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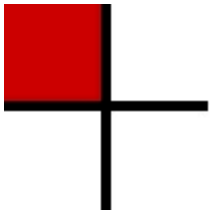
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## Writing Politics

Campbell Jones, Chris Land and Steffen Böhm

If you must unite, Marx wrote to the party leaders, then enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principals, do not make theoretical ‘concessions’. This was Marx’s idea, and yet there are many among us who seek – in his name – to belittle the significance of theory! Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity. (V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*)

What more can we say today about the relations between writing and politics? ‘The pen is mightier than the sword’ goes the old slogan, but is it mightier than the traditional forms of direct action, political protest and insistent recalcitrance? Further, what hopes can we have for protest and resistance without these being inscribed – in the first case inscribed in an already existing conjuncture that must be understood in all its complexity, but also inscribed in the sense that action must be mobilised through language, and its results and effectiveness communicated and criticised?

At a time at which the passing allusion – never mind the writings (or the politics) – to Lenin seems so easily dismissed out of hand, perhaps we should remind ourselves of what we can continue to learn from the traditions of progressive theory. Avoiding vague generalities, we are referring to Lenin’s insistence on the dual demands of concrete politics and abstract theory. For Lenin there is no attempt to grant absolute priority to one or the other, but equally there is no idea that we might reduce one to the other, a practice that so often amongst academics results in an idealism that sees the world changed by caressing a computer keyboard. For a critical theory, the dual demand of writing and politics remains inescapable, as is an insistence on the duality of this demand.

In various ways each of the papers in this issue open questions of writing, politics and their relations. Regular readers of *ephemera* will probably not be surprised to find a wide range of approaches to these issues and we will be the first to admit that the connections between confessional reflections on life without God, the future of the Left and of post-essentialist politics are not immediately obvious.

In the first two articles Carl Rhodes and Anthony O’Shea write in two columns, presenting a major, principally academic discourse in one column, and a second column running alongside and offering a reflection upon the discourse of the first. This doubling

commentary exposes the personal and, in contrast to the traditionally neutral and objective language of much academic writing, makes clear the implication of the writing subject in the text, and in O'Shea's hands it exposes the pretences of neutrality by offering an explicit and touching personal confession. Indeed, both of these papers are suspicious of the notion that the first, academic discourse is more 'objective'. They show how this discourse is the product of a set of received conventions that we in the social sciences have been trained to perceive and accept as objective. This opens up the question of whether a personal reflection is any more or less authentic than the discourse upon which it reflects. As (one of) Carl Rhodes concludes, "there is a reflexivity, which, while questioning textual authority, also reinforces it by trying to answer too many questions". Similarly, O'Shea suggests that his *confiteri* – a confession or declaration – is not an exposition of a 'subjective position' but rather an opening to difference. Both authors draw attention to the margins that are simultaneously excluded from and enframe dominant academic representations of organization. By using parallel streams, they also manage to bring the margins literally into the middle of their writing. In this small white margin that separates and joins the two discourses the politics of writing is made explicit, and the possibility of another politics of writing starts to take form.

There is more than one way of executing reflection, and more than one possibility for a politicised writing. Although Glen Whelan does not follow the same two-fold writing strategy as Rhodes and O'Shea, his article reflects on the specific locations of the production and reception of academic writing. Considering the reception of Pierre Bourdieu's critical analysis of television and the journalistic apparatus, Whelan draws attention to the disparity between the activity of Bourdieu's writing in relation to these two audiences, and in doing so clearly indicates the ways in which even the most intentionally political writing cannot entirely escape from disciplinary protocols. In the same way that Bourdieu claims that he founded the notion of field both with and against Weber, in his paper Whelan articulates a reading of Bourdieu that works both with and against Bourdieu. Hence he argues that Bourdieu's critique of television might be more effectively executed by taking Bourdieu's very concepts more seriously. Rather than propounding a vanguardism of theory, Whelan insists upon a recognition both of the complexities of the practice of theory and the need for theoretical reflection on practical politics.

In the context of a generalised suspicion toward journalistic writing, which is clearly evidenced in Bourdieu, we are happy in this issue to present an interview with George Monbiot. Both a journalist and activist, Monbiot discusses attempts by New Labour in the UK to surreptitiously privatise the public sector through schemes like the Private Finance Initiative. Opening the provision of public services to private finance, this scheme accepts without question the idea that the 'free market' is the universal basis for efficient economic organization. Monbiot's careful research into the realities of these schemes tells a rather different story – one of gross inefficiency and the squandering of public monies in what amounts to extortion or fraud. In the face of the increasing compromising of government by industry – for example Lord Sainsbury as UK science minister in charge of making decisions on the future of genetically modified crops and agriculture when his family partly owns one of the largest supermarket chains of the country – Monbiot considers the question of what might be done to resist this seemingly

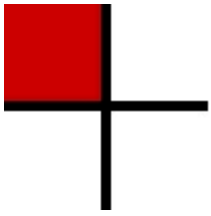
endless incursion of the market into every aspect of our lives. Drawing lessons from recent protests against the globalization of capital and the possibilities of resistance through the media, Monbiot considers the importance of the mundane and day-to-day work of organization that needs to be at the centre of any attempt to resist these changes. Putting forward strategies for resistance to global capital, Monbiot raises important questions that we are here advancing as questions of organization – the organization and mobilisation of resistance and of alternatives to the increasingly undemocratic organization of liberal capitalist societies.

In his short intervention Tony Tinker offers a reflection on the broader significance of the Enron/Andersen debacle. As he clearly indicates, media coverage of this affair – where it is not conveniently diverted towards propagandising on the ‘war on terror’ – has fallen into an uncritical parody of personalised recrimination. With striking analogies to the current stage of global violence, the structural dynamics of accounting and auditing practices have been reduced to the work of a few bad eggs. If only we can seek and destroy those evil people, then global goodness will once again be reinstated, or so it would seem. But as Tinker insists, there is something less to do with psychological inadequacies and more to do with ritual practices that enable the possibility of the Enron/Andersen affair. It is then the responsibility of, amongst others, those who educate accountants, auditors and other occupants of contemporary organizations to recognise their silent complicity with this affair.

Each of the two reviews in this issue take up books that have had a significant impact in social and critical theory broadly, and bring these in relation to contemporary thinking about management and organization. Alessia Contu reviews the second edition of Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which originally appeared in 1985 and was reprinted last year. She introduces the work of Laclau and Mouffe, a body of work that has been important in critical, Marxist and political theory for some years, to Organization Studies, a field that has been strangely uninterested in engaging with the possibilities of a post-essentialist and post-Marxist conception of the social and of theory. Introducing a work to Organization Studies nearly twenty years after its publication – what might we say about the margins of Organization Studies, and the omissions and silences that it more or less officially sanctions?

In the second review, Iain Munro discusses Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*, once again introducing and reflecting upon the importance of their arguments for Organization and Management Studies. Munro places the role of the academic at the heart of his analysis. Hardt and Negri point to the increasing centrality of immaterial labour in the (re)production of social organization and surplus value. Developing Foucault’s concept of biopower, they point to the ways in which the production of knowledge, emotion and social networks are increasingly dominating the forms of production, revolutionising in their wake the previously dominant forms of production: agriculture and manufacturing. As well as suggesting the need to reconceptualise the revolutionary subject as a multitude, based on difference rather than identity, Munro alerts us to the central role played by academic labour in this new regime of production. Rather than being able to take an external position to production, from which to reflect objectively and comment upon its logic, those reflections and commentaries are themselves part of the production of biopower, social organization and surplus value.

As Munro, and indeed all of the papers in this issue recognise, it is no longer enough for academics to take organization as an ‘object’ of analysis. To write on organization is, directly or indirectly, to effect social organization. If this point is taken to heart, it is surely crucial that academics, as part of the maintenance crew of the knowledge economy, reflect on what it is they are producing, and on the nature of the labour processes that they are engaged in. When we take into our hands the production of knowledge, both inscribed (as in this journal) and embodied (in students), we cannot avoid a responsibility for reflecting on our writing and our politics. As Lenin, Bourdieu and Whelan insist – if we can construct such a motley grouping – a recognition of the limits of current practices is a condition *sine qua non* of effective change. Recognising the limits of the current political economy of academic writing might remind us of basic questions of how and where, maybe most importantly, of *why* we write.



## Text, Plurality and Organisational Knowledge / I Like to Write About Organisations

Carl Rhodes

### abstract

The paper discusses how genres of writing are practices that writers engage in to stage authority by presenting knowledge in conventional forms. What is argued is that writing cannot neutrally represent 'reality' but rather that, through genre, writing itself constructs the reality that it purports to represent. Focussing on narrative and storytelling approaches to Organisation Theory, the paper proposes a narrative approach to writing about organisation that accounts for power and authorship. This is done through a theorisation of the 'heteroglossic' organisation – one that suggests that organisations can be conceived as a range of different generic textual practices that simultaneously represent different points of view and different ways of expressing those points. The paper concludes by suggesting that by taking a heteroglossic perspective, an understanding of writing about organisations can accept that rather than portraying their essential characteristics, research texts exist amongst the many competing claims to organisational knowledge. The paper is written in two parallel streams. The first seeks to explicate a theory of writing described above. The second seeks to problematise this explication on its own terms and to demonstrate some of the ironies that emerge from writing about writing.

I like to write.

I like to write about organisations.

I like to write about writing.

Who am I?

People who write about organisations tell stories; they recount events, they reconstruct experience, they reformulate opinions and they try to tell readers about what is going on. It is in the telling of these stories that meaning is made and it is these stories which are the embodiment of both organisational knowledge and knowledge about organisations. In creating these stories, writers have available to them a range of writing strategies and these different ways

*The I that writes the text...is never more than a paper-I. (Barthes, 1977: 161)*

*Hello, I am another 'I', an I deeply sceptical of that one writing over on the left there. I'm going to try to keep up with that I, to question it and to keep it in check. That I often does not*

of writing are important to the way that knowledge is staged. As writers create textual images of organisations and the people within them, they impose meaning on experience. Writing is not a neutral conduit for meaning, it actively constructs that which it ostensibly seeks to represent – it is central to the nature of knowledge. This paper intends to highlight and problematise this centrality of writing to the practice of organisational research and subsequently to theorise a model of organisation which can account for the importance of writing.

The paper is developed in three parts. The first part discusses the relationship between language and knowledge. It starts by reviewing how genres of writing are practices, which writers engage in to stage authority by presenting knowledge in conventional forms. What is argued is that writing cannot neutrally represent ‘reality’ but rather that writing itself constructs the reality that it proposes to represent. The second part of the paper examines how narrative and storytelling approaches to Organisation Theory have addressed these issues of power in the writing of organisations. In order to further develop a narrative approach to writing about organisation that accounts for power, the third part of the paper develops a theorisation of the ‘heteroglossic’ organisation. This is based on the concept of heteroglossia as introduced and developed by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). This concept refers to an understanding of the social world as being comprised of a multiplicity of ‘languages’, which struggle with each other to make meaning out of the world. Based on this, society and organisations can be conceived as a range of different textual practices that simultaneously represent different points of view and different ways of expressing those points. The paper concludes by suggesting that by taking a heteroglossic perspective, an understanding of writing about organisations can accept that rather than portraying their essential characteristics, research texts exist amongst the many competing claims to organisational knowledge. Writing about organisations is then ironically relativised against its alternatives and writers can develop an ironic humility about the nature of their products.

*know that this one exists even though I am here so close – separated by a margin and a line it’s easy for me to be hidden away. This margin is important to me, in a way it helps make me – you’ll notice that one of my distinguishing characteristics is that I take up less space than he does – I am in the margin both figuratively and literally. You see I write in a different way to him – one that I don’t think is necessarily expected in this genre of the academic paper. I am marginal. I’m not complaining about this marginality though – if I wasn’t marginal I wouldn’t be me. I am both written in the margin and have been written into the margin. It is my fate to be marginal – I don’t think I could write like this if I wasn’t. But anyway – here I am and I’m going to run alongside. Despite my marginality I’ve got one big advantage, I can read that I’s stuff, but he can’t read mine!*

*It is worth noting here that I am more open about my Iness than he is. In fact, he doesn’t even refer to himself as an I. I have seen this avoidance of an explicit I in a lot of academic writing, and I find it interesting how it tries to position the text (internally) as being independent of a writing subject. To my way of thinking, though, the I is still there. What I mean here is that the absence of his I, does not extinguish the author, but rather creates the author in a particular way. Derrida calls this the “effect of signature” (Derrida, 1982: 328) where the*

### Language, Genre And Knowledge

This paper starts from the premise that writing is central to how we understand, theorise and research organisations. It has been claimed that despite this centrality of writing to the practice of research, organisational theorists have “largely ignored questions of how we enter the lifeworlds of our subjects, how we speak about them, how much space we permit their voices in our research, and what consequences our acts of representation might hold for them” (Prasad, 1998: 32). The implication here is that in seeking to understand organisations, researchers have frequently emphasised the display of their own models, theories and experiences to the extent that people who populate those organisations are relegated as voiceless informants whose own representations are eschewed in favour of the researcher’s all encompassing interpretations. Additionally, writers can ignore the way that they write in favour of concentrating on what it is that is written about to the extent that writing strategies are naively understood as conduits of a pre-given and extra-textual meaning. Although in organisation studies, these issues of textuality are becoming increasingly addressed (see for example Linstead, 1999; Czarniawska, 1999; Rhodes, 2001), the conventional avoidance of attention to issues of writing makes it important to question the way that researchers stage authority so as to be able to understand how writing practices create images of organisations in ways that are not explicit in the research text.

In working to understand research and knowledge in organisations, we can start from the view that writing itself is a method of inquiry, but that in such inquiry, no particular genre can claim a privileged form of knowledge (Richardson, 1994). Genres can be described, in this context, as ways of writing which are recognisable to readers as being of a certain kind. A genre is a type of writing that, having been reproduced many times by different writers, has become commonplace and accepted as a way of writing about some phenomena. Genre, then, as a conventionalised form of text, is given rise to by the functions, goals, conventions and rituals which express particular social meanings (Kress, 1985) such that a genre itself has a meaning which operates

*writing itself does not need to refer to the author through the use of an explicit I in order to retain an implied reference to the author. Instead, this reference is achieved by appending a ‘signature’ to the text as a whole – in this case by the presence of my proper name at the title of this paper. This is where I come in, because writing from two Is as is being done in this paper (separated only by the thinly constructed line on your left) is meant to problematise this effect and render it more transparent.*

*Let me tell you about myself. I’m the black sheep of this family. I just don’t want to take all this stuff about organisations so seriously you see. When I see something written down (including re-reading my own writing) I find it hard to believe, hard to take it for granted. I know that that I over there takes himself very seriously – and so do I, in a way, but in a very different way. My seriousness comes from a different place – I like, in my more positive moments, to think of myself as the critical I or the self-reflexive I. Nevertheless, I am concerned about this self-reflexivity. I can’t escape it now that it is here, but it makes life so difficult. It makes writing so difficult. But, you see, I do like writing about organisations, and I like reading about them too, but to be so self-aware can be tiring and troublesome – it draws such a fine line between humility and narcissism. I am tired, but I will go on.*



together with the overt meanings that a text represents.

Because genres are accepted ways of writing which have gained acceptance through repeated and ritualised use, they can also be seen as particular ways that authority is achieved. This suggests that “readers interpret texts as being factual in so far as they encounter appropriate textual conventions which can be read in appropriate ways” (Atkinson, 1990: 36). Textual formats, however, become taken for granted and constrain writing practices to operate within institutionally conventional forms. Texts become ‘proper’ because their genre makes them appear ‘real’ and ‘natural’. These conventional forms, or genres, are then models for writing that gain legitimacy and are plausible with particular readers. Scientific texts, such as those conventional to organisation studies, are themselves based more on credibility than truth. It is through these strategies, as conventionalised in genre, that texts become regarded both as scientific and as being an embodiment of knowledge. Genres can be understood as shared models of representation and interpretation that validate and frame experience (Brown, 1987). This ‘sharedness’ implies that genres do not originate with authors; they draw upon and reproduce the cultural context in which they exist. Generic representations only appear realistic when the genre used has become commonplace; at the extreme, a text “is not convincing because it is realistic; instead it is realistic because we have already been convinced” (Brown, 1987: 148).

Recognising the complicity of genre in constructing plausible knowledge enables a questioning of conventional genres by suggesting new ways of reading the world, which, rather than reconstructing experience in conventional codes, aim to deconstruct convention through new forms of encoding. Such forms of expression de-realise the conventional by questioning the uses of conventions (Brown, 1987). In turn, this attempts to disrupt power by playing with genres of truth. Whereas, textual practices are what constitute our social realities (Atkinson, 1990), creating experimental representations of ‘the world’ can disrupt and question the authority and dominance of those practices.

*By now, that other I has started to write about his intentions and his plans for this paper. All that theorising and academicising about organisations and writing about them, it's a tough job, but my existence will hopefully make it easier for him and I can do a bit of theorising myself. I can worry about some of the stuff that is so hard to fit in to his academic writing. If you learn your writing from being a student, from being an academic and from publishing in academic books and journals, you develop habits that are hard to break – hard to recognise even. He's guilty of that; and so am I at times. But I feel a bit less restrained, more carefree, more at liberty to ramble and to mix genres.*

*I do have a troubled relationship with that other I. He is writing authoritatively, he is building an argument, he is positioning himself to be read as a expert. This is part of his training, it is part of the genre that he has been taught and has been reinforced by teachers gone, by academic colleagues, by journal reviewers and by publishing guidelines. He feels constrained by this but is still somehow trapped in it. His entrapment traps me also but I'm less sure of myself.*

*In writing about writing, and in creating this I, I feel compelled to position myself within this particular paper and within the genre of the academic paper in general – this is what reflexive I's like me do, so ... that's what*

Genre is also related to how we perceive the unity of particular texts. Genre is thus a typical form of a written work which is seen as finished and resolved such that genre represents a particular way of constructing a text that comes to be known as the 'whole' (Bakhtin and Medvedev, 1978). The use of genre is a way to control aspects of reality through particular ways of seeing; it is a method for taking charge of and finalising reality. Genre, however, is not avoidable as a way in which realities are constructed and an awareness of them does not allow a writer to operate outside of them. Using genres in research and the formulation of knowledge is a way of validating particular ways of understanding; ways that relate both to the 'what' of the research, and to the 'how' of writing. This is a relation where changing the 'how' unavoidably changes the 'what'.

As authors use genres to depict organisations, language does not act as a mirror for reality, but rather the linguistic and discursive conventions employed by authors are inseparable from the meaning of the text. In turn, the use of genre is related to the way that writers control the meaning of their research through the way they create textual representations of organisations and the people in them – "in texts the discursive differences are negotiated, governed by differences in power, which are themselves in part encoded in and determined by discourse and by genre" (Kress, 1985: 32). These practices are, however, kept hidden in the texts that they produce when texts create an appearance of transparency, where a "found world is assumed communicable in a 'clear' style in which there is no apparent intrusion by language or an embedded researcher" (Lather, 1991: 124). This approach, which naively proposes language to be a transparent medium for expressing reality, hides the role that authorship plays in the power relations of research and knowledge as "each genre constructs positions or roles which the participants in the genres occupy" (Kress, 1985: 37). Language is then the medium that creates rather than reflects the world – reality is never anything but a pre-text for language and authorship and, as such, using language to claim to explain the world is a case of the world's ambiguity being concealed (Barthes, 1977). It is in this concealment that a researcher, as author, can stake a

*I'm going to try to do. Part of my desire to do it this way stems from the fact that, as you will see, or perhaps have already seen, his writing on the left has, as one of its major themes, the role that writing genres have in the production and writing of research. As such, I feel that it is important to make a statement on academic writing as a genre, and where I believe that both this I and that I stand in relation to it. After all, neither of us can write about genre (or anything else) without doing so in some genre or other. The reflexive moment when this is realised can be disturbing as any writing about writing falls under its own critique. This reflexivity is a condition of my writing; it is a given from which I cannot escape and which I (more so than him) have chosen to be explicit about.*

*My choosing to write an academic paper can be seen as an example of what Fuller and Lee (1997) call 'textual collusion'. It is about writing within certain limits because to write that way is set out in the discursive regimes of the academy. Fuller and Lee are talking about student writing, but I think that the same holds for writing papers like this too. The conventions of academic writing hold sway in what appears in journals (some more rigidly than others). This paper, by its nature and its location, is inevitably an academically sanctioned piece of work. For it to have been considered worthy to be published in the journal*

claim to knowledge. Knowledge represented in conventionally accepted genres is less an achievement of a representation of 'reality', and more the exclusion of other possible meanings. Here "the choice of a dominant rhetoric, figure or narrative mode in a text is always an imperfect attempt to impose a reading or range of readings on an interpretative process that is open-ended, a series of displaced meanings with no full stop" (Clifford, 1986: 110) such that each mode of representation enacts a struggle which is both questionable and powerful even if a 'full stop' is insinuated.

Based on the discussion above it can be seen that "the world we know is the world as represented" (Jeffcut, 1994b: 228); further, there is no culture or organisation which can be innocently and accurately represented by observers, but rather the observer creates cultural and organisational fictions through the process of their research. On reflection then, so-called realistic representations become labelled as 'true' not because of correspondence with objects but because they conform to orthodox practices of reading and writing (Brown, 1994). In terms of understanding organised work, the project must then "be focussed on the exploration of paradoxes of textuality in the inscription of order" (Jeffcut, 1994a: 261). Organisation Theory in particular may be conceived of as nothing other than a practice of representation, but the nature of this practice is contrived; it produces an effect of representation and like the painting of an object, the representation is not the object itself (Clegg and Hardy, 1996).

### **Narrative And Organisational Research**

There is a growing body of organisational research which takes a 'storytelling' approach; an approach that has highlighted the importance of narrative ways of knowing both in terms of stories told in organisations and stories told by researchers (De Cock, 1998). These studies "build on a foundation of multidisciplinary research that has shaped the understanding we have of story and storytelling" (Boyce, 1996: 5). Although it has been argued that much of the research in storytelling does not address the orientation of the researcher and that the dynamics of power and meaning are largely

*you are reading, it must have met the conditions, or an interpretation of the conditions, that have been set out in the history of the textual practices associated with academic writing.*

*This issue of collusion is closely related to the notion of 'addressivity' – to whom is the text written. As Fuller and Lee put it, "the notion of addressivity, that knowledge is always directed to someone at some time, is crucial to any analysis of literacy practices within a pedagogical site" (1997: 413). In the pedagogic site where you and I (as the writer and reader of this text) reside, it remains the case that I can't help feeling that I am writing for you, and you are reading from the academy. Within these confines of academic writing in which I operate, I am already constituted in the subject position of the writer, the researcher and the theorist, just as you are positioned as a reader in a particular field and as a potential critic. I can play with these rules, but as long as I choose to call this an academic paper and to publish it in an academic journal, I don't know how to fully break the rules. Surely if I did break the rules it would ultimately mean that this is no longer an academic paper, it would be something else. In some way, I must produce a text that is seen by you as worthy of publication, worthy as a relevant contribution to some knowledge. Textual collusion, in*

unaddressed in the way that stories are positioned (ibid.), there is a growing body of research which does directly address such issues.

In pursuing this line of research, some writers have developed a narrative approach that goes beyond looking at stories as communication and examine stories as textual metaphors through which to understand organisations. This stems from the view that societies, cultures and expressions of experience can be read as texts and that life itself is a narratively produced text (Denzin, 1989). Organisations can thus be understood as socially constructed verbal systems in terms of stories, discourses and texts where each person who is part of the organisation has a voice in the text but where some voices are louder, more articulate and more powerful than others (Hazen, 1993). Any practice of communication in organisations is thus viewed as a text that is read, written and interpreted. Such a textual approach sees the organisation as being constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by its members and others who come in contact with it. This network of 'text' imposes meaning on experience, creates communication between individuals and legitimates patterns of social relationships (Phillips and Brown, 1993). Storytelling in particular is a way that people individually and collectively make sense of their experience and "stories are the blood vessels through which changes pulsate in the heart of organisational life" (Boje, 1991: 8). Building on this one can conceive of the 'storytelling organisation' – and organisation seen as a framework of simultaneously occurring stories (Boje, 1994; 1995). The storytelling organisation is created through the telling and living of collective stories, but where

[t]he storytelling organisation can oppress by subordinating everyone and collapsing everything to one "grand narrative" or "grand story." At the other extreme, the storytelling organisation can be a pluralistic construction of a multiplicity of stories, storytellers and story performance events that are like Tamara but are realised differently depending upon the stories in which one is participating. (Boje, 1995: 1000)

By drawing on narrative theory organisation studies has the potential to create conversations that open up multiple narratives that include the non-conformist

*this sense, is the "enactment of pedagogies, the (re)production of curricular knowledges and the formation of subjects" (Fuller and Lee, 1997: 410). For me to write this paper, and for it to be published and read, I must collude (at least to some degree) with the requirements of academic writing and journal publishing. This paper then, like any other, is a socio-discursive practice, and my collusion is about "moving around inside relations of power" (Fuller and Lee, 1997: 410); relations in which you and I are deeply implicated. The issue I face is about how much I can move around without trespassing into territories outside of those where academic papers must reside so as to ensure that I don't find myself excluded from the academy.*

*Lee (1998) points out that there is a complex relationship between producing knowledge through writing and the production of the subjectivity of a type of knower/writer. I agree with Lee that writing is central to the work of knowledge production and that academic writers (like myself) must learn to (re)produce the writing conventions of a discourse community (represented here by you, my 'preferred reader'). But, what I also want to acknowledge is that while I am indeed colluding with these (re)productive strategies, at the same time I am troubled by them. Writing to you and acknowledging you as the reader here, in this way, is in*

and resist the conventional (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). In this way, as narratives produce identities, the opening up of narrative possibilities to understanding organisations resists the forcing of pre-determined and confining identities on to people. This 'opening up' however is not apolitical and different narrative modes of organising experience are used by people to create different understandings of experience (Law, 1994). As such, organisational experience is understood through the way that it is told – a representation of an organisation becomes one of many competing versions of what the organisation is. Additionally, in this process, choosing a narrative order simultaneously hides other ways of ordering and the conception of the organisation is left as a collection of contrasting and potentially unreconciled stories.

As well as considering organisations as being narrative, organisational theory can also be seen as a practice of storytelling. Indeed sociology, ethnography and organisation studies have long been founded on the ability to tell a good story – a foundation which requires a suspicion of those theories which “seek to subsume everyday accounts to their overwhelming narrative” (Clegg, 1993: 42). This suspicion is wary of modernist grand narratives which try to order all experience yet is respectful of stories embedded in the sites of the social world such that theory can engage in a dialogue with the practices of everyday life. Against this backdrop, reflexive research must place the narrator within the framework of the story and that a greater diversity of organisational theory can be achieved through experimentation with varied writing forms (Hatch, 1996). Such variety can be achieved by applying literary and narrative approaches to research where organisational researchers open up their texts to multiple readings so as to question the authority of authors and to allow both research participants and readers to be involved in the production of research (Putnam, 1996). This opposes the view of the author as an agent in favour of a postmodern decentering of authorship by focussing on the dynamic multiplicity of discourse, text and interpretation.

In looking to storytelling to inform research stories and experiments can coexist in social inquiry as they

*part an example of this questioning. If the writing of an academic paper lays some kind of claim to 'new' knowledge then I suggest that the productive and reproductive elements of the text must always be held in tenuous balance. Don't get me wrong here, though, I am not suggesting separateness of production and reproduction as if this distinction were in any way natural or given; I see the two as co-existing in any form of writing. The issue relates more to the way that productive or reproductive effects are staged in a text. Surely, writing down words is always something new; yet, at the same time, any words I use have always been used before. 'Production' may be most evident in those texts that try to appear unconventional, and 'reproduction' may be most evident in those that adhere more openly to convention. The balance of (re)production is not absolute but rests in the staging of the text; newness can be a matter of 'look'. Thus, in thinking about that I's writing, I am highlighting my concern about the balance that he is able to strike in negotiating textually manifested knowledge claims in the shadow of the conventional rules imposed by the academy. His writing seems so conventional. Nevertheless, he and I both proceed in our attempts to write ourselves into the subject positions of author, writer, knower and theorist simultaneously – it's just that he's over there and I'm in the margin.*

both work to create intersubjectivity in the joint enterprise between the inquirer, the actor and the audience – in this sense, social inquiry is not only informed by the practice of physical scientists, mathematicians and logicians, but “can learn from the art and craft of the novelist, dramatist, journalist, film-maker, soap opera creator” (Butler, 1997: 945) and so forth. Such experimentation suggests that techniques such as fiction, docudrama, journalism and first-person confessionals can be used to write about the shape and texture of organisations and to help others understand them. In such narratives facts are the empirical grounding for plausible narratives; narratives which can generate productive scholarly discourse (Pacanowsky, 1995).

In general then, stories of different genres can be viewed in terms of research being a process of text production (Barthes, 1977) and being represented as narrative knowledge (Lyotard, 1984) where knowledge is a “melting pot in which different linguistic games are combined” (Kallinikos, 1997). In this sense, the textual representation of organisations implies, or at least allows, diverse narrative possibilities. The ‘truths’ offered by scientific research are subject to the limitations and intricacies of narrative representation and do not stand alone as true representations. Thus, the factual is replaced by the representational and the forms of language that we call knowledge are humbled through critical reflection of their own intellectual assumptions.

### **The Heteroglossic Organisation**

In conceiving of an organisation as a multitude of stories and storytelling practices it is important to understand writing about organisations not just in terms of the different stories that can be told, but also in terms of the different ways that those stories can be told, and the different effects made possible these different ways of ‘telling’. Such issues have been directly addressed in literary theory in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981; Bakhtin and Medvedev, 1978) and especially through his concept of heteroglossia. This term is translated from the Russian *raznorecie* meaning ‘variegated speech’. This notion of heteroglossia opposes the view that a

*The rules that he and I allow to govern our writing are the rules of genre. These rules propose, albeit ironically, that “as soon as a genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity” (Derrida, 1980: 56). My text here has announced itself in the genre of academic writing so I must not cross that line – further, it is both through my writing and through your reading that this lack of crossing is to be judged and that the line is (re)drawn. In producing and reading a text as an example of academic writing, I can’t help submitting that it must be judged in relation to genre. But how can such a judgement be made? I like it when Derrida writes, “a text cannot belong to no genre; it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging” (1980: 65).*

*Here I am trying to play with the genre in the margin. This play has created me – I am the I who can question my Iness. Of relevance here is the way that we two Is are achieved through authorship and through the position in which the writing places the author and narrator of the ‘story’. The I who writes or narrates (that includes him and me) in this sense is not the same thing as a ‘living person’*

single unified language operates in any society and focuses instead on how language is multiplanar and breaks down into different discourses. Indeed heteroglossia is the 'master trope' of Bakhtin's work and reflects an enormous sensitivity to the plurality of experiences and language use in society (Holquist, 1981). The use of the concept of heteroglossia in the context of this paper refers to the differences between the various discursive strata within any language, such that any individual utterance is conceived of as a struggle between convergent and divergent meanings (Clark and Holquist, 1984). Through heteroglossia, a range of competing speech practices operate at any particular point in time, these speech practices representing different points of view of the world and different ways of understanding experience (Stam, 1988). Bakhtin sees the creative interaction of contradictory and differing voices as being opposed to a passive and receptive understanding (Morris, 1984). In language, which is the arena of this interaction, there applies centripetal forces that aim at centralisation and the production of shared meaning used by dominant social groups to impose their own monological and unitary perceptions of truth. Such power works to establish stabilisation on its own terms and thus the exclusion of other possible readings (Gergen, 1995).

Working against this is a centrifugal force which is what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia. This asserts that by suggesting that something is thus, centripetal power can only exist against the possibility of alternatives (Gergen, 1995). It is the existence of these alternatives that marks heteroglossia – a breaking up of a unified image of the world into a multiplicity of linguistically created worlds (McHale, 1987). Through this concept of heteroglossia all monological truth claims are relativised against other views of the world in a way that counters the hegemony of single languages and absolute forms of thought. In this way, authoritative and persuasive social voices become ironically or parodically relativised against other voices within heteroglossia. The centrifugal force of heteroglossia opposes the centralising imposition of the monological world through multi-vocal discourse. Heteroglossia is also "accompanied by polysemy, the proliferation of socially uncontrolled meanings for these voices"

– *I am a 'paper being'. My ideas here have been borrowed to some degree from Roland Barthes when he writes that "the (material) author of the narrative is in no way to be confused with the narrator of that narrative" (Barthes, 1977: 111). The implication that I see is that the I who narrates a story is a function of that story rather than being an independent self who is expressing his/her own views, experience etc. Barthes also suggests that it is language rather than an author that speaks; the author too is "never more than an instance of writing, just like I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject' not a 'person'" (1977: 145). What I am trying to get at here is that in writing (both here and there), different authorial subjectivities can be created through different ways of writing; the author is created by the genre. My I is created through its text. I am not he who writes, I am the I who is written.*

*In considering an author as a function of the text, it seems to follow that the power embedded in writing is not a power exerted by the 'author as person' but a power enacted by the employment of genre and the authors that genre creates. I see a danger in assuming equivalence between the 'person' who writes and the author because it imputes agency into that person – it's just too humanistic. It's this humanism that is achieved, in part, through the assumed*

(Gagnon, 1992: 231). Heteroglossia highlights how the plurality of language is conceived of as a both/and instead of an either/or operation through the centrifugal forces that try to keep things separate, and the centripetal forces that strive to keep them unified (Clark and Holquist, 1984). Bakhtin's insight is how a language is composed of innumerable languages that are based on different experiences and have their own way of understanding and evaluating the world (Morson and Emerson, 1994). Individuals participate in a number of these languages each of which claims a privileged view of the world. The languages of heteroglossia, however, compete with one another as the many 'languages of truth' participate in an unending dialogue with each other and with the experiences they attempt to represent.

Drawing from Bakhtin, it can be conceived that writing about organisations is also characterised by heteroglossia – a multiplicity of languages in unending dialogues of power. These dialogues are manifested in words of real people, whether they call themselves researchers, academics, managers, workers, or whatever there are different ways of telling the organisation's story each of which can be thought of as being borne from a different language. The language of boardroom, the coffee room, the annual report, the pub, the performance review meeting, the academic journal, or the industrial relations bargaining table all write the organisation differently. Further across different points in time and space each language will itself change and be used to different ends. This heteroglossia leads us to the concept of the heteroglossic organisation; a theorisation of organisation that posits that knowledge is diverse and multilingual and that representation can always be achieved through different genres and alternative portrayals. In terms of research this suggests that conventional genres of writing organisation act to suppress the heteroglossia by limiting alternative portrayals – they apply a centripetal force. The power that is exercised in such writing is that which seeks to homogenise all experience into a single account or mode of interpretation. Such an exercise lays claim to centralising all knowledge around a particular way of understanding and writing. The concept of the heteroglossic organisation rejects this centralisation

*equivalence between the 'living person' and the 'paper author'.*

*As a point of interest (at least to me) you may have noticed that early in his text he referenced a book by Bakhtin and Medvedev called The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. I find this book interesting not just because of what's written in it but because it is what people call one of Bakhtin's 'disputed texts'. What's disputed in particular is whether or not Bakhtin actually was involved in writing it. In fact, there are a number of such disputed texts. Some people think that during the 1920s Bakhtin published a number of books using the names of two of his friends – Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov. Now these aren't made up names, these two people apparently did exist, they did publish books and they were friends of Bakhtin. So, the original Russian version of The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship was published in Leningrad in 1928 under Medvedev's name only. In 1982, a publisher in New York released it again in Russian, but this time the author was cited as being Bakhtin. The English translation he refers to was published in 1978 suggests that the book was co-authored by Bakhtin and Medvedev. What can we make of this? The dispute itself is unresolved with some Bakhtinian 'experts' disagreeing on the matter. So, Michael Holquist (1990) thinks that Bakhtin was primarily responsible for the book, and*



and replaces it with diversity and heterogeneity. It suggests that organisations do not just comprise of different stories but also of different languages and ways of writing; the intersection of the stories and the tellings. The heteroglossic organisation is, then, both multi-vocal and multi-generic.

The concept of the heteroglossic organisation accepts that to write about organisations simultaneously informs and performs, and that information cannot be achieved without the performance. In order to have information about an organisation that information must be represented in a symbolic form; this act of representation is a performance of a text. Without performance there is no information. What this implies is that the stories about organisation do not exist outside of the storytelling and just as an organisation is comprised of multiple stories, so is it comprised of multiple ways of telling them. The heteroglossic organisation then exists as an indefinite matrix of stories and storytelling practices. Further, by foregrounding the role of language in constructing organisation, seeing organisations as heteroglossic attests to the instability of organisational stories and the way that they are told. Stories, then, are not just enactments of different opinions or perspectives, but rather they are part of an unknowable web of meaning that is always in flux and can never be captured and finalised in a text.

Accepting heteroglossia as a feature of organisations draws into question the efficacy of attempts to write about organisations in single genres or through single forms of representation. Such approaches can be dangerous when they suggest that one language can speak for all others through a centrifugal monologisation. What Bakhtin reminds us of is that such authoritative discourse

permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylising variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it (1981: 343)

Such language “does not presume alien utterances beyond its own boundaries” (Bakhtin, 1981: 285) and can easily become dogmatic and conservative.

*Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990) think that Bakhtin had little to do with the writing of the book. Now I don't want to regurgitate the arguments behind each side of this dispute (you can look up my references if you're really interested!) but, what I do find interesting is thinking about what this dispute implies for authorship. Did he write it or didn't he write it? The dispute itself seems to reflect a more general obsession with being able to make a direct link between an author created through a text and an embodied person. My view is that the writer (by this I mean the embodied person who wrote the book) does not need to be thought of as the author (the authorial subjectivity constructed by the text). Now of course the two aren't independent, but that doesn't mean that they are the same either. There might be truth seekers around the world interested in knowing once and for all if Bakhtin's hand actually held the pen that inscribed the marks that became The Formal Method.... But my concerns are different – I'm not so much interested in who writes a text but am more interested who is written by it.*

*In relation to this, personally, I'm still unsure of who I am as a writer or author, but it seems workable to suggest that the way that authorial subjectivities (such as this I who is writing to you) are created through texts has implications for how an*

At an extreme such authoritative discourse seeks the utopian goal of absolute monologue that suppresses all difference and otherness – a pathology of language that purports to be so compelling that no other discourse is necessary (Holquist, 1990). For Bakhtin, however, such a unitary language is not something given, it is something that is posited. Something that purports to be able to speak the truth of the world in a direct fashion. Bakhtin's heteroglossia proposes that the differences that authoritative discourses aim to suppress cannot (and should not) be resolved. Difference is part of existence and any attempt to unify language or monologise the world can only exist amidst heteroglossia.

Thinking of an organisation as heteroglossic similarly asserts that organisations will always be made up of different languages and different stories which represent different point of view and interpretations. These different stories can be told through in genres and even if one story poses itself as authoritative the others will still not be extinguished. Attesting to heteroglossia brings up questions as to how to account for diversity in writing. Indeed the heteroglossic organisation is one that is conceivable but is not representable – that is to say that we can conceive of the multiplicity but its unfinalisability can never be written down in a text. A conception that proposes that an organisation is made up of many stories in many genres is indeed different from a text that claims it has represented all of those stories in all of those genres. To put forward such a text would always be a failed attempt at monologisation – an attempt to say it all, for all time and for everyone. The paradox that this opens up is that organisations are always being written but at the same time are never Written. That is, a finalising representation or set of representations is always elusive and to say that such a representation has been written is a process of power that closes off competing perspectives and modes of representation. Further, even in the face of a range of competing representations we cannot say that we might know more about an organisation, but rather we can realise that each is a contested claim to speak the 'truth' about the world (Rhodes, 2000). Any text of organisation is woven from the materials at hand into

*awareness of reflexivity might enable this writing to account for the attempts at power of its representations.*

*Chia suggests that*

*what constituted the initial 'reflexive' turn in academic theorising resulted from a heightened self-awareness associated with the increasing realisation that the researcher/theorist plays an active role in constructing the very reality he/she is attempting to investigate. (1996: 79)*

*I'm concerned though that such a reflexivity still assumes an equivalence between the person who writes and the author/researcher; it assumes that it is the researcher who constructs reality. Anne Game (1991) questions this assumption when she writes: "when research is understood as writing, critical attention is drawn to the practice of textual production which is research, as opposed to the final writing of the research 'results'" (Game, 1991: 28). What this leads to (again) is the view that writing generates, rather than being generated by, an authorial subjectivity. Power is therefore created by, rather than expressed through, writing. If I try (uncomfortably and unsuccessfully) to be in control of this text, it's because the text has constructed that control not because of who I am. But, as a reflexive I, I feel desperate yet somehow unable to relinquish these attempts at control.*

*I'm caught in a terrible bind. I*

a fabric that reflects its manufacture – its fabrication as a text. Because the concept of the heteroglossic organisation is one that not only accepts that organisations comprise of an indefinite number of stories, but also an indefinite number of ways of writing them; it suggests a writing of organisation that accounts for a multiplicity of stories and a multiplicity of genres. Such an organisation can, however, never be written; it can never be finalised; it can only be alluded to through the incorporation of unreconciled perspectives and different, possibly experimental, ways of writing.

As Lyotard puts it “we have an idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it” (1984: 78). The notion of a heteroglossic organisation is an example of an idea of the world, but to propose an example of it would be to suggest that we could represent all of the different stories and all of the ways that they are told. The heteroglossic organisation is therefore unrepresentable and each new attempt to present it further demonstrates its unrepresentability. To write the heteroglossic organisation is then a matter of alluding to it while accepting that the goal of representation is unachievable. Writing might then be a matter where “it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be represented” (Lyotard, 1984: 81) such that the terrorist utopia of a reconciliatory unity and totalisation of language is no longer sought.

The challenge that this poses for storytelling and narrative approaches to organisations is the ability to write knowledge whilst at the same time drawing attention to the fact that the knowledge is written. What a narrative approach can offer is a type of knowledge that accepts and exposes the mechanics of its own production through attention to issues of genre and language. This recognises that writing about ‘organisation’ is a way of constructing and reproducing organisational knowledge through the use of textual, narrative and rhetorical practices. Writing creates the organisation through the textualisation of the personal and vicarious experience of the writer; writing is central to organisation and an understanding of organisation must be based on a conceptualisation of writing. In

*feel compelled to tell you not to believe me – to be suspicious of writing, even mine. I realise though, that if you don’t take my advice then you will be, in effect taking it. Similarly, if you do take my advice you effectively need to question it. No doubt, you are capable of reading my text in ways beyond those that I can conceive or suggest, but still I don’t know how to write in a way that really accepts the limitations that I know my writing has. I want to convince you of my argument but my argument is all about being suspicious about what you read. Obviously, I cannot suggest that this suspicion should be of all texts except my own. I’m gridlocked by my own views of writing and it’s hard to figure out how to get out.*

*Of course, this gridlock is of my own invention – I have written myself into it. This reminds me of an experience I had at a conference I went to recently. I was talking about some of the ideas that have informed this paper and at the end a question came from the audience – “Yes, but is your heteroglossia dialogised?” At the time, I was caught off guard and I think I gave some sort of brief and uninspiring answer – nevertheless the question still remains with me. To talk of different voices and genres etc. is fine – surely its obvious that different people will have different points of view and that they won’t agree and that some will try to become dominant. But how might these different points*

this sense, writing is the means by which people define order in their environment through particular structures of representation (Hassard, 1993) such that organisations are a symbolic product that is written (Linstead, 1993) both literally and figuratively. It is this concern about writing which raises doubts about representation and interpretation and calls for a more self-reflexive approach which gives attention to how texts are produced and read and leads to texts which are more open and reflect the ambiguities of both social worlds and worlds of language (Alvesson and Berg, 1992). Organisation is then not a noun but a verb that performs itself (Law, 1994) through the stories told about it. The discourse of organisation is itself an 'organisation of organisation'; that is, writing on organisation is organised by and inextricable from the theory or methodology by which it is framed (Cooper, 1990).

To theorise the heteroglossic organisation is an affirmation of the irony of writing. It is a writing that accepts that it can never accomplish a real writing or a true representation; it is a writing that is continuously relativised against the alternatives that it inevitably suppresses. The possibility for a narrative approach to organisational knowledge that this entails is one that firstly recognises its own play in the suppression of heterogeneity by the ways it limits alternative portrayals and secondly realises that such limitations are insurmountable – this is the irony of writing organisation.

Richard Rorty explores irony in terms of a person's 'final vocabulary' – "the words in which we tell...the story of our lives" (1989: 73). Based on this, to write the heteroglossic organisation is to position oneself as an ironist, who, as defined by Rorty fulfils three conditions:

- (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered;
- (2) she realizes that arguments phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts;
- (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than other, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a

*of view recognise each other and interact without the intention of manufacturing a hegemonic consensus? After all, all writing would appear to presuppose an other. Unless I write through the madness of an untranslatable idiolect, I must assume that you (the reader) exist and that I have something to say to you. In my case here my intention is not to attempt the futile vanity of creating a text that proposes itself as a finalised monologue. If you've read his text before reading mine you'll know that he's writing about (amongst other things) heteroglossia – about the links and inter relationships between different social languages, different voices and different genres. He thinks that organisations are like this too and that writing about organisations might benefit from an acknowledgment of this heteroglossia rather than trying to write the 'truth'. Again I ask the question that was asked of me – "Is this heteroglossia dialogised?"*

*Now it's pretty obvious that I am aware of his existence – I talk about him all of the time, you might even say that I'm obsessed with him. What I think his problem is though, is that his heteroglossia does not admit to its own dialogism – he can write about heteroglossia, but alone he can't demonstrate it (that's what he needs me for). It's like his genre does not allow him to perform the heteroglossia that he argues for. He's alone, he's building an argument, he's*

neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old. (1989: 73)

The ironist who writes organisation then recognises that any representation they make is always fragile and subject to change and in the very instance of writing is aware that the knowledge being written can be relativised both against other stories and other ways of writing. Writing, then, does not hold up a mirror to the world, but rather any instance of writing is a way of "adhocing through the complexities of an ever shifting sea of meaning and action" (Gergen, 1992: 223). The employment of Rorty's vocabulary to writing organisation is one where new writing is always possible and pursued, but is done without recourse to the goal of producing a final version of the final vocabulary. Such writing can only ever attempt to allude to its own instability by contrasting perspectives, 'voices' and genres in a way that acknowledges and possibly even foregrounds the irony. This then characterises the writer as being informed by what Gergen calls a sense of 'lucid humility' where

[t]he view of knowledge-making as a transcendent pursuit, removed from the trivial enthrallments of daily life, pristinely rational, and transparently virtuous, becomes so much puffery. We should view the bodies of language we call knowledge in a lighter vein - as ways of putting things, some pretty and others petty - but in no sense calling for ultimate commitments, condemnations or profound consequences. We should rather be more playful in our sayings. (Gergen, 1992: 215)

Such writing is a way of producing a 'writerly' text (Barthes, 1974). This concept is developed through Barthes' distinction between 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts. The readerly text is one that limits the number of oppositions that it incorporates by purporting to be an unproblematic transcription of reality. The focus of the readerly text is not on itself (i.e. a text) but rather on what the text purports to signify; it is a text which conceals its textuality through dominant and taken for granted genres and modes of representation. The readerly text achieves closure and positions the reader as a passive consumer of its meaning. In opposition, Barthes proposes the notion of the writerly text; a text which foregrounds its nature as a textual and cultural product. Such a text

*making a statement – in this way he's tied to the trace of social science where you have to pretend that you are 'right' (the dialogic implication being, of course, that others are wrong).*

*So ... he doesn't, for example, acknowledge that I exist. He makes no direct reference to me at all, he refuses to write me in. But still, I do think he knows that I'm here. I can tell by the way that he writes. He might be self-righteous, even pompous but I think his heart's in the right place, he's just afraid to let go. He and I are real people – we inhabit the same body, it's just that at different times and different places we speak with different voices and interact with different other people. But writing sometimes seems to me to be more solitary than it is. Like I said before I think that it's all about others – writing for others, using words that have already been used by others, and trying to present yourself to those others. The question, I guess, is which of those others get some acknowledgment and whether they're allowed to have a life of their own or need to always be subsumed into the narrative of a single I. I don't think they need to – for me it's just about figuring out ways to do this.*

*He can't do it alone. In my more positive moments, I think of myself as having lost the naïveté that still rings through his writing. A naïveté that lacks self-consciousness, lacks an awareness that whatever one*

highlights its incorporation of voices and generic conventions rather than attempting to keep its production transparent. It is a text that is heterogenous and contradictory and denies the possibility of closure. To produce a writerly text is to produce a text that seeks to interrupt itself and to reveal the way that it constructs a plausible reality – to demystify the textual construction of organisation. Importantly such a text does not provide the reader with a prepackaged meaning, but rather encourages readers to participate in the production of that meaning.

### Conclusion

The irony of the heteroglossic organisation is one that accepts that organisational knowledge can be expressed in different voices, through different stories and using different generic conventions, but also realises that expanding the multiplicity of representations of knowledge does not mean that we can say we know more about what is written. On the contrary, multiple representations demonstrate that none of them can be seen as correct, and that each one is relativised in the endlessly heteroglossic possibilities of an organisation. Rather than assuming that through writing we come to know more, the notion of the heteroglossic organisation suggests an unsurity of what it means to 'know' anything about organisational life as portrayed in language. Textual representations are not mirrors of the reality of the organisation, but rather they are contesting claims about the organisation such that the writing of research moves from attempts to represent or persuade to a reflection on the relationship between texts (Fox, 1995). These relationships need not be seen as exclusive or incommensurable, but rather, within them any representation produces an effect that is capable of being relativised against some other representation. This approach accepts the plurality of different perspectives and representational possibilities where organisational realities are many things at the same time and where theory sensitises people to those multiple realities (Walter-Busch, 1995). Theory and knowledge then fabricate the social that they once claimed to describe or explain (Fox, 1995).

*says or writes, it can always be said or written about differently. He proposes that multiple languages and genres should be used, but it's me who does it. I try to contest, to subvert to make things less simple and conclusive. In one way of thinking, all language is dialogised – the words and the genres that both of us use have all been used before – we've just borrowed them for our own purposes. We learnt these different uses of language from interacting with other people, from reading other people's writing, from speaking and listening. Without those other people, neither his text nor mine could have been possible. Why not acknowledge that otherness? My strategy is to try to be different, reflexive and less conclusive.*

*As the major text on the left is coming to an end I also must sign off and end my 'self'-ish musings. I'll finish, then, by telling you a little of the history of this paper and how it came to exist in its current format. In its original version, I didn't exist – it was just him. He was much bigger than but had to be trimmed down to make space for me. In his former state, he received criticism – he'd presented himself at a seminar, he'd been read by his students, and he'd received written commentary by journal reviewers (and been rejected) – a consistent line of criticism from all corners was his lack of reflexivity. It seems that there is a dominant logic that suggests*

Thinking of an organisation as heteroglossic is about eschewing the desire to pronounce one's writing as being the master voice that is able to speak authoritatively about what is going on. Instead, "all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values" (Bakhtin, 1981: 291). To write then is to find one's voice whilst recognising the voice of others; to tell stories rather than to write *the* story and to recognise the reflexive and ironic interplay between those stories. "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's [or writer's] intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981: 294). Writing cannot close off meaning, the final story can never be told, nevertheless "no writer who began in a rather lonely struggle against the power of language could or can avoid being coopted by it" (Barthes, 1977/1993: 467) – to write, even if acknowledging multiplicity will always close off alternatives, its character is such that it inevitably reduces.

Heteroglossia does not imply that writing somehow liberates from power, but rather points to an awareness and a sensitivity to the effects of writing and the power relations that produce those effects. Such awareness can lead to an ironic humility of one's own position and self construction in the interplay of organisational texts. The challenge this presents to writing relates how to recognise multiplicity whilst still being able to write and find one's voice in and through it. It is worth noting, however, that the recognition of this multiplicity does not necessarily imply naïve relativism – producing or recognising a plurality of stories and genres is not to say that all are in some way equal in their validity as representations of independent 'points of view'. On the contrary, the potential value of such multiplicity is precisely to draw attention to the fact that the stories and genres are different and *not* equal and that their claims to validity or truth are inextricably related to their modes of representation. This difference is such that dialogised heteroglossia renders monologue untenable and in so doing might

*that to propose a writing that is writerly and ironic must itself be done in a reflexive and writerly way – the text must be consistent in form with its own argument. In order to respond to this critique, the 'I' that is now writing was created – an I that is overtly reflexive.*

*What concerns me, however, is that although now the reflexivity is more overt, some of the irony is gone. In the previous version of the paper, by being written in an authoritative style, whilst arguing for non-authoritative writing, a gap was created in the text. This was an ironic gap where the 'I' that wrote did not heed the advice of his own writing. The effect this seemed to have on the people who read the text was an immediate desire to have this gap filled – but in its own way this gap added a writerly dimension to the text – it begged the reader to ask why the text was written in such a contradictory way. Although overtly the text was authoritative, there was a built in irony – an open offer to the reader to question and problematise the text's authority. The response to this gap, however, came in the format of a request for the gap to be filled by the 'author' of the text; indeed, to be filled in or for the text to be abandoned. Consistency was demanded, and I, I succumbed. This is why 'I' was created, to remove the irony and the inconsistency. Although I speak from a position of reflexivity, I am complicit in the authoritative staging of this text*

work to subvert monologue through multi-centred questioning and critique. This is not to replace one monologue with another, but rather to subvert the dominance of monologue itself. The implication is that monologue does not necessarily guarantee power and that it is pluralism, in the guise of heteroglossia, that can offer opportunities for subversion and resistance.

*and perhaps by having been called into existence, there is a reflexivity, which, while questioning textual authority, also reinforces it by trying to answer too many questions.*

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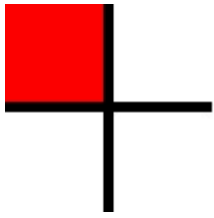


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## Writing With(out) God? \*

Anthony O'Shea

### abstract

In recent years Jacques Derrida has argued that he has always been writing about himself and God as a *confiteri*. Since the modern world claims that God is dead what might it mean to now write without God? Indeed what *is* God and what might God's death also mean? This paper explores what God and a possibility of writing with(out) God as a form of confession might mean. Whilst considering the arguments of Derrida it sides more with Bataille to argue that God is more literally Absence rather than without being or absent. Importantly this absence is revealed to, leaves and continually contaminates us with an overwhelming feeling of loss that destabilises 'self' and 'being'. The contaminated, insufficient 'self' writes as a lost confession and a confession of loss: it is an outpouring of words through the rupture of 'being'. This paper is one such *confiteri*.

### Introduction

Quid ergo amo, cum Deum meum amo? Can I do anything other than translate this sentence by SA [Saint Augustine] into my language? (Jacques Derrida, 1993: 122)

That's what my readers won't have known about me ... to be bound better and better but to be read less and less well over almost twenty years, like my religion about which nobody understands anything. (Jacques Derrida, 1993: 154)

[Y]ou have spent your life inviting calling promising, hoping sighing dreaming, convoking invoking provoking, constituting engendering producing, naming assigning demanding, prescribing commanding sacrificing. (Jacques Derrida, 1993: 314)

The works of Jacques Derrida have been considered for some time in contemporary management literature (Cooper, 1989; Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992; Chia, 1996). Whilst these are important in their own right I would contend that they tend to preference the various writers' beliefs that Derrida writes 'on' something. My concern in this paper however is not to demonstrate that Derrida writes *on* a subject rather than about it – this has been done eloquently before (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992) – but to consider *why* Derrida writes at all.

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In this paper I will argue, following Derrida (1992b, 1993), that much of his work has taken the form of *confiteri*. In using the term *confiteri* I want to distinguish between this mode of address and the more modern understanding of confession. For Derrida:

When he [Saint Augustine] asks in truth of God and already of his readers why he confesses himself to God when God knows everything, the response makes it appear that what is essential to the avowal or the testimony does not consist in an experience of knowledge. Its act is not reduced to informing, teaching, making known. ... [but is a performative act] in order to 'stir up' love ... by 'doing the truth' (*veritatem facere*). (1992b: 286)

*Confiteri* is a performative act of faith, a declaration of love for God rather than an announcement of truth and fact that demands forgiveness. Thus for Derrida Augustine's Confessions, and his own Circumfession, is not an attempt to close the distance between writer and reader but a free invitation without obligation, to the reader to find faith (Derrida, 1995a: 14). The issue is not whether we 'know', 'believe' or 'forgive' Augustine (or Derrida) but to reconcile ourselves to God. *Confiteri* is given as an (overwhelming) passionate testimony of faith, a sacrifice, a waste of the subject, a gift without return as a way through the *aporia* of a modern onto-theological metaphysics mired in appropriation and (self-)interest:

We speak *in* and *on* a language that, while being opened by this *ference*, says the inadequation of the reference, the insufficiency or the lapse of knowing, its incompetence as to what it is said to be the knowing of. ... And the language of ab-negation or of renunciation is not negative ... because it denounces as much as it renounces; and it denounces, enjoining; it prescribes overflowing this insufficiency; it mandates, *it necessitates* doing the impossible, necessitates going (*Geh, Go!*) there where one cannot go. Passion of, for, the place, again. I shall say in French: *il y a lieu de* (which means *il faut*, 'it is necessary,' 'there is ground for') rendering oneself *there where* it is impossible to go. (Derrida, 1995b: 58, emphasis in the original)

We (St Augustine, Derrida and I) do not seek your forgiveness, we do not attempt to protect and retain what we have but give it all up willingly, we sacrifice ourselves in front of you to God. What *faith* is there then in management and the restricted economy! As a highly personal and emotional act of faith, an emotional outpouring of a bleeding and ruptured being, it is an admission of failure, a tormented cry of someone who finds themselves to be insufficient, less than perfect before an all-knowing and perhaps impersonal God (Derrida, 1992b; Bataille, 1988b). It is the supplicant's cry, 'God knows that I am human, all too human'. Whatever Hegel and various latter day thinkers may think we will never attain perfection, there is no supersession, nothing is retained, held back, reserved!

What this is not is yet another discourse on dialectics. It cannot and should not be collapsed under the weight of the subjectivist-objectivist, inside-outside, distal-proximal arguments that continue to haunt so much of management writing under the guise of a post-(structural, modern, psychoanalytic, colonial, feminist, and so on – fill in the blank as you see fit) versus modernist argument. In *Sauf le Nom* Derrida (1995b: 73-75) discusses the "tradition of *Gelassenheit*, this serenity that allows being without indifference" (1995b: 73). This is not a subjective position or an explication of (a self-conscious and egoistic) interiority but rather an opening to or reception of difference. In these terms the subjectivist and (occasionally) 'autobiographical' works in some management discourse that preference the use of 'I' remain as a form of onto-theological metaphysics in that they remain based on a relational logic of form and also

appropriation, reserve, accumulation and interest: 'I am this, you are that'. *Confiteri* however is "to give oneself up [*se render*] and to surrender one's weapons [*render les armes*] without defeat ... [to] a love without jealousy that would allow the other to be – after the passage of a *via negativa*" (Derrida, 1995b: 74). Derrida's message is simpler, sweeter and perhaps all the better for being so – we write as a performative cry to an absent God 'Come, yes, yes'.

But what God does Derrida cry for? God is not deconstruction. Whilst deconstruction can be seen as an attempt to prevent the closure of metaphysics from within, Derrida's interest in apophatic theology and God is concerned with 'more' than this process. His concern is with a generalized messianic theology as an attempt to relate to the Impossible (as God, as other, as the *tout autre est tout autre*) that is beyond metaphysics and representational being (Derrida, 1995b: 35-85) hence: "God (is) beyond Being but as such is more (being) than Being: *no more being* and *being more than Being*: being more" (Derrida, 1992a: 90, emphasis in original).

It is worth noting that whilst "very early on [Derrida] was accused of – rather than being congratulated for – resifiting the procedures of negative theology" (Derrida, 1992a: 74) deconstruction is not negative or apophatic theology. Deconstruction remains a performative process by which we make ourselves ready for the in-coming of God as *tout autre* but apophatic theology is an attempt to 'understand' God beyond understanding: the first passionately inclines us to the Impossible (Derrida, 1995a) the second *is* the Impossible. Our *aporia* is that we cannot separate the two: God is prior to and more than being, representation and language.

What is Derrida's understanding of God and does it avoid onto-theological metaphysics? Derrida (1992a) argues that by displacing God into an infinite future yet to come (if indeed it ever does) that he avoids reducing God to presence and form. But does he? In order to draw out and put into play some of Derrida's concerns requires a consideration of God and *confiteri*: what is God as *via negativa* and how is *confiteri* performative; how does it open a way through the *aporia* of metaphysics to the Impossible beyond?

In the remainder of this paper I will attempt several (impossible moves). A theoretical consideration of what Derrida understands, or perhaps suggests, by God. Alongside this I will offer an example of *confiteri*. We so often attempt to understand and know experience only through and following on from theory but it is not prior to the experience of the *via negativa*. However, one should be read with, through and against the other: *confiteri* is an attempt to stop the closure of theory, an opening in the *aporia* of metaphysics to God and the Impossible beyond. In both cases I can neither write about something but must play on various themes and in so doing expose myself to the glare of the Sun and readers alike.

In my play(fullness) I will go in a direction that Derrida leaves untravelled though no doubt is aware of, to consider Bataille's (1989, 1995b) argument of God *as* Absence rather than absent. This is risky business, a road less travelled and with someone whom Sartre, that expert on being God, considered mad, bad and dangerous to know. Bataille nonetheless has important issues to discuss concerning God, and Derrida has a long

standing familiarity and respect for him (Derrida, 1978): so there is some recourse to my madness and risk. However if *confiteri* was merely a communication with God or someone else as other I would not risk myself – this may be the supplicant's cry before God but it is also to, and may ultimately only be for, themselves.

There remains however at least one other purpose to this paper. It is a development of my earlier suggestion that "*The Impossible* for Organizational Theory...be a continually transgressive praxis" (O'Shea, 2001: 61). It takes some of the themes in that paper, re-writes, subverts and puts them in to play. Be careful what you wish for.

### **Confiteri**

*The positivistic elements of management theory have been well identified for some considerable time. Nonetheless in some management journals we are still exhorted to write objectively, preferably in the third person, exclude subjectivity and be able to generalise our findings. At the 2000 Academy of Management Conference an invited speaker went so far as to say that 'good writing' is never written in the first person before offering Charles Dickens as a doyen of 'good narrative style'. It seems that much of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, at least for this speaker, is not 'good writing'. I am a 'bad writer', writing both continually in the 1<sup>st</sup> person and admiring and wanting to emulate others, such as Proust and Andre Gide. What space and what hope can there be for the likes of me in management discourse? Am I forever to be banished beyond the margins, silenced, left to take the risks yet receive none of the rewards: isn't this the very fate and poisoned chalice bestowed already on some recently in a review article in the Academy's journal?*

*Writing on management outside the space of literature and (respectable management) discourse I am confronted by nothing. This void, this khōral desert (Derrida, 1995c) voids me, empties me, makes me nothing and then exhorts me to speak. Outside rationalised space the very absence of things reveals the absence of God. But it does more: it demands that 'I', not the 'I' that I was but that I will become as tout autre to myself, find myself, speak about myself and lose myself again in a never ending cycle of sacrifice. How does one write on management in the absence of*

### **Derrida's God**

The concept of an ontological and kataphatic Christian God may be traced from the ancient Greeks, through Plato to the age of Luther (Taylor, 1999). This is God figured as something, 'God is love'. Against this negative theologians have long argued that God is not an essence or being, love may stem from God but God is not love. For some, since the death of God in Nietzsche, negative theology leaves us with a foundationless silence about God. Derrida raises a challenge for (his understanding of current) negative theology: if one is to avoid speaking (of, and limit God to, Being), does one have to remain silent about God (Derrida, 1992a)?

Derrida's God (Derrida, 1992a, 1995a) is a response, or challenge, to this negativity: how to think and speak about God without reducing God to an onto-theological presence. His is a God that whilst yet to come we are nonetheless required to prepare for (Derrida, 1992a, 1993, 1995a, 1999; Caputo and Scanlon, 1999). This, for Derrida avoids trapping God as of metaphysical kataphatic being or apophatic *hyperousia*. Or does it?

Derrida equates God with the

*a stable self, in a continual collapse of being, in a space beyond ('good') literature and God? Pick up the pieces even as they slide through your fingers and change, play with them, rearrange them, write on them not about them (Bataille, 1992), isn't this poetic? This is poetic discourse as sacrifice, as a continual self-subversion (Lala, 1995) and where discourse on management in the absence of God becomes a narrative of vulnerability (Banks and Banks, 1998). It is an autobiography of risk where the subject dies and writing is confessional (Derrida, 1993; Blanchot, 1986): poetic writing as sacrifice not about oneself or some reified, ontical other but literally on oneself: play with the ashes, rearrange the pieces, write on the skin (Bataille, 1992). How does one do such a sacrificial confession? I'll start with a confession as it's good for my immortal catholic soul: it offers me the ghost of a chance that I might catch sight of St. Augustine's (1998) City of God. (But I'll never enter, as I'm damned for eternity: I know this to be true, my father told me so as a child. Augustine's City of God has no use for shit.)*

*A (brief) confession: My work, or so I've been told by some colleagues, is highly subjective and in danger of being monothematic. Quite simply I keep talking about myself and family. I cry out. If I must speak about what I 'know', then I must be silent. I know nothing, the only thing I have (an incomplete) knowledge of is my life. And I confess, I must speak, I am driven to communicate, the excess of experiences that are more than me but help to (re-)constitute me, overflow me and force me to share them through communication.*

*So please God hear my confession.*

*But there is nothing to hear my prayers, nothing to witness my tears in the desert, nothing to witness my death(s). But in the distance I can see a spectral shimmer of light: is it the City of God or just another phantasm, just another organized state or organization that will fall to dust in my hands? Oh God why doesn't thou forsake me: Oh father why do I forsake you? All I want to do is*

Impossible and thus argues that God is outside of metaphysics (Derrida, 1995b) and so beyond reduction to a kataphatic understanding. God, as *causa sui*, is "this birth that carries itself without premise" that "appears impossible, more than impossible, the most impossible possible, more impossible than the impossible if the impossible is the simple negative modality of the possible" (ibid: 43). This impossible beyond being is wholly affirmative, "the 'yes,' the 'come'" (ibid.) that opens us to the other: God as an experience of desire for the ineffable, the other. God as such is an openness to the infinitely different and deferred future beyond the phenomenological horizon, but which haunts our thoughts. We thus have a faith in, and confess to a non-representable God that John D. Caputo (1999b: 208-215) describes as Derrida's phenomenology of the non-appearing; the specter of what is to come that calls us forth and that we welcome by passion, prayer, *confiteri*, by having faith in something that we do not understand but can only experience. A phenomenology of the non-appearing is a faith in an interruption of phenomenological experience by an absolute, infinitely distant rather than a foreseeable future.

[Y]ou have spent your life inviting calling promising, hoping sighing dreaming, convoking invoking provoking, constituting engendering producing, naming assigning demanding, prescribing commanding sacrificing (Derrida, 1993: 314.)

*talk to you, about you, on you. So I'll start by  
talking about myself because you are not there oh  
God of absence, God as Absence.*

### **Confession**

*Date: July 7<sup>th</sup> 2000.*

*Place: Athens, Greece.*

*How do you talk about someone  
you have never met? How do  
you close an infinite distance of  
an absent other? There's  
nothing to see, nothing to re-  
present, nothing to even miss in  
representing. Nothing then to  
mis-represent? But who would  
take this risk, indeed what is  
risked? You or the other  
represented in their absence?*

*Oh to risk myself and talk about  
Bataille but I'm too insufficient  
for that! The half-hour of clock  
time that I've been given to  
present on Bataille seemed so  
brief at first, but now faced with  
the reality it's dilated out in to  
infinity. I feel myself fall into  
this starless night and Bataille  
isn't here to save me, all that  
there is is the experience of  
falling and loss. Found wanting  
whilst trying to touch the (black)  
Sun Bataille, I fall back knowing  
only that I'm insufficient, not  
enough, not good enough. Yet  
my experience has left me  
contaminated, even in his  
absence Bataille is here  
contaminating me with his  
(non-)presence, seeping through  
my skin, rupturing my mind,  
dissolving my body. He's just  
too much for me, he's excessive  
and this excess forces me to  
speak.*

*So I speak, not about Bataille  
but on loss, risk and*

### **Confession**

This passage relates to my experience of presenting a paper on Bataille at SCOS 2000. I abandoned the paper at the start and instead spoke about experiencing myself as loss, lost and insufficient in relation to two incidents in my life. These were the birth of my daughter and the day my father left me as a 7 year old child with the words 'You've never been the son I wanted'. My father expelled me from his life for over 25 years: not his son, less than human, just shit. Reconciliation? There is only absence. The passage makes use of some 15 of Bataille's concepts contained primarily in the *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, *Inner Experience* and *Visions of Excess* (Bataille, 1995a, 1988b and 1985 respectively).

Georges Bataille has come to be recognised as someone who wrote at the limits of poetic language (Derrida, 1978; Kristeva, 1984; Guerlac, 1997). Indeed both Julia Kristeva and Suzanne Guerlac argue that Bataille's work continually transgresses the limit of language. He not only evades truth, beauty and limits but actually forces them to slip and founder. He achieves this only because God is an absence rather than either an onto(theo)logical presence or an absent presence. At and beyond the limits of discourse truth is not merely deferred and different, it is dissolved and lost in the present (O'Shea, 2000).

Bataille's concept of a general economy beyond the restricted rational one of the modern world demands another form of negative theology where God is both an infinite absence *and* continual squander: God both takes and gives without return and without end. In this absence *as* God meaning and truth will slip, falter and lose themselves. If we enter this void, if we *fall* into it, we will not become God but will be lost. Poetic language is our attempt to communicate this infinite void, this *mise en abîme*, and to commune with it. Knowing God, or rather how we 'know' God, become inextricably connected to poetic writing. Bataille's is not a negative theology understood and



*insufficiency. This suppurating wound pours out words about the shit that I am before collapsing into silence. A presentation about Bataille? No! But perhaps it was an experience on Bataille.*

described by Derrida but is God as an excessive absence that demands communication whilst swallowing or voiding any sense of meaning. Having spent (squandered) so much time thinking about God it now seems time to talk about God and poetic language.

### **Confession**

*Date: July 7<sup>th</sup> 2000;*

*Place: Athens, Greece.*

*How can the shit that I am have been part responsible for my baby daughter? I know that I am shit, my father told me so as a child. He left me with a wound that I cannot close. I bleed; I pour out my filth continuously. I have no choice; in his absence he contaminates me with his excess. Out of sight, out of mind? No, in his absence he is always with me, he cannot be denied, he makes me what I am – a continual collapse of being, good and evil, less than a Sartrean no-thing, much less than zero. And yet from this filth, this less than zero, arises the beautiful potential of my baby daughter. As pure potential she is more than me, more than I can have, more than I can be. She helps to show that although less than zero I am still more than nothing. I am not God: I'm too insufficient for that. I'm only human yet perhaps that is my saving grace.*

### **Plato, Beautiful Poetry and God**

The onto-theological God is the God of Plato's world. It is a God of presence whom the poet has a divine access to and duty towards (Asmis, 1992). This is a God that the poet must represent; this is a God that the poet knows. Yet how can a mortal know God: what is this presumption if not an objectification of God? Doesn't the poet reduce the ontological Being of God to a mere being? Doesn't the poet become more than God and thus everything? If God is only the "author of...good only" (Plato, 1948: 358) what is the poet author of? God? Everything and nothing? Good and evil? And everything beyond good and evil? Does not the poet become the author of the being God? The Platonic poet, as author of God, does not re-present God's word but their own. This poet is not beyond but both good and evil, yet Plato believes that they would deny part of their existence! As insufficient as I am I cannot do that, I am neither God nor more than God, but I am and cannot deny myself as both good and evil.

Plato, at least for me, leads us to a position where poetry comes to constitute everything and deny that it is everything by denying evil. Plato's poet must know God to represent God: in so doing they become less than human by attempting to be more than God. His poet places a double negative on language, a melancholic never-never where the poet denies being evil and so cannot repeat evil. The poet who constitutes God becomes less rather than more than human.

Yet, as Nietzsche argues, we are human because we are both good and evil. We deny God and ourselves by denying our evil and the solution out of this melancholic repressed identity (Butler, 1997). Plato's poet becomes a limited effect of language at the very moment of limiting poetic discourse. This poetic discourse is only a passive form of power as it is representational. As such it is a poetry that is already and always limited by words: restrained by limit and non-transgressive – this is not Bataille's poetry.

### **Against the Name**

*Seven year old boys so often idolise their fathers, rightly or not the father becomes God. I wasn't an exception. In parting he said, 'You've never been the son I wanted.' yet this wasn't enough for him, it wasn't excessive enough, he had to add, 'Fuck off and die'. I am dead, have been since the age of seven. Lost in the kingdom of the dead, in the desert khōra I have neither home nor can ever enter the City of God. Derrida writes on the Name (of the Father), Kristeva about the Mother. In the very absence of my father, an absence that didn't herald but brought my death, I die(d) and so have nothing left to risk. And so I write against the Name – (in the) Absence of God, stop making sense.*

### **Absence**

*I shouldn't be – a double negation inscribed on being. I exist only because of a space left for me by another – the son whom I am not. My parents only wanted two children and I am the third in a denied trinity: the first is my sister, the second my dead brother, finally and least come I.*

*My brother died stillborn after my father kicked my mother down two flights of stairs whilst she was 5 months pregnant. He left her haemorrhaging life onto a cold concrete floor.*

*What a waste, what a sacrifice,*

### **Dead Gods and Derrida's God**

We have in fact only two certainties in this world – that we are not everything and that we will die. (Bataille, 1988b: xxxii)

Modern Christian theology, for many, follows in the wake of the concept 'God is dead' (Marion, 1995; Taylor, 1999). Negative theology, restricted to a dead ontological God, opens us to an impossible possibility: that we can replace and so become God. Sartrean existentialists thus argue that the human condition is now inextricably linked to a state of angst where we have an unfulfillable desire to become God since we must cease to be ourselves at the very moment of attaining divinity; we are thus a 'useless passion' (Sartre, 1958: 615). This returns both poet and poetic language to Plato: without God there is no good or evil, in desiring to be God we desire the very ground from which we can constitute what is good and evil, yet this is an empty 'desire-for' the Impossible. This form of negative theological circle not only reveals to the poets that they are 'a useless passion', it is the ultimate in cruelty: the poet is shown everything, made to want it, but access is denied. Poetry becomes less a language of Sartrean angst and more an instrument of infinite torture. It is also left incomplete, a language that cannot constitute itself and, in the absence of good and evil, has lost its own (Platonic) *raison d'être*. Who would be a poet here?

### **Absence of God**

Derrida demands of poetic language the impossible, to dream the Impossible, whilst restricting it to an enclosed space of purpose. His absent God is his response to his understanding of negative theology where God is dead. It is a demand to prepare for the return of an absent God and so it demands of poetic language an answer to the question 'What is God?' Yet, rather like Blanchot (1982) shows of Sartre's question, the very asking in this sense presumes an essentialist ground: God as Being beyond our present understanding of Being. Thus poetic language can only follow from and is placed under control of this. Poetic language attains a purpose, albeit one that it may never fulfill in Derrida's God of difference, but a purpose nonetheless. It is left referring, indeed deferring and in deference, not to itself, not even to nothing, but to a *tout autre* that has yet to come. The poet as slave to an absent

*what an event to follow, what a space to fill. I am not my father's son – he died many years ago.*

*Oh but my brother could have been anything, at least everything that I am not and perhaps he would have received from my father everything that I did not. I am so little that he must be (close to) everything for my father – in his negation he approaches God even as I'm left in his wake. I am so little and know virtually nothing, but I do not want to be God. For me there is no desire-for or desire-of God.*

*And what did my father leave when he divorced and left my mother to live in South Africa? Beyond the phenomenological horizon, out of sight but not entirely out of mind, the trace of an absent presence that is yet to come?*

*Do I miss the point? There is not, within or inscribed by this absence, any idea that I will say either 'Come back, yes yes. I miss you...' or failing to recognise him, 'When will you come back?' Absence has not made this heart grow fonder, I haven't, and can never, forget the physical and mental cruelty. Absent or not, I remain in his debt.*

*Sacrificed, denied, perpetually in debt, all that remains is ashes. There is no City in the dessert, only ashes, only a desertification of being.*

master!

Against all of these Gods the poet stands accused, limited by words, restricted by language, and passive. It seems as if there is no way out in the presence of these deities. How can poetic language be transgressive?

Bataille's God is one of absence that joins excessive squandering with loss. It is also one that allows for an active performativity, and thus transgression as a form of self-subversion without limit (Lala, 1995; O'Shea, 2001). This is a poetic discourse where language does not merely operate at the limits of discourse: it continually attempts to rupture and go beyond it. It can do this because God is an excessive absence into which we may fall and expend ourselves without end. As an endless void we may lose ourselves. In this experience of loss we transgress ourselves because we are made formless: we can be self-subversive because there is no longer a self left to risk. In the infinite and starless night that is Bataille's God we are in Death's kingdom. There is now no sense that we turn away from death, refuse it and so refuse to risk ourselves because we fear death; we are already there. God as a shattering and loss of presence. God as non-presence. God as Absence.

We cannot inhabit Death's Kingdom for long and still be: *la petite mort*, the many other small deaths that we die during life, 'being' formless, all are but temporary. Without form we cannot inhabit Augustine's City of God but nor can we remain wandering in the desert for long. Death is not ours to have, to hold, to command, delay or to share (Derrida, 1995d; Blanchot, 1998), and unless Death has finally come to us we must ultimately return to (a) 'being' alive in the face of Death: life is only a special condition of Death (Bataille, 1985). 'Being', even though it is insufficient and second to Death, nonetheless retains, or is contaminated by, (part of) God: the sacred is ever present even whilst it is denied in the profane (Bataille, 1988b). What might this suggest for our understanding of 'self'?

### Nothing to Lose

*As nothing I have nothing to lose. This sense of loss, of absence, leaves me incomplete, pouring endlessly out from a gaping wound, hemorrhaging life endlessly onto a cold concrete floor. That and a nothing devoid of a master. I'd rather be this than a slave. This is not quiescence but an affirmative cry to be everything that you shouldn't be.*

### See my wounds...

See my wounds; I do not hide them. (Augustine, *The Confessions* 10.28.39)

Bataille, along with Augustine, argues that there is no stable sense of self. Augustine's argument in *The Confessions* is a *confiteri*, a mode of speaking made possible and authorised only by God. For Augustine we are not who we think we are and any claim to an understanding of 'self' can only be made in the presence of God. However, for Derrida it requires that we beseech God's help (Caputo, 1999a). The 'self' exists and can only be experienced in the presence, or coming to presence, of God. Bataille's argument is somewhat different, here God's very presence *as* a void continually ruptures being and any stable concept of 'self'. Whilst Derrida's *confiteri* expresses the phenomenological Bataille's remains deeply non-phenomenological: Derrida's seeks help but Bataille is an outpouring of loss. The 'self' for Bataille is ruptured by *non-savoir* rather than one that seeks *ça-SA* (Hegel's *Savoir-Absolu* Derrida, 1986). Our very modern concept of complete, whole, knowing selves flounders because of this rupturing contamination that makes us what we are. We cannot be whole *because* an absence or void infects us; we only exist because of this contamination – without it we would be/remain dead but it is not something that we can either understand or that will bring us to the *Savoir Absolu*. Into this black hole we pour our words, not in order to fill it – which would be impossible – but because we must.

### Why Confiteri?

God as an absence forces us to communicate and drives us back into language because it is an excessive experience (Conner, 2000; O'Shea, 2000, 2001). Once God and the Sacred has been revealed to us we are contaminated by it: all our communication becomes *confiteri*. This is not a confession *to* God but an outpouring of a confused soul because of a sacred revelation for which they were insufficient and remain insufficient to know, understand and communicate it. Whilst poetic language transgresses the limit of discourse, discourse remains as the only means we have to communicate. The poet and poetic language may transgress language but must use it in order to communicate. Words may not be enough but they are all that we have and use them we must.

Since the death of God, a death that supposedly signalled the end of metaphysics, good and evil, truth and fact, poetic language has had a profound question to answer, 'how to speak in the absence of God'. Derrida has some interesting points to make on this in his attempt to make sense of God. Derrida would reduce God to presence in order to make sense of God and in so doing subject poetic language to his sense of God. Bataille offers

a way out by arguing that there is no Being God, no presence, no sense, only an excessive absence that we lose ourselves in. In the absence of God we cannot make sense of God and we really should not limit ourselves to a world made by God.

Too much management writing, whether subjective or objective is presented behind the thin veneer of perfection, clarity, lucidity; yet all we are, and should confess to being, is human. We are not God. We are contained within and are God's creation. Less than perfect we should recognize this and its import. For management theory this is not just a case of importing a subjective quality to our work but also a realisation of the very imperfection, incoherent and ephemeral qualities that make us human, all too human. Without these a quasi-Hegelian wish would be granted; we would obtain Spirit, the *Savoir Absolu*, time would stop and with it Death would reign. On seeing the atomic bomb reek its destruction Oppenheimer was heard to say "I have become alpha and omega, destroyer of worlds. I have let loose Death upon us." Be careful what you wish for!

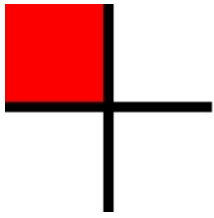
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## Appropriat(e)ing Wavelength: On Bourdieu's *On Television*\*

Glen Whelan

### abstract

Much of Pierre Bourdieu's work has revolved around thoughts on limitations, and the possibility of their overcoming. Through an elaboration on the manner in which Bourdieu's *On Television* was received negatively by journalists, and more positively by academics, this paper begins to explicate the objective limitations that all agents concerned with consciously initiating and directing social change are subject to. I then make note of the manner in which this differing reception is consistent with Bourdieu's own writings on the homeostatic tendencies of the habitus. I conclude the paper with a brief comparison of Bourdieu's efforts at initiating change in *On Television*, with his more successful efforts at initiating change in the field of sociology. Whilst I concentrate on the work of Bourdieu as a matter of prudence, the paper also aims to begin and develop what I believe to be the more general need for the academic community to devote more energies to the two step process – the analysis of reproduction and the creation of becoming – that is consciously initiated and directed social change.

*To the memory of Pierre Bourdieu*

(Y)ou can think with a thinker against that thinker. For example, I constructed the notion of field both *against* Weber and *with* Weber. (Bourdieu, 1990b: 49)

Someone, at any rate, should do a sociological analysis of what's happening in the field of journalism, and its political implications. Maybe someone like Bourdieu could do it. (Deleuze, 1990: 27)

### Introduction – Objective Constraints

The above quotation is taken from an answer Deleuze gave on a question regarding the constraints that philosophy specifically, and European cultural fields in general, were being subjected to by the 'opinion-makers', i.e. journalists and the media (Deleuze, 1990: 26-27). Given the question asked, and the general tenor of Deleuze's response, it is not surprising to find Deleuze suggesting that Bourdieu conduct a sociological

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\* I would like to thank David Birch, Steffen Böhm, and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

analysis of the situation given the brilliant manner in which Bourdieu has concerned himself with limitations throughout his career. The importance of thinking and writing about limitations is central to Bourdieu's work because, for him, as well as Deleuze (albeit in a markedly different style), the corollary of thinking about limitations is the possibility of freeing ourselves from them. According to Bourdieu, the sociologist is able to provide us with a certain amount of freedom, however particular, by making explicit "the social determinants of different forms of practice" (1990b: 15). By making explicit social determinants we are, paradoxically, freed from the "illusion of freedom... from the misplaced belief in illusory freedoms" (1990b: 15-16). Essentially, once we are freed from the idea of being the absolute masters of our own domain, freedom becomes possible. In many ways, Bourdieu's work could be thought of as the negative to Deleuze and Guattari's positive. Reproduction as the negative of becoming.

One similarity that is clearly evident in the work of Bourdieu and Deleuze is the way in which they both hesitate at writing in terms of the subject. For Bourdieu (1988: 149-150), whilst people may be biologically distinct, they are "endowed with transindividual dispositions". For Deleuze, using remarkably similar language, "the notion of the subject has lost much of its interest on behalf of *pre-individual singularities and non-personal individuations*" (1991: 95, italics in original). Bourdieu, the sociologist, has spent much of his career documenting the extent to which these transindividual dispositions organize the social/human. Deleuze, on the other hand, and especially in his work with Guattari, has spent much of his time in a speculative engagement with the pre-individual and the non-personal. Bourdieu, the sociologist, and Deleuze, the philosopher, both operate on either side of the same coin. And herein lies the joy of reading both. For together, their collective works help us to find the iron cage, heat it, and begin to refashion it. The iron that once formed a cage, becomes a material to be used for *our own* design.

The need to make use of the existing becomes clear whenever we want an organization, an institution, another person, ourselves, or any delimitation we can think of involving the human, to change. In such a situation we must, necessarily, make use of the momentum inherent to the posited unit to bring this about. To exemplify quickly and crudely: How do you convince a racist that racism is wrong when a racist, by definition, thinks that racism is right? It is my opinion that the only way to make such an alteration is with elements of the racist's thinking. One must endeavour, no matter how difficult the task, to find a line of thinking that inhabits the racist, and which might subsequently be used by the racist, to convince the racist, to make the change. Michel Foucault (through translator Richard Howard) tells of this sort of need in *Madness and Civilization* when t(he)y tell the story:

(O)f a sufferer who thought that he was dead, and was really dying from not eating; a group of people who had made themselves pale and were dressed like the dead, entered his room, set up a table, brought food, and began to eat and drink before the bed. The starving 'dead man' looked at them; they were astonished that he stayed in bed; they persuaded him that dead people eat at least as much as living ones. He readily accommodated himself to the idea. (1965: 188-189)

Such is the lot for those who want to initiate any sort of *human* change, but possess neither a magic wand nor absolute sovereignty. Once the reproduction to be altered is correctly identified and documented, the consequential task of creating the desired



becoming needs to be actualised. It is this point that forms the backbone of this article, and I make it early in the piece – “at the risk of ruining the suspense”, just as Bourdieu (1998c: 21) has done elsewhere. What follows is a brief outline of the reasons for Bourdieu giving the two public lectures on television that were subsequently published as *Sur la television* in French, and as *On Television* in English. I then move on to a discussion of the manner in which *On Television* was received in a differing manner by English speaking academics and journalists, and how this seems to mirror the reception of the lectures/book in France. Following this, I outline how this differing reception is consistent with Bourdieu’s writings’ on the homeostatic tendencies of the habitus. I conclude with a brief discussion of what I think would have been a better plan of attack, through a brief comparison of *On Television* with Bourdieu’s own praxeological project.

## The Reason for *On Television*

In his more recent works, Pierre Bourdieu has been increasingly concerned with the conditions in which reason is possible. Rather than relying on “moral exhortation to abolish ‘systematically distorted’ communication from sociology”, Bourdieu prefers to direct his attention to a “realistic politics of scientific reason” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 188). For Bourdieu, reason only becomes possible when we give up on the notion that “history is guided by reason” (Bourdieu, 2000: 126), once we give up on the notion of trans-historical, universal forms of communication (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 188; Bourdieu, 2000: 109-110). Reason becomes possible in very particular social conditions for Bourdieu, autonomous conditions in which reason is determined by the strength of arguments; by the capacity of an argument to convince. The mathematical field is an example of an autonomous field for Bourdieu in that the producer’s sole consumers are also the producer’s competitors (Bourdieu, 1998a: 61). Scientific reason only arises through those “apparently anarchical social mechanisms” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 189) which only allow one to “win with arguments, demonstrations, or refutations” (Bourdieu, 2000: 109).

It is clear, then, why Bourdieu thinks the progress of reason is only possible “from a political struggle rationally oriented toward defending and promoting the social conditions for the exercise of reason” (1998b: 139). It is just this struggle for the conditions of reason that Bourdieu takes up in *On Television* (1998a). The book *On Television* (1998a), is the English version of a transcription of two lectures Bourdieu recorded in France on 18 March 1996, and which were subsequently “broadcast by Paris Premiere in May of the same year” (Forbes, 2000: 24-25). As Forbes (2000) has noted, the broadcast of the two lectures, and their publication in book form, are just one of a number of overtly political activities Bourdieu has undertaken in the last seven or eight years. As Forbes has written:

In the year (1995) in which he reached conventional retirement age, Pierre Bourdieu appeared to embark on a new career. In the past he had frequently refused to “prendre position,” but now he appeared to plunge into politics and to adopt the persona of a public intellectual. (2000: 22)

These more political activities undertaken by Bourdieu are clearly related to his increasing theoretical concern with the conditions of reason, a concern which, whilst

being more explicit recently (see Bourdieu, 2000), underlies his entire scholarly output. As Bourdieu has noted in a televised interview:

Gradually, because of my work, and for other reasons, I was led to take a stand on problems which to some extent fall within my competence or that of my discipline (...) I thought it important that sociology should have its say when it had something really important to say, and television was an immediately obvious example. (1998d, in Forbes 2000: 34)

This brief outline of Bourdieu's recent trajectory helps us better situate the reasoning behind *On Television*, for which he had two clearly stated concerns. Firstly, he was concerned to highlight the movement of market pressures into previously autonomous fields. For Bourdieu "television poses a serious danger for all the various areas of cultural production – for art, for literature, for science, for philosophy, and for the law" (1998a: 10). His concern is that the "writers for nonwriters or philosophers for nonphilosophers", that one finds on television, act like a 'Trojan Horse' by introducing "heteronomous agents into autonomous worlds" (1998a: 59). These agents are heteronomous in the sense that the field in which their capital is most recognised, the field of journalism, is "very strongly subordinated to market pressures" (ibid: 54). In passing themselves off as 'real' writers, and 'real' philosophers, fields in which their capital is less valued than in the field of journalism, Bourdieu thinks that the autonomy of those very fields is put in danger. With the autonomy of these fields at risk, the progression of reason and the universal, being dependent upon this autonomy, are also put at risk.

Bourdieu's second concern, consequentially following the first, was that his analysis might provide "some tools or weapons to all those in the image professions who are struggling to keep what could have become an extraordinary instrument of direct democracy from turning into an instrument of symbolic oppression" (1998a: 12). In giving the lectures, Bourdieu made it very clear that he was wanting to "reach beyond the usual audience at the College de France" (ibid: 10). Given that he was moving into fields where people would be less familiar with his work, Bourdieu decided to "construct his arguments so that they would be clear to everyone" (ibid: 10). His concern with targeting those 'in the image professions', is well founded in that they are the most powerful agents in terms of the dissemination of information, in that "they control the means of public expression" (ibid: 46). He was right to think that, if we are to move beyond the type of television that "rewards a certain number of *fast-thinkers* who offer cultural 'fast food' – predigested and prethought culture" (ibid: 28), it would be necessary for journalists to be actively supportive of such a need; that they be on-side.

In wanting to achieve these aims, Bourdieu is doing just what his theoretical project would require. But where there is a slight inconsistency between *On Television* and his overall project is in how he tried to achieve these aims. It is this inconsistency that, in my opinion, underlies the difficulty Bourdieu came up against. The specific difficulty becomes clear when one notices how *On Television* was received differently by academics and journalists. Whilst the reviews of *On Television* were, to an extent, mixed upon its publication, it is clear that the more scathing reviews of the book are attributable to journalists, and the more positive attributable to academics, with John Pilger (1998) being the clear exception amongst journalists. The differing reception is of

interest in that it helps to highlight what I think is the fundamental difficulty faced by anyone concerned with initiating and directing social change – that of making use of that which is in a way that is otherwise. The difficulty is particularly evident when the change sought can only be initiated with the help of the members of the field in which the change is sought, as was the case with *On Television*. Bourdieu was clearly aware of this difficulty and of the need for a collaborative effort, for as he wrote in the prologue to *On Television*, the lectures and the subsequent books were:

(A)n attempt to offer to all sides a possibility of liberation,... from the hold of these mechanisms, and to propose, perhaps, a program for concerted action by artists, writers, scholars, and journalists ... Only through such a collaboration will it be possible to work effectively to share the most universal achievements of research and to begin, in practical terms, to universalize the conditions of access to the universal. (Bourdieu, 1998a: 1)

## Fuzzy Reception

The ‘success’ of *Sur La Television* is undoubted if one measures such success in terms of sales, given that the text was a bestseller in France (Forbes, 2000: 25). But its success in encouraging the various fields of cultural production to work together in support of the ‘progress of reason’, the primary aim of the lectures, appears to have been limited. As Bourdieu (1998a: 89,n.2) has noted, the two lectures sparked a controversy in France that “lasted several months and engaged the most important journalists and columnists from the daily papers”. With regard to this uproar, Louis Pinto has written that the “journalists who were in a position to express themselves” either denied the entirety of Bourdieu’s argument or “wrote ironically of the banality” of his claims (2000: 96-97). Rather than try and contribute positively to Bourdieu’s concerns, the journalists were more concerned to highlight what they thought to be Bourdieu’s “boundless ambition” (ibid.).

Whilst the English translation that appeared in 1998 has been received with more moderation, there appears to be a number of similarities between the responses of the Anglo-American and French journalists. Two reviews by Anglo-American journalists stand out as being particularly scathing, reviews which in a number of ways make the same charges against Bourdieu as made by their French counterparts (see Pinto, 2000). The first, written by Ian Hargreaves (1998) was published in *New Statesman*, and the second, written by Hal Hinson (1998), was published in the American webzine *Salon*. I make most reference to Hargreaves’ review, the longer of the two. The title of Ian Hargreaves’ review, ‘Slim and Shallow’, neatly sums up his thoughts of *On Television*. Towards the beginning of the review, Hargreaves, commenting upon the merits of receiving the book as a parting gift from his successor as editor of the *New Statesman*, wrote:

What better than an introductory tract on journalism by France’s most famous sociologist as I head off to become professor of journalism at Cardiff University, in a department which seeks to combine, under one neo-classical roof, the coarse business of training hacks with the intellectual exploration of “media studies”? (1998: 52)

Hinson, with tongue firmly in cheek, commences his review with:

Life being famously short, it's been a while since I last hunkered down with a piece of deep-dish theoretical sociology, but it took only a meager helping of "On Television," the latest opus from esteemed French scholar Pierre Bourdieu, to remind me why. After grappling with a prose style so eye-stinging and impenetrable that you're obliged to reread each sentence a minimum of three times, you begin to realize that Bourdieu is the literary equivalent of Anthrax – a little goes a very long way. (1998<sup>1</sup>)

The similarities between the two reviews on the excursion beyond the academy by Bourdieu, don't end with their indignant beginnings. Indeed, Hargreaves's and Hinson's primary criticisms are the same. Hargreaves writes that Bourdieu's main thesis about the field of journalism being influenced by market pressures is "as obvious as it is incontrovertible ... Who can doubt that journalism is shaped in very large measure, by the marketplace?" (1998: 52). Whilst Hinson asks, "what could be more obvious than to point out the medium's slavish devotion to the almighty franc?" (1998).

Hargreaves complains that in opposition to the current situation "Bourdieu offers no considered clue as to an alternative" (1998: 52), and even goes so far as to say that "Bourdieu has nothing at all to say about subjects which might yield answers to his questions" (1998: 53). Hargreaves criticism doesn't end there. He is also critical of the "unmistakable tang of self-interest" that he finds evident throughout *On Television* (1998: 52). He thinks this self-interest manifest in Bourdieu's concern to show that there exists "a world of robust original thought... among true academics" (ibid.). He thinks it to be a failure by Bourdieu to not recognise the positives of the marketplace; to not recognise that "all market places have their own correcting mechanism" (ibid.) – I hope in ignorance of Bourdieu's well-rounded critique of anything resembling Rational Actor Theory (see Bourdieu 1990a: 46-50; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 123). In their respective reviews, both Hargreaves and Hinson tend to concentrate on what they think Bourdieu doesn't do. They avoid discussing the need, or lack thereof, for Bourdieu's clearly stated objectives, preferring to criticise Bourdieu for what they see as his lack of answers to the problem, or for the obviousness of that which he highlights.

The reception of *On Television* by a number of reviewers from within the academy are, in stark contrast to the reviews cited above, very positive. Richard Shusterman (1999a), who simultaneously reviewed *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, commences his review by making a favourable comparison between Bourdieu, Sartre and Foucault. Shusterman (1999a) thinks the three comparable given their capacity to "wield influence in arenas of social struggle far grander than those of campus politics". Shusterman goes on to write that from even "the most reluctant quarters, there is a growing recognition that Paris has a new 'master thinker'" (1999a: 25). Shusterman, who also edited *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader* (1999b) in the same year, writes that by "earning the counterattacks of political leaders and media stars, Bourdieu became a surprise celebrity" (1999a: 26). He thinks that both texts give American readers the chance to be "properly introduced to the political Bourdieu; they can even get an inkling of some of his major theoretical ideas (like 'field', 'habitus' and 'reflexivity') without toiling through weighty tomes of academic writing" (1999a: 25-26). The rest of Shusterman's review essentially summarises, in an accurate manner, the main thesis of the two texts.

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1 As Hinson's article appeared in *Salon*, a webzine, no page reference can be provided.

In a similar vein to Shusterman, Hernan Vera (1999), writing in the journal *Contemporary Sociology*, mainly concerns himself with outlining how he thinks of *On Television* as being a prime example of the empirical utility of Bourdieu's 'method', what is perhaps better referred to as Bourdieu's praxeological framework. In a nutshell, Bourdieu's praxeological framework is concerned with the "dialectical relationships between... objective structures and the structured dispositions which they produce and tend to reproduce them" (Bourdieu, 1973: 53-54, italics in original). Perhaps the best example I can think of to quickly illustrate this dialectical relationship is the driving of a car. In Australia, we all (nearly all of the time) drive on the left hand side of the road. If you were to drive on the right hand side of the road, you would only ever be able to see the back of the traffic lights or the back of the road signs. You would also, more fundamentally, continually risk driving head on into a vehicle driving on the *correct*, which is to say the left, side of the road. In this way, the 'structured structures' that are the road signs, traffic lights, and general flow of traffic, produce the 'structuring structures': what amounts to the (un)thinking abidance of *individual drivers*. These 'structuring structures' then have a tendency to reproduce the 'structured structures' from which they derived in the first place. With what I assume to be this understanding of Bourdieu's praxeological framework, Vera goes on to write of how Bourdieu constructs the journalistic environment in a manner consistent with his conception of 'field', a term that is part of Bourdieu's 'technical vocabulary'. The conclusion of Vera's review of *On Television*, neatly embodies its overall feel:

This work is packed solid with insightful observations... This is not the attack on television and journalists that the passionate and still unabated reaction to the 1996 French version of these lectures might suggest... Social scientists and journalists will find much of value, and much to take issue with, in this book. This is, in fact, a good example of what a theoretically guided sociological vision can contribute to contemporary affairs. (1999: 197)

The reviews of *On Television* by Shusterman and Vera tend to concentrate on the success Bourdieu had in applying his complex concepts to a topic that is of interest to most people. Both Shusterman and Vera are correct in pointing out what they do. As academics who have engaged with Bourdieu's work, they are able to recognise this success because they are already aware of his overall direction. Yet they both fail to acknowledge the fact that one of the fundamental aims of *On Television* seems not to have been met. Rather, they support Bourdieu in saying that the text is not an attack on the field of journalism that it was perceived to be. Given that Bourdieu was not solely (if at all) interested in writing a bestseller, this talk, particularly by Shusterman (1999a), of *On Television* as being suitable as an introductory text on Bourdieu seems somewhat misplaced. Whilst Bourdieu was concerned to make the text readily understandable to most people, he was still primarily concerned to communicate with the fields of cultural production, and most specifically, the field of journalism.

In the light of this, one could be excused for thinking that two different books had been reviewed. Hargreaves and Hinson, as my *archetypal* journalists, tend to concentrate on what Bourdieu doesn't do. Rather than writing of the validity of Bourdieu's objectives, Hargreaves prefers to write about what he perceives as Bourdieu's self interested ambition. Rather than commenting on how the market constraints that he thinks so obvious as to be incontrovertible, constrain an editor of the *New Statesman*, he prefers to comment on how he thinks the market can give people what they want. Hinson takes

issue with the fact that Bourdieu “rarely mentions specific programs or broadcasts” (1998). In writing this, he fails to mention that Bourdieu (1998a: 10) more or less apologises for the brevity of his analysis, for the lack of empirical data, reasoning that it would have hindered the clarity of his message. Hinson (1998) even goes so far as to write that Bourdieu “comes across as something of a dilettante”, an interpretation that Phillippe Marliere has recognised as being easily, but wrongly made, given “Bourdieu’s evident eclecticism” (1997: 16).

In a contrasting manner to Hargreaves comments, Shusterman thinks that “Bourdieu offers both direction and example” (1999a: 26). Shusterman and Vera, as my archetypal academics, make positive mention of Bourdieu’s efforts to step outside the academy. With their knowledge of Bourdieu’s work, they are able to see the manner in which Bourdieu successfully utilises his theoretical concepts to analyse the media. In direct contrast to Hinson who wrote that “perhaps something really was lost in the translation” (1998), Vera thinks the text to be “a good translation of the two lectures” (1999: 197). What the differing reviews reveal is that, effectively, the members of the two fields tend to highlight and discuss what they know about, what they deal with on a daily basis, and avoid or exclude the remainder.

## Homeostasis as Exclusive Organization

The fuzzy reception of *On Television* outlined above is entirely reconcilable with Bourdieu’s theoretical project, as he himself has recognized. I will suppose that the two reviews by journalists that I cite are the type of response Bourdieu had in mind when he asked, following the telecast of the lectures: “What can possibly explain the remarkably violent reactions by so many of France’s best-known journalists to this analysis?” (1998a: 1). In what proves to be an answer to his own question, Bourdieu (*ibid.*) begins by noting that given the extent of his disavowals throughout the lectures, the journalists’ ‘virtuous indignation’ could not possibly be the result of them having felt personally targeted by the lectures. With this ruled out, and given that his concern throughout the whole process was purely emancipatory, a concern Bourdieu thinks so obvious that it should “go without saying”, he concludes that the ‘unwarranted outrage’ is “best explained by certain attributes of the journalistic vision” (*ibid.*). Thus, in familiar style, Bourdieu writes of the tendency of journalists to: “equate what is new with what are usually called ‘revelations’... (to) emphasis(e) that which is most obvious in the social world... a readiness to denounce or indict” and the tendency of journalists “to focus on an analyst’s (supposed) ‘conclusions’ rather than the method by which those conclusions were reached” (1998a: 2).

From the preface to the lectures, it is clear that Bourdieu realised that the journalistic disposition was to prove to be one of the greatest obstacles to achieving a ‘united front’ of cultural producers. This concern is evident when he wrote that he had “every reason to fear that this discussion will mostly feed into the narcissistic complacency of a journalistic world all too inclined to pseudo-criticism” (Bourdieu, 1998a: 12). In this light, Bourdieu appears to have pre-empted the negative reception the lectures were to subsequently receive. The reason for Bourdieu’s consternation over the possible success

of *On Television* is brought into sharper relief when one relates it to the line of thinking he has pursued throughout his career. For example, on the homeostatic tendencies of the habitus, Bourdieu has written, in a manner consistent with his overall project, that

the *habitus* tends to ensure its own constancy and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information ... , and especially by avoiding exposure to such information... the *habitus* tends to protect itself from crises and challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible, that is, a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions by offering the market most favourable to its products. (1990a: 60-1)

A number of other academics have also highlighted the manner in which the negative reception of the lectures only served to reinforce the point Bourdieu was making. Pinto (2000: 96-97) has noted how the manner in which the French journalists criticised Bourdieu only served to confirm Bourdieu's hypothesis. Similarly, Szeman has written that

the reaction of the print and electronic media to his pointed criticisms served as a confirmation of his conclusions regarding the severe limits of contemporary journalism. The transformation of Bourdieu's book into one of the seemingly endless string of "current events" and "social issues" that grips the media for a moment... exemplified all of the media's gravest problems in their very attempt to dispute Bourdieu's assessment of their failings. (1998: 1)

My concern with writing of the problem in this way is that it results in the very difficulty that Bourdieu needed to overcome remaining obscured. The difficulty faced is essentially that of communicating/constructing the need for change within a language and understanding that actively reproduces that which we wish to change: of overcoming the homeostatic tendencies of the habitus which reject and avoid change. In the instance of *On Television*, Bourdieu's concern to encourage media professionals to look past the pressure to get a scoop, to begin thinking of the multiple ways in which their day-to-day practices invisibly censor the news, and so on, had to be situated and constructed in a way that was compatible with the thinking it sought to overcome.

## **The Limitations of Writing of Limitations**

The specific problem Bourdieu faced in *On Television*, then, was that the change he was seeking to bring about required members from the journalistic field to come to the party. It is my opinion that Bourdieu misguided the direction of his representation in *On Television*. I think that this misguidance can account for, to a large extent, the hostile rebuttal of Bourdieu's position by many from within the journalistic field, a rebuttal that proved fatal to the achievement of his clearly stated objectives in giving the lectures.

From reading the negative reviews written by journalists on *On Television*, one is struck by the tone in which they refer to Bourdieu's person. As I mentioned above, both Hargreaves (1998) and Hinson (1998) make specific reference to the heights Bourdieu has climbed to within the academy. Hinson writes of Bourdieu's writing style as being "eye-stinging" and "impenetrable", and makes specific mention of his own aversion to "deep-dish theoretical sociology". Given that Hargreaves was off to join the academic world himself at the time of writing, such naked jibes may well have been seen as

disingenuous, accordingly, he writes of Bourdieu as not exactly being a “media studies person” (1998: 52). Both Hargreaves and Hinson are quick to categorise Bourdieu to an outside. For Hinson, Bourdieu is an academic who writes a lot on a little and does so with a distinct lack of clarity. For Hargreaves, Bourdieu is an academic who has hubristically strayed from his area of expertise.

By associating Bourdieu with an elsewhere, both Hargreaves and Hinson are all the more able to question the validity of the claims being made. Bourdieu makes this process of exclusion somewhat easier when one recognises how Bourdieu’s “general tone” could be easily interpreted as being “openly polemical” (Marliere, 1997: 16). It is not hard to understand the charge of polemics, when one notes Bourdieu talking of the “narcissistic complacency of a journalistic world all too inclined to pseudo-criticism” (1998a: 12). If any comment is going to be excluded by the journalistic habitus, then this would be it. Even without such obviously incendiary remarks, the lectures read a little pedagogically. As Hargreaves (1998), Hinson (1998) and Marliere (2000) have all recognised, Bourdieu’s claims do come across as kind of obvious. The commonly acknowledged nature of Bourdieu’s concerns combined with a discernible polemical undercurrent, goes a long way to explain the negative reception of the lectures.

Given that the constraints on journalists are somewhat obvious, why would Bourdieu be concerned to explicate them so thoroughly? Perhaps this concern is partly attributable to what might be termed a ‘hangover’ that Bourdieu endures from his more theoretical projects. One of Bourdieu’s primary concerns throughout his body of work has been to expose the manner in which agents within fields that place a large degree of value on originality, independence, free-thinking, etc., fields such as the artistic field and the philosophical field, are less free and independent than is often thought. The reason for this concern of Bourdieu’s is to free such thinking from the notion of freedom. Whilst this concern is clearly valid within the field of academia, the need to concentrate on highlighting such constraints within the field of journalism seems less important, in that it seems unlikely that many journalists would be under the *illusion* that they are free – from the *market* in which they are embedded – in the *same* sense that many artists, writers or academics think themselves as being.

The fundamentally *financial* market constraints that journalists face are, I think, much more explicit than the more subtle, and difficult to quantify, constraints which artists or philosophers encounter in their day-to-day activities. To digress slightly, I also think that the anti-capital of being unfashionable, or out of favour, with the masses or majority, is much more likely to act as a capital in the artistic and philosophical fields. In the journalistic fields however, one is likely to be out of a job rather quickly if the circulation figures of a newspaper, or the rating figures of a current affairs show, drop off. The simple reason being that when these figures plummet, so too does advertising revenue, the lifeblood of any commercial media enterprise. As I have already noted, both Hargreaves and Hinson bristle at what almost amounts to the redundancy of Bourdieu’s extensive elaboration on market constraints. In this sense, I can’t help but agree with Hinson – to repeat a citation I have already made – when he unforgivingly asks, “what could be more obvious than to point out the medium’s slavish devotion to the almighty franc?”. One could, I suggest, almost go so far as to say that the doxic relationship that exists between the media habitus and the media field is one which



necessitates the explicitness of market constraints in this way. The doxic relationship between a specific habitus and a specific field is neatly summed up by Bourdieu when he writes that:

The doxic relation to the native world, a quasi-ontological commitment flowing from practical experience, is a relationship of belonging and owning in which a body, appropriated by history, absolutely and immediately appropriates things inhabited by the same history. (1981: 306)

With the above in mind, we can write of the journalistic habitus – that which is appropriated by history, the journalistic field – as appropriating a desire to increase circulation or rating figures from this field itself, i.e. the structured structures produce the structuring structures which in turn tend to reproduce the structured structures from which they *originally* derived. I doubt there are many journalists or television reporters who enjoy seeing capital's value – rating and circulation figures which positively correlate with advertising revenue – decrease. In this way, the doxic nature of the journalistic habitus results in the journalists, far from being unaware of the financial constraint, embracing this constraint as the capital by which they measure their success. In writing this, I do not mean to suggest that journalists are more capable of being reflexive than academics. I am merely trying to highlight that Bourdieu seems to assume from word go that journalists are unaware of the financial constraints that I think they are, by professional necessity, explicitly aware of.

Whatever the 'real' reason for Bourdieu stumbling in sight of his goal of a 'united front of cultural producers', I think it difficult to deny that the negative manner or concentration of Bourdieu's efforts had something to do with it. Every mention Bourdieu makes of television journalism in the lectures comes across as being entirely negative, and it is clear, the entire way through, that it is Bourdieu, the *eminent sociologist*, who is making them. At the risk of making an over-generalisation, this is perhaps an understanding attributable to the academic habitus (with the exception of those who would refer to themselves as cultural studies people) – a fear of identifying good, thought-provoking work in fields somehow thought to be lesser. Bourdieu was concerned to note that his situation in delivering the lectures is "absolutely unique because... I have a *control of the instruments of production* which is not at all usual" (Bourdieu, 1998a: 13, italics in original). In continually making the point that it was difficult for anything of value to be said on television, Bourdieu is continually highlighting the limitations of the field he is so concerned to overcome. Whilst this is important, highlighting limitations only gets us so far. I think a more positive task is required, that of highlighting exceptions. Yet, for Bourdieu to do so, would have resulted in him having to employ tactics similar to those he so thoroughly denounces in *On Television*. As he notes:

Journalists, on the whole, are interested in the exception (...) They show things and make people believe what they show. This power to show is also a power to mobilize. It can give a life to ideas or images. (Bourdieu, 1998a: 20-21)

This reveals a certain perversity to Bourdieu's position. For it is not only journalists, who want to make people believe in a certain point of view, but also sociologists. In writing this, I don't mean to suggest that journalists and sociologists, do, or should, aim to convince for the same reasons, or in the same ways. I am only saying that both

journalists and sociologists – and me in this very paper – have the aim to convince. I struggle to imagine that Bourdieu would ever have sat down to write a paper with the express aim of being proven wrong: with the express aim of making people (dis)believe what he wanted to show. And as I have already noted in the above, Bourdieu was explicitly concerned to *convince* all parties concerned. Bourdieu wanted to make them *believe* in the need for a collaborative effort to bring about change and, perhaps most importantly of all, he wanted to provide the parties with the tools to bring the change about (Bourdieu, 1998a: 12). With this reasoning in mind we can easily understand that both sociologists and journalists aim to convince, and hence, the superfluity of Bourdieu's concern to point this out in the particular.

At the risk of repeating myself, it was Bourdieu's clearly designated aim in *On Television* to convince the field of television journalism of the need for a concerted effort to bring about change. In wanting to do so through the documentation of the significant constraints the field was subject to, Bourdieu's critique/commentary was exclusively directed at highlighting the limitations of the field. Transgressions of these limitations or possibilities for transgression, however minor, were excluded from his commentary. In this regard, one could possibly accuse Bourdieu of a reductive reading of the field. But to move in the other direction, it could be thought that Bourdieu was not reductive enough. As Michel Foucault might have put it, life is death. For example, the strength of Bourdieu's praxeological project can be thought as being, at least in part, attributable to the elements of subjectivist and objectivist thinking that he leaves behind. In excluding exceptions – rather than concentrating on them *once* the reproductive tendency of the field had been duly noted – I think Bourdieu made a tactical error that undermined his strategic intent. It is a tactical error that resulted in Bourdieu having no room in which to propose a genuinely positive “program for concerted action” (1998a: 12), given the amount of time it took him to document the causes of reproduction. It is perhaps an error attributable to the habitus of the sociologist, being, as they are (or at least as Bourdieu is), so concerned to document *objective limitations*. In wanting to bring about a transformation of the field of television journalism, Bourdieu was, by definition, concerned with bringing about an exceptional event on some level. One way of putting my position would be to say that, rather than concentrating solely on documenting the homogeneity of a field, Bourdieu might better have begun by heterogenising the homogenous. He had to begin and highlight *certain* exceptions, and further such possibilities.

### **Fraying Edges – Lines of Flight**

Once the reproducing homogeneity of a field has been recognised and documented, the consequential task, whenever change is sought, is to begin and alter this homogeneity. Lines of flight need to be identified and acted upon. As Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 16) have written, a “minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language”. In *On Television* Bourdieu seems more concerned with documenting the major language, then making it become minor. It is in this sense that I wrote at the start of this paper of Bourdieu being the negative to Deleuze and Guattari's positive. Reproduction as the negative of becoming. It is

important to note that neither task is privileged over the other. For any becoming to be successful will require the successful identification of the trans/pre-individual dispositions that result in a given reproduction. In reading Bourdieu, I constantly find a recognition of this double need. As he (Bourdieu, 2000: 236) has written, “all effective symbolic” action is dependent “on pre-existing dispositions”, and that such a dependence “is also visible in the discourses or actions of subversion”. He continues:

The symbolic transgression of a social frontier ... is itself possible, and symbolically effective, instead of being simply rejected as a scandal which rebounds on its author, only if certain objective conditions are fulfilled. (Bourdieu, 2000: 236)

Not only does Bourdieu recognise this as being necessary for any becoming to be possible, I think he has successfully initiated such a becoming with his praxeological project. Whilst this project (see Bourdieu, 1973) is opposed to both subjectivism and objectivism, the real brilliance of the project, and in my opinion, the reason for its success, lies in the manner in which he puts elements of both projects to use. For Bourdieu to have made no use of any tools produced within the objectivist and subjectivist projects respectively would have been for Bourdieu to make his work unintelligible to what would have effectively been the entirety of the sociological field of the 1970s. But to do this, Bourdieu had to, at least to some extent, heterogenise each of the homogenous fields. Bourdieu made the major languages of objectivism and subjectivism become minor. He brought about change with the help of that which he wanted to overcome. Bourdieu's praxeological project is amazingly positive in the manner in which it overcomes the criticisms it posits with the help of that which is criticized. The documentation of the limits of both objectivism and subjectivism was but only one part – the *negative* reasoning of the need for change – of the successful change he has initiated in sociology. Bourdieu's praxeological construction provided the *positive* reasoning for moving beyond this base dichotomy. This positive reasoning made it significantly harder for those who would have willingly done so, to return to either hard-headed subjectivism or objectivism given its immense explanatory power.

I think that Bourdieu has, throughout his career, operated much like Michel de Certeau's historian in *The Writing of History* – he has acted creatively. de Certeau notes that “(h)istoriography uses death in order to articulate a law (of the present)” (1988: 101-102). The talking of the dead becomes, in a sense, a talking through the dead, a talking from the dead. The “dead of which it speaks becomes the vocabulary of a task to be undertaken” (ibid.). Bourdieu has treated both objectivism and subjectivism as the historian treats the dead. Whilst de Certeau recognises that “no thought or reading is capable of effacing the *specificity* of the place, the origin” (1988: 56) from which it originates, he also recognises that, by quoting from the documents of the past, the historical discourse turns what it quotes into “a source of reliability and a lexicon of knowledge” (1988: 95-96). Through quotations taken from, and reference made to, the two sociological schools of objectivism and subjectivism, Bourdieu removed the ‘I’ of the author, he dissimulated the place from where he was speaking (ibid.). Bourdieu has, throughout his career, spoken the language of his audience, of sociologists, “better than they do” (ibid.).

It is this type of thinking that Bourdieu failed to actualise in *On Television*, despite there being what I think to be a significant amount of death through which he could have

spoken. Rather than speaking through the field of television journalism, we might say that Bourdieu spoke at the field of television journalism. Rather than making the major discourse of television journalism become minor, Bourdieu spoke about this major discourse in the minor language of sociology. When one applies Bourdieu's own theoretical framework to the change that he himself brought about in sociology, one cannot help but notice that he spends much of his time building that which he wants to bring about, rather than merely talking about the reasons why that which he wishes to change reproduces. Bourdieu made the two major discourses of objectivism and subjectivism become minor in his praxeological project – in this way he changed sociology rather than merely talking about the need for such a change. It is this positive task that I think Bourdieu failed to accomplish in *On Television*. I think Bourdieu effectively created, or made it very easy for, the two major gripes of the journalists that I have outlined above. Namely, that Bourdieu's criticism's were so obvious that they go without saying – which is half-true – and secondly, that he offered no real direction as to what action should be taken – which is three-quarters true. When one fails to accomplish the second task – the positing of a future direction or becoming – I think it more likely that those prone to criticise (those whom Bourdieu would call 'fast readers' [1998b: 93]) will concentrate on the perceived obviousness of the criticisms made.

I think that actualising a different project need not have taken a lot longer, nor been more difficult, to complete. To exemplify how this other project might have been undertaken, let me start by highlighting the type of program Bourdieu was no doubt rebelling against – *Philosophy: A Guide to Happiness*, hosted by Alain de Botton, possibly the perfect example of a 'Trojan Horse'. This show, which Bourdieu may have been pleased to see described by television journalist Gordon Farrer as reality "TV meets Philosophy 101" (2002: 18), is not exactly breaking new ground. Even so, we can still find at least one item worth commenting on in the first episode of the series on Socrates. In this episode we find de Botton mimicking the actions of Socrates by going up to people in Athens and asking them questions like: 'What is justice?'; 'What is it to be happy?', and 'What does it mean to be self controlled?'. In doing so de Botton highlights, through the responses of the people he questions, that everyday people can be reflexive, and that reflexivity can result in intelligent nonconformity – the general theme of this specific episode. For an even better example of what we might loosely call the Socratic method, there is the Australian television show *Front Up*. This show, which ran for quite a number of years, featured the host travelling around Australia going up to people in the street and asking people to speak about their lives. The wealth of the stories, and the depth of emotion that people would reveal was quite startling. The host does, to the letter, exactly what Bourdieu accuses television moderators of not doing, and what he perversely does himself, in *On Television*. As he writes:

When you want someone who is not a professional talker of some sort to say something ... you have to help people talk. To put it in nobler terms, I'll say this is the Socratic mission in all its glory. You put yourself at the service of someone with something important to say, someone whose words you want to hear and whose thoughts interest you, and you work to help get the words out. But this isn't at all what television moderators do. (Bourdieu, 1998a: 33)

In *Front Up* then, we have what effectively amounts to a perfect enactment of the Socratic method on television. This is not the only issue of import to the cultural fields that we can find very well enacted on television. The British reality TV series *Faking It*,

wonderfully explicates the predominance of the transindividual. In one episode of the series, the producers took a classically trained musician to London and trained her in the ways of a DJ. For a month, the girl lived with two London based DJs, learning the ins and outs of what and what not to do. She was versed in the various sub-genres of dance music, taught the art of beat mixing, and had the appropriate language of the club set drummed into her. At the end of the month, she was required to play a set for, and answer the questions of, a number of the scene's luminaries. She passed with flying colours, with none of the four judges picking her as the girl who had only recently become immersed in the scene.

Both *Front Up* and *Faking It* exemplify two of the fundamental themes Bourdieu has been concerned with throughout his career. Whilst neither of the shows states the theoretical import of what they are doing, to someone who reads Bourdieu, the similarities between these shows and his work are striking. Both of these shows use their time economically, neither try and fit too much in. Bourdieu could have applied the principles one finds in both these shows to his project in *On Television*. Like the host of *Front Up*, Bourdieu could have gone out into the field and let the pressured 'hack' speak, the pressured 'hack' who, it seems fair to assume, would have been only too well aware of the 'real-world' problems of deadlines, information verification, decreasing circulation figures, decreasing ratings, etc. Like the producers of *Faking It*, Bourdieu could have co-opted the services of a number of journalists, and let them speak of the self-referencing activities of journalists, of the ways in which the field feeds off of itself, of the manner in which protocols limit serious dialogue.

The above examples make two points clear in relation to my present concerns. Firstly, it highlights that it is possible to find exceptions to the rule, to find the heterogeneous amongst the homogenous. Secondly, the above analysis suggests that Bourdieu may have been able to learn something from the field he was criticizing in going about his task. By letting and helping the 'real' speak, Bourdieu could have significantly avoided the two criticisms journalists laboured him with in their analysis of *On Television*. The first criticism made by journalists was that Bourdieu was not saying anything the journalists themselves did not already know. By letting the journalists themselves speak this gripe is circumvented. The second criticism, that Bourdieu provides no course of action, is avoided by Bourdieu highlighting the manner in which television can do that which he thinks necessary for the progress of reason. Whilst the examples may be few, they are examples none the less which can be, significantly, found within the broader field as it is. By finding positive examples from within the field, and by helping the members of the field elucidate that which they are surely aware of – the fact that they are heavily constrained by the profit motive – Bourdieu would have avoided being excluded to an irrelevant outside, he would have begun to make the major discourse become minor.

## Conclusions

### In the specific

We might say that rather than concerning himself with communicating the need for change, Bourdieu would better have served his aims by attempting to begin and construct the change. In being concerned to communicate the need for change, Bourdieu concentrated on the homogeneity of the field of television journalism. If he had concerned himself with constructing the change, Bourdieu would have been concerned with highlighting examples of the otherwise he was concerned to bring about. Bourdieu has constructed just this sort of change through his overall theoretical project. He has done so through engaging with the subjectivist and objectivist discourses he wished to move beyond. Rather than concerning himself solely with the constraints inherent to these two ways of thinking the social, he has shown us how these two differing modes of thought, when read carefully, suggest the need for and provide the building blocks for his own praxeological project. Similarly, I think Bourdieu would have been better off in engaging positively with the field of television journalism. By letting the field speak for and of itself, Bourdieu could have begun constructing the possibility of the changes he sought. By highlighting positive examples of television journalism, such as *Front Up*, and of television productions such as *Faking It*, Bourdieu could have begun to highlight that it is possible for the medium to give time and space to issues of import. By not engaging positively with the major discourse, I can't help but feel that Bourdieu enabled that which he was concerned to change to continue and reproduce.

### More generally

I have noted that Bourdieu, in his later works, became increasingly concerned with the need for a "political struggle rationally oriented toward defending and promoting the social conditions for the exercise of reason" (1998b: 139). I couldn't agree more with Bourdieu in his thinking this to be a worthy struggle in which to partake. But in agreeing with him I feel, somewhat contradictorily, that I have to disagree in that I think defence or promotion are far from enough – far to negative. The task required is the much more positive one of continually constructing the new conditions for 'the exercise of reason'. In writing of defending or promoting I fear that Bourdieu comes perilously close to the Habermasian/Kantian position he was so disdainful of. If it was a simple matter of a logical defence or promotion, reason would never be in danger. But as Bourdieu continually highlights throughout his work, reason dictates that we are not very reasonable creatures, logic dictates that in most instances our thinking is illogical. To again note what I think to be Bourdieu's immensely productive mantra, we need to 'free ourselves from the notion of freedom'. In specific regard to consciously initiated and directed social change, this means that we recognise the need for social change to be constructed. To ask for the media to become more progressive is a little like asking first world countries to be more sustainable, to be more equitable, or to move beyond the mindless rhetoric that continues to dominate much of our politics. In short, I think progress only ever arises from a positive construction, a positive becoming. It is a positive task which I think to be exemplified so well by Bourdieu's own praxeological project, a project that was only made possible by the rarest of combinations – diligence and skill.

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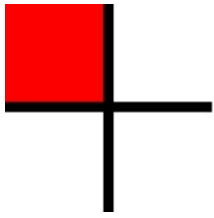
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## Strategies of Resistance

George Monbiot

### abstract

In this interview George Monbiot, political and environmental activist and author of *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*, talks with Chris Land and Steffen Böhm about his recent investigations into the Private Finance Initiative in the UK, funding in academia and the possibilities for organized resistance in a world that is increasingly run in the interests of big business. Suggesting that a grass-roots democratic movement is the only way to effectively prevent the future from being sold from under unborn feet, he offers no simple solutions to the problems currently facing the left, but points to the continued importance of resistance and considers some of the dilemmas facing those engaged in that struggle. As the circuits of capital are increasingly global in their scale and reach, so the organization of resistance also needs to operate globally. As glamorous as this may be, however, the mundane, day-to-day and local business of mobilisation cannot be neglected. Simultaneously stern and optimistic, the points that Monbiot raises are important for everyone, particularly for those concerned with questions of globalisation, the organization of resistance, and the public sector.

*ephemera*: The first time that we personally came across your work was when you spoke at Warwick University as part of a 'Globalise Resistance' seminar organised by the Socialist Worker Student Society. At the time you spoke about the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project to replace the two hospitals in Coventry, with one super-hospital, and suggested that not only would this new hospital have fewer beds than those it was replacing, but it was also going to cost millions more to build than it would have cost to repair the old hospitals. The rationale behind this seemed to be that private investors were only interested in expensive, large-scale, green-field building projects, and not in carrying out relatively minor repairs. By forcing funding to be raised through PFI, the government had effectively forced the health authorities into playing on business' terms. Have there been any developments at Coventry, and with the PFI more generally, since then?

*George Monbiot*: There are several things I would say. First of all on the specific issue of Coventry, the scheme still appears to be going ahead. The only change is that it has risen from an estimated 174 million pounds to 311 million pounds and yet it is still offering fewer beds than the two hospitals that it is replacing. It is an extraordinary thing

but this is actually very common to PFI projects: we see a huge rise in costs especially between what is called the outline business case and the full business case, and then again between the full business case and the final contract. What we are seeing in Coventry is that the taxpayer will get even worse value for money than the case outlined in *Captive State* and yet we are still seeing a severe reduction in the clinical services.

Now, on the broader question to do with developments in PFI, I have come across several things which are really disturbing since I wrote the book. The first is that I was sent some leaked documents showing that one health care consortium – a group called Octagon who have built the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital – were last year due to extract 70 million pounds from the scheme before it had taken a single patient. This was over and above all the service payments that they were due to receive and it was over and above all their anticipated income. They were due to just extract a cool 70 million pounds from the scheme. They were able to do this through a mechanism called ‘refinancing’ where you go back to your lenders and say, “We were able to build this project with much less project risk than we thought we were taking on, so can we renegotiate the loans at lower rates of interest and reap the difference all in one go?” So what that money represents is just part of the difference between the value for money which the taxpayer would have got had it been publicly financed and the value of money that we are getting as a result of the private financing. The 70 million is just part of the gap between the two. Now after I revealed that this was going to happen it seems to have blocked that plan, but what I have subsequently found is that the same sorts of deals have been happening throughout PFI projects and the tax payer has lost billions of pounds.

So that is one issue that I have come across. There is a further one which I think shows the absolute lunacy of the scheme more clearly than anything else and that is the issue of what is called ‘preferred bidder status’. What happens in the course of negotiating a contract is that before full contract negotiations begin the government will choose one consortium as the preferred bidder for a particular project. That will then be the only consortium with which it negotiates when it starts talking about the contracts. The result is that the consortium has the government over a barrel. There is no competition at all, so they can effectively demand whatever terms they want and the estimates that they give the government to start off with become completely irrelevant. They then find all sorts of ways of increasing the price of the project and there is no one else to say, “Well we can do it more cheaply”.

*ephemera*: Once they are in the process they can't really turn their back on this particular consortium?

*George Monbiot*: That is right. That is the only consortium left in the running so there is no one else to turn to.

*ephemera*: But what about the market? Surely that is what the whole idea of PFI and public-private partnership is about?

*George Monbiot*: Exactly. This is supposed to be a market mechanism but there is no competition involved so the market simply cannot work. What I have also found out is that in order to ensure that they receive money from the private sector, public bodies are

effectively rigging what is called the ‘public sector comparator,’ which is the comparison between what the private sector is offering and what it would have cost if it was done by the public sector. They do this in order to qualify for private finance because they know that private finance is all the government is going to allow them to get. This means that there isn’t any comparison with the public sector either. You have a situation where there is no competition within the private sector and then, because the public sector comparator is always set higher than what the private sector are offering, however outrageous the sums are, there is no competition with the public sector either. So, this whole market mechanism operates in the absence of competition.

*ephemera*: Perhaps that answers our next question. When we have seen discussions and debates on television and radio, or in the press, about the PFI and Public Private Partnership, the Blairite line always seems to be that the result is actually a net increase in investment in public services and yet you seem to be suggesting that with refinancing and rigged comparators, that this isn’t so. If this is the case, why do you think that this assumption is so rarely challenged?

*George Monbiot*: Because there has been a confusion between government spending and investment. There is no question that PFI represents a net increase in government spending, largely because it offers such appalling value for money. But that increase in government spending is represented as an increase in investment. What we are actually seeing is a decrease in investment in terms of providing the public services that we need. So right across the sector we see hospitals being built with fewer beds because the only way they can find the money to pay off the private consortium is to reduce the size of the hospitals being built and supply fewer doctors and nurses. The government's own consultants show that every two hundred million pounds spent on PFI in the National Health Service reduces the number of doctors and nurses by one thousand. So we are actually seeing far less investment, in terms of the delivery of services, than ever before. This is another of the profound ironies surrounding PFI. It is supposed to boost investment in public services and it is actually massively decreasing it.

*ephemera*: In a sense this connects to a question that is very close to our own institutional location. Warwick University is positioning itself at the forefront of a new kind of university – the University Of The Future if you like – by taking over 60% of its funding from non-governmental sources, or private finance. Recently on campus there has been some student resistance to this, primarily focusing on the need for a set of ethical criteria or guidelines by which the university should decide which investors are acceptable and which are not. For example, one protest was against McDonalds and ESSO funding the teaching of corporate ethics. Do you think that the strategy of developing a set of ‘ethical investor guidelines,’ or something similar, could actually make a difference? Or is it the very fact of private investment and private interest in the public sector that acts as a corrupting influence?

*George Monbiot*: I can understand why people are pushing for a more ethical pattern of investment, but I think there are also matters of principle at stake here and one of the principles is very simply that corporations will not give universities money unless they are expecting something in return. That something means a re-orientation of the subjects studied and the research conducted towards the needs of corporations rather than

towards the wider public need. That very clearly results in a reduced benefit, and in some cases actually a substantial loss, to the wider public as well as to academics themselves. So I feel that we should seek to resist corporate funding itself except as a very minor component of research funding. I don't see any great harm with a few specific projects being funded, but when we see not only the very rapid growth of direct corporate funding, but also the corporate takeover of the government bodies that hand out public research funds, then I think we have a very worrying situation indeed. What we see is the very rapid capture and co-option of academia, and in particular science, by bodies that are not aligned with the broader public interest.

*ephemera*: What do you make of the argument that you need to work with companies to get them to accept more ethical principles? For example, the Chairman of Greenpeace was fired recently because he was involved with consulting for companies that had a questionable environmental record. He took the line that working with them from the inside was an effective way to help reorganise and reorient them toward 'green' issues. Greenpeace saw things rather differently, and assumed that he had been co-opted.

*George Monbiot*: My experience suggests that the way you get companies to change is to work against them and not to work for them. What companies are extremely afraid of, and will go to great lengths to avoid, is protest, direct action, public embarrassment and exposure. What they are very happy with, and they have an infinite capacity to absorb, is dialogue and discussion and people attempting to work for positive change on the inside. In fact, what we see is a process which some people have described as "being dialogued to death," whereby the big companies that have come in for criticism have effectively managed to bring their critics into the fold, get the game back onto their home turf and set the rules according to their own prescriptions. The result is that not only are those activists effectively hamstrung, but campaigning and activism in general are too.

Now, there is nothing wrong with talking to corporations if you want to talk to them as long as you have no illusions about the utility of that process, but there is a lot wrong with taking their money whilst talking to them. One should also be aware that talking to them is not going to change anything at all. What is going to change them is public pressure and public pressure does not mean becoming their consultant with a great big salary and finding ways in which they can present themselves more effectively to the public. This isn't just Lord Melchett, it is also Jonathan Porritt, it is Sara Parkin, it is David Bellamy, it is Tom Burke, it is Des Wilson: some of the most prominent environmentalists of the past twenty years. These people have effectively become the subcontracted public relations agents for some of the most environmentally destructive companies on earth.

*ephemera*: So where does this leave the possibility for protest and resistance? In *Captive State* you suggest that we need to lobby government to be responsible to the interests of those they are supposed to represent – the voters or the citizens – rather than the concerns of business. At the same time though, your discussion of the way in which business has insinuated itself into government seems to suggest that, at least with New Labour, the nation state is no longer a source of protection from the corporate takeover.

So where would you see this leaving those who would seek to limit growing corporate power, and perhaps reverse this trend?

*George Monbiot:* Well I think we have to use a great variety of tactics and approaches if we are to have any chance of success. If we just vote for change and do nothing else then that vote is wasted. If we just take to the streets in protest then that protest is wasted. If we just write to our MP then that letter is wasted. We have got to do all of those things and many more besides if we are going to have any chance of precipitating genuine change. What we have to do is to reclaim the political process from control by corporations and by a few very powerful individuals.

Now there are several ways of approaching this. One is to engage in a tug of war to try and reclaim government. I think that is a valid activity to engage in and I feel that we desperately need a successful party on the left which is able to challenge government from the left, forcing it always to be aware that if it doesn't start moving in a progressive direction then it is going to lose votes. But at the same time we have to engage in much more active citizen politics, much more active attempts to reclaim our lives at the community level. There are some people doing this very effectively and I would point in particular to the Citizens Organising Foundation and the way in which they have been working with community groups to boost the presence of those groups, and the presence of individuals within those groups, to make them much more politically powerful.

*ephemera:* Can we just take this as a kind of spring board to bring in the subject of globalisation? So far we have talked very much about the British context – the local if you like – but many would argue that the local is always already global in some sense today. The problem is that a lot of activist organizations, for example the Unions, are still very much focused on the national level. Isn't that misguided in a way, and does a local concern have to be reconciled with some sort of global force of action?

*George Monbiot:* I think it is absolutely critical that we start to engage on every level. If we just engage on a local level we will be fighting the PFI hospital and not notice that the general agreement on trade and services is coming up behind us, threatening to make all such fights completely irrelevant. On the other hand if we just fight at the global level we can spend an awfully long time fighting the broad initiatives whilst the ground is being taken from our feet at home. We have somehow to engage on all of these levels: at the regional level as well as within the European Union. It is important to start engaging with policy making on all levels and to make our views felt.

Of course this is a huge task not least because there aren't that many people who are one hundred per cent dedicated to the task. There are a lot of people who will go to a protest every six months, register their discontent and then they go home again and don't do anything else. It is fine to register your discontent, that is definitely part of the process, but by itself it doesn't change anything. What we need to see is a hard grind of day-to-day activism, mobilisation and movement building which can actually start to exert some effect on all of these levels. Now, none of that is going to be easy and in fact my current challenge, in my next book, is to address how we can start to engage at the global level and reclaim governance from its crisis of legitimacy.

*ephemera*: Does that tie in with the idea of the World Parliament which you discussed in a recent interview by Caspar Henderson of openDemocracy ([www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)), and do you think that the World Social Forum that was recently staged in Brazil might work towards that end?

*George Monbiot*: Yes, the World Parliament is definitely one of the thought-experiments which, along with several other people, I have been looking at. The idea would be that it could begin to emerge from some body such as the Social Forum which slowly becomes, first of all a sort of representative of populations and communities, but eventually perhaps would become a directly elected body. That would have a moral power which no other body at the global level has, so that is one possible approach.

*ephemera*: Who would actually elect these people?

*George Monbiot*: Well, the people of the world would elect these people. I mean one model, perhaps a crude one, is to say that you divide the world into six hundred constituencies each of ten million people.

*ephemera*: But where does that leave the subject of protest? For example, there was a recent protest in Barcelona against EU and the EU summit, and you seem to be suggesting that people go there but that in the end they don't really change anything. Don't you think that there needs to be a kind of space for protest on that level as well?

*George Monbiot*: Oh yes! I am not saying don't protest. I am saying don't only protest. If you think that just going to protest is going to change the world then you are wrong. If you see that as well as protesting you have got to engage in the much less glamorous and much more difficult business of day-to-day mobilisation and activism, building community movements and all the rest of it, then that is a move towards the sort of political change which will work in the long-run. It is not a question of either or. It is a question of both.

*ephemera*: I am reminded of an article that you wrote in *The Guardian* responding to the May Day protests, in 2000 I think, in which you were basically denouncing the violence of the protest, and yet in the Troublemaker's Charter at the end of *Captive State*, and in the discussion that we have just had, you recognise that change won't come about without some kind of a struggle.

*George Monbiot*: Yes, absolutely. There has got to be a struggle and struggle is the prerequisite of change. There can be no change without struggle. But that struggle has got to be very cleverly plotted out and thought about very hard. We have got to use the best tactics and the best strategy and simply throwing rocks at the cops is not going to change anything.

*ephemera*: In the light of things like the recent Barcelona protest though, it seems that even the most peaceful protest can actually bring quite a violent retaliation from the police who are 'defending' the state's interest. It seems that those in power are all too prepared to respond violently to a peaceful protest, or even simply dismiss what would otherwise be a peaceful protest so that it doesn't get the media attention it needs to be taken seriously?

*George Monbiot:* Well yes, and these are all very good reasons for not engaging in violence ourselves. As soon as that starts you move the action into the court of the government, and governments are supremely good at violence. They understand violence better than anyone else. They can cope with violence better than anyone else. They are far more violent than anyone else, and if we try to engage governments on that turf we are doomed. We are finished. There is absolutely no way that we can match the organised violence of government with disorganised protest and we are lost if we think we can go down that route. Secondly, it is much easier to dismiss a protest, however many people are involved, as a meaningless rabble of people if there is violence that the TV cameras can film, that the newspapers can report and that discredits the movement. But even more important than discrediting the movement, it distracts attention from the aims of the movement. All you see is the means and you don't see the ends anymore. That does a great disservice to the movement.

*ephemera:* But what you have at the moment is that non-violent protest seems to be almost entirely ignored by the British media. So what you end up with is half a million people going onto the streets but then there is no mainstream media coverage at all. Don't you think that some kind of media coverage is central bringing certain social questions more centrally into the public consciousness?

*George Monbiot:* The question you have to ask though, in the context of a corrupt, corporate media dominated by people like Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black, is whether no media coverage is better or worse than coverage of people fighting with the police? If that is the choice that you are faced with, I think actually no media coverage is best. This illustrates the point that we have to start to reclaim the media as well as reclaiming all other aspects of our lives.

*ephemera:* So how do you see your own role, as somebody working within the media and also then raising these questions concerning the political and economic constitution of the media and the state?

*George Monbiot:* Well, it is always going to be a very difficult balance and I find that now there are fewer and fewer outlets for the sort of issues that I want to cover. Things are changing quite rapidly now and especially since September 11<sup>th</sup>. There is much less willingness to have a broad range of discussion and to go over many of the issues which are most important to people around the world.

*ephemera:* Do you have practical examples of that? Have you experienced that censorship yourself, for example in your writing for *The Guardian*?

*George Monbiot:* Oh, there is huge pressure within *The Guardian* at the moment. I mean I am very lucky as the comment editor is very supportive. He is a very radical person himself, but ... I shouldn't name names. Put it this way: there is a strong fraction within *The Guardian* which for some time has been trying to get rid of me. So far I have resisted that and I am still there but one day they might succeed. It is just that in general the media is becoming a far more hostile environment for radical or progressive thought.

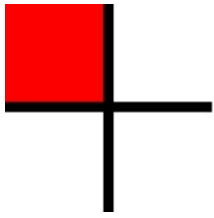
*ephemera*: Do you think that the more radical media networks, like Indymedia for example, can present a real alternative to the mainstream corporate media?

*George Monbiot*: I think that what we are seeing is generally a great proliferation of media sources. I mean one example of this of course is digital TV but another example is the Internet and the media which people turn to will fragment. I think we can make good use of that and we can start to find gaps in the armoury which weren't there before. Initiatives like Indymedia, and indeed many other outlets such as Schnews and Squall and Red Pepper magazine and scores and scores of very good internet magazines: Znet for example, One World, McLibel, Corporatewatch. There are many, many examples of very good alternative media outlets. There is a good chance that they could begin to grow in influence and increase our catchment.

**the author**

George Monbiot is the author of *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*. His other books include *Poisoned Arrows*, *Amazon Watershed* and *No Man's Land*. He writes a column for *The Guardian* and has been involved in protests against road building, mahogany imports and genetic engineering. He helped to found the land rights campaign The Land is Ours. He is an Honorary Professor at the Department of Politics at Keele University and a Visiting Professor at the Department of Environmental Science at the University of East London. In 1995 Nelson Mandela presented him with a United Nations Global 500 Award for outstanding environmental achievement. He has also won the Lloyds National Screenwriting Prize for his screenplay *The Norwegian* and a Sony Award for radio production. He has been named by the Evening Standard as one of the 25 most influential people in Britain, and by the *Independent on Sunday* as one of the 40 international prophets of the 21st Century.





## Educating Andersen

Tony Tinker

The Enron-Andersen debacle is degenerating into an exercise in finger-pointing and scape-goating. The lynching of Andersen may provide instant gratification for legislators, who can declare a quick victory and then vacate the field of combat, however, they may come to rue the day of their sound-bite policy-fixes. Does anyone serious believe that disemboweling Andersen, and forcing the remaining 'Fat 4' to disgorge their consulting services, will remedy the problem?

Less than a year ago, Andersen was, by common consent, 'The Marines' of the accounting profession. They were the best of the bunch. Their bad luck was to be caught standing when the game of musical chairs at Enron stopped. But for the grace of God, any other Big 5 firm could now be standing in the dock. Ironically, today, partners at the Fat 4 are dancing in the streets at the prospect of picking-clean Andersen's client carcass.

Beyond the Fat 4, there are a raft of conflicts of interest that make Enron-Andersen sequels inevitable, ranging from Congressional and Bush Administration campaign finance support, Investment banking versus client advisory, legal services, a compromised SEC and other oversight agencies, dilatory press scrutiny, and last but not least the complicity by academics and teachers, whose acquiescence ranges from benign neglect to deep complicity.

Academics are also on the front-line of public concern regarding conflicts of interest. They staffed the Enron boardroom and Audit Committee. Big 5-funded chaired professors dominate the American Accounting Association (AAA), the premier association in the U.S. for professors, educators and researchers. Many colleges are now heavily bankrolled by the 'Big 5-and-friends' to such an extent that there is a prima facie question about the independence of accounting research and teaching. The AAA's membership has plummeted from 13,000, to around 8,000 over a decade when accounting has been booming. The flight of small practitioner members is explained by their antipathy towards the takeover by the Big 5. The Big 5 now match member dues, dollar for dollar, in terms of their financial contributions. The AAA now distinguishes itself, as a prestigious academic institution, by the questions it fails to ask about education, training, recruitment, and placement practices at the Big 5.

Enron, Global Crossings, and Waste Management Inc. are simply the most recent fiascos in a long series of audit failures over the years. If we knew the profiles of the audit teams in terms of length of experience and educational background, educators and colleges could begin to take remedial action. The AAA, and the accounting research community, have never investigated the composition and background of audit teams who worked on debacles like ESM, ZZZ Best, Lincoln Savings & Loans, Wedtech, or Regina. Indeed, the Big 5's penchant for settling out of court, and agreeing to SEC for 'cease and desist orders', often results in vital information, about the anatomy of audit failures, being sealed and removed from the public realm.

How many audit failures were staffed by auditors were 'Audit Lite': graduates from a celebrity MBA program, with a mere 6 credit hours of accounting under their belts; compared with a 'Real-Audit' training of 50 credit hours from an accredited institution? Sending an MBA audit-lite to do battle with Enron-type management is like sending Long Island High up against the New York Yankees. If these 'audit-liters' were destined for the lucrative pastures of management advisory employment (the audit serving as a fast-food induction to business) it is conceivable that they never actually acquired a CPA audit license (and never intended to do so). The Big 5's hiring, placement, and promotion practices are vital concerns for accounting educators and researchers. The AAA's acquiescence on these matters is only likely to perpetuate the blight on financial markets that is attributable to the dubious quality of (audited) financial information.

At the 2003 AGM of the AAA, a motion will be put before the members, asking that the institution to adopt a more progressive stance in three respects: The AAA should publish annually, all support (financial and otherwise) received by AAA, its officers, editors, and editorial board members, from any accounting firm or corporation, in excess of \$5000. The AAA should request that each Big 5 firm publish annually, details of new hires, in terms of schools, years of accounting education, and their entry positions (departmental destinations) within the firm. In the event of an audit failure, the AAA should request an audit firm to make available to researchers, on request, the educational background of members of the audit team involved.

But beside these urgent necessities, we can learn something from the Enron affair that goes beyond the pleasantries currently presented in the media. Enron says something about contemporary capitalism and its ideology, and about the accounting profession and its practices. Enron is not an isolated case of accounting or auditing malpractice. On the contrary, it discloses the lie of normal accounting practice today.

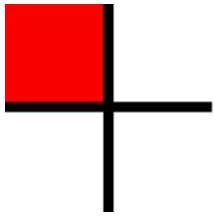
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## A Political Answer to Questions of Struggle

Alessia Contu

**review of:**

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Verso. (PB: pp. 240, £13, ISBN 1859843301)

### Introduction

*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (HSS) was first published in 1985. A new edition was published in 2001 with a preface by the two authors, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Last year Verso, their publisher, organised a seminar for the presentation of the new edition. The two authors with, amongst others Renata Salecl, Nancy Fraser, Robin Blackburn, Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey, convened at the Tate Modern in London to discuss the impact and the significance of the book, sixteen years after its first publication. I participated in the seminar with two colleagues. We enjoyed very much such a live performance. It was indeed a ‘tasteful’ seminar. As a type of commercial, divulgatory activity, it was critical enough, passionate enough, academic enough. More than anything it was ‘red’ enough, reflecting the colour of the lecture theatre where the seminar was held. No blood shedding, no revolution, inside or outside the room, but an awareness that here there was something spelling out why we can still take action or, as Mouffe put it, why we can still stand up and ask ‘awkward’ questions. She meant by this the questions that cannot be answered within the dominant system, i.e. what is assumed as transparent, necessary status quo. Mouffe in particular forcefully elaborated this ‘questioning’ for displacing the ‘there is no alternative’ dogma. The example she discussed was globalisation. This provided an interesting illustration of a reality established by *necessary* market forces, corporate enjoyment, flexibility and general progress for all. She reminded us of the need to propose alternatives that can be built by displacing the terms of the ineluctable historical and economic necessity that seems to be at the ‘basis’ of the reality of globalisation.

While it is not the scope of this piece to enter into the details of the discussion at the Tate, I am just proposing a few hints that I think are important to understand their position in political theory and practice. Laclau and Mouffe offer a political answer to

the crisis of dominant, rationalistic narrative of the social, and try to propose a fresh view to the reality of political struggle and social change.

Their thinking, first jointly shaped in HSS in 1985, has been re-cast, in the introduction to the second edition, in the light of their subsequent more or less separate work (see Mouffe, 1996a, 1996b, 2000; Laclau, 1990, 1996; Laclau in Butler et al., 2000). So one finds specifications on social antagonism or the importance of the Master signifier or the retroactive role of decisions, etc. The most important aspect of the new preface to the new edition is their critique of those who wanted to reduce their work to that of 'identity politics'. In their usual hyperbolic way Laclau and Mouffe answer such reductions by rejecting the dichotomy 'redistribution' vs. 'recognition'. Unsurprisingly, they refute the notion of politics as either being a matter of political economy (with its essentialist notion of class-struggle) or a matter of struggles for the recognition of (particular) subjectivities, the so called 'identity politics' (Žižek, 1999: 3). This is one of their fundamental points – Laclau and Mouffe offer their theory of hegemony 'against' the simple dichotomy of either/or (see also Fraser, 1997).

The theory of hegemony is the 'centrepiece' of their original contribution, as a way out, or better in Lacanian terms, a way to 'live with' the deadlock engendered within and discursively expressed in, the opposition between Modernism/Postmodernism, structure/agency, Rationalism/Post-rationalism, global emancipation/micro (local) emancipation. And if it is (not) a matter of either/or one can consider that there is more than a chance to make a difference in the light of something that, as we shall see, they call radical and plural democracy.

To put it in other terms, Laclau and Mouffe attempt to demonstrate that once everything became discourse does not 'necessarily' imply any of the three reactions:

1. Retrieval from political activism and analysis and exercise of 'purist ironism';
2. Reduction of engagement to local, particularistic struggles; or
3. Re-placement of new foundation in the same transcendental guise that the (Derridean) Event displaced.

Rather, by addressing the ontological dimension of discourse they propose an understanding of politics as an hegemonic terrain in which the irreducible openness of the social is stabilised in articulations around Master-signifiers, which retroactively establish the meaning of the hegemonic formation itself, by *questioning* subjects in(to) an intelligible order (HSS, 2001: vii-xix). There are two points to be added to this condensed version of the new preface to their work. The first is the contingent character of the hegemonic articulation. Its necessity is established by means of the articulation itself, i.e. there is no transcendental order that guarantees that articulation. In particular, a hegemonic formation is achieved in the dialectic between logic of difference and logic of equivalence by which a (particular) subject occupies the (empty) space of the 'universal'. The second aspect to be considered is the condition of any hegemonic articulation, what we have described as the openness of the social. This is the inherently antagonistic character of the social which is the (impossible) discursive realisation of an irreducible negativity, a kernel that cannot be symbolised or better that 'presents' us with the limit of any symbolisation, i.e. a leftover to any order, codification,

structuration, legislation – what we understand as ‘objective’ social reality. Antagonism is in other words the condition *sine qua non* of hegemonic politics.

As is indicated in the title the point of the book is to rethink the *strategy* of the politics of the Left. In particular HSS answers “the necessity of redefining the *project* of the Left in terms of a ‘radicalisation’ of democracy” (ibid: xv). “Radical and plural democracy”, they continue, “was conceived as a new stage in the deepening of the ‘democratic revolution’, as the extension of the democratic struggles for equality and liberty to a wide range of social relations”. This means that the Left should re-think its role, constructed following Marxism, around the interest of the privileged agent of social change (the working class), and work with(in) an hegemonic logic that would entail the creation of a chain of equivalences among democratic struggles against different forms of subordination (at work, as between sexes for example), in order to build a new hegemony. Such hegemony could not only counter and weaken, in defensive terms, the current liberal-capitalist complacency (Eagleton, 1995: 37) but actually displace it by showing how it is sedimented in relations of power. This is another way of pointing out why ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’ are not mutually exclusive. As they argue, such a move goes hand in hand with the creation of a new imaginary of what it means to live together in relations with others.

This is the theoretical/political apparatus that enables Laclau and Mouffe to re-inscribe ‘politics’ and struggle for emancipatory practices into the agenda. This is done by taking on board the anti-essentialist stance of post-structuralist critique. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is a political and social theory of clear post-structuralist inspirations that works for a political strategy. In other words, it is partisan and committed to a project of the Left, which in its institutional outlets is lost in a deep crisis or have embraced spurious and highly dangerous pragmatist views.

By rehearsing their arguments one can, on one hand, offer a reading of their ideas and on the other hand, indicate connections with debates in Organisation Theory. This is what I will do in the next few pages. In particular I refer to various criticisms of Laclau and Mouffe as a way of discussing the main points of their theory of hegemony and their notion of radical democratic politics. In the first part I touch upon the ‘curse of intellectual malady’ put on Laclau and Mouffe by (certain) ‘traditionalist’ reactions to their deconstructive endeavour (Geras, 1990). This is to discuss their work of the Marxist tradition and the significance of hegemony. Then I illustrate their notion of hegemony as a radicalisation of Gramscian thinking and the valence of deconstruction. This is to open up their view of politics and its relation to the democratic imaginary. In this process I consider the critique attached to the fear of relinquishing the ‘vision’ of ‘just society’ (Eagleton, 1996: ix) that is supposedly attached to anti-foundational knowledge. I also discuss their politics particularly in the light of criticism that sees their work as a continuation of the project of liberal capitalism while altering some of its traditional assumptions about the subject (Bertram, 1995: 85). In this process I refer mainly to HSS but also to other readings of their production.

## Whose Marxism?

The main point of various criticisms, sometimes so fierce that they verge on becoming a personal attack (see Geras, 1990; Veltmeyer, 2000; and Hunter, 1988), are around their rejection of what Barrett, calls the “axioms of Marxism: particularly with regard to the relationships between class, ideology, and political discourse” (1991: 80). Using Laclau and Mouffe’s own metaphor, one can say that in 1985 this is realised by embarking on a journey that, by engaging with the concept of hegemony, ‘ends’, making explicit the emergency of a contingent logic of the political (HSS: 2) which displaces the teleological aspects of Marxism.

HSS traces “the genealogy of the concept of hegemony” (p. 7) ending up being a deconstruction of Marxist tradition. Via a dense analysis of the exponents of the Second and Third International, they recuperate, to use Derridean terminology, the structurality of this structure (Derrida, 1978: 280), demonstrating how Marxism was produced as a necessary and universal knowledge, as the science of ineluctable laws. On the one hand, this guaranteed the necessary character of the development of the social in the sense of a forthcoming class unity and the advent of a transparent power-free society. On the other, its adoption could ‘certify’ the reading of the social in the same direction. This means that all signs of variance from the expected ‘model’ of the social and inexplicable relations were read as contingent (but complementary) moments in the transition to what was the necessary unfolding of History (HSS: 19-22). This episteme, in most authors, had its centre in a deterministic, naturalist conception of the economy and/or in the ontological primacy of the working class as the privileged agent of struggle.

## Hegemony: What's in a Name?

To clarify what has been defined as a caricatured and impoverished account of Marxism (Geras, 1990: 72), it might be useful to point out that their deconstructive endeavour centres on the history of Marxism as answer to its own crisis – the ‘why’ and ‘how’ the unity of the working class was proving problematic, making rather difficult the advent of the revolution against Capital in Western Europe; and why and how the revolution happened as it did in Russia. It is in this history that ‘hegemony’ emerged as the name for the *contingent*. Hegemony is the opposite of the ‘expected’, necessary unfolding of History. It was unnamed and negative in Western Europe. The fragmentation and disunity of the working class was signalled there as a mere transience, a *contingent* moment to be overcome via all sort of mediations and semi-autonomous mechanisms. It was positive and named in Russia; where ‘hegemony’ became the name of the new relation at the basis of what was then called the combined and uneven development of capitalism. Hegemony, however, was understood as a *complementary* moment that enabled the explanation of special, extraordinary empirical circumstances ‘external’ to the real nature of class relations (HSS: 49-54). Hegemony became, in other words, the condition of possibility (and at the same time, hidden impossibility) of Marxist readings of social reality as *historical necessity*. Hegemony is the supplement for contingency that, in Laclau and Mouffe’s reading, is not secluded to a moment of negativity of historical dialectic, a mere transition to a higher order of society, but an always already

present impurity of the contradictory coherence of Marxism as a discourse of the structuration of the social. This is their ticket for a theorisation of contingency, where the primacy of the political is proposed and theorised.

What has made possible the history of Marxism is the inherent duality and ambiguity in Marx's text between "the economic determinism and the ethical orientation of socialism, between economism and the primacy of politics, even between the scientific and ideological component of the theory" (Laclau, 1996: 67). In other words, the history of Marxism as a continuous attempt to clarify and escape, by means of introducing concepts such as 'mediation' and 'relative autonomy', the charges of class reductionism and epiphenomenalism (see Torfig, 1999). As Laclau and Mouffe argue, Marxists of the Second and Third International maintained intact a necessary view of history as rational totality. Specifically, they argue that Kautsky kept a strict materialist view based on the determinist relation of base/superstructure. Bernstein broke with this determinism and gave rise to a conception of widened autonomy of the political. This autonomy was conceived as contingent space for the working class that was, however, re-cast within a evolutionary conception of progress; Sorel with his Bergsonian and Nietzschean inspiration, totally left behind a conception of the necessary development of history based on the laws of economy or a *telos* of progress. He considered the social as *mélange* where relations were not following a determinate path, but where the 'will' of the agent was the most significant engine of change. The conception of struggle was moved in the political, contingent terrain. Nonetheless, Laclau and Mouffe argue, this had a unified character in so far as there was *one* myth of the social, the general strike, that could work as a horizon of identification of the working class.

It should, however, be clear that Laclau and Mouffe's work is not to seize Marxism or its tradition as the object of *their* antagonism because they see it as an obstacle to an unspecified 'socialist pluralism' that they supposedly advocate (cf. Clegg, 1989: 183). Rather their act is further reaching as is the notion of deconstruction they use. In other words, their book is not showing (their) antagonism to the Marxist tradition, as if one day they woke up after having worked strenuously within this episteme for years and were suddenly against it. But rather by deconstructing the duality, ambiguity and binding of the Marxist tradition or Marxist texts (Laclau, 1990; Laclau in Butler et al., 2000) they are making explicit, giving space, opening a surface of inscription to the antagonism of the social, i.e. a radical negativity that cannot be subsumed, relocated, absorbed in any episteme and order as such, nor in Marxism, nor in any structuration of the social. Deconstruction is not only a literary move but is an instrument for politics.

Turning back to hegemony, the name as theorised and developed by Gramsci is based on a proposition of the social and its subjects – the organic bloc and collective wills - as 'accomplished' in contingent articulations rather than as a fulfilment of something already present *in nuce*. In another words, Gramsci, for Laclau and Mouffe, breaks with dualism and a deterministic view of the social. Via a further radicalisation of his thinking, which passes through a critique of economism (HSS: 75-85), it is possible to rethink politics and 'reactivate', as they say, Marxist categories. Politics therefore becomes invested with the hegemonic logic through which social formation as 'discursive' formation are created and subjects maintained. This is for them an *existential*, i.e. regards not only the ontic, which can be studied in, for example, the



assurgency of new social movements that cannot be understood within Marxist categories, but is also a new ‘ontological paradigm’.

It is by starting this journey that dislocatory events of the historical conjuncture in which the book was originally situated, like the crisis of social-democracy (i.e. cuts and progressive disappearance of the welfare state), the rise of neo-liberalism, the crisis of communism (which proved all its depth in the immediate following years), and the assurgency of new social movements – feminism, protest movements of ethnic, national and sexual minorities, anti-institutional ecology struggles, anti-nuclear movements – could be theorised in their specificity. Laclau and Mouffe describe as ‘schizophrenic’ those moments in which an increasing heterogeneity of the social could not be subsumed in the categories offered both by the classical Left or the liberal-conservative ethos that remained wedded to traditional (e.g. family, church, etc.) values. ‘Dislocation’ was the name given to such a condition in which a ‘surplus’ arises as the ‘inexplicable’ of a conjuncture, which is expressed in all sorts of unpredictable and unmasterable effects (Laclau, 1990). This is why, unsurprisingly, they end up concentrating their effort on recasting the traditional Marxist understanding of the working class as the privileged subject of social struggle. Within a hegemonic politics there is not an ontological or privileged ‘agent’ of struggle – an agent that pre-exists the struggle itself, but it emerges in a contingent articulation which ‘names’ the subjects of struggles, their enemies and their strategies. Obviously, recasting the social as discursive formation obtained in the contingent terrain of hegemonic politics loses the certainties (even feeble and proving more difficult to maintain, like the assurgency of the working class *qua* structurally determined ‘subject’) on which many Marxists find it still possible to think of social change and emancipation. This is why Laclau and Mouffe have been disregarded as revisionist, obscurantist and their intervention boxed as a product of an intellectual malady (Geras, 1990: 64, 71).

## The Political

Anti-essentialism is the intellectual malady to which Geras refers (1990: 71). Re-reading the book today from beginning to end one can concede that ‘anti-essentialism’ appears as a heavy and tired trope. Although such a criticism was obviously not intended against the rhetorical implant of the book, it was a reaction to the profound challenge to the actual foundation and the status of Marxist and mainstream knowledge of the social. However, proposing and arguing for an understanding of reality as having no ground other than its own condition of structuration, with nothing external to itself – a transcendental – that could grant its validity, was, and still is, the most important contribution of the book. In 1985, it was also a theoretically fresh message.

It is important, however, to focus on Laclau and Mouffe’s main attempt to propose a view that takes us into a radically new theorisation of the social. Laclau and Mouffe, in 1985, construct an apparatus that theorises the contingency we have described earlier, by questioning the Hegelian totality and developing Althusser’s notion of overdetermination. The results of this operation is that the social is understood as openness that cannot ever be totally mastered and closed in a final suture (HSS: 93-

105). At that point their analysis meets with a number of contemporary currents of thought that can help them to face the consequences of having erased society as a valid object of discourse, i.e. a single underlying principle fixing – and hence constituting – the whole field of differences (HSS: 111). Laclau and Mouffe, building upon Derrida's critique of the sign, approach 'discourse' as an ontological tool pointing at the open, undecidable (yet decided) structuration of the social which never reaches a final moment of closure. Is this representable they ask? The answer is yes, and this (impossible) representation is antagonism. Antagonism is a subversion of the social as a positive, intelligible totality. It is the experience of the limits to any structuration, order, symbolisation, legislation. Antagonism shows the inherently negative, contingent feature of the social because it poses (and at the same time denies) the social as a full and positive objectivity/identity. In other words, the social always has a 'constitutive outside'. What antagonism stands for is the (im)possibility of representing an inherent lack, and the desire and anxiety of closure, which is, in other words, the (infinite) play of our condition of finitude (HSS: 122-127; Laclau, 1990; Laclau in Butler et al., 2000: 76-77). As we have pointed out earlier, Derridean as well as Lacanian moves are at work here, despite the dispute on the status (see Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000), for Laclau and Mouffe they point at the primacy of the political and its ontological valence. 'Being' does not have any metaphysical or transcendental origin or end but is constituted through this contingent (still necessary within its constitution) articulation – that is hegemony.

Laclau and Mouffe analyse the discursive construction of antagonism, highlighting how it is played in the terms of logic of equivalence and difference. This is because as Laclau (in Butler et al., 2000) puts it, this is the only raw material available: the differential structural location shaping the symbolic field (ibid: 77). The logic of equivalence is that of condensation in which the field is divided into us/them, creating the enemy against which (radically different) but equivalent subjects can struggle constituting themselves against the common enemy. The logic of difference is, instead, the emergency of identities established in their substitution with others. They call the first 'popular struggle' – colonised/coloniser, fascist/antifascist, etc. The second 'democratic struggles' such as the social movements of the Twentieth century: feminist, gay, anti-nuclear, anti-racist, etc. which are substitutions with the notion of equality of human rights. Their theory of hegemony works bringing these logics together making sense of how the social is 'criss-crossed by antagonism'. This view points at the plurality and multiplicity of relations of subordination that are, or can become, sites of antagonism and open the possibility of working for emancipatory practices.

Laclau and Mouffe are putting forward in all its implication the notion of the 'combined and uneven development' that was supposed to explain why certain classes were fulfilling a task that did not belong to themselves. In its first theorisation, as we have seen, these were considered a complementary moment that, as Laclau and Mouffe argued, in itself showed exactly the limits of the inscription, symbolisation that made it possible, i.e. Marxism. The 'task', that in onto-teleological politics is given from the outset to a 'specially chosen' subject of antagonism, in hegemonic politics, comes to the fore when the subjects emerge in the act of decision in which a (particular) subject incarnates the (universal) subject of struggle. In fact, arguably their theory of radical democracy and hegemony becomes more refined when articulated within the debate of

the particular/universal debate. The main point to be considered is that 'universality' is realised, maintaining that the object that occupies the (empty) space of the universal also always 'holds' its particular identity. To put it in the terms of the (im)possible decisions which are at the basis of hegemonic articulation, as Laclau has argued, the fact is that *this* decision is always still *a* decision (Laclau in Mouffe, 1996: 54-60).

What is important to consider is their argument of why this is not the site of another possible totalitarianism. We can do so by following their arguments that re-inscribe socialism within the imaginary of the 'democratic revolution' rather than seeing it as separate. However before discussing this aspect in more detail and linking it more directly to Eagleton's point of the need for a 'vision of just society', I would like to make a point on the notion of discourse.

### Discourse or 'Just Talk'?

Perhaps it is obvious to many that opening up a theorisation of the contingent, undecidable, incomplete character of the social does not mean extinguishing the notion of structure asserting that we, suddenly, find ourselves living in a continuous fluidity where there is 'just talk'. The elaboration of a theory of discourse, in this particular instance with its deconstructionist/Lacanian insertion, does not imply that, for example, we could simply talk emancipation out of reality (cf. Acroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). As discourse theorists (Torfig, 1999), there has been an attempt to criticise Laclau and Mouffe's theory within a linguistic reduction of the concept of discourse and to inscribe them into the realism/idealism debate (Geras, 1987). Laclau and Mouffe clarify this point from the outset – defining discourse as a structured, meaningful configuration which combines linguistic and non-linguistic acts, and rejecting the distinction between discursive and non-discursive – but clearly it did not work. So they proposed, in 1987, another answer to such criticisms, that, as we know, are also directed to many in the field of Organisation Theory who would tend to use the word 'discourse'. I here briefly rehearse them, following Torfig's distinctions (1999: 95):

1. Discourse does not deny the existence of material reality. Referring to the social as discursive does not mean to extinguish the existence of social or natural objects. For example a stone can be constructed as a projectile or as an object of aesthetic contemplation, but it is still the same physical object.
2. Discourse is not a linguistic category. Laclau and Mouffe proposed Wittgenstein's example of laying bricks and also the one of football. Let's use the latter, funnier one. 'If I kick a spherical object in the street or if I kick a ball in a football match, the physical fact is the same, but its meaning is different. The object is a football only to the extent that it establishes a system of relations with other objects, and these relations are not given by the mere referential materiality of the object but are rather constructed.
3. Discourse is about action as much as it is about meaning. Wittgenstein is used again, to include the performative as well as semantic aspect of any signification. In other words all actions have a meaning, and to produce and disseminate meaning is to act.

## Political...Conclusions

I wish to focus on what are the implications and opportunities opened up by a theory that is built upon the contingency of the social and its political nature. Laclau and Mouffe have been almost considered heretics for having rejected the ontological centrality of the working class in the struggle for emancipation, for ‘turning’ to discourse and its limit in order to understanding the social and its structuration with its real effects. In summary, for having taken to its consequences a thorough anti-essentialism into Marxism as grand narrative. But their theory, it could be argued, is interesting and worth considering, exactly because of that. In this respect it is possible to find some connections with a long-standing discussion on the same issue in Organisation Theory. What has been described in the introduction as a ‘deadlock of representation’, and its implications for radical critique, has been addressed in Organisation and Management Studies in various debates – from Organisation Theory to the specificity of Labour Process Theory. Often the debate has been played within the Modernism/Postmodernism distinction. However, there has been very limited consideration of Laclau and Mouffe’s writing. Moreover, when attention has been paid to their theory, it has been rehearsed in Foucauldian fashion (see Clegg, 1989; 2001; Willmott, 1997). It is indubitable that there are points of contact with the Foucauldian ‘tradition’, but there are also many points of disagreement – another paper would be the space for such a reflection.

What might be interesting at this point is, rather, to show more specifically how their theory contributes to such a debate. First of all, there is the question of on what ground can radical critique be accomplished when we do not have a (transcendental) ground on which this critique could be based (see Parker, 1995). The other obvious consequence of the ‘missing ground’ is that because we do not have such a ground we cannot speak of emancipation. To put it bluntly this is because emancipation is linked with the Enlightenment project which, imbued with rationalism, has shown the totalitarian seeds attached to any emancipatory project of human liberation and awareness (see Burrell, 2001). Following Laclau and Mouffe’s arguments, however, radical critique and political engagement that work for emancipatory practice are not *despite* but rather *because* of what Parker calls ‘epistemic impurity’ (and its conditions). In other words, one should not conclude that the epistemological failure of classical totalising discourses should be transformed into an ontological condition of what is going on in our social world (Laclau in Butler et al., 2000: 301). The notion of emancipation in this type of political logic is obviously different from the idea of accomplishment of a power-free, transparent society. Nonetheless emancipation works as important, if not even as a fundamental ‘horizon’ for the elaboration of critique. Let’s see the points that sustain this assertion.

The first point is that post-transcendental politics do not deny the existence of a ‘ground’. Quite the opposite, as we have seen and will seek to clarify in the next few paragraphs. For any matter we can think or speak of, there is a ‘ground’ that is always there which is limited and always subverted. To put it in other words, to assert the contingency of any objectivity (the social) should not be taken as ‘everything become contingent’ where we find ourselves living in a fluid and dispersed and fragmented reality. This would seize contingency as mere ‘absence of necessity’, and negativity as

the opposite of full positivity, which would be re-posing the same metaphysical argument it is contesting but with an opposite sign, so to speak. Rather, as Laclau puts it, “contingency is the element of impurity which deforms and hinders its full constitution” (1990: 27). So the point is not the ‘replacement’ of a totally united, positive universe with a totally fragmented, negative one. But it is to consider the limits of any positivity (objectivity) showing how any objectivity is always contaminated, constituted as it is as decision taken out of a structural undecidability, rather than internal law of becoming. The social is not impossible but is (im)possible. Deconstruction shows the (im)possibility of the constitution of the social with the experience of the undecidables. It is by going through the undecidability of the social that decisions are taken, subjects emerge and practices are established/perpetuated (Laclau in Mouffe, 1996b). Therefore deconstruction becomes a fundamental instrument for politics as the “practice of creation, reproduction and transformation of social relations” (HSS: 153).

### The ‘Horizon’ of Democratic Emancipation

What is the connection between deconstruction as critical genealogy (Derrida, 1996), the conception of hegemonic politics and the project for rethinking (the possibilities of) emancipatory practices as strategies of the Left? Laclau and Mouffe develop this connection by going back to the significance of ‘democracy’. They embrace Lefort’s view that democracy, with the French Revolution and ‘the Chart of Rights of Man’, engendered a different experience of the institution of the social. Democracy, giving primacy to the will of the ‘people’, breaks with an experience of the social as an expression of something *extra*-social, a theological political logic – i.e. guaranteed/ordered/organised by the person of the ‘Sovereign’ – the unity of Power, Law and Knowledge. Obviously the experience of the social without a ‘Sovereign’, which provides a unity with its condition of existence in a metaphysical order, always carries risks with it. On the one hand, there is emergence of totalitarianism – the attempt to re-establish the lost ‘order’ and unity by ‘forgetting’ and denying its contingency and its negativity and ‘emptiness’, which could be represented as Order (vs. Chaos). And on the other hand, the production of a chaotic flux of social elements dispersed and fragmented. Democracy is understood to occupy a precarious point or space between these extremes. Fundamental to this understanding is that it is within the ‘democratic imaginary’ as Laclau and Mouffe call it, that new antagonisms could be articulated. New social movements can in this way be understood within their own specificity as an enlargement of the ideals of liberty and equality that were first systematically produced in the French Revolution – substitutions in a differential chain. So while Laclau and Mouffe see a certain continuity between the struggles against the *ancien régime* and the strive for recognition and egalitarianism, they also point out the discontinuity of new struggles that originate within the unmasterable dislocatory effects of capitalism (commodification of wider social relations, bureaucratisation, etc.).

This has two consequences. On the one hand, the socialist struggle can be considered as part of this democratic imaginary. In particular Laclau and Mouffe argue that socialism, in its Marxist connotation, replaced the equivalential logic of ‘people vs. *ancien régime*’, with a class distinction ‘labour vs. capital’. Class functioned as a nodal point for the creation of an equivalential chain in which very diverse subjects were articulated

as subjects of the struggle against Capital. However these struggles were different in various historical junctures (from Russia, to China, to Italy before the Second World War or in the late 1960s and 1970s), while class nonetheless became an ossified truth. This entails the idea that first there is 'class' (established as it was, at the level of the economy) and then the identification of subjects with their structural position, *hence*, class struggle. Or if you prefer, first there is class, then class interest and then 'recognition' of this interest. If this did not happen, it is because something went wrong in this process, such as ideological seductions of the ruling class, hence the introduction of 'false consciousness'. Laclau and Mouffe argue that 'class', understood in such ossified guise is based on the Jacobinian myth of a revolution that would find the social anew as a transparent and power-free society. However, this is not only an impossible concept because it would deny the very basis of its constitution, i.e. power arising by the incompleteness of the social. Furthermore 'class', as in proletarian class, has lost its historical value as a nodal point exactly because of its ossification of privileged, pre-existing subjects which has made impossible for other antagonisms to articulate themselves with it. In other words, not all antagonism could be re-absorbed at a class level.

It is, however, important to avoid some drastic reactions. On one hand, what Eagleton summarises as "the intellectual dishonesty of pretending that Marxism is a living political reality or that the prospects for socialist change, for the moment, at least, are anything but exceedingly remote" (1996: ix). The same disbelief, it seems to me, is felt by others in our field. For example, commentators in the labour process debate have abandoned the idea of revolutionary struggle and find themselves incapable, within a structuralist, economist frame, to even conceptualise struggles with a universal character rather than 'simple' local demands which can be manifested as mis-behaviours (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). Or others, as Laclau's notes on Žižek reveal, are trying to recuperate 'class' as a more fundamental concept because "it takes place at the root of the capitalist system" (Laclau in Butler et al., 2000: 292). Again, *as if*, by default this would generate a possible 'identification' and hence a universal struggle. In other words, rejecting an ossified notion of class and a structuralist version of struggle (based on the assumption of an intrinsic antagonistic contradiction) does not imply an acceptance of the current status quo (neo-liberal capitalism). Rather it offers the opportunity for a new radical understanding of struggle that enables the reading of new subject positions that are coming into being proposing a varied and polymorphous anti-capitalism.

Laclau and Mouffe in fact re-cast socialism within the democratic imaginary and therefore as a dimension in the struggle for equality and liberty. They commend that the only alternative for the Left is to position itself within the horizon of what can be called radical and plural democracy. In this view capitalist relations of production are obvious sites of subordination maintained, as many studies have shown in different ways (the technologies of Human Resource Management and corporate culture, to give examples). However, relations of production are not by default sites of struggle. Antagonism can arise because of what subjects are (and can be) via all sorts of identifications that are available in the formation in which relations of production are and become intelligible. Talking of capitalism in abstract does not make sense. If we take as a target neo-liberal

capitalism then it is within an understanding of equality extended to the economic sphere that we can recuperate a notion in which capitalism is understood as exploitative.

Today there seems to be a growing number of people concerned with the distribution of wealth, self-determination of how to use land, resources, etc. These are struggles articulated against multinationals and neo liberal trade and, at the moment, they seem to have very little to do with the traditional 'working class'. Still they articulate an anti-capitalism in the name of fairness, justice and equality, challenging radically the basis of what parliamentary democracy has become – liberal democracy. They are calling, it seems to me, for a radical approach to democracy that, on one hand, Laclau and Mouffe help us to understand and theorise in its specificity. On the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe's ideas of hegemonic politics enter 'life', even if obviously they cannot ever be prescriptive about it. It would be reductive to explain these seeds of antagonism as another of those contingent moments of history. Even worse would be to develop an attitude, particularly for the Leftist that lived through the '68, of cynicism of the sort of 'have been there, done that'. In other words to reduce these struggles to the fantasies of a few thousand idealist youngsters. In Italy the movement that is going on in the streets by millions at the moment does not have a traditional class character as it is understood in Britain, still around the issues of waged labour a wider political subject might emerge that incarnates today very different demands. Probably so wide that it is not meaningful anymore, that is why some leaders have started to call for the idea of 'rights', a concept that, if associated in the mind of many with liberal views, comes to mean something very different in the strategic moves of the leader of the biggest Trade Union in Italy. The defence of the rights of few in the labour market comes to incorporate the universal notion of right for equality and freedom at work, in the public sphere of the media and in the decisions regarding the *res publica*. Gramsci has shown that the strongest ideas are not necessarily the ideas of the strongest, leaving us with the notion of collective wills, a concept that today makes more sense than in any other historic moment. The Left (whatever that might come to mean, here I am in the terrain of conjecture and vision) should have, when re-inscribed in the democratic imaginary, something to do with the articulation of such a will.

So as Laclau and Mouffe suggest, in the moment in which the 'end of ideology' has been 'accomplished', the Left should act strategically and displace the political horizon of neo-liberal politics, rather than simply accept the terms of the game and move to the centre of pragmatics politics with its cleansing of any notion of antagonism (the Third Way), or propose again a politics that, paraphrasing Barrett, clings to the hope that one morning the working class comes to its senses (1991: 61). The notion that Laclau and Mouffe wish to continue the project of liberal capitalism is totally misleading (cf. Bertram, 1985). Today's 'identity politics' should not be seen as functional to neo-liberal capitalism and looked at as mere 'distraction'. Rather, it should remind us of the many antagonistic fields that now are fragmented in particularistic demands, but that could be re-articulated by a politics of the Left working within the democratic imaginary that could re-create a new hegemony. When Laclau and Mouffe talk of the creation of a collective will it is always done within a particular understanding of the universal, as we have seen earlier. In other words what is at stake it is not the creation of a new 'solid foundation'. This is because the democratic imaginary, given that it is simply the equivalential displacement of the egalitarian imaginary to ever more

extensive social relations, as such is only a logic of elimination of relations of subordination and inequalities, therefore cannot be the 'founding' moment for the reconstitution of the social fabric. In the experience of democracy, the space of the 'Sovereign' is an empty one – a gap. However, and this is the other important aspect, this space is not suddenly cancelled out of existence but keeps functioning as the space of universality and necessity. This is where the radical theory of hegemony comes in, as equivalential chain in which different demands recognised themselves as equivalent in their fight against an enemy that in the plural democracy is transformed into an adversary (Mouffe, 1999), and in which one subject incorporates the role of the universal without nonetheless ever losing its own particularistic character. This is, in other words, the construction of the Gramscian collective will. This is, Laclau and Mouffe argue, the place for a real alternative of the Left.

Laclau and Mouffe create a surface of inscription for the strategy of the Left where deconstruction is the mode of a critical analysis for "grasping the nature of power relations and the dynamics of politics" (HSS: xix) and hegemony the logic for the establishment of social division on a meaningful basis (something that can be understood with Marx as a 'general crime' – see Laclau in Butler et al., 2000: 302) where the articulation of equivalencies (with the democratic imaginary) around Master signifiers retroactively establishes a vision of the type of organisation the social might have. This should be an answer for those, like Eagleton (1996), who worry that post-tele-ontological politics means abandoning the vision of a 'just' society, in other words assuming an anti-utopianism.

I find Laclau and Mouffe's work an extraordinary theoretical endeavour and a political auspice. Their work, so far, has been rather descriptive and highly theoretical, I do not personally consider this a pitfall, but many lament its very abstract level, and even Laclau himself has endorsed the criticism and is committed to restore the balance in his future writing. However, it seems to me that in the new preface they, more strongly than ever, pose the urgency for the Left to engage with hegemonic struggles, rather than being, as it has been so far, transformistically incorporated in the system. The challenge, given also the central stage that the far Right is taking in becoming the agent that is articulating the anxieties and insecurities of the privileged inhabitant of the 'Old World', needs to create a new articulation with democratic demands and a plural and democratic politics, which can offer a democratic rather than xenophobic point of identification. This is to be intended also to disrupt the generally unchallenged role of multinational companies that, as Laclau and Mouffe write in their new preface, with zealous impetus "attempt to impose their power over the entire planet" and call for "a vision about what could be a different way of organising social relations, one which restores the centrality of politics over the tyranny of market forces" (HSS: xix).

Obviously they are not prophets and it is obvious they cannot 'announce the messiah'. However, it seems to me clear that they are not aligning themselves with the neo-liberal agenda but, on the contrary they are amongst a few scholars who are proposing a theory of the social that can actually conceptualise a persuasive idea of struggle and social change without going back to an essential agent. In particular they recuperate the idea of emancipations which constructs, through political actions, the subjects which have to be emancipated. It is also proposing a way of why and how those who have identified



traditionally with the politics of the Left can still be actively involved in radical critique as part of the deepening of the democratic imaginary as well as counterpoising with outrage what is today proposed as the results of ‘decisions’ that did not have any alternative. We have seen much of these – from the ‘war against evil’ to the latest manufacturing company that moves to the Far East, to the managerialisation and privatisation of social services to the indifference for the collapse of forgotten states and population. This is not to be as we say in Italian *qualunquisti*, but it is to remind myself, if not others, that the situation is not OK! It is actually bad and deteriorating. Recuperating and radicalising the Gramscian notion of hegemonic politics, the radical possibilities of deconstruction, which places the project of the Left within the impossibility of the order that is nonetheless always there, is the incredibly powerful message of Laclau and Mouffe’s work. Without falling into some misplaced voluntarism one can remember that unless we start working towards this logic, working with(in) the (im)possibility of the social, there is always someone else with more certainties and appealing promises that will be instituting the ‘social’ for us all.

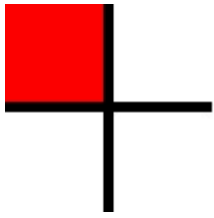
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## Empire: The Coming of the Control Society

Iain Munro

**review of:**

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (PB: pp. 496, £12.95, ISBN 0674006712)

Capital from its inception tends toward being a world power, or *really* the world power. (Hardt and Negri, *Empire*)

Every limit appears as a barrier to be overcome. (Marx, *Grundrisse*)

*What makes heroic?* – To go to meet simultaneously one's greatest sorrow and one's greatest hope. (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*)

In many respects *Empire* is a book about rebels and revolutionary heroes. These heroes are to be found scattered across the pages of history, in both fact and fiction, including St. Francis of Assisi, bishop Bartolome de Las Casas, the rebel slave Toussaint L'Ouverture, Bartleby the Scrivener, revolutionary ideologues such as Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, the film maker Charlie Chaplin, the peasant soldiers of Vietnam, the Chinese students of Tianamen Square, and the Zapatista rebels of Mexico. Each of these heroes is a step on the way to a new revolutionary force that Hardt and Negri call "the multitude". This revolutionary being will transfigure society beyond recognition, to found a truly communist global society, a counter-empire. The book ends by looking forward to the coming revolution, "a revolution which no power will control – because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence" (p. 413).

The book draws upon a staggering range of sources and disciplines including literature, history, philosophy, economics, politics, and international relations. It is a truly multidisciplinary study that takes Marx's *Capital* and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* as models. A comprehensive critique of the book will not be attempted in this review because for my own interests it will prove far more fruitful in this limited space to see the many ways in which Organization Studies and the study of Management may be enriched with reference to this brilliant work. As such, this review will provide a brief outline of the major concepts discussed throughout the book, and

then attempt to suggest how the Organization Studies and Management literature might benefit from using these concepts.

## **The Control Society**

Hardt and Negri draw on an idea loosely sketched out by Deleuze towards the end of his life, which suggests that in the Twentieth century we have moved from a disciplinary society to a more invasive society of control (Deleuze, 1995). This does not mean that disciplinary institutions have disappeared, but that their authority is no longer confined to particular institutions. Instead power is becoming integrated into every aspect of social life by way of increasingly interconnected networks. They follow Foucault and Deleuze in showing that historically the police includes everything so that now the object of policing has become life itself.

Hardt and Negri's analysis of *Empire* focuses largely on international relations and politics for many of its examples, however, it also strays into areas such as management when useful. In fact, the authors state that management thinking has a strong affinity with postmodern theory and postmodern forms of control, and quote from an edited collection on postmodern management by Boje et al. (1996) to illustrate this assertion. The quotation they use goes as follows, "The postmodern organization...has certain distinctive features – notably an emphasis on small to moderate size and complexity and adoption of flexible structures and modes of institutional cooperation to meet turbulent organizational and environmental conditions" (p. 152). The authors take pains to show that the postmodern epoch is by no means any freer than the modern epoch. They warn us that postmodern ideals such as the production of difference, hybridity and flexibility may be associated with new forms of social control. In fact, many people do not experience mobility or flexibility as 'liberatory' but as a forced flight from poverty and misery. Not all movement is liberatory, for instance, the massive migrations from the country to the metropolitan centres, the flows of legal and illegal migrant workers upon which transnational corporations depend, and the millions of dispossessed who have had to flee famine and war.

Disciplinary practices mold the behaviours of individuals, whereas networks of control modulate their interactions. Discipline operates by segregating and fixing, whereas modulation operates by integrating and organizing differences. Hardt and Negri highlight marketing as a paradigmatic postmodern process whereby "every difference is an opportunity" (p. 152). The paradigmatic form of modulation according to Deleuze (1995) concerned the control of money, specifically when the gold standard was replaced by floating exchange rates.

The authors observe that this new form of power is immanent to the means of production and the social fabric in a quite different way than in disciplinary power. Disciplinary power was still tied to transcendental notions derived from the identity of God, the monarch and the state. The authors state that "the elements of transcendence in disciplinary society decline while the immanent aspects are accentuated and generalized" (p. 331). Transcendental elements include the authority of the sovereign

state and its constitutive institutions, such as schools, barracks, the police and so on. Immanent aspects include the networks of production, the identity of those who constitute these networks and the webs of cooperation these networks presume.

There is very little on the dangers of the control society in the management literature. Indeed, there are some developments which may be seen as hugely sympathetic to the idea of the control society. Many recent fads concerning the management of 'knowledge' (information systems, knowledge management) and 'business processes' (business process re-engineering, supply chain management, enterprise resource planning) champion the idea of the increasing cybernetic integration of workers, computer systems and machines. The most bizarre affirmation of this kind of thinking that I have come across so far is to be found in a book on knowledge management which states that communication technology can encourage workers or 'crew members' to "begin constructing a common language and synchronizing their mental and physical rhythms" (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995: 231). There is some literature in Organization Studies which questions these kinds of workplace innovations, but it is grounded in an outdated theory of power (disciplinary) that was developed for the industrial workplace. *Empire* and its theory of the control society provides a theory of power specifically derived from post-industrial relations of production. If one wants to find more reflective and critical explorations of the control society it is worth looking to literature and film, particularly in the genius of William S. Burroughs, J.G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick, and films such as *Gattaca*, *Videodrome*, or *Existenz*.

## **Biopower**

Hardt and Negri draw on Foucault's concept of biopower, which he developed for the social practices of Eighteenth and Nineteenth century capitalism and updates the concept to be relevant for the new practices of post-industrial capitalism. One of the central differences in their reformulation of biopower concerns the increasing importance of what they term 'immaterial labour', and how to exercise control over bodies and minds in order to extract value from this form of labour. Immaterial labour is made of three broad areas: communicative labour in informational networks, interactive labour in symbolic analysis and problem solving, and affective labour in the provision of a service. A distinctive problem of this new mode of production is the impossibility of measuring the value of such labour (p. 401).

Affective labour fits well with the other more information-based forms of production, not only because it is immaterial but also because it produces "social networks, forms of community, biopower" (p. 293). A new level of cooperation is essential with the emergence of immaterial labour, where the production process directly concerns the production of social relations, and cooperation is at once a product of these networks and a prerequisite for their formation. It is also important to note that affective labour is clearly a corporeal activity, but its product is immaterial, such as a feeling of ease or excitement.

There is some interesting work which has attempted to adapt Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power and biopower for investigating postmodern organizations (Jermier et al, 1994; Townley, 1994; McKinley and Starkey, 1998; Ball and Wilson, 2000). The work of Hardt and Negri would be particularly useful in helping to clear up some of the conceptual confusion that has arisen in this literature, as a consequence of attempting to apply concepts developed from a largely industrial era to one where work has been increasingly informatized. There has been some movement in this direction, I am thinking specifically of the recent publication of *Body and Organization*, which despite its title, deals very well with aspects of 'immaterial labour'. The ethnographer Paul Rabinow has also taken the idea of biopower and attempted to make it relevant to the postmodern world, particularly with regard to the biotechnology industry and the work on the human genome (Rabinow, 1996a, 1996b). Rabinow describes the postmodern epoch as a 'biosocial society' where the barriers between nature and culture have entirely broken down and our very biology is becoming artificial.

## The Network and the Informatization of Production

Today, the assembly line has been surpassed by the network as the most powerful mode of production. The network is the quintessential postmodern institution, being a virtual space for both the production and the circulation of information. The network has made Empire possible, specifically in terms of the globalization of production. The network is not simply the Internet alone, but involves the entirety of connections that make up the world market as a whole. In fact, the world market, the flows of finance, money, information and commodities, is held up by Hardt and Negri as the ideal type of network. No one exists outside of the network, or as Hardt and Negri put it: "In its ideal form there is no outside to the world market: the entire globe is its domain" (p. 190).

Hardt and Negri distinguish three modes of production whether it be based on: i) agriculture and the extraction of raw materials, ii) industry and the manufacture of durable goods, and finally, iii) service provision and the manipulation of information. Economic activity is increasingly characterized by the third of these modes of production. However, it is important to note that when production moved from being largely agricultural to largely industrial, the remaining agricultural production was itself reorganized along industrial principles. Exactly the same process of reorganization is taking place today with respect to the manufacturing industry, not only is it supported by more information, it is itself being transformed into another kind of service: "all production tends toward the production of services, towards becoming informationalized" (p. 286).

There is plenty of mainstream work praising the entrepreneurial flair of networks (in its most ideological form see *The Economist*, 29 July 1989, p.82, but for a more reflective summary see Castells, 1996). There is also some more critical work on the status of the network as an organizing force (Wallemacq, 1998; Munro, 2000). Within Organization Studies and Sociology there has been some interest in the development of Actor Network Theory which explicitly takes the network and concepts like hybridity as its guiding principles (Law, 1992; Law and Hassard, 1999). There is also an insightful

literature in Sociology on cyberbodies which deals well with the role of networks and hybridity (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Haraway, 1997).

## **Empire**

Protection and oppression can be hard to tell apart. (p. 106)

The idea of the U.S. becoming a world police force is traced back to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 where the U.S. vowed to 'protect' all the Americas from interference by European nation states. This was further reinforced in the Twentieth century when President Roosevelt declared that the U.S. would become an "international police power" (p. 177). A distinctive feature of conflict within Empire is the re-emergence of the concept of the 'just war', and the idea of humanitarian intervention. In fact, conflict within Empire is increasingly described in terms of police actions where the enemies are not a distinct country or army but are described as 'criminals', 'drug lords' or 'terrorists'. They are increasingly difficult to localize and identify, creating a state of 'omni-crisis' rather than clear conflict. Given that this book was first published in the year 2000, it contains some remarkable predictions about the recent emergence of the 'war on terrorism', waged with only vague and unattainable objectives, against a diffuse enemy, and across a potentially unlimited time span.

Global capital has moved from rule by imperialist nations, to rule by an imperial Empire. The old imperialist form of sovereignty is an enclosed space, using linear controls (the road and railway network), which subsume its outside (the frontier, the colonies, the global ecology). As this it simultaneously civilizes and creates alien/savage identities. According to Hardt and Negri, the closing act of the old 'imperialist rule' was the Tet Offensive of 1968. Since then the world has been moving rapidly toward the 'imperial rule' of Empire. This form of sovereignty is an open space where there are no more frontiers, it is composed of vast networks, and it integrates all identities within its constitution.

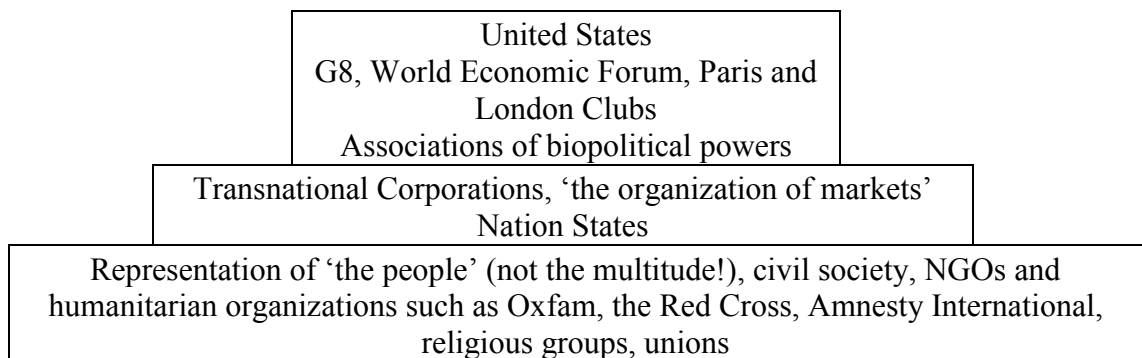
"Empire is a machine for universal integration" (p. 191). At the same time, however, the multitude is divided and turned against itself by maintaining certain cultural differences in order to ward off any unified resistance to capitalist control. The first world has now entered the third world through banks, especially by debt, and transnational corporations, and the third world has entered the first with the appearance of ghettos and shanty towns near its productive centres. In reality, there is no third world and the authors point out that the distinction was always rooted in a fallacy, that of diachronic economic development. Hardt and Negri state that "empire is characterized by the close proximity of extremely unequal populations" (p. 336). They mention cities such as Los Angeles and Sao Paulo as specific examples, but this phenomenon has become widespread towards the end of the Twentieth century. Unsurprisingly we now live in a climate of segregation and anxiety, which also calls for constant protection and intervention.

The authors state that there are three major sources of global control in Empire: the bomb, money and ether (p. 345). The threat of nuclear destruction has lead to the

gradual disappearance of wars between nations and the emergence of an “omni-crisis” and global police force. The flows of money and finance exercise huge power over the policies of both corporations and nations. As Deleuze previously stated: “A man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt” (1995: 181). And finally, control is exercised through communication networks, remotely and continuously. The importance of communication to imperial control cannot be overemphasized: “Communication is the form of capitalist production in which capital has succeeded in submitting society entirely and globally to its regime, suppressing all alternative paths” (p. 347). It is through the new communication networks that older forms of sovereign power such as the nation state are being undermined, and these same networks also provide the site of production and circulation of capital in the world market.

The authors do not proclaim the end of the nation-state, but that the nation-state is a relatively subordinate force within Empire. The authors map out the pyramidal shape of Empire where, although the U.S. is at the top, it is by no means the control centre of Empire. Empire operates in a non-place (*ou-topia*) which has no control centre, although it does have more or less dominant constituent forces. Below is a diagram outlining the constituent layers of Empire:

### The Three Tiers of Empire



By virtue of being the only remaining superpower and being the only nation with the capability to stand in as a world police force, the U.S. is situated at the pinnacle of the pyramid. This however, is not the same as being in a position of control over the rest of the pyramid. On the same tier as the U.S. are the global elite which determines the transnational agreements and monetary instruments that regulate international exchanges. The second tier contains the transnational corporations that regulate the global flows of capital, technology, and people. Nation states are situated slightly below the massive transnational corporations, but they are able to bargain with these huge corporations and still have the power to redistribute incomes and discipline their own populations. In the lowest tier of empire we find the civil society, NGOs and humanitarian organizations which form the capillary ends of the networks of power. Power, in the form of military and police intervention, is often invited into an area and



legitimated by organizations on this lowest tier. This tier is beyond politics “meeting the needs of life itself” (p. 324).

Hardt and Negri note that Empire contains within it the seeds of its own destruction, the possibility that the intense cooperation that is required in a network society will allow the means of production to be captured by the multitude. From its very beginning Empire existed in a state of crisis and decline. But the authors go further than this and state that the process of degeneration and ‘corruption’ is essential to the functioning of Empire. Following Deleuze (1995), they show that Empire works by means of corruption, in a machinic fashion as it declines and decomposes. Corruption is the process by which capitalism separates a body and mind from what it can do, thus controlling its productive powers and extracting surplus value. Corruption and decay are continuously at work in all realms of social production, for example, in the lobbying done on behalf of corporate interests, in the privatization of what was originally public (land, rivers, knowledge and ideas), and in the extraction of profit from sterile financial speculation. These all constitute acts of violence against the productive powers of the multitude no less than does the invocation of terrorism to suspend the democratic process or the deployment of a rotten police force to harass and attack protest groups.

As far as I am aware business and management texts appear to have remained happily oblivious to concerns relating to the West’s colonial past, its exploitation of vast slave and migrant populations, to say nothing of the emergence of Empire. However, the rising popularity of management courses on subjects with an international flavour such as international marketing, international business and global strategy, all of which are taught in the department to which I belong, suggest an implicit awareness amongst students and teachers that Empire is with us. As a book, *Empire* may provide a very rich background to the historical phenomenon of globalization, but also on how production is organized within today’s networks of power. Business ethics was one of the first areas in management theory to look into problems of international business beginning in the 1970s and 1980s. However, rarely do journals such as *The Journal of Business Ethics* ever express any concern for problems relating to the exploitation of the masses, or the forms of corruption that are necessary to Empire, or the difficulty in telling protection from oppression in this new global regime.

## The Multitude

Disobedience to authority is one of the most natural and healthy acts. (p. 210)

The concept of the multitude replaces that of the proletariat, or constitutes a different form of proletariat, as the revolutionary force within Empire. Unlike Marx’s mass of industrial workers, the multitude includes the entire world population. Today, everyone is subject to exploitation by capital, the unemployed are just as important in creating the conditions for the exploitation of a flexible, mobile workforce as are those who have jobs. Although the multitude contains everyone, the poor form the core of this collectivity since the poor are the elementary productive force of capitalism.

The multitude lies beyond representation, and its revolutionary potential lies not in its ability to represent itself as ‘a people’, but in its productive forces and creative capacities. Drawing analogy with St. Francis the authors accord the multitude’s god-like powers in its potential for creativity: “only the poor has the ability to renew being ‘The poor is god on earth’” (p. 157).<sup>1</sup>

There is an implicit comparison between the multitude and Nietzsche’s superman. The multitude is beyond human in at least two senses, first because it is fundamentally machinic being composed of a hybrid of machines, communications networks and people. And second because it is the creator of new values and as such can be understood in terms of what Deleuze called the ‘self overcoming man’ (Deleuze, 1983). The multitude’s continual experiments in living and producing brings about the transvaluation of values (Nietzsche, 1969). The multitude is the driving force of capital, because its forms of resistance determine the path along which capital will move to exploit labour in the future. The worker and student protests of the 1960s and 1970s led to a rise in the value of services and intellectual labour associated with a move against factory discipline and a re-evaluation of the production of culture in terms posed by the counterculture. The hero of resistance ought not to be an isolated and lonely individual but the joyous collective. Hardt and Negri refer to the stories of Coetzee’s Michael K. and Melville’s Bartleby as a warning against isolated resistance, the moral being that such a lonely struggle is effectively suicidal. They contrast such solitary creatures with “the genius of collective practice” (p. 206), which can become an experimental and joyful experience.

The concept of the multitude could prove very fruitful in helping to reform the study of Industrial Relations, and reformulate its understanding of what constitutes the proletariat today. The area of Organization Studies is notable in its almost complete disregard for the multitude, specifically when glancing at the contents of any textbook in the area – where are the poor, where is the multitude? There is a notable exception in the work of Gibson Burrell, whose book *Pandemonium* attempts to launch a ‘retro-organization theory’ and looks specifically at the areas excluded from mainstream study such as the peasantry, the dispossessed and even terrorists, all of whom may constitute the multitude. Hardt and Negri also tell us that disobedience is a perfectly natural and healthy phenomenon and what is needed is a body “completely incapable of submitting to command” (p. 216). Such bodies are described in the essays of William S. Burroughs on the subversion of control by viral mechanisms, and in the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1988) and Land (1995) which resist the organized body with a Body without Organs.

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1 St. Francis of Assisi lived in the early 13th century and abandoned a life of relative comfort for a life of extreme poverty, preaching that Christ did not even own the clothes on his back. For an excellent fictional account of his life I can recommend *God’s Pauper* by Nikos Kazanstakis.

## Immanent Revolution

According to Hardt and Negri, revolutions of the kind that Che Guevara imagined are no longer possible. One cannot cut oneself off as a nation from the world market, to do so would simply lead to the creation of a ghetto. Today, however, the revolutionary forces of society confront capital as never before, directly without the need for mediators such as the unions or the nation state. The fact that the multitude continuously creates the network of communications which is at once the means of production and the product itself is of profound revolutionary import. According to Hardt and Negri where the means of production revolve around immaterial labour, such conditions “provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism” (p. 294).

The networks of the control society are always open to the possibility of resistance, where the effectiveness of the network is to a large extent determined by the freedom of movement allowed within it. In the words of the authors: “The same design element that ensures survival, decentralization, is also what makes control of the network so difficult” (p. 299). This quirk in the design of the networks of control allows for new possibilities of radical democracy, “the circuits of productive cooperation have made labor-power as a whole capable of constituting itself in government” (p. 350).

The authors confess that one weakness of their analysis is an inability to say what the new revolutionary practice might look like. However, they also note that it is not for them to map out a new theoretical utopia but for the multitude to experiment and create new ways of living together. One important indicator they give is the crucial role of the commons in resisting the privatization of everything: “The commons is the incarnation, the production and the liberation of the multitude” (p. 303). This is particularly important when the communication networks increasingly demand cooperation and a common language.

They suggest at least three ways by means of which the multitude may achieve the new communist *ou-topia*. The first is by campaigning for a ‘social wage’, guaranteed for all. This is based on the idea that production is biopolitical to the core, where the social and the economic coincide completely, and is therefore reliant upon all members of the globe for its functioning. Secondly, they call for truly global citizenship, not simply for the capitalist elite, but for the entire multitude. This may seem like an ideological statement, but the authors explain that this is merely the recognition of an existing economic reality, since the developed nations already rely on a huge migrant workforce, much of it ‘illegal’, for their agriculture and manufacturing. Nomadism and miscegenation are “the first ethical practices of Empire” (p. 362). People must themselves gain the right that money already has – “the power to circulate”. And thirdly, knowledge and language must become part of a commons for public use, and not sealed behind the gates of private ownership: “Knowledge has to become linguistic action and philosophy has to become a real reappropriation of knowledge production. In other words, knowledge and communication have to constitute life through struggle” (p. 404).

There is some work in the Management literature which addresses the idea of liberation, but rarely if ever addresses the idea of revolution. Much of it is inspired by the work of Jürgen Habermas and his idea of ‘discourse ethics’. This could itself just be another symptom of the control society, ‘keep talking, communicating, producing, obeying’, rather than being liberatory in any respect. Unsurprisingly, to really look for the experiments in living which are being performed by the multitude today, one has to look outside of the Management literature. The multitude is coming together in protests throughout the world in their efforts to campaign for a commons, whether it concerns the environment, intellectual property rights, or the division of the world’s resources. Although Hardt and Negri do not say so themselves, there are some fascinating experiments in creating a commons on the Internet which are currently ongoing. These involve projects such as the development of open source code, the establishment of the Freeware Foundation (<http://www.fsf.org/fsf/>), the development of the GNU general public license (the remarkable invention of free property) and shareware such as Napster and Gnutella. Even more important are debates concerning the status of intellectual property in general, which have massive implications for the welfare of the multitude, for example, whether or not the human genome is to be treated as a commons for the public good, and whether or not essential pharmaceuticals are to be permitted to be produced cheaper in those poorer third world countries which desperately need such medications (Chomsky, 1999).

## Conclusions and Connections

[P]hilosophy can’t battle with the powers that be, but it fights a war without battles, a guerrilla campaign against them. (Deleuze, 1995)

This review has attempted to provide a short introduction to a few of the principle concepts developed in *Empire*: the control society, biopower, post-industrial networks of production, Empire, the multitude, and the concept of immanent revolution. It has also attempted to give a brief comment on the profound importance of these concepts for Organization Studies and the Management literature. If for no other reason this book should be read for its very rich and informative history of globalization and the rise of post-industrial forms of production.

*Empire* is not a new communist manifesto, nor did its authors intend it to be such (Hardt and Negri, 2001). It is not written in the style of a manifesto, being a rather weighty academic piece of work. One of its major strengths is that it draws on a diverse range of sources, however, it often draws on some difficult philosophical concepts where it helps if one already has a good knowledge of the two outstanding works that *Empire* takes as its models, *Capital* by Marx and *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari.

The authors are acutely sensitive of the significance of truth for the postmodern world, and wish to highlight the revolutionary potential of this concept. We cannot wash our hands of truth, and like Chomsky, we need to take control of the production of truth, a duty that should be clear to anyone, academic or otherwise, after reading this book. “The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of production” (p. 156). This is the

case not only for the production of goods and services, but the production of knowledge and truth. This is the essence of biopower.

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## the author

Universities provide excellent breeding grounds for the spread of disease, lecturers, and rumour has it, knowledge and ideas. The Iain Munro virus has recently spread from the Warwick Business School to the Department of Management, St. Andrews University, where the cold weather has mercifully halted further contamination.

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