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It Appears that Certain Aphasiacs…

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

'Multiplicity'

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

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

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

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

Revolution

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

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

Empiricism

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

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

Representation (Form, Content…)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dialogue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

discussion

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Myths of a Near Future: Advertising the New Economy

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abstract

Throughout 1999 and 2000, the Internet and e-commerce rapidly became a priority concern for the business media, together with other associated constituencies such as employment agencies, management consultants, business schools, venture capitalists, and the world's major stock exchanges. Under the umbrella term of 'New Economy' we witnessed the semiotic production of a distributed, heterogeneous, linked, socio-technical assemblage that conceived of the (economic) world in a very specific way. What was perhaps especially contemporary and unique about this phenomenon was its short life span, the extent to which mainstream institutions were so rapidly and willingly implicated, and the paucity of real economic or material referents in which to ground and locate the 'e-revolution'. As one commentator suggested, the idea of the New Economy was in large part not about economies or technologies at all, but about ways of thinking about economies (Frank, 2001). We choose to read New Economy narratives as myths. These myths were of a near future, a future that could almost be seen and grasped. In this paper we document and describe these New Economy myths through a broad semiotic analysis of advertisements published in the Financial Times (UK edition) over the period March 2000 to December 2000. All the advertisements are made available via hyperlinks (at www.ephemeraweb.org/journal), thus allowing the reader to engage with this text in creative ways; which may involve ignoring our analysis.

'Thank you again for your interest and watch this space!'

The turn of the millennium witnessed an intense foretelling of strange new futures based around the advent and widespread use of computer-based communication (Hine, 2000). Prominent personalities from the worlds of politics, business, and academia (see, for example, Leer, 1999, for a representative collection of speeches and essays by luminaries[1] speaking out on behalf of 'Cyberspace') were promulgating their particular e-topias, with more than a whiff of the snake-oil salesmen about them. That the self-proclaimed Internet theorists, almost without exception, seemed to be fervent market

1 These included presidential hopeful Al Gore, Nicholas Negroponte, Jim Barksdale (Netscape), John Patrick (IBM), Charles Handy and, the Prime Minister of the U.K., Tony Blair.

populists, did not seem to raise many eyebrows at the time. The myths of a near and prosperous future were alluring and people desperately wanted to believe them.

Perhaps most striking of all to the somewhat detached observer was this sudden matter-of-factness of the appearances of internet related issues in such a wide range of settings: TV programming, newspaper editorials and supplements, and virtually every advertising medium at the corporate world's disposal. The Internet seemed to be everywhere during the winter and spring of 1999-2000, with an 'everywhere' admittedly limited to places where the mass media were readily available. The Nasdaq composite, the US technology market index that helped drive a true 'dotcom' mania on both sides of the Atlantic, rose an astonishing 88 per cent in less than five months. It ended its seemingly unstoppable rise on March 10 2000, after having crossed the 5,000 mark. Whilst there was serious ambiguity as to what this might actually signify, it did not prevent investors from gathering in excited knots by the market's high-tech electronic showcase on New York's Times Square to applaud the phenomenon of the age (FT, 09/03/01). Nor was the exuberance limited to the United States. At the European Technology Conference in Spring 2000, "the bankers were greeted at the opening night party by semi-naked women, nipples visible and dabbed in gold paint, daintily pretending to be fairies" (FT, 22/05/01). The impending dotcom revolution, or so it seemed, was constructed on the back of a complex and bizarre composite of 20th century sci-fi imagery of speed and progress, 21st century optimism of a new glorious dawn in a connected global village, together with a mixture of more ancient images and signifiers: opulence, wonder, power, wealth beyond ones wildest dreams, and a fear of exclusion, bordering on paranoia. The excitement about the New Economy was outweighed only by a sense of panic among investors that they might miss the opportunity of a generation.

The extent of involvement was reminiscent of epochs long past. People from all classes, castes, professions, backgrounds and ethnicities sought to gain membership and take a stake in the New Economy. Elizabeth II, Sovereign of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, and Defender of the Faith, in her magnificence saw it fit to invest in Getmapping.com, an Internet mapping company. And she was not alone. Housewives, professionals, manual workers and students got involved by investing in dotcoms listed on the seemingly unstoppable stock markets, where demand far outstripped the supply of shares. Shares in Priceline.com, the vendor of discount airline tickets, were bid up to the point where its market capitalisation was twice that of United Airlines. The company's founder, Jay Walker, hailed himself as a 'New Age Edison,' inventing and actually patenting a 'buyer-driven' business model (Frank, 2001). Investors bought the story hook, line and sinker and the share price shot up from under $20 to over $160 within the space of a month (April 1999), bringing Walker an $8 billion paper fortune. In March 2000 Yahoo!'s market capitalisation stood at $93.7 billion, a figure greater than that of Boeing, General Motors and HJ Heinz put together. That these Internet entrepreneurs all seemed to be losing money was dismissed as a triviality:

> It takes guts to lose money. Particularly when it's other people's and especially when it adds up to $4 billion. That is roughly the sum the 13 internet entrepreneurs featured in this book lost in 1999… The point is that all 13 have in the past – and in the main have continued to do so – racked up hundreds of millions of dollars in losses with no end in sight... The pain is possibly eased from the knowledge that despite these hefty losses, the 12 companies had a combined market

> capitalization of $170 billion, giving the 13 entrepreneurs a combined wealth of more than $35 billion… What's $4 billion when market analysts forecast that the internet economy will be worth £3.3 trillion in 2003? It's a question well worth asking: if your company is first to market in a business revolution, what price success? (Price, 2000: xv-xviii)

So to the principles of accounting had seemingly been overturned and traditional barriers of price-to-earnings had been smashed.[2] The past and present did not matter, it was all about the 'great push forward' into a bright new future. Why should 'the people' be held back by the dead hand of the physical world when we could all be 'Living on Thin Air' (Leadbeater, 1999). The light-headedness witnessed in early 2000 was nothing compared to the spirit of optimism forecasted for the near future. Scott Kriens, CEO of Juniper (a company competing with Cisco in the internet infrastructure market), suggested in those heady spring days that estimates of 2 billion internet users by 2002 were far too conservative. By 2003 there would be 10 billion internet users! Forecasts for population growth[3], like the balance sheets that didn't add up, and the cash spent without any consideration for profit or return, were merely inconveniences, trifles to be ironed out at a later date. Of course, new internet users could always be imported from Mars, as one journalist mischievously suggested (Parsley, 2000).

E-commerce, dotcom, and New Economy phenomena were not just linked to internet technology. For many in industry and academia a far more significant revolution was supposedly taking place. The New Economy revolution, like all revolutions before it, was a cultural and social revolution. As the ultra-hip culture of cyberspace became the culture of the corporation, the organisational world seemed to have become a funky free-for-all. House writers for new magazines such as *Wired*, *Forbes*, and *Business 2.0* proselytised about an organisational world pregnant with brilliant futures. The chronologists at Greenwich put their minds to reshaping Mean Time (GMT) into E-Time (GET), a new date point zero that would secure a referential date line for a 24-7 future. Established newspapers and magazines now carried weekly supplements and columns devoted to e-commerce and related developments. The *Financial Times* perhaps went further with this than any of their dinosaur, print based, competitors, partially re-branding itself as FT.com, the dotcom newspaper. Business wanted us to know it had changed, and a flood of corporate advertisements appeared to convince us of this fact. Out went the pinstripe suits, in came 'casual wear'. The New Economy organisations were youthful, sensitive, soulful, and, of course, profoundly democratic. In a December 1999 hagiography of Amazon.com, *Time* magazine hailed its methods as a glorious 'dotcommunism'. As one critical commentator put it, it was as if "Business had set out to destroy business itself, at least as it used to be practised in the old days" (Frank, 2001: 171). We picked out two quotes capturing the spirit of this revolution. Understatement clearly was not part of the agenda.

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2 For example, in June 1999, eBay was trading for 3,991 times earnings while the average P/E ratio for the S&P 500 was about 20.

3 Even the most expansionary forecasts did not predict a rise from about 6 billion people living on this planet at the turn of the millennium, to 10 billion 3 years later.

> Consider this: from the other side of the gulf opened by the Web, virtually all of the structures that management identifies as being the business itself seem to be bizarre artifacts of earlier times, like wearing a powdered wig and codpiece to the company picnic. (Levine *et al*., 2000: 114)

> The great socialist project – the dream of handing over power to the people – is being realized in front of our eyes. It is being realized, not by the disciples of Communism, but by the preachers of free enterprise and market capitalism… None of this has anything to do with politics. We are simply talking about the logical consequences of the forces of funk… (Ridderstråle & Nordstrøm , 1999: 206)

And then 'the bubble burst' and the long dark slide of the Nasdaq began. On March 9 2001 the Nasdaq Composite fell to 2,062, its lowest level since December 1998. This fall represented a decline of 59.2 per cent from its closing peak of 5,048 on March 10 only a year earlier. Similar falls were recorded in other technology markets. In Germany, the Nemax 50 index of Neuer Markt stocks, which peaked at 9,603.36 dropped to 1,931 over the same period, a fall of nearly 80 per cent. This meant the destruction of an extraordinary coffer of paper wealth. The total market value of the Nasdaq dropped from $6,700bn to $3,160bn in one year, a decline equivalent to 35 per cent of US GDP. Cisco's market value had dropped from $466.5bn to $164.2bn, Yahoo!'s from $93.7bn to $9.7bn, and Amazon.com's from $22.8bn to $4.2bn. In the UK, Freeserve's market capitalisation fell from £6.1bn to £980m while QXL.com's value plunged from £2.4bn to £48m, slightly less that the cash reserves it actually held.[4] The slide in technology stocks had no obvious immediate cause. It seemed that investors became concerned about technology valuations, particularly in the wake of a study of cash burn rates at internet companies that was published in Barron's weekly on March 18, 2000 (FT 09/03/01). The magnitude of the disaster truly struck home when one of the authors received a letter from the magazine *Business 2.0* on May 25 2001 informing him: "We're sorry to tell you that, for economic reasons, we are having to suspend publication of the UK edition of Business 2.0…. Thank you again for your interest in Business 2.0 and watch this space!" Given that he had paid a subscription fee of £12 and only received 10 issues, the meltdown had cost him a cool £2.

e-commerce, e-topia, e-phemeral

The quotes, facts and events contained in our narrative so far are mildly amusing, and many proved so ephemeral it is difficult to imagine that they have any significance at all. What was all this dotcom hype about anyway? But they do matter. They provide a unique a window of opportunity to examine the way business talks about itself, the fantasies it spins, the role it writes for itself in our lives. And business did talk about itself a lot in early 2000. The sheer amount of corporate advertising surrounding the e-commerce and New Economy phenomena was hard to ignore and in late February 2000 we made a conscious decision to start researching the ways that particular tropes of e-

4 An eager analyst from Merrill Lynch had declared in March 2000 on BBC television that QXL.com was massively undervalued at £2.4bn.

commerce and the New Economy were articulated and mobilised in the press. We chose the *Financial Times* (UK edition) as a source for collecting ads. It is a widely read newspaper and a respected opinion maker in the business world, and had purposively positioned itself at the front of the dotcom revolution. This made it a 'desirable' outlet for consultancy firms, hardware and software manufacturers, dotcom companies and financial institutions to situate themselves in the unfolding New Economy story.

But did we, as researchers, get our timing wrong, just like the hapless British investors who poured money into technology shares spurred on by the April tax deadline? Not quite. E-commerce related advertising actually peaked in June, with the months of September and October also yielding bumper crops of ads. The ads tended to run for several weeks, appearing at frequent intervals. We collected 131 ads in total. The delayed reaction to the end of the dotcom mania could be clearly witnessed towards the end of the year (November-December) when the number of advertisements appearing in the press seemed to shudder to a halt. The content of the few ads that appeared in 2001 would change drastically, but more of this later.

Our primary aim in this study is to highlight the role of imagery and texts in framing and producing the New Economy. As noted above, the New Economy[5] phenomenon proved to be curiously elusive during the period of our study, an almost uniquely discursively created object.[6] It was based on confidence and faith as much as any set of

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5 In this our study parallels the work of Emmison and Smith who examined the interplay between words and images in cartoons as an "intriguing window for viewing the ways in which societies come to understand their economic and political processes" (2000: 86). In particular their study regarded the changing cartoon representations of 'the economy'.

6 Thus the vision of bright technological futures tended to remain remarkably faithful to the original meaning of Utopia which is 'nowhere' or 'no-place' (through the confusion of its first syllable with the Greek eu as in euphemism or eulogy its commonly accepted meaning is now 'good place', Carey, 1999: xi.). Strong (if opposite) parallels can be seen between the utopias devised for the New Economy and Samuel Butler's (1901) utopian novel Erewhon. For Butler's fictional Erewhonian Society, as with our own real New Economy utopia, technology is the crucial means of and to the future. However, whereas technology, the web and e-commerce are represented as a progressive, emancipatory, even revolutionary means to the future in the New Economy, for Butler's Erewhonians' the counter is the case. Erewhon has rejected technology, smashing and destroying even the most basic and everyday mechanical objects. Rather than being understood as a means of social furtherance, technology was deemed to have an inevitable enslaving, dehumanising, desocialising effect. Butler, along with other utopian writers of the period such as William Morris, author of the post-rational aesthetic utopian novel News from Nowhere (1889), is a nostalgic commentator on the impending dawn of technological society. These authors would, if writing today, no doubt take a keen interest in the evolution of the New Economy and severely criticise all of those who look at its impending development as progressively utopian:

> "There is no security"—to quote his own words—"against the ultimate development of mechanical consciousness, in the fact of machines possessing little consciousness now. A mollusc has not much consciousness. Reflect upon the extraordinary advance which machines have made during the last few hundred years, and note how slowly the animal and vegetable kingdoms are advancing. The more highly organised machines are creatures not so much of yesterday, as of the last five minutes, so to speak, in comparison with past time. Assume for the sake of argument that conscious beings have existed for some twenty million years: see what strides machines have made in the last thousand! May not the world last twenty million years longer? If so, what will

material referents. As a case in point it invites, or even incites, us to reflect on the apparent truism that whilst lack of judgment is rare in individuals it is endemic in an age. Of course, not just any representation can have the effect of persuading the public to believe in its vision. However, our introductory narrative presses the point that the vision engendered by the various representations surrounding e-commerce and the New Economy were perceived as convincing to large numbers of people and, in particular, those close to the corporate purse.

It is sometimes argued that a focus on the images used in advertisements neglects the way in which such images are shaped by the economic logic and social organisation of the relationship between advertising agencies and their clients (Silverman, 2001). Little is known about the many ways in which advertising designers produce their work, how the views of graphic artists do and do not converge with corporate managers' discourse, or how readers appropriate and rework ad images and text (Hackley, 2001). Yet, contrary to Ogilvy (1983) we do know that advertising is constituted from more than simple design or information communication strategies. A good case can be made to NOT see advertising primarily as a sales strategy. As Donna Haraway suggested in her study of technoscience ads:

> At least as significantly, the readers of these ads taste the pleasures of narrative and figuration, of recognising stories and images of which one is part. Advertising is not just the official art of capitalism; advertising is also a chief teacher of history and theology in postmodernity… These ads work by interpellation, by calling an audience into the story, more than by informing instrumentally rational market or laboratory behavior. (Haraway, 1997: 169)

Of Barthes, Myths and Coding

In our analysis we examine the words and images (making up 'signs') that are used in the 131 collected print ads. New Economy discourse is literally teeming with signs. Veiled by the false obviousness of the 'natural', by pseudo economic 'common sense', these signs call out to be coded/decoded. Through our coding of the FT ads, we attempt to categorise and expose interlocking narratives and situate the emerging themes within a system of cultural representation. The analysis of ads from a semiotic framework is of course not original (see, for example, Williamson, 1978).[7] Following this approach, advertising functions as a complex hierarchical semiotic register in that signifiers transfer from first order referents of meaning to second and third order ones. Goldman

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they not in the end become? Is it not safer to nip the mischief in the bud and to forbid them further progress?" (Butler, 1901/1970: 199)

7 By looking at signs in a selection of ads, Williamson demonstrated that the meaning in the ads is not just floating "on the surface just waiting to be internalised by the viewer, but is built up out of ways that different signs are organised and related to each other, both within the advertisement and through external references to wider belief systems" (1978: 44). In order for the ad to work effectively on the viewer (i.e. that the meaning given is transferred efficiently), it is vital for the advertiser to draw on the "reservoirs of social and cultural knowledge maintained by audiences."

and Papson (1996) theorised that the inevitable consequence of this process is that advertising imagery is eventually able to function and mean without reference, in that any image can (at least hypothetically) serve to signify any other. Sign systems are becoming arbitrary. They are liberated from many of the constraints imposed on other semiotic systems and consequently provide a unique medium suited perfectly to the representation and construction of myth and fantasy. In a recent book, Emisson and Smith (2000) provide a schema for analysing advertising materials. Drawing on Barthes' work (1957) they propose an examination of the signs in each advertisement on a first-order level (i.e. the denotative, language level) before then looking at the myths that are present in the text at a second-order level (i.e. the connotative level, what is not said explicitly but what is implied).

Whilst we appropriated the title of this article from a piece of short fiction by J.G. Ballard (1982), in focusing on the concept of 'myths' we acknowledge an intellectual debt to the work of Roland Barthes. Barthes contributed a great deal to semiology, textual analysis and, more indirectly, his work also had repercussions on linguistics and sociology. But his principal contribution was not a systematic theory but a certain way of looking at things, an intuitive approach. It was this approach that taught readers to regard the ephemera of social life as signs. Barthes was attentive to the ways language and other semiotic systems are embedded in culture, and the extent to which they are also the means by which culture reflects upon and renews itself.

In a series of monthly articles, first published during the 1950s and later collected as *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes revealed the ideological misrepresentation, the social 'lie' in a film, an advert, or a discourse. He was seeking out – and denouncing – ideological distortions, the attempt to make what is thoroughly cultural seem natural and what is acquired seem innate. In other words, Barthes was hunting for what is falsely self-evident, what he himself referred to as the 'what-goes-without-saying'. He produced a kind of ethnography of society through an analysis of the signs that society produces. In order to move from the accumulation of these short, sharply critical pieces on current events to a more general discourse, he was to make use of concepts taken from Saussure in a theoretical essay 'Myth Today' which also served as a postscript. Myth is to be understood as having two meanings. Firstly it is, as its Greek etymology suggests, a legend, a symbolic account of the human condition. Secondly it is a lie, a mystification. In myths the sign is turned aside from its proper function (its primary denotative function), since in myth, connotation is parasitic on denotation. For Barthes, the role of the 'mythologue' is to expose the semiological chain that myths try to naturalise. This unveiling is a political act: founded on a responsible idea of language, the 'mythologue' postulates the freedom of the latter.

> For if there is a "health" of language, it is the arbitrariness of the sign which is its grounding. What is sickening in myth is its resort to a false nature, its superabundance of significant forms, as in these objects which decorate their usefulness with a natural appearance. The *will to weigh the*

> *signification with the full guarantee of nature* causes a kind of nausea: myth is too rich, and *what is in excess is precisely its motivation*. (Barthes, 1956/1982: 113, emphasis added)[8]

Whilst Barthes' earlier writings could be labelled as 'structuralist', after publication of *The Fashion System* (1967) which represented "a dream of scientific method" (Calvet, 1994: 161), Barthes took a completely different path, as if his desire for systematisation had been exhausted and satisfied. With *Roland Barthes* (1975) and *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes' writing had entered a new phase, signifying a kind of unravelling of his ideas and his own authority. He was now writing without any of his former theoretical props, without recourse to any grand theory like Marxism, psychoanalysis or semiological theory. Barthes no longer attempted to define codes so as to maintain the multi-valence and their potential reversibility. Far from being unitary and finite, the text is constantly in motion; and each code is known only by its departures and returns. Codes are thus "so many fragments of something that has always been already read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that already" (Payne, 1997: 20). In the inaugural lecture that marked his acceding to a position of the highest authority – the Chair of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France in 1977 – Barthes chose, characteristically enough at this stage in his life, to argue for a soft intellectual authority: "… no power, a little knowledge, a little wisdom, and as much flavour as possible" (1977/1982: 478). It is in the spirit of his views on semiology expressed in that lecture that we have carried out our analysis. To quote Barthes:

> The semiologist is, in short, an artist (the word as I use it here neither glorifies nor disdains; it refers only to a typology). He plays with signs as with a conscious decoy, whose fascination he savours and wants to make others savor and understand. The sign -at least the sign he sees- is always immediate, subject to the kind of evidence that leaps to the eyes, like a trigger of the imagination, which is why this semiology (need I specify once more: the semiology of the speaker) is not a hermeneutics: it paints more than it digs, *via di porre* rather than *via de levare*. Its objects of predilection are texts of the image-making process: narratives, images, portraits, expressions, idiolects, passions, structures which play simultaneously with an appearance of verisimilitude and with an uncertainty which it is possible -even called for- to play with the sign as with a painted veil, or again, with a fiction. (Barthes, 1977/1982: 475)

When conducting a semiotic analysis that is sensitive to these considerations it is important to recognise that it is a constructive endeavour on the part of the analyst rather than a purpose directed towards the discovering of codes as such. The art of semiotic analysis is one of revealing hidden or partially obscured meanings in order to

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8 To elaborate further:

> Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. If I state the fact of French imperiality without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and goes without saying: I am reassured. In passing from history to Nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes, 1956/1982: 132)

extend understanding and elicit further meaningful analysis. This text, like the advertising texts analysed below and the referents they themselves signify, are in this respect on an equal and common plain, with neither being privileged. Before proceeding with our description and understanding of the advertisements chosen for analysis, some description will be given to the manner by which we derived them. This is not provided to re-assure a scientifically sceptical readership or to impress an analytical method as such. By making explicit the process of constructing our analysis we hope to guide the reader in our rationale and purpose. We acknowledge that other codes and readings are possible and even desirable, but that this neither retracts nor undermines our own analysis, nor necessarily strengthens it.

Rather than undertaking an analysis of each of the 131 different advertisements we have elected to look for commonalities and contradictions within the advertisements as a single analytical set. Moving away from a single level description of each advertisement we identify emergent themes from the sample as a whole. Our own analytical process draws on coding techniques widely applied in qualitative research (e.g., Strauss, 1987; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Throughout the process of coding one "fractures the data, thus freeing the researcher from description and forcing interpretation to higher levels of abstraction" (Strauss, 1987: 55). Leiss *et al.* (1990) apply a similar type of analysis in their analysis of advertisements of social communication.

In order to facilitate familiarity with the data set and to assist preparation of the coding process, we completed an exploratory analysis using 12 ads. This enabled an initial set of codes to be developed, followed by a brief analysis of the coding system involving a series of refinements to allow newly emerging themes to be included and examined. Having completed the exploratory coding the analysis was thus extended to the full set of advertisements. As with any coding process, the analysis is not a linear process of exposition and explanation. Additional codes were incorporated into the coding system during the analysis as more themes in the advertisements emerged. As the analysis progressed, many of the initial codes were subsequently modified with some being collapsed into others or dismissed. A detailed profile of the ads analysed and the codes that were assigned to them is given in table 1 contained in the appendix. To help make explicit the relationship between the ads and the codes ascribed to them, table 1 also provides hyperlinks to image files for each of the ads.

Myths of the Near Future

> There is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things. (MacIntyre, 1985: 216)

Our coding revealed a number of classifications which, as would be expected, were closely interrelated. In order to construct a useful and insightful analysis we imposed a series of hierarchies on the codes to indicate how they relate to, and are differentiated from one another. From this mapping we identified three main themes, what Strauss (1987) might refer to as 'axial' coding. The discriminatory significance of these codes

was of course the result of our analytical process and serve the primary objective of providing a frame of reference for the meaning we see in the advertisements.

The first of our axial code refers to the types of language, terminology and text that are used in the advertisements and the ways these have been appropriated and transformed to convey specific meanings significant for discourses about e-commerce and the New Economy. Most of the language referred to in this code is taken from the title and strap lines present in the advertisements, although, where appropriate, other text from the ads is also included. We witness here the invention of new terms and phrases, the introduction of pre-suffixes and abbreviations for existing words, and a manipulation of existing terminology that is common in corporate advertising. For the purposes of summary and ease of reference we have labelled this code 'Discourse Creation'. By examining the advertisements at a syntactic and semantic level we show the building blocks of e-commerce and New economy signification which, when compounded and read, feed into prevalent mythologies.

The second code is concerned with what can be thought of as 'operational' or 'transitional' strategies described in the advertisements. Most of the advertisements that we examined share a common trait of offering solutions to current business problems or issues. The operational and transitional level is described as those proposals, promises and offerings included in the advertisements that indicate a process or operation connected with e-commerce and New Economy practices. Operations such as website design, development and management are characteristic of this type of language. They are transitional because they tend to refer to a current state of business practice, a preferred future state of business practice, and offer a service or product that can operate to effect a transition from the former to the latter. This aspect of the advertisements is almost always constructed in terms of a solution. Questions concerning what it is that needs *solving*, what the *solution* is, and what the *benefits* will be once the 'problem' has been *solved* are dealt within this coding scheme. For the purposes of summary and ease of reference we have labelled this code 'E-commerce and Solution'. This code is shown to be present in two forms, distinguished by the type of operations and transformations described and the specificity of solutions offered. Some solutions are explicitly constructed using discourses such as 'We can save you *x* million dollars', or 'You can increase your market presence by *x*%'.[9] Other devices however represent 'solutions' as a generic category. Many of the advertisements offer 'solutions' where no specific indication as to what this 'solution' may actually entail is given. Such discourses have a tendency to enlist mythical, second order signifiers to covey these generic, universalistic 'solutions'.

9 For a discussion on the use of statistics and numerical discourses in media representation, see Potter and Wetherall (1994). In their analysis of television documentaries about terminal illness they find that statistics and other numerical representations are often used to effect objectivity, scientific authority and actionable targets. They conclude that such discourses have the quality of being more persuasive, regardless of source, when compared with alternative type descriptions.

The third code identified across the 131 advertisements is concerned with a particularly dominant set of signifiers. For the purposes of summary and ease of reference we have labelled this code 'Pushing Forward'. Pushing forward is discursively framed in two contexts that can be thought of as forming two sub-codes or categories, namely: 'globalisation' and 'speed'. The first of these sub codes represents a spatial push forward and the second represents a temporal push forward. 'Globalisation' refers to both textual and visual referents that signify in some way, the world (the world is 'getting smaller'), the globe (being connected and wired) and the dissolution of nationally defined boundaries (business conducted on a global basis). As well as being constructed in terms of advancement on some kind of global frontier, the pushing forward code is also represented temporally, that is in terms of speed and rate of change. This theme includes signifiers of technological speed (processing power and speed of a computer system), the fast pace of e-commerce and the New Economy (you must keep up or else your firm will get left behind), as well as the increasing infringement on the present by the future (the future is now, the present is already the past).

Having introduced the three principle codes we see as emerging from our analysis of the 131 advertisements, we will now describe each in more detail and relate the codes to specific examples.

Discourse Creation

The rise of little 'e'

The most explicit level of discourse creation, modification and adaptation can be seen with the use of the signifier / *e-* /, usually represented as a pre-fix to another term (e-commerce, e-business, e-hub, etc.). On a first-order level, / *e-* / can be taken as an abbreviation for 'electronic' (as in *e*lectronic-commerce), although it is clear that the signifier has a more clearly defined referent than this. / *e-* / commerce is used to refer to services on the internet, on-line shopping and trading, and so on; but not to other equally 'electronic' commercial activities, such as electrical goods retailing, transactions conducted over the telephone, or other the vast amount of other product and service offerings that involve electronic equipment or the supply of electricity for instance.

The signifier / *e-* / enforces a second-order signification that has specific regard to the internet and trading on the world wide web. '/ *e-* ing/' for example, which is used to signify the transformation of a business from old to new economy, does not signify 'electricification' nor 'electrocution'. In fact it has no material referent in this respect. Andersen Consulting (re-branded with similarly second order signification as *Accenture*) discuss the / *e-* ing/ of firms in FT30. Here, the firm attempts to reflect the move that many organisations have made towards e-commerce by using the signifier / *e-* /. This '/ *e-* ing/' process is illustrated in the advertisement as a cosmetic surface process that is 'sprayed' (e.g. as with a deodorant, cleaning fluid, or paint spray), to produce an instant although temporary cover-up effect (e.g. covering up odours etc). Use of a spray can is further communicative of the way that the stock markets have reacted to e-commerce. Embraced as an amazing revolution resulting in the overvaluation of many firms, the '/ *e-* / revolution' appears to have 'worn off' (odour returns, old paint is revealed). The ad thus uses both second order signifiers / *e-* / and/ *e-*

ing/ to carve out the discursive context of the message, namely that there are two types of e-commerce consultancy. Most is 'surface' / *e-* / where as Andersen Consulting offer 'deep' / *e-* /, i.e. a lasting effect and the possibility of long term competitive advantage.

Whilst several of the ads make interesting use of the / *e-* / signifier, (see table 1), an interesting modification of this theme can be seen in ad FT21. In this ad from PricewaterhouseCoopers, the signifier is used to greater second order effect. Many of the salient nouns (e.g. strategy) in the text have the letter 'e' removed, thus addressing the reader with questions such as; "Where is the 'e' in your strategy?" Unless your organisation has / *e* /, presumably a referent to / *e - commerce*/ (the implication being that it can be supplied by PwC), your strategy is incomplete and is therefore likely to lead to business failure.

Both ads FT30 and FT21 illustrate the movement of first order signification to second order signification. The fact that FT21 makes no attempt, either explicitly or implicitly, to identify what / *e - commerce*/ stands for, might be suggesting that, at least in terms of advertising rhetoric, no such referent is necessary. / *e - commerce*/ itself becomes the sole referent and therefore the commodity aspect of the communication. It is startling how futuristic, fashionable and stylish little / *e-* / has become. The / *e-* / in e-commerce denies its referent (electricity) because to openly acknowledge it turns the e-commerce phenomenon from an exciting, cutting edge business process, into one that sounds rather antiquated and manual. Signifiers of *e-commerce* conjure up images of slick office buildings, full of slick young executives hot-desking all over the place, talking about slick new websites, and feeling passionate about an imagined, fantasised liquid flow of trillions of bytes of information through an intercourse of millions of terminals, servers and computers. But discussions about *electronic commerce* do not stimulate the same kind of enchantment. Electronic commerce almost conjures up the image of Edison selling light bulbs to old Mrs Jones from the hard wooden counter of a mid-west hardware store.

New technology terminology

In addition to the / *e-* / signifier, an abundance of new words related to e-commerce and the Internet have emerged. Terminology including /b2b/, /b2c/, /WAP/, the /*New*/ economy, /*m*-commerce/, and /dot.com/ have either been created in order to represent new myths or have been adapted from existing managerial discourse and recast.

One reason for why language seems to have been so readily adapted and modified, and why existing grammatical structures have been so eagerly transgressed, might be in part attributable to the form and structure of the Internet medium itself. Hypertext protocols and domain name restrictions limit and reshape the use of conventional grammar, capitalisation and spelling. Domain names cannot contain capital letters, spacing or punctuation. They all bear a post-fix (.com, .org, .dk, etc.) which, although initially having some purposeful signification (company, organisation, Denmark), now serves only as a marginal referent. Email and web writing etiquette (netiquette) has changed the way users write language and therefore modifies expectations when reading it.

A series of ads from Sun Microsystems (FT8a, FT8b, FT31, FT11) clearly illustrates this emergent fluidity of English language usage and the second order, mythic signification that is created as a consequence. A strap line in these ads states, that "we're the dot in .com". This piece of text is confounding for so many reasons that it almost makes the statement totally vacant of meaning, although most readers would no doubt take from the ad at least some, if not all, of the sentiments intended. Even if we dismiss facile interpretations, i.e. that Sun Microsystems associates itself with values of punctuation, a full stop etc., and look for more appropriate significations, we find little in the way of meaning. The 'dot' between the domain address and the postfix is simply a point of grammatical necessity. Its only role in signification is to differentiate between that which proceeds and precedes it. Furthermore, the postfix 'com' is equally devoid of explicit significance. The analysis becomes a little clearer when the phrase is read as part of the visual imagery included in the ad FT8a & FT8b. FT8a "The Incredible Growing Business" is designed as a Hollywood film poster type image showing "the business is showing phenomenal growth", symbolised by the fast, upward "rocketing" of a skyscraper. In ad FT8b "The Making of The Incredible Growing Business", the exterior image of the business given in the previous ad is supplemented with a "behind the scenes" explanation for the growth. The message (we're the dot in .com) is signifying that, although Sun's contribution may encompass only a small component of the overall business process, a behind the scenes function, it is this 'support' that provides the foundation for an exciting new business venture with potentially limitless growth. The basis of this growth, the reason why the 'dot in .com' is so crucial, and the processes for achieving growth are neither illustrated nor justified. The powerful images of immense business growth are offered as referents of themselves.

Parallels with this ad can be seen in ad FT88 for Kyocera. As well as choosing a humble association with the 'dot' to reflect their core, seemingly minor, behind the scenes role in e-commerce success, the ad simultaneously links the minuscule (inconsequence) with the supreme (exponential growth). The narrative is constructed around myth signification that great things can and *will* spring from (almost) nothing, as long at the right advice and expertise is commissioned. These 'Jack and the bean stalk' type narratives promote rapidity over moderate and consistent growth, as well as inviting and encouraging investors and dot.com hopefuls alike to commit to small e-commerce projects with the promise of immense profits and wealth.

E-commerce & Solution

Explicit discourses

A large percentage of ads are attempting to sell a range of products and services, ranging from consulting to hardware instalment. These ads tend to draw on and employ endorsement narratives including: representations of past personal "conquests" (FT12): "Using our own e-business suite, Oracle saved $1 billion in one year"; representations based on and around specific reputations and brand values associated with former and current clients (e.g. FT2: Siebel's testimonial from Cable and Wireless); and representations incorporating impressive statistical records (e.g. FT104 "We created more than 125 e-marketplaces and added billions of value to our clients' businesses").

Ad FT25 for IBM incorporates a clear endorsement narrative involving British Airways. The ad announces the role IBM has played in helping "British Airways and thousands of other companies" to build a "self-service website". The use of blue chip, establishment endorsements such as BA is semiotically significant because it illustrates the potential sign value that e-commerce ventures can gain from servicing high profile brands and clients. The image used in ad FT25 is also intriguing. The scene is set in a traditional interior (bare wooden floor, old-fashioned lamp and set of drawers) but with evidence of modernity and contemporary life (highly visible plug sockets and leads). The elderly cleaning woman dons an apron and mops the floor using old-fashioned cleaning equipment. There is not a vacuum cleaner in sight. The image of the wise old sage of a cleaner in a contemporary environment constructs and represents the need for a "trusted hand" (IBM and BA) to help you through the transition from the old to the new.

The dominant narratives of revolution, a brave new world, "out with the old and in with the new", and so on, would on one level seem to contradict with this type of endorsement by establishment brands. It reveals a fundamental paradox at the heart of the e-commerce myth. On the one hand the future of the New Economy is going to be markedly different from the traditional economy, with plenty of opportunity for new start-ups, new ventures and new business practices. Such a hopeful and radical vision implies the demise of the traditional economy and its constituent players (including both IBM and BA). On the other hand, e-commerce product and service providers use high profile traditional economy brands to promote and encourage the purchase of their products and services in the New Economy. For e-mythologies to be remain consistent they have to incorporate the vision that the size of the New Economy will be much larger and rapidly changing than the traditional one; that new markets and customer segments will 'appear' which traditional corporate interests will not want, or will be unable to service, thus paving the way for new entrants. The fact that consumer markets will either remain at their current size or maybe grow steadily, and that as in the traditional economy larger more established organisations will have an advantage, seems to remain unsaid in most ads.

The use of high profile brands to promote e-commerce organisations testifies that marketing strategies and issues remain relevant, and that rather than seeing a distinct and revolutionary fracture between old/traditional and New Economy, one should perhaps give greater credence to notions of continuation and development. But during the e-commerce boom such reasoning was not reflected in the narratives presented in advertising materials or the business media more generally (viz. the poor performance of traditional equity indices during 1999 and early 2000). That the hopes and optimisms expressed for e-commerce were somewhat misplaced or overstated may well have resonance now, but bears little relevance to the dominant myth discourses that were popularised during this period of unparalleled confidence in New Economy stocks. The new/old economy divide was clearly a key rhetorical signifier in e-commerce myths.

FT59, an ad for the investment bank J.P.Morgan, employs a slightly different set of images and tropes to communicate a message with similar mythic features. The ad frames the setting in the theme of success, power and achievement through reference to a $21 billion deal. But rather than referring to traditional brand endorsement, the

narrative instead draws on 'old' economy notions of personality, employee trust and relationship. This 'face to the firm' approach does not use an image of a young, slick dot.com executive, but rather a middle-aged and trustworthy looking company executive. The graphic spots (dots) that appear all over the page are impressed with finger prints to further emphasise the lasting presence of traditional principles translated into New Economy solutions.

Generic discourses

As with those illustrations identified above, many of the e-commerce narratives are structured by implicating an issue, anxiety or problem (e.g., how to achieve growth and success in the New Economy), imply a method (product or service) to address the issue and then give explicit reference to the resolved outcome (e.g., raised profits, opening up of new 'e-markets'). In contrast to these specific e-commerce solutions, other ads are structured in terms of generic, unspecified expectations and 'solutions'. These ads, freer of specific referents and consequences evoke a broader range of myth discourse. The Nortel Networks ads, for example, (FT10, FT55) frame the narrative with the question: "What do you want the internet to be?" This statement locates e-commerce as an opportunity that is to a certain extent negotiable by the reader, rather than proscribing a set of schematic issues or anxieties requiring resolution. The ads offers a series of somewhat incongruent "potentialities" in answer to this rhetorical question; for example, "like a campfire", "the collaboration of business and imagination", "a powerful ally in the global battle against AIDS". Each of these points of closure could be subject to an interesting individual semiotic analysis. Taken collectively, it is apparent that the emerging discourse of e-commerce framing the ads develops the New Economy concept at a different level to the specific and self-contained identified in the previous section. The aspiration and optimism echoed in these particular ads is indicative of a much more liberal set of myths in which well defined inputs and outputs are transformed into generalised potential consequences of the New Economy. These narratives operate by maintaining loosely, in some cases arbitrary, signifier-signified relationships, with the mythological character of the ads being made explicit and acknowledged. The over arching signification of the narratives reinforces creative, lateral brand values through reference to myth represented elsewhere in business discourse (e.g., business and imagination). Loosely bound signifier-signified contexts provide a basis for incorporating metaphor and analogy. For example, ad FT43 for Requisite Technology exclaims, "without a complete e-content solution, a net marketplace won't fly". Here "complete e-content", "flight" and "net-marketplace" serve as signifiers free of referent beyond this particular text.

Most of ads are constructed with blends of both solution-specific and solution-generic discursive elements. For example, the ad for PricewaterhouseCoopers FT21 describes a solution-generic type myth ("innovative solutions", doing "it all"), generic terms with nominal referents in which meaning is *reasonably* structured and determined (e-business services, e-strategies, e-designs and e-infrastructures, e-answers), and specific signifiers involving corporate endorsements from previous and current customers. It should be noted, however, that even specific endorsement terminology which one would anticipate as being subject to reader authentication and verification is often represented with equally generic signifiers; for example:

We created a web-based e-solution for the world's largest procurer of goods and services

Terminology such as "web-based e-solution", "most recognised", "world's largest", and so on create the effect of functional specificity without recourse to any reference, or "referent". This type of discourse has a dual capacity to deny location, firstly by drawing on the disarming genre of the grandiose, wondrous, spectacular or mysterious, and secondly by incorporating signs that at first glance seem 'natural' and full of meaning (e.g. "the world's largest") but on closer inspection are *substantially vacant*. The incorporation of this type of terminology into New Economy marketing communications provides a relatively self contained illustration of what some contemporary semiologists have come to identify as 'free-floating signification'. Signs, lacking stable referents are to a certain extent mobile and transactional within any given system, whereby meaning becomes increasingly context specific, and almost totally substitutable and subsumable by other signs. In the example taken from the strapline of FT21 above, the phrase "web-based e-solution", could quite easy be substituted as "e-based web solution", or even "solution based e-com web" with little or no decomposition of meaning. Signification is both at once meaningful and meaningless. It is at once a totally internalised register as well as alluding to an unspecified floating and vague referent.

Pushing Forward

Globalisation

The commonly applied discursive metaphor that the world is becoming more 'global' (or less so for that matter) clearly identifies the second order signification of the term globalisation. The 'push' towards greater global connectivity implicates a range of myth discourse which is closely bound, perhaps *inextricably* bound, with New Economy writing and advertising. Ad FT83, for example, shows an image of the earth with detail of main land masses that are intimately 'linked' to one another through a Merrill Lynch logo. The signification here is complex. Not only is the implication that the world is 'connected' and therefore a unified and single 'global' entity, but also that Merrill Lynch, graphically, 'connects the world'. Representations of global 'connective-ness' are powerful signifiers because they imply control, (benevolent) dominance and power over all that is known[10] (See also FT125, & FT63). It is probably for similar reasons

10 Baudrillard's (1981) often quoted reference to Borges' short story Of Exactitude in Science (Borges, 1954/1975: 131) has some relevance here. Borges mockingly recounts the story of a map which was identical with the country it represented, leading to the end of the discipline of geography in the country. A description which equals what it describes is of course an absurdity. The postulation of a reality which exhausts the powers of representation of the camera or the alphabet, is one of Borges' most instructive hypotheses. It is the "superabundance of forms", "the will to weigh the signification with the full guarantee of nature" Barthes refers to as "sickening in myth" and "a kind of nausea", that is Borges' target here. In myth the inadequacy of our representation of reality is disguised by the plenitude and continuity of the words and images we use to represent it, to the point where the reader supposes that what has been said about a given situation is all that there is to be said. The story goes as follows:

that imperial dynasties often choose to signify their dominion by 'painting the globe red' so to speak, or that military conflict and battles are often pictorially represented with similar types of imagery. But whilst conflicts over map-space have over the past century or so been largely associated with military conquest[11], it is now organisations and corporate interests that choose to wrap the world in complexes of arrows, networks and cages to represent their own 'global' presence. With what can be read as somewhat imperial rhetoric if taken out of context, the Merrill Lynch ad declares they "have eyes and ears in 26 countries… in all four corners of the globe", and will "help" you to "pounce on opportunity".

The Morgan Stanley Dean Witter ad FT101 continues this global theme, claiming to "network the world". The ad impresses upon the reader with totalitarian zeal that the "*new* global economy", which will be achieved, not through the use of gun ships and armies but by the establishment of e-commerce networks and corporate expansion, will "offer" freedom to all. The signification of this liberation myth is visualised by the shadow, or "dream" (i.e. what *could be* rather than what *is*) of a bird flying free of its cage, leaving the remaining caged bird in captivity. The rhetoric of "barrier-free financial markets" and a "borderless European stock exchange" implicates a mythic corporate e-topia that will emerge from the push into a connected and joined-up world.

The global 'push' is represented more implicitly in a wide variety of ads we collected. Liberal globalisation, as a beneficial and inevitable signifier of the New Economy, is a core mythic theme to the extent that it might be considered almost an archetype of the discourse.

Speed

The construction and representation of a causal relationship between technological 'speed' and business success is a dominant theme in a number of the ads examined. In ad FT48 Citrix announce their "lightning-fast agility to deliver". The supporting image of a slick, young dotcom businessman on a jet-powered skateboard flying in the clouds, well above the skyscrapers below, explicitly supports the strap line as well as drawing on some of the other mythic components of freedom, advantage over competitors, reaching great heights etc. Although the surfer is flying by himself, flying free above the

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> In that empire, the craft of Cartography attained such perfection that the map of a single province covered the space of an entire city, and the map of the empire itself an entire province. In the course of time, these extensive maps were found somehow wanting, and so the College of Cartographers evolved a map of the empire that was of the same scale as the empire and that coincided with it point for point. Less attentive to the study of cartography, succeeding generations came to judge a map of such magnitude cumbersome, and, not without irreverence, they abandoned it to the rigours of sun and rain. In the western deserts, tattered fragments of the map are still to be found, sheltering an occasional beast or beggar; in the whole nation, no other relic is left of the Discipline of Geography…

11 For many Europeans alive today, the Second World War probably resides in their consciousness as a giant map of Europe, in which arrows tipped with German insignia trail across from Berlin only to meet arrows tipped with Allied insignia travelling East from London or West from Moscow.

'old' skyscraper institutions below, his opportunities for "achieving great heights" are assumed to be greater because he is not anchored to the old referents of the old economy thanks to the "digital independence" offered by Citrix systems.[12] FT8a draws upon a similar causal referent between speed, technology and organisational success.

The signification of speed, and references to an intensification of the general pace of business can act as both a narrative device to convey positive reinforcing myths (as above), but is equally powerful as a negative reinforcement device. Ad FT40, offers the warning, "in the surge economy, three year growth projections shift by the hour". The veiled threat of being "left behind", the call to reject existing accounting and forecasting instruments (thus using old economy referents as signifiers for the New) and the use of vacant signification (the 'surge' economy), operates by introducing the problem of inevitable uncertainty and playing upon the fear it creates.

FT33 further illustrates the free-floating signification characteristic of New Economy myth. In the ad for KPMG Consulting and Microsoft, the first order signifier of the 'New Economy' is itself subsumed as second order through reference to the 'old e-world'. Rate and pace of change is narrated by implicating a further set of progressive terminology, presumably the 'new e-world'. In true Baudrillardian fashion we see the increasing rapidity by which signification is created, modified and subsequently re-created as a referent for another set of signification at a second, third, fourth, '*n*' level order. Vacant of meaning, these signifiers operate by pure difference without any conceptualisation.

FT86 progresses along this narrative order by contrasting visions of the "internet of today", soon to become the "internet of yesterday", with the "Next Generation Internet" Siemens proposes the reader to join. This rhetorical device draws upon a classic science fiction utopian narrative (cf. Smith et al., 2001), with the organisation-as-author being positioned as both the gate-keeper and the leader of the migration from the present to the future. The organisation is represented as a liminal entity spanning the structural oppositional space of present and future. Ad FT5, also on a salient futurist New Economy myth, asks the reader to imagine an unimaginable (near) future ("Throw off the bonds of tyranny of place and time"), followed by an announcement that the future has arrived and can be entered with the help of Red Cube's guidance. The theme is also repeated in FT86. In these ads the prevailing myth discourse describes the future as a commodity that is increasingly and speedily being made available for application in the present. One possible interpretation is that the underlying motivation for these narratives is to reduce perceptions of uncertainty and risk about the future by representing it as partially located in the present. A future represented as unknowable and unpredictable in terms of technological progress and fantasized opportunities also needs to rest alongside a signified future in which security is known to exist and risk offset and made manageable.

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12 Our sole concern for this lone maverick business surfer can only be that he does not run into the Sun Microsystems skyscraper thrusting upwards (see FT8).

Forward to the Past

We already indicated that the steady stream of ads suddenly seemed to dry up at the end of 2000, never to resurface. The ads that were published in 2001 conceived of 'e-business' and the New Economy in radically different ways. No longer were they signifiers of a *near future*, but rather of a *recent*, rather confused, *past* FT132. No longer was a distinction made between "New and old economy", "e-business and business". Companies with strong brand recognition (IBM, Intel, Microsoft) now started exploiting their "conservative" credentials for all it was worth (e.g. FT133). It was again "business as usual" and new start-ups, new ventures and new business practices only formed a very marginal part of this agenda. These new advertising strategies mirrored actual events in 2001. TV programming no longer included "e-broadcasting" and newspapers discontinued their "e-supplements". For example, on May 19 2001 *The Times* newspaper announced it was to scrap its dedicated e-business page because, "E-business is just, well, business". Even management gurus now displayed a distinct sense of coolness towards the New Economy.

> The "new economy" appears less like a new economy than like an old economy that has access to a new technology. Even the phrases "new economy" and "old economy" are rapidly losing their relevance, if they ever had any… In our quest to see how the Internet is different, we have failed to see how the Internet is the same. (Porter, 2001: 78)

All this brings a definite sense of chronological closure to the New Economy phenomenon. However, this is not to say that this brings analytical closure. Perhaps only now, with a little distance emerging, can we truly appreciate what a rich source of research material the New Economy phenomenon has yielded.

Postscript

So what remains to be said? In our desire to provide a structured narrative, we attributed many stable meanings to the various ads. How can we be sure that we are not locked into a circle of illusion, that our intuitions are not wrong or distorted? The only sane response to this is to say that such uncertainty is ineradicably part of our epistemological predicament; that even to characterise it as uncertainty is to adopt a severely restricted criterion of certainty, which deprives the concept of any sensible use (Taylor, 1985). Our reading depends closely on our culture, our understanding of the world, which by definition we must share, at least partly, with the early 21st century reader. Hence we refrain from ensnaring ourselves in loops of reflexivity. Even if we should choose to travel down that path, textual reflexivity is unlikely to prove satisfactory because it pays little attention to the concept of the reader and retains a naïve belief in the possibility of writing truer texts. As Latour (1988: 170) suggested: "Instead of piling layer upon layer of self-consciousness to no avail, why not have just one layer, the story, and obtain the necessary amount of reflexivity from somewhere else?"

We also refrain from offering a second order analysis which would involve embedding our codes in a detailed critique, as one of the reviewers suggested. To answer the 'so

what' question that this suggestion entails, would involve proving that we are doing more than just telling stories, that we are really offering some explanation (Latour, 1988). Explanation[13] is not something we aspire to as we believe it is not *a desirable goal in the context of this paper.* We wrote this piece for the pleasure of writing, for the joy of playing with signs "as with a painted veil." This in itself has serious purpose: to go against "the will to weigh the signification with the full guarantee of nature" Barthes found so nauseating in myth. As he suggested in his inaugural lecture, the semiologist should strive "…to maintain, over and against everything, the force of drift and of expectation" (Barthes, 1977/1982: 467). Releasing the 'sign' by tentatively constructing new semiological chains is, however, a less frivolous activity than it might at first appear. It counteracts the aim of myth which is to abolish complexity, do away with all dialectics, organize "a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident" (Barthes, 1956/1982: 132). Yet, we do not intend to 'fix' our signification in an alternative political project from that of the market populists, as this would make our project bound, finalizable, and subject to the same critique of an 'excess of motivation' Barthes referred to in *Myth Today*. If our semiological analysis of the New Economy myths resonates with the reader, breaks apart their naturalness, then we will be more than satisfied.

Thus we see our text as 'seriously playful' (yes, the ambiguity is intentional), an example of the 'weak thought' Rorty refers to in his collection of essays on (mainly) Heidegger and Derrida. It involves a reflection that "does not attempt a radical criticism of contemporary culture, does not attempt to refound or remotivate it, but simply assembles reminders and suggests some interesting possibilities" (Rorty, 1991: 6). It is also fully consistent with the notion of 'dialogism' developed by Bakhtin.[14] Dialogism is founded on the ineluctability of our ignorance, the necessary presence of gaps in all our fondest schemes and most elaborate systems (Clark & Holquist, 1984). A word or discourse undergoes dialogisation when it becomes relativised, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Bakhtin did not overestimate the power of the dialogue. He knew that dialogue does not guarantee forward movement. It merely opens up the possibility of forward movement. Nor does dialogical interaction lead to some final and irrevocable 'triumph of truth.' For truth cannot triumph without becoming a dogma, a totalitarian lie. Dialogue is essentially interminable, which led to the arch-Bakhtinian concept of 'unfinalizability,' according to which anything could give birth to something new and more fertile. Bakhtin's view on the generic expectation of closure is perhaps best expressed by quoting his final words on the impossibility of endings, with which he closed the last article he ever wrote:

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13 One of the reviewers asked, with some justification, for quite a few explanations: 'Why have the ads created this myth? As the hype has faded now, is the myth gone as well, or have we simply switched to another myth? What is the general role of myth in capitalism?'

14 Although one finds few direct references to Bakhtin in Barthes' work, his friend Julia Kristeva certainly introduced him to Bakhtin's work and they must have had various discussions on Bakhtin's notions of polyphony, heteroglossia and dialogism (Calvet, 1994).

> There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival. (Bakhtin, quoted in Clark and Holquist, 1984: 348-350)

To paraphrase Latour, this text is in your hands and lives or dies through what you will do to it. Of course, through our slightly unusual textual strategies (including exploring the technical possibilities of using hyperlinks to the ads) we have attempted to encourage certain outcomes and perhaps forestall others. But this does not detract from our essentially dialogical intention. We believe the technology enables us to take a truly dialogical perspective and genuinely invite you to 'play along' and examine the ads (including the ones we did not discuss), thus making engagement with this text a creative experience. All we ultimately have to say is: 'to the best of our abilities, and based largely upon material to which you have full access, this is what we make of the New Economy phenomenon'. Over to you…

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Appendix: Table 1

Advertisement	Company	Main Codes	Axial Code
FT1	Quidnunc	New' Technological Words Fear Superior Knowledge Solution	Pushing Forward
FT2	Siebel	e Face to the Firm Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT3	Compaq	e Technological Power Solution Simplification	Pushing Forward
FT4	Marconi	e New Technological Words Future Technological Power	Pushing Forward
FT5	Redcube	Future Speed Technological Power e New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT6	Sunevision	New Technological Words e Future Empowerment	Pushing Forward
FT7	Alcatel	Solution Speed	Pushing Forward
FT8	Sun Microsystems	New Tech Words Speed Globalisation	Discourse Creation
FT9	Compaq	Technological Power Endorsement New Tech Words Globalisation	Pushing Forward
FT10	Nortel Networks	e New Technological Words Simplifies Freedom	E-Commerce and Solution
FT11	Sun Microsystems	New Technological Words Freedom	Discourse Creation
FT12	Oracle	Endorsement e	E-Commerce and Solution
FT13	Deloitte Consulting	e New Tech words Fear Security	E-Commerce and Solution
FT14	CS First Boston	Globalisation Empowerment	Pushing Forward
FT15	SAP	e New Tech Words Contradiction Solution Speed	Pushing Forward
FT16	Digital Island	e Speed Globalisation Technological Power	Pushing Forward
FT17	@' rating	e New Tech Words Security Fear Speed	Discourse Creation
FT18	Siebel	e Contradiction Globalisation	
FT19	Infineon	Fear Security Contradiction	

FT20	i2	Value Solution Globalisation e New Tech Words	E-Commerce and Solution
FT21	PricewaterhouseCoopers	e Endorsement Globalisation Solution	Discourse Creation
FT22	usecolor.com	Empower Solution New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT23	IBM	e Solution Contradiction Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT24	MSDW	New Tech Words e Endorsement Solution Value	Discourse Creation
FT25	IBM	e Endorsement Old Explains New	E-Commerce and Solution
FT26	GorillaPark	Globalisation New Tech Words Speed	Pushing Forward
FT27	Hannond Suddards	e Old explains New	Pushing Forward
FT28	Andersen Consulting	e Globalisation Simplifies	Discourse Creation
FT29	Nettec	e Solution Future	Pushing Forward
FT30	Andersen Consulting	e Fear Security	Discourse Creation
FT31	Sun Microsystems	New Tech Words Fear Security Technological Power	Discourse Creation
FT32	Interworld	Old Explains New e Solution	
FT33	KPMG/Microsoft	e Speed Future Fear Solution	Pushing Forward
FT34	McKinsey and Company	e Old Explains New	Discourse Creation
FT35	HP	e Solution Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT36	Informix	New Tech Words Endorsement Solution	E-Commerce and Solution
FT37	Marconi	Speed Future	Pushing Forward
FT38	Viewocity	e Endorsement Speed New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT39	Adero	Globalisation e New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT40	Intel	Customisation Speed Fear Technological Power	Pushing Forward
FT41	Deloitte Consulting	e Youth Fun	E-Commerce and Solution
FT42	Intel	Contradiction e Globalisation Technological power Customisation	Pushing Forward

FT43	Requisite Technology	Solution New Tech Words e	E-Commerce and Solution
FT44	Adero	Globalisation Technological Power Fear Speed	Pushing Forward
FT45	Sun Microsystems	New Tech Words e Technological Power Endorsement	Discourse Creation
FT46	Cisco Systems	Speed Globalisation Technological Power	Pushing Forward
FT47	Pandesic	Speed e	Pushing Forward
FT48	Citrix	Technological Power Speed Endorsement Youth	Pushing Forward
FT49	Excelon	e New Tech Words Superior Knowledge Empower Solution	Discourse Creation
FT50	IBM	e Face to the Firm Customisation	E-Commerce and Solution
FT51	Sybase	Fear Solution	E-Commerce and Solution
FT52	HP	e Speed Technological Power	Discourse Creation
FT53	Vignette	e	
FT54	Streamwave	Technological Power Future	Pushing Forward
FT55	Nortel Networks	e Solution New Thinking	E-Commerce and Solution
FT56	C-Bridge	Fear Speed Solution	Pushing Forward
FT57	Biomni	Endorsement e Solution	E-Commerce and Solution
FT58	e-start.com	New Tech Words e Endorsement	Discourse Creation
FT59	J.P.Morgan	Customisation Endorsement Face to the Firm New Tech Words	E-Commerce and Solution
FT60	agt	Globalisation e New Tech Words Solution Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT61	virgin.com	New Tech Words e	
FT62	SAS	e Solution Endorsement Technological Power	E-Commerce and Solution
FT63	Global Crossing	Globalisation Technological Power Speed New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT64	MarchFIRST	Youth Globalisation	Pushing Forward
FT65	Ernst and Young	Fear Security	
FT66	Aspira	Future Youth Solution	Pushing Forward
FT67	.tv	Globalisation New Tech Words Speed	Pushing Forward

FT68	C-Bridge	e Speed Fear New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT69	Brokat	e Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT70	Aspira	Future Youth Solution	Pushing Forward
FT71	Intel	New Tech Words Globalisation Speed	Pushing Forward
FT72	Ernst and Young	Fear Security Speed	Pushing Forward
FT73	Meta4	Speed	Pushing Forward
FT74	Oracle	e Solution	E-Commerce and Solution
FT75	AIG	Old Explains New Fear Solution Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT76	Allaire	Youth Fun New Tech Words e Customisation	Pushing Forward
FT77	Robertson Stephens	Face To Firm Endorsement Globalisation	E-Commerce and Solution
FT78	Mitsubishi Electric	Endorsement Globalisation e	Pushing Forward
FT79	Digex	e Endorsement Technological Power	E-Commerce and Solution
FT80	IBM, i2, Ariba	e Contradiction Globalisation Freedom	Pushing Forward
FT81	PricewaterhouseCoopers	Future Youth e Fear	Pushing Forward
FT82	Network Commerce	Technological Power Endorsement Future New Tech Words	E-Commerce and Solution
FT83	Merryll Lynch	Globalisation	Pushing Forward
FT84	Arthur Andersen	New Tech Words Fear Value	Discourse Creation
FT85	MSDW	Globalisation e Youth Fun Speed	Pushing Forward
FT86	Siemens	Future Speed Youth New Tech Words Globalisation	Pushing Forward
FT87 FT88	CS First Boston Kyocera	Contradiction Speed Globalisation e New Tech Words Globalisation	Pushing Forward Discourse Creation
FT89	IBM, i2, Ariba	e Contradiction Globalisation Freedom	Pushing Forward
FT90	Robertson Stephens	New Tech Words	Discourse Creation
FT91	bmcSoftware	Speed Fear e Technological Power	Pushing Forward

FT92	Unisys	e Endorsement New Tech word Technological power	E-Commerce and Solution
FT93	SAS	e Face to the Firm Fear Security	E-Commerce and Solution
FT94	Covisint	Youth Endorsement Globalisation Speed	
FT95	Sappi	Fear New Tech Words	
FT96	Novell	Technological Power e Freedom New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT97	Microsoft	Solution e Freedom Future	E-Commerce and Solution
FT98	Sun Microsystems	New Tech Words Fear Endorsement Technological Power	Discourse Creation
FT99	Siemens	Future Technological power New Tech Words	Pushing Forward
FT100	Intel	Technological Power Contradiction Globalisation Speed	Pushing Forward
FT101	MSDW	Globalisation Freedom Future	Pushing Forward
FT102	Digital Island	e Speed Fear Technological Power	Pushing Forward
FT103	AspenTech	Value e Solution Globalisation	
FT104	PricewaterhouseCoopers	e Endorsement Freedom	E-Commerce and Solution
FT105	Corvis	Technological Power Speed Future	Pushing Forward
FT106	Commerce One	Youth Fun e Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT107	Digex	Endorsement Technological Power	E-Commerce and Solution
FT108	Getronics	Future e	Pushing Forward
FT109	Getronics	Future Freedom e Solution	Pushing Forward
FT110	Getronics	Solution Freedom e Future	Pushing Forward
FT111	Merrill Lynch	Technological Power Globalisation Security	Pushing Forward
FT112	NortelNetworks	New Technological Words Simplifies Freedom Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT113	SAS	Face to the Firm e Solution	E-Commerce and Solution
FT114	Ericsson	Customisation Future	E-Commerce and Solution

FT115	CS First Boston	Speed Superior Knowledge Endorsement	Pushing Forward
FT116	PricewaterhouseCoopers	Future e	Pushing Forward
FT117	Ericsson	Customisation Future	E-Commerce and Solution
FT118	IDA Ireland	e Technological Speed New Tech Words Youth	
FT119	PricewaterhouseCoopers	Future e Fear	Pushing Forward
FT120	Excelon	New Tech Words	Discourse Creation
FT121	Nortel Networks	New Technological Words Simplifies Freedom Endorsement Fun	E-Commerce and Solution
FT122	Lucent Technologies	Speed Fear Youth e Future	Pushing Forward
FT123	World Online	Future Youth Endorsement Globalisation	Pushing Forward
FT124	Tivoli	Endorsement Fun Speed e	Pushing Forward
FT125	i2i	New Tech Words Globalisation	Discourse Creation
FT126	J.P.Morgan	Old explains New Superior Knowledge	E-Commerce and Solution
FT127	Oracle	Fear e Technological Power	Discourse Creation
FT128	MSDW	New Tech Words Endorsement Globalisation Speed	Discourse Creation
FT129	Getronics	Solution Freedom e Future	Pushing Forward
FT130	Siemens	Globalisation e Endorsement	E-Commerce and Solution
FT131	Digital Island	Youth Fear e Speed Technological Power	Pushing Forward

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Does monster.com Have Any Byte? An Exploratory Dialogue

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abstract

Dot.coms were lauded in 1999. Dot.bombs were savaged in 2000. Dot.survivors linger in 2001. Despite this roller-coaster history the recruitment industry has gone on-line and digital. Fuelled by claims of access to "a gold standard workforce"[1] organisations are urged by the HR industry press to get on line to improve their recruitment strategies. Puzzled by the proliferation of hyperbole and the rhetoric of cyber-recruitment, we, two management academics decided to become participants in this brave new world of e-cruitment. Despite the promises of a sophisticated and effective method of attracting the best candidates for employers, as potential employees we found the on-line interaction to be frustrating and time-wasting. We spent hours attempting to respond to the on line prompts at various job sites and we experienced the decision protocols underlying the web-based recruitment programs to be so immutable we could not even succeed in registering our interest in any advertised position. This experience leads us into a dialogue as we both sought to understand our personal responses to the dissonance between the rhetoric of e-cruitment and our reality. Reflecting her theoretical bias towards a psychoanalytic perspective, Jan asked 'What in the process of recruitment is being defended against by the adoption of e-cruitment methods?' Sue's discourse perspective led her to a different question. 'What are the disciplinary effects of the discourses surrounding emerging social practices such as e-cruitment?' In the spirit of co-operative inquiry that encompasses a both/and approach we use these two critical theoretical perspectives to analyse the construction of 'e-cruitment' as a digital tool for attracting and selecting human resources. We intend to hold a dialogue that includes theoretical insights from both these perspectives to broaden our understanding of the issues.

Sue: Recruitment and Selection: a Discourse Perspective

The Story

We attempted to find a great job on the Net. The right job for both of us. What we found was a very different world to the

Jan: Recruitment and Selection: a Psychodynamic Perspective

What's the Problem?

We just don't 'get' the hyperbole that surrounds the recruitment of staff on the Net. Within two weeks of logging on to a num-

1 From a brochure advertising the Slash Time and Costs Through On-line Recruitment conference, Sydney, Australia, November 1999.

one promised in the rhetoric. When we registered ourselves as potential candidates for positions advertised on a number of recruitment sites we became increasingly frustrated and suspicious of the rhetoric. It took an inordinate amount of time to register because of slow Internet connections and tiresome design protocols that restricted our movements once on line.

In addition to this we were often asked to categorise ourselves into prearranged categories that did not fit our experience, skills and abilities. The system felt alienating, controlling and immutable. We failed to register for any job.

We could not accept our failure. We created a composite employee from the far-more impressive resumes of our respective former partners. Again we failed. We were genuinely frustrated, embarrassed and diminished by the experience.

Fortunately we work within an environment that despite all its many shortcomings, still allows opportunities for reflexive enquiry. We decided to use our experience to gain some greater, albeit personal understanding of recruitment and selection via the Internet.

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Background: The Discursive Construction of Reality

Recent developments in the social sciences have focused on language and the power of social discourses in shaping how we come to know and accomplish social order of job sites, brochures for two different conferences on electronic recruitment landed (coincidently) on our desks. Why would anyone pay $1500 a day to attend? All these claims – access to top talent, speed, greater power, lower costs, greater reach, improved efficiency, competitive edge - appear high-blown and fanciful (eg. Browne, 1998; Fister, 1999; Useem, 1999; CCH on-line, 2000; Kay, 2000; Goldsborough, 2000; topjobs.com.au, 2000; Zall, 2000). We thought the use of the Net was just a technological adjunct to standard processes of recruitment. And yet the claims suggest recruitment has been transformed (Wyld, 1998; Hilpern, 1999) and is undergoing "a paradigm shift" (advertising brochure, 1999)! What is meant by this? Our dialogue begins as we set out to explore.

Either/Or Theoretical Frameworks

The starting point of our dialogue represents the either/or of traditional academic critique. We shared a common experience, the personal humiliation of not being able to apply for a job and the recognition that our personal experience represented a problem worthy of further exploration. However we sought an understanding of this problem from two quite different theoretical perspectives. Sue experienced the process of on-line recruitment as a form of discipline, it seemed that only certain types of job applicants could register. I responded to the anxiety and humiliation the experience created and tried to make sense of the popularity of on-line recruitment from this position.

Background: The Presence of Anxiety

The requirement for quality staff in a competitive and globalised environment has placed growing pressure on all organisations to ensure they have the capacity and capability to meet the demands of re-

ganisation. In the area of organisation studies, writers have used a discursive approach for understanding organisational strategy (Barry and Elmes, 1997), research (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Kilduff and Mehra, 1997), human resources management (Townley 1992), leadership (Calais and Smircich, 1988), gender inequalities (Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997 and Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998), organisational culture (Casey, 1999) and organisational analysis (Burrell, 1988 and Smircich, Calas and Morgan, 1992).

Discursive approaches to understanding social reality call into question the cultural and historical specificity language and knowledge in the process of knowing what is real and under what conditions reality exists. Language and knowledge from this perspective are not just symbolic systems that report the nature and state of a reality 'out there'. They are powerful and practical constituents of our locations and experiences across different historical and social contexts (Dachler and Hosking, 1995:4).

For example texts, theories, the popular press and other media, codes of morality, utterances and even computer programming protocols are powerful elements in the reality construction process. They represent forms of social practice that make available to us knowledge that tells us what there is to know and whether what we know is a valid account of our experience by providing us with 'rules' that tell us what is true and what is not (for example scientific knowledge). Hence concepts such as truth and reality are understood in terms of mechanisms through which knowledge and language constitute social reality in terms of seemingly incontrovertible truths that define and order our experience (Chia, 1996:14, Potter, 1996:125-140). Social discourse are

cruitment and selection. The process of selection is not a simple task. Any appointment of staff is mediated by organisational requirements, legislative prescriptions and social and political expectations; all within the context of significant financial repercussions should inappropriate or unlawful selection practices occur.

It is clear there is considerable scope for anxiety generated by the demands of recruitment and selection. These anxieties emanate from both the conscious and manifest concerns with the task of finding and securing the best applicant as well as the unconscious fears that are triggered by the selection process itself. And it is because of these conscious and unconscious anxieties that recruiters seek to control as much of the process as possible.

The agreed protocols of recruitment and selection whether addressed from the perspective of Human Resources Management (Stone, 1998; Compton and Nankervis, 1998) or organisational psychology (Schein, 1980) are based on assumptions of the necessity for rational choice and objective and scientific methods to select the right person for the right job. Sophisticated technologies and testing procedures have been designed with the intent to evaluate general ability, specific skills and personality and/ or psychological profiles of applicants (Compton and Nankervis, 1998). Any use of non-scientific processes of recruitment and selection are condemned (Compton and Nankervis, 1998; Di Malia and Smith, 1997; Graves and Karren, 1996/1998). Interviews whether formal or informal, conducted individually or in groups, by telephone or face-to-face are discouraged for their non-scientific and subjective bias in decision-making.

The ramifications of a poor appointment are so dire for the recruiter/ human re-

defined by Alvesson and Billing as:

> a set of statements, beliefs, and vocabularies that is historically and socially specific and that tends to produce truth effects – certain beliefs are acted upon as true and therefore become partially true in terms of consequences. (1997: 40)

They are central to understanding practical strategies that give rise to competing social realities. The elaboration of meaning through discourses involves conflict (for example, the conflict inherent in the different theoretical approaches outlined here) over competing and hierarchically ordered systems of knowledge.

While dominant discourses such as those surrounding the Internet and e-cruitment appear powerful in shaping our experience (what's wrong with us? Why don't we fit in to job specifications?) as we applied for a job on line, discourses are inherently unstable, contradictory and ambiguous. This quality of discourse is usually hidden from view through discursive mechanisms that continually and productively constitute and reconstitute an apparently seemless and consistent view of reality.

In the context of this study, a discursive approach offers an inclusive and generative path towards a greater understanding and comprehension of the social world because it seeks to bring into focus the ambiguities, contradictions and instabilities embedded in social discourses. It allows us to ask questions about why we know what we know about the Internet and e-cruitment so we can deconstruct taken for granted assumptions that create unchallengeable truths about the Internet and e-cruitment.

Disciplining Social Reality Through Prohibition Mechanisms

Foucault (1981) argues that discourses sources practitioner/ manager every effort is made to minimise any personal or subjective involvement in the process. The demand is for recruitment processes that embrace the latest technologies, are scientific, objective and provide perfect predictors of the perfect employee.

The Development of Social Defences Against Organisational Anxiety

There is a large body of work within organisational literature that recognises the influence personal and group psychology has on organisational life (eg. Schein 1965; Katz and Kahn, 1978; Levinson, 1978; Hirschhorn, 1990; Diamond, 1993). For this discussion however I shall be focussing on the psychodynamic approach that emerged from the Tavistock Institute in London by researchers who examined the way in which participation in work and organisational life stimulates painful anxieties which in turn leads to the creation of powerful defensive systems within organisations. Elliot Jaques (1955) and Isobel Menzies (1970) showed that in addition to functional reasons for the establishment of various organisational systems, processes and structures these arrangements also provided organisational cohesion in the defense against shared anxieties.

In describing this process as a social defense, the concept provides a link between individual and collective anxieties and provides a way of seeing the interrelationship between the individual and the group. It is as an individual taking up a work role that particular anxieties are generated; it is in establishing systems to defend against those anxieties that social systems are created. Over time the social defense system is built up and maintained as members of the group enter unconscious agreements to diminish their task-related anxiety

contain within them the will to truth, legitimating mechanisms that define and defend some forms of knowledge and ways of knowing reality over others. The will to truth is productive because the will to truth creates practical strategies that function to maintain the legitimacy and stability of competing social discourses.

The disciplining effects of social discourses are the consequences of procedures of exclusion that operate through strategies of prohibition, division and rejection that function to maintain the truth effects of social discourse. These strategies give rise to specific forms of social practice whilst prohibiting others thereby constituting specific and possible ways of knowing in terms of what is possible to do or say or construct as real. For Foucault (1981) this is evidenced by the growth of regulatory practices throughout history that constitute ways of knowing reality in terms of classifications and rankings via strategies of prohibition, division and rejection (Foucault, 1981; see also Townley, 1993 for the use of these ideas in relation to Human Resources Management).

Prohibition strategies discipline our understanding and experience of social reality by placing constraints on objects and circumstances of speech. These strategies name what can be talked about, how it is discussed, what can be named in discussion and who is authorised to name and speak for certain kinds of knowledges.

Prohibitions constituted through social discourse permit strategies of division and rejection that divide the world up into the real, what is true, good, moral or right and the 'other' that which cannot be incorporated or embraced by the true or correct reality. For example disciplinary (as in various academic) knowledges divide the world into elements that can be legitimately incorporated into specific academic (Gilmore and Krantz, 1990).

Identifying the ways in which organisational members use the psychological processes of splitting, projective identification, idealisation and so on Elliot Jaques provided an elegant example of how the experience of splitting and projection has institutionalised the role of a first officer aboard a ship. Any ambivalence, negative feelings, fears and doubts experienced by the crew is split off and projected onto the First Officer, whose duty is to take responsibility for everything that goes wrong. This unconscious process allows the ship's Captain upon whom the crew is dependent, "to be more readily idealised and identified with as a good protective figure" (1953/1990: 426).

Yet another example is provided by Menzies' (1970) in her seminal work on nursing, in which she argued considerable anxieties are generated when engaged in the tasks required of an occupation essentially about illness and death. In performing these tasks feelings of fear, disgust and distaste may emerge, just as feelings of compassion, guilt and libidinal and erotic attraction may be experienced. She showed that in an effort to defend against these anxieties, systems within hospitals were designed to limit close contact between nurses and individual patients - rosters rotated staff through different wards and shifts; rituals were introduced such as waking patients to give them drugs when sleep was more beneficial; patients were often identified not by name but by bed or illness and so on. With no particular ties to any individual patients and with no thought required to perform mindless rituals nurses were able to avoid feelings of anxieties. Although the experience of nursing may have changed since Menzies' account the use of social defenses has not.

Before moving to a discussion of how the

systems of knowledge governed by epistemological rules that define what is and what is not counted as valid knowledge.

The Internet as an 'as if' Reality

Strategies of prohibition, division and rejection operate to discipline ways of knowing about the Internet by defining and de-limiting what we can know about on-line recruitment and the technologies that make it possible.

A good example is the mystery that surrounds the nature and operations of the Internet. For many of us, the Internet is at once part of our everyday life and a mystery. We use it everyday but at the same time we wonder about its scope, applications, its size and its phenomenal rate of growth. What is it? Where is it? How does it work? Who pays? Who are involved in it and how are they related to one another? These are questions often asked and seldom answered.

Wynn and Katz's (1998) discussion of an 'as if' world constructed through the internet may offer some explanation for why it is difficult to remove the mystery surrounding the Internet. This 'as if' world represents an unreal reality, a fantastical world, qualitatively different and disassociated from the reality outside the Internet.

While we do not consider the processes through which these realities are constituted we do provide a good summary of the rhetoric surrounding the WWW and popular constructions of Internet realities. These include:

- Futurism and radical scenarios
- WWW as fantastic and unreal
- It bears no relation to the current social context
- WWW has transformed culture
- Social domain with no known bounda-

use of on-line recruitment may act as a defense against the anxiety experienced by recruitment and selection there are two further points that must be made. The first is to address the difference between Sue's analysis and my own. The second is to examine just a few of the psychological issues associated with recruitment and selection.

Different positions – similar desire

It is apparent from a comparative reading of Sue's understanding of the use of on-line recruitment and selection, we adopt quite different analyses. This is an issue that has occasioned much discussion between us outside of this more formal and less personal dialogue. Our individual work reflects knowledge of, and support for these different perspectives. Even though we are aware there are many academics drawing on either perspective who may rage against the other, we do not experience the positions as incommensurable.

We both argue there are many dimensions to work-life experiences – our mutual interest is in the main however in the political (institutional) and the psychological (the personal/ interpersonal). Through the use of political critique we hope to encourage activity and change. The psychoanalytic dimension is used as an aid to understand behaviours and systems that often defy comprehension. The discursive dimension is used as an aid to understand behaviours and systems that are often hidden from our comprehension. Again, it is our hope that in assisting understanding we can contribute to action that benefits organisational members and their clients/ customers and so on.

Our different analyses are not presented as either/ or dichotomies. We do not intend to argue the finer points of our positions

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The materiality and legitimacy of this world is created and sustained through strategies that prevent or prohibit us from comparing it with realities outside the Internet. How can we compare the world we now know with such a futuristic, unreal and difficult to define scenario? We can't because we only have limited discursive resources made available to us to do so. This is a point made by Civin (1999) who argues that competing views on cyber-technology tend to occupy two extremes – the anti-technological Luddism and the absolutely rhapsodic.

For me, these articles demonstrate the discursive limitations in possible ways of knowing about the Internet. We can go with the mystery and engage in a rhapsodic support of cyberspace or question the mystery and engage in the dangerous Luddism of those who are sceptical. There is no room for fence-sitting!

The discursive strategies of prohibition, division and rejection discipline our understanding of the Internet by constituting systems of hierarchically arranged and often mutually exclusive realities. These discursive strategies constitute the Internet in terms of an either/or reality by reference to that which is outside its ken (quite literally), the other, a world that is not the Internet.

Disciplining Human Resources

HRM, as Jan argues across, is concerned with the development of objective and scientific methods for recruiting and selecting appropriately qualified staff in an efficient and effective manner. In order to achieve this aim, HRM theories and practices operate as techniques that render the subjects of HRM, people and organisations, objects of practice by construing them as controlduring the dialogue. We are aware this may be constructed as mealy-mouthed and wimpy we nonetheless contend our argument is with a process that normalises the dehumanisation of employer-employee relationships. We believe our anger and hostility is better directed against such "innovations" as on-line recruitment sites rather than against each other.

The Anxious Recruiter

For the purposes of this paper issues shall be examined only from the perspective of the recruiter and will be limited to only three issues - the myth of the perfect or idealised employee, feelings of envy and of rejection and exclusion.

The Perfect or Idealised Employee

Pressures for improved performance, growing incidence of corporate mergers and rationalisations, downsizing, global competition and so on are creating a demand for "super-employees" who have multiple skills and can work within increasingly demanding working environments (Ulrich, 1993; Graves and Karren, 1996). These expectations of super-employees are both difficult to achieve and highly ambiguous. For instance commentators, while noting the paradox as if an aside, identify the necessity for employees to take risks but avoid failure; know every detail of the business and delegate more responsibility; be passionate about vision and be flexible and able to change direction quickly and speak up, be a leader and be participative, listen and co-operate (Kanter, 1990).

It is apparent that no employee can fulfil these impossible (dare one say schizophrenic) expectations. Such demands create fantasies of an ideal or perfect employee and in so doing create for recruiters an impossible task. At an executive level

lable and manageable units through the application of rational and scientific methods.

Townley (1993) argues human resource theory and practice encompasses a broad range of complex and heterogeneous elements of organisation and human behaviour, which are defined and ordered by HRM discourses. Following Townley's (1993) post-modern analysis, I argue that discourses surrounding on-line recruitment give rise to strategies of division and rejection that simultaneously define both the subjects and the relations assumed in personnel recruitment activities on the Internet.

Here are some examples of the outcomes of these disciplining mechanisms:

The Internet is 'HOT'

'The Internet is 'HOT'. It is new, technologically advanced and therefore its efficacy as a recruitment tool cannot be questioned.' Similarly the goodness and technological savvy of those involved in Internet recruitment also cannot be questioned.

This rhapsodic rhetoric (Civin, 1999) not only creates a discursive space that disciplines our ability to question the underlying assumptions of recruitment on the Internet, it disciplines our concept of the recruit and the recruiter by dividing up potential employers and employees into two groups, those who use on-line recruitment (read those who are 'hot', modern, technologically savvy) and the 'others' (read those who are 'not hot': the less technologically savvy and less successful) who don't.

The 'others' those who don't participate in on-line recruitment face rejection and failure. They are the ones left behind (see the perfection may require the skills and qualities of a superhuman saviour. And yet despite the elevation in the business press of some corporate leaders to superhuman status the essence of humanness is imperfection. The fantasy of the perfect employee or the leader as saviour is just that – a fantasy.

The cost of belief in finding the perfect employee can be enormous. Intrinsic to the fantasy of the perfect employee is the fear of hiring an imperfect candidate. Such a fear may (and has) paralyse/d the process of seeking the most suitable candidate, whether it be on an insistence the advertising be listed as widely as possible, that a large enough pool of candidates is available, that all selection criteria be met and so on. In this circumstance no employee can ever be 'good enough'.

Rejection and Exclusion

Corporate down-sizing, frequent mergers and acquisitions, outsourcing of services, privatisation of government services and agencies and a sustained unemployment rate in Australia of about 8% have all contributed to a large pool of professionals seeking employment. Although not all commentators on the human cost of downsizing see a parallel with extermination camps (see Stein, 1996), the psychological impact of forced redundancy can be enormous (Sparrow and Cooper, 1998; Luthans and Sommer, 1999; Grunberg, Anderson-Connolly and Greenberg, 2000).

It is this contextual factor that must be considered when making explicit the presence of rejection and exclusion within each step of the process of recruitment and selection. Because there are usually more applicants than positions available the task of informing a candidate of success is mediated by the awareness that many more applicants must be informed of their fail-

dinosaurs below), the inefficient and ineffective ones like Jan and myself.

The Internet is Transformative

'The Internet is transformative. It has radically transformed the rules of recruitment by changing the rules and relationships in the HR process of recruitment and these changes cannot be ignored.' Hence statements such as 'the world of recruitment is changing' and HR practitioners need cheaper faster delivery of services because of the global nature of the business world are examples of this rhetoric. The implication is that HR people are desperate for new recruiting strategies and new types of recruits and the Internet will help them transform their recruitment practices (see for example Bryant, 1999:34-35).

Strategies of division and rejection work to at once create the world in which HR recruitment operates (global and rapidly changing) and the kinds of practices HR practitioners must adopt (technologically sophisticated) to find new kinds of recruits (hot? sexy? technologically savvy?). The world HR practitioners once inhabited is gone, rejected out of hand as an irrelevant past along with the activities they traditionally engaged in as the next section demonstrates. In addition to this those that they deal with, potential employees are radically transformed into the new workforce for the 21st Century.

The Old Ways are Difficult and Crude

The 'other' divided off world must be rejected because the 'old ways' of recruitment are difficult, outdated, technologically naive and crude as the following extract states.

> Recruiting will not be the rather crude process it is today of plugging a roughly round person into a roughly round hole and hoping that the fit is good enough. (Callander, *HR*

ure – that is, of their rejection. To reject is almost as unpleasant as to be rejected; responses to the feelings rejection invokes may vary – but for most are feelings of considerable anxiety. As infants we were excluded from our parents' world and every person no matter their subsequent circumstances therefore has experience of rejection and exclusion. Rejection is to deny belonging and attachment – and to belong is considered a fundamental human psychological and physiological need (Maslow, 1970; Bowlby, 1973; Klein, 1986).

For recruiters, although it is they who are engaged in the act of rejection and exclusion, it is the anxiety of their own rejection that is projected on to unsuccessful applicants and experienced in the act of excluding an Other.

Envy

One of the rarely discussed features of organisational life, envy, can also be readily invoked during the process of conducting a search for a new employee (Bedeian, 1995; Stein, 2000). The *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary* suggests there are two aspects to envy – the first involves a wish to have the good fortune and/ or possessions of an Other; the second involves feelings of resentment and discontent towards the more fortunate Other.

It has been suggested social comparison is often the trigger for envy (Duffy and Shaw, 2000). And so much of the recruitment and selection process creates circumstances in which social comparison is inevitable. Employee résumés and curriculum vitae provide significant amount of personal information that is readily accessible to all those involved in the selection process. Details of place of residence, educational achievements, career history and successes and so on can

Monthly, May 1999: 54)

Don't be a Dinosaur

'Recruiting is never easy (Gallagher, 1999: 154-155), but of course the Internet makes it easy'. Here we find dividing and rejecting strategies at work once again, The Internet world of science and technology is contrasted with and rejecting of the alternative – existing technologies used for acquiring, tracking and developing human capital. Traditional recruitment tools are outlawed. The Internet offers technical sophistication and managers and recruiters are implored not to become 'dinosaurs' (Howes, 1999:55). The Internet simultaneously offers managers the potential to add value and become technologically sophisticated (hot – see above), as well as avoiding the difficulties of making judgements about potential job candidates. The technology will do the choice work (see Greengard, 1998:75).

Summary

In summary, strategies of prohibition, division and rejection work to construct the Internet as a world of science that takes the inexactitude out of recruiting staff. Simultaneously the strategies of division and rejection take the complexity out of human beings in a pared down social reality where social relationships are made simple through the mediation of sophisticated technologies.

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provide a very clear image (or fantasy) of the applicants. And of course, no matter how pedestrian the applicant, résumés are invariably designed to highlight successes and achievements. Yet, even being conscious of the upbeat résumé, any unfulfilled desires or resentments felt by the recruiter may be accentuated by the discrepancy between the recruiters' own achievements and the alleged successes of job applicants.

It is outside the realms of this paper to consider the ways in which envy may influence the selection process – at this point my only concern is to suggest envy is invoked by the necessity to read applicant's employment and life histories. Envy at its most intense can be very destructive (Klein, 1957) – irrespective of its intensity it is always an unpleasant and distressing emotion to experience (Parrot and Smith, 1993; Stein, 2000). Whether acknowledged or not I suggest envy forms a significant component of the emotional exchange experienced by recruiters.

Summary

It is apparent involvement in recruitment and selection of staff can be a process fraught with psychological stresses. Either consciously or within their unconscious recruiters face fundamental anxieties – the anxiety of fear of failure, the anxiety of rejection and exclusion as well as the anxiety created by envy. The use of the Internet is clearly a perfect tool to address the requirement for a large global pool of potential applicants. With claims of reach and access that transcend national borders and appears without boundaries, e-cruitment can be understood as providing the possibility that the "perfect" employee who is "out there" can be found and attracted to join the organisation. Nonetheless it I still find it difficult to understand how e-cruitment has radically trans-

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formed the essence of recruitment and selection. I shall therefore argue the Internet is just one more technological tool in a raft of tools recruiters use to defend against the anxieties generated by the process of recruitment and selection.

Dialogue

Jan, in response to your concluding paragraph, I agree. The Internet has not transformed the recruitment process. The discourses surrounding the Internet have created an 'as if' world where technology has transformed a previously difficult and definitely not sexy activity into something alluring and exciting. It seems a prominent theme in the discourses surrounding the Internet is that it is hot. What is your response to this?

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This is a dividing and rejecting strategy. The subtext of the 'Internet is hot' is of course, everything else is not hot. As I indicate in my brief analysis discourses surrounding the Net and Internet recruitment create a dichotomy that discipline the ways in which we not only come to know and talk about Internet but as you indicate Jan, construe those involved in online recruitment activities, employers and employees. Internet recruitment is given a materiality and legitimacy by linking into discourses of rationality and technical competence to construct the either/or

My first response to the use of 'HOT' is hot and sexy; hot and sweaty. Sex. I don't think it necessary to embark on a discussion about Freud's identification of the power of the libidinal drive because we all understand at some level why sex sells. I guess it is easy though to suggest why recruiting through the Net might be attractive – if the Net is hot, then presumably people who use the Net are also hot. Therefore if I use the Net I am hot and the people I want to recruit must be hot too. As I mentioned one of the anxieties of finding suitably qualified staff is the necessity to find people with the appropriate range of skills, competences, attributes and experience. Almost by implication, to be hot also means smart and savvy and with the skills required to be part of a new millennium workforce. The use of the Net is therefore a screening process - the very use of the technology ascribes particular qualities to the prospective employee. These qualities are usually male, young and Tertiary-educated (see Hoffman, Novak and Chatterjee, 1995). In my quest for the idealised and perfect employee, there is some reassurance that the hot employee who is "out there" is within the reach and access of the Net. From a personal perspective there is also real attraction in using the Internet. If I am hot I am not dull and boring and drab. From a psychodynamic perspective my doubts and fears about my "hotness" quotient can be split off and projected into the Net – which can then be introjected or taken in as hot. In this process I get rid of my un-cool bit and because I use the Internet I am now

world of relatively simple, rational, and technology based solutions to a complex and difficult activity. Other ways of thinking about the Internet or recruiting staff on-line are rejected and dispensed with time and time again. The Internet is constituted and legitimised as not only the 'one best way' for recruiting staff but also the staff that are recruited are constituted as being of a particular kind with particular qualities which 'fit' into the futuristic scenario of Internet recruitment. Potential employees are no longer mundane, messy, complex and difficult to categorise individuals; they are constituted as an undifferentiated group of highly skilled, technologically savvy, committed and discriminating people.

Jan, I think you are falling victim to the rhetoric. The *ephemera* journal is just another way of providing a publication opportunity for academics such as ourselves. I argue the appeal of the journal is not the medium through which it is published, i.e. the Internet, but rather the fact that it provides us with an opportunity to publish this kind of theoretical exploration.

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Yes, I think the idea of splitting is very relevant. I see it in terms of practical strategies of prohibition, division and rejection that discipline and simplify ways of knowing complex social phenomena. All the messy stuff, the difficulties programmers face in developing software to deal with human complexities and differences are split off, assumed away, rejected out of hand. We are discursively prohibcool (a.k.a. hot).

A personal thought and an aside – what does this concept of HOT mean for us seeking publication in *ephemera*, an on-line journal? I would have to admit I do find the whole concept of *ephemera* very attractive, desirable and dare I say, sexy? It is not mainstream – so is a challenge to conservatives. That's fine. Because its editorial board and processes maintain academic rigour it nonetheless has the necessary legitimacy and integrity. Good. But it is more. Because of the mystique that still surrounds the cyberworld it is as if even entering that domain provides an immediate and attractive cachet. It does feel as if we can transcend our personal and career demographics and create our Selves in a way not possible in other media. It is as if publication in *ephemera* can contribute to our identity.

I think you are right here Sue. I realise I have probably been seduced by the rhapsodic. It's worth giving more thought to this. It would also be interesting to pursue this with the founders and editors of this journal. Returning to your earlier point, you talk of the world of either/or used as a way of simplifying the difficult and complex and chaotic. It sounds very similar to the process of splitting, projection and idealisation – Melanie Klein (1986) refers to this as the paranoid schizoid position in which the dichotomy of good/ bad or simple/ complex and so on is established in order to manage the complexity and uncertainty of living. Of course this position may lead to rigidity and loss of creativity (Krantz, 1996) – so focused are we on maintaining the dichotomous relationships there is little room to contemplate playing with possibilities or challenging the basis of the split. It is also apparent we have a shared view of the "idealisation" of the potential applicants – you refer to the undifferentiated in which there is no room

ited from discussing such difficulties as well as psychologically defending ourselves from them. Your point about the idealised employee is also interesting. The discourses surrounding the Internet constitute those engaged in on-line recruiting (recruiters and recruitees) as rationalised, relatively contextless, non-complex and homogenous participants and 'the other' those who do not embrace the technology or fit the requirements of online recruiting. At a more personal level we both experienced this when we attempted to register ourselves for jobs on one of the on-line recruitment sites. Our skills and experiences did not fit neatly into the categorisations offered by the database protocols. Do you have a further comment about this?

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for shades of skill, competence etc. Again, from my perspective the use of recruitment on the Net perpetuates the myth or fantasy of the perfect employee.

Before I answer the question it is probably worth offering a brief explanation of the practicalities of on-line recruitment. For recruitment companies and companies conducting their own recruitment on-line, software and hardware has been developed to sort resumes matching key words to pre-set criteria, to conduct on-line psychological and behavioural testing, to interview applicants and generate letters for unsuccessful applicants (see McCune, 1998). Interactive voice response or computer assisted telephone-screening systems have also been developed to automate the recruitment process (McCune, 1998; Davey, 1998). Should it be required by any recruitment agency or employing company the technology can ensure there is no human involvement in the process of recruitment and selection. It is apparent the use of Internet technologies in the process of recruitment and selection creates considerable distance between recruiter and potential applicant. Just as the use of technology in the finance industry has changed the concept of "customer" from a flesh and blood person who meets with a teller or a consultant or a bank manager to a transaction file that details dealings with bank services (Arnold, 1998), the use of on-line recruiting has changed a potential job applicant to a resumé and the recruitment company to "a portal for job-seekers" (Steggall, 2000). The many claims of the technology in general and the Internet in particular make it a very attractive tool for recruiters not just for its efficiencies but because of the diminution of any direct human involvement in the selection process. The technology portrayed as objective, rational, impersonal and powerful (Shade, 1997) meets the demands for scientific and

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I agree. Those who engage in Internet recruitment are participating in a pared down reality where the relationships between individuals are constituted in rational and impersonal terms. I see this in objective tools methods of recruitment and selection. An additional feature attractive to HR recruiters is the claim the Internet provides anonymity which can transcend gender, ethnic and racial differences (Falk, 1998; Wallace, 1999). The use of on-line recruitment methods can therefore be sold as non-prejudicial or discriminatory. From a psychodynamic perspective the attractiveness of on-line recruitment can be understood as instituting a social system that depersonalises job seekers and removes any subjective engagement between recruiter and potential employees. Even more than the lack of relationship is the depersonalisation demanded by the technologies and software. Applicants and/or the resumés that represent them are stripped down into keywords that can then be manipulated into determining a skill-job fit. Any sense of personhood is rendered irrelevant and extraneous to the disembodiment of the skill and/or experience. Just as Menzies identified the way in which ritualised systems served as an antidote to the anxieties of nursing, so too does the use of Internet technology to conduct recruitment and selection allow recruiters deny the anxieties generated by recruitment. So to answer your question Sue: I think because the requirements of the technology (of course which are driven by the people who demand and programme it) we were little more than disembodied entities. I recall how we felt at the time. We tried to engineer our work experience to fit the requirements and we couldn't do so. There was no opportunity for us as whole people to be considered – our bits did not fit. And our bits, let alone our whole were not valued. At the time we tried to find a phone number to speak to someone about the application and the only point of contact was an email address. Not only could we not be known to the recruiting company they could not be known to us. There was no opportunity to establish any relationship in any way

terms of what Foucault calls 'normalisation'. The discourses surrounding Internet recruitment operate as both an objectivizing force and a subjectivizing force. The Internet at once creates categories of job seekers and defines the subjectivities of those who fit the category 'job seeker'. Again as I said before, this depersonalised category assumes an undifferentiated group of individuals, a group of same people who fit the mould.

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I think this is an interesting point. It seems that the discourses surrounding e-cruitment do not constitute job seekers as individuals capable of creating and changing their individual subjectivities in analysis or problematise individual uniqueness this would be difficult to handle electronically. It is preferable to consider job applicants as key words on a C.V not complex human beings capable of presenting particular unique selves to the world. Well it seems I have the final word in this dialogue but I speak for both of us and the multitude of other academics who write from different theoretical perspectives. The phenomena of e-cruitment needs further investigation. We have provide some food for thought from our unique perspectives and our dialogue across perspectives, over to you…

with the recruiters or the recruiting company. It felt very strange and also very alienating.

You mention undifferentiated which leads me to an observation. In the course of conducting research for this paper I have been struck with the divide that appears as a result of the differentiation of the available literature in this area. For instance, there is a huge body of material devoted to the practicalities and practise of on-line recruitment but contains very little theoretical analysis. On the other hand there is a large body of analysis of human-computer interaction created by the use of the Internet. The analyses whether psychological, technical, critical or cultural (see Turkle, 1985; Young, 1995; Wynn and Katz, 1997; Falk, 1998; Wallace, 1999; Civin, 2000) appear however to focus on dialogue across emails, within discussion groups, in bulletin boards, in MUDS (multi-user dungeons) and MOOS (MUDS object oriented) in home pages and so on. Despite the ubiquity of the Internet within workplaces there appears very little reference to the construction of on-line relationships within an organisational setting. How would you explain from your perspective this either/or dichotomy created between the non-reflexive HR, organisational commentary and the abstract analyses of private behaviours when presenting material on the experience of relationships on the Internet?

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'The Knowledge Era': The Story of a Research Project[1]

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abstract

This paper is an experiment. The experiment consists in writing a text which does not follow the 'classic' mode of reasoning of academic rhetoric but weaves different styles and personalities together in rapid and rhythmic manner. The paper is based on a three-month ethnography in an consultancy company and narrates the story of the development of a research project originally entrusted to three young researchers. From the beginning, it is clear that actors have different aims, that different aims require different ways of acting and that because of this reflexive relationship events are only partially under the control of the subjects involved in the action. The circular and reflexive relationship that arises between practices and discourses in every space of action (including scientific research and fieldwork) induced me to try to construct a story in which the account followed the course of action as closely as possible, interpreting personages (researcher and participating subjects) and events (since these involve the actors or the researcher) as dynamic and reconstructible social facts which constitute subject of investigation. Rather than construct a text that showed analytically the heterogeneity of the elements that contribute to the outcome of research, I preferred to translate this heterogeneity directly during the writing stage, making the various possible courses of action explicit and letting the progress of the story 'mobilize' and 'perform' the most significant events.

> It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not. Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that was much later. In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell. (Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy,* 1987: 1)

The story begins when the ethnographer receives a brochure. Printed on the brochure is the logo of a private university recently set up with funding from a group of famous and hugely wealthy multinationals. It bears the title 'New Tools for the Analysis of

1 I thank Steffen G. Böhm, Barbara Czarniawska, Campbell Jones and the convenors and participants of the sub-theme 'Knowing as the Desire' at the EGOS Conference 2001 for their useful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

Professional Communities as Distributed Intelligence Systems'. The aim of the project is:

> to experiment with and test new research tools capable of supporting the study of professional communities in economic organizations…From a technological point of view, the results of the project will enable development of a model of an on-line community based on significant methodological and theoretical assumptions.

The outcomes foreseen are the following:

- Materials for the international dissemination of the project's results;
- A tested methodology for using the tools identified;
- A tested theoretical model with which to describe and support professional communities;
- A Web application able to reproduce the underlying organizational model in a virtual environment.

The brochure bores the ethnographer, and he fails to understand why it has ended up on his desk, seeing that he does not own a company, knows nothing about professional communities, and uses the Web mostly to send e-mails. Yet he continues to glance through the brochure and comes to the 'Methodological Tools' section. These tools are:

- Social network analysis;
- Extraction of individual and group mental models by means of text analysis;
- Ethnographic analysis of informal groups.

The ethnographer is somewhat irritated by the brochure's description of the research methodology, and especially by the expression 'methodological tools' with its implicit assumption that methodology is a tool. But at least he begins to realize what has happened. The ethnographer's name is Zoe, he is a graduate in sociology of organizations and has spent the last six months working as a researcher on a university project. He collaborates on a more or less stable basis with a lecturer who has obviously suggested his name as a researcher/ethnographer for the project. He grows curious and decides that he will meet the merchants of knowledge and find out what the project is about.

The meeting is to take place on an island in the Venice lagoon. *Laguna University* (for that is its name) has bought the entire island, taking advantage of the fact that some years ago the Venice city council decided to sell off some of the islands in the lagoon. When Zoe arrives in Venice, a private launch is waiting to ferry him to the island. Some other members of the project are on the launch: two young researchers, two university lecturers, and various merchants of knowledge. Zoe falls into conversation with one of the latter, who tells him that the island where they are heading used to be the city's mental hospital. The most distant and isolated of the lagoon's islands, difficult to reach and equally difficult to leave, it offered ideal protection for Venice's citizens against the 'lunatics'. Zoe is intrigued by the story and begins to think that scholars, too, are a little 'mad' and should therefore be kept separate from the rest of the citizenry. Moreover, it is the ideal site for a private university: impregnable to students on terra firma without

boats, and an enchanting setting for scholars in search of a little Eden in which to pursue their studies.

Once on the island, the passengers are ushered into a splendidly appointed room and presentation of the project begins. Delta (an Expert-merchant,[2] not the most powerful of them but the project's general factotum) introduces the other merchants involved. He introduces them with a slide depicting the caricatured faces of merchants. For example, one of them with an abundant head of hair is given an exaggerated bouffant; another with a prominent nose is given a schnozzle *à la* Cyrano. Yet another has a red star on his chest, because, the merchant explains "he's the communist among us". Zoe asks himself whether being (vaguely) communist is as comical as being bald, or having a large nose (assuming that a large nose is comical), or whether it is to be interpreted as an ontological category ('bald', 'large-nosed', 'communist'). He also reflects on the changes taking place in multinational companies: what ten years ago would have been an impediment against a managerial career ('being a communist') is now a grotesquerie to poke fun at.

The meeting continues with presentation of the project's various areas of research.

The first is 'extraction of mental models'. In spite of what the name might suggest, this appears to be a clean and painless process. Slides produced by the subjects are inspected (for a merchant of knowledge slides are an excellent indicator of his/her thoughts); in-depth interviews are conducted with the subjects responsible (elsewhere they would be 'authors', but the world of the knowledge merchants is driven by 'competencies', so that there are no 'authors', only those 'responsible'); they are asked to 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' about how to do what they do and how to know what they know (torture is not recommended). There is a danger of self-evidence and tautology here, but never mind, for the (guaranteed) outcome of the process is the certain and systematic specification of the cognitive processes that regulate action in a given organizational setting. These processes can be transposed to other settings and other subjects. Or they can be modelled by software enabling the more efficient management of knowledge. The knowledge merchants are fascinated by this new method to colonize knowledge, and long discussion ensues on how to incorporate it into technologies and persons. Zoe instead asks himself what has happened to the people who first produced this knowledge, given that they have been dispossessed of their practices and thoughts.

The second talk is about 'intelligent agents' (the brochure mentioned 'social network analysis', in fact, but brochures do not always tell the truth). An 'intelligent agent' is a sort of computerized 'personal assistant' which facilitates communication and information-sharing among different operating systems and/or software programs and/or

2 The hierarchy of merchants is as follows:

- Junior-merchant
- Expert-merchant
- Manager-merchant
- Partner-merchant.

databases and/or persons communicating by computer. Take the case of someone who wants information about a car, for example. This person probably already has a number of characteristics in mind: he may be interested in a runabout and not a sports car; it may be that he rejects yellow out of hand because he loathes the colour; it may be that he is only interested in new cars and not in second-hand ones; or that the car must have five doors and not four; and so on. It is the task of an intelligent agent to know all these details and to broker information by connecting with other intelligent agents and asking them what information they have about cars. The ethnographer thinks that all this talk about intelligent agents rests on some pretty weighty assumptions, primarily that people have very clear ideas of what they are looking for, and that these ideas are not refined as their search proceeds. And what if they change their mind? And then, when we distinguish between 'runabouts' and 'sports cars', is the intelligent agent's idea of a 'runabout' and a 'sports car' identical with that of another agent? Of course, we can make further specifications to restrict the class of objects being referred to, but can we be sure that increasingly detailed information ensures non-ambiguous communication, rather than generating more and more misunderstandings?

Finally, it is the turn of 'the ethnographic method in the analysis of informal groups' to be presented. Zoe at last begins to understand what the merchants' interest in ethnography is all about. One of them (Delta) has stumbled across an esoteric volume on organizational research, where the author uses the metaphor of organizations as 'communities of practice' to assure the reader that there are magic formulae for the successful management of organizational knowledge. To be sure, neither Delta nor any other of the merchants has read any further than the title and subtitle of the book. But after rapidly leafing through it, they are convinced them that one of these magic formulae is ethnographic research. None of them has any precise idea of what this is: a useful way to indoctrinate pygmies, perhaps, or to flog mirrors to Amazonian tribes. In any event, their plan of action is as follows: according to the results of a study based on social network analysis, their team of merchants is a community of practice. What they want Zoe to do is follow the first three months of the learning path of a 'newcomer', so that they can identify how knowledge is managed within their group and, in a broad sense, the entire organization. Zoe is rather sceptical. He knows very well that social network analysis works on the basis of an algorithm which measures the social distances among a given set of individuals. And he thinks that it serves at most to form the teams for some sort of tournament among the employees of a company. But he holds his tongue and accepts with an enthusiastic smile.

In any case, the main purpose of the meeting is for the members of the research group to get to know each other. Zoe's situation, why he is there, and his doubts, have already been described.

Then there is Soemia, whose task it will be to plot the mental maps. Soemia is an arts graduate. She has had some brief research experience (in linguistics) and like Zoe she is currently unemployed. She says that she knows nothing about mental models, how they are extracted, or how they are implanted. However, she seems very much at ease as she talks to the knowledge merchants, and she already knows where the coffee machines are located in the university.

The other young researcher is called Bassiano. He has not yet graduated and is studying economics. He has recently begun writing his degree thesis, which deals with constructing the architecture of intelligent agent software.

Finally, besides the knowledge merchants, there are two university lecturers in charge of the project. There should be three of them, because Zoe's research tutor is also involved, but she is in the throes of a 'linguistic turn' and has declared that she will only recognize the semiotic-rhetorical role of project director. She will sign everything that needs signing, she will appear in all the official documents, but nothing more. The other two directors of the project are instead very happy to be more than mere discursive-institutional constructs and therefore do everything to demonstrate their intentionality, their capacity for action, and their ability to plan future action. One of them lectures in economics but has drifted into psychology and sociology: he is responsible for extraction of the mental models, in fact. The other is a research fellow in economics (although he has a degree in philosophy) and researches the 'architecture of information systems'. "The most dangerous!" Zoe would say afterwards, reflecting on the cynicism necessary to translate the refinement of philosophical reasoning into an approximation of the connections in an intelligent agent system.

In any case, the meeting goes well: the various areas of the project, the funds available and the research timetable are all presented as the knowledge merchants wish. But the three young researchers are told something they had not anticipated: they are expected, indeed obliged, to be present on the island for one day a week. The reason adduced is that it is important to form a research group based on the sharing of knowledge so that the group's members can be constantly in contact and kept up to date on the project's progress. Because the island is difficult to reach, however, the researchers should arrive the previous evening, so that they are already on the premises in the morning. Their accommodation and travel expenses will be paid by the multinationals funding the project, which also finance the host university. Zoe asks himself why it is necessary for them to meet once a week, especially since the empirical phase of the project has not yet begun and any research material is still highly provisional. He knows little about bookkeeping and budget management, but his reaction is that this is a device to ensure that the money always circulates within the same group of organizations.

Before the three researchers leave the island, the knowledge merchants take them on a guided tour of the university. Magnificent lecture halls, luxurious libraries, state-of-the art computer rooms, the beauty of Venice constantly (and distantly) visible. Zoe looks around, because he has learnt that details are noted the first time you see them – thereafter they merge into the background – and he realises that … the university is deserted! They meet no lecturers, no students; the silence and cleanliness of the surroundings are due to the absence of anyone or anything that might produce noise or dirt. He discovers that the university is in its first year of operations, that courses will begin only during the next six months, and that their research group is truly 'unique' because there are no others. Thus, while the launch transports them back to *terra firma* he thinks of all the studies he has read which argue that the purpose of institutional action is often to gain social legitimacy, and that in the case of a university, probably one of the first ways to do so is to set up a research group.

Where the ethnographer begins to understand what it means to be a knowledge merchant

Omega is a new recruit at Aspera (for that is the name of the merchants' company). She has a degree in economics and business studies and has already completed a six-month work placement at Aspera (to prepare her degree thesis). One month after graduating, she officially began her first job with the company. Omega is also the 'newcomer' chosen by Aspera for Zoe to shadow. When they meet, they do not like each other. Zoe thinks that observing someone with such an ear-splitting voice for three months is going to be difficult, while Omega resents her shadow's appearance. There is nothing personal in these reactions, for they have only just met, but to pretend that appearance is unimportant would be hypocritical, for both an ethnographer and a merchant.

The first meeting with the client

The appointment is for 8:00 outside Omega's house, where Beta is already waiting. In the hierarchy of merchants, Beta is a 'Partner-merchant'. The ethnographer asks himself how it is possible for your 'boss' to turn into your 'partner'. Omega and Zoe get into Beta's mobile office: a splendid saloon with stereo, automatic gears and telephone, a smell of wet grass, and a cruising speed of 200 km/h. They arrive at their client's premises. At 'reception' Beta introduces himself as 'Aspera', nothing more nothing less; the ethnographer is introduced as the 'shadow', which seems not to create any particular problem. They meet the 'Buyer' (the company interface for the purchase of knowledge merchandise) and other persons (the 'quality supervisor' and the 'human resources manager'), all of whom, as far as the ethnographer can make out, were born on the Greek island of ISO in 9001. Zoe is bewildered and follows close behind Omega, but more in order not to get lost than out of any sincere research interest. Also the date, 9001, strikes him as strange, but he thinks that he'll have time to understand. And then in any case it is only a number; it's space that makes time and nothing more.

When they have left the company and are back in the car, Omega and Beta talk about the morning. She is astonished by the 'coldness' of the people in the company. Beta says that it is normal: when an outsider comes in there is always this suspicion. Apropos 'outsiders' (and perhaps also 'suspicion') Beta turns to the ethnographer and asks him what he wants to do when he 'grows up'. Zoe says that he still has plenty to time to decide (or otherwise). Beta asks Omega the same question, and she replies (jokingly) that she wants to set up a consultancy company with funds to promote female entrepreneurship. Zoe takes advantage of the relaxed tone of the conversation to ask what Beta wants to do when he 'grows up' (of course, Beta is already 'grown-up' and the ethnographer's question inevitably sounds sarcastic. Zoe doesn't care: he thinks that these are the people who he's got to spend the next three months with, best to get it out in the open immediately). Beta says that his aim is to "enjoy himself", that for him merchandising knowledge is fun, and that his ambition is to "get to 55 and then spend my time travelling, studying and screwing around".

Zoe asks him how long he has been working for Aspera, and he replies "always", adding that (for him) a knowledge merchant has a type of DNA different from that of a fence. It is part of a merchant's genetic code to take on the organization's problems, to

become accepted and constantly valued. It is an enormous satisfaction for him to see his work bear results and to be told things like "if it hadn't been for you it would never have been possible". He concludes by saying that he regards the role of merchant as a "game", and that he thinks he'll continue to enjoy playing it for another fifteen years.

Omega asks Beta what he thinks of her "performance" during the morning, but he pretends not to hear and instead reminds her to write up her log for the day. The three say goodbye and Zoe and Omega go back to the office. During the car journey, Omega thanks the ethnographer for asking Beta what he was going to do when he 'grew up'. She had wanted to ask him but didn't had the courage. Zoe thinks how paradoxical situations sometimes are: he wasn't interested in what Beta wanted to do; he was interested in seeing how he would reply in the presence of Omega.

The first interviews

One evening, a virtual messenger of the knowledge merchants appears on the ethnographer's computer screen summoning him at 8:00 the next morning. Omega and the ethnographer meet outside her apartment building. She gets into the car without even saying good morning, and as if thinking out loud, tells him that she is going to be in trouble because she didn't finish a job the previous day.

Omega puts on her make-up during the car journey.

On their arrival at their clients premises, it is Gamma (a Manager-merchant) who introduces the group; the presence of the ethnographer, besides being unexpected, seems unwelcome. Also Delta notices the hostility, and points it out to the ethnographer, almost reproachfully.

When the two interviewees have been introduced, the scene moves to another room. Gamma begins to describe the project and the first problems arise: the two manager interviewees do not know what Gamma is talking about, the Buyer hasn't explained clearly enough, or not at all. Gamma tries to explain the purpose of the project and then hands over to Omega. She begins a presentation but is soon interrupted. The two interviewees are not convinced by the 'competencies analysis' that the merchants want to develop. They think that it should be the merchants telling them about the competencies required to start up new business. Gamma answers that it is precisely this that they are going to analyse. They are waiting for an appointment with the Mega Director to shed light on future strategies. For the time being they must start with the actual situation, which they expect to understand from the interviews. The Commercial Director (one of the two interviewees) says that he still does not have a clear idea of the merchandise, and in any case it would take two weeks to explain everything that they do. Gamma takes offence and challenges him: "Right then, get started, I'm ready!".

The Commercial Director stands up and begins to describe the market strategies. He uses a whiteboard, although there is no need for one (the ethnographer thinks that use of a whiteboard must be the custom among people born on ISO in 9001). It is Gamma who manages the situation (that is, asks the questions) and the conversation continues between just the two of them; the Buyer listens, Delta takes notes, Omega looks bored. The Commercial Director develops a metaphor: "It's clear that for the client it's like the

war in Serbia … you can bomb as much as you want, but until you move the army in, you can't control the market." Delta say, "That's a good comparison!" and the atmosphere improves. The Commercial Director sits down, he stops drawing tree diagrams and talks in relaxed manner. Gamma stops asking questions, Delta stops writing, Omega continues to take notes with the care typical of someone who has just finished university. Although Gamma continues to conduct the interview, Delta begins to ask questions as well. The ethnographer is a convinced pacifist and has collapsed after the joke about the war in Serbia.

The interview stops at 12:30 because the Commercial Director has another appointment.

When they have left the building, Omega, Delta and Gamma talk about the morning's work, which they think has gone quite well. Omega says that she felt unprepared, Delta says that he does not really understand why Gamma wanted to make the presentation on his own but refrains from outright criticism.

CARE?

Beta asks Delta what score he has given to one of their merchant colleagues, and Delta says that he's given him '5'. Beta disagrees: you give '3' if the person "has done his job", '4' if he's turned in a good performance, and '5' if his performance has gone "further", if it has been outstanding, if he has developed new ideas or new projects.

This is part of the only conversation held in the car during the journey to the third appointment with the client. The conversation is about CARE, Aspera's internal assessment system. Every year, Aspera holds a 'day of reckoning', Omega explains to the ethnographer in an undertone: "senior merchants assess your performance in terms of achievement and personal qualities. The result of the assessment is discussed with the person concerned and then with his or her Partner with regard to career advancement (and a pay rise). There is a score for each individual job and a final one".

Beta says that unfortunately everyone gets '5'. "Unfortunately" because that means there is no selection, whereas that is the exact purpose of the assessment system. "Luckily" every so often someone receives '2' or '1', which (according to Beta) does not automatically mean that you're thrown out of the company; it may be a stimulus (or an imperative, thinks Zoe) for you to try harder. Omega later tells the ethnographer that the CARE system is only a way to divvy up funds. Her degree thesis was on the monitoring of performance at Aspera, and she discovered that during CARE meetings the company's turnover is announced. Those present are told how much has been budgeted for pay increases and they then decide how much to give to whom according to their position in the company. This is followed by jockeying among the partner-merchants on which of their assistants should receive bonuses. So in the end everyone gets '4' or '5'.

However, the atmosphere in the car is not as relaxed as it was on the previous two occasions. Omega, Delta and Beta say very little, and above all none of them mentions today's meeting. Only the ethnographer feels at ease: he still does not know that today the merchants must meet the Mega Director.

When the going gets tough …

On arriving at the company, the group discovers that the meeting has been delayed for an hour. Beta asks the Buyer if there is a room where they can work while they wait. When alone, the merchants discuss what they want to 'obtain' from the interview with the Mega Director.

Gamma reports on the state of the project, Beta and Delta take notes. Omega works with her computer, drawing a graph that she has forgotten. Omega has had problems with the presentation. Gamma telephoned her on Friday evening to tell her that there were changes to be made, and she worked the whole weekend, even though she had planned to relax. She sent the presentation to Delta, who made some minor changes and then gave it to Beta, who was not satisfied and sent it back to Omega. She, however, did not know what to do, and now she has even forgotten a slide… Gamma, Beta and Delta talk; Omega watches in silence, her computer switched on in front of her. Delta asks her to call Aspera for "service communications". Omega therefore has to leave the room in order not to disturb the conversation. When Omega returns, the three are leaving the room to begin the meeting with the Mega Director, and they are leaving without her. In this way they can also avoid the intrusive presence of the ethnographer, who as Omega's shadow remains in the room with her. The reason given for her exclusion ("there shouldn't be too many of us") strikes her as an excuse (and in fact the Mega Director has ordered: "no women, and no shadows!"), she thinks that she must be doing a dreadful job to deserve such treatment and already imagines an enormous '1' being dumped on her. Before leaving the room, moreover, Delta gives her some administrative matters to attend to (mostly telephone calls) and this puts her in an even worse mood: "You get a degree and everything… and then you go off and work as a secretary! Why do they have to stress me out like this?" The ethnographer cynically points out that stress management is probably one of the most crucial aspects of her job.

Perhaps because of this excessive dose of cynicism, something unforeseen now happens. Omega is hit by 'slide syndrome', an illness widespread in tropical tourist villages and also rather common among knowledge merchants. The 'slide syndrome' consists in the fact that you have spent long hours the previous night preparing a superb set of slides and then find there is neither a projector awaiting you nor an audience prepared to listen to you. Omega decides to use the ethnographer: she deploys the rhetorical device of "valuable research data" to force him to listen (with feigned interest) to her presentation. Not in all its details, but she shows him her slides, the more 'problematic' ones especially, and then goes to the whiteboard and draws a diagram of how she wants to present the situation. She repeats to herself the mantra: "presentations should be perfectly sequential … otherwise they're useless … perfectly sequential … otherwise they're useless … sequential … sequential … useless …".

After half an hour or so, Gamma, Delta and Beta return. They have met the Mega Director but did not present the project. Beta is pleased because he can see an intricate situation with plenty of opportunities to do business. Delta is less confident, although Beta's buoyancy reassures him. Delta and Beta swap comments:

Delta: "The Mega Director wants to see how Aspera works, so he's going to invest peanuts in a teeny little project. It's like going to a restaurant and ordering a glass of mineral water to see how good the service is."

Beta: "We'll do a little project just like they want, and then we'll say that we've already thought about how to do it big-time."

The ethnographer (who deconstructs when bored) asks what doing a glass of mineral water 'big-time' would be like.

…the tough gets going

The meeting begins. The Mega Director sits at the head of the table with the various section heads to his left, and Delta, Omega, Gamma and Beta to his right. Omega's shadow sits at the end of the room, a long way from the table and close to a bone-chilling air conditioner. Is this, he asks himself, the 'researcher's privileged vantage point of observation' so widely cited in the literature? And isn't it odd, he muses, how all you need is an air conditioner to work out where you are. During this first month with the knowledge merchants (whose natural habitat requires air conditioning, certainly not the humdrum oxygen breathed by ordinary mortals), he has learnt that the air conditioned by Beta's machine (for example) does not have the same quality as the air conditioned by the machines in the Aspera offices, which differs from the air at Laguna University, which in turn differs from the air that they are breathing now. He begins to imagine writing an article on air conditioning as an organizational process. He has been told that the introduction of air conditioning at both Aspera and the university coincided with a ban on smoking. All the windows were hermetically sealed, because of the new air conditioning system, so that anyone who dared light up a cigarette was immediately detected. Which did not mean (as usual, and as Zoe has already realized) that people stopped smoking. Some Manager-merchants still smoke, and so too do some of the senior-secretaries. But once Zoe saw a Manager-merchant (with a glorious career in the army behind him) make a Junior-merchant do ten push-ups because he had smoked in the office.

Zoe stops day-dreaming when he hears his name spoken. It is Beta, who has begun to present the knowledge-merchandise, as well as introducing the group of merchants in strict hierarchical order, with the ethnographer added as an after-thought. His voice is loud and assertive; he times his pauses well, with no hemming and hawing. While still standing next to the screen on which the project slides are being projected, he hands over to Gamma, who continues itemizing the merchandise, and then concludes.

Nobody speaks.

Beta tries to add a more incisive finale to the presentation. The Mega Director raises an objection. Beta turns to Delta and Omega, asking if they want to reply ("Coward!" thinks the ethnographer). Omega answers, but somewhat too 'technically', so that Beta interrupts her to emphasise the freshness of the merchandise. The Mega Director makes a damaging criticism while leads to tough discussion and finally to the client's refusal to buy the knowledge-merchandise.

When the meeting has ended, the merchants go off to the Buyer's office where, crimson-faced, he apologises for what has happened. The merchants are equally crestfallen.

On the way back they discuss what to do. Gamma tries to find a "domain" in which to intervene. Delta worries that their reputation as merchants has been damaged. He proposes that instead of doing what they have been taught to do in the passive role of the merchant who always goes to the client, listens and then does everything he wants, they should force the Buyer to clearly say what kind of knowledge-merchandise his company is interested in. But, Beta replies, that would be to double-cross the Buyer, who is instead (according to Beta) belly up and ready to do anything to help. Delta and Gamma continue to discuss the problem, but without finding a solution.

The ethnographer is in a panic: too much talk, too many words, too many metaphors to follow and note down (sitting in the back of a car travelling at 200 km/h). And then too many new events, too many situations to interpret, too many incidents from the past. Zoe knows that he has witnessed a 'critical event', one that his colleagues would give anything to observe, and yet he does not know what to make of it. This is the first time he has attended a meeting of this sort, and consequently he does not how it 'should have' proceeded. To be sure, the merchants presented merchandise that was rejected; you don't have to be an ethnographer to realize that things did not go according to plan. But that was only the outcome. What about the process? What is it that should convince the ethnographer that he has witnessed an event 'unique' in terms of processes? Perhaps the client always rejects merchandise the first time it is pitched to him, so that what is a critical event for the consultants is merely a routine one for the Mega Director.

The next day Gamma receives a telephone call from the Buyer. They agree on another project (this one is called 'Skills Census'). When Gamma finishes talking on the telephone, he gives the others the gist of the conversation: "In the end I sold him the project that I wanted".

Where the ethnographer begins to realize how tough the knowledge market is

In the meantime, the work of the rest of the research group at Laguna University has gone ahead. To tell the truth, when the three young researchers meet again on the island, they have little to say to each other. They have different vocabularies and attitudes, and above all they have diverse interpretative schemes with which to make sense of what they do. Bassiano's main aim is to write his degree thesis, so that although his research work is focused on intelligent agents, its overriding purpose is to enable him to put together a bibliography for his thesis. His attitude can be summarized as: "I'll study anything you want, as long as you let me study things that are useful for my thesis". Soemia instead has the problem of finding a job; more specifically, she views her research as a springboard towards a brilliant career with Aspera. It is not that she is uninterested in extracting mental models, but she wants to be sure that it will give her a permanent job with the knowledge managers. Her attitude is therefore: "I can extract the

mental model from a courgette, as long as you don't ask me to reflect on the why and wherefore". Zoe is intrigued and amused by the situation and exploits his role as shadow to stay on the threshold of events; he is often irritating, because he constantly asks questions. Moreover, it often seems that he is pretending not to understand, so that the others are forced to explain everything in the smallest detail. He does not do this deliberately, in the sense that he truly does not understand, but it is the way that he does it that is annoying. Because when Zoe does not understand something, he does not ask for explanations timidly or obsequiously; on the contrary, he uses his ignorance as an excuse to talk to as many people as possible, and to prompt collective discussion. An example was when he failed to understand a joke played on him by a secretary and reported it during the second meeting of the research group.

The second time

The second meeting of the research group has been eagerly awaited by everybody, especially the knowledge merchants, who are anxious to have something 'deliverable' to place on the market. The results of the mental models and intelligent agents sections are presented by the two project directors, not the by the young researchers. Nothing is added to what was said at the first meeting, the only noticeable difference being that the logos of Laguna University and Aspera now appear in the upper-right corner of the slides.

The preliminary results from the ethnographic area are instead presented by Zoe himself, because his academic supervisor is still recovering from her fit of pragmatics. Zoe is happy that he can present his work in first person, but he is also preoccupied. Less because his presentation does not involve the use of PowerPoint (a totemic software application which invariably forms the background to the merchants' ritual meetings) than because he has decided to report an episode that happened a couple of days previously in the Aspera offices, and which has greatly helped him to understand the organizational structure in which the knowledge merchants operate. Thus, when his turn comes, he asks those present to read a sheet of paper on which he has written the following:

> THE ORGANIZATION IN THE WARDROBE?
>
> I am in the northern Italy offices of a well-known company operating in the knowledge market. I am there to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. I am in one of the offices together with three other persons, whom I am observing. Sigma comes into the room. She has been described to me as the company's "historic and living memory". I was introduced to her when I arrived on the first day, and since then we have exchanged cordial 'good mornings' and 'good evenings' but we have never talked. Sigma needs to make some photocopies, and I am sitting in front of the photocopier. So I stand up and make room for her (the office is rather small and the five of us can only move around with difficulty). When she finishes photocopying, she stops in front of me and asks me to follow her. Because, she says, she wants to talk to me for a moment. We go into the office of one of the managers (who is not on the premises), she closes the door and begins:
>
> "I'm sort of a mother figure round here, because I'm the oldest. You're just about the same age as my son." She wants to give me a piece of friendly advice ("Don't think that I want to …") about my appearance ("You're a youngster .. who's a bit …"): "The world of work is different from university!"

> I entirely agree with her, but I fail to understand what it has got to do with my appearance.
>
> "Last week you were in Milan" (at an Aspera branch office). Indeed I was, but I did not realize that she knew. In any case, I still fail to understand.
>
> "It seems that you were wearing a T-shirt …a bit creased … well, everyone noticed it (reproachfully) … I'm not telling you to wear a jacket and tie, but be a bit more … fortunately today you're wearing proper shoes and not trainers … I'm not telling you to change your ideas or your personality. The habit doesn't make the monk and the desk doesn't make the man, but … really (I'm telling you because you're the same age as my son), things are different in the world of work … Then, as long as you're here, which is only a small branch … unless there's a meeting … but when you go to MILAN!"
>
> I have the dazed expression of someone truly unable to understand.
>
> "Try to sort yourself out! You're a youngster … Me too, when I first saw you I thought 'and who's this, how dare he come in here without anyone introducing him to me' (though in fact I had been introduced to her immediately) … I mean, for pity's sake … look, really, I'm telling you this as if I was your mother, don't think that I'm crazy … but the world of work is different, I wouldn't want you to think … really, take my advice."

Zoe uses the episode to draw the merchants' attention to a number of features. Firstly, the organization's internal control mechanisms. One could, in fact, offer various interpretations of 'what really happened' and 'why' a secretary should take it upon herself to inform an outsider about the dress code and behavioural standards necessary for him or her not to be 'noticed'. Apart from these aspects, however, it is the entire process that is significant and raises further questions. The secretary mentions an event that occurred at a time and a place where she was not present. For her to know about it, she must have been told by someone. That 'someone' may have been a superior or a colleague, but she nonetheless felt authorized to intervene; or perhaps her intervention was explicitly requested; or perhaps whoever told her about it knew that it would prompt her to intervene; or perhaps it was a combination of all three explanations. Whatever the case may be, the aspect to emphasise is the intrusiveness with which the organization (albeit in the reassuring and kindly guise of 'mama') enters people's personal lives, to the point of rummaging through their wardrobes. Moreover, Sigma's speech evinces that Aspera's various branch offices do not all enjoy the same prestige. Yet there is a background image that must always be conveyed and enhanced during the ritual situations (like meetings, for example) when the organization meets (and represents itself to) itself. And then there is Sigma's expression "the habit doesn't make the monk and the desk doesn't make the man", which fascinates Zoe because it involves a plethora of metaphors: the reference to so markedly male a figure as a 'monk', the connection between religious life and work, the translation of a popular Italian saying ("the habit doesn't make the monk") into an organizational maxim, the assigning of the same aesthetic value to a desk as to a monk's habit, the image of the desk as something 'worn' like a habit … in short, the translation into the merchants' jargon of the weberian "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism". All these elements (control, hierarchies, rituals, aesthetic canons, the metaphors that give meaning to organizational action) are well known to organization researchers, as well as being abundantly documented in the literature (the habit doesn't make the monk … the desk doesn't make the man … does research make the scholar?). But, Zoe asks himself, is there not a further interpretation to be made of the interaction with Sigma? He has reflected long on the matter and has

concluded that there is indeed something worth dwelling on: something that Sigma said but was then lost in the exchange.

This reflection was also stimulated by the events that followed his presentation. His entire speech, in fact, was intended to argue that Aspera's pervasive hierarchical structure impedes the spontaneous formation of communities of practice, however much the people that he has observed indubitably share practices, and first and foremost the practice of describing themselves as a community of practice. Zoe proposes to the merchants a reading of their work as 'display' activity: that is, as exhibiting, showing, parading, flaunting; forms of action whose common denominator is that they are centred on an object and directed towards an audience. And considering that the merchants talk so frequently of 'play', Zoe is beginning to see their activity as exactly that; not as comprising 'game rules' in Crozier's sense, but with the twofold meaning of 'game' (when he defines the content of consultancy work) and 'play' (with regard to 'how' the consultancy is done). This is the final image in Zoe's presentation. The merchants are enthusiastic, much more pleased than Zoe expected. They have been highly amused by the Sigma episode, and as he recounted it they glanced at each other and sniggered, muttering comments to each other like: "See! She's done it to him as well!" Secondly, the idea of the 'display-game' greatly interests them, and they entirely agree. Indeed, two hours after the presentation Beta (who was not present at the meeting) calls Zoe on his mobile phone to congratulate him on the presentation, and also to ask him for clarification about this idea of their work practice as a 'display-game'. Zoe is surprised because he thought that his speech, with its thinly veiled irony, would arouse at least conflicting reactions. All this enthusiasm and good humour makes him suspicious: perhaps the merchants can see something that has escaped him, because he is too absorbed in his ethnography. The suspicion is reinforced by a dream that comes to Zoe some nights later.

The ethnographer's dream

One night Zoe has an ethnographic dream. He dreams that he is observing a meeting of the knowledge merchants. The meeting is being held in one of the Aspera offices, but the room is structurally identical with the kitchen in the ethnographer's flat. The knowledge merchants are sitting around a table and talking; the ethnographer is seated at a distance from the group, close to the door. As he watches the meeting, the ethnographer feels a cold blast of air-conditioned air. He looks up at the ceiling, and notices that hanging above the table where the merchants are seated is a large and elaborate lighting fixture. The ethnographer's eyes follow the various filaments that radiate out from the main body of the object, and he realizes that what appeared at first sight to be a lighting fixture is in fact an enormous spider. The spider dominates the entire room, and the ethnographer now sees that its cobweb (which looks like ordinary electrical wiring) covers the merchants sitting around the table. "Fortunately," he thinks, "I'm outside. But them … how can they fail to notice that they're covered with a cobweb?"

The dream continues. The next scene finds the ethnographer at one of the Aspera branch offices discussing his research with the knowledge merchants. At a certain point, the merchants take the ethnographer into an office and ask him to continue the discussion

sitting around a table. The ethnographer immediately recognizes the office: it is the kitchen in his flat! He realizes that they are going to have their discussion with an enormous spider hovering over their heads. He is not frightened, however. On the contrary, he is curious to see what will happen, to find out what he will see and feel beneath the cobweb. So he sits at the table with the knowledge merchants, and as the discussion proceeds he looks around in search of the spider and the cobweb. But he cannot see them: the only thing above his head is the large lighting fixture. He thinks that this is due to a trick of perspective, the same one that prevents the knowledge merchants from seeing the spider. However, there is something that does not add up: he knows that there is a spider, he has seen it very clearly, and he should be able to recognize it again without difficulty. Though the perspective may have changed, there must still be details that make the chandelier recognizable as a spider. The ethnographer continues to look up at the ceiling, in search of evidence of the spider, but he sees nothing except the main body and branches of the lighting fixture. Nor can he see the cobweb, only the electrical wiring. The ethnographer is utterly bewildered: he doubts his own sensations and his own memories, and continues to gaze up at the ceiling, showing little interest in the discussion (which still continues) and a certain amount of agitation. At a certain point, the knowledge merchant sitting closest to him (Beta) leans over and murmurs: "Have you seen the light fixture? You know, it's really a spider, and the room's covered by an enormous cobweb. As long as you sit at this table you won't see it, but I assure you it exists. Don't worry, though, the spider's harmless. The reason why we try to make it look like a lighting fixture is that we don't know how to explain why it's here. You know, so that the people who come in here aren't frightened …".

When the ethnographer wakes up, he has the impression that things are getting clearer. The still unresolved aspect of his ethnographic observation and interpretation is 'why' Sigma cared so passionately about the appearance of a person who did NOT belong to the organization. But he had misunderstood: Sigma's entire speech was intended to point out to the ethnographer that his assent was not required because he was considered part of Aspera. She told him this very clearly at the outset: "the world of work is not university!", thus identifying the context of which the ethnographer was part and which framed the rest of her argument. Zoe thought that his role as 'researcher' exempted him from sharing the practices of the people observed, and more in general, from involvement in the projects being prepared by the merchants. He thought that 'merchandising' and 'researching' are distinct activities, and that his observations and interpretations were entirely unconnected with the merchant's trafficking in ideas.

He now begins to imagine a situation in which he, the research project, and the research group are instead an integral part of the merchants' project, and that they are all functional to ensuring its successful outcome.

With this doubt in mind, Zoe begins to notice a series of details that had previously escaped him. Three of them will suffice here as examples.

- One day, during a car journey, Delta says that he needs 'to take a leak'. He tells Omega to stop the car and relieves himself at the side of the road. He tells Zoe not to write it down, and Zoe realizes something new. When Delta or anyone else use expressions like 'don't write this down' or 'listen carefully', and similar peremptory

phrases, they are fashioning their community of practice. Their assertiveness is directed not at Zoe but at practices, some of which can be reported, others not. Taking a leak at the side of the road is not a practice to be shared. Putting on your make-up in the car is a relative aspect which can be mentioned. Two consultants engaging in informal conversation is a practice that should be consolidated and therefore carefully noted.

- One afternoon, Omega causes embarrassment between Zoe and another merchant by asking an inappropriate question. Zoe thanks her through gritted teeth, and Delta tells her that the mistake will certainly cost her a '2' in the final assessment. Delta is joking, but a doubt crosses Zoe's mind: what if Omega is really going to be assessed on her performance as 'observee'?

- One day, during a halt at a motorway service area, the ethnographer goes off for a moment while Delta and Omega are talking together. When he returns, Delta says to Omega: "Go on, tell him!" The two of them snigger. Zoe does not understand, and Delta explains that Omega has just told him that she now understands something he was telling her in the car. Delta thinks that it was a good ethnographic example of knowledge sharing, so he has asked Omega to repeat the scene for the ethnographer. Then they ask him if he believes everything that they tell him, and if he is not sometimes bored with listening to them. Zoe thinks that he is not bothered if what they tell him is 'true'; he also thinks that you need a boundless sense of self-importance to believe that someone can find you interesting for eight hours a day, three days a week, for three months on end.

But he is finally convinced of his suspicions when he re-reads parts of his fieldnotes taken during two days of observation:

> 7/5/99 – Aspera
> The context is the Conference Room at Aspera. The room contains a (large) table with seven chairs, a photocopier, two telephones, a picture (an abstract), a bookcase displaying various Aspera publications and another bookcase containing various management and computer journals. Soemia has been in the room until three minutes ago. Soemia has just asked Delta and Omega what they have to talk about. They tell her that they've got to prepare the project for the client. She says that she'll go back to the other office and that if they need her, they should call her (QUESTION: why does Soemia spend so much time in the Aspera offices? Why is she on such good terms with Delta and Omega? In what way could they have need of her?)
> Omega: "Are we going to do the slide straight way?"
> Delta: "Work on the living flesh?" (COMMENT: but if the slides are "living flesh", are concepts "dead meat"?).
> (…)
> They joke about the methodology to use and call it the "Schnauzer method" and the "Strunz model". They are laughing so loudly that Omega asks me to shut the door. (without thinking, I close the door, but I am surprised … am I not a shadow?).
> Soemia comes into the office. She has spoken to another merchant, who needs to receive some of their documents. He also has a problem with his PC. Omega offers to lend him her computer; first, however, they go off together to have a look at the other one. (COMMENT: Soemia's presence is taken a little too much for granted).
> (…)
> Delta and Omega distinguish between 'functional' skills (concerning the technical aspects of the job) and 'intrinsic' skills (leadership, innovativeness, analytical ability, etc.) and try to think of some examples to put on the slide. Omega asks me to help them. I answer, "I don't exist!" She

says, "Yes, but you're here, you're watching us do this presentation, trying to define concepts … who knows what you think … but we've got to find a simple way to explain it to the client".
They decide to use 'knowing how to cook' as an example of a functional skill. Omega says that it should be clear that they are taking only 'knowing how to make pasta' as an example. Delta asks me to help them, even if only to come up with a formal definition of 'knowing how to make pasta'. I say 'no'. He asks if it is because I am observing them, or because I don't like what they are doing. Obviously it is because of the role that I am performing. Then Delta tells Omega to ignore me and not to be distracted by me. Omega points out that it is *he* who is being distracted.
They want to find a fictitious name for the methodology. Omega objects. Delta replies that there is no need: they can do it as joke for when they show the slide to Beta. Omega says that they should do the 'real' one first and then attach the 'fake' one afterwards.
Delta: "Beyond the bounds of decency".
Omega. "Beyond 5 … we'll send the project to Beta and tell him that we deserve a 5."
They compile a 'joke' slide on the methodology.
They are enjoying themselves hugely. They imagine a series of absurd situations. In one of them, Beta sends the presentation to the Buyer without even looking at it, and the Buyer telephones him for explanations. Delta says that if they had someone able write articles in perfect academic style, they could pass anything off as genuine: that would be a good source of business!
They don't know what title to give to the questionnaire. They decide on "Semi-structured questionnaire in electronic format, which means … everything and nothing!" (they laugh)
I ask why they have not cited the authors whose definitions they are using. Delta tells Omega to make up some references, "so that we've got our backs covered. Well done Omega, we've done a good job today … complete tosh, but well done". Delta says that they should involve Soemia during the afternoon so that they can work out how to structure the list of skills (comment: Soemia?).
(…)
Delta has told Omega to set up a conference call with Beta and Gamma. Gamma is on the line. They have sent the presentation to him, and he looks through it while they explain. They come to the 'joke' slide and laugh loudly. Gamma says what he thinks and then surprises everyone with a new definition: "Stragetic Knowledge Areas". On conclusion of the telephone call, Delta and Omega begin work on Gamma's suggestions. Soemia is also in the room, writing memos to Beta and Gamma (comment: Soemia??)
(…)
Delta asks Omega to help him with the colours to use in the slides, but Omega is too busy helping Soemia send the memos (comment: SOEMIA???).
(…)

14/7/99 (Venice)
I pick Omega up at 8:30 outside her apartment building. We leave for Venice, where we have an appointment with Delta (outside his apartment building).
Omega tells me about yesterday evening. She worked in the office until 21.45. Sigma tore her off a strip for making a mistake. Omega had met an important Aspera Partner who was in her office branch yesterday. She was impressed by him because "he seemed the calmest person in the world. And he coordinates the Bologna and Brescia offices … learning how to manage stress is probably one of the stages in the growth process … and of leadership".
On our arrival in Venice, we find Delta waiting for us in a bar. We have coffee and talk about the possible involvement of other people in the Laguna University project. They'd like some psychologists to help with the 'group facilitation process' (in companies). They've already contacted some academic psychologists, but they don't know how far they can be available. (Delta): "We'll take a psychologist, spread him with Community, wrap him in a Mental Model, and stick an Intelligent Agent here [points to the centre of his forehead]".
When we have finished our coffee, we go off to the offices of Junior Enterprise, where they are working today. Junior Enterprise is a student association at the Economics Faculty of Venice University (NOTE: why are they going to work there?).
We go into the student union. A door to the right of the entrance gives onto a large room with three computers, cupboards and a photocopier. There are three people in the room. All those present place their mobile phones close to the window, otherwise they won't pick up a signal. After a

> while, the window sill looks like a showcase for mobile phones, the number of which corresponds to the people in the room.
> Delta and Omega move around casually: they put their things on a table, plug the computers into a telephone socket so that they can go online, they borrow some floppy disks (NOTE: while we were at the bar, Delta invited a friend/colleague whom he met by chance to 'drop by').
> (…)
> Delta reads a document written by Omega. He shows her the changes that he has made and suggests some further specifications to insert. Then he concludes: "Anyway, kids … it's the dog's bollocks … have you seen how good it is, Zoe? … with all the strategic areas, all the little pictures … great, isn't it?"
> (…)

Where the ethnographer moves out of the shadow

Zoe realizes that his role as 'shadow' is purely illusionary. Or at least, if he wants to understand something about the situation of which he is part (any talk of 'observation' at this point would be entirely specious), he must stop 'reflecting' Omega and begin 'reflecting' himself. He continues to act the ethnographer, but he uses two different notebooks: one for his fieldnotes as Omega's shadow, the other for notes on his role in the group (he is affected by 'reflexivity syndrome', a virus imported many years ago by Clifford and Marcus after their sojourn among the postmodern tribe. The disease can be caught by reading their book *Writing Culture*, and in general by conducting any sort of ethnography where 'otherness' is assumed to be a process and not a result).

Zoe decides to investigate Soemia. Without much difficulty (he only has to buy Delta a couple of drinks), he discovers that Soemia is an old friend of Omega and Delta. She has the keys to Delta's flat and she knows all Omega's computer passwords (why is it, Zoe asks himself, that in the Internet age having a set of someone's house keys and knowing someone's passwords are equally indicative of intimacy). She is their close friend, therefore. At the bar, Delta cannot believe that he's got an ethnographer all to himself, and after the third glass of wine begins to talk freely, without being prompted by questions. He tells Zoe that Omega is a close friend of his wife, who pressured Delta to find a job for Omega at Aspera. Delta's wife used to be the president of Junior Enterprise, and it was there that she met Omega. Moreover, although Junior Enterprise is a student association, it has an invisible link with Aspera which becomes more visible if you look at the titles of the seminars that it has organized ('Merchants for a day', or 'Selling is beautiful. The outstanding example of Aspera') and its source of funding (only and exclusively Aspera). Delta chuckles as he tells Zoe the title of the next conference: 'The Knowledge Game'…

Zoe waits patiently. As Delta drunkenly yells the *Merchant's Song*[3] at the top of his voice around the alleyways of Venice, Zoe stupefies him with a tedious academic

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3 Which runs as follows:

> I'll tell you about my mobile phone so fine
> I log on to the net and surf the web on-line.
> To life a liberal attitude I take
> I judge people only on how much money they make.

discourse on the importance of practice in learning, gets him to sign an application form, and bundles him on a plane to Lancaster, where the first international conference on 'Learning in Practice' is being held.

When Delta wakes up, he has a hangover. He is not sure where he is, and everyone laughs at him because he is dressed as a merchant (grey suit, tie, white shirt, shoes and socks) even though it is July and extremely hot. He meets Ms. Potential of Critique[4] and spends the next few days amid the dimensions of Power/Knowledge, Gender/Knowledge and Practice/Knowledge.

When he returns to Italy, Delta vows to take revenge on Zoe for what he has made him suffer. He invites him to his summer villa and submerges him with ethnographic indiscretions, dazing him with scabrous details. He confesses to Zoe that it was he who had ensured that Omega would be the 'newcomer' that Zoe observed, because he has always disliked her. He says that ethnography was chosen as a research area only because they couldn't think of anything more incomprehensible. He also tells the ethnographer about the many times that he and the other merchants have laughed at him because of an episode when Zoe was asked about the pay-off of ethnography and he burst into tears. Yet Delta concludes by saying that meeting Ms. Potential of Critique has changed him, and that he has decided to quit being a merchant.

Zoe is sincerely moved. He thinks that he must have been an egocentric and cynical ethnographer indeed to think that this warm-hearted and sensitive knowledge merchant was plotting against him. He decides to quit being the ethnographer and to 'restore' to Delta all the ethnographic insights accumulated during three months of observation. With an extreme act of generosity, he even gives Delta a copy of his fieldnotes, thinking that they may assist in his catharsis.

By now it is late July, and this is also the episode when Zoe and Delta wish each other happy holidays and make an appointment for September.

September: where the ethnographer realizes what 'distributed intelligence' means to a knowledge merchant

September is the month when the project is scheduled to end. The ethnographer has spent the summer on holiday, but he has also finished his research report and is ready to submit it. When he downloads his e-mail accumulated during a month spent away from

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I'm a manager happy with his new portfolio
Happy to sell knowledge to whoever has dough.

4 The invention of 'Ms. Potential of Critique' is due to Michael Habersam 'Investigations into Investigative Controlling – or: What to Learn from 'Detective Columbo'?', Paper presented at the Conference Personnel, Organization, Poststructuralism, Innsbruck, 1-2 June 2001.

home, he notes that there is a message from Soemia. He reads that Delta has told Soemia about his ethnographic observations and has given her some of the material so that she can make up for data that she has been unable to find. The ethnographer is dismayed: What? His 'raw' observations in the (raw) hands of Soemia, she who can extract a mental model from even a courgette?

But Zoe's electronic mailbox has another surprise in store: a document signed by Delta which says that given that the various research areas have only been 'exploratory' in nature, the project's output will consist not of a software application to support the formation of online communities but a one-day conference at Laguna University, during which Aspera will present the results of 'its' research to an invited audience (all private individuals or wannabe merchants). Also because (though this is not stated in the document but Zoe knows it full well) Soemia has managed to conduct only one solitary interview (with Delta for that matter) and therefore to extract only one mental model. However much Delta's mental model may be interesting, to generalize on it alone would be difficult to justify, to say the least. And then Bassiano, the 'intelligent agents' researcher, has come to a dead end. After exhaustive bibliographical research and brain-racking on the architecture of an 'intelligent agent', he has read an article (thanks – or otherwise – to Zoe, who pointed it out to him) which tells him that the most prestigious technological research centres in the USA have been working on the subject for fifteen years. The majority of them, however, have only tried to construct an 'agent' (given the unrealistic premises of the project), finding it impossible to go much further than a refined search engine. Bassiano thus has realized that his thesis is practically dead in the water. And moreover (thanks to Murphy's law) he had been called up to start military service within a month. He has therefore consigned a file of bibliographical material to Aspera and dropped everything.

The introductory pages to the conference presentation bear Delta's signature and run as follows:

> THE KNOWLEDGE ERA: HOW TO HANDLE A DISTRIBUTED INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM
>
> *The community as a system which 'generates' new knowledge.*
> A community is a typical social arrangement whose nature may be 'congenial' to the generation of distributed knowledge. In other words, a community is a social device able to activate distributed intelligence. Communities can do many things. They can foster sentiments, projects, symbols and beliefs through the learning of their members. Such learning may be more closely focused on the transmission of existing knowledge than on the generation of new knowledge. Discussed here are communities understood as knowledge generating systems which yield value for the community itself and its members within a broader social system. Our intention is to describe some typical features of this kind of community as revealed by our own observations. To this end we shall use stories, events and real situations collected by a group of youngsters who have studied our own organization for some months.
>
> *The novice as the activator of knowledge*
> Under our approach, those who join an organization, from a strictly 'cognitive' point of view simultaneously join a community system. More or less inevitably, and owing to various circumstances, entry into a community marks the beginning of a learning path. But of what type? It is sometimes conservative (acquisition) and sometimes generative (production). Our group, which tends towards the latter, places the new entrant in a particular situation. Rather than an apprentice in consolidated knowledge, he or she is considered to be the potential bearer of new ideas capable of recasting, even crucially, the geometry of existing ones. (…)

> *Practice as a meta-knowledge tradition to be used for innovation*
> If the novice learns how to innovate, the suspicion arises that we, though a generative community, display certain features of a 'conservative' one. In other words, we convey to the new entrant knowledge that tends to persist over time and to be handed down. But more than knowledge of content, this is knowledge of process: that is, an array of 'instruments' which we give to new entrants so that they can use them to generate innovation. (…)
>
> *The game as a dimension of legitimacy*
> What is the typical condition for a new entrant to become an 'innovator novice'? Our practice resembles a 'game'. A game which extends beyond its ludic content and also displays the essential features of the game-player. We define a 'player' as someone who is allocated more resources than responsibility. (…) Our practice consists solely in the advice that we give to our game-players: "enjoy yourselves".
>
> *From the periphery to the centre: the acquisition of 'validation power'*
> What is the role of those who form the core of the community, its senior members? If the novice is the true generator of knowledge, in what are experts actually expert?
> We believe that senior figures have a twofold role to perform. Firstly, they must promote innovation, enabling the novices to play and providing the surplus resources without which the game cannot take place. Secondly, they must validate the innovation produced by the newcomers by means of a grid of parameters in part tacit, in part explicit, which represent the criteria that the community uses to decide what is meaningful and what is not. (…)
>
> Beware of knowledge that becomes a religion: the intermixing role of the team
> It should be emphasised that if the community is left to itself, it will close itself off against groups expressing a different vision of the world. Practice tends to become dogma, innovation to become ideology. We believe that a team is a device able to perform a twofold role. Firstly, the team induces its members to scrutinise and revise their entrenched beliefs (…). Secondly, the team intermixes different visions of the world. (…) We believe that the formation of teams, insofar as this is not a spontaneous process, should be managed by recasting and revising the current geometries of local knowledge.

Now, who honestly believes that the above document was exclusively the fruit of the analytical capacity of a knowledge merchant? The ethnographer certainly does not. Indeed, he recognizes a large quantity of words and ideas identical to ones (although expressed much more critically) in the materials that he gave to Delta at the beginning of the summer. Zoe now has all the elements necessary to reinterpret the entire story from a different standpoint. He reinterprets the story by translating it in terms of certain thoughts that came to him during summer as he savoured scallops from the bay of Saint Jacques, followed the navigation routes of Portuguese sailors, and met caravans of people travelling, for different reasons, but inexplicably in the same direction.

Delta is a knowledge merchant in his third year of employ with Aspera. He is an exceedingly good merchant – he has invariably been awarded '5' in CARE assessments – but he knows very well that in order to pass from the level of 'Expert-merchant' to 'Manager-merchant', he must now cultivate a new knowledge business that bears his personal signature. He finds a sufficiently new, fashionable and ill-defined concept ('communities of practice') and decides to stake his career on it. This may seem an irrational gamble, but risk is inherent in any act centred on such an unpredictable phenomenon as knowledge. As chance will have it, the concept chosen by Delta is a matter of debate in the academic community, as unknown in that of the market. For

Delta this is both an opportunity and a constraint. If he manages to introduce the concept, he will be rated as 'outstanding', as someone constantly able to devise new projects. But in order to do so he must transform the concept into a label: a black box which nobody would ever take it in mind to investigate. The first thing to do is find a vocabulary comprehensible to his actual and potential interlocutors: 'community' and 'practice' are words without a particular market tradition; better to replace them with 'system' and 'intelligence', two terms which do not smack too greatly of Marxism. Two terms, moreover, that can be easily fashioned into engineering metaphors with a bearing on process management software programs.

At this point the undertaking becomes somewhat complicated. Delta has to find a way to recount to his clients a story slightly different from those to which they are accustomed. Merchants, in fact, have always told businesses that if they manage and monitor knowledge correctly, they will increase their turnover. Now he has to persuade them that managing knowledge is absolutely necessary, not just to increase turnover but to survive, because in the 'Knowledge Era' only those businesses able to monitor knowledges effectively will remain in the market. It is vital to talk of 'knowledges' in the plural, so that the same knowledge merchandise can be re-sold several times, by having clients believe that the knowledge has been created specifically for them. But if a knowledge merchant starts telling a 'new' story, he must be able to 'certify' it in some way. Imagine yourself in his shoes: I am a knowledge merchant; I tell my clients that knowledge is by now the only production factor worth investing in (or else be forced out of the market). In order to be credible, I must somehow vouch for the fact that my organization (which, moreover, is an organization explicitly founded on the marketing of knowledge) is the first to manage these processes efficiently. If this 'certification' is provided by another organization which apparently has nothing to do with the market, then my story becomes all the more credible. There thus materializes a research group set up at a young but wealthy university and comprising persons with credentials as researchers. Behold, therefore, the ethnographer who flanks the merchants when they visit the client and publicly attests to the knowledge monitoring process to which Aspera is the first to subject itself. Behold, therefore, the low-cost personnel (Soemia, for example) who work – in what capacity does not matter – in Aspera's offices. Behold, therefore, how Aspera acquires a cheap bibliographical survey of a cutting-edge technological innovation. Behold, therefore, how Aspera can establish itself as an economic-institutional referent by organizing a conference which ratifies its interest in research and which bolsters the academic legitimacy of Laguna University (which is funded by Aspera, amongst others). Even should the process have no other result, satisfactory outlets for the further delivery of knowledge have been created. And, finally, if the project is a flop, then the 'youngsters' (as Delta calls them in the document) who worked on it can be blamed.

Indeed, it is for precisely this reason that Aspera – in the person of Beta – has allowed Delta to set up the entire process. Beta, who has the DNA of a merchant, knew from the outset how things would pan out. According to Aspera's reference parameters, ethnography has practically nil value added; mental models may be marketable, but only if they are functional to some end; a software program is an excellent black box, but something must be put into it.

Zoe thinks back to his dream. Again according to Aspera's reference parameters, what is most important is bringing new people under the spider's cobweb, possibly without their realizing it. And this, as Beta says in the dream, is not because the spider is dangerous but because it is a disquieting presence which nobody is able to explain. Zoe thinks that the story explains exactly this, and he is pervaded by ethnographic joy.

Six months later, back at Zoe's university, he is stopped by a girl who, without even introducing herself, begins to talk about his Aspera research report. Zoe has completely forgotten it, and although he has managed to have it published (after black-boxing some processes), it strikes him as incredible that someone has read it so carefully. Suddenly, the girl refers to the episode of the mama/secretary, which does not appear in the published version – this Zoe knows because a reviewer advised him to remove the episode entirely because it was 'private and irrelevant'. Zoe discovers that the girl is writing her thesis at Aspera, where on the basis of a simple scheme developed by Zoe to model his observations, she is trying to write a software program. She has been told (by Soemia, who now has a permanent job at Aspera) to talk to the ethnographer, both for clarification and for her personal problems. Zoe pretends not to understand, and tells the girl to pay attention to the lighting fixture above the table where they ask her to sit. Whereupon he dissolves into a shadow (this is the latest ethnographic trick that he has learnt and he uses it constantly).

the author

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discussion

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ephemera | notes from the field
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From: Bronwyn Boon<bboon@business.otago.ac.nz> in conjunction with Bryan Parker, Steven Lamb and Gemma Munro

Subject: **Beyond prose … but not without reason: Creativity in 'plastic cages'?**

To: submissions@ephemeraweb.org

Dear Editors,

I am thinking about writing a wee 'note from the field' for *ephemera* and wondered if I might pass some ideas before you to see what you think. The 'field' in question is an undergraduate (second year) 'organisational theory' management paper[1] that I am currently teaching on. The notable issue I want to discuss from this field is that of 'creative assessment'. More particularly, *I want to begin to explore the consequences of inviting students to use different modes of expression*[2] *in their assessment*. My reason for encouraging students to go 'beyond prose' was to bring critical theory 'alive' for them! Well … at least to open up the possibility of engagement in a student for whom writing academic prose induces intellectual torpor. Consequently I felt a sense of elation when an amazing collection of thoughtful, acute and creatively articulated responses came across my desk. Indeed I felt that I had tapped into a wonderful subterranean seam of creative expression that would sweeten both their – and my – experience of this management paper. Reflection, however, brought doubt and discombobulation. In that each piece is subjected to the process of rational calculation – so fundamental to contemporary university education – am I not invading some 'private' dimension of the student's self and in so doing rendering these students more totally 'calculable'[3]. And what does this do to my sense of pedagogical 'resistance'? To paraphrase Wendy

1 A Bachelor of Commerce Degree from the University of Otago is a three year degree. Students are able to select their 'major' subject (or subjects) from the disciplines of: Management, Marketing, Accounting, Economics, Finance, Information Science and International Business. Apart from International Business, each 'discipline' is represented institutionally as a 'department'. Completion of a 'major' generally covers 54 – 66 of the 120 points required for the degree. Additional points are therefore gained across other commerce subjects and/or - in part- across other university faculties. The organisational theory paper that is the 'field' of this discussion is a 6 point second year paper within the Management Department. Management majors - and other commerce subject majors - voluntarily select this paper from a total of nine other year-two options. The two year-one Management papers are compulsory pre-requisites for admission into this paper. In turn, the completion of this paper enables a student to proceed on to two year-three organisational theory papers.

2 Different from essays and tests written in prose.

3 As with Thayer's cadets, described by Keith Hoskin and Richard Macve (1988) 'Accounting and the Examination: A Genealogy of Disciplinary power', *Accounting, Organizations & Society*, 11(2): 49.

Brown[4], am I merely fabricating something like a plastic cage that reproduces and further regulates these students in a way that this exercise was designed to confront?

I have two main motivations for wanting to publish this 'field note'. The first is to literally put some of these pieces 'out-there' for the academic 'critical management' community to enjoy. The second has something to do with my negotiation of the relationship between theory and practice within the pedagogy of a 'critical' management undergraduate paper. The problem of undergraduate commerce student engagement with critical thinking is an important issue for all academic management departments that contain a 'critical' element. These early level undergraduate papers are often a time when students are first exposed to a conceptual space that enables them to challenge orthodoxy, question power relations and disrupt the normal[5] accounts of work /management / organisation. To get to that point, however, these students have to engage with the argument that there *are* established social orders and dominating discourses[6] informing knowledge about organisations and the people who inhabit these social spaces. Importantly, these 'privileged[7]' students also have to put themselves into the picture. As bell hooks suggests 'privileged students are often downright unwilling to acknowledge that their minds have been colonized, that they have been learning how to be oppressors, how to dominate, or at least how to passively accept the domination of others'[8]. (And these are students of Literature and Women's Studies she speaks of.) I have also found the practice of engaging these management students in the 'personal-is-political' aspect of a 'critical' agenda an ongoing challenge. It is, however, an important component of a 'critical management' paper. The process of learning the conventions of privilege, oppression and domination must surely be more explicit and programmatic in a Commerce Degree. It is, therefore, not surprising that a significant number of the commerce students I deal with exhibit a sense of discomfort, hostility, resistance and apathy with some of the material of the course.

Which brings me to the 'alternate' assessment option. The setting of assessment tasks for the paper is one of the times when I more consciously confront the issue of student engagement. This time I decided to respond more thoughtfully to the problem. Again I found a passage from bell hooks[9] helpful.

> When one provides an experience of learning that is challenging, possibly threatening, it is not entertainment, or necessarily a fun experience, though it can be. If one primary function of such a pedagogy is to prepare students to live and act more fully in the world, then it is usually when they

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4 Wendy Brown (1995) 'Introduction: freedom and the plastic cage', in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 28.

5 As Steffen G. Böhm; Campbell Jones and Chris Land (2001) suggest in their opening editorial of ephemera 1(1):1-10.

6 Matts Alvesson and Stanley Deetz (2000) *Doing Critical Management Research*. London: Sage.

7 I use 'privileged' here in reference to bell hooks "pedagogy and political commitment: a comment" in *Talking Back*. South End Press: Boston, MA.

8 bell hooks (1989: 102), as above.

9 Indeed another passage from bell hooks (1989: 103), as above.

> are in that context, outside the classroom, that they most feel and experience the value of what they have shared and learned.

In bringing together the two aspects of 'engagement' and the 'outside-the-classroom context' I came up with a variation of 'form'. The standard form I have used in the past is of course 'the essay' - a form of expression that is strongly (completely) associated with the 'inside-the-*management* -classroom context'. Prompted by hook's argument, I wondered how these young people express ideas and issues *outside* their management courses? How could I alter the medium through which they engage with these ideas and therefore shift the context in which these ideas are experienced? In other words, how can I bring critical theory closer to their experience of living? In drawing on hooks and the past experiences of Malcolm Lewis[10], I included a creative option in the final assessment piece[11]. My 'blurb' in the course outline went something like this:

> Critical thinking can be presented in all sorts of ways. While essay writing is the usual form of expression in academia, other modes of expression can be equally powerful. For example poetry, visual art, oral expression, or video film etc can be used critically and creatively. In this essay I invite you to address the following issue using an alternate mode/s of expression. You can of course write an essay if you prefer.

For my own sense of 'calculative competency' I asked those who selected the 'alternative expression' option to include a brief written commentary (500 – 750 words) on how their 'presentation' spoke to the issues described in the assessment prescription.

While only 11 of the total 105 students took up the invitation to articulate critical thinking in an alternative way, I was – as they say - 'blown away' by some of the pieces. The creativity and power of the work not only raised my flagging end-of-the-year-assessment spirits it sparked the idea for a research project on different modes of assessment in under-graduate management education[12]. I have included here three 'pieces' I would like to 'exhibit' in the 'field note'. They include a painting, a piece of music and a poem. All three are based around critical reflections of the 'machine' metaphor[13]/discourse.

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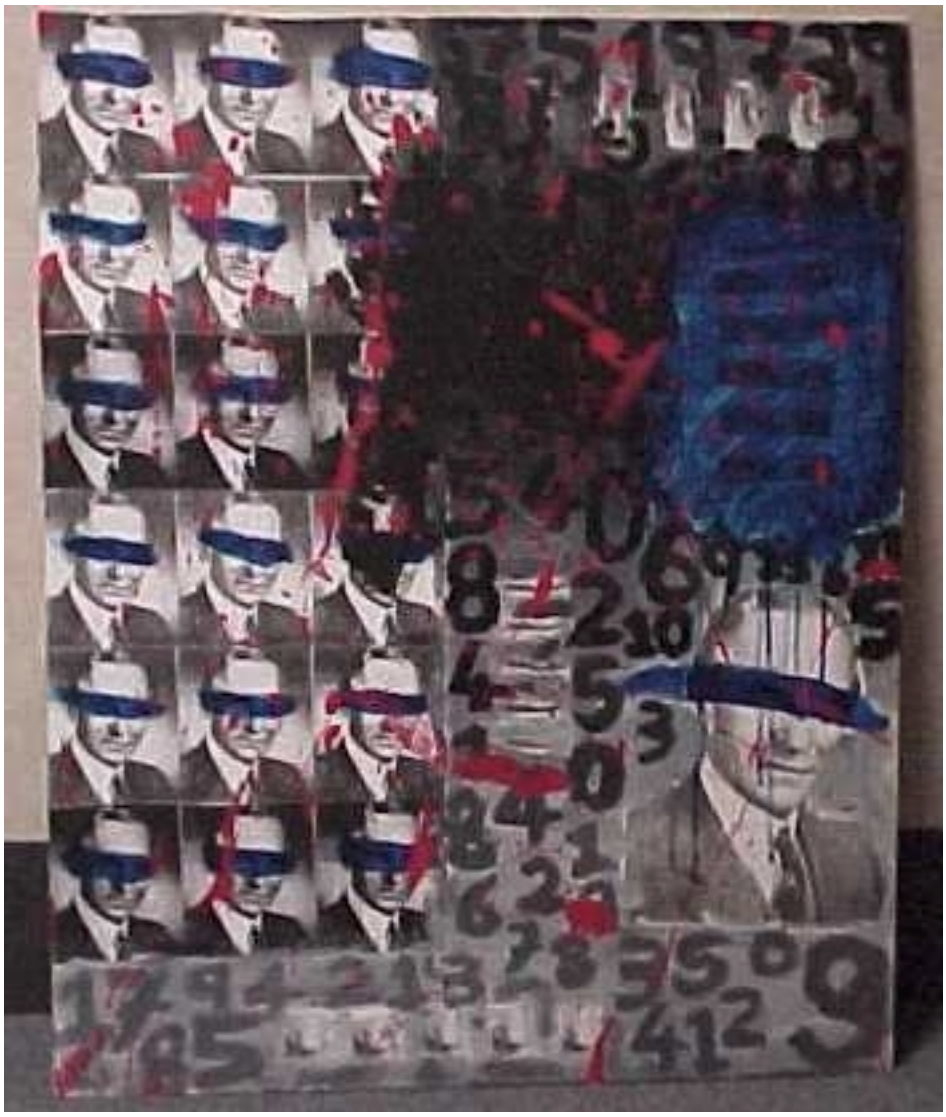
10 A colleague – in the Management Department, University of Otago – with whom I had taught in the previous year. At that time he invited students to 'respond' to an essay on 'postmodernism' in terms of substance and form – which also had interesting and creative results.

11 A 'compulsory' exercise that counted for 20% of the final grade.

12 Indeed this text represents a very preliminary reflection on this experience.

13 Gareth Morgan (1986) *Images of Organisation*. London: Sage.

Bryan Parker submitted this *acrylic & paper collage on canvas (20”*16”)* titled: ‘**19 Henry Ford’s + Parts**’



(This is a coloured picture; please see PDF file at www.ephemeraweb.org/journal)

This is Bryan’s commentary about his work.

> The dominant discourse this painting is depicting is that of 'the machine'. 'The machine' is a metaphor for "the way of thinking about the exercise of 'production', ie: a way of organising /managing /controlling work, organisations, society." (Boon, 2000). 'The machine' can also be thought about as the actual thing being made or used in the process of 'production'. The man in the collage is Henry Ford, and of course we know that Ford's great invention was the automated assembly line. The reason why Ford was replicated on the left of the canvas was inspired from the artist Andy Warhol. Warhol depicts in his paintings "how conformity is abetted by mass production technology and advertising strategies, the former resulting in the standardization of products, the latter contributing to the standardization of habits." (Stich, 1987). Warhol had even said that he wanted to be a machine. The repetition and replication of Henry Ford signifies the replication a machine can produce with flawless copy after copy of the product. Ford himself did this on the assembly line at his plant.

The sets of eyes, ears, noses and mouths mirror the way a machine and Ford's motor car was a complexed (sic) product made up of simple parts. The human face is a complexed (sic) product of nature, but even when you are drawing a face as a child, the simple body parts of a nose, mouth, ears, etc. can be easily constructed and placed to form the product of a face. The idea of using paint and the collage of paper together is inspired from the artist Robert Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg's idea was that the paint would link the collage and make it part of the painting.

The numbers in the painting signify the quantitative part of 'the machine' and are inspired mainly from the work of Jasper Johns. They are also painted mainly in black to align with Ford's policy of "any colour you like as long as it is black." The numbers also illustrate the dehumanising aspect of working in a mass productive, mechanistic environment.

This brings us to the critical discourse of the painting. The critical element is that of 'the machine's' and Ford's exploitation of the worker in the process and production of a final product. This is shown by the blue paint depicting the blue collared worker. The reason for painting over Henry Fords eyes is to link the way that Ford had the goal of mass production. The only way he could see this goal being achieved was to see the worker as a tool of his to exploit. This brings in the Marxist ideas of the worker being exploited by the employer for the benefit of the employer.

The black part of the painting in the centre depicts uncertainty. It links the blue of the worker with the collage of Ford 'the employer' and shows the divide and the uncertainty s inherent between the two identities. This uncertainty and link between the two identities is a reflection of the employer /employee relationship in that without the employee the employer would not get any production done and without the employer the employee would not earn any money to live off. The numbers also link in with the black colour of uncertainty by showing that 'the machine' being an efficient thing that it is, can have uncertain outcomes and problems that have the opportunity to occur. An example of this is the Y2K scare.

The red colour of the painting depicts blood. The blood, as a symbol of life, shows that amongst 'the machine' humans are also a part of the grander picture. The splattering of blood over the painting shows the human cost, that has and potentially can occur, of the workers and the rest of society in general if 'the machine' remains a dominant part in organisational culture. The red colour also depicts the communist values inherent with the discourses of 'the machine'.

To conclude, Andy Warhol's following quote may be a fitting insight into the dominant and critical discourse's that are part of 'the machine'.

"Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government: so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine." (Warhol cited in Stich, 1987).

References: Boon, B. (2000) Lecture 5 'The Efficient Machine', Management 211 Lecture Notes, University of Otago. And Stich, S. (1987). *Made in U.S.A.*, University of California Press, California:USA.

Steven Lamb submitted a piece of music – 8 and a half minutes long – which he wrote, arranged, recorded (all 8 tracks) and mixed.

[Please access this piece at the ephemera|journal homepage at www.ephemeraweb.org/journal]

BEHIND THE MACHINE

For this assessment I chose to try and present the machine discourse, and the alternative discourse in a musical form. I chose to present it in a solely musical form with no lyrics, as this allows more musical freedom, but it will take more explaining. The way in which I tried to present the piece is mostly symbolic, either in the sound of the sound created, or the mood trying to be expressed…

To try to explain the piece, I tried to covey the differences in the discourses, by breaking the piece into four sections. A discourse is a collection of statements about a topic that allows you to talk about it, but only from a certain stance. The piece is a progression of how the machine comes about and where it leads and the effect this has on the people involved. I tried to make the difference between the machine and the worker (the worker being a symbol of the alternative discourse, i.e. the emotion and alienation or dissatisfaction of the people) very clear, and I hope this comes across. The workers that I talk of are the proletariat, the working class, and not the wealthy owners of capital. This is a more Marxian view of the machine, as an exploiting machine, using the worker as a means of production, ignoring their humanity. I think it would be best to try to describe the four sections individually and then how this comes together as a whole. In the explanation I apologize if the musical explanation, while important, seems hard to understand though I will try to explain as best I can.

The first section is set before the machine discourse comes about. I chose to depict this with a piano part (actually synthesized), played in free time, that is it is free to speed up and slow down as it pleases and it is not controlled by anything else. It is very unregulated. I tried to covey a sense of romanticism, in contrast to later in the piece. This symbolizes the workers when they only needed to work when they wanted, not regulated by the clock or any sense of time. A flute to introduce melody soon joins the piano. I chose a piano and a flute, as they are acoustic and woodwind instruments and therefore are very non-mechanical (though you could argue the piano is), so this in itself symbolizes a simpleness (sic) of pre-industry. This hopefully gives a sense of calmness.

The second section introduces the machine. To symbolize the machine I used an effected drum kit, with an industrial sound with lots of clanking and the like. If you listen carefully when it enters, you can hear the breath sounds of the workers behind it on the 1st and 2nd beat of every bar. The beat chosen to represent the machine, is a slow chugging, pulsating beat. The beat is electronically produced, in itself significant in that it represents a highly rational, extremely accurate rhythm, never a millisecond off, just like the machine it symbolizes. This is like the view given by Morgan (1990), one of rationalization of everything. That is everything is calculated and made scientifically explainable, I suppose like I'm dong (sic) now. That is trying to rationalise and explain what I did and why I did it. The beat is also standardized, uniform and there is no room for deviation from it, the "Beat of the System". This is in contrast with the piano previously; which had the freedom to go where it pleased, the instruments locked in a type of normative control. The idea was to make it sound like a factory. When the distorted guitars enter, they play a marching type rhythm, which symbolizes the monotonous rigor of work. Here I chose to adopt a different scale to emphases (sic) the difference in tonality. I chose a phygrian mode for the guitars to give it a nasty, harder sound, compared to the piano. The other guitars, especially the slide guitars were an attempt to sound like pistons in the machine. The mood I tried to get across here was one that you could not escape and that the beat and groove of the machine inevitable, the proletariat being forced into the wage labor as their only option. In the middle of this section there is an interlude where the machine slows, and a new melody enters that was supposed to reflect the yearning of the worker for something better, but soon enough the machine takes over again, back to the grind. This was to reflect the different interests of the workers. A quote that illustrates this is "Primarily, labor is a process going on between (sic) and nature, a process in which man, through his own activity,

initiates, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature" (Marx, 1867, p. 169). This suggests that the machine is self-imposed.

The third section is supposed to look at the workers life outside the machine. This is the alternative discourse. I tried to present what the worker wants and feels. The previous section showed the machine and also the workers submission to it. In this section I reprised the piano, with a string section, to give it a relatively more sad feel. One of the points I symbolically tried to make here is that there are some hangover form being tied to the machine. One is that the piano now plays simple arpeggios in a regulated time, as now the effect of rationality has set in on him/her, and is no longer allowed the same freedom that they had at the start. This was to give the feel that the worker is always on the clock and is never free form (sic) it, even when away from the machine. In the background you can hear the pulse of the machine, fading in and out, reminding the worker that the machine is inescapable, and wage labor has them tied to it.

The final section revisits the machine, and portrayed here is the growing domination of the machine as it builds up to the climax of the piece. The increase of the frequency of the beats represents the increase in efficiency of the machine, even if only for its own benefit. The beat changes to give the feeling of building up, about to vent. A solo lead guitar is used to give the feel of the growing of the machine and the taking over of it. The speed and dynamics, along with the mood all are meant to give a feeling of uncontrollability and the piece builds to climax. I left the end of the piece somewhat ambiguous, as its hard to say whether efficiency today will build to the point where it burns out, or slows down as people become content with what they've got.

In summary, the purpose of the piece was to convey the dominant discourse of the machine and how it is efficient and regulated, to give the feel of a factory, like mass production. The alternative discourse was presented as the workers (the more natural instruments) being forced to submit to the machine's regularity, although they still want something better, but are forever changed. The third goal of course was to make a piece of music that, all other things aside, simply sounded good, which is of course up to the listener.

References:

Marx, Karl (1867) *Capital*, translated by Eden & Cedar Paul (1933), London: JMDent & Sons

Morgan, Glenn (1990) 'Rational Calculation, Professional Power and the Managerial Division of Labor?' in *Organisations in Society*, MacMillian Educational: UK

Gemma Munro submitted a poem.

A hollowed tooth snaps a gash in his cardboard portrait
He falls into line behind him
The limbs of an industrial millipede
Wind-up workers stamping factory time on concrete floors

Gaunt eyes that don't look alive
Two mirrors looking each other in the face
The rolling belt dictates the pace
Making one fraction of an object
It moves on, leaving him in his place

Bent to fit around the steel
They work while watched by whips
Making wages for a meal
Efficiencies sweat shines the concrete floor.
The pig who gluts the profits
still wants more

the tooth bites
at the end of the day
an empty hole
is all it has to say

Overview
A brief outline on what the poems essence is as follows: it describes an employees subjection to the industrial society where everything has a process, and the employees are merely pawns on a chessboard, as they are treated, as nothing more than an input of production to the heartless capitalist. It explores the Marxist idea of the emptiness attached to not creating anything tangible for the employee…

Structure
The structure of the poem is very simplistic. Examples of some of the structural techniques include the following. The shortening of the versus (sic) in the poem represent the sense of diminished self worth the industrial worker experiences as the day progressed and then eventually ended. The violence in the punctuality in the opening line portrays the dehumanisation of the whole work process. The rhythmical rhyme of 'face, pace and place' represent the machines 'stamping' or 'pounding' monotony nature…

Analysis

A hollowed tooth snaps a gash in his cardboard portrait

This line is referring to the rational process of calculability as a means for predictive control, in this case workers and money. It lets the capitalist measure how much profit they have made with the use of the 'time-clock'. The machine discourse sees it as the 'betterment for all', i.e. the

employee gets the money they clock in for, they are not working extra hours and minutes even seconds and not being paid. Realistically however the time-clock represents the rational, efficient, calculable process where the employee works and the clock deducts pay from every second they do not work. The cardboard portrait refers to the dehumanising aspect of the machine discourse i.e. everything can be reduced to a number, the employees wages are probably based on serial numbers.

He falls into line behind him

It refers to Marx's notion of the 'exploitation of workers' i.e. labourers are lined up and herded into the organisation. Here it also draws reference to the dehumanising aspect of the industrial society, no employee has a name as there is no socialisation in the work place and they are merely an input of production.

The limbs of an industrial millipede

This incorporates Ford's notion of specialisation. It is an illusion of the assembly line and it constructs the position of workers in the division of labour. No one has an idea of the final product but every employee is needed in order to complete the final product. The millipede needs all 1000 of his legs to walk and function correctly, but separate one of those legs on its own, and it is worthless to the millipede, as is one employee who tightens bolts on the assembly line, if no one else was there to play their part. Hence the functions of each leg (employee) are all co-dependent on the legs beside them. They do not have autonomy; it is connected to a greater whole or weight. The legs' job is to support this great body of weight above them, i.e. the bourgeoisie is the greater whole that lies above the proletariat, and hence, the capitalist can not function without the employees.

Wind up workers stamping factory time on concrete floors

This line refers to clock work soldiers and how the machine dictates their pace of work. They do not have autonomy - employees become merely extensions of the machine they work for.

Gaunt eyes that don't look alive
Two mirrors looking each other in the face

The Marxist idea of the employee's productivity contributing to the final product, which is not their own, it does not belong to the employee at the end of the day but to the capitalist. It explicitly states labour is no longer a process going on between man and nature, it is an empty process.

The rolling belt dictates the pace
Making one fraction of an object
It moves on, leaving him in his place

These lines further elaborate the idea that an effective industry organises employees to be part of a process, their part in the process is stagnant, rendering individual contribution insignificant to the whole, the machine is the one that controls the speed the employee must go. It also draws on the aspect of social position, i.e. an employee can not change his social position because the organisation is already ultimately efficient, the capitalist does not need to promote a bolt tightened to a wheel maker because it will involve training and delays. Just as a proletariat can not advance the social ladder to join the bourgeoisie.

Bent to fit around the steel

Again this line refers to the controlling aspect the machine plays over the employee, as the factory is designed around a process, typically the machine. The employees work for the machine - the machine does not work for the employee. The space of the factory is functionalist. The architecture is designed around a process, human interactions are only allowed to facilitate this process, i.e. the 'smoko' room is not located in an open section of the industry floor but separated, both by locality and its architecture.

They work while watched by whips
Making wages for a meal
Efficiencies sweat shines the concrete floor

> These lines are all focusing on control. The bourgeoisie own the forces of labour and therefore own the labour process. These lines were inspired by the Charlie Chapman movie "Modern Times". Where the capitalist watched and controlled every employee by a huge television screen, to ensure the organisation was running as efficiently as possible. Because of the very nature of industrial work, as stated earlier, there is no longer a process going on between nature and man when he conducts his work, he is working for money, always just enough to survive on. Here it refers to Marx's theory of 'surplus value' or profit. The way in which an employees labour is being exploited by the bourgeoisie, as we get more efficient and work harder we create an increase in the capitalists surplus value, the employee just gets by and reaps no rewards for his sweat, his hard work goes unrewarded.
>
> *The pig who gluts the profits still wants more*
>
> Again it refers to the notion of the exploitation of employee's labour, in order to increase the capitalist's 'surplus value'. They take on a 'technological imperative' where they see greater efficiency helping to increase the surplus value. The capitalist is never satisfied and continually needs to keep on exploiting the worker's labour.
>
> *the tooth bites*
> *at the end of the day an empty hole*
> *is all it has to say*
>
> These lines refer to the time-clock that opened and now closes the poem. It brings back those feelings of emptiness the labour process is, as the employee is not making something for himself, but is bettering the capitalist. They have made nothing tangible for themselves except money to barely survive - they feel empty. Another reference in this summary is drawing upon the fact workers have been utilised to their fullest potential for the day, they do not feel joy and inhalation (sic) as they have been utilised as a bag of flour is utilised - as it is all part of the production process.

Having presented these three pieces, I suspect it would be timely to offer some sage reflection on the process. So here would be the place to elaborate on the discombobulation I introduced in my first paragraph. At the core of my feelings of disquiet about this 'creative' assessment exercise is a sense of invasion of a private 'space'. No, perhaps it's not so much an invasion but a 'calculation' of a private space. Somewhat ironically I include Glenn Morgan's[14] paper on rational calculation and professional power in the course reading package. I find the way he introduces Hoskin and Macve's[15] work on the 'examination mark' useful as a way of raising the power/knowledge dynamic within the knowledge produced about them as students undertaking this course and as employees and managers in their work contexts. (Indeed Steven Lamb's 'commentary' included recognition of this process.) My current discomfort comes from a sense that I am broadening the domain of this process. Morgan states that:

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14 Glenn Morgan (1990) 'Rational Calculation, Professional Power and the Managerial Division of Labour', in *Organizations in Society*, MacMillan Education Ltd – in conjunction with the British Sociological Association, London.

15 Keith Hoskin & Richard Macve (1986), as above; and (1988) 'The Genesis of Accountability: the West Point Connection', *Accounting, Organizations & Society*, 11(2).

> (t)his process of construction is simultaneously a process of power and knowledge. In knowledge terms, the question arises as to how to evaluate the individual – indeed, how to 'know' the individual as an object of specific organizational practices.[16]

It is in the 'knowing' of these students as '*enhanced* objects' of university practices of assessment that troubles me. Through this 'creative' assessment practice the participating student-subjects are objectified through more than just their prose but their art, music and poetry too. In other words, in reaching into their 'outside-the-classroom context' I am making more parts of their subjectivity available for university sponsored rational calculation. It is at this point that my foray into creative pedagogy feels more like a support of 'enterprise culture'[17]. Is this an exercise of expressive liberation, or merely the unification of public and private 'subjectivities' under the order of the education-employment marketplace? In my quest to encourage these young students to engage with critical theory outside of the familiar formalized and programmatic essay forum, have I obscured the calculative power of the regime?[18] As I asked earlier[19], am I merely fabricating something like a plastic cage that reproduces and further regulates these students in a way that this exercise was designed to confront? In this sense, have I merely replaced an 'iron cage' with a 'plastic cage' of assessment?

That is all I wanted to say for now. At this point I would like to hear from 'the floor'[20] as they say. I wanted to bring this research note to the *ephemera* site because of the 'critical dialogues on organization' agenda and the interactive technology available to make that happen.

Which now brings me to the issue of an appropriate form for this paper. I think it is important to avoid 'the standard' essay format and not only because this paper is centrally about providing the space to move away from the constraints of the essay form. Of course my concerns about pervasive and invasive calculation in terms of university students are completely traceable onto university staff confirmation and promotion practices. So this discussion need not be just about 'creative assessment', it could also be about intellectual property investments and rights. But I digress. One of the aims of this piece is to initiate dialogue on the issue of 'critical' pedagogy for business / management students. An additional reason for avoiding 'an essay' format, therefore, is to reflect the fact that so much thoughtful and productive intellectual dialogue goes on in a myriad of 'academic' venues outside of the published essay. The email, the conference, the pub, the corridor, the classroom, the café are perhaps more familiar sites of critical dialogue in our day to day academic practices than our 'official

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16 Glenn Morgan (1990: 99), as above.

17 Nikolas Rose (1989/99) Governing the Soul. London: Free Association Books; and Paul Du Gay (1996) Consumption and Identity at Work. London: Sage – for example.

18 Wendy Brown (1995) 'Introduction: freedom and the plastic cage', in States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

19 By paraphrasing Wendy Brown (1995: 28), as above.

20 Or whatever spatial metaphor is appropriate for an electronic debate.

publications'? So, I was wondering about crafting this piece as some sort of conversation in one of these 'spaces'. What do you think? Would that be appropriate for your journal?

Warm regards and thanks[21]

Bronwyn

the author

Bronwyn Boon is a lecturer in the Department of Management at the University of Otago. Juggling teaching demands and 'quality' family time, she is still struggling to find the time to put a rather mature PhD 'to bed'. Most days she remains optimistic that her treatise on 'career', 'place' and 'subjectivity' will one day be completed.
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discussion

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21 I do want to express my thanks to the Mant 211 students of 2000 who shared their creativity with me and allowed me to use their material in this research. I also want to thank Campbell Jones for his persistant hassling and Shayne Grice, Bevan Catley and Tania Cassidy for their helpful comments with this 'wee note'.

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Contextualising Genoa: Protest, Violence and Democracy

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abstract

This note emerged from comments made in the ephemera discussion group, following the events at the G8 summit in Genoa, in July 2001. The first thing which struck me about the reporting of the protests was the extent to which the peaceful protests of the vast majority were almost completely ignored (in the UK). Instead, the media attention was almost exclusively focused on the minute number of protesters committing violence. Secondly, I felt that to a significant extent, subsequent discussions on the events in Genoa were too accepting of the establishment/orthodox rhetoric. Therefore, the twin objectives of the paper are to give some sort of voice to some of the (300,000[1]) peaceful protesters, and secondly, I want to, very briefly, challenge the language of the mainstream rhetoric, to show the tensions and limitations within it. The peaceful protesters are given a voice through using direct quotations from a selection of those who protested in Genoa. These quotations are taken from a range of sources. This is more of a random, rather than a representative sample, with a focus on protesters from the UK.[2] This is thus a (somewhat limited) attempt to, "articulate the experiences of people who, historically speaking, would otherwise remain inarticulate" (Coleman, 1986: 31).

Contextualising Genoa

The events in Genoa represented the latest high water mark in the growth of the anticapitalist movement. Since the most public emergence of this movement, in Seattle, Washington in November 1999 it has grown phenomenally. This growth has been such that the movement has mushroomed in less than two calendar years into what George Monbiot suggests, "in numerical terms, is the biggest protest movement in the history of the world" (2001b). Thus Genoa, rather than being an isolated incident, represents only

1 This figure refers to the main demonstration which took place on Saturday 21 July. The figure of 300,00 was published in Corriella dela Sera, and has been widely used.

2 Constraints of time and space meant that it was not possible to gain a more extensive, or representative data sample.

the latest point in a trajectory of protest which started in Seattle, but which has also produced events in Nice, Prague, Melbourne, Quebec and Gothenburg.

These events, like Seattle, were timed quite deliberately to coincide with, and confront the agenda of specific intergovernmental conferences which were felt to be helping push forward the globalization of a neo-liberal economic agenda, which the protesters are fundamentally opposed to. The main actors felt to be the strongest advocates of this economic perspective are the governments of the largest industrial economies, transnational organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, as well as the planet's largest multinational corporations. The intergovernmental conferences at which the protests have been staged represent one of the main forums in which these diverse actors publicly meet and decide on important policy issues. The protests in Genoa were timed to oppose a meeting of the G8, an organization which represents the governments of eight of the largest industrial economies (Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, the USA and Canada) and which has played a key role in the globalization of neo-liberalism.

In general, the protests have been concerned to challenge the globalization of a neo-liberal, monetarist economic philosophy. The strength of the protests against this doctrine are related to what its critics in the anticapitalist movements see as the extreme negativity of its effects. These include: increasing inequality, rather than reducing it (both between rich and poor within countries and between the most and least industrially advanced nations); the deregulation of social policies which negatively effect the pay, conditions and security of workers (leading to sweatshop labour in the less industrialized world, and insecure, poorly paid jobs for the workers of the most industrialized economies); which allows the private sector to control activities which have historically been purely under the control of governments (such as healthcare, education); and which have disastrous environmental consequences.

The diversity of the issues against which the protesters are fighting is an indication of the heterogeneity of the anticapitalist movement, which is constituted by a loose coalition of environmentalists, socialists, anarchists, and debt campaigners. This diversity is captured by the following range of quotes from some of the peaceful protesters who went to Genoa, describing why they went:

> We went to Genoa because we are against privatization and the domination of multinational corporations over everyday life…we are also worried about the destruction of the environment. (Richard Moth & Nicola Doherty[3], *Socialist Worker*, 4th August: 7)

> I went to protest about GATS[4], which was on the agenda at Genoa. It's about the privatization of everything. (Dave, student [Sheffield] – personal dialogue)

3 Richard and Nicola were two of the British protesters who were in the school beside the Indymedia centre which was raided by Italian police following the protests, and were among the approximately 90 people who were systematically, and brutally beaten by the police (see later).

> I went to Genoa as part of a delegation of four people from my local GMB[5] Branch. We wanted to send a message against privatization, in defence of asylum seekers, and against corporate greed. (James Woodcock, *Socialist Worker*, 4th August: 6)

> I earn a living as a teacher. In the last 10 years I've seen conditions deteriorate, colleagues made redundant…then Labour wins in 1997 and does it's best to privatize everything. (Geoff, Teacher & NATFHE[6] union representative [Manchester] – personal dialogue)

> We are both students in sixth form colleges in London. We joined the protests in Genoa because we felt it was the only real way of getting our voices heard. (Ben & James, *Socialist Worker*, 4th August: 6)

> I went to Genoa to participate in the mass demonstrations against the G8 and it's policies. I went because I believe in a free and equal society with people living in harmony with each other and the ecological system. (Jonathan Norman Blair [http://www.ainfos.ca – 01/0801])

CHALLENGING RHETORIC

The purpose of this section in the paper is to briefly attempt to challenge the assumptions of the dominant rhetoric concerning two issues: the question of violence and the question of democracy/representativeness. Too much of the debate that I was involved in on these topics pandered to the mainstream/orthodox agenda of those trying to discredit the activity and goals of the protesters. What was unexplored, in relative terms, were the tensions and contradictions in the rhetoric used to undermine the perspective of the protesters. For example, how does the violence of the protesters compare to the violence routinely used by the governments of the G8, or of the violence which could be argued to be inherent in capitalism. In examining these issues, I am attempting to both broaden and shift the focus of the debate. In shifting the debate I suggest moving from the legitimacy and actions of the protesters, to the legitimacy and actions of the agents of corporate globalization – global multinationals, neo-liberal governments, and the IMF etc. In terms of broadening the debate, the issues of violence and democracy should encompass the actions and the legitimacy of all parties, not just the protesters. This does not mean that the violence of the protesters should be ignored, but that it can be considered within a more balanced context.

The Question Of Violence

In the discussions that I have been involved in, I felt that dialogue had been too narrowly restricted to debating the violence and actions of the protesters. Thus even though the Italian police were making widespread use of tear gas, extended batons, and riot shields (not to mention live ammunition), their actions (at the time the events were

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4 General Agreement on Trade in Services. This is a proposal concerned with opening up a range of public services to private management and ownership.

5 British Trade union

6 One of the largest British higher education teachers trades union.

being reported), were typically not questioned, and were not conceptualised as violence in the same way as the actions of the protesters were. In addressing the question of violence, it is useful to consider it in its widest possible context, encompassing all types of violence (emotional, psychological, physical, economic..), and all agents of violence. In the limited space I have in this article, it is not possible to fully examine the question of violence within capitalist societies. What follows is therefore a brief sketch of some pertinent points.

The alienating monotony, stress and repetitiveness of work, which is the typical experience for vast numbers of human beings can be conceived as producing significant levels of emotional and psychological violence against workers. This is to some extent a direct result of the economic logic of capitalism, where the vast majority of humans are denied the benefits of the wealth that they help produce (Harman, 2000: 26). Marx described this experience of work, and the psychological consequences of it on workers, in his early work:

> 'It is true that labour produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker…[the system] replaces labour by machines, but it casts some of the workers back into barbarous forms of labour, and it turns the other section into a machine. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker…. [The worker] therefore does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind….The worker only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. (Marx, 1975: 325-6)[7]

Secondly, capitalism produces what could be referred to as economic violence due to the unequal distribution of resources, and because economic resources are not distributed on the basis of human need. Thus, between 10-12 million children on this planet die from diseases that could easily have been prevented if global economic resources had been distributed more equitably (Callinicos, 2001: 396). Susan George (1990), in a *Fate Worse than Debt*, damningly illustrates how the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF imposed on vast number of African countries in the 1970s vastly exacerbated, rather than alleviated, the suffering of millions of ordinary African people.[8]

Finally, there is the issue of war, which is inextricably linked to the capitalist system, the tensions between nation states, and their competing economies. Arguably, the twentieth century represents an extreme low point in this repect as it witnessed immense levels of violence and suffering, against civilian as much as military populations, vividly articulated in Eric Hobsbawm's history of this period, *Age of Extremes* (1994).

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7 While these words were written in the mid 19th century, they can be easily applied to the sort of sweatshop workers in Central America, and Indonesia that were so vividly described by Naomi Klein (2000).

8 These programmes represented an early form of neo-liberal, free market economics.

Overall therefore, capitalism can be understood as a system which produces suffering on a vast scale for enormous numbers of people, and where this physical, emotional and psychological violence is to some extent inherent within the structure and logic of the global capitalist system (Callinicos, 2001: 396).

Further, the extent to which governments will use violence to 'protect' intergovernmental meetings, and to protect property at all large-scale demonstrations requires to be acknowledged. The police behaviour in Genoa represents something of a low point in this respect, and is worth documenting. Firstly there was the killing of the Italian protester.[9] Secondly, were the general tactics of provocation, intimidation and violence used by the Italian police to deal with peaceful protesters throughout the three days of protests. This is captured in the following quotes from some protesters:

> The police were itching for a fight, and were pulling peoples teargas masks off…they fired volley after volley of tear gas at the peaceful demo by ATTAC[10]….the whole day was characterized by the police attacking peaceful demos…police brutality was worse than anything I've ever seen. (Dave, student [Sheffield] – personal dialogue)

> The police raided the camping centres at dawn on the 20th, even before the summit began. Dawn raids by paramilitary police! (Another report on Genoa [http://www.ainfos.ca – 01/08/01])

> Genoa was my first big demo. It was a roller coaster ride, emotionally and physically….at moments I felt so strong, because of the solidarity…I also felt extremely scared at times by the police tactics… the police were cutting and slashing with batons, there was sheer panic..those guys were so big…with their massive batons. (Sue, student [Manchester] – personal dialogue)

Arguably, most shocking of all was the level of violence used by the Italian Police on the evening of Saturday 21st July, when the demonstrations had finished. This occurred when the Italian Police raided a school building which was known to be housing protesters. Some of the detail of these events, and the scale of violence used is captured in the following quotes and picture:

> What happened in the school and carried on here at Bolzanetto[11] was a suspension of human rights, a void of the constitution. I tried to talk to colleagues and you know what they answered: we don't have to worry because we are covered. (Italian Policeman, quoted in La Repubblica, 26th July 2000)[12]

> ...the serious beatings, and the pools of blood in the GSF building were described as the result of police brutality. The group involved were referred to as anticapitalists who organized the protest marches against the G8. …The serious beatings and the pools of blood in the GSF building were well described. (http://italy.indymedia.org [published 01/08/01])

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9 Carlo Guiliani was killed on Friday, 20th July. He was shot twice, and his body was then driven over by police.

10 Association for the Taxation of Financial Transaction. This is a French protest group, set up in 1998, involving a coalition of individuals, associations, trade unions and newspapers.

11 This was the detention centre where those arrested were taken following the Police attack.

12 For the original Italian of this article see: www.repubblica.it/politica/gottododici/pestaggi/pestaggi.html

(Source: http://italy.indymedia.org)

> The police beat people one by one. They worked their way along the line. People were screaming and crying. I couldn't walk after the beating. I had to be carried out of the building. (Richard Moth, *Socialist Worker*, 4th August: 7)

> They beat the people who had been sleeping, who held up their hands in a gesture of innocence and cried out "Pacifisti! Pacifisti!" They beat the men and the women. They broke bones, smashed teeth, shattered skulls. (Fascism in Genoa [http://www.zmag.org, 01/08/01])

If the issue of violence at Genoa is to be discussed fully then the actions of the Italian police require to be considered, as much as the violence of the protesters. In this context, the property-related violence of a handful of protesters seems somewhat less significant. Further, when the political issues raised by the protesters are taken account of, this also shines a light on the extreme violence inherent within capitalism. However, while the violence inherent in the capitalist system may make the violence of the protesters pale into insignificance, this does not mean that the violence of the protesters can be totally ignored. This is particularly the case because the question of violence is one of the issues which divides the anticapitalist movement.[13]

13 Some of the questions the anticapitalist movement faces with regard to violence include: is it ever justifiable? Can it be used in self defence? Is violence justified if it is with the objective of overthrowing a violent social system? Is violence against property different from violence against people? Is it justifiable to attack the property of multinational corporations, but not locally owned businesses?

The Question of Democracy and Representativeness

> ...these protestors are unelected, they represent nobody and everyone should remember that the leaders here are elected to represent their nations, unlike their protesters…(Reported comments from a security advisor to George Bush, SKY News, 19/07/01)

> Who is better placed to speak on behalf of the poor: middle-class white people in the north or the elected representatives of the poor of Africa themselves? (Claire Short, UK Minister for Development, quoted by Seabrook, 2001)

The above quotes bring into question the legitimacy of the protesters' right to protest. Primarily it is suggested that because the protesters are unelected, they do not represent anyone except themselves, and that they do not speak for significant numbers of people. However, the legitimacy of the G8 leaders present in Genoa as being democratically elected, or as representing the opinions of their populations can also be questioned.[14]

While the recent second landslide election victory that New Labour received in the recent British elections (June 2001), suggests a massive popular mandate, a closer analysis brings this into question. Firstly, the turnout, at 59% was the lowest since 1918. Further, New Labour only received a total of 10.7 million votes, the lowest number of votes a winning party has EVER received in Britain (Rees, 2001). This number represents approximately only 25% of the UK electorate. New Labour can therefore hardly claim to be a representative voice of British public opinion.[15] The lack of representativeness of the Blair government seems even starker, when the massive unpopularity of many of their policies is acknowledged. Thus, while opinion polls in early 2001 suggested that over 70% of the UK population were in favour of the renationalization of Britain's railways, New Labour are firmly opposed to such a policy.[16] Further, while Ken Livingstone won the mayoral elections in London, on a mandate to keep London's underground system totally within the public sector, in late July the UK government won a court action against Livingstone, to force through it's detested Public-Private Partnership scheme for the redevelopment of the underground.

The issue of democracy becomes even more contestable when considering the vast numbers of senior business people who have been given *unelected* positions of significant power within New Labour's previous and current governments. Some of the most prominent examples include Lord Simon (BP), Lord Sainsbury (Sainsbury), and Lord McDonald (television). Further, the full extent to which UK politics has witnessed the involvement of senior business people in a wide range of domains, is described

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14 Apologies in advance for the parochiality of examples provided in this section. They are drawn primarily from the UK, and the USA. However, the similarities in the policies of the G8 governments, and links to business means that from whichever of the G8 countries you consider, you can easily swap the name of Blair or Bush, for the head of state of other countries.

15 This is even more so in the case of George W. Bush in the USA, as he received less than half the votes cast in recent U.S. elections, with a turnout of even lower than occurred in the UK elections.

16 As were the other two mainstream political parties.

vividly in George Monbiot's recent book, *The Captive State*.[17] This situation is arguably, not that different within the other G8 nations. As George Monbiot illustrates:

> Of the eight men meeting in Genoa this week, one seized the presidency of his country after losing the election. Another is pursuing a genocidal war in an annexed republic. A third is facing allegations of corruption. A fourth, the summit's host, has been convicted of illegal party financing, bribery and false accounting…. (2001a).

The clearest blurring/overlap between government and business is arguably in Italy, where the party of Silvio Berlusconi, the powerful TV magnate, won their recent general election (with approximately only 30% of the vote). The extent to which these neo-liberal governments directly involve business people, and represent their interests led Susan George to talk about, "the permanent government of the transnational corporations" (foreword to Bircham and Charlton, 2001). Overall, therefore, the democratic legitimacy of Blair, Bush, and other G8 governments to be representatives of the opinions of their people, rings somewhat hollow in the light of the above. Thus, it is suggested that any debate about the issues of representativeness, or democracy, can most usefully be discussed within this broad context, rather than focusing narrowly on the legitimacy of the protesters.

Conclusion: A Time For Cautious Optimism

In concluding about the significance of the events in Genoa a note of cautious optimism can be sounded with regard to the development of the anticapitalist movement. Not least because the movement has provided an important ideological and symbolic opposition to neo-liberalism, and corporate globalization. Thus for those opposed to the current economic order and the disastrous consequences it has for the vast majority of the inhabitants of this planet, there is cause for optimism that there is increasing support for an alternative, more equitable and sustainable vision of society. The extent of the violence used in Genoa (by the Police), and at the EC intergovernmental conference in Gothenburg earlier in 2001 could be interpreted as an indication of the anticapitalist movements' strength: it is perceived as such a real threat that extreme levels of violence are felt to be justified in dealing with it. Arguably, the level of violence used to 'protect' these meetings could be interpreted as sending a deliberate message to any prospective protesters: if you come to protest, be prepared to face serious injury.

However, a note of caution is also necessary. The anticapitalist movement has grown phenomenally, but it could also fragment, or decline just as quickly. While the strength of the movement is the unity of purpose that has been created from groups with extremely diverse ideological perspectives, this also represents a potential weakness. Differences of opinion over the question of violence represent one among many issues

17 Again, this situation is to some extent replicated in the USA. A significant proportion of George W. Bush's policy advisors are closely involved with the business organizations which funded Bush's election campaign.

which divide the movement. Thus, it remains an open question whether the aftermath of Genoa will witness the splintering of the anticapitalist movement, or whether it will continue to grow.

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Consumer Culture Coroners

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review of: **Thomas Frank (2001) *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy*. London: Secker and Warburg.**
(HB: pp.430, £18.99, ISBN: 0436276194)

A previous reviewer for *ephemera* made innovative use of amazon.com in his discussion (De Cock, 2001). I'd thought I'd follow his lead. An *ephemera* concession might be inappropriate in the current context so I'll confine myself to pointing out that the site shows that purchasers of Thomas Frank's *One Market Under God* have also bought books by Naomi Klein, Noreena Hertz and George Monbiot. No surprise there. But I wonder why? Frank warns that his contribution gives "no advice that might help the reader to pick a NASDAQ tenbagger, say, or rebrand a line of detergent or footwear" (p.23). Which I think is unhelpful not only because no sane person would have been expecting it, but also because I have no idea what a "tenbagger" is. I think perhaps I'd quite like one but would probably feel bad about it- but more of this later.

So what's the point of Frank's book? And the answer is that I'm not sure. As a starting point, I offer a new innovation- from *The Guardian Editor* supplement *The Digested Read Digested*. For those not wishing to read the full version, Frank appears to be saying: 'Bad, Bad. BAD. Bad, Bad, Bad, Bad. BAD'.

This is a little unfair because Frank has a strong central thesis. He argues that in contemporary society the increasing power of business is protected and projected by what he calls 'market populism'. This is the belief that the will of the people is expressed and facilitated through the market. According to Frank market populism:

> was just the thing for a social order requiring constant doses of legitimacy. Taking as a fact the notion that business gives people what they want, market populism proceeds to build all manner of populist fantasies. Of businessmen as public servants; of industrial and cultural production as a simple reflection of popular desire, of the box office as a voting booth. By consuming the fruits of industry, we the people are endorsing the industrial system, voting for it in a plebiscite far more democratic than a mere election. (p.30)

Under market populism it follows that an unregulated market drives a truly democratic society. The market represents the people; it provides the products they like at prices they can afford. And the relentless upward movement of the stock market ensures their financial security. The two coalesce in our investment strategies. Just invest in brands – the products that you buy, consume and trust. The market will even provide for those 'downsized' – if they are given shares in the company that has sacked them then everyone benefits from the 'efficiencies' resulting from their sacrifice. Given the mutual benefit flowing from the market, any attempt by government, unions (and particularly the French) to control its activities (and those of its agents) represents unwarranted elitism. Criticism of business becomes criticism of the tastes and choices of the common man. Regulation protects only the snob products of the elite.

Hence markets are not only mediums of exchange but also mediums of consent. And consent is managed via a massive PR enterprise. The major part of the book is devoted to exposing the ways in which market populism has been propagated. We read of cyber-prophets juggling divinity and natural law to present market forces as inevitable and irresistible (and woe betide anyone who tries to resist); new age managers seeing business as really a means for further social causes; Generation X'ers investing carefully in order to (one day) avoid the authority of regular employment; advertising executives recasting themselves as ethnographers developing brands by building 'relationships' with clients/consumers/citizens. Worse, Frank shows how potential critics in the media and academy have either been seduced by the market or become preoccupied with internal squabbles. Under market populism what were once countervailing sources of power now provide only reaffirmations. The result is that we have become more and more ignorant of massive (and growing) inequalities of income.

So having established his thesis, Frank spends the best part of 300 pages outlining the bad and mad arguments mobilised in the name of market populism. There are some nice sections that point out particularly telling contradictions. He shows how corporations represent themselves as depending on 'good' management. And 'good' management is, of course, deserving of handsome rewards. But as soon as management is embraced outside the market it becomes an anathema for creating 'rigidities' and 'stunting' enterprise. Frank notes that investing in 'big brands' betrays the hypocrisy at the heart of market populism. It assumes that the market is both free to make its own choices, but also controlled by the brand managers.

But after a while, and after the same names keep cropping up, we start to need something else. Indeed at one point, Frank seems to stop commenting himself, content it appears to let the absurdity speak for itself. There are a number of problems here. Personally I'm not that close to swallowing the bombast peddled by the new economy prophets. And I'm sure few reading this piece will be either. But that's not saying much. Belief would, for some of these ideas, be similar to believing in Father Christmas. We have a fair bit of empirical evidence, the bursting of the dot-com bubble, the US economic downturn, that Father Christmas is at least feeling rather fragile. Maybe some will be shocked by this news and follow some personal path to redemption. But what are the rest of us, the readers of Klein, Monbiot and Hertz to do. We read, see and feel much about the effects of growing power of corporations to make us deeply

uncomfortable. But what are we going to do about it? To put it another way, what comes after bad, bad, bad, bad, BAD.

It is tempting in considering this discomfort to confess our implicit identifications with the tenets of market populism. I have an ISA. This means that I'd prefer the market to go up rather than down. This means that whilst I'm not too preoccupied with spotting 'tenbaggers', I guess I'm counting on someone (and who knows perhaps someone closer to believing the tall tales in Frank's book than you or I) to look out for them on my behalf. Many of us are employed in university departments sustained by shiny dreams of aspirant new economy professionals. I understand that Frank has faced some personal criticisms along these lines, being asked to account for a number of articles written for business magazines. He explanation was simple, "I have to eat. I have a child on the way. I'll write for anyone who will pay me, as long as they don't force me to change what I have to say. And I also don't want to preach solely to the choir" (Newitz, 2001: 2). But it was quickly pointed out that just because he hasn't been censored doesn't mean that he hasn't been co-opted. The dissenting voice becomes proof of the liberalism of the powerful.

In another section of the book, Frank writes about market populism and academia. Frank has a PhD. He talks about the difficulty of getting a tenured job and of academics turned into casual labourers by the market. Nevertheless he is disillusioned by the state of his discipline. He feels academics have become cultural coroners dissecting the decomposing corpses of their disciplines – self-obsessives indulging in "theoretical hedging – paying homage to all the right texts; identifying and avoiding errors of this school and that; situating itself with relationship to Foucault, Gramsci, Deleuze and Guattari" (p.284). He also writes about a visit to an advertising conference full of bright young things. Casting a weary eye, the conference seemed to him, "like postmodern cultural radicalism come home to Madison Avenue complete with all its usual militancy against master narratives and hierarchical authority... Only one thing was wrong. These enthusiastic, self-proclaimed vicars of the *vox populi* were also, almost to a man, paid agents of the Fortune 500" (p.257). Frank finds many graduates but few '*bona fide*' Phd's. They are however keen to see themselves as very, very clever. At the same time, at Frank's own *alma mater*, ad agencies like Oglivy and Mather trawled for anthropology PhDs (p.275). His view is that academics are either indulgently preoccupied with internal debates or in the process of selling out (or being sold out) to the market. I'm sure that readers of *ephemera* can produce their own version of these sentiments... Derrida, Foucault, ESRC, RAE, MBA. His response, probably not taken by many *ephemera* readers, is to address a different audience and given that he has mouths to feed, to take the corporate shilling direct. We launder it through something called *Critical Management*.

Once this felt in itself deserving of criticism. So I poked fun at the (in)authenticity of Naomi Klein's middle class camper van dreams (Smith, 2001). And became steadily (but silently) bothered by our increasingly indulgent (and repetitive) 'reflexive' loopy-loops. Now, you will be pleased to hear, I am less hung up on whether we are co-opted by, or complicit in, the system. Since it is obvious that we are, its clearly redundant as a line of criticism. It is a preoccupation that creates only resigned fatalism. That's not to say that some exploration of the desires that lead to this co-option is not important. It's

just that it has to provide the basis of something more. In the context of globalisation, many of these desires have bad effects. And they are clearly intensified by the persuasive efforts of capital. Bad indeed. But like our own disciplinary efforts, the consumer culture coroners are becoming self-sustaining and formulaic – *The Guardian* recently (4/08/01) published in the review section a top ten sales chart for 'anti-capitalist' books.

Yet Klein's loft apartment, Frank's hungry baby and my 'tenbagging' are still relevant. Whether unintentionally or not, at least Naomi Klein's musing about her mall-rat youth, the tacky corporate takeover of her once trendy residential area and wistful regrets over the loss of the "untrammelled pastures" once explored by her (rich, white, liberal, elite) parents brings to the fore some of the questions we must confront if we want to respond to the bad things that Frank simply reports. At one point, Frank makes a criticism of media mogul and founder of *USA Today*, Al Neuharth, by noting ironically that he had put a criticism of elitism into the mouth of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, "The more you judge others by your own standards, the more you show total disregard for their circumstances" (p.331). Now whilst this might be deeply suspicious coming out of certain mouths, as a general point I think it is important. *One Market Under God* catalogues the absurdities of capital and hopes (I assume) that people will recognise this and formulate some suitable responses. But at the same time Frank tends to see individuals as gullible and is scathing of "audiences-agency" approaches as another examples of populist spin. If its rhetoric is so self-evidentially unconvincing, then why is it so powerful? He mocks the blunt tools of focus groups and market segmentation and criticises a financial journalist for not defining 'his' middle class, but writes himself of an undifferentiated middle class whose consent and desires are supremely managed by market populism.

Clearly 'people' want 'stuff'. New cars, out of season melons at reasonable prices, fashionable sporting goods, the sense of security produced by expanding wealth. On the one hand, the displacement of the rural peasantry in the developing world will continue whoever buys a corporate melon. On the other, if we want people to change the products that they buy, we have to consider the significance of their social-economic position on these desires and the willingness to modify what we consume. So whilst I want the various elements of Frank's analysis to provide alternatives, and an understanding of market populism to offer some grounds for resistance, this must be informed by an understanding of our differing positions within this system and the effect this has on the viability of these alternatives. It's easy to feel hopeless when faced with the vastness and intangibility of the systemic badness that is reported. But it's easy to give in to shiny desires when implored by the abstract anti-materialism of the already sated.

I pointed out earlier that Frank warns against the absence in his book of investment strategies or branding advice. But no advice at all? If all this is to be more than hand wringing, if it is meant to produce action, then perhaps producing specific and detailed advice is precisely what *we* should be doing. Market populism is about effacement of course. And Frank writes powerfully about its strategies, about how effacement is achieved. But given the sheer volume of corporate criticism that is currently being produced, I'm more concerned about what is being effaced and what we can do about it.

This needs facts, claims, assertions leading to prescriptions and alternatives. Things that hang heavy... those unephemeral things. I'm not sure how this can be reconciled with a sympathetic and differentiated understanding of why people want things, but suspect it means beginning with the things themselves.

Nike, Gap, Saipan, sweatshops…yes, yes. But how much do you *really* know about that melon?

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discussion

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Moving Beyond the Science Wars?

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review of: **Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Science Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univerity Press.**
(PB: pp.216, £13.95, ISBN: 052177568X, HB: pp.214, £37.50, ISBN: 0521772680)

Making Social Science Matter is a book of particular significance, not only because of its contents, but also because of its timing. In the wake of the recent 'paradigm' and 'science' wars, a dispassionate and resolutely unorthodox book such as this is invaluable. Flyvbjerg first and foremost demonstrates an obvious close and passionate relationship with the book's aim and content. The book's contribution is evident right from its very start where key contemporary debates in the social sciences are engaged. Flyvbjerg also provides an interesting 'hook' for his readers by presenting a provocative argument that seems to suggest there is no room for theory (as we have come to know it) in the social sciences.

Flyvbjerg opens with a review of the science wars that have raged between the natural and social sciences since the mid 1990s. He discusses an incident in which Alan Sokal, a New York University mathematical physicist, was successful at having a bogus article published in a 1996 issue of the journal *Social Text*. The article feigned an earnest cultural studies reflection on the political and philosophical implications of recent physics research. Sokal revealed the hoax himself in order to discredit the *Social Text* editors. Needless to say, Sokal's hoax became a hotly contested debate throughout the world. The Noble prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg used the hoax to bring attention to what he saw as dangerous anti-rationalism and relativism in social science and cultural studies. While on the other side, social theorists countered by criticizing Sokal and Weinberg, calling them and "like minded natural scientist 'pre-Kantian shaman[s]' repeating the 'mantras of particle physicists', with their 'reductionist view of science'" (Flybjerg, 2001: 1). Flyvbjerg asserts that these wars are misguided, arguing that the "mudslinging of the science wars is unproductive" and has "undoubtedly served political and ideological purposes in the competition for research funds" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 2).

For some time now, critique of the natural sciences has been evident in paradigmatically oriented debates in the social science field. Since the publication of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) classic text *Sociological Paradigms and Organization Analysis*, numerous organization theorists (Jackson and Willmott, 1987; Reed, 1988) have debated the concept of 'paradigm incommensurability' (see also Hinings, Clegg, Child, Aldrich, Karpik and Donaldson, 1988). Of late, theorists appear to be making a direct call for paradigmatic wars to come to end: Langley (1999) and Pentland (1999) assert it is time to dispense with the positivists versus anti-positivists as well as the inductive versus deductive debates; Calas and Smircich (1999) suggest that it is time to dispense with the modern versus postmodern debate; Weick (1999) argues that in a discontinuous and discursively oriented world, rather than continue to fight we need to acknowledge multiple viewpoints and make sense of things the best way that we can. What differentiates Flyvbjerg's book from the work of these and other theorists however, is that he validates why it is time to move beyond the paradigm wars by drawing upon the work of 'heavyweights' such as Socrates, Aristotle, Weber, Nietzsche, Habermas and Foucault. Additionally, the novel way in which he challenges the role of theory in the social sciences will be seen by many, as representing an important turning point in the literature.

Flyvbjerg presents the book in two main parts. In part one his main argument is that social science "never has been, and probably never will be, able to develop the type of explanatory and predictive theory that is the ideal and hallmark of natural science" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 4). He argues that this is so because context and judgement are irreducibly central to understanding human action. In short, social science cannot produce reliable predictive theory because people do not exist in ideal settings, they cannot exist independent of context and time. By drawing upon the work of Hubert Dreyfus, Pierre Bourdieu, and Harold Garfinkel he is able to show, that to date the social sciences' emulation of the natural sciences is misguided and has simply led to a "cul-de-sac". He asserts, that in consequence "social theory and social science methodology stand in need of reorientation" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 4).

In part two, Flyvbjerg presents his attempt at such a reorientation. At the heart of his approach lies the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, which he believes offers a way out of the science wars. He defines phronesis as "prudence or practical wisdom" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 2). If one considers how the words 'prudence' and 'wisdom' are imbued with themes of time and politics, one can appreciate why Flyvbjerg sees phronesis as going beyond both analytical scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know-how (*techne*). He sees phronesis involving "judgements and decisions made in a manner of virtuoso social and political actor" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 2). He argues that once phronesis is introduced to the discussion one can see "that social science has set itself and impossible task by emulating the natural sciences and attempting to produce explanatory and predictive theory" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 3). He suggests that the social and natural sciences have their respective strengths and weakness, but along fundamentally different dimensions, (the natural sciences being context independent and the social sciences being context dependent) "a point which Aristotle demonstrated but which has since been forgotten" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 3).

To give phronesis a more contemporary interpretation Flyvbjerg develops the concept on three fronts. First, he uses Aristotle's insights into the role of case knowledge in phronesis to clarify the important status and use of case studies in social science. Second, he attempts to enrich the concept of phronesis by introducing considerations on power, considerations that are not present in its classical conception. He expands the concept from one of values, in its classical form, to one of values and power. Third, Flyvbjerg refines the concept by developing a set of methodological guidelines for doing what he terms 'phronetic social science'. He then provides a number of empirical examples that illustrate his approach.

Flyvbjerg concludes his book by arguing that if we want to make social science matter we must: "drop the fruitless efforts to emulate the natural science's in their attempt to produce cumulative and predictive theory" (*episteme*); "we must take up problems that matter to local, national and global communities, and we must do it in ways that matter" and; "we must effectively communicate the results of our research to fellow citizens" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 166). He acknowledges that the science wars will probably continue as will the current dominance of the natural science approach to social science research. However, his 'phronetic social science' approach now offers an alternative. An alternative, in which the purpose is "not to develop theory, but to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 167).

There are two points by way of critique, one in regard to how Flyvbjerg addresses legitimacy in his approach to power and the other in regard to how he addresses representation. It must be said before this critique is offered however, that Flyvbjerg's writings on power and representation, here and in his previous book *Rationality and Power* are considered first rate. Here in particular, his comparative analysis of the Habermasian and Foucauldian approaches to power provides the reader with an understanding on where theory and research into power currently stands, as well as an appreciation for how it has arrived at this point.

Flyvbjerg indirectly discusses legitimacy. This is evident when drawing on Foucault's work he states that "one must study discourses on two levels: (1) the level of their tactical productivity, where the question is, 'What reciprocal effects of power and knowledge [do] they ensure?' and (2) the level of strategic integration, where the question now becomes, What conjunction and what force relationship make it necessary to utilize discourses in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur?" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 124) However, a more direct approach may have enhanced the book by helping readers to both see and appreciate more fully the link between Foucauldian analytics and phronesis.

Flyvbjerg, while acknowledging the importance of historical analysis, appears to downplay the importance of the link between Foucault's archaeological and genealogical phases in genealogical studies. More specifically, how historically constituted codes of order both constrain and enable the way power is exercised in a social system appears to be of only secondary importance. It is asserted here however, that downplaying this effect, runs the risk of reverting the focus of analysis to 'what' happens, rather than 'how' and 'why' things come to happen as they do. A focus on

addressing 'how' questions as opposed to 'what' questions, as acknowledged by Flyvbjerg, is one of the hallmarks of genealogy. Flyvbjerg acknowledges the effect of codes of order when he writes: "Foucault's norms are contextually grounded" and, because of norms "people can not think or do just anything at anytime" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 99-100). 'Norms', in this sense seen as being synonymous with 'codes of order'. However, Flyvbjerg does not elaborate on how people use their knowledge of norms strategically. Said more simply, Flyvbjerg does not elaborate on how people use their knowledge of what authors such as Clegg (1989) term the 'rules of the game' (codes of order or norms) to legitimise their preferred course of action or outcome, while fully acknowledging, as does Flyvbjerg, that the "rules are not the game" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 42). That is, the rules of the game constrain but do not determine the nature and outcome of the game. One can supplement Flyvberg's account with that of Mark Haugaard's (1998) book *The Constitution of Power,* which provides an excellent account of how people use norms (or more accurately their social system's archaeology of order) strategically.

In regards to the second point of critique on representation, Flyvbjerg argues that dualisms "may facilitate thinking and writing, but they inhibit understanding by implying a neatness that is rarely found in lived life" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 49). To privilege one representation over another in a dualistic either-or framework "is to amputate one-side of understanding" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 49). He writes that "Rather than the 'either-or' we should develop a non-dualistic and pluralistic 'both-and'"(Flyvbjerg, 2001: 49). He adds that we should not criticize representational viewpoints rather we should criticize only the dominance of viewpoints over others.

Flyvbjerg draws on Nietzsche's comment that "there is a point in every philosophy when the philosopher's conviction appears on stage" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 93). While, Flyvbjerg may not see himself as a philosopher his conviction, somewhat contradictory to his call for the development of a non-dualistic 'both-and', does appear on stage. A conviction that clearly lends itself to the development a 'phronetic social science', which has little if any room for abstract theory. His main argument is based on an either/or dualism between the natural sciences and the social sciences, the natural science's being attuned to the promulgation of abstract theory – *episteme*, and the social sciences being attuned to the study of social practice – *phronesis*. By drawing upon the work of Aristotle and others, he establishes salient boundaries between theory (*episteme*), know-how (*techne*) and social practice (*phronesis*). In doing so however, he not only strengthens his argument for a shift away from *episteme* to *phronesis*, but also implies that theory (*episteme*), know-how (*techne*) and social practice (*phronesis*) exist independent of each other. Generally, the separation of theory and practice is recognized as being part and parcel of what is known as 'positivism'. Yet, if, as Flyvbjerg does, one considers Foucault's power/knowledge nexus, one recognizes that theory, know-how and practice do not exist independent of each other. That is, theory and practice have a reciprocal relationship and thus, theory (*episteme*) influences the nature of social practice (*phronesis*). While Flyvbjerg undoubtedly recognizes that theory influences practice, the nature of this influence is not clear in his book. Furthermore, his placement of boundaries between theory (*episteme*), know-how (*techne*) and practice (*phronesis*) while at the same time espousing the need for a 'both-and' approach, reveals a paradox that requires further explanation.

In recent times, theorists such as Karl Weick, Stewart Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, Kenneth Gergen and, more generally, some 'ethnographers' and 'action researchers', have called for the gap between theory and practice to be bridged. In particular, if one reflects upon Karl Weick's work on sensemaking, one could argue that sensemaking is a form of practical theorizing. In short, when people attempt to make sense of things they are actually theorizing. This was the central insight that Clegg took from ethnomethodology in his 1975 book *Power, Rule and Domination*, when he referred to 'theorizing power' as something that both professional theorists and lay people do. One may ponder over the difference between Flyvbjerg's conception of phronesis and sensemaking. If so, phronetic social science might also be seen as the study of practical theorizing. One difference between phronetic social science and sensemaking however, appears to be that phronetic social science is based on a premise that reinforces the boundaries between theory and practice, while sensemaking takes steps towards narrowing the gap between them.

It is acknowledged that Flyvbjerg defines theory as being abstract (context independent). Nevertheless, people still reflect upon abstract theory, constituted within their knowledge, when making sense of things. The impact of this reflection on *phronesis* needs further explanation. It is also acknowledged, that Flyvbjerg suggests that phronetic social science will involve bridging the gap between *techne* and *phronesis*, this bridging resulting in "*techne* with a head on it" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 168), meaning technical know-how shaped by value rational deliberation. Maybe Flyvbjerg needs to go further and put a head on *episteme*, which he went a long way towards doing in his previous book *Power and Rationality,* through its power-is-knowledge approach to power. In this approach to power, Flyvbjerg argues that the outcome of the struggle for power shapes the constitution of rationality. In other words, the winner of the power game decides what is 'valid' knowledge, not to mention what is rational, right and just.

With the previous critique on 'legitimacy' in mind, one must question whether Flyvbjerg will win his own power game. For instance, will those readers committed to a more orthodox approach who not only value the pursuit of abstract theory in social research, but also find quantitative research interesting, hear his 'voice'? Or, will Flyvbjerg's 'hook' - *there is no room for abstract theory in the social sciences* - be viewed by these readers as infelicitous. If so, rather than legitimising his approach Flyvbjerg may simply reconstitute another paradigm war?

Alternatively, those readers who are more familiar with interpretative sociology may not find Flybjerg offering anything terribly new. Rather, they may see his arguments as reflecting much of what Weber had to say more than a century ago. Additionally, readers of journals such as the *Harvard Business Review*, who appear already commitedly anti-theoretical, might find Flyvbjerg ignorant of their viewpoint or, if not ignorant, apologetic on their behalf. Either way, one must question whether these readers will also hear his 'voice'.

In Flyvbjerg's defence, his aim is to call attention to what he sees as the central problem in the social sciences, that is, the limited theoretical and methodological success that the social sciences have had in comparison with the natural sciences. He also acknowledges

that his attempt to offer an answer to this problem "should be seen as only a first step that will undoubtedly need further theoretical and methodological refinement" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 5). It is hoped that the above points of critique provide helpful insights for such refinement; their offering, is not intended to suggest that Flyvbjerg has been unsuccessful with his aim. Indeed, his provocative argument will capture the interest of academics and students alike and, *Phronetic Social Science* is likely to help generate interesting and valuable research in the future. However, the tensions and paradoxes in Flyvbjerg's arguments need to be careful scrutinized before it can be said that phronetic social science actually offers a way out of the science (or any other paradigmatically oriented) wars.

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Radicalising Organisation Studies and the Meaning of Critique

David Boje, Steffen G. Böhm, Catherine Casey, Stewart Clegg, Alessia Contu, Bogdan Costea, Silvia Gherardi, Campbell Jones, David Knights, Mike Reed, André Spicer and Hugh Willmott

abstract

On July 6th, 2001 egosNetWork (www.ephemeraweb.org/egosnetwork), a group initiated to facilitate the exchange of ideas between junior and established academics and aims to nurture the diversity and critical thinking in Organisation Studies, invited some of the major figures who have been involved in expressing critical voices within the formalised institutions of management and organisation studies to respond to a set of 'provocations', which pose questions about the meaning of critique in an effort to contribute to the radicalisation of organisation studies. What follows is a transcript of this discussion that took place as part of the 17th EGOS Colloquium 'The Odyssey of Organizing' in Lyon, France.

Campbell Jones:

I have been asked to start with some 'provocations', which will take the form of four questions that I want to open out to the panel and to everyone here. This is not particularly well structured, but is basically a set of ideas which reflect some of my concerns about the way that critique, critical studies of management and organisation and 'critical management studies' have been emerging.

The first is around the relationship between critique and dogmatism. Quite often we evoke some kind of Kantian metaphor of the relation between dogma and critique: the task of the critic is to refuse or to resist common sense, common sense being in some way dogmatic or 'doxical'. There are, of course, are a couple of problems with this basic Kantian distinction. The first problem is that critical understandings are never able to totally differentiate themselves from, or totally step outside, the common sense of the time. There is always some kind of co-implication of critical reason with common sense, with dogma if we want to call it that. The second problem is that critical thought itself can become dogmatic. It can be just as repetitive of the common sense of the day as dogma itself. So the question that I want to pose around this is the extent to which critical management studies and other variations of critique, as they have been manifested in organisation studies, are today crystallising as a form of dogma, with a certain set of rules about how we do critique. So critique must follow a particular form, must be enunciated in a particular language and so forth. This might be my first question.

The second question I have relates to the status of post-structural theory in critique and critical management writing. My reflection here comes out of a concern with the way that critical management studies is described by Fournier and Grey in a recent paper[1]. Fournier and Grey are pluralistic and outline a number of positions which they describe as being critical management studies (CMS). For them CMS "encompasses a broad range of positions including neo-Marxism (labour process theory, Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Gramsci 'hegemony theory'), post-structuralism, deconstructionism, literary criticism, feminism, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, environmentalism…post-colonialism and queer theory".[2] So there are, it would seem, a plethora of critical discourses. But as Paul Thompson has noted, when Fournier and Grey go about describing what CMS does, how it works, they tend to identify a quite specific aspect of these traditions they identify. Thompson suggests that in Fournier and Grey's analysis there is "no significant difference between what is claimed on behalf of CMS and those made for post-structuralism and post-modernism in general".[3] So the suggestion is that when Fournier and Grey describe what CMS is, the kind of strategies of critique, which include non-performative intent, de-naturalising and reflexivity, these strategies represent a quite particular version of what critique could be. It may be possible, with the rise of post-structural theory, which, of course, has been valuable to the field of organisation studies, that we still have a 'marginalisation', to use the language of post-structuralism, in which critical management studies takes on post-structuralism as if post-structuralism is, and should be, the hegemonic form of critique. 'If you don't do critique post-structuralist jargon, that you are not *really* being critical!'

The third point I want to make is about the quite particular ways in which post-structural theory has been read. Here I am referring to the tendency which we have seen in critical management studies to suggest that following post-structuralism we must no longer make the grand claims that used to be made on behalf of progress or whatever. So the critic, following post-structuralism, should be far more modest. So modest, in fact, that even goals such as 'emancipation' are no longer acceptable. Not acceptable in their traditional form, and for some writers not even acceptable at all. I am thinking, for example, of Alvesson and Willmott's suggestion that we must work towards 'micro-emancipations'[4], or what I saw represented in a recent issue of *Organization Studies* in which Andrew Chan suggests that discourses in which we hope for a radically different future belong to a 'tired paradigm'[5] of revolution. By juxtaposing this with some of

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1 Valérie Fournier and Christopher Grey (2000) 'At the Critical Moment: Conditions and Prospects for Critical Management Studies', *Human Relations*, 53(1): 7-32.

2 Fournier and Grey (2000: 16).

3 Paul Thompson (2001) 'Progress, Practice and Profits: How Critical is Critical Management Studies?', Paper presented at the *19th Annual International Labour Process Conference*, London, 26-28 March, p.1.

4 Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott (1992) 'On the Idea of Emancipation in Management and Organization Studies', *Academy of Management Review*, 17(3): 432

5 Andrew Chan (2000) 'Redirecting Critique in Postmodern Organization Studies: the Perspective of Foucault', *Organization Studies*, 21(6): 1070.

Derrida's recent comments on the goals of critique, we could open up this question a bit. A couple of comments of Derrida, which I want to indicate. One is when Derrida says, "Nothing seems to me less outdated than the classic emancipatory ideal".[6] Another comment from our 'post-structuralist friend'. Derrida says: "I refuse to renounce the great classical discourse of emancipation. I believe that there is an enormous amount to do today for emancipation, in all domains and all the areas of the world and society….I must say that I have no tolerance for those who—deconstructionist or not—are ironical with regard to the grand discourse of emancipation. This attitude has always distressed and irritated me. I do not want to renounce this discourse".[7]

My fourth point is to do with change and hopefulness. What we seem to find in a lot of versions of critical management studies in relation to the suspicion of grand narratives of progress and change is the total disappearance of the suggestion that there could be something alternative *at all*. Here I want to mention three comments from Slavoj Žižek, who is possibly one of the more 'optimistic' among contemporary critical writers. The first is where he identifies the way in which today it is very easy to think of total environmental collapse: it is almost as if total environmental destruction, the end of the world as we know it, is easy to think, however, even modest change in the relations of production is almost impossible to imagine. The second from Žižek is the way in which, in the analysis of the social and organisational world today, "the very mention of capitalism as world system tends to give rise to the accusation of 'essentialism', 'fundamentalism' and other crimes".[8] In doing so, imagining ways in which there might be alternatives is erased. The third comment from Žižek, which I want to evoke, and my last comment, is where he writes that today "the moment one shows the slightest inclination to engage in political projects that aim seriously to challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: 'Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!'" Žižek argues that "in this way, conformist liberal scoundrels can find hypocritical satisfaction in their defence of the existing order: they know there is corruption, exploitation, and so on, but every attempt to change things is denounced as ethically dangerous and unacceptable, rescuscitating the ghost of 'totalitarianism'."[9]

So there are four comments or four questions that I want to open up, and hopefully, with a little luck, I may have provoked some response.

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6 Jacques Derrida (1992/1994) 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', trans. Mary Quaintance in Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (eds.) *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. New York: Routledge. French: *Force de loi: Le "Fondement mystique de l'autorité"*. Paris: Galilée, p. 28/62.

7 Jacques Derrida (1996) 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism', trans. Simon Critchley, in Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau and Richard Rorty (eds.) *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. London: Routledge, p. 82.

8 Slavoj Žižek (1997) 'Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 225: 46.

9 Slavoj Žižek (2001) *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* London: Verso, p. 3-4.

Stewart Clegg:

It is enormously hard to say that one is critical or that one is doing critical work. While admiring enormously the philosophical breadth and facility that Campbell just gave us, I'd like to take a very concrete case, because I think that empirical cases can make things clearer. My country is Australia, as you probably know, and in Australia the indigenous people are usually referred to as Aborigines. Up until the 1960s in our country there was a policy by state governments, welfare agencies and church bodies of removing light skinned children from Aboriginal families, where they were regarded at risk, and placing them into institutions or adoption by white families. Now, this policy was done at the time by people of liberal disposition, and certainly even though the consequences may have been quite different from the intentions, certainly were not done with bad intentions. Now, a couple of years ago a report was published called *The Stolen Generation* and it was about the plight of the Aboriginal people who had been, at an early age, separated from their family, their culture, their traditions and their beliefs, often placed in quite cruel and cold situations, and it created a great furore, a great outpouring of discussion. Now, the critical position on this is rather hard to identify because, on the one hand it would seem to be a very good thing for children not to be removed from their parents under any circumstances whatsoever, and I think that many intellectual people, perhaps of a critical disposition, would have held that position. Until, perhaps, two or three weeks ago, as a result of some internal politics in the peak organisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders Commission, ASTIC, one notable Aboriginal activist, Pat O'Shane who is the Chancellor of the University of New England, raised the issue of the distressing levels of violence and abuse in Aboriginal families, in the context of a debate sparked by some remarks she made about an allegation of rape made against a prominent Aboriginal leader. Now, the historical reasons for that violence are clearly not unrelated to the life experiences that many people in the community had gone through. In turn, this lead to the publicity about some research which had been done by some critical social scientists, lead by an Aboriginal anthropologist, in the state of Queensland, who discovered that in Aboriginal families and communities something like 70% of women and children had suffered, and were suffering, major physical abuse. Now, the question of how one should react to that is very, very difficult. What is the correct critical position, and how does philosophy help us find a correct critical position in this situation? A care for the person, a care for the self in the Foucauldian sense would probably say 'well, there should be some intervention, the children should be removed'. But it was precisely those kinds of liberal instincts that led to the traumas that were reported in *The Stolen Generation*.

So I think that the point of my little story is to say that I don't think that we can define critical positions in any way irrespective of context, which was, I think, one of the first point that Campbell was making, and I think that sometimes, contextually, it is extraordinarily difficult to do so. Sometimes with the best of intentions in the world we wreak the worst kind of agency, and thinking that our agency emanates from critical intentions is no guarantee against the havoc that we can wreak.

Hugh Willmott:

I'd like to endorse a lot of what Stewart said. I have to confess I was quite surprised with the line that Stewart was taking here and I didn't expect to agree with so much. Of

what I could say about that is that I think that critical thinking has a role to play in precisely what Stewart was drawing our attention to. These issues are difficult, the are problematic, and one of the things that critical thinkers can help us with is to draw our attention to that, to make us more aware of that, to enable us to perhaps 'hesitate' and reflect a little before we do things. Maybe hesitating a little before we decide to take these particular children out of those families. Hesitating now to think that maybe it was the best thing that we could have done. I don't think critical thinking allows us to achieve closure. I personally think that it is a mistake to believe that somehow we are going to get to some theory or some form of thinking that will solve those issues for us. I think it is much more about drawing on a whole variety of critical thinking to be open to the possibility of understanding ourselves and the world in a different way, and therefore being able to make decisions that are aware of the undecidability involved in making those decisions. I believe that Foucault, Habermas and others who people in critical management studies have drawn on can be helpful to us in that regard. I believe that is where we can learn from and benefit from and, if you like, 'enrich' our understanding of management and organisation, and indeed inform the practice of managing and organising, in making those kinds of very difficult decisions that Stewart was drawing our attention to.

David Boje:

I'd like to make a slightly different response, if that's OK. I am travelling with a good friend of mine, Steve Best, a post-modern philosopher. He used the word 'poser', and suggested that critical theorists and post-modern theorists maybe are posers. You can intellectualise the activity of critical theory, post-modern theory, deconstruction, or whatever terms you want to lay on it, but words are actions. In my association with members here, and with Steve, I've tried to reflect upon my own action, and whether I'm just a poser or whether I'm somebody who is getting involved. Now a number of ways I'm involved. You may not like these ways, cool, but I try to be a vegetarian. I'm into that. Ecology, critical accounting theory, trying to do something about nature, something about the environment instead of just functional accounting; biotechnology, virtual organisations, predatory capitalism.

No, I don't think we should dismiss of the grand narrative of capitalism. It's there, and definitely affects us, and we need to take it on, head on. But it is very difficult, and I agree we get dogmatic. I know I get dogmatic about Nike corporation when I see the swoosh. I wonder, well how could this person be so gullible, to go along with this system of sweatshop exploitation, of which the victims are 720,000 women, aged 15, 16 to 23 (they are fired when they are 23 so that they can hire someone else who is 14 or 16). These are people that are caught in very exploitative situations, and we can say 'well, it's better than not having a job'; or 'capitalism gave them this opportunity to work'; economic development and so on. Now deep down I just don't buy it. I don't buy that explanation, that Tiger Woods should get 100 Million Dollars for multiple contracts to put logos on his body, when the bodies of these female workers are being abused.

Grace Anne and I went to Mexico. We went to a factory. We interviewed these workers. We couldn't interview all the workers, because just to be interviewed, you'd be fired.

Just talk to Boje and you'd be fired! But we were able to interview a couple of sisters, who told us their account of what it is like in a Nike factory, what it's like to try to negotiate situations like maggots in your food, like earning $2.90 a day for ten hours work. They are forced to work six days a week, sometimes six and a half, sometimes more than ten hours in the same day, not to get their pay sometimes. And then they got so distraught that they actually took over the factory for two days. Here are these women, girls, young girls, and they are going to take over a factory from a bunch of bullying militarist management, and go against that whole system, and where the hell am I? Where am I in that situation? I'm writing about it, I'm teaching, but what is my action in that situation? What is my accountability, once I know that that story is there? They told us that the police were called in, because the ambassador from Korea made a deal with the FROC-CROC Secretary General of the State of Puebla. They actually called in the riot police with their shotguns and batons and shields and wounded them up, these women, forcing them out of the factory. Their parents had brought them blankets, their boyfriends had brought them food, and they were in there with their children, and the riot police forced them through the gauntlet. They were being beaten with batons and shields. Fifteen went to hospital and the women among them said that two of those women lost their babies; they were pregnant.

Now we tried to get that story into the news. Nobody wants to touch it. We tried to get that story to Nike. They deny it. So, yeah, I'm dogmatic about it. I think I've got a cause to be dogmatic about it. I don't believe the advertising bullshit. I don't care if you deconstruct it with Derrida, Habermas, or whoever. That is not important. What is important is not to be an academic who is sitting in an office somewhere turning out articles that don't mean a damn thing.

Audience question:

It's impossible not to be moved by the fairly dramatic stories that we have heard, and I certainly wouldn't disagree with the points made. For me as well, I think it's important not to forget a lot of the mundane stuff, because as well as the extreme examples, there is a lot of boring everyday stuff that controls, and subverts power and the way it is used. I wonder whether there is a role for us as well, in looking at what gets taken for granted, taken as normal, and isn't obviously evil, but is fashionable. Surely the critic has a role to play in problematising these very mundane and apparently normal things, as well as pointing to things that are obviously troubling.

André Spicer:

I think David's presentation was excellent. The scary thing is that we don't even represent these stories in academic journals. They don't appear. Studies of people working don't appear in academic journals. We are more interested in talking about discourse and philosophy, as opposed to these actual stories. So they don't appear in the press, and they don't appear in academic journals, which are more interested in talking about managers than workers.

Catherine Casey:
There are plethora of academic journals in industry and labour, and what you are saying is probably reflective of the disciplinary demarcation of management and organisation. And of course, there is such a multiplicity of such stories. In fact, the first which came to mind after Campbell's comment was that I couldn't help thinking of Horkheimer and Adorno's line about our role as one of 'unceasing interrogation' of all forms of knowledge and work practices. And this may mean a more modest self-interrogation, to endeavour to unceasingly interrogate all forms of knowledge and work practice and to scrutinise ourselves.

David Knights:
I agree with that absolutely. I think that the major problems with critical theory or critical management studies, or whatever we want to call it, is too great of an ambition. I think that if we are more reflexive and if we examine that ambition, we might begin to recognise that, to some extent at least, this is a project for ourselves, it's a project of identity. But if we allow that project of identity to contaminate too much of what we do, there is great danger that we do things for ourselves rather than for our so called 'victims'. I agree that we should be doing what David [Boje] does, we should all be doing a lot about these things, but let's not be too ambitious, and let's realise that a lot of what we are doing is *teaching*. Teaching students, and teaching the next generation of academics, and the next generation of people in the media, and people in business, to be more reflexive about the kinds of things that get done to people through some more exploitative activities. We are not going to destroy capitalism. That would be foolish to think that we could. But we can perhaps make things better for this small group of people, including ourselves I suppose, but as long as we don't get hooked on the project, as it were, of securing ourselves through critical work – being narcissistically preoccupied with our own identity and how we are seen by others and ourselves.

Steffen Böhm:
I'd like to respond to what David [Knights] said about not being too ambitious; I have an uneasiness about that, which relates to Campbell's point about the loss of an emancipatory project and with that some kind of feeling of paralysis. I would like to invite the panel members to talk a little bit about this loss of an emancipatory imagination. What is your view on an emancipatory project? What would that look like?

David Knights:
Again, I think there is a problem with an emancipatory project, because it leaves us, very often, deciding for endless others how should they live their lives, and I think that this is not for us to do. I think that something that critical theorists *can* do is to put up a series of alternatives and say 'there are other ways in which you can live your life'. But it's not for us to impose our particular ways in which we think that people should live their lives onto them. And therefore I think that emancipation can only come from the other, not from an academic who can tell people the truth about their lives, and tell them how they should go about their lives and how they should emancipate themselves.

Mike Reed:

I think that what we are arguing for here is a more discriminating understanding of critique. Emancipation is a big word, and it has all kinds of big connotations attached to it. And as Stewart, David [Knights], Hugh and various other people have said, we need to be very careful about it. We need to be careful about the way we use words like this. It seems to me that even if we do try to develop a more discriminating sense of what critique is, and recognise that it can take different forms, and it can serve different purposes, at some point it seems to me you will get back to some engagement with some of the classical tradition. It's almost unavoidable that at some point you have to engage with something that is in the past. That is the bigger context from which we make a critical statement. So I am all for a more discriminating sense of critique, a sense of critique that is more pluralistic, more focused, more practical, but I don't think, whatever kind of critique you try to develop, that you can, in some way, take it out of the classical context. One other small point: I think you can make a statement about, or at least some kind of estimation of political activism. You might want to try to do that. You might want to say that what we do should be coincident with some kind of political activism. But I think there are potential dangers with that. There are problems with that, of the kind that I think David [Knights] has just articulated. With political activism, maybe we rush to judge, we rush to actively intervene, we rush to recommend. So I think what we need to do is to be more discriminating. But whether we like it or not the classical tradition is part of our heritage and we will draw on it.

Alessia Contu:

Perhaps the point is that we continually rush to make decisions. Continually we are making decisions, and continually we are doing something which involves intervening with the other. So in a sense our political activism is not like a project that is somewhere else and then suddenly we are linked to it. We are already political in whatever we say and in whatever we do. So politics is something which immediately we should, via our selves, confront with. We should put that forward, rather than keep it in the background.

Silvia Gherardi:

I want to start with something personal, starting with something from myself. I want to start with the fact that I'm 51, and a woman. I am telling you my age for a reason. That means that I was a student in 1969, in the Faculty of Sociology. At the time it was the only faculty of sociology in Trento, even in Italy, and one of my memories of that time was that our Dean was standing on the stairs of our faculty, I still have the image of him, and he said that we were going to be a critical university. So I grew up, and a generation of sociologists in Italy grew up with Marx, Gramsci, and all that, and we learned very easily the rhetorics of 'being critical'. We learned the tricks of the trade. Still, I can recognise some of my generation who grew up together with me with the same fashion and the same fads. You learn how to do it, then it doesn't matter to what you apply it. You do it quite easily. And so what I could see was a critical approach being turned into a rhetorical trick, and producing a 'correct' critical position: a new orthodoxy.

This is not the end of the story, however, because since I remained in the Faculty of Sociology as a young teacher back then, there was a second wave of critical thinking. Since Italy and France are quite close we didn't have to wait for the Americans to import Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari back to Europe. We would read in French. So at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties we had a new generation of sociologists in Italy, they were producing dissertations deconstructing everything. And when I was talking with my colleagues, they would say 'Oh no, gosh, another deconstructive dissertation'. So the reason I feel uneasy talking about critique is not that I conceive of something different. The point is that I can't conceive a way of knowing that is not critical. How could that be, a non-critical knowledge? I don't have models, because knowing, in any case, is a claim grounded in power, and is always coming from some sort of position.

I should also say that I'm a feminist. My other experience is in feminism, and over the last years I've been reflecting on why the feminist movements are still so powerful in expressing a critical position. I think that one reason is that feminist thought, instead of assuming a critical position on somebody else's philosophy, expresses a radical thought of its own, it appropriates 'otherness'. And from a position of authorized 'other' it speaks back (and not against) and speaks for its own. To be other, and to think, to act and to produce knowledge from the point of view that your identity is grounded in otherness is a way for being and knowing already decentred, nomadic, questioning subjectivity, questioning the politics of knowledge. Towards any claims of knowledge the feminist question is: 'Who's knowledge is this? Who is making the claim to knowing and why?' My answer to Campbell's questions is simple: to be able to express a radical thought is an/other story!

Bogdan Costea:

I just wanted to echo Mike's points, but to add that I often find myself trapped in not knowing exactly what level I am operating at, engaging in a critical project that has a tradition, in the West at least, which is much longer than the latter part of the twentieth century. So, the return to classical analysis and philosophical analysis that we might call critical, as a project, in order to understand the world and our place in it from a philosophical perspective, this is often confused with the problem of political engagement. Now once I do the critique, should I do something with it? Does critical thought always lead to something? Is it of the now, or does it allow me some sort of historical contextualisation of contemporary processes? In the act of teaching, and in this regard I must say that I agree with David [Knights] about the important role of management education, is the recovery of a historical sense of organisations, management and work a worthwhile enterprise to engage in? Does that contribute to any sort of critical understanding of what is going on? I don't know. Maybe I don't know enough about the whole plethora of authors who claim to be critical, whose voices are very loud. Of course, everyone wants to be the loudest. But I think there is an interesting paradox: at least recently with the exposure of post-structuralist, post-humanist philosophical discourses there is a danger that some noises obscure their own internal contradiction.

Audience question:

This debate is going along rather too nicely, so I want to throw in some questions. What about resistance? What about practice? What about capitalism?

David Knights:

Foucault said regularly that one of the reasons he didn't talk about resistance, or tried to avoid talking about resistance, is precisely because it could be co-opted so easily by the powerful. But I think we should engage with practitioners, I don't think we should avoid that activity. I've done it all my academic career. I probably haven't had much effect, but it's worth trying to do. I think that managers are not as stupid as sometimes critical theory makes them out to be. And they can be critically reflective as long as they are given the opportunity to think. Now that is not very often, but there are occasions when they can do, and I've found a way of doing that. I don't think I would be so ambitious as to say that this is going to transform capitalism.

David Boje:

I really believe that teaching is a way to get through to the project we are talking about. I just wanted to say that MBAs, when they hear the kind of presentation I just made about Nike, they find it rather irrelevant. Until they have had the experience of the situation themselves, they'd think I was interfering with their consumption habits. If you intervene with their food, their clothes, that's the worst thing you can do. But I did break through to them when I tried panopticism for a number of years. Just recently I had a real breakthrough, and it relates to France, where we are now. France is moving to a 35 hour week of work. Now if I ask MBA students in America how many hours a week they are working, just about everyone of them, if you add in their school time, is working 50, 60, 70 hours. And if you go through the workaholic questionnaire with them, they start to self-reflect about the system that causes them, or induces them, or seduces them to put in that much work. Only *then* are they willing to read some of the classics, like Adam Smith or Chapter 10 of Marx's *Capital*. They read that and they think: 'OK, this is how the system does this to me, where I give up my family, I give up my life, and I devote myself to this work'.

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