

## Unwrapped: Let's Get Out of Here

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We live in a time of packages. Everything comes in set, glossed, and 'just so'. This also seems true of scientific journal issues: either they are deliberately 'special issues' where the theming is the very organizing principle, or they are apparently 'open issues' where an editorial constructs a thematic line through the various papers in the issue. Within poststructuralist organization studies, with its especially elastic and, well, ephemeral, concepts and theories, the temptation of thematizing is, as history teaches us, very hard to resist. However, in the current issue of *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* this will, as one may have sensed by now, be avoided. There will be no packing, setting or thematizing. There will only be the event of juxtapositioning and listing, which, really, according to Foucault, is the event of colliding: "[the] event – a wound, a victory-defeat, death – is always an effect produced entirely by bodies colliding, mingling, or separating" (1977: 173).

The reason for not creating a set out of the articles in this issue lies not in the difficulty of thematizing the actual articles in this issue of *ephemera*. On the contrary. Their manifold and rich composition, and their head on dealing with their focus makes them, again, susceptible to succumb to a number of unifying themes which we shall resist the temptation to spell out here because, as editors, having already tried to academize and streamline the papers in the long and painful processes of reviewing and editing, we do not accept the adequacy of letting yet another layer of meaning suck through the texts. Just one author is often one too many, and these texts are already burdened with five, seven or ten authors. On top of this number come their readers.

The fact that this number of *ephemera* is an event and not a package, does not stem from any certainty that events as such do not become packaged and thematized. Again, on the contrary, this is exactly what events most generally do, and the components of these packages and sets have often been coordinated and meticulously calibrated as to fit to the overall design of the performance of the event. Organizations prove, as always, to be particularly unashamed expressions of this condition of packaging, and one needs only to turn to the theme park in order to be fully confronted with an especially mean but in no way exceptional case: in the theme park, all events are carefully managed under, as the idea goes, the values of the relevant consumer segment. A family theme park would then *not* include in its package, say, ecological crisis, racism, sodomy, domestic violence, incest, or divorce. Neither would it include sublime happiness,

excessive sexual pleasures, or orgone joy. Not because at least some of these components are not present in virtually all families in the world, but exactly because they are: a theme(-park) generalizes and universalizes all events and detracts from them the singularities they might express. Repeated long enough, we end up with what is known as 'history'. Not incidentally, most theme parks are 'historical', and, consequently, most families being driven through them hysterical, since the excess of the event always escapes from our attempts to capture it ('Say "Hello" to Mickey!'), and returns as 'irritation' and 'whinging', recognizable as simply floating desire ('Fuck all plastic and purple colours in the world, I want to get out!'). The event expresses that 'something' which always escapes history (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 171). History is what happens, but the event is *what we make of* what happens. History, then, is not thematized, but flares up, suddenly and inconveniently, in a moment of danger (Benjamin, 1999: 247).

But how do we escape this packaging, this 'pigeon-holing' and branding? How can we 'park the theme'? Perhaps the contribution of this issue of *ephemera* is exactly that then, a collection of pieces that look for the exit signs, a way out from what might be seen by many as an inescapable themeparking (*v.*) of modernity.

This process begins with a short experimental movie, through which Alf Rehn plays with the concept of mundanity and meaningless, emptiness and void as he wanders through and gets stuck in a deserted office environment. With no commentary other than the juxtaposition of texts and images, Rehn forces us to listen to our internal dialogue as we desperately try to make sense of what we see on the screen: ascribing meaning where perhaps there is none. Filling in the gaps in the film from our own experiences we construct its script – as if all that matters is the linguistic interpretation of events. Perhaps it would be better if we just shut up.

Even more so since we are, according to William Burroughs, ventriloquist's dummies, not speaking, but being spoken. Burroughs is the engine in Christopher Land's paper on apomorphine silence, a silent call for shouting up and getting our act together: we need to get off this cop ridden planet. Reading Burroughs, Land's fascination of the so-called 'linguistic turn' in philosophy which, on its own footing, has run through the social sciences and thereby created a veritable themepark for postmodern organization theorists, is modest. Language is a virus, it spreads like a disease and one will never know its master, only, it is not, as Nietzsche (in vain) tried to teach us, the *I*. Much as Rehn's movie, Land's paper also addresses the idea of *another voice* than language, a virulent inner voice, a sub-consciousness with capabilities of resistance. This surplus of meaning, this 'something' which always escapes history is a part of the event of any text, and Burroughs' method is as paradoxical as it is straightforward: cut up the text, assemble it anew. Only when sampling reached popular music should this method become common practice: as for now, Land's 'own' experiments with the cut-up method is for you to experience. And get out of.

The unfortunate dominance of English native speakers in organization theory is one way language exploits and dominates us (see Sørensen, 2005), and it is for sure not broken by publishing this volume of *ephemera*. Perhaps it is, at least, provided with what the editors consider a welcome contrast by Eric Fay's recognisably 'French' contribution,

subtitled 'a theory of open deliberation in organizations'. As common sense rationality, and, by implication, language alienates us from our bodily experiences, Faÿ introduces Ricœur, Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Henry in order to construct a theory that embodies rationality with an 'innate authority' and an empowering way out. In an almost Burroughsque vein, Faÿ quotes Merleau-Ponty for the following report: "I feel destined to move in a flow of endless life (...) along with which there comes to me the feeling of my own contingency." This contingency can, however, become the vantage point for letting life manifest itself. Not, however, through language as such, but through returning to the moment of silence under the chatter of words in which rationality is suspended and the phenomenological *époque* is revealed as the condition for a new equivocation, a new exercise of the imagination. Fearlessly, Faÿ invites the reader into his ethnographic experimentarium, to see what such a new deliberation might sound like in an organizational setting, potentially offering us ways to live that escapes common language.

In contrast, Mark Tadajewski does not see the necessity of a real organization in order to go poaching. Tadajewski ventures directly into the abode of the paradoxical incarceration of somewhat malfunctioned intellectual adaptations known as a conference. Of all conferences one on 'philosophy in management', and of all places held at Oxford. Meandering, Tadajewski revisits possible roles philosophy (or 'philosophy') could take up 'in management'. Critical falsification could be one, and extended discussions on Karl Popper and Galileo points in this direction, the atmosphere only slightly disturbed by the Gibson Burellsque assertion, that, as far as philosophy in management goes, the debate is characterized by conversation and gossip, rather than by dialogue. The pressure for tenure, for feeding the evaluation machines and for handling one's personal vanity makes organization theorists highly pathdependent in the urge to fill the gaps. This notwithstanding, Tadajewski considers the possibility that 'thinking carnivalesque' may equally offer us a way out of ordering, this time the order of academic circles, Ox-fordism and the Oedipus of the reference system (c.f. whoever, whenever, at any page).

Further pursuing the jolly good theme of UK-bashing, *ephemera* introduces the 'Copenhagen School' of Niklas Luhmann reception: Ole Thyssen's paper on the invisibility of the organization is different from most poststructuralist organization theory. Not just – here we go again – because Thyssen is a non-UK/US scholar, but *also* because he does not write about French philosophy: the English dominance in organization theory might be a lamentable fact, but not when it comes to the primary sources. They are all French. However, Thyssen makes a call for adapting Luhmann's paradoxical – and Germanic – system theory to organizations (a task Luhmann himself did not quite manage within his otherwise extremely productive lifespan), from the premise (and this premise is a part of the paradox) that organizations are invisible, since they consist solely of communication. So, Rehn's movie might not, after all, show a real organization, nor its artefacts, since the organization itself, i.e. its communication, is absent from the pictures. This methodological problem receives an elegant solution in Thyssen's adaptation of Luhmann: the way not *out of* the organization, but *into* it is by observing how the communication makes use of the name as a token of its workings and, furthermore, how rhetoric can become the prime technology of management in order to 'run' this invisible organization, i.e. create the premises for the continued

autopoiesis of the communicating system. Rhetoric can also, however, serve as an analytical tool for the organization theorist who is now looking for an organization, and Proust's master novel *Remembrance of Things Past* serves as Thyssen's empirical material. This is only surprising if one overlooks that this counterintuitive approach meet up, somewhere behind our backs, with the recent tradition of analyzing organizations as scripts and texts, stories and narrative. This then becomes an issue of power and politics: which stories prevail? Which go under? The manager, says Thyssen, is responsible for the text and stories of the organization, and in the rhetorical practice of the manager the organization becomes, to a certain degree, visible, if only as 'a many headed monster'....

For readers who are still in need for ways out, the note by Gazi Islam and Michael J. Zyphur could provide this. Taking as point of departure the plethora of television screens in a present day organization – a Business School – they call into question whether 'getting out' is the most effective way to 'escape' surveillance. Writing through the work of Edgar Allen Poe, Islam and Zyphur sketch two employees' responses to the 'blind eye' of these screens noting how streams of continual information emanating from them serve to structure viewers' perceptions of the external world – in doing so, oppressing other possible interpretations. This is a tale of resistance, of subject and object and the blurring of the two. Islam and Zyphur's note questions whether acts of resistance merely affirm the divide and further subjugate the actor to her/ his oppressor or by contrast, whether passivity is the only meaningful response: in inertia there is at least the possibility of rejecting the very existence of the Other after all. In a delightful antagonistic style, Islam and Zyphur do not try to resolve this dilemma only to set up the problem. This effectively leaves the reader to choose which argument they prefer before being reminded in the conclusion that choices, opinions, beliefs, world-views or whatever label we use only exist because they turn around other 'poles of critical being' that simultaneously negate and reinforce them. Neat packages in glossy wrapped cartons cannot exist without the possibility of being torn open and exposed too.

Finally, we have three book reviews included in this issue, all addressing consumption and consumer culture in some way. Firstly, Phillip Hancock provides a frank assessment of Alan Bryman's (2004) text *The Disneyization of Society*, written as an accessible undergraduate introduction to the pervading ideas and currents that Bryman has attributed to the influence of the Disney Corporation on everyday life. In his review, Hancock discusses the extent to which 'accessibility' and 'simplicity' unfortunately go hand in hand as a trade off with (at least some degree of) intellectual depth throughout the text.

The focus of our second review – by Yiannis Gabriel – is also a book aimed at the undergraduate market, this time Paul Ransome's (2005) *Work, Consumption and Culture: affluence and social change in the twenty-first century*. In it, Gabriel finds a welcome recognition of the intertwining nature of work and consumption but also a failure to extricate the complexities of consumption and to over-emphasise the hegemonic properties of certain discourses of consumer culture. Once again, we see a triumph of access over critical evaluation.

The final review in this issue is from Gavin Jack, who discusses Liz McFall's (2004) *Advertising: A cultural economy* and finds there a brazen willingness to tackle the complexity of consumption full on. Fall's text critiques the historical, social and technological myopia of several contemporary commentators on advertising and Jack concludes his review stating that "this book should be on the book-shelves and reading list of all students and scholars of advertising" begging the question whether academics should be writing 'accessible', 'beginners', easy-read' style texts at all.

The final unwrapping is always left to the reader, but be reminded that what wrapping in general conceals is not 'the real thing'. Wrapping conceals the fact that the real thing is folded, that what is wrapped is always already wrapped in itself. A thematic wrapping, like a family theme park, conceals the forces at play in a family, forces of creation, of standstill and of death, conceals the folds of the family, its history, alright, *but also its utopia*. To possess, says Deleuze, is to fold, in other words, to convey what one contains "with a certain power" (1993: 110). The way out is to follow the folds of the world, sticking around, protruding all the small ruptures that ply our soul. It is a discovery, says Deleuze further: "We are discovering new ways of folding, akin to new developments...folding, unfolding, refolding" (1993: 137).

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