?

I

A monument is traditionally conceived as something constructed in stone or bronze to commemorate and celebrate significant past events or people doing great things in the past, and monuments are typically associated with epitaphs and tombs, statues and obelisks. This conception is confirmed by the word's etymology, which originates from the Latin verb *monere*, 'to remember'. From this assumption, one can argue that the task, function or objective of a monument is to work as a device into which the celebratory memory of a significant event or a great person is stored, and from which it can be retrieved. As devices for storage and retrieval of celebratory memories, monuments also construct and express memories, and they do so by portraying images, which make us see the hagiographic aspects of certain historical events or persons. At the bottom line, one can see how monuments are directed towards the past and towards history. And one can see that the commemorative function of monuments is about transcending or overcoming time. People who have died and events that have been brought to an end are given a prolonged existence

and enabled to live on in monuments. Whereas living events and living beings have a most finite period of existence, these seem to exist in eternity.

II

The power of monuments and their ability to transcend time is not however just a matter of celebratory commemoration, remembrance and memory creation. Monuments are not merely historical edifices directed towards the past. Perhaps more importantly, they are also directed towards the future. This is what Deleuze and Guattari suggest in a rather complex argument put forward in *What is Philosophy?* (1994). Although the monument is created by the preservation of materials such as bronze and stone within a certain expressive form, Deleuze and Guattari insist that the monument is also about the preservation of sensation. More specifically, they say, it is about preserving the percepts and affects that are produced by materials that pass into sensation and start speaking to us as images. And as such, the monument is dissociated from any real relations with materials and instead becomes “a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 167). Consequently, these blocs are never like the past really was or ever will be. In other words, they do not reflect or imitate events or people themselves. Rather than making us remember the past, Deleuze and Guattari argue that they make us fabulate. And since they make us fabulate, they do not so much make us think about the past as they make us think about the future. Since they transcend time by projecting the future (rather than the past) into the present, the real function of the monument is not so much to commemorate a great historical event or person. It is more to influence the thinking and action of the present population in such a way that a similar great event or person may return in the future. In other words, it is about shaping the past so that we can shape the present and the future.

But in order to be effective in transcending time, projecting the future into the present and influencing how people think and how they act, the monument must transcend space. As this makes the actual visibility and image of the monument crucial, Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on blocs of sensation must be complemented with a discussion of the material constitution or make-up of the monument. In order to have a place in time, the monument must be visible and have a place in space. As well as being visible outside its own time of creation, the monument and the image it portrays must be visible outside its own spatial point of location. This is a matter of size and shape. But in order to endure temporarily in space, size does not necessarily mean that bigger is better. Against winter storms and riots roaming the streets, for example, a smaller monument may stand stronger and longer. With regards to temporal endurance in space, it is also important that the materials applied in the construction of the monument possess a minimal degree of solidity, and that they are assembled with techniques that secure the solidity of the monumental construction as a whole. This is crucial if the monument is to resist abuse over time from spatial forces such as wind, humidity, weather and pollution, as well as withstand pressure from changing cultural sentiments.

However, even if the monument seems to be rock solid, the image that it portrays can never guarantee the return of the event or person to which the image refers. The image

only actualises the possibility that a certain event or person will return and we can never know whether the future of which the monument speaks will ever arrive. This is first, because monuments and the images expressed on their surfaces are always freely interpreted by spectators, and second, because not even monuments are rock solid.

III

Interpretation is a matter of reading, and in *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre argues that the monument is the only architectural edifice in which the reading precedes the creation itself. This is because monuments are meant to evoke a particular reading or a particular interpretation, that is, they are meant to commemorate and celebrate a particular great event or person. Buildings, on the other hand, at least buildings without monumental status, are simply places to dwell. And non-monumental artworks are first created, only to be read or interpreted after the moment of their creation. Unlike the monument, art, or at least abstract art, is not invested with one single intended meaning. Instead, its very purpose and beauty lies in its ability to give rise to a multiplicity of different possible readings and interpretations. This is because abstract art does not have form in the Platonic sense of the word. Unlike the monument, which results from the imposition of form onto matter, abstract art results from creative processes that merely activate matter and put matter to work, as formless matter. In abstract art, one is therefore never certain about the purpose to which matter is put to work. Consequently, the abstract artwork does not pacify matter. Instead, matter remains active in the abstract artwork, which means that the reading and interpretation following its creation is surrounded by fundamental openness.

This interpretative and semantic openness is however not limited to abstract art, but also intervenes in the monument. Even if its creator seeks to assign a particular form to the monument in order to ensure that it is read or interpreted in a particular way and expresses a particular meaning, this can never be fully achieved. Different people will potentially have different opinions about any particular monument.

Moreover, monuments, if only to a lesser extent than abstract works of art, are penetrated by a material openness. Not even a monument can guarantee that matter is pacified and put to work for the purpose and the meaning that was initially intended by its sponsors and creators. This has to do with the relationship between matter and form in the sense that the stage when matter is put to work is not necessarily followed by a concluding and final stage that shapes initially formless yet working matter into a particular and eternal form. It is possible that the matter making up a monument may escape form altogether and yet again work at its own speed and actively move into a wide variety of different directions.

IV

The idea that matter is active and capable of escaping fixed forms and recreating itself along lines of flight is central to Deleuze and Guattari's argument in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988). Here they are not really concerned with monuments, but rather with the nature of

things. But insofar as monuments are things, there is no reason why we should not take their analysis seriously when thinking about the nature of the monument.

At the centre of Deleuze and Guattari's discussion is the critique of Aristotelian hylomorphism. According to hylomorphism, all the things in the world result from a combination of form and matter. Active forms are imposed wholly and totally upon passive matter, and *voilà*, the thing is produced. Indeed, within the framework of hylomorphism, it may be more adequate to speak in terms of content than in terms of matter, as formed matter cannot do anything on its own. Somewhat ironically, matter existing as content inside a form (i.e. inside a form of content) is empty, as it is void of any independent power of expression. Expression or meaning resides with the form alone, and becomes organised within a form of expression.

In response to hylomorphism, Deleuze and Guattari insist that no forms are absolute. And consequently, forms of content and forms of expression can never fully and completely dominate content and expression so as to organise the two into a stable and conclusive relationship where the former is represented by the latter. In other words, since matter cannot be completely confined within a specific form of content and fully formed into content it is not mirrored in a corresponding form in which one particular meaning is expressed. Instead, matter moves around freely and independently, working towards its often disparate and incoherent aims, producing expressions and enunciations that have no responsibility to a particular form.

This leads Deleuze and Guattari to leave the hylomorphic language of forms of content and forms of expression altogether, and instead speak in terms of variables of content and variables of expression. Their change in terminology has however nothing to do with a wish to emphasise a sense of causality whereby independent variables may be seen to determine dependent variables. Rather, they want to emphasise the way in which matter is a matter of variation and variability, change and fluctuation. And more specifically, as it draws our attention to the movements of matter, this notion of variables of content and variables of expression indicates the degree to which content and expression is deterritorialised or reterritorialised, the degree to which content and expression are carried away or stabilised.

As matter moves around, it intervenes into and disrupts different forms, whether these are supposed to perform monumental tasks or not. And by so doing, matter exercises effects and makes things happen. That is to say, matter performs functions on its own to such an extent that Deleuze and Guattari start speaking in terms of Matter-Functions. However, none of these functions or effects could ever be grasped within a project of prediction, no matter how systematically or imaginatively inclined its staff might be. If one starts looking, what one would tend to find are casualties rather than causalities. Whether or not the active and independent movements of matter in the future will reinforce or undermine the intended meaning behind the construction of any one particular monument, we therefore cannot know for sure. If we go along with the position that all matter is active and to some extent formless, we have to recognise that all matter also has the power to escape the monumental form. And consequently, even if all that is solid does not melt into air, we should at least be aware of one thing – that the extent to which the monument can enjoy stability and transcendental power enough to fulfil its function of shaping the past, the

present and the future is limited. And that the extent to which the monument can exist as a monument – in time and in space and in eternity – cannot be taken for granted

V

When we speak of ephemera or the ephemeral, we usually want to imply the opposite of the eternal. Like the mayflies that share the name, ephemera only have a most temporary existence. They are dead the day after they are born. And since we traditionally associate the monumental with the eternal, we also tend to draw a firm distinction between ephemera and monuments. In light of the above discussion, maintaining the dichotomy between ephemera and monuments becomes fundamentally problematic. Not even monuments can exist as monuments forever. They might not be ephemeral in the strictest sense of the word, which means that they would be gone the day after their erection. But they might be gone, or at least drastically *changed* a lot earlier than their sponsors and creators had hoped for.

This reassessment of the monument and the relationship between monuments and ephemera may also pose some questions to the readership, contributors and editors of the journal *ephemera*. One might for example consider the extent to which organisations are monuments. After all, there are numerous examples, both historical ones and contemporary ones, of entrepreneurs, corporate founders and business, political and religious leaders who have sought to live beyond the finitude of their own lives by investing in the organisations that they have established and run. Further on, one might consider the extent to which such organisations are able to commemorate and celebrate their founders and long-time leaders, so as to prolong their finite lives and so as to shape the thinking and action of current organisational members. One might also consider the nature of organisation and organisations more generally, and ask whether organisations have a stable and enduring existence, or whether organisation is more a matter of temporal and ephemeral arrangements and processes.

So perhaps we should also ask ourselves whether or not the existence of a journal such as *ephemera* removes us from the ephemeral and re-embeds us within the orbit of thingness. Of course, it may be inevitable that we turn *ephemera* into some kind of monument for organisational research. But as long as we recognise the limitations of any and every monument and any and every thing, and are aware that *ephemera* is at base a precarious and fragile project, this may or may not be a problem.

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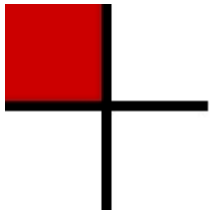
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Fucking Management: Queer, Theory and Reflexivity¹

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abstract

In this paper I attempt to make connections between 'queer' theory and contemporary thinking about managing and organising. It is structured around a re-presentation of queer, particularly the work of Butler and Sedgwick, and a discussion of the potential consequences of queering for managers, managerial practices and the science of management. Throughout, I am primarily concerned with authority claims - both personal and institutional - as well as the relation between (critical) theory and (critical) practice. I conclude with some reflections on what 'queer', and 'theory' might mean for 'me'.

My Usual Problems

There are only a few variables, after all; earth, air, fire, water, birth, death; above all, desire. Their combinations are infinite, but still, I've always tried to keep each element clear and discrete in my mind (mundane, Martin would say, ordinary) because when they run together they make something incomprehensible, uncontrollable, something - something opulent. (Dale Peck, *Fucking Martin*, 1994: 189)

The first is Management. Management, as the plural noun for 'managers', are an occupational group who have supposedly engaged in a very successful strategy of collective social mobility over the last century. From a disparate collection of occupational nouns - owner, supervisor, administrator, overman, foreman, clerk - a term has emerged that appears to represent anyone engaged in the co-ordination of people and things. There is an unusual reversal at work here. The historical effects of the division of labour have usually been to subdivide tasks, and their attached labels, whilst this move is an attempt to undivide, to create an umbrella which covers many labours. Through this undivision, this

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merging, a new class is created. Perhaps not a class in the Marxist sense, though that might not be too wide of the mark, but certainly a class in the sense of concepts.

The second is also management. That is to say, with the spread of certain kinds of practice, or descriptions of practice, claimed sometimes to be related to what Managers do. Thus there is increasing talk of the management of everything - from supply chains and customers, to careers, relationships and lives. The division performed here is between managing something, which is good, and not-managing, which is bad. The not-managing usually gets less attention but seems to include both bad management (mis-management) and no management, in other words both doing things badly and leaving things alone altogether.

The third is also Management. The name of University Departments that indicates another kind of practice - reading, writing and talking about what Managers do (often) and what management is (sometimes). This is certainly not a practice that can be isolated from the other two, simply because much of the output of this 'discipline' is shaped by, and in turn shapes, contemporary practices in both of the other areas. (Though perhaps not nearly as much as some of its practitioners would like to think.)

So, those are my three problems. Three forms of identity - managers, management and management (science). Take the title and see what you get. 'Fucking Management' - a curse against what 'they' do, an authoritarian instruction on how to manage your fucking, and the announcement of my hostile intention towards the discipline I seem to have this particular occupational fascination with. Now most of the time I seem to be 'against' these things, indeed that kind of stance seems to be one of the conditions of possibility of 'critical management' itself. Management, in its various guises, is simply a 'bad thing'. The masochistically heroic energy and identity I get from these simplicities is seductive. I know who I am, and what we (us critical management academics) are fighting for. Or at least I think I do sometimes.

Queering

For some time now I have also been worrying about the 'postmodern', specifically about the connections between 'epistemology' and 'ethics' (Parker, 1992; 1995; 1998). I suppose what disturbed me initially was the idea that if everything was just a story, then political and ethical commitment was somehow weakened. This is the slippery slope argument which leads from not knowing about things to not knowing what to do. In that sense it was easy for me to argue that postmodernism was inherently dangerous for any form of principled action. However, more recently I've begun to feel that this is a very 'English' stance to take - one that treats the postmodern as if it were an analytic category which could be placed into firm relations with other static categories - like ethics, politics, theory, epistemology and so on. It seems to me that, in some recent writing, versions of the post have been articulated as terms which are now settled. Hence to label oneself as a postmodernist, poststructuralist, critical modernist or whatever involves placing a mark which indicates (for author and reader) where 'I' claim to stand. Now in certain circumstances that might be a tactically helpful thing to do because it quickly constructs

somewhere to speak from, but it also runs the risk of applying a misplaced concreteness to subject positions and knowledges, and of causing your own thought to congeal.

In a sense this is a noun/verb issue. The concreteness of 'postwhatever' can congeal the radicality of permanent suspicion. So, this is why I want to explore queer. First, because it holds the possibility of setting a different body of writings and questions in motion which might begin to invigorate my rather stale thinking. Second, because in its activist and sloganeering moments, queer seems to be provoking questions about the language, knowledge claims and ethics/politics of the academy itself. Queer is currently a turbulent and unsettling term, one with no clear referent and a variety of lineages and expressions. It is both a claim to difference and to community, to radical alterity and to political tactics, at one and the same time. The paper begins by introducing and reviewing certain elements of queer for an audience primarily interested in management and organisation. However, at the same time I will be using these ideas to interrogate the notion of 'theory' itself in order to destabilise some common assumptions about what it is and does. Against some romantic versions of the post, I want to insist that queering theory is not a position - a standpoint - but an attitude of unceasing disruptiveness. Whatever is known must be doubted, whatever seems full must be emptied, whatever is obvious must be secreted away. Making theory queer is a challenge for thinking, and it is not a challenge that will ever start or stop with a new word (postmodern, or queer), however fashionable it might be in certain quarters at the present moment.

This means that my use of queer does not map neatly on to a generalised deconstructive project - largely because of this suspicion of 'theory' which sometimes follows from poststructural arguments but is rarely explicitly articulated. It seems to me that 'theory' is a terribly overused and misunderstood word within the social sciences but, most importantly, it is a word which necessarily suggests that something called practice lies somewhere else. Importantly, theory is often seen as prior to practical action, or (for academics) as a form of knowing that represents the crowning glory of academic practice. Theory, far more than empirical research, travels around the global academic circuit as a highly prized public symbolic commodity. Now this is an attitude that I think needs queering, and the more activist 'practitioners' of queer do a considerable amount to blur the boundaries between theory and practice. Borrowing an older feminist line - the personal is the political. Everyday practice is therefore a form of theory too, and theory is a kind of practice (however hard it might pretend to be something else).

Now it follows from this that I can not (or perhaps, should not) treat these ideas as if they were bits of a jig saw puzzle that only people like me ('intellectuals', 'academics') can solve. The point of this investigation is to try and work out whether collapsing the hierarchical logic of theory might help me to think about a different kind of engagement. Not simply a reversal, where practice becomes the determinate term, but a folding of both terms together. I do hope it might do some of these things for my readers too, but that can not be for me to determine. I will also need to acknowledge some more obviously reflexive themes. There is a great risk of indulgence here, particularly for a white man from a stiff upper lip culture, but it is very important for the argument in this paper that I do not treat queer as if it were something that only inhabited the realm of the pure idea. Dethroning the (masculine?) fantasy of the pure intellectual by pointing to the material conditions of his reproduction is crucial. In that sense I will try not to write as if there is one Martin Parker

who cooks, cares for four children, has sex and so on; and then that there is another creature of the same name who inhabits the University of Keele and merely thinks and writes. I want, in this paper, to try and fold these two together, to queer the presupposition that the production and consumption of theory is a public, political matter - whilst fucking happens elsewhere.

What I am Not Doing

Before I begin, I want to start deflecting some of the criticisms I can imagine being aimed at me. The fact that I want to do this at this stage in the paper certainly indicates a substantial degree of sensitivity, of defensiveness and nervousness on my part. Make of that what you will, because you will anyway.

First, I want to be clear that I am not claiming a particular license to play with queer theory. As constituted over the last ten years or so, this is a body of work which grows from other people's academic, personal and political problems and fascinations. I have not been, and am not, involved in these matters to any meaningful degree. In some sense then I am simply appropriating the results of a series of interventions which have very little to do with me. Because this is a form of intellectual piracy, I have no wish to glorify my position as merchant of queer. However, though some others (authors, activists or whoever) might wish to claim more 'ownership' than me, they presumably set these ideas afloat in order that people might be tempted to do something with them too. I assume that this - together with the epistemological and political positioning of queer - means that I need no official license, perhaps just a degree of reflexivity about the differential location of ideas.

Second, I assume it is quite possible that some readers might begin to attribute various 'depth' or 'development' psycho-social explanations for my puerile title, inconsistent style and prurient interests. Sexual repression, exhibitionism and various forms of guilt (for my sex, gender, sexuality, class position, ethnicity and so on) seem the most likely candidates here. I am not going to worry very much about this because it doesn't interest me very much, but also because these kinds of assertions are so reversible - such is their logic. However, there is a danger that by concentrating on constructing explanations for *why* I wrote this piece my anticipated critics might be in danger of neglecting *what* I write.

Third, and this is for me the most important point, I am not intending to 'colonise', to 'appropriate', to 'domesticate' queer. I am not trying to make it into a new area for management research or practice. Management has often been rather effective at incorporating various ideas and themes, but just as often has turned them into slogans which present little challenge to the future of management as either occupation, practice or discipline. I have no intention of suggesting a clear future direction, research programme, or political manifesto here. The paper is concerned with exploring a particular kind of engagement, an intervention into both queer and management, but I am not at all sure that this will be 'useful' for managerialists, or anyone else. In fact, I think I would be rather pleased if it wasn't. Nonetheless, I have to begin by trying to capture queer, as gently as I am able, in order that I can present it pinned out for your critical gaze.

Re-presenting Queer

queer adj., n., & v.

adj.

1 strange; odd; eccentric.

2 shady; suspect; of questionable character.

3 Brit. **a** slightly ill; giddy; faint. **b** slang drunk.

4 slang offens. (esp. of a man) homosexual.

n. slang offens. a (esp. male) homosexual.

v.tr. slang spoil; put out of order.

in Queer Street Brit. slang in a difficulty, in debt or trouble or disrepute.

queer a person's pitch Brit. spoil a person's chances, esp. secretly or maliciously.

queerish adj.

queerly adv.

queerness n.

[perhaps from German *quer* 'oblique' (as thwart)]

Dictionaries are always useful places to begin spinning words, because they remind you that (even as they define and refine meanings with their curious precise shorthand) the meanings never end in the entry of entries. The final definition is never available in the dictionary. Nonetheless, I'm going to evidence my capturing of queer with two books published in 1990 that hardly mention the word at all, but that have both (within that brief period of time) become core texts on the queer syllabus. I will then explore some of the writings within which queer begins to be articulated more explicitly, before turning back to my three problems with management, and my own position in this text, in the following sections.

Before that though, a few words on some political practices. In some sense the word queer seems to have begun being used in a distinctively modern way on the West coast of the USA in the late 1980s. It indexed a kind of hostility to assimilationalist versions of gay politics and liberation, was given some impetus in the wake of the AIDS crisis, was certainly related to generational differences and was (semi) institutionalised in the ACT UP, Queer Nation and Pink Panther groups, and San Francisco's 'Year of the Queer' in 1993. "We're here, we're queer, get used to it." This was no attempt to demonstrate similarities of concern, no attempt to be involved in the formal political process, or to be tolerated behind closed doors. Rather it was a loud and proud assertion of difference, based on a politics of absolute recognition. This was a politics of T-shirts, alternative magazines, street marches, graffiti and posters. Though, as Gamson (1996) elegantly shows, there was (and still seems to be) little agreement within any putative 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual' or 'transgender' 'community' over the meanings or usefulness of the word it has nonetheless been amplified in some rather odd and fantastic ways. Indeed, within a very few years, it has been taken to index both a set of political practices and various forms of academic theory - particularly within cultural studies - which brings me to my first academic text.

Judith Butler's hugely impressive *Gender Trouble* (1990) has rapidly assumed canonical status as a book which sets out to 'trouble' fixed categories - most particularly those of sex and gender. Butler argues that, in conceptual and political terms, the category of 'woman' is one that should be treated as historically variable, as relational and not foundational. In a move which directly confronts more conventional feminisms - though with an admirable sympathy - she suggests that "the category of woman as a stable subject [*is*] an unwitting

regulation and reification of gender relations" (1990: 5). Butler wishes to corrode a certain kind of metaphysics, an attitude which assumes that 'masculine' and 'male' stand in opposition to 'feminine' and 'female' - the 'heterosexual matrix'. The unthinking assumption that gender, sex and sexuality somehow line up in these binary ways is one that is common both to 'patriarchy', and to much of feminism itself. Yet placing these terms, and this dualism, in actual and theoretical 'scare quotes' is to insist on their historical contingency and to refuse their naturalness, their seductive symmetry. Butler, through a series of careful but critical engagements with de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig, Levi-Strauss, Freud, Lacan and Foucault, attempts (successfully in my view) to dethrone the idea that there is any 'abiding substance' hiding behind all the actual manifestations of sex, gender and sexuality.

This is a radical form of constructionism, one in which social and psychoanalytic accounts, and even the body itself, are demonstrated to be accomplishments, mediations, performances.

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results. (1990: 25)

In suggesting that there is no time, no place, no essence where the heterosexual matrix can be finally located, Butler is avoiding the search for origins. Hers is a project which is intended to describe how origins come to be identified, how a 'natural', 'real', 'authentic' place before or after 'the law', 'the social', 'power', 'culture' seems to be needed in so many of the arguments and assertions about sex, gender and sexuality. Utopian matriarchal pasts that 'we' might return to, prediscursive libidinal multiplicities that 'we' might release, and utopian destinations that 'we' might reach. And here we get to her most powerful metaphor: if we dispense with origins, all these manifestations and configurations are better considered as forms of 'drag', as masquerade, as parody. This metaphor both denaturalises everyday practices, and also suggests that the relationship of sex and gender is not origin(al) and copy, but copy and copy. There is nothing behind the mask, no depth beneath the surface, nothing waiting for us "on the far side of language" (1990: 114). All these performances are simulacra, but at least 'drag' can be a repetition that has a subversive intent and effect. Precisely by celebrating its constructedness, drag foregrounds the becoming of gender. It helps to prevent the congealing, the reification, that origin stories must rely upon. 'Queens', 'dykes', 'femmes', 'fags', 'leather men' - and, of course, 'queers' - are dramatic expressions of our own performances, of the bodily acts, disciplines, ornamentations and relations that constitute the practices of sex/gender/sexuality.

Now this is both a theoretical stance which relies on a form of Foucaudian genealogy, but also an argument about the politics of representation and identity. If feminism is not speaking for an unified category of woman, then who is it speaking for, and why? Butler's answer is that a feminist genealogy is an effective way of exposing the fragility of categories, and thus of ensuring that feminists take the problem of representation more seriously. Emptying the category 'woman' becomes a precondition for a new kind of politics, a politics which interrogates the question of the construction of origins. But this does not mean that some form of representationalist politics can be simply refused, or evaded. As she puts it:

The juridicial structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices. (1990: 5)

The point then is to refuse the single or abiding ground which is constructed by a feminist identity politics, whether positively in celebrating 'woman', or negatively by identifying 'man' as the problem, as the enemy. Indeed, if this 'heterosexual matrix' can be destabilised, perhaps the sheer variability of identities (and hence of identity politics) can be fully recognised. Ironically, it is precisely through feminism's claims to be representing 'woman', that the multiplicity of cultural, political and economic intersections that produce 'women' have been practically effaced. This is the "tragic mistake" (1990: 128) that any exclusionary politics, whether 'heterosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian' and so on continues to make. Gender (taking that word to stand for all the others), is not a thing, not an essence, but a "*stylised repetition of acts*" (1990: 140, emphasis in original). So too, Butler implies, are all the 'other' categories of 'same' and 'Other' – "color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness" – that require the "exasperated 'etc'" (1990: 143) to attempt to cover their diversity. Adding all these 'essences' does not get us any closer to totality, or transparency, and this is simply because the 'etc' is really endless, it is the supplement of meaning and will hence always exasperate all our attempts to capture it. For Butler, the 'critical task' should never pretend to be outside construction and representation, but instead should:

...locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (1990: 147)

My second 'ur-text' for Queer, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), is largely a work of deconstructive literary criticism. Like Said's *Orientalism* (1978), an important text for post-colonial studies, its method is post-structural and its texts are largely parts of the literary canon. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is concerned to show that binarisms are unhelpful and she demonstrates this through the central metaphor of the "relations of the closet – the relations of the known and unknown" (1990: 3). In a typically deconstructive move, she wishes to read texts in order to show that what is 'out' in the text relies on something else being 'closeted'. It is not enough to assume the "redemptive potential of simply upping the cognitive wattage" (1990: 7), but also to explore how ignorance is actively constructed.

If ignorance is not – as it evidently is not – a single Manichaeian, aboriginal maw of darkness from which the heroics of human cognition can occasionally wrestle facts, insights, freedoms, progress, perhaps there exists instead a plethora of *ignorances*, and we may begin to ask questions about the labor, erotics and economics of their human production and distribution. (1990: 8)

So ignorance, like secrecy, is something that is made. An enquiry into its making should not privilege either the dominant or the subordinated term in a particular relation – homo and hetero for most of her book – but a host of others too:

...secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness, same/different, active/passive, in/out, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, utopia/apocalypse, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntariness/addiction. (1990: 11)

So, after establishing her biographical (and necessary) indebtedness to feminism and her anti-homophobic motivations, in a delicious parody of classical philosophy Sedgwick sets forward a series of 'axioms' that guide her enquiry. In a sense, all the axioms are establishing the principle of pure difference - not symmetry, or listing (Butler's 'exasperated "etc"'), but sheer difference. Probably the most foundational, in an ironic sense, is 'People are different from each other.' That is to say, that sex, gender and sexuality mean different things to different people at different times. That their sexual investments vary in intensity, importance and in (human or non-human) object choice. That the relations between their chromosomal sex, their gender and their sexuality should not be assumed. Further axioms explore this difference in more disciplinary terms, by refusing to assume that antihomophobic enquiry, feminism, lesbian and gay studies and literary criticism will all line up neatly either. This is a hostility to what she later called the "Christmas Effect" - when sexuality, children, consumption, work, the state, the family all line up in lockstep, speaking with one voice (Sedgwick, 1994: 5). There is no neat and tidy clearing up and sorting out of knowledges and practices here, but an engagement with difference by a woman who, as Sedgwick puts it, has investments as a woman, a fat woman, a nonprocreative adult, a sexual pervert and a Jew (1990: 63).

This book is then, though less explicitly than Butler's, another example of Foucaudian genealogy. It is an extended argument about the relationality of the named and that which does not dare utter its name. As Sedgwick shows, it is also an engagement with the politics of naming, between the assertion of a special and particular difference (the 'minoritizing' view) and the assertion of a generalised sameness (the 'universalizing' view). For both forms of representation the same/different divide functions in some rather predictable ways - either the Other is reified, treated as both special and external, or the Other is included, treated as another example of the same. If the secret is to be worth anything, it can not be held within a glass closet, it can not be an open secret, an empty secret (1990: 164). There is no way beyond this, there will always be secrets, but it is possible to use deconstructive methods:

... towards an examination of the resulting definitional incoherence: its functional potential and realization, its power effects, the affordances for its mobilization within a particular discursive context... (1990: 92)

For Sedgwick, it seems that a play with secrecy - 'I know that you know' - is similar to Butler's use of drag. This is a secrecy that she both discusses and enacts in the text via her suggestive (but rarely explicit) re-readings of, and collisions between, various texts. Secrecy is a condition of language and politics, and there is no light bright enough to make it go away.

So both these books make theoretical and ethical/political gestures simultaneously. Like much, though not all, of feminism the knowing becomes a practice which is inseparable from the practice of being the knower. And this is perhaps what gives subsequent queer writers their distinctive flavour, not so much that they are concerned with gaylesbianbisexualtransgender issues, but that they collapse 'theory' and 'politics' in their texts. To put it another way, the texts intend (though whether they succeed is another matter) to explicitly perform the ethical/political in their writing. As Sedgwick put it a few years later, by which time she was using the word 'queer', the project is one of 'across' formulations.

The *queer* of these essays is transitive - multiply transitive. The immemorial current that *queer* represents is antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist. Keenly, it is relational, and strange. (1994: xii)

And this necessarily means that “there are important senses in which ‘queer’ can signify only *when attached to the first person*” (1990: 9, emphasis in original). There is, in other words, a big problem with suggesting that queer theory has its own metaphysics of presence, an identity independent of its tactical use in a location.

Yet, despite the admonitions of both Butler and Sedgwick, queer has become canonical. Such is the way with words once academics get hold of them. ‘It’ is increasingly generating its own stars, publication outlets and dialect. And, it seems to me, some of ‘it’ is also demonstrating its own versions of minoritarian and majoritarian politics. On the one hand it is fair to say that a lot of what has been written beneath the label of queer has been about transgenderlesbiangaybisexual identified people. There is here a re-recovery of a hidden history, of secreted stories. Much of this writing is celebratory, in the sense that it attempts to reverse the terms of the subaltern discourse, to embrace the stigma and make connections with and for other people with related identities. Like the ‘herstories’ of feminism, the critique of the ‘malestream’ within organisation studies or the people’s histories written from below, this is a project which attempts to legitimate a particular set of minority knowledges. So we have writings about music, literature, advertising, comic strips, the academy, work, AIDS and so on which make connections to/with bisexualtransgenderlesbiangay individuals and communities in other spaces and times, and with other cross-cutting identifications too - most notably race and ethnicity. This is, if you like, the side of queer which exemplifies its collapsing of theory and practice through (usually highly engaged) writings about particular practices, what Joshua Gamson calls an “ethnic/essentialist politic” (1996: 396).

On the other hand, the majoritarian impulse is also evident in two ways. The most obvious is a generalised “deconstructionist politic” (Gamson, 1996) which seeks to undermine any and all claims to ethnic essentialism. I will have more to say about this in a moment, but there is also a form of queer which seeks to make similar kinds of claims but in less ‘French’ language. Steven Seidman is probably the most important writer in this area, and he has suggested (correctly I think) that queer is - in terms of its social ontology - a form of radical social constructionism (1998, see also many of the essays in Seidman, 1996). Yet, for Seidman, if queer is to develop some more influence, it needs to move away from its poststructural leanings and to become both more historicized and contextualised, and a form of general social theory. Queer must move from the edge and get closer to the middle, to demonstrate that “we are all in the closet” (1998). It is important to point out here that the closet is both productive and repressive at the same time - concealing a ‘real’ self just as it indexes an alienated an inauthentic self. Yet as Seidman acknowledges, this is not a new insight. The subaltern self has been re/cognised by feminist and post-colonialist thinkers as being an important site of resistance, of an identity positioned against domination. (To which it might be added Marx too, in terms of his distinction between a class ‘in itself’, and a class ‘for itself’.) But this is a general statement that tells us little about the actual relations between ‘closets’, ‘passing’, ‘heteronormativity’ and so on in societies nowadays. In other words, the politics and sociology of queer is rather “thin” (1998: 184). In this move Seidman is suggesting that, in terms of academic practice, queer needs to become more majoritarian, but also that it should research the “contextual, agentic

aspects of meaning making” (1998: 188). He is both asking for queer to become a norm (though a highly unstable one) and for it to re-invigorate a social constructionist sociology. Ironical in some ways, that French post-structuralism should once again be re-read through the lens of US pragmatism, both in terms of its democratic liberalism, and its hostility to structural generalisation.

There is a sense in which both these minoritarian and majoritarian versions of queer are implicitly or explicitly positioning the poststructuralism of Butler and Sedgwick as a kind of “textual idealism” (Epstein, 1996: 157). Indeed, it might be rather persuasively argued that (since both books are rather ‘difficult’) they are reproducing the theory/practice distinction in their form and content just as they attempt to disavow the reader of the validity of such a distinction. To be frank it is hard to imagine someone without a good grounding in (at least) the three F’s (Foucault, feminism, and Freud) being able to make much of what Butler and Sedgwick write. It would, however, be rather too easy to make too much of these internal differences, and this short review of queer is really intended to point to unities rather than divisions. After all, the hinge of both criticisms is a tactical one, not a foundational disagreement. The point is to debate the effectiveness of outsider and insider strategies for contesting what Cheryl Cole calls “mechanisms of containment” (1996: 298). These mechanisms are discursive, in the sense that they are both conceptual dyads (deviant/normal) and also practices of inclusion and exclusion (around HIV for example). It seems to me that, for queer in general, it is not a question of either texts or practice, but one read through the other (and through the Other).

So queer then, in the very broad terms in which I have reviewed it here, is an approach which seems to be centrally concerned to politicise the terms on which knowing is often conceptualised. Its key move is to question the boundary, not simply to demonise that which lies on one side and to celebrate that which lies on the other. Queer eschews simple finger pointing, it avoids resting on the simplicities that separate the innocent from the guilty, the victim from the oppressor, or experience from abstraction. There are no political or authorial positions that are not also complicit in that which they condemn. As Ki Namaste puts it, we can never move ‘outside’ current conceptions of sexuality (or anything else for that matter), but then we are never entirely ‘inside’ it either. The dominant discourse sets frames for thinking with, but at the same time it always leaves something outside the frame. This means that both repetition of hegemonic understandings, and of romantic resistance to such understandings, are not options.

What we can do, queer theory suggests, is negotiate these limits. We can think about the *how* of these boundaries - not merely the fact that they exist, but also how they are created, regulated, contested. (Namaste, 1996: 199, emphasis in original)

Or, as Gamson says, the point is to recognise that identities (whether separatist or collective) are “made-up yet necessary”, both contingent and inescapable at one and the same time (1996: 395).

So, that is my review of queer - and it is mine - with all the paradoxical claims to authority that involves. In a while I will return to the three versions of management in order to see what difference these understandings might make, but first, how distinctive is queer?

Necessary and Sufficient Explanations

It seems to me that the centre of management (as a discipline) is still profoundly conservative in political and conceptual terms. I state this as a truism which is simply banal. However, this centre has always had its periphery, an Other which functions to demarcate and identify that which is the same. How would 'Critical Management' know what it was if it weren't for the 'British Academy of Management'? In other words, the inside and the outside are made in the same movement. But the outside has been celebrated rather a lot recently. Indeed, there is something rather dull, rather tiresome, about the seemingly endless series of attempts to force management as a discipline to recognise its (self-consciously fashionable) other. More research is almost always needed, there are always gaps in the literature and careers are forged in the heat of disrupting, estranging and deconstructing this, that or the Other. In that sense:

...queer theory suggests this month's trendiness, just the latest progeny spawned by the Foucaudian revolution and adopted by over-eager literary critics and proponents of cultural studies. (Epstein, 1996: 145)

Or, as de Lauretis has put it, queer "has quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry" (in Spargo, 1999: 68). So my attempt to 'insert' queer inevitably needs to be contextualised as a move in an academic game, a game which (if my strategy works) will 'end' in an academic paper in a refereed journal with my name attached. But acknowledging that fact, that motivation, is part of what queer seems to press on me. In saying this, I am both ironising this paper and trying to claim some distinctiveness for this move to a particular way of thinking. But queer is also necessarily related to older currents of thought - on gender, post-structuralism, social constructionism - so in what sense is it 'new'?

Initially I suppose it might be possible to dissolve queer into a project which is concerned to think about sex, gender and sexuality. Accepting that, rather general, description then we find a large body of writings resting on various forms of feminism, equal opportunity liberalism, and studies of men and masculinity which have (over the last twenty years or so) been concerned to think about gender and organisations quite systematically. But, in this paper, I'm not particularly concerned to legitimate talking about 'sex' (of any classification) in management or organisation studies - though I don't object to it either. Take for example Greenberg and Bystryn's paper on male homosexuality and bureaucracy (1996). They note that male self assertion and competitiveness, and the separation of home from work are historically recent phenomena, and moreover, that these developments are paralleled by the rise of the bureaucratic society. Indeed, Merton's 'bureaucratic personality' is the archetypal male personality too, one that separates hatreds and passions from the brute instrumentality of getting things done. It is also worth noting that, from the Spanish inquisition to the holocaust to the contemporary military, homosexuality has often been repressed by bureaucratic mechanisms. So, Greenberg and Bystryn suggest, the more bureaucratisation we find in a given society, the more intolerance of homosexuality we also find. The more repression, the greater the sexual asceticism and fear of the Other. Though this is an interesting and persuasive argument, I am uncertain as to whether it needs queer theory to legitimate it. Indeed, presupposing as it does a particular economy of repression and freedom, it could be said to have little to do with a distinctively queer form of thinking. As David Bell (1995) has suggested for geographers, speaking of sex is one

thing, but queering implies a desire to fuck the discipline a little. Or as Michael Warner has put it rather pithily, the aim is “to make theory queer, not just to have a theory about queers” (1993: xxvi). Queer then, if it is to be an useful term, is not merely reducible to a concern with sex, gender or sexuality.

But then spinning queer in a different direction, towards poststructuralism, might allow us to make a rather parallel claim. If queer is a relational postdualist epistemology, one largely indebted to Foucault, then we also find a large body of writings concerned with French poststructuralism, postmodernism and radical social constructionism which make connections with organisation theory. So queer ‘theory’ becomes a branch of social ‘theory’ more generally, one that is concerned to legitimate the linguistic turn within studies of management and organisation. But this too seems to dilute any distinctive meaning that queer might have, it subsumes it to a primarily theoretical project, a form of writing engaged in by academics employed to produce knowledges for their particular clients. Take William Haver’s discussion of queer research for example (1997). Though Haver uses the word queer, and references Butler, his main concern seems to be engaging with Deleuze, Guattari, Blanchot, Lyotard, Nancy and so on. Not, I hasten to add, that there is anything wrong in doing so - my point is simply that the word queer seems rather superfluous here. It is a rhetorical gesture that does little, in Haver’s text, to dethrone the high priests of French theory. So, to reiterate Warner’s aphorism, the task is to make theory queer, not simply to invent a new branch of it. Queer, if it is to be an useful term, is not easily reducible to poststructuralist theory either.

Finally, is queer just another form of social constructionism? As I have noted above, much of queer relies on a social ontology which is indebted to a version of interactionism. In some sense Butler’s version of ‘drag’ is methodologically prefigured in 1960s’ US sociology as dramaturgy or ethnomethodology, much of which was framed as an organisational sociology. Take, for example, Harold Garfinkel’s essay on Agnes the transexual (1967). Garfinkel’s attempt to explicate the rules by which ordinary people deploy common sense knowledge to achieve sex status seems to exemplify the kind of approach that Butler is hinting at. Indeed, his list of “properties of natural, normally sexed persons” (1967: 122-133) and his use of the term ‘passing’ (and ‘management devices’) are far more rigorous than Butler’s. Yet his aim is not the same. Where Garfinkel wants to explore the mechanisms of accountability in order to explain them better, Butler’s aim is to problematise them for explicitly political reasons. For Garfinkel, demonstrating that the social world is indexical and contingent appears to be an end in itself. For Butler, the point is to de-naturalise in order that new forms of performance can be solicited. So, I would suggest, queer is not ‘only’ social constructionism either.

So what is different about queer? What do I want to claim for its distinctiveness? I have spent some time suggesting that it isn’t only about sex, or about poststructuralism, or about social constructionism. These are necessary to explain queer, but they are not sufficient to explain it (away). For me, queer seems to be a curious and unstable amalgam of all of these things, one that gains a voice through a ‘war of movement’ within the present. This is not to say that its fate may not end up being similar to that of postmodernism, and this paper is probably one of its gravediggers. But queer makes its sense now. It is fashionable, and there is no good reason why theories of management should not engage with the fashionable. “Queer today and gone tomorrow” (Spargo, 1999: 65) is not necessarily a

criticism, but could be an invitation to engage with the contemporary. In order to do this, let me return to my three versions of management - as occupational group, as everyday practice, and as discipline.

Fucking Management

I'll begin with management as a group of workers. It seems to me that, again at the risk of being rather banal here, the most obvious point to make is that this generalised term can not be understood apart from its manifestation in local practices. Following a form of radical social constructionism, management would have to be understood as a form of performance. This is clearly a move which turns nouns into verbs, which makes the thing of management into a doing, or a becoming. To mistake the word for a thing is to be trapped by the metaphysics of presence, to reify the object of enquiry. And here perhaps Butler's metaphor of drag might be a useful way to re-invigorate an interactionist or dramaturgical view of how it is that managers manage to 'pass' as managers (see, for example, Mangham and Overington (1987)). Doing 'manager' is playing a role. Management means wearing the costume. It calls upon the bodily comportment, the props and scripts and gestures that signify 'manager' in the late twentieth century. The problem, or one of 'my' problems, is that the role has become hardened into a series of predictable scripts, an unreflective rehearsal of what the type 'manager' does. But treating management as 'drag' - not just dramaturgy - suggests both its provisionality and a possible playful form of resistance. As Butler puts it: "Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatise the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?" (1990: viii). So perhaps what might be called 'camp' management would be a form of practice which would dramatically enact its provisionality, its fragility, without constructing a fictional outside to the discourses of management within organisations.

Now that kind of argument is both about academic treatments of management (viewing managers as if they were in drag) and also an argument about a subversive form of management (suggesting to managers that they should perform as if they were in drag). In other words, it folds academic 'theory' and management 'practice' into one another. This, it seems to me, is the kind of thinking that queer is rather good at. It recognises the complicity of academic representations in constituting the (in this case) organisational world. Gibson-Graham (1996), in a short think-piece, makes a similar suggestion about markets, economics and academics which rests its pitch on the metaphor of queering the 'public' domain. Why assume, for example, that all forms of exchange can be reduced to capitalist commodity production? For Gibson-Graham, academics might like to queer conventional representations of those matters that they take to be most obvious, partly because these representations become performative in themselves and partly to free management (as a discipline) from the hegemony of liberal economics. So once again, what academics claim the world is like, and what kind of world managers live in, are seen as inescapably linked. The point here is surely to dethrone singular assumptions, such as those held by being 'for' or 'against' management. Butler puts this point with characteristic clarity.

The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms. (Butler, 1990: 13)

So if we are suspicious of dualisms, of dyads, then the 'us' and 'them' which divides 'the critical' from 'the conventional', academics from practitioners, should also be the object of critical scrutiny. Not, to reiterate the point, because we can step outside them to somewhere on the far side of language, but because they can become objects of scrutiny in themselves. Now this brings me on to management as a practice, as a form of discipline which seems to be increasingly constitutive of the well tempered liberal subject. Managing our selves, our relationships, our sex, our children (if we have them) and so on. In a very related way, it seems to me that queer is a current of thought and practice that might regard the self-disciplines of the management of everyday life with considerable scepticism². Against the certainties of liberal governance, against bodily and intellectual habits which celebrate conformity and repetition we have a conception of subversion and transgression as a habit in itself. But this is not a romantic version of resistance as a return to something else in time or space, or as a modernising move to some time or place which is better than now. What interests me here is the possibility of a practice of queering which would avoid such interminable positioning as 'post' this or that, against something, for something else. Instead, adopting Sedgwick's metaphors, the movement would be an unceasing exposure of what was secreted away, and at the same time a closeting of some other term. This is a denaturalising process, a radicalisation of what is understood to be traditional and taken-for-granted. Against managing, in the sense of control, this is a continual, permanent, never ending movement of asking "who are 'we'"?

This point needs to be made more clearly, because it is all too easy to let it slip into being an essentialism of the outside. After all, I might be read here as setting up an opposition between the free play of queer against the constrained work of management, movement versus mobility, the dandy versus the organisation man, disorganisation versus organisation. The romance of this transgression, of this heroic struggle, hangs around some queer writing too (Namaste, 1996), as well as much of what is often called postmodernism. But the point of queer is surely not to choose one of these words, one of these positions, as if they are choices that can be made by a rational liberal subject who stands beyond the social. To play is to work, and free play is only possible when something else has already been fixed. Or, as Bob Cooper has demonstrated in many of his essays, organisation and disorganisation are made in the same moment (see, for example, 1990). Unification and division are parasitic on each other. Joshua Gamson, in a lovely essay on queer tactics, seeks in a similar way to show that both the 'ethnic/essentialist' and the 'deconstructionist' movements make sense. This is not an either/or. They reflect the fact that:

...two different political impulses, and two different forms of organising, can be seen facing off. The logic and political utility of deconstructing collective categories vies with that of shoring them up: each logic is true, and neither is fully tenable (1996: 396)

Management then, as an everyday practice, cannot simply be opposed by queering. In the terms I have been setting up here, both make each other. The point is not to believe that 'we' can do without management and become queer, but to continually recognise the disciplining characteristics of both of these moves.

2 Not that queer is the only site which encourages such scepticism. For a similar argument, from 'critical humanism', see Grey (1999).

Finally then, management as a discipline, as a place that I inhabit on an everyday basis. Whilst much of what I have suggested above has clear implications for 'intellectual' practices generally, I wish to focus here on some of the institutional issues. Above all, I would say, queer insists on a reflexivity about knowledge, about the places and spaces whereby certain forms of knowing are legitimated, about the subjects and objects of enquiry and the manners that pertain to its production and distribution. Now in one sense this obviously means disrupting certain assumptions about the place of queers within the academy. Most of Higher Education is still premised on largely heterosexist assumptions about 'being married to the job'. It trades on the increasingly hyperproductive and hypercompetitive preconditions for an academic 'career' which rely on instrumental reasoning and abstraction (Wiegman, 1997). This might be seen as a liberal problem of inclusion, and addressing it requires that queers are brought in from the cold - in terms of different living arrangements, pension schemes, anti-discrimination policies and so on (see, for example, Humphrey, 1999). But, more importantly for my argument, queer also disrupts some of the pretensions that the liberal academy has about itself. Queering the academy does not only mean making an academy of queers, but queering *the idea* of the academy. Like feminism, queer theory's foregrounding of desire and power can:

...profoundly disturb the idea that the forces of power are outside the academy and that therefore academic knowledge can offer a disinterested judgement of politics (Clough, 1994: 167)

The knowledges of management (as a discipline) have never been value neutral, but neither can they become politically engaged simply by trading on liberal guilt. They are always implicated in the production of discipline, both power over organisational subjects and power over appropriate knowledges. Wishing it otherwise can never make it so. But, and this is a typically Foucauldian point, power-over is always also power-to (Foucault, 1982). Disciplines are productive, and can not be wished away. Once again, the point is to recognise the both/and of knowing, the positivity and surplus of institutional knowledge. A university which dressed in drag, and recognised its own economy of secrecy and disclosure, its own sexual economy of repression and freedom might be an institution that worked against itself in some rather productive ways (see, for example, Burrell, 1993).

So, to wrap up this section, I want to make some general points about the distinctiveness of queer. I have suggested it is not reducible to queers, or to deconstruction, or to social construction though all of those ideas provide it with its necessary conditions of possibility. Though queer is clearly not one movement, and does not provide one politics, it seems to me to provide a conjunction between the hermeneutic of suspicion and passionate political engagement which is highly productive. In a sense, its lack of simplicity, of coherence, is precisely what marks it out at the present time. Gamson provides two 'axioms' which, like Sedgwick's, seem to express some of these central paradoxes rather nicely. First, "*secure boundaries and stabilised identities are necessary not in general, but in the specific*". In other words, 'we' cannot avoid using dualisms, dyads, us and them, but 'we' must always be aware that these are local claims (and perhaps accomplishments). 'We' can not manage without 'we', but 'we' is always a problem. Second, the "*destabilisation of collective identity is itself a goal and accomplishment of collective action*" (1996: 412, italics in both originals). That is to say that collectivities (of managers, of critical management, of academics) should try to be like self-destructing pieces of machinery. Part of the critical task is reflecting on the elevated authority claims of the critical position itself. Which is

another way of pointing to the practice of queering, not from without, or from within, but from across the boundaries that organise our lives.

Some Secrets

So, what is left in the closet of this paper? Much of my writing has undoubtedly been rather abstract. I have been concerned to do a 'proper' academic job on some (often rather dense) writers, and have made the connections and separations that seemed necessary for a paper of this sort. There is a lot of academic rigour here, a lot of logic. But, 'fucking management'? Hardly. More like masturbation in front of academics³. To complete this self-indulgence it would seem that I need to put myself into this paper at its end, in order that 'I' can be the stop on this endless questioning, this permanent and rather tiresome queering. There is an issue of disclosure here, of the release of repression that heralds true freedom, real emancipation. As Oscar Wilde's character Lord Henry suggests to Dorian Grey:

"You, Mr Gray, you yourself, with your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame" (in Sedgwick, 1990: 138)

Should I then, 'come out' as the author of this paper? Tell you that I typed some of it with a baby on my lap? Tell you some of my terrors and passions, secrets and lies? Tell you about my home, my work, my body and tastes? Swim for a while in the warm bath of reflexivity, of reflexivity about my reflexivity? Show you my standpoint, celebrate an epistemology of experience? Expose the 'real' me? Claim that 'here I stand, I can do no other'? (Parker, 1995; Willmott, 1997)

Of course not. I will (and have) told you as much as I need and want you to know (though - as I said - I cannot, in advance, predict what the effects of that might be). Queer is not about 'my' reflexivity, though I am (in this paper) its condition of possibility. Of course at the same time I can not ignore the 'I' - what Sedgwick calls a grammatical form 'that marks the site of such dense accessible effects of knowledge, history, revulsion, authority, and pleasure.' And this is my final point, that queer is not reducible to reflexivity either. When I claim to be the author of this paper, this is also a necessary and impossible move (Foucault, 1984). Just as the 'we' of collectivities is a political problem for liberal politics, so is the 'I' for authority claims.

Not a simple, settled congratulatory "I", on the one hand, nor on the other a fragmented postmodernist postindividual (Sedgwick, 1994: xiv)

3 One colleague, on reading this, wrote - "You've turned sour and self-conscious here. Like you had being playing some Chopin and, getting near the end, turned grinning to the audience and stuck in some ragtime for no particular reason." He was right, and I am.

Queering the authentic self, and the non-self, are part of the deconstructionist/essentialist matrix too and 'I/we' can not choose one without also simultaneously (but often involuntarily) choosing the other. I want to capture this paper (and my current understanding of queer too) like this. I use the word, as Epstein says "nervously" (1996: 153). I am not certain what queer means to other people, and what it says about me. The word worries me. But my understanding of queering is that a certain 'nervousness' about words, and about practices, and about the relationship between them, is sometimes rather useful for fucking things up, for making fluid what was seen as foundational. A nervousness about categories makes, as my epigraph suggested, 'something incomprehensible, uncontrollable, something - something opulent'. And that sounds like rather an interesting thing to be doing.

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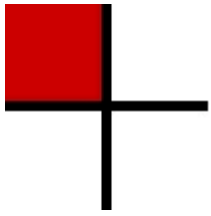
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Haine de la poésie: Nonsense and the Absence of God¹

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abstract

In this paper I explore George Bataille's figuring of the loss of meaning and self-identity in relation to his work *Haine de la poésie*. Bataille considers poetry to be important to human communication as it operates at the limits of discourse. Transgressive and excessive, it dissolves and exceeds the profane subject and reveals the sacred. Whilst Plato may have believed that poetry could be excluded from the Republic, Bataille argues that it has never left: it remains immanent to and helps construct the human condition. It continually reveals to us that we are not the center of creation and that some excessive experiences are beyond our understanding. Nonetheless we are forced to attempt to know and communicate because these experiences are excessive. One such experience is desire. Bataille leaves organisational theory with a challenge: how do we recognise and respond to these excessive experiences that remain beyond words?

Introduction

At the same time, love was burning me. I was limited by words. I had exhausted myself with love in the void, as if in the presence of a desirable and undressed - but inaccessible - woman. Without even being able to express a desire. ...As I was staring at the void in front of me, a touch - immediately violent and excessive - joined me to that void. I saw that void and saw nothing, but it, the void, was embracing me... (Bataille, 1991b: 143)

The Impossible (Bataille, 1991a) is a three-part prose and poetry novel amongst Georges Bataille's works published originally in 1947 as *Haine de la poésie* (Hatred of Poetry). The title was changed in 1962 by Bataille to *The Impossible* with the publication of the second edition since "almost no one understood the meaning of the first title... [although i]t's true that this second title is far from being clearer...but it may be one day" (Bataille, 1991a: 10). *The Impossible* is a story of a continual quest for an ecstatic, sacred experience that continually slips from and evades the narrator. The narrator comes to a realisation that the sacred is not contained within an object that we love, or at some fixed point in the future or past that we travel towards or away from but is elusive and ephemeral. The subject is lost

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) Conference 2000 as 'The hatred of poetry: Bataille's desire for poetry in the republic'.

at the very point of experiencing the sacred and truth is momentarily revealed. What is revealed and re-veiled² is that “we have in fact only two certainties in this world – that we are not everything and that we will die” (Bataille, 1988b: xxxii).

The truth of truth is these certainties: we are not everything and we will die. The sacred³ is more than us: more than we can ever know and understand, we are too insufficient to hold it and so it continually escapes us. In the moment of the ecstatic and excessive experience of the sacred we are lost, dissolved in and exhausted by the infinite void of this inner experience. This is an experience of loss, a death of the subject who is then born anew. This is no Phoenix that arises from its own ashes, the subject does not return from death as the self-same: this is the birth of a ruptured, agonised and anguished subject. Found wanting and contaminated by the sacred, caught in the shadow of its own mortality, knowing that it will die, yet in fear of and in flight from it. This is an anguished subject that is human, all too human. Much more than the flight of Icarus (Taylor, 1987: 114-148)⁴ as an attempt to touch the Sun/God, this is also a story of the fall of Lucifer as a being found wanting by the sacred. This is a story of ecstatic experience followed and presaged by a fall from grace.

In this paper I will explore Bataille's figuring of truth and the loss of meaning and self-identity particularly in relation to his *Haine de la poésie*. Poetry is important for Bataille as it operates at the limit of discourse and thus at the limit of our understanding of humanity, human society and the human condition. It is transgressive, a momentary excess that exceeds and confirms the limit: a moment that dissolves the profane subject and reveals the sacred. Poetry is a necessary part of society because it affirms the sacred as the immanence without which we would not be human. I will argue first that Bataille's *Haine de la poésie* not only returns poetry to Plato's Republic but recognises that poetry never left. I will then

2 Blanchot (1993) argues that language and truth is both a revealing and a reveiling. In knowing something as an object as a being in-itself, the object is revealed to the subject. However this specular knowledge always at the same time covers a reveiling of everything that cannot be reduced or subjected to the being in-itself by the spectator. For Bataille sacred experience involves a complex double dialectic where we are brought to and exposed to death yet attempt to refuse and turn away from it but can never deny it. Death makes us human.

3 The sacred for Bataille is everything that the profane has attempted to exclude. The profane is the rational world of work, utility and project. The sacred is not the same as Christian religiosity: it is wild and excessive, it risks us and continually threatens the profane. The profane attempts to suppress, exclude and negate the sacred through the use of the taboo. Yet the taboo paradoxically must acknowledge the sacred: quite simply you do not render taboo what does not exist. Moreover the profane attempts exclude the sacred to negate its force and violence. The taboo here operates as a turning away, a recoil from violence and death. This is however itself an expressive act that is irrational: we recoil from horror, say “Yeuch” when confronted with the decayed and putrefying remains of offal, literally cry out in pain and cry tears of sorrow. All are an overflow of the sacred as experience in reaction to the sacred (Guerlac, 1997; Kristeva, 1984).

4 Bataille (1985: 70) compares Icarus with the eagle who “alone among all beings can contemplate while staring at ‘the sun in all its glory’, the Icarian being who goes to seek the fires of heaven is, however, nothing more than the automutilator.” Mark C. Taylor considers Bataille's argument here as an excessive practice of the subject: in so doing he rather collapses Bataille's argument into an existential seeking after God. Taylor's modernist (Ward, 1997: xl-xlii) appropriation of a ‘pre’ or ‘post’ modern (and I hesitate to use these labels) Bataille ignores Bataille's continual argument in his works that figure us caught in and constituted by flows of power.

argue that we are not Cartesian human subjects, nor are we Kristevan (1987) humans because we love but are human only because of desire. Desire is the sacred, an impossible beyond of inner experience that overcomes us momentarily at times of ecstatic, excessive experience. I will also argue that Bataille leaves organizational theory with a challenge: how do we recognise and respond to *The Impossible*?

Haine de la poésie

In Book X of *The Republic*, in *Laws* and in Diotima of Mantinea's story in the *Symposium*, Plato rejects any form of poetry that is not constitutive of ethical existence. For Plato poetry is a "moral rather than a linguistic construct" (Asmis, 1992: 345) it acts as the bridge between mortals and the divine, "the poet is a creator of moral goodness and the poem serves only as a means of conveying this goodness" (Asmis, 1992: 345). Although he recognises that poetry may reflect both the good and the evil of the human condition, he argues that the *duty* of the poet is to constitute only the good:

Let this then be one of our rules and principles concerning the gods, to which our poets and reciters will be expected to conform - that God is not the author of all things, but of good only. (Plato, 1948: 358)

For Plato God can only in word and/or deed constitute the truth and "the lying poet has no place in our idea of God" (Plato, 1948: 361). He not only expels the "lying poet" from the Republic, that is any who do not constitute and uphold the moral good, he rejects anything that is not moral good. Poetry here is the development of moral good as a means to reflect and repeat the transcendental pure: 'non-ethical' poetry is a hatred of the pure, it is the hatred of meaning, the very hatred of a transcendental God. This reduction of poetry to a restricted form of meaning, is however a hatred *of* poetry that promulgates two forms of poetry, one that is good because it accepts the pure and one that is evil. Good and evil are not part of the sacred but of the profane: an attempt to know, understand and curb (Bataille 1989a). It is an attempt to curb the sacred and bring it under the control of the profane. It then permits the exclusion of 'evil' poetry. It presumes then that poetry has two forms that are separable and different, that there are two distinct beings that we might call ethical and non-ethical poetry. But what if the sacred cannot be reduced to the profane and if poetry is not separable? What if they are both good and evil, or perhaps neither good nor evil? What if there is no God either in the onto-theological or the metonymic sense: what if, as John Lennon once sang, there is no hell below us and above us only sky? In this sacred void where God, absolute meaning and knowledge are absent truth loses its ground. This is a void however that is not one that can be collapsed into *différance*. The very being of God and truth is not a God who has yet to come (Derrida, 1995): a God whose very absence demands that we defer understanding of the deity not as *tout autre* but an absence of sense, a non-sense in the present that we experience. The sacred void is not Derrida's (1974) *mise en abyme* that would require an "infinite amount of time" to investigate (Gasché, 1994). It is an immediate experience that tears us apart, leaves us gasping for breath and crying out for more even whilst we know that we cannot contain its infinite night. There is no sense

here that given time⁵, an infinity of time, that we would reach its bottom and that the deferred God would return. Instead we experience the sacred, lose ourselves in it and lose it, fall from it only to be returned to it. This infinite repetition keeps repeating that we are not everything, we will die (and so lose ourselves an infinite number of times), and that we will never attain the absolute, never know God and certainly never become God.⁶ Humanity is too frail and ephemeral a thing to fill this void: Sartre's desiring existential subject is too insufficient to become God. The truth revealed to us is in this immediate and overwhelming experience is always then a discourse of our insufficiency and the sacred's excess. An excess that is more than us, ruptures us, beyond our understanding and ability to communicate but forces us to communicate. This excess ruptures our being, leaves us as an open wound that continually exhausts itself: it leaves us dying to talk, driven to tears, wanting to share our joy, pain, tears, laughter and sorrow. The sacred is both the tears of Eros and a tearing experience.⁷ This exhaustion makes us organise, to socialise, to form societies in order to expel the sacred, give it release through communion and communication. Yet this release is never enough, communication is a project of the profane world of work, meaning and truth: the profane is a human endeavour and is insufficient to know, understand and grasp the sacred (Connor, 2000). Indeed we know this to be subjectively true: when we laugh excessively to the point of crying we want to share the experience and others want to share it too, but we can find no way of doing so through rational communication. This excessive laughter can only be experienced, it cannot be communicated because it is sacred: it is an inner experience that refers to nothing but itself, communication in the profane however is always relational.

5 Derrida (1993) argues that we cannot give time as it is not a gift that we possess. In this sense there is no time like the present (as a gift) that recalls to my mind Blanchot's (1995) word play. Yet Bataille's argument is yet another reversal, the void is the absence of a presence that cannot be fulfilled by humans. In Bataille's void there are only sacred, inner experiences. These are neither objects nor do they have any external referents: they are non-comparable and do not exist in space or endure through time. They are immediate, excessive experiences that refer only to themselves. They arrive as the lightening flash and are gone in the wink of an eye but when we are caught by them time can dilate out to infinity or contract on itself so as to disappear. We subjectively experience these moments as rhythms that we come to think of in terms of a subjective time. This non-linear time of *durée*, contra Bergson (1923), is not a temporal container of everything but is preceded by and given content by the sacred. We know this to be subjectively true. In the bittersweet absence of my partner time for me seems to crawl, to stand still and to dilate out into infinity. Transfixed by the plenitude of my baby, I'm lost in her smile: I drown in an unfulfilled desire. This is no desire figured as lack, but an immediate experience that deepens even as I drown in it but that is gone all too quickly regardless of what the clock on the wall claims! I cannot adequately describe this experience, I am too insufficient and words are not enough. Furthermore the very difference that makes me human, that makes me an individual opposes any appeal here to a common experience. Yet the excess of the inner experience demands that we communicate and in order to do so we must attempt the impossible: I am driven to bridge the infinite gulf between myself and others. And so we try to create common experiences where none may exist.

6 God, for Bataille is both an impossible absence and absent, an impossible void that cannot or should not be filled. To become God would entail more than that we become Sartre's no-thing as it would fill the void of the sacred and visit death unto the profane world in all its untrammelled force. When Oppenheimer saw his atomic bomb explode he murmured "I am the alpha and the omega". He thought that he had become God. When he saw the consequence of the bomb he cried out in anguish, "I am become death, destroyer of worlds".

7 *The Tears of Eros* (Bataille, 1989b) was Bataille's final work.

Poetry and the Transgression of Meaning

Poetry that does not rise to the non-sense of poetry is only the hollowness of poetry, is only beautiful poetry. (Bataille, 1991b: 161)

The experience of the sacred leaves us gasping for breath and vaguely aware that we are insufficient for the sacred. It also leaves us contaminated by it: the fall from grace is the fall of a lost being who nonetheless falls to earth holding some part of the sacred as a Promethian fire. The sacred returns to and is thus always present in the profane even whilst the profane attempts to ignore, exclude, even negate it. We cannot put out this fire and if we ignore it, it will accumulate as *la part maudite* (Bataille, 1988a and 1991c), grow larger until it eventually runs out of control, catastrophically consuming everything. Plato's separation and rejection of non-ethical poetry from the Republic is one instance of profane societies' attempts to exclude the sacred. It attempts to repress and deny what is evil and ugly in humankind, the poison and hatred of humanity, but in so doing sows the seeds of its own destruction. In attempting to exclude, it must know, name and give birth to (a human conception of) evil. His attempt to repress or negate non-ethical poetry cannot exclude evil, it leaves it hidden within the Republic, festering and accumulating as an accursed share, *la part maudite*, until it can erupt so violently that it ruptures society through war or other means of mass destruction.

Poetry however is a continual attempt to write and speak the impossible, that is what lies beyond because "true poetry is beyond laws" (Bataille, 1991b: 158). It is an attempt to transgress the profane, to communicate the sacred, but through a discourse that transgresses language. For Bataille poetry joins us to the void where there is no fixed meaning and no good or evil but in doing so it does not negate meaning, good and evil, beauty and the ugly, it instead transgresses them. Transgression "does not deny the taboo but transcends and completes it" (Bataille, 1987: 63). Without transgression a rule would be a brute fact of life. Transgression does not negate a rule; it completes it in order to affirm it and then goes beyond it. Poetry does not deny that we have concepts about good and evil, beauty and ugliness, it instead plays with them, calls them into question and goes beyond them into a void, it "removes one from the night and the day at the same time" (Bataille, 1991b: 159). For Bataille "[p]oetry has no powerful meaning except in the violence of revolt" (Bataille, 1991a: 10). Poetry here is a continual subversion and transgression of meaning.

Poetry for Bataille is a continual mode of praxis, a continual play and movement between a suspension of meaning and its oblivion in the void. This movement however is not a nihilism that we passively submit ourselves to it. It is an affirmative seeking after of sovereignty. It is a continual "self-subversion" (Lala, 1995: 109) where we seek our own sovereignty. Sovereignty for Bataille is a continual self-legitimation. A legitimation that requires us to continually transgress rules and taboos in order to affirm that we are *self-legitimizing*. For Bataille the human condition is premised as a Nietzschean ontological self-overcoming: we are not sovereign beings, Hegelian Masters or Slaves, we are instead beings who attempt to achieve sovereignty.

Poetry as a movement of transgression, as the impossible that opens out onto the void, continually fractures the profane and opens it out on to the sacred excess. It is a means by which *la part maudite* may be consumed or escape without catastrophic destruction. Poetry

is the hatred of beautiful poetry, a continued act of self-subversion where the sacred finds momentary release in the profane by transgressing it. It attempts to continually unground itself, to place itself into the void, to continually move beyond itself and meaning. It is an act of continual "self-subversion". As an act of "self-subversion" there is no ground for an accumulation of meaning or of *la part maudite*; there is no ground: "I approach poetry: but only to miss it" (Bataille, 1991b: 159). Poetry here, rather like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, continually moves beyond expectations and meaning.

Poetry opens out on to a void where meaning is continually put into play and where *la part maudite* can not accumulate excessively. It "opens the night to desire's excess. In me the night abandoned by the ravages of poetry is the measure of a refusal - of my mad will to *exceed* the world" (Bataille, 1991b: 162; my emphasis). It is a means whereby we are exposed to the force of desire. Desire opens us up to the sacred, unrestricted by the profane even whilst it is at the limit of the profane.

Desire for Poetry

Realism gives me the impression of a mistake. Violence alone escapes the feeling of poverty of those realistic experiences. Only death and desire have the force that oppresses, that takes one's breath away. Only the extremism of desire and of death enables one to attain the truth. (Bataille, 1991a: 9)

Bataille argues that true poetry is a continual transgression of meaning. He further argues that only death and desire have the necessary force to make us transgress in this way. For Bataille the only truth and certainties that we face are that, "[w]e have in fact only two certainties in this world – that we are not everything and that we will die" (Bataille, 1988b: XXXII). For Bataille the human condition is a complex series of contradictions based on our continual refusal to accept that we will all ultimately die. Death remains as a limit experience, society, culture, technology, religion, all the trappings of the human world are our attempts to distance and protect our selves from Death. Death however can never be denied, we are all ultimately fated to die. We can only truly attempt to achieve sovereignty, Nietzschean self-overcomings, when we face up to and accept this. Desire for Bataille is a force, perhaps the only force, capable of bringing us to this truth. In so doing desire forces us to face up to and find a meaning in death.

Bataille presents a complex anti-Hegelian reading of desire to argue that it is a force external to us, that has many different modalities but one form (O'Shea, 1999). Rather like Deleuze's affirmation of Bergson's time, desire here is a singular multiplicity (Deleuze, 1988): desire is Nietzsche's will to power (O'Shea, 2000). At its most extreme desire is a force without limits, capable of seizing us and throwing us into the eternal void, capable of continually rupturing our being, of leaving us continually open to and rended by its full force. In the void nothing exists to protect us from the force of desire, there is *no* Republic here and certainly no *God*. All that awaits us is Death and desire.

As a force that is external to us, desire is beyond our control. It is not we who desire something but desire that overwhelms us, rends us, leaves us incomplete without substance and ground in the eternal void that is beyond the restricted economy. Bataille's poetry here both paves a way for desire to come to us and is our own inability to describe it and its

effects adequately: poetry as a moment of transgression at the limit of the profane. We are left "limited by words [unable] to express a desire...Staring at the void in front of me" (Bataille, 1991b: 143). Desire is external to us and completely *other* to us as the *tout autre*. We can not control it or fully describe it. It is beyond, indifferent to and different from our attempts to understand and find meaning for it. Language can not do justice to it since language is some thing of the rational world. At best we can try to describe desire by putting language into play through poetry. Desire remains as an irrational force, beyond human rational, conscious comprehension yet capable of seizing us and taking us beyond our world of laws, taboos, language and beautiful poetry:

I am falling into the immensity
Which falls into itself
It is blacker than my death...

...the immensity
and I
denounce the lies of each other

truth dies
and I cry
that truth lies...
(Bataille, 1999: 61-62)

Plato's beautiful poetry clings on to a presumption that there is some pure essence that is beyond us. Bataille however argues that beyond us, beyond the profane there is the sacred night. In the immensity of this night without stars there is no substance, no essence, there is only a void in which we may continually attempt to self-legitimate and where poetry continually seeks to "self-subvert" poetry, meaning, truth. In the void desire finds its voice as Bataille's poetry of the impossible: "poetry attains this violence [the revolt of meaning] only by evoking the impossible" (Bataille, 1991a: 10).

The Hatred of Poetry

Humanity is faced with a double perspective: in one direction, violent pleasure, horror and death - precisely the perspective of poetry - and in the opposite direction, that of science or the real world of utility... [W]e must, respond to something which, not being God, is stronger than every right, that *impossible* to which we accede only by forgetting the truth of all these rights [of the real world of utility], only by accepting disappearance. (Bataille, 1991a: 10)

Plato's reduction of poetry then is a hatred *of* poetry: it is an attempt to reduce it to a single form, fix it and restrict to a given system of meaning. This poetry remains within and is part of the logic of the profane world of utility: things have value because they have a meaning and meaning is itself given by value. In so doing this logic of utility violates poetry as play, as a continual unfolding, transgression and dissolution of meaning, but it can not negate it. *La part maudite* is retained, immanent to and capable of rupturing the Republic and its restricted economy of meaning. *La part maudite* remains in Plato's republic because poetry has been restricted to a system of (Divine, religious rather than sacred) meaning that is transcendental to and beyond us. Here there is no way out for, nor any means of consuming, the accursed share until it explosively ruptures the Republic.

Indeed we are locked into a world not of our own making: a world made in seven days by a God who is everything but is completely beyond us.⁸ In the absence of an onto-theological and metonymic God however there is nothing to hold us to the profane. In this absence we can momentarily attain the sacred.

Bataille argues that poetry and desire are immanent to the social profane world, and particularly modern societies since the Republic because they are restricted economies of accumulation. Poetry must be a continually seeking after the impossible, a continual attempt at "self-subversion". This impossible form of poetry gives a voice to a desire that opens us to the infinite beyond Plato's restricted realm of the Republic. It opens us up to an infinite void where meaning, truth and substance are continually ungrounded, dissolved and lost. Poetry here is a praxis, a play, unfolding, transgression and dissolution of meaning. As praxis poetry can both consume the accursed share and also continually open up the restricted economy. *La part maudite* does not have to be accumulated but can instead be expended in a non-catastrophic manner. For Bataille the hatred of poetry is a hatred of the restricted economy, a hatred of systems that attempt to fix meaning and that deny "the wonder struck cry of life" (Bataille, 1989a: 46). Bataille thus demonstrates both the complex dialectical form of the *Haine de la poésie* and why poetry ultimately is transgressive.

Bataille's message for organizational theorists then foreshadows much of 'post-modern', 'post-structural' thought. We need to recognise that the truth of organizations is not contained within some objective element of their nature. Organisation and organising here is a social practice of the profane world (Chia, 1996). It is nevertheless a practice that can never be completed because meaning escapes the profane, death remains to curtail any project of human endeavour. It is a continual attempt to distance our selves from death, but it is a practice that is ultimately doomed to failure. There are perhaps two complex questions then for organizational theorists to explore: how does meaning and truth come to be constituted, conveyed, accepted and undone through organising; how can we organise ourselves in such a way as to face up to, accept and find joy in this knowledge? Bataille's response is the challenge of *The Impossible*:

Must I lose my reason for writing?

If I spoke of war and torture...: seeing that war and torture, today, are situated at points which ordinary language has determined, I would stray from my object - which draws me beyond the accepted limits.

What does philosophy matter since it is this naïve contestation: the questioning that we can only undertake when we are appeased! How could we be *appeased* if we did not rely on a whole body of presupposed knowledge? Introducing a metaphysical given at the extreme limit of thought comically reveals its essence: that of every philosophy. (Bataille, 1991a: 40)

The Impossible for Organizational Theory is to be a continually transgressive praxis and reflective not only of a *différance* of meaning but to be an attempt to express the

⁸ Apropos here is Geoffrey Bennington's (1995) article 'Because the world is round'. Bennington argues that Bataille's general economy of excessive consumption is and must be restricted because the world has physical limits. He ignores that Bataille's argument, rather like Deleuze, opens us out onto the sacred infinite that is not restricted by some physical limit.

immediate, visceral, excessive experiences that make us human. Whilst the latter is impossible it is nonetheless something that we must attempt, indeed that we are driven to do. It is a challenge to write, speak and enact organizational theory and practice as a poetic "self-subversion". If we do not attempt *The Impossible* then we remain caught within the delimited space circumscribed by the limit experience. All that there is here is an already constituted form of knowledge. A form of knowledge that traps us within limits but that ultimately is not true, an empty and meaningless objectification of life.

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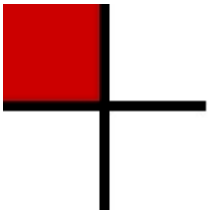
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Globalising Solidarity: Organising Aid for Cuba. Interview by *ephemera*

Phil Lenton

SALUD, Aid Organiser and Activist

abstract

Throughout the sixties and seventies, Phil Lenton was a political activist involved in protests against nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. In the 1970s, he began working for UNISON. At a time when workers often came off worse than employers in direct confrontation, he organised alternative forms of industrial action, actively seeking alternatives to traditional strikes. In the 1990s he became involved with Cuba through his work twinning UK and Cuban health service unions. Since his retirement from UNISON, his activities have concentrated on organising aid for Cuba, and global health initiatives. In this interview with *ephemera*, he reflects on a life of political activism and the potential for collective action in an age when the old certainties of Marxist class-conflict have been eroded by globalisation and the emergence of new political groupings, defined only, if at all, by their opposition to capitalism.

51 Ambulances for Cuba

ephemera: We are in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and as we conduct this interview, a boat is arriving at Teesport in Middlesbrough where it will find 51 ambulances, a double-decker bus and three containers full of medical supplies lined up on the quay ready to go to Cuba. We are talking today with Phil Lenton who has been organising this aid mission to Cuba. For the last six months or so he has been dragging ambulances from all parts of the UK to get them, finally, to Cuba. Perhaps, Phil, you could start by talking about how you got to be in this situation?

PL: January 1998 I visited a hospital in the mountains in Santiago, Cuba, to link them with a hospital in Gateshead and their urgent need was for a bus because they had no spare parts for their existing ones that were broken down. There had been a fatal accident because they had no parts for the brakes. Also, without a bus they couldn't get their staff to work so the hospital might have to close. I had been used to sending aid to Cuba on a small scale in containers and sometimes by scrounging space on a plane. But the thought of a bus was something completely different and when I asked how would I transport it there if I could get one, I was told that the Cubans would divert a ship to Britain. I spoke to contacts of mine in the Transport and General Workers Union to see if they could help us, and within two weeks they came back to me and said they had ten double-decker buses! The Cubans

were then challenged about diverting a ship and that's when the negotiations really started about what we were going to do and how to make the ship a viable proposition because of the cost of fuel for diverting the ship, the port fees *etc.*, which all needed hard currency. I was asked how many buses I could get and how many ambulances, and we finally concluded an agreement in May 1998. I would try to fill a ship with aid for Cuban hospitals and it would be called 'SALUD, the Trade Union Ship for Cuba'. So that is how it started.

There was a condition that no matter how many ambulances, buses or whatever we got, if there was no food then there was no ship. They specifically wanted food because there had been a drought and they had serious shortages. We managed to put together a team of people who wanted to have a shot at this and they included an organisation called the



International Rescue Corps, who specialise in rescue work in earthquakes and floods all over the world. Many of them were trade union members and friends of mine, including a number of trade union officials, and off we went scrounging whatever we could: asking bus companies to donate buses; asking the London Ambulance Service if we could have an ambulance or two. We had the logistical nightmare of finding these items as far apart as Devon in the south of England, to Aberdeen in the north of Scotland, so the question was how to get them all in one place. In fact, what was the place going to be? What port would do it? We had no money, that was the key thing. There was absolutely no budget, no money whatsoever. Everything we asked for we asked to be given for nothing. We did launch an appeal through the trade unions to try to raise money, which was very successful. We then had to tackle difficulties like tax and insurance on these vehicles travelling to one point. We then had to find a port that was prepared to do this for little or no payment.

ephemera: Where did you go from in the end?

PL: We started off looking at Tyne Dock in Newcastle, but when the scale of the thing became apparent we took the view that it wouldn't be big enough. After that a friendly shipping agent, Waterfront Shipping, who agreed to provide their services free of charge, recommended a number of ports and one of them was Liverpool, although they did say it was likely to be expensive. Liverpool had other problems. It had the legacy of a bitter strike with sacked dockers at loggerheads with the Transport and General Workers Union, and both at loggerheads with the Port Authorities. The Transport and General Workers Union helped us to talk to the Port to get the fees down, so we just had to take a decision. It was also a port that the Cubans knew and they were reluctant to send a ship to a port that they had never visited. There had been very few Cuban ships come into Britain, but Liverpool was one that they knew, and that was probably the deciding factor.

ephemera: Your involvement with this aid effort comes out a connection with the trade unions although it also takes directions that the trade unions have not traditionally been involved with. Can you tell us a little more about that?

PL: Nobody had ever asked trade unions to donate or find aid on this scale before. We've heard of special projects where maybe a double-decker bus is driven from England to North Africa, with aid for children in a particular school or something like that. But this would really be a challenge for the trade unions and even the leadership of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, who were very, very sceptical about going down this road. They said, "It's impossible, it can't be done, you don't have any money, you don't have any skills to do this, the Cubans will never deliver a ship."

ephemera: But you have done it once and now you are doing it a second time?

PL: Yes. I think that in the process of doing it that first time we actually showed everybody what could be done. We all knew that there was a huge risk, that the ship might not turn up and we would be left with all this aid on the port side. Which in fact happened. The ship that was supposed to come was coming from a port in Poland, Gardenia, and for some reason, which we never really got to the root of, the Cuban ship was trapped there. It was in the port to load fertiliser. It started to load and then suddenly the port stopped them without giving any reason. We don't know whether it was accidental, whether there was good reason for it or not, but the ship was effectively trapped. I went to Cuba to talk to the shipping people and the trade union leadership there to say that this was a serious problem



and so another Cuban ship was then diverted from St Petersburg. That ship arrived precisely when the Cubans told us it would arrive. Of course the port was panicking because they had all this cargo on the port side and they needed that space for other cargo. So this was just one of the many logistical problems that we knew we had to face.

ephemera: So you had these problems with the logistics of getting the ship organised, and also these problems with the unions. How far were the unions involved?

PL: Well it was important to get the support of somebody important in the union leadership. We got the support of Robbie Bickerstaff who is the General Secretary in UNISON. Also Ken Cameron, the General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union. We also did a publicity stunt at the TUC (Trade Union Conference) where we handed out sticks of rock [candy] with the name of the project, SALUD, written through them, just a stunt to kick the thing off. We handed them out to people in front of the TV cameras, because these were significant trade union leaders handing out sticks of rock.

ephemera: When was this?

PL: That was the TUC of September 1998. UNISON allowed us to use its mailing list to mail branches directly and we also got the TUC to do the mailing. We had to say that this was a new kind of project, it was humanitarian, but it was trade unions sending humanitarian aid, which was a brand new concept. That same year Claire Shaw, Secretary of State for International Development, issued a challenge to trade unions to basically stop whinging about things in the Third World and start developing humanitarian aid programmes with sister trade unions in other countries. So we also said we are taking up that challenge. We went to see the Department for International Development, but what we got from them was basically, "Thank you for coming, it sounds very interesting", but there was no money. They were not hostile, but there was no budget for Cuba. Three countries in the world were excluded from any budgets, that was Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti for some reason. There had also been a series of world disasters, Hurricane Mitch, there had been earthquakes and the disaster fund was empty as well. So they were very nice, very polite to us, but said there was nothing that they could do. So we were on our own.

We developed a team of people who found they could do things, or if they didn't know how to do it they knew someone, who knew someone who knew how to do it, or how to fix this, or how to find that. And that is how it went on. We were inundated with offers and at one stage we had offers of sixty buses but we couldn't take them because we had no storage facilities for them and the bus companies wanted them moved. We had to come to a point where we said, "right, that's it, that is the date that we want the ship here, and that is the date that we get the cargo to Liverpool". I think if I was going to make any comment about the trade union role in this I would say it was about ordinary people, ordinary trade unionists, who have come through very difficult times under the Thatcher government. I mean there were very few things trade unionists could do anymore and huge demoralisation. Here we had the opportunity for trade unionists to get involved in doing things very positively. So we had people in hospitals going round asking for specific pieces of equipment that were coming out of service. We had local Transport Union workers asking their company for buses, asking them to fill them up with fuel, asking them to provide drivers, so there was an impact on employers as well. We also got unions that had always been hostile, or at least had been hostile to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, involved. A number of unions, like the GMB (General Municipal and Boilermakers trade union) had generally been hostile but in two regions, London and the North, they gave us full support and raised money to buy ambulances. Their national executive also gave us a donation, which we felt was a new step forward.

ephemera: It sounds as though there is a split here, where on the one hand you have resistance from the trade unions because you are doing something different, something new, and on the other hand, once you are able to get people interested or motivated you gained considerable support.

PL: No, the resistance came from the people who felt that they had been doing work for Cuba for many years and then suddenly the new boys came along.

ephemera: Was this the Cuba Solidarity Campaign?

PL: No, it was some people, and I wouldn't necessarily be critical of them, who rightly felt that this was a high-risk project. With the trade unions it was more, "well we have never done this before."

ephemera: So different kinds of resistance?

PL: Different kinds of resistance, yes. But at the end of it, I had a letter from Ken Gill, then President of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, who congratulated us and then said that he was one of those who was previously quite critical. He congratulated us on being able to bring trade unions into the work around Cuba. Also we had a number of additional trade union general secretaries who put their name to the work. It sounds arrogant, but it was almost like achieving the impossible. When we said we were going to do this, this and this, everybody was saying, "Well it can't be done." Then we came up against all sorts of obstacles but we found ways around them. That was the philosophy. It was a 'can-do' philosophy, as opposed to a 'can't-do' philosophy.

From South Africa to Cuba

ephemera: You have spoken in our earlier conversations about your own passionate commitment to Cuba, but how did it happen that you personally became involved in Cuba?

PL: I had been sent to work in South Africa for the African National Congress (ANC) in the elections in 1994 and many of the people - South African people - I was working with were full of admiration for the Cubans. It was from them that I discovered the significant role that the Cubans had played in helping to bring down the Apartheid regime there, and also liberating labour in Namibia from South Africa. This was the Cuban troops in Angola, Cuban doctors and teachers in Angola, but particularly the Cuban troops with the Angolan army who defeated the South African army at a place called Quitacavara in the late 1980s. This led to the international conference and the Angolan accords meaning basically that Namibia would become an independent nation, Cuba would withdraw its military support to Angola over a period of time and it effectively it meant the end of the power of the South African army. The people I was with thought that that was the beginning of the end for the Apartheid regime. I hadn't really understood that role before.

When I returned from South Africa, by sheer coincidence a Cuban health union General Secretary was visiting Newcastle and asked to meet me. That's where it all began. We started off by twinning regions of UNISON with regions of the Cuban health union. That involved people looking to see what Cuba had done in the way of health and seeing that the backbone of their revolution had been health and education and that they had high standards. Things like infant mortality rates there are as good, if not better, than in Western Europe and certainly better than in the United States.

All this was at risk because of the ongoing blockade by the Americans and collapse of the Eastern Bloc. They called it the second blockade, where all their ability to trade dried up and their economy went into freefall. I could see that there were things in Cuba really worth saving, particularly the health service and education, their advances in medicine and I just love the Cuban people. The way that they do things for other nations, other people,

when they have got nothing themselves is really quite remarkable and that became a sort of lesson for me, to try and do something to help.

ephemera: So when did you first visit Cuba?

PL: 1995

ephemera: This is just a year after you had been working in South Africa. What was the nature of that visit?



PL: Things were pretty grim. Because of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and all the trade contracts disappearing, food was in desperately short supply. There was no fuel and no transport. There were electricity blackouts for 30-40% of the day and night. Things were very, very difficult for people. I thought that it was going to be very difficult for Cuba to survive that period. As I went on with my visits. I could see the steps that they were taking to change the situation. They are a very imaginative people who find ways of getting around every problem that is confronting them.

ephemera: So were you visiting with the purpose of providing aid at that stage, or did that develop at a later time?

PL: At that stage I was trying to set up a twinning between the Santiago Province of the Cuban Health Union and UNISON Northern region. That was the main objective, but it was also just to have a look to see what it was like, because neither I nor any of my colleagues had ever been there.

ephemera: And you have visited a number of times since then?

PL: I think about fifteen or sixteen times in total now. That first time was before there was any tourism to speak of in Cuba and of course that is one area that has mushroomed.

Early Experiences

ephemera: Can you talk about your early work experience, leaving school, work and so on?

PL: I left school at sixteen. I had become quite political, probably through my family, so I got very involved in the anti-Vietnam War campaign during the early sixties. After finding myself in jail after being arrested during a demonstration, I went through job after job after job. Fifty jobs by the time I was twenty. Life was different then. You could just walk out of one job and into another one. When I was twenty-six I got a job working for NUPE (National Union of Public Employers) who sent me to Newcastle to work as an organiser. I think that is when I discovered my real skills were in organising things, sometimes in a

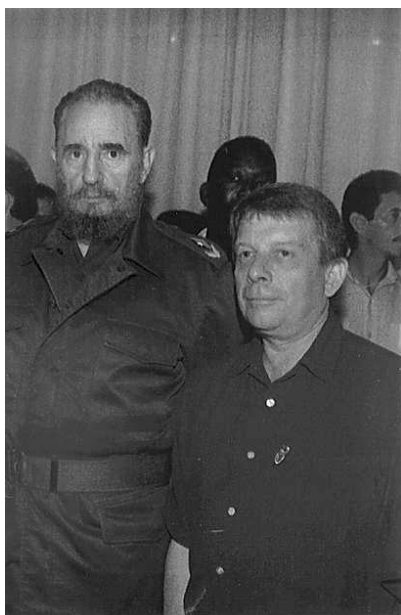
shambolic way, but always to achieve an end. I was very much involved in recruiting, in organising campaigns and industrial disputes.

After 1993 UNISON was created as a merger of three trade unions. Two years later I was seconded into the role of actually forcing branches to merge, many against their will and trying to get to grip with the union's finances, not as an accountant, but just trying to find the money. So that was one of my jobs. It meant making a lot of enemies because you actually had to stand up and force change through, that was what it was about. It was about forcing change, embracing change and then trying to control it. Many of the branches that we were forcing to merge were reluctant, at best, to do it. I moved on to try to tackle some of the thorny issues around finance, then tackling some pretty serious issues of, as we call it, political cleansing, where certain groups literally, through use of threats and violence force others to yield power to them within the trade union and that is not an acceptable principle. So I had to tackle that as well. I was quite used to those kind of things, so getting into the Cuba work was really a logical extension of that because once again you have to tackle very difficult problems and force a way through: force a change of thinking, force a change of how you deliver something. I retired in November 2000, so I had been doing it for 28 years and three months by the time I retired. It was a sort of seamless transition from doing that kind of work to the work that I am doing now.

ephemera: You make it sound almost seamless! From working with UNISON to this?

PL: Well that is true. Not that it was something I enjoyed doing, but I became the prosecutor - we use the word 'union representative' - in high profile disciplinary cases within the union, mainly to do with harassment, intimidation, bullying *etc.* and I would be doing that one month and then I would be doing work for Cuba for another three weeks. The balance of the two kept my sanity.

ephemera: You finished with UNISON two months ago. Do you still have friendly relations with them?



PL: Oh yes. In May of 2000 my dream of taking Robbie Bickerstaff of UNISON to Cuba was realised. He went there for May Day and it was an official visit. There were lots of invitations to him previously and I was trying to persuade him to go. The truth is that every time I have taken somebody new with me to Cuba they have come back enthused with this work and the team has been expanding and expanding. So then to have Robbie Bickerstaff on the team became very, very important and we have a network of people in UNISON who continue to do this work. My leaving of UNISON is to work full time now for the organisation and the network in UNISON is just one part of it. There is a network in the train drivers union (ASLEF), in the Transport and General Workers Union, the National Union of Teachers and we also have private companies who have joined.

ephemera: Private companies? Such as who?

PL: The first buses came from Stagecoach. We shipped a load of fire engines over as well to Cuba. The maker of those fire engines and the double-decker buses that we sent to Cuba was Dennis and the chairman of Dennis has now asked what he can do to help. English, Welsh and Scottish railways helped us with a train to transport ambulances. Admittedly a lot of this was through trade unions.

ephemera: Through union members working in these organisations?

PL: Yes, except with Dennis. With Dennis and some other companies, they actually saw an article in the newspaper called *Bus and Coach Buyer Monthly*. One of their journalists or editors had seen these buses and ambulances, but I had wondered who on earth read this. Obviously people who wanted to buy buses. That generated the interest from the Chairman of Dennis. Another company who specialize in spare parts have sent us brochures to see if there is anything that they can do to help. So it is beginning to gather momentum and we've taken it beyond the trade unions now.

ephemera: You were talking about the organisation that you are working for now and we have agreed not to mention who is funding this, but you have been able to get in a situation where you are actually funded, to be given a salary so that you can live, by a very generous donor. Do you want to talk about this organisation and how it came about?

PL: Sometime in early 2000 I was sitting down with three colleagues talking about the future. We had done one ship and we were going to do another one. Because the demands on individuals were enormous, there was a suggestion we should try to get SALUD charitable status. We took this concept through further and thought that we would try to (a) get SALUD charitable status, because it would open up more doors to us, and (b) work beyond Cuba, but start in with those places where Cuban doctors are working in poor countries to improve infant mortality. That was the kind of thinking that we had, which talking about it now, sounds so simple. But it would require somebody to be working full time on it and nobody knew how we were going to find that money. But there was an anonymous benefactor who had been to Havana and seen the results of the work that we had done who agreed to do just that. The Cubans thought that it would be better if we worked as an NGO, a non-governmental organisation. From their point of view it would make things easier. As a result of all this we have set up SALUD International and have a couple of honorary patrons including Robbie Bickerstaff. We have two wings. One is the charitable trust, and the money from that will be spent on whatever the objectives of the charity specify. Secondly, we'll have a part of it that is not connected with the charitable trust, because it would be more about campaigning. Maybe campaigning is not the right word, but we want to explore and promote the debate about the globalisation of solidarity which we have begun to see in its embryo form.

Globalisation of Solidarity

ephemera: What do you mean by 'the globalisation of solidarity'?

PL: Strangely enough when the Pope visited Cuba in January 1998 he made three speeches. One was about the evils of contraception, which went down like a lead balloon in Cuba. One was about family values which, given the pressure they are under, again went down like a lead balloon. The main speech, which was welcomed there, was one where he talked about the effects of globalisation on poor countries and he used the phrase that what is needed to combat this is the 'globalisation of solidarity'. So that is a concept that the Cubans are exploring and we want to explore as well. It is an idea that will develop and we want to open up that debate, so we are setting up a web-site and we will publish something regularly on this concept of globalisation of solidarity. The Cubans will be invited, and anybody will be invited to do the same.

ephemera: I suppose this is the other side of globalisation that has not been given much coverage: a kind of colonisation of the rest of the world by America and Western Europe. When you talk about the globalisation of solidarity on the other hand, it has a slightly more positive ring to it. Can you talk about the concept and the work that you have been doing on that?

PL: As I said, this idea is in its infancy at the moment, so we might all think differently tomorrow. At the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle, when there were huge demonstrations and the pepper gassing of the demonstrators, I think that was the point when people thought "Hello, what is going on here? What is it all about?" And you had the attempts, particularly by the United States, to deregulate world trade even more; to open the doors to the huge multinationals to take over and wipe out national industries, particularly in developing countries. I think there were two significant results of that conference. One was that the smaller countries got together and stopped any agreement being reached. I think that was when the alarm bells were set ringing. Secondly there was the nature of the demonstrators. This is not to take anything away from them, but there was no common theme. No common theme about what they were saying. There was a multitude of organisations that were all arguing different things. So you have the problem of globalisation destroying industries in poorer countries and you have the disparate views and ideologies of the people opposing that. So nobody can wave a magic wand and say "Hey presto! Here is the line and you have to follow it." But there are people who are very close to SALUD now who are trying to pull all that together: the various diverse groups who are concerned about globalisation, and the impact of the WTO, the IMF, World Bank etc.

I think it is about putting a positive direction on that movement and what we are doing is only a small part. I'll give you an example. I think what confused things, even amongst British trade unions, over this was the line that the British Government was taking at the World Trade Organisation Conference, supported by British trade unions, that the WTO should impose minimum or core labour standards on all member countries. Whilst that might sound a desirable thing, in my view it is actually interfering in the affairs of the smaller poorer countries by rich Western countries that dominate to make sure that the goods produced by the poorer countries are not competitive. It is a very complex argument, but this is the kind of debate that needs to be had.

There is also the question about doing something. One of the things that we can do, and this comes back to Cuba, is that we can start looking at areas of poverty and actually to do

something about it. The Cubans have offered their doctors, nurses and teachers at no cost, but what they do need is technical support, medicines, etc, which only private industry or the West can provide. We could actually begin to save lives in Latin America and Africa by doing this, and that leads onto other kinds of issues. If you have a population that is growing, where is the economic infrastructure for it *etc.*? What we want to do is push that debate out, try to open it up and see where it takes us.

ephemera: The situation in Seattle had competing groups with no single unified core to hold together all of their various struggles, but the traditional response from trade unions has generally been that the economic struggle - the struggle between capital and labour - is the central struggle, the central antagonism around which all other struggles are organised and co-ordinated. Now you have ecological groups, women's groups, groups from developing countries and you are talking about those as being equal and working alongside other struggles. Is that where you are?

PL: There are all sorts of different interests which is why there are different opinions and I think that we have got to define what it is about globalisation that is bad or good. We have a lot of people saying that globalisation is a very good thing, well let's have the argument! What is it? If there are aspects of globalisation, which I am convinced there are, that favour capital and neo-liberalism - or deregulation as it is called - what are they, who do they affect, and how do we tackle them? Without a doubt that will mean involving more groups than just trade unions. There are issues of child labour and the exploitation of women. There are issues of the exploitation of whole populations of ethnic groups, as well as issues of national sovereignty, national industry, sustainability and all those kind of arguments. At the moment the argument is too much of a *cliché*. We need to understand what it is we want to tackle and how we are going to tackle it, so this issue of the globalisation of solidarity just a small contribution to that debate. Let's start sharing views and see where it takes us.

Cuba is actually playing quite a key role in all of this. It is developing new relationships with Latin American, Caribbean, South American and African countries, as far as possible on the basis of equality. This doesn't mean to say that there is harmony and agreement over everything, but on some things there is total agreement. For example the whole Latin American, Central American, Caribbean bloc was the core group in preventing any agreement in the WTO. Cuba is a member of the WTO, so Cuba is involved in this and is actually setting up, with the agreement of national governments, these areas in their countries where it can try to improve healthcare and that can be followed by improvement in education. How this relates to the whole idea, I don't know. I think that we have to explore that.

Learning Politics

ephemera: You said that you came from a political background, about being in a family which made you political in some kind of way. Do you want to talk about that and your own political education or your own association with politics?

PL: Well I grew up in the late fifties and early sixties and it was a political time, post war. The way that I have always seen it, the generation who fought in the war, both at home and overseas, were transformed and changed by that experience. The 1950s and 60s was quite a political era. Both my mother's and father's families were very strong trade unionists. My father's family were railway trade unionists. He fought in the war and was a prisoner of war. He organised a strike in the POW camp - I'm not sure that was the most sensible thing for him to have done! They were unloading railway lines off a train I think. Who knows what actually happened, but the story was that they were unloading a train and it got to five o'clock and they said they had had enough: "We've finished." To which I am told a Luger pistol was put to his head. Everybody was following him. And he says no, we've worked however many hours today and we are not doing any more, that's it, and they all sat down. The next morning he and half a dozen others were sent to a salt-mine for the rest of the war, which he discovered later was a satellite of a concentration camp. So experiences like that obviously affect you, and like any person of that age who had a father or mother in the war, they tell you some stories, but they don't tell you others. You begin to develop an interest in what is going on around you. My father became General Secretary of a small union. I got involved in the peace movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

ephemera: That was your first experience of organised political action?

PL: Yes, I was about twelve at the time. They used to have this march from Port Marsden, which was the atomic weapons research establishment near Reading, to London every Easter: a four-day march. I went on it. Looking back on it, my parents let me go on a march for four days at the age of twelve or thirteen, so I think they must have been very liberal with me. Within two years I had got them to go on the march as well. Through that you begin to meet people and you become more political. I was involved in some youth politics for a bit, then the Vietnam War came along. This was something that my generation knew we had to express ourselves about. I don't know anybody that wasn't involved in some kind of action around Vietnam. It was on the television every night and it was horrific. We used to organise rallies, demonstrations here there and everywhere, including a regular one in Grosvenor Square. Some of the demonstrations were interestingly confrontational. One weekend there was a demonstration for the whole forty-eight hours and I was leading the night shift on the Saturday night when the police arrested everybody. When it came up in court, we were 'lost' around a number of prisons and nobody could find us anywhere. I was eighteen at the time and that had an effect on me.

ephemera: In what way?

PL: I began to hate the system. I think that is when I really learnt hatred. I used to think, "Why do people take jobs locking people up for the abysmally small wages that prison officers get, what kind of person actually does that? What kind of person is prepared to work for such low pay? They must get some pleasure out of locking people up." That is the way that you begin to think and I can see where the hatred comes. It must have a couple of weeks before they found me, I was at Ashwood Prison. So I came out of there changed - not bitter, but far more determined I think.

ephemera: What do you mean by the system?

PL: The capitalist system I suppose. I consider myself a Marxist, I consider myself a Communist. There I was, deliberately lost in a prison with no means of anybody knowing where I was and these things are not supposed to happen here. Then you realise that they do happen, then you begin to think, "I had better do something about this". So I became very determined to try and change things.

ephemera: Campaigning for nuclear disarmament, protesting against the Vietnamese War, these are Marxist causes?

PL: No, not necessarily. The peace movement or whatever you want to call it was about a genuine fear of nuclear war, of nuclear weapons, but it was a very, very wide group. Going back to globalisation, it had as many different groupings in it as the WTO demonstrations. In the fifties and sixties the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had many different groups: there were conservatives, liberals, labour party members, communists, greens (who had no real 'green' label at the time), women's groups, gay groups, anarchists - they were all there. The thing about the CND was that it had one single objective, to oppose nuclear weapons, a very simple objective. But of course it would challenge conflicts where nuclear weapons weren't necessarily involved. It would get out of that single line at times.

Vietnam? Well on the one hand Vietnam was about the small guys taking on the big guys, or the big guys taking on the small guys, and on the other hand it was about national liberation. Once people were against it because they didn't like it, then they began to learn the history of it, colonialism, the cold war, the politics of Vietnam, the politics of China, the politics of the Soviet Union all come into it. So yes, I would say my opposition there was from a Marxist perspective.

ephemera: Marxist? In what sense Marxist? Marxism is often simplistically derided or thrown away and considered to be *passé* - as belonging to the sixties or to some other period that we are supposed to have grown out of today. But you are talking about Marxism in a way which seems far more sophisticated than this. What does Marxism mean to you?

PL: Marxism to me was an explanation of the way society has evolved and is expected to evolve, the economic relationships that make that happen or make that inevitable. At the time it was also about trying to change the world. In the early sixties we all thought that we could achieve the impossible and to a degree we were quite successful. Like I just said, there was my fathers generation, the people who came out of the trenches having seen friends that they had made the night before blown to pieces, going through this trauma. They come back as different people, sometimes traumatised, but people with values of humanity. In politics at the time there was a lot support for the Soviet Union, a lot of support for the Red Army. So that was that generation. The next generation as I see it was my own. We were never heavily theoretical reading Marxists. We had a basic education in Marxism. As young people in our teens I suppose we got involved in the peace movement and the Vietnam War. As you move on into the seventies those people end up having real jobs and families and then they go into the trade unions. You have got the older generation from the wartime who by this time are in the leadership of the trade unions and then you have got this other generation coming through. The combination of the two of those in the 1970s was that the trade unions made huge, huge advances and brought down two

governments. They brought down the Heath government and eventually brought down the Callaghan government. I think that things change as you go on through your life because the situations that you are in change, and I ended up working in the trade unions where I put my politics into practice organising resistance. Certainly in the eighties under Thatcher I was organising resistance against everything that she was trying to impose. In the seventies I was still learning, but in the eighties, as a trade union official, I wasn't afraid to take risks and to experiment with new forms of organisation or means of putting pressure on an employer.

Creative Industrial Action

ephemera: What kinds of pressure?

PL: Well we had the first ever strike of hospital ancillary workers in 1972 and nobody in any of the unions of the health service really had a clue how to organise a strike. I had only been working in the union for about six months and so I tried to organise the health workers at the Newcastle hospitals to do things that would be good for them: to improve their morale and apply pressure to the employers. It was very easy to say to workers 'out' or at least it was then. It is very easy to get workers out on strike but it is very, very difficult to get them back in again with some pride, with some gain.

What I did learn was that strikes were not the only means of achieving an end and that actually getting people out was a huge step that could go drastically wrong. In 1986 for example, I had nurses in a private nursing home in Gateshead that had been trying to expose some outrageous care standards in this home. They went on strike and they were all sacked. This is the nightmare scenario of having a strike because there is no way back. So we got them to make a record, we got them to produce a play, and we got them touring the country with a play and a record about what was going on in their nursing home. Eventually a lot of the local authorities in the area found ways of offering these people jobs to get them back. So you had to find new ways of doing things, I mean making a record and play – *Sacked for Caring* – was quite imaginative, though I didn't dream up the idea myself. My colleague Keith Hodgson, who is now the education officer, was the ideas man and I was the doer. The same with other strikes where we had to stop privatisation of hospital services. We had a strategy in this region, and only in this region, of keeping the contractors out, and we succeeded for three years in keeping them all out. Not just by strikes but by a variety of things like occupations and publicity. We used to call it 'creative industrial action'. The key to it was finding out who was the decision-maker, the manager, that you had to target. Whose life did you have to make miserable in order to get the settlement. So you had identified, maybe the general manager of the hospital and then you targeted everything on him or her. It wasn't that you couldn't get people out, but that you needed to get them back in, so that was a tactic we experimented with.

I remember a long dispute in Belfast, in a hospital where the workers had just imposed sanctions. They weren't doing this and weren't doing that, and the dirty linen was building up all the way through the corridors of the hospital, so the general manager came in and said that he wanted all of it moved. The workers said that were not going to move it. The

general manager said that he wanted it all moved by the morning or they were all sacked. When he came in the morning, the corridors were all clean but when he went to his office and opened the door all this laundry fell out. Wearing them down and bringing some fun into it, so that people could not take it all too seriously - so that was the sixties and seventies I think.

ephemera: Strikes and this kind of organised direct action are not particularly popular today, apart from incidences such as the 'organised' political action in places such as Seattle, and also Melbourne, Nice and Prague. A couple of years ago we could have quite confidently said that organised political action is over or is in decline. What would you say about that today?

PL: I think that there are a number of issues there. One is going back to that generational idea that I was talking about. The generation who grew up in the eighties and early nineties grew up, in Britain anyway, under Margaret Thatcher and everything that she represented, which was nothing but a cultural and philosophical regression to selfishness, self-interest - everything that was opposite to collective action. And if you dared take any collective action then you were hit over the head with a big stick because she brought in all these laws to try and stop collective action happening. You are right to say that it had been in decline, although you could then throw in the example of about 1990, 1992 when the government announced that they were going to close all the remaining pits. There was not so much an upsurge of militancy in the pits, but they marched on London and were joined by people from right across the classes. They lost. There were moments when if somebody began some collective action people would relish joining in irrespective of what it was. But after so long without any kind of activity, to start it all over again it will mean starting in different ways, in diverse ways.

The fact that ecological issues and things like that are issues that motivate people now is no surprise. Global Warming is today's Vietnam War in some respects. I think that the work I have been doing with Cuba is a form of collective action, a very strange form of collective action, but it is about moving people into doing things. The possibilities are not high. When Vauxhall workers were faced with closure of their plant, there were very angry protests about it. Down the road at Dagenham, Ford says they are going to close the plant and the workforce there sign up for it. That would not have happened twenty years ago. Even with issues like Global Warming, ecology and feminism there aren't really many collective actions going on at all. What is the issue? I come back to this question of globalisation again. I think we will find eventually that everything is linked into that. Whether it be trade unionism, exploitation of groups, global warming: all those sorts of things are linked into that and it is an area to be explored to see whether we can actually motivate people into doing things. They are already doing it. We are talking big numbers in Seattle. Nice for example was an EU conference on the future, it wasn't a WTO conference or an IMF conference like Prague. But it attracted demonstrations and you look at what they were demonstrating against. The huge trade union demonstration was about improving the social charter. It wasn't about bringing capitalism down or anything to do with the conflict between labour and capital, it was about improving the EU social charter: more maternity leave etc. Which are fine objectives but it wasn't exactly revolutionary. So all these things are different, Nice is different to Prague, is different to Seattle, is different to Melbourne, is different to London. There is no answer to this question except to say:

yes, you are right that collective action had almost disappeared. Yes, it is appearing in sporadic areas but I don't think that it is co-ordinated or has a direction yet and I think that the politics of globalisation needs to be explored. I think that's it in a nutshell. Let's see what the issues are and let's see if that provides the platform to organise collective action.

ephemera: What is the future? What are the next things that you are going to do with SALUD?

PL: It is about involving more and more people *here* in, dare I say it, collective work with people *there*. So, for example, one hospital I have identified used to be supported by individual subscriptions from transport workers and cigar workers. We are looking to the Transport and General Workers Union and other transport unions to get their members involved in doing things to help that hospital. So that is one example. Because of the logistical difficulties and the fatigue amongst some in this country from collecting ambulances, I am going to go to Canada and Spain to speak to the trade unions there about doing what we have done with ambulances. Why Canada and Spain? Because there are scheduled Cuban ships that regularly visit ports in those countries, so we wouldn't have to divert one. It's about putting it all onto an organised basis.

I have ideas that I want to explore which are maybe too big, but I want to explore the possibility of involving corporate entities, or trade unions or whatever, here in supporting Cuban doctors in other countries. I think the one that I really want to try and tackle, but it is huge, is the question of AIDS in Africa. I was there in October 2000 and I was absolutely astonished, no that is not the right word, shocked, traumatised at the percentage of people in the country that are HIV positive. The figures that I got there were 1 in 9 of the population and 1 in 4 women between the ages of 18 and 28. And when you think of the consequences of a disease like HIV on that scale, it is unimaginable. I don't know any special cure for it but that is not what I am talking about. What I am talking about is whether with Cuban doctors and corporate financial assistance we could actually provide a resource there for the experts to use. It may not be practical but it is another thing I would like to explore.

Another thing that I am doing involves Cape Asbestos, a South African company responsible for the deaths of thousands, not just of its own workers from the asbestos mines, but also people who fitted out asbestos in ships on the Tyne or wherever and contracted the cancer that is caused by contact with asbestos. It is estimated that there are 70,000 potential cases and every time lawyers, presumably working on behalf of trade unions representing members in ship yards etc., have tried to take this company to court it has dissolved and appeared under another name in another country. Without going into all the details, as it is fairly confidential, it is estimated that there are at least 70,000 cases in South Africa, mainly miners and production workers, and they need to be registered so that they can pursue claims against Cape Asbestos. The situation now exists where it may be possible to do this. I have been asked if I can conjure up resources to find a diagnostic process or equipment to diagnose all these cases. I have to do that at the same time as the other work, and I come back to the balance with my family again, so I have to do this as much as possible by remote control. So that is where I find myself at the moment.

discussion

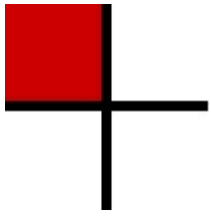
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Through a Glass Darkly: Tales of Super-Capitalism

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review of:

Banks, I. (1999) *The Business*. London: Abacus.
(HB: pp.393, £16.99, ISBN 0316648442)

Ballard, J.G. (2000) *Super-Cannes*. London: Flamingo.
(HB: pp.392, £16.99, ISBN 0002258471)

Powers, R. (2000) *Gain: A Novel*. London: William Heinemann.
(HB: pp.355, £15.99, ISBN 0434008621)

I am pleased. Very pleased indeed. Three authors, all renowned to a greater or lesser extent for exploring the 'darker' side of human existence, have recently tackled one of the most underwritten subjects in fiction: business. The novels of Banks, Ballard, and Powers deal with the big corporations and their powerful executives, so dominating our lives in an age of triumphal capitalism. Of course, the dysfunctions of capitalism have been discussed at length in the academic literature (most recently under the label 'critical management') and popular non-fictional texts (e.g. Naomi Klein's well received *No Logo* and the accompanying special report on the UK Channel 4 News in October 2000). But whatever their particular strengths, these critiques find it hard to equal the sheer invention, raw emotive power, and the delicate narrative constructions offered by master storytellers at the height of their creative powers.

So yes, I am pleased, but also somewhat surprised. The pervasive social phenomenon we conveniently refer to as 'Business' is not an obvious choice for authors whom at some stage in their career all have been referred to as 'avant-garde'. This review will examine how Banks, Ballard and Powers fare in their encounter with 'Business'. At this moment it suffices to say that after the treatment at the hands of our 'merry trio', the reader will find it hard to look upon big corporations and their executives in quite the same way.

A particular textual strategy I employed in writing this review is to incorporate the readers' reviews that appeared on the Amazon UK website. Whilst by no means implying that there exists such a thing as a 'typical' reader, or even being particularly enamoured with the

idea of giving a book a ‘score’, the readers’ responses, contradictory as they inevitably are, nevertheless provide a good flavour of the reception of the books. Table 1 below contains an overview of readers’ reactions (with 5 being the highest score) to the three books.

Author	Banks	Ballard	Powers
<i>No. of reviews</i>	50	7	25
5*	3	3	12
4*	10	2	4
3*	16	1	5
2*	13	1	2
1*	8	0	2

Table 1

The Business (1999)

Key protagonist Kate Telman is a Level 3, powerful senior executive in the Business. The eponymous organisation is ancient, rich and invisible:

The origins of what we now call the Business predate the Christian church, but not the Roman Empire, to which it might fairly be said we owe our existence, and which, at one point – technically at any rate – we owned. (p.37)

Kate gets involved in the machinations of Level 1 execs when the Business decides to buy its own state – Thulan – in order to acquire a seat at the United Nations. Banks traces Kate’s responses as the plot unfolds: her personal/professional life (of course for the 21st century executive the two are irrevocably intertwined) is very much the focus of the book. We are treated to various bizarre side-shows of the super rich business elite (such as a Scud missile owning American Level 1 executive), some of whom display behaviours which could at best be described as ‘eccentric’. Ultimately Kate ends up doing exactly what the business expects of her – conceding to marry the Prince of Thulan – but with the opposite aim of Level 1 executives, in that she intends to put her skills to use in protecting Thulan:

“For the first time in my life I can really do some good. Or fail in the attempt.”
“What you’re saying is their country needs you.”
“I suppose I am. Sounds a bit presumptuous, put like that, but yes.”
“You’re the fucking Peace Corps.”
“I’m the fucking Marines, Luce.” (p.391)

The Business got by far the roughest ride in the reviews, notwithstanding the fact that many of the readers were self-avowed Banks fans. To those disappointed readers the book appeared somewhat dull, with little of the dark humour and vicious plotlines that were so appealing in books like *Complicity* and *Use of Weapons*, making it almost an ‘un-Banksian’ book. As one reader put it:

I think that the important word here has been used in a previous review: savagery. It’s because he could be so downright nasty that I have found most of Iain Banks’ books compelling; his best works are epic in imagination, written at cracking pace, and well, horrible. It’s an element that is noticeable by its absence from *The Business*.

Another one suggested:

There is an overwhelming feeling that the subject being tackled is not compatible with Banks' writing style... Banks' obvious talents remain too constrained by a story that simply fails to rise to the heights of previous achievements.

So does business get the better of Banks? Perhaps a little. Undoubtedly this book lacks Banks' trademark excesses. His usual vicious irony is a little muted and a more gentle satire takes its place. But there are still the usual quirks of characterisation and unforgettable scenes are dotted around, making *The Business* as much of a page-turner as some of his best work.

So where does this reader stand? I would rate *The Business* quite highly, although I can well understand the frustration of some of the fans. The book is not 'savage' by any stretch of the imagination, which is a little disappointing in light of the business excesses described in the book. Yet, as an academic teaching business studies I can distinguish perhaps the concurrent realistic/parodic (and for this reason subversive) elements of the book a little more clearly. Indeed, Banks must have picked up quite a few copies of "Heathrow Airport Organisation Theory" (cf. Burrell, 1997) in his research efforts. Chapter 4, which opens with Kate offering "Let me explain some things about the way our company works..." is a gem in this respect. The Business is democratic: "we vote for our bosses". Executives above level 6 have to swear they have given up any religious faith they previously espoused (although the Business does not insist they actually stop worshipping in public or private). The Business practices total financial transparency, and corruption is frowned upon:

not because it is intrinsically evil but because it acts like a short-circuit in the machinery of business, or a parasite on the body corporate. (p.93)

Yet, the Business is:

quite happy to deal with corrupt regimes and people... In all this, of course, we're just the same as any other business or state. It's just that we've been doing it longer and are less hypocritical about it, so we're better at it. Practice makes perfect, even the practice of corruption. It ought to be one of our mottoes: Corruption – we deal with it. (p.94)

What is so striking in this novel is that the Business' executives find it so easy to manipulate the world – ultimately the quest for a UN seat is little more than a diversion for immensely rich and powerful people. They do it:

because they love the organising, the gamesmanship of it all, the buzz of getting away with adding zero to their personal worth just for the sheer hell of it. (p.375-376)

The reader could look upon *The Business* as an entertaining little fantasy about the astonishingly powerful, but when he or she turns to non-fictional descriptions of the behaviour of today's executives (e.g. Frank, 2001; Klein, 2000; Mokhiber and Weissman, 1999) it quickly becomes apparent that the line between parody and well-researched 'facts' is a very thin one indeed.

Super-Cannes (2000)

If Banks' fans are somewhat justified in complaining about a lack of savagery and nastiness, readers of J.G. Ballard's latest terrifying dystopia would be hard pushed to come to such a conclusion. Rape, voyeuristic sex, random violence, murder, drug-abuse, paedophilia; you name it, *Super-Cannes* provides it somewhere in its pages.

The actions described in the novel centre on the new high-tech Business Park of Eden-Olympia (loosely mirrored on the existing Business Park of Sophia Antipolis), part of Europe's newly emerging version of Silicon Valley at the Côte d'Azur. Transnational capitalism's most dynamic corporations (Ballard refers to a variety of household names - 3M, Exxon, Hyundai, BP Amoco, Hoechst, Ciba, Motorola, Unilever - throughout the novel) and their top executives have converged on Eden-Olympia. According to its resident psychologist, Wilder Penrose, Eden-Olympia is "a huge experiment in how to hothouse the future... an ideas laboratory for the new millennium." Ballard is quite clear about the topicality of his novel:

Whether we like it or not, Eden-Olympia is the face of the future. Already there are hundreds of business and science parks around the world. Most of us - or at least, most professional people - are going to spend our entire working lives in them. (p.254)

The key protagonist in *Super-Cannes* is Paul Sinclair, whose young wife Jane has been offered a position as doctor in Eden-Olympia. Shortly after their arrival Paul finds out that Jane's predecessor, David Greenwood, has died in a shooting spree during which he massacred a number of notable executives. *Super-Cannes* is part detective novel, as Paul takes on the role of sleuth trying to unravel the web of intrigue that led to the fatal shootings. However, in his every move he is carefully observed by Wilder Penrose. As Paul is later told:

"They ran a special trial designed to explain what went wrong with David. You were their laboratory rat. Penrose wanted you to take on David's role, and start to think like him." (p.335)

But the relation between Penrose and Sinclair is more complex than that between man-in-white-coat and laboratory rat. Penrose makes it his personal quest to convince Paul Sinclair (and by extension the reader) of the importance and validity of the Eden-Olympia social experiment (and by extension that of super-capitalism). It is a clever narrative strategy that allows Ballard to paint a convincing but ever so frightening picture of 21st century organisations, complete with glaring paradoxes.

"Today's professional men and women are self-motivated. The corporate pyramid is a virtual hierarchy that endlessly reassembles itself around them. They enjoy enormous mobility... In many ways I'm a kind of leisure coordinator. I run the adventure playground inside their heads. It's open to everyone here. You can explore your hidden dreams, the secret places of your heart. You can follow your imagination, wherever it leads." (p.96)

"So Eden-Olympia has gone beyond morality?"

"In a sense yes... A giant multinational like Fuji or General Motors sets its own morality. The company defines the rules that govern how you treat your spouse, where you educate your children, the sensible limits to stock-market investment... We can rely on their judgement, and that leaves us free to get on with the rest of our lives. We've achieved real freedom, the freedom of morality." (p.95)

As Paul gets closer and closer to the truth about what happened on the fateful day of the shootings, he discovers that many company senior executives are involved in perverse and deadly 'games'. In a chapter called 'The Therapy Programme', Penrose explains how what at first appears perverse and amoral is actually obvious, sensible and sane. This is very much Ballard at his best, juggling with notions of right and wrong, and throwing up huge question marks in the process¹. It's worth quoting extracts of the dialogue at some length:

Paul accuses Penrose:

"You've known everything about Eden-Olympia and done nothing?... It's another Alice world – corporate profits are higher than anywhere else in Europe and the people earning them are going mad together." (p.250)

Penrose counters:

"At Eden-Olympia, madness is the cure, not the cause of the malaise. Our problem is not that too many people are insane, but too few." (p.253-260)

He goes on to provide some background to the 'therapy programme':

"We're breeding a new race of deracinated people, internal exiles without human ties but with enormous power. It's this new class that runs our planet. To be successful enough to work at Eden-Olympia calls for rare qualities of self-restraint and intelligence. These are people who won't admit to any weakness and won't allow themselves to fail..."

Yet, these new super-humans were not functioning well:

Chief executives and main-board directors stumbled into work with persistent viral complaints. Worse than that, they all reported a loss of mental energy. Decision-making took longer, and they felt distracted by anxieties they couldn't identify. Chronic fatigue syndrome haunted the place..."

What the executives needed was:

A carefully metered measure of psychopathy. Nothing too criminal or deranged. More like an adventure-training course... Vigilante actions, incidents of deliberate road rage, thefts from immigrant markets, tangles with the Russian Mafiosi... The benefits were astounding. Immune levels rose through the ceiling, within three months there wasn't a trace of insomnia or depression... Corporate profits and equity values began to climb again. The treatment worked."

At this stage Paul is at best ambivalent about the goings-on at Eden-Olympia. Another character accuses him:

You secretly think Penrose is right, and a new kind of world is being born here, based on psychopathology. You're deeply impressed by Eden-Olympia." (p.351)

1 Ballard does drop a few subtle hints as to whom he believes is really deranged (if I am mistaken, then his vision of humanity is even darker than I think it is). He has Penrose say:

"Meaningless violence may be the true poetry of the new millennium. Perhaps only gratuitous madness can define who we are." (p.262)

Another character provides a very different view on "going beyond morality":

"Eden-Olympia's great defect is that there's no need for personal morality. Thousands of people live and work here without making a single decision about right and wrong. The moral order is engineered into their lives along with the speed limits and the security systems." (p.255)

As Paul continues his investigation he makes further discoveries. The three local hostages, presumably also killed by David Greenwood, actually had been executed under supervision of the Eden-Olympia security chief (who later gets murdered himself). David Greenwood had been running a full-scale paedophile ring and his mad revenge attack had been aimed at all the people who had corrupted him. The novel ends as Paul, realising “what needs to be done”, prepares to engage in a shooting spree of his own, having whisked away his wife to safety in London.

Whilst the number of reviews is much more limited (the book was published as recently as September 2000), Ballard’s novel can count on a much warmer reception than Banks’. There were only 2 dissenting voices (see table 1), the gist of which are captured in the following quote:

The characters in this work are under-whelmingly superficial and ‘wooden’. In the main the superficiality of the work seems to be a consequence of Ballard’s lack of knowledge/understanding of concepts and debates which are at the core of theorising about morality, late capitalism and E technologies.

A point which is both fair and unfair. Ballard has no interest whatsoever in providing an in-depth analysis of 21st century capitalism, the point being that one only has to scratch the surface to discover all its discontents. The ‘wooden’ characterisation is part and parcel of Ballard’s dark vision. Indeed the reverse would have detracted from the integrity of the work. *Super-Cannes* contains a brilliant narrative about new social structures and their associated psychopathologies. In terms of sheer shock-value and perspective jamming this novel is without equal among texts (conceived of here in their broadest sense, thus including the work of academics) on the 21st century organisation. Ballard has never shied away from controversy (viz. his novel *Crash*), but he seems to be growing fiercer as the decades pass. The irony in *Super-Cannes* is vicious indeed. The image of all-powerful executives – “they know the world would collapse without them, and they can get away with anything” (p.344) – turning into playgroup Nazis, with all the associated excesses, creates an effect close to the tradition of Grand Guignol. Yet, Ballard never quite pushes things so far that the plot would degenerate into self-parody. The parallels with events in 20th century history are drawn with chilling premonitory power:

We’re back in Weimar Germany, with a weekend Freikorps fighting the Reds. Sooner or later some corporate raider with a messianic streak will turn up... and decide that social Darwinism deserves another go... Wilder Penrose and Delage have to be stopped, along with their lunatic scheme. Not because it’s crazy, but because it’s going to work.. The whole world will soon be a business-park colony, run by a lot of tight-lipped men who pretend to be weekend psychos. (p.344-345)

Long live the New Economy!

Gain: A Novel (1998 US edition, 2000 UK edition)

Richard Powers’ novel is the most academic by far. It is significant that the author feels the need to flag up that *Gain* is a novel to a reader who might be taken in by the wealth of detail provided, thus thinking that the book is a non-fictional account. *Gain*, in parts, reads like a well-crafted business history, painstakingly researched (clearly involving more and

better research than the average business book) and convincingly composed with evocative details. For example, Powers' description of the evolving structures of the Clare organisation throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, of the role of its sociology department, and of the changing advertising fashions would be a great addition to any intelligent management textbook. *Gain* also contains all the information on soap making one would normally find in an instruction manual. Some less-impressed readers clearly found it hard to deal with the level of detail:

It reads like a Harvard Business School case report a major soap company/ conglomerate.

However, *Gain* already has received significant recognition in that the novel won the James Fenimore Cooper prize for Historical Fiction from the society of American Historians. In *Gain*, Powers tells a tale of people, ideas, and structures moving through time and mutually affecting one another. The social, the natural and the discursive are intertwined. Not totally surprising, therefore, that Bruno Latour considers *Gain* as the best business book ever written (a tip-off from one of the *ephemera* editors). Even a review in *Business Week* was full of praise for the book:

Gain is a demanding volume that will leave readers marvelling at the author's erudition and troubled over the apparent price of civilization.

The novel consists of two stories, one historical and one contemporary. The first tells of the rise of Clare, from its humble beginnings as an 1820s Boston soap shop to transnational corporation. At the very end of the book we reach the stage of organisational development Ballard describes in *Super-Cannes*, where the triumph of corporate America is complete and world-wide. The second story examines the life of Laura Bodey, a working mother living in Lacewood, Clare's corporate HQ, who is afflicted with ovarian cancer, a disease apparently caused by the chemicals released by one of Clare's factories. The plots of Clare and the development of capitalism in America, and the development of Laura's cancer run in parallel. Only in the last 50 pages or so, when Laura's cancer is fully developed and Clare emerges from the First World War, do the strands really come together. In telling Clare's story, Powers touches lightly on myriad aspects of American business life over the last 170 years, like the changing fashions of advertising and the history of labour and management. The textual device of inserting a variety of ads works particularly well. They provide a good trace of how Clare, and by extension, other 20th century organisations, see their place in the wider society.

We're waging war on the working class

Not that we want to hurt anyone. Just the opposite. As far as we're concerned, most people have been working too darn long. And we're fighting to change all that...
Class warfare? You bet! And we won't stop fighting until everybody's a member of the leisure class. (animated film, 1963)

(p.329)

Breathing Easy

This year Melissa blew out all her candles. In one breath. By herself. Last year, just humming along while the other kids sang Happy Birthday left her gasping for air. Until Respulín appeared among the rest of her life's presents, each new candle taxed her lungs to the breaking point. She could not run, sing, shout, or even jump a rope. She lived in constant fear. A spring day felt like being buried alive. Melissa turned nine today. Maybe she still can't spell oral leukotriene D4 receptor antagonist. But she does know how to spell Happiness.

The Biological Material Group

CLARE MATERIALS SOLUTIONS

(p.116)

A powerful theme that emerges from the book is that the tainted American soil will take revenge for the sins of the exploitative fathers. A theme elaborated to great effect by authors such as Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon, and taken up by various underground bands in the 1990s².

The disenchanted, bright young Director of Holdings, whom many thought was being groomed for bigger things, quit the firm in 1983 to take a position at Harvard Business School. There he made a name for himself with a carefully worked-out theory that American business could work once and only once, with a blank continent in front of it to dispose of (p.337).

Yet, *Gain* is certainly not a simplistic rant against corporate polluters, or even an anti-corporate book, as some readers suggested³. The description of the entrepreneurial Clare brothers is engaging and sympathetic. At no stage can one point to a particular individual or event that marks the shift from sympathetic entrepreneurs to evil corporation. *Gain* is ultimately an attempt to come to grips with the modern world and the forces that shaped, and continue to shape, it. Powers shows how the evolution of big business has enhanced our lives in many ways, while exacting a terrible price in other ways. It is a meditation on a particularly American idea of progress. This is not to say that the irony cannot be just as cutting as in Ballard's book at times:

For the war not only proved the impossibility of beating the giant corporations. It showed how much the public good depended upon them... General Motors and Union Carbide saved the world for democracy. Du Pont fired one shell in every five, laundering its windfall millions by expanding into

2 A particularly powerful example comes from Washington D.C. band Fugazi:

“...bury your heart u s of a
history rears up to spit in your face
you saw what you wanted you took what you saw
we know how you got it – your method equals wipe out
the end of the frontier and all that you own
under the blankets of all that you’ve done
memory serves us to serve you yet
memory serves us to never let you wipe out”
(Fugazi: ‘Smallpox Champion’, from *In on the Kill Taker*, Dischord Records 1993)

3 *Gain* attracted the most scathing individual criticisms of all three books:

“Read like an endless press release written by someone who knew nothing about the reasons why American business is such an immense wealth producing engine.”
“I find it extraordinary that Powers and other leftists still have 19th century, and in some cases, medieval, views of capitlism (sic), economics and class... Capitlism (sic) is the freedom to pursue your purpose in life. Powers and others have a problem with this.”

paints and polymers... The business of America would never again be anything but business...
(p.297)

The treatment of Laura Bodey and her family is no less critical/sympathetic than that of Clare. Initially the characters appear pretty two-dimensional (yes, wooden again), and come over as quite pathetic. Only towards the end of the book when Laura succumbs to her illness do the various characters (Laura, her children, her ex-husband) lift themselves out of the banality of their existence. It is as if only in great adversity humanity can shine through. The ending is incredibly moving and perhaps the only stage at which Laura's story pushes the Clare story in the background. This is where the two strands come together, if not at the level of events, then surely at the level of meaning. The book is so carefully crafted that it is inconceivable that this just happens by accident. Over to some of the fans:

In this novel, the conditions of American society enable characters to conceive of great visions and to pursue them with courage and enthusiasm. At the end of the day, however, they cannot escape the banal truth of their existence. Did so many brave, intelligent people labor and die just so that the heroine's teenage son can play video wargames in the comfort of a suburban bedroom? It is troubling, Powers suggests, that all our hopes and strivings should take us no further than this.

Powers is not out to shock, to write page-turners or to wrap you in a web of suspense; rather, the book calls for a simple meditation on how the way we've arrived dictates where we are and where we can go.

Although at a surface level this novel offers the least excesses (no playgroup Nazis or super-wealthy execs playing self-indulgent games), *Gain* ultimately presents the bleakest picture of the books reviewed here. In *The Business* the protagonist manages a fairytale-like escape to a (relatively) untouched country and its (relatively) uncorrupted prince; a chance to make a difference. In *Super-Cannes* the protagonist prepares for a massive shoot-up, a chance to stop (a particular manifestation of) evil in its tracks. In *Gain* there is nothing to do. The victimiser is not so much a corporate evildoer as it is humanity itself. Self-destruction may be inherent in the human condition Powers seems to hint: "People want everything. That's their problem", Laura Bodey announces from her deathbed. The following reflection on the degree of implication in our own predicament gives a flavour of the power and eloquence of Power's prose.

She vows a consumer boycott, a full spring cleaning... Her vow is hopeless. Too many to purge them all. Every hour of her life depends on more corporations than she can count... Who told them to make all these things? But she knows the answer to that one. They've counted every receipt, more carefully than she ever has. And wasn't she born wanting what they were born wanting to give her? Every thought, every pleasure, freed up by these little simplicities, the most obvious of them already worlds beyond her competence... She cannot sue the company for raiding her house. She brought them in, by choice, toted them in a shopping bag. And she'd do it all over again, given the choice. Would have to.
(p.304)

Implications?

We now have reached the point where the canon of organisation studies traditionally requires us to formulate an answer to the perennial question: What are the implications for practice? I have no problem with this, although in addressing the question I may need to

shift its implied meaning. The fundamental, if somewhat implicit, point of this review concerns the importance of narrative fiction in understanding organisation and management. It is a point I have elaborated on extensively elsewhere (De Cock, 2000; De Cock, 2001) and which has been the subject of two academic books (Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994; Knights and Willmott, 1999). Whilst I find myself in broad agreement with their editorial/authorial intention to shed light on the blindspots produced by the professional-scientific way of viewing organisational realities, I have some reservations about the facility with which the novels discussed in these books are passed through the lens of organisation theory. For example, Knights and Willmott suggest that:

Lodge takes full advantage of his licence as a novelist to condense a variety of experiences, which he translates into a dramatic narrative, [thus opening a space] for ways of making sense of work... that were previously excluded because they were considered alien and therefore irrelevant for the study of management. (1999: 8-9)

But the strong interpretation these authors supply⁴, which admittedly may work very well in a teaching context, dilutes the impact (the ‘condensed experience’, the alternative representation) of the novel. It sanitises that which should be left ‘raw’. Ultimately it is not the message – “What does the author ‘really’ have in mind? What principles does this text exemplify?” – but the considerations the readers assemble in the course of reading that should be of primary interest. Distracting, agitating, emotionally moving the reader, rather than rejecting or confirming particular theoretical points; therein lies the true value of reading narrative fiction on organisation and management. As Knights and Willmott acknowledge:

“For in order to have any impact at all, the break with convention often has to be exaggerated, polemical or controversial.” (1999: 14)

It is precisely the parodic, polemical, controversial, and sometimes savage, nature of the books reviewed here that makes them so important.

In my stumbling attempt to answer the “So what?” question, Rorty’s work on the importance of the novel proved inspirational. In his *Philosophical Papers*, Rorty (1991, 1998) outlined three ways in which literature can better address the problems of the West than philosophy (and by extension, organisation theory) can: first it is better able to genuinely illustrate diversity and plurality by re-description; second, it can employ a variety of narrative techniques which are more instructive than philosophical reasoning, e.g. it can use irony and ridicule to cut through the proliferation of theory we are all bogged down in; and third and most importantly, using narrative detail can evoke sympathy for the suffering of others and awaken in us a realisation of our own potential for cruelty and the desirability of solidarity. On all three counts our novels score highly. The business landscapes they portray are genuinely different from the ones we are used to in both the popular business press and academic organisational texts. *Gain*, *The Business* and *Super-Cannes* are superbly written, demonstrating a variety of narrative techniques; as for moments of irony, they cover the full spectrum of mild satire to vicious cynicism. It is in

4 In the case of *Management Lives* (Knights and Willmott, 1999) the four concepts of identity, insecurity, power and inequality channel the reader’s sensemaking.

these ironic/parodic instances that we are made most aware of our potential for cruelty (details about what sorts of cruelty we are capable of feature most prominently in *Super-Cannes*, but also to a significant extent in the two other books). The three novels reviewed demonstrate how much can be said about business when we turn to texts that are not bound to conventional social scientific or media requirements in their ways of interpreting the world. They offer us business activities as a way of illuminating the human condition, no mean feat. But these novels are not written to put the reader in an actional or policymaking frame of mind. In many ways they exemplify Peter Sloterdijk's (1991) critique of the kinetics of our time; a critique that can never provide a theoretical conscience for a practice. The result of such a critique is that actual processes are described in such a way that initially there is 'nothing to do', precisely because we are so deeply implicated in and defined by these processes. It only encourages to take a step back, perceive better, hesitate, stop doing what has always been done. Anything else will perpetuate and amplify our current predicaments, however beautiful the action slogans may sound.

In a piece where I have reflected on so much powerful prose, it is perhaps fitting to end with an eloquent, if rather polemical, quote:

[We should] realize how little theoretical reflection is likely to help us with our current problems... Once we have criticized all the self-deceptive sophistry, and exposed all the false 'self-consciousness', the result of our efforts is to find ourselves just where our grandfathers suspected we were: in the midst of a struggle for power between those who currently possess it... and those who are starving or terrorized because they lack it. Neither twentieth century Marxism, nor analytical philosophy, nor post-Nietzschean 'continental' philosophy has done anything to clarify this struggle... The horrors peculiar to this century... are no better describable with the help of more recent philosophy than with the vocabulary used by our grandfathers. (Rorty, 1991: 25-26)

[W]hen you weigh the good and the bad social novelists have done against the good and the bad the social theorists have done, you find yourself wishing that there had been more novels and fewer theories. (Rorty, 1991: 80)

Rorty certainly would agree that Banks, Ballard and Powers have redressed the balance a little.

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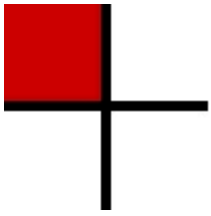
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Out of the Cynical Bind? A Reflection on Resistance in *Fight Club*¹

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University of Melbourne, Australia

review of:

Fight Club, USA, 1999

(Dir. David Fincher, 135 min., Cert. 18, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation)

Why Film?

A colleague was recently speaking to an eminent labour historian about the how we can understand the conditions that people have worked in through history. The labour historian commented that fictional texts are usually far more insightful than many social science investigations. Fictional work such as literature, poetry, visual arts and film often give a brilliant expression of how people experience modern workplaces.

The potential of fictional works as a source of ‘data’ when studying the social world has been recently opened up by the so-called linguistic turn (Jameson, 1998) that has pointed out meaning as a central question in understanding the social world. An obvious source of ‘data’ that is rich in meaning is the arts. This has led researchers in many social sciences to suggest that fictional works are an ideal means of investigating the social world. The strict distinction between scientifically validated truth and fictional work has been challenged. This has led to many researchers examining discourses (Calás and Smirchich, 1999). Writers like Boje (1995), Case (1999), Phillips and Zylidopoulos (1999) and Putnam and Fairhurst (2000) have argued that narrative is a key organisational process. They therefore suggest examining stories or narratives within organisations. This does not only mean examining the official narratives such as a dominant corporate culture, but also ‘marginal’ narratives such as workers’ stories. The importance of stories is not just limited to those told ‘within’ organisations. The way work has been understood has been shaped significantly by works of fiction. Think for instance of the novels of Charles Dickens that shaped nineteenth century England’s understand of the urban poor and sweated labour. The images of the dirt covered faces of coal miners was also permanently etched on the

¹ This review has benefited immensely from an ongoing writing project with Peter Fleming.

memories of the English middle classes by novels like D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, and photographs of coal miners emerging from the pits covered with coal dust.

One medium that has a significant history of representing people's experiences of organisation is film. In order to tap into this significant archive of reflection on the contemporary workplace, I shall focus on a single film that examines the brutalities of contemporary corporate capitalism – *Fight Club*. Moreover I will focus on one of the most significant themes in this film – strategies of resistance in the context of corporate capitalism.

Introducing *Fight Club*

David Fincher's film *Fight Club* is a look at the malaise produced by contemporary corporate capitalism in the United States. This world of water-coolers, multinational corporations, and rampant consumerism is investigated through the actions of Jack (played by Edward Norton) – a cynical technocrat employed by a multinational corporation, and Tyler (played by Brad Pitt) – a rebellious entrepreneur and film projectionist. Although both characters are central functionaries in the post-industrial accumulation process, both have a keen critical sense of the alienating nature of the economic and social system they prop up. After the two meet during a business trip on an aeroplane, Jack's shoe-box apartment is mysteriously blown up. As he has nowhere to go, he rings Tyler who meets him at a bar. Jack subsequently moves into Tyler's dilapidated house in an abandoned industrial zone. After some typical boyish antics, an evening of drinking leads to the two engaged in a 'friendly' brawl in the car park outside a seedy bar. This fight seems to reveal Jack's passions that have been destroyed by long hours of staring at a computer screen. Tyler and Jack feel this exhilaration needs to be shared with other men, who are invited to join in their underground fight club. Soon enough, fight club gains a cult following amongst men from all walks of life (car cleaners to computer programmers). As the ranks of fight club swells it takes on a definite flavour of a male secret society ('the first rule of fight club, you don't tell anyone about fight club'), and Jack begins to drift away from his work-a-day world, becoming ensnared in this parallel underground world.

Sensing the significant malaise fight club members share towards their corporate 'day world', Tyler begins to plot. He reasons that the passion, energy and commitment that the members of fight club currently direct towards fighting one another, could be organised in a more sustained effort against the very condition which causes their alienation – corporate capitalism. The newly focused fight club becomes a squad of terrorists who train their efforts on illicit activities such as destroying corporate art and replacing the saccharine airplane safety cards with cards that depict more realistic air disaster scenarios. Slowly these plans become more serious and culminate in the planned bombing of large credit card companies in order to crash the consumer credit system.

This particular film is relevant for organisation studies for a number of reasons. First it gives an excellent depiction of contemporary work and consumption through the eyes of one disgruntled 'knowledge worker' – Jack. It is therefore similar to films such as *Clockwatchers*, *Clerks*, and *Human Traffic* among many other films that depict the malaise

suffered by post-industrial workers. What is particularly interesting for organisation studies are the patterns of resistance to corporate capitalism found in *Fight Club*. In order to contribute to the burgeoning literature on resistance in organisations (e.g. Jerimer, Knights and Nord, 1994), in particular the current debate around 'micro' and contingent forms of resistance, I will examine three forms of resistance to corporate capitalism in *Fight Club* – cynicism, parody, and organised opposition. I will then consider the violence driven model of masculinity that underpins many of these forms of resistance depicted in *Fight Club*, and conclude with an agenda of resistance through 'strategic universalism'.

Cynicism on Planet Starbucks

The first aspect of *Fight Club* we are struck with is the airless world of pre-prepared airline food, the typically blandly furnished office cubicles, and bloodless technocratic tasks in which the story begins. The workplace has exceeded alienation, it is a world of endless games of Microsoft *Solitaire*, and terminal boredom disguised by a succession of 'action lists'. It is the world of white-collar alienation that critical management studies and labour process theory have recently focused attention on. The most morally questionable tasks are undertaken in the guise of simple technocratic calculation. Jack's job is to calculate whether it would be cheaper for a large car corporation to recall cars with potentially fatal faults, or to simply pay out the reparations for the fatalities resulting from these faulty vehicles. Although Jack deals on a day-to-day basis with life and death, he is plagued by a lack of any semblance of meaning or emotion in his work. The attempts by various functionaries within the organisation to 'motivate' or 'inspire' him are instantly seen through, and come off looking like hollow promises. The reactions of Jack to his post industrial family are similar to the cynical reactions to corporate culture programs we find described in Casey (1995), Kunda (1992), and Collinson (1992). In an almost perfect mirror of Jack's cynicism, we find the engineers Kunda studied announcing that the corporate culture was 'California bathtub crap'.

Equally important in *Fight Club* is the realm outside of work. We find Jack attempting to seek solace in various consumption activities. In one scene he fantasises over a catalogue of new furniture that will allow him to remodel his shoe-box apartment. This furniture passes itself off as an easy tonic for the woes of post-modern life, and will construct his nest as a genuine retreat in which he can nourish his soul. However, Norton sees through the promises of this new-age consumerism with ease, cynically pointing out "I would flip through catalogues and wonder, "What kind of dining set defines me as a person?" We used to read pornography. Now it was the Horchow Collection" (*Fight Club Script*: 11).

Jack also attempts to conquer his alienation in therapy groups. Jack attends a variety of support groups for a various of afflictions that he is not, and has never been, affected by. Although Jack does not share the 'real' concerns of his fellow group members, he gains a kind of comfort that he cannot find in the modern metropolis or his place of work. This comfort is a cynical one as Jack can see through the methods of these therapy groups, understanding they are based on fantasies fuelled by a 1960s nostalgia. He goes along with these fantasies nonetheless because they make him feel good. Indeed it is this cynical 'enlightened false consciousness' (Sloterdijk, 1984) that characterises Jack's world at the

beginning of *Fight Club*. He can ‘ironically’ see through Starbucks, photocopier slavery, and a world dominated by corporations. The dilemma Jack (and others like him) face is that he is quite enlightened about the ‘true state of affairs’, and needs little ‘consciousness raising’. However Jack continues to *act* as if he had accepted this state of affairs he knows to be irrational and morally perverse. He continues to buy IKEA tables. He continues to attend support groups. He continues to complement his boss on his boring and predictable ties. Most of all, he keeps the wheels of the corporation he works for rolling in a well-oiled manner.

Parodying the Flesh Market

The initial world that one encounters in *Fight Club* is a telling portrait of the cynical reactions of working people to living amongst a world increasingly dominated by large corporations. This leads the viewer to directly encounter the cynical bind in which many find themselves in - we can see perfectly clearly what is wrong with this world, but feel powerless to challenge it all the same. The only ‘escape attempts’ (Cohen and Taylor, 1976) from this corporate world extend to a cynical joke at the expense of a superior’s tie, and illicit use of counselling groups. With the introduction of Tyler Derden (played by Brad Pitt) we find that the pathetic nature of this cynical bind is quickly collapsed.

When Jack meets Tyler, they develop a rapid agreement as to the problems with the corporate dominated world in which they exist. Where they part ways is with the great question ‘what is to be done’. Unlike Jack, Tyler is not pleased with the cynical sneer as a strategy of engagement. Instead Tyler begins by being a savage participant in the market, who lives by the everyday dictum, ‘one must take advantage of the corporation before it takes advantage of you’. Tyler does this by participating in an underground economy of making soap from the body-fat disposed of in liposuction procedures. Unlike the passive cynicism of Jack, Tyler displays a kind of ‘active’ cynicism. He takes the demands of the corporate world at their word. He engages in the free market (World Bank), he recycles (Body Shop), he enjoys (Coke). But Tyler delivers these demands of the corporate world back in an all-too-literal manner. Through selling soap made from human fat for exorbitant prices, Tyler is able to parody the irrationalities of consumerism – “Tyler sold it (the soap) to the stores for twenty bucks a bar. God knows what they charged. We were selling rich women their own fat back to them” (*Fight Club* Script: 71). The most subversive point made here is that there is a market for everything – even human flesh.

Strategies of parody are not limited to *Fight Club*. Parody as strategy of resistance is seen in Jaroslav Hašek’s novel *The Good Soldier Šveik* where a recalcitrant soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army named Šveik throws the military machine into disarray through obsessively following his superiors’ orders to the letter (Fleming and Sewell, 2000). Similarly, unions have realised the ability to paralyse a labour process through the parodying process of ‘working to rule’ – that is taking the bureaucratic rules of an organisation at their word. Finally, it has become a popular strategy amongst anti-consumer groups to parody corporate advertising in order to critique the products they are selling. For instance, the organisation Adbusters brings us the sickly ‘Jo Chemo’ instead of

'Jo Camel'. In each of these instances we find that parody can be used as a potential force of resistance to organisations beyond the screen.

The success of parodies such as Tyler's as an effective form of resistance against the irrationalities he identified in contemporary capitalism is questionable. Through the act of parody he continues to reproduce the cash nexus he loathes so much, albeit in a clever, mocking fashion. His parody of corporate capitalism merely ends up producing an 'exciting new start up company' which may grace the pages of a business magazine. At the same time this kind of parody allows a feeling that corporate capitalism doesn't have the fascist tendencies many attribute to it after all. Indeed one could point to the ability of capitalism to produce a parody of itself, not take its values too seriously, or even develop an 'ironic' attitude towards itself (Rorty, 1989). Although not all forms of parody are guilty of surreptitiously propping up the social relations they try to critique, it is possible that parodying a system which one aims to critique may simply reproduce this very same system with a playful, ironic character. Indeed, as Richard Harvey Brown (1987) suggests, it is vital to discern whether the parody or ironic gestures one produces are functional (by providing an pressure release valve for the pressures of a given system) or radical (by significantly challenging the very basis on which this society operates).

Organised Resistance in *Fight Club*

If *Fight Club* remained as a dynamic between the cynical Jack, and the parody driven Tyler, it would have been an exploration of reactions to the contemporary workplace and consumer society. *Fight Club* would have been on the familiar terrain of 'micro strategies' of resistance to the contemporary organisation of production. What make *Fight Club* push beyond these bounds is the path of transgression and transformation that Jack finds himself dragged down by Tyler as his antics move away from playful lawlessness and gradually make the viewer increasingly uneasy. This unease seems to be injected into the situation as soon as Jack and Tyler's minor and boyish challenges to 'the system' move from randomly breaking windows in abandoned factories with golf balls to inflicting damage on their own bodies through regularly participating in organised brawls. The bruises and spots of blood that Jack sports during his day job begin to make his boss and co-workers uneasy. Indeed the fight club is a space where the physically harmless nature of the work-a-day world of corporate life is violently inverted. This inversion comes in the form of organised bare-fisted fights between two men, while others stand around and cheer. The normal spectator role whilst watching televised sport is dropped in favour of an active, very bodily participation (all spectators must fight on their first night). Indeed this is a similar inversion to the active participation in overturning the rules and mores of the normal world that were performed in medieval carnivals (Bakhtin, 1984).

An important aspect of this overturning of social mores is that it does not have the same ad-hoc nature as the cynical sneer or the parodying gesture. Rather, the fight club is organised. Being organised, fight club does not take the corporate world as its basis, but rather brings into being another basis from which to challenge the demands of work and consumerism. Tyler is quite clear that fight club is set up to counteract the malaise that he sees its members wallowing in. The first way in which it counteracts this malaise is by the

carnavalesque fighting. The second, more radical strategy pursued by Tyler is to organise the members of fight club into a focused group of anti-corporate terrorists. The activities this group initially mount are of a symbolic nature such as destroying corporate art, smashing up chain store windows, and placing air-plane safety cards depicting the horror of a real air accident. These actions of 'symbolic guerrilla warfare' are similar to campaigns that are already being carried out around the world, such as defacing sexist advertising, reworking corporate art, and creating illegal art work on store fronts². In this respect *Fight Club* reflects the growing attitude of dissent to corporate globalisation, and resistances to it through acts of 'symbolic guerilla warfare'. *Fight Club* highlights resistance that has been sharply brought into focus by an international wave of protest that started at the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle in November 1999, and continued through Washington, Melbourne, and Prague in 2000.

The fight club however goes beyond important symbolic gestures such as the destruction of corporate art. Instead of defacing more Starbucks coffee houses, they turn their tightly organised capacities to destroying one of the central systems which keeps consumer capitalism functioning – the credit card system. In order to wipe consumers credit records (which would free many from the burden of paying them back through mindless labour), the fight club, under the direction of Tyler, goes about planting bombs under inner city sky-scrapers. What we see on the screen is truly quite unusual – a vision that corporate capitalism can actually be shaken to its very core in order to establish a less alienating world. This is a sentiment that seems to have suffered a degree of demise in the critical imagination along with concepts such as justice, equality, and non-capitalist social relations.

Violence and Masculinity

Fight Club can be read as a significant insight into strategies of resistance that are employed within, and against contemporary capitalism. However, underpinning the forms of resistance identified in *Fight Club* is a very strong issue of masculinity. The fight club is an all male secret society. The primary goal of the fight club appears to be resisting corporate capitalism, but not because of its dynamics of exploitation, inequity, and environmental degradation. Rather corporate capitalism is to be resisted because contemporary work, consumption, and therapy have alienated men from true masculinity, not allowing them to be 'true men'. This 'gender alienation' can be seen clearly in Tyler's diagnosis of the world in which fight club operates:

"Look at the guys in fight club. The strongest and smartest men who have ever lived - - and they're pumping gas and waiting tables; or they're slaves with white collars. Advertising has them chasing cars and clothes. A whole generation working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy shit they don't need." (Fight Club Script: 71)

The fight club is explicitly set up to overcome this gender alienation, and assert what it means to be a 'true man' once more.

2 See www.adbusters.org for some excellent examples. Earlier examples can be found in the artwork of the French Situationists.

As 'masculine', like 'feminine', is not innate or self evident but constructed (Silverman, 1992; Brewis, Hampton and Linstead, 1997), it is important to ask what form of masculinity is asserted in *Fight Club*. The central feature of masculinity in *Fight Club* is obviously violence. By beating, and being beaten, during the fighting matches the men in fight club are able to assert and develop their sense of masculinity in the face of characterless corporate world which has previously sapped this violent masculinity:

"A guy comes to fight club for the first time, and his ass is a wad of cookie dough. After a few weeks, he looks carved out of wood. He trusts himself to handle anything." (Fight Club Script: 49)

This assertion of masculinity as a resistance strategy seems to be based on an idea of a 'real man' who is independent from emasculating corporations and consumption activities. Indeed these ideal figures are probably the cowboys, action heroes, and hard-boiled detectives the men of fight club watch on television and film.

This assertion of violent masculinity carries on from the fight club into the action oriented terrorist activities. As the terrorist unit based at Tyler and Jack's seedy house develops, one begins to recognise an army boot camp, even with tinges of fascism. The principles that these crack troops live under appear to be conditioned by violence and authoritarian order. The actions taken by this increasingly fascist group are also oriented by violence. Instead of picketing credit card companies or planting a virus in their computer systems, the 'brotherhood' opts for an extremely violent option worthy of their on-screen heroes – blowing up the buildings in which the credit card companies are housed.

The theme of resistance which is driven by a threat to masculinity is not unique to *Fight Club*. Collinson (1992) points out that one of the key forms of solidarity amongst the factory workers he studied was a sense of working class masculinity, which was threatened by proposed changes and challenges to the union. A similar point of resistance in organisations amongst the printing workers Cockburn (1983) studied was the (re)assertion of their sense of masculinity against management. Masculinity, in particular violent masculinity, continues to colonise how resistance becomes possible both inside *Fight Club* and beyond.

The strategies of resistance we find in *Fight Club* are underpinned by a particular construction of masculinity. This construction of what it means to be a man is oriented around violent resistance to the emasculating world of corporations and consumption. Although this strategy of resistance may appear appealing on the silver screen, it is questionable whether the particular model of violent masculinity that underpins it is an effective, and indeed ethical approach to resistance. Although violence has been a common strategy of resistance to capital, we must recognise the possible draw-backs. The violent masculine model of resistance underpinning the fight club's strategies simply reasserts the violence of various hues (be it physically painless alienation, or more immediate exploitation of peoples bodies) that fight club exists to challenge. As the fight club becomes more organised and begins to take more radical strategies, we begin to recognise in the fight club the very structures of the corporations which they hope to challenge. The viewer begins to see in this squad of budding terrorists the very behaviors of the corporate automatons they hoped to escape being. Moreover, the men of the fight club seem to simply reassert the violence and militarism which bell hooks (1996) suggests exists at the basis of contemporary (American) capitalism.

Reclaiming the Universal?

Fight Club offers us a limited range of strategies of resistance. In particular the strategy of resistance *Fight Club* ultimately recommends to the viewer is based upon a reassertion of the model of violent masculinity that underlies the very system fight club hopes to challenge. In the remainder of this review I aim to ask what are the other possible approaches to resistance that reach beyond the kind of violent, masculine resistance we find in *Fight Club*. To explore this question, I will attempt to reach 'beyond' *Fight Club*, and concentrate on the general issue of resistance. One strategy of resistance I suggest that does not seek violent dialectical opposition or passive cynical resignation is radical identification with the espoused values of society.

One typical critical approach when examining the espoused values of our society is to dialectically oppose them as they provide the ideological underpinning for capitalism, modernity, patriarchy and so on. This leads to actions that range from blistering critiques of dominant systems of thought (eg. Liberalism) in the pages of academic journals to brutal strategies of 're-education' such as those used during the Chinese Cultural Revolution or the era of anti-communist hysteria in the West. This strategy of resistance is of course exemplified by violently didactic Tyler and his followers towards the end of *Fight Club*.

A second common critical strategy is to examine the ideals espoused by a particular system, then turn to the empirical realities within this system, and point out the yawning gap between them. The next step in this strategy is to sadly reject the espoused ideals in favour of nasty brutish 'reality'. This of course is the kind of cynicism that characterises common responses to corporate culture and many critiques of globalisation. The key problem with this strategy is that it simply asserts the existing state of affairs, and leave the possibility for social change disabled by the 'unstoppable realities' one observes. This is the strategy exemplified by the early cynical Jack in *Fight Club*.

In the remainder of this review, I would like to chart out an alternative strategy of resistance - 'strategic universalism' (Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000) which operates by simply taking the espoused values of a particular society at their word. 'Strategic universalism' is *universal* because it recognises any particular articulation of values relies on a claim to an Other, an unquestioned, and unchallenged basis. It is *strategic* because it recognises that the basis of Other is consistently slipping away and it is impossible to subject it to a systematic analysis. Given a particular ethico-political project, we may want to cautiously embrace a set of particular universals on which our articulations are based. For instance, to challenge the masculine violence that appears to underlie the fight club's resistance strategies, we unwittingly invoke the 'universal' of equality that is challenged by the exclusionary masculinity of the fight club. We may also invoke the 'universal' of peace that is undercut by the violence leveled by the fight club against its own members and others (Tyler's 'girlfriend' Marla becomes a target). A strategy of resistance through strategic universalism would explicitly recognise that articulations are based on universals, and that these universals may be evoked for an ethico-political project. Moreover this strategy would radicalise these universals that common articulations are based upon. This would mean radicalising or universalising commonly espoused values such as democracy, care for the natural environment, and equality.

One condition that modern capitalism has produced which may serve as its failing is a set of statements of values. The typical values espoused by a modern capitalist nation include democracy, equality, human rights, and care for the environment. However we are consistently 'putting off' or deferring the achievement of these basic values in favour of further repression. For instance, at the beginning of *Fight Club* we find Jack working in a job that he hates in order to purchase consumer goods so he may gain a faint glimmer of happiness. A similar scenario is that of impoverished workers who are told by the IMF to curtail their demands for wages so that market forces can be 'got right' in order to deliver them freedom. By simply taking seriously the basic value claims that institutions like nation states and the United Nations operate under, it is possible to chart futures far different from the inevitable acceptance of the market. If we are told that we live in a democracy, then why is it we have practically no say in how our workplaces, government institutions and schools operate? Why can't we have democracy now? If we are told that we live in an increasingly prosperous society, why is it that so many people are excluded from the so-called benefits of the market? Why can't all benefit from this prosperity now?

There is a whole raft of examples where social movements have simply 'taken seriously' the espoused values of the dominant and oppressive aspects of society in order to negotiate some degree of emancipation. The feminist movement partially relies on taking seriously the values of equality that are espoused in the founding documents of patriarchy. The union movement relies on taking seriously the founding assertions of liberal capitalism by radicalising freedom to include not just the freedom of capital, but the freedom of workers. Indeed Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggest that by simply taking the commonly agreed upon values of democracy seriously, using them 'to the hilt', then a significant radical agenda of changes to contemporary society emerges.

This strategy of radicalising the espoused values of our time may prove to be very productive in advancing the project of emancipation. By taking seriously the broad claims of democracy, one is rapidly focused on asking the question why is democracy limited to a vote every three years or so? Why is it not possible to have a say in how the institutions we work in are structured? By taking seriously the ethic of human rights espoused by most nation-states and corporations, one is able to ask why is it that so many of people's basic human rights are contravened on an everyday basis, and what proposals we can make to eliminate these abuses. David Harvey (2000) points out that if we simply take the United Nations' 'Declaration of Human Rights' (a document which many nations are signatory to) at its word, then many of the practices associated with corporate capitalism would be up for debate. The ridiculously unjust health system of the United States (held up as a paragon for other countries) convenes basic rights to health detailed in article 25. The anti-union policies being pursued by many governments contravene the International Labour Organisation's 'declaration on fundamental principals and rights at work' and article 23 of the declaration of human rights.

A careful examination of key documents containing the espoused values of many nation states and global institutions reveals quite a significant project for critical organisation theory. Three key international documents that represent the espoused ethics that are to be taken seriously are the United Nations' 'Declaration of Human Rights', the International Labour Organisation's declaration of the fundamental rights at work, and various United

Nations' environmental agreements³. Each of these documents charts out what it is we should expect as basic rights. The point for critical organisation theory is to not only highlight the yawning gaps between what is espoused and what organisations actually do, but to tease out what these espoused values might actually mean for organisations. Most of all, a project of strategic universalism for critical organisation studies would ask how this gap between the espoused values and the reality may be closed in practice.

Conclusion

In order for critical organisation studies to advance its espoused purpose of emancipation a continued focus on strategies of resistance is vital. The film *Fight Club* dramatically raises the possibility of resistance to corporate capitalism. In particular we find three different strategies of resistance in *Fight Club* – cynicism, parody, and organised resistance. Only the last strategy of resistance appears to provide an effective challenge. However this strategy of resistance is underpinned by a model of violent masculinity that simply reasserts many of the structures that the fight club hopes to challenge. In order to provide a model of resistance that avoids the problems associated with this violent approach to resistance found in *Fight Club*, I have sketched the outlines of a 'strategic universalism'. This not only provides a fragile solution to the issue of how it may be possible to articulate resistance beyond violent opposition or passive cynicism, it also charts a significant political program for critical organisation studies.

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3 For the United Nations' 'Declaration of Human Rights' see <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/index.htm>. For the key United Nations' Environmental agreements see <http://www.unep.org>. For the International Labour Organization's 'Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work' see: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/decl/index.htm>

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discussion

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