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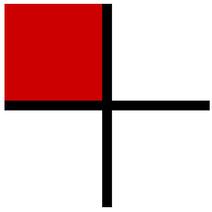
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Marginal Competencies

Sverre Spoelstra, Tony O'Shea and Ruud Kaulingfreks

In the first editorial of this journal, the founding editors expressed their hope that *ephemera* would not be concerned with what it can do *for* or *with* organization studies, but what it can do *to* organization studies (Böhm, Jones and Land, 2001: 10). Seven years down the road, it is perhaps apposite to pause a moment and ask how to understand *ephemera*'s relation to organization studies today; perhaps with some risk of reflecting our life away.¹

Some evidence suggests that *ephemera* hasn't changed the face of organization studies. For example, with currently 9 citations on Google Scholar, Gibson Burrell's '*ephemera*: Critical Dialogues on Organization' (the first article of the first issue) appears to be the most successful *ephemera* article so far – not quite in the same league as Levitt's 'Marketing Myopia' (1960) or Prahalad and Hamel's 'The Core Competence of the Corporation' (1990) who respectively score 569 and 4832 citations. Different kinds of dynamics are at work behind this kind of statistics, but few would doubt that impact upon the field of organization studies is amongst them.

Sceptics and sympathizers alike might question the idea of *ephemera* as an organization studies journal in the first place. After all, in a number of our issues (e.g. 4(3) on the multitude, 5(3) on social forums and 7(1) on immaterial and affective labour) the reader will have a hard time finding any reference that is widely accepted to be 'part of the field', e.g. articles published in *Organization*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, etc. What is more, many classic organization studies articles – including the ones by Levitt, and Prahalad and Hamel mentioned earlier – have so far never been referred to in *ephemera*. If *ephemera* has the ambition to do something to organization studies, as the founding editors hoped, have we lost the plot? Indeed, how could we possibly maintain to be a defining factor in organization studies at all?

One step back: 'To define' simultaneously means to determine (from the Latin *definire*) and to draw boundaries (*finis* = boundary). We have never attempted to determine organization studies. As the name suggests, *ephemera* is rather interested in the undetermined and the undeterminable. To a certain extent it tries to mirror this

1 These reflections are not meant to represent the editorial collective as a whole.

indeterminacy by not being bound to a fixed set of themes, established formats and traditional styles. *Ephemera* has, however, been very much concerned with drawing boundaries, or to be more precise, experimenting with, and sometimes transgressing, boundaries. Such experimentations are necessarily contested and are unlikely to be embraced by the majority of scholars – certainly not immediately and, in most cases, never.² While we are not against Levittian success, it is perhaps here that we can find one of the reasons for the lack of Google Scholar-impact.

It is profoundly disquieting that an academic field that promotes itself as multi-disciplinary, liberal and inclusive and that seeks to understand the marginal in organizations as a key theme puts at risk those whose work is viewed within the field as marginal. Anecdotally a representative of the Academy of Management once thanked a colleague for his continued research that took important risks at the very margins of the field. As he responded, those risks resulted in his remaining unpublished in the Academy of Management journals.

Here's the hypothesis that we will not test: *ephemera* is marginal in the field of organization studies because it is a marginal journal. Contrary to negative connotations of 'marginal' (often associated with low quality), operating in the margin has the huge advantage of loosening and experimenting with boundaries. After all, the centre is as far away from boundaries as one can get, despite the fact that the centre, by its very nature, attempts to keep them as close as possible. (Organizations defined by core competencies have relatively fixed borders close to their centre, which is another way of saying that core competencies determine.) Our marginalia include: the aforementioned themed issues on organizational matters outside the current definition of organization studies, media such as sound files, videos, and pictures, experimental forms of writing, and unfashionable treatments of familiar topics. The core business of *ephemera* is its very marginality.

Academia has an important and pivotal role to play in society as it may both develop and instil practice and knowledge in subjects and sanctifies what is known and knowable. At such a juncture there is massive scope for academics to commit symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990) by, for instance, a delimitation of normative behaviour. Thus management scholars are made complicit with, for instance, the establishment of 'best practice' within organizational fields. A practice that all too often is more strictly concerned with the imposition of normative behaviour acceptable and established through, but not necessarily followed by, an elite (O'Shea, 2000). For us modernity needs a counter-logic that "enables the tactical redeployment of the marginal against the normalizing practices of a disciplinary society as well as otherwise (in)corrigible academic disciplines" (Pease, 1995: vii, in Champagne, 1995).

It is our belief, and here again we concur with Champagne (1995), that our strategic value lies in our ability to question and oppose the homogeneity that we find rife in organization studies. A homogeneity that we feel results in an inability to question and to think in its desire to achieve conformity. Against the organizational studies norm, and

2 At least one of us has been told that his work lies too far beyond the place and so has no place in organization studies.

in so doing we of course help determine the norm, there is a need to look elsewhere towards other ideas, concepts, theories, disciplines. Thus to us there is as much 'value', probably more, in an original paper that discusses Sloterdijk in organization studies as in the 9765th that again demonstrates the ubiquity of benchmarking. The former helps define and develop the field through its marginality; the latter repeats the norm. Sadly, and as the statistics show (see above), the very nature of marginality often means that few attend to it.

Put in simple words then *ephemera* is marginal because it raises issues not spoken about in academia or the field of organization studies. It seeks to raise its own voice and not to repeat what's fashionable in the field. It expands the boundaries by forgetting about the centre and searching for what has been neglected or looked over. It questions the boundaries of the field by searching for that what we consider relevant.

This issue of *ephemera* is an open issue – by its very nature not a consistent whole. Yet the contributions that you are about to read have one thing in common: they all address marginal themes in organization studies. They are all about themes that are somehow related to organization studies but in experimental ways or about themes that arguably deserve more attention in organization studies. In short: this issue of *ephemera* clearly demonstrates our preoccupation with the margins of organization studies.

The first article of this issue, by Jussi Parikka, deals with virus and contagion in production. It is an article in which one doesn't find references to organization studies 'proper'. Parikka engages with amongst others Deleuze and Hardt and Negri and in the latter case puts forwards what we might consider as a more positive reading of viral life than appears in *Empire*.

In their article, Martyna Sliwa and George Cairns, propose both a greater role for novels in organization studies and advocate 'lay reading' as a means of praxis and interpretation that attempts to avoid the asymmetric power relationship of student-teacher in academia.

Niels Thyge Thygesen and Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen discuss New Public Management and systems theory. Whilst systems theory may be party to a wider audience in organization studies, it is this paper's focus on the works of Niklas Luhmann that arguably invests it with a marginality for a 'mainstream' organization studies audience. Their work interestingly questions the orthodoxy in management and organization studies concerning the "very assumption of unity" (Thygesen and Andersen, this issue) behind 'Management By Objectives' (MBO).

Pat Kane in conversation with Steve Linstead and Rob McMurray discuss amongst other things playfulness and the ethics of play in our dystopian world. A world where we are told that those of us privileged to live in the so called 1st world have increasing amounts of leisure time and capital with which to exploit it; a world however where those not as fortunate face a different reality. Kane's concern with an ethics of play critically considers our subjectivity in a subjectivising post-Fordist world and how play may avoid its totalising attempts.

Bruno Latour, interviewed by Tomas Sánchez-Criado, explains his search for a *Ding* (or thing) politics as was expressed in the exhibition 'Making things Public' in Karlsruhe in 2005. Things being originally 'assemblies' or 'cases' call for a political awareness of gathering between humans and nonhumans.

Is Stephen Dunne's review essay of Corporate Social Responsibility the exception of our editorial logic here? Without doubt, CSR has been a popular theme in virtually all journals of our field (and not often discussed in *ephemera*). Even if this is the case, however, rarely do we (here: critical scholars of organization) take the trouble of reading the likes of Kotler, as Dunne points out in his review. We couldn't agree more: Not just Sloterdijk deserves marginal readings, so do Kotler, Covey and Levitt.

The last contribution to this issue of *ephemera*, a review essay of Daniel Gross' *A Secret History of Emotion* written by Nader N. Chokr, deals with an emergent theme in organization studies: emotion. Rather than trying to understand emotions in a biological or psycho-biological significance, or in relation to cognition, the author looks at them from a rhetoric point of view, or how emotions are constructed in different times in history or for different cultural groups.

To end we might wish to voice a note of caution and issue some challenges. *Ephemera* somewhat provocatively lies on the margin of organization studies. Arguably such a position is always in danger as the boundary ebbs and flows in relation to the centre and as the centre attempts to territorialize all within its scope. Does one become absorbed, or do you attempt to live on a constantly changing terrain or indeed go beyond the margin to live in uncharted territory outside organizational studies? None of these are easy choices and none are necessarily right. What may work for some might prove to be anathema to others. It seems to us though that for the journal to remain liminal requires that our roles and positions within it must periodically, if not continually, be reviewed. The *ephemera* editorial collective must reflect the changing and diverging nature of the boundary and organizational studies fraternity. So after 7 years only one of the original editors remains 'in post'. Recently we have welcomed new friends and colleagues to the collective and now some of the 'old' collective will assume affiliated roles. We hope that the journal will continue to be marginal but to do so ultimately requires both it and us to change.

Some challenges then – what can you do to sustain us at the margins? Not simply to affirm but to question, subvert, challenge and transgress the field. What can you do, as marginal, to oppose your own subjection by our academic field and contest the legitimacy of the centre that forecloses and totalises? Let us not just theorise on organization but address the politics of our field to organize us as docile, marginalised subjects.

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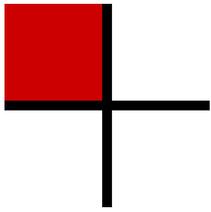
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Contagion and Repetition: On the Viral Logic of Network Culture

Jussi Parikka

abstract

The article analyzes the diagrammatic logic of the viral in network capitalism. Combining strands from post-Fordist philosophy, meme theory, and computer virus technology, the text aims to provide tentative ideas of the infectious quality of the network object in digital culture. Instead of merely analyzing the virality of subjectivity in control societies, we also need cultural analyses of the infectious object. Instead of analyzing virality in actualized terms of negativity or the automatic force of rhizomatic resistance, the article points towards a parasitic media analysis that focuses on relations – *in medias res*. This means studying the dynamics of network culture in terms of the excluded-thirds, the parasites, and offering new ideas for approaching the status of objects in the age of digital reproduction and contagion.

The commodity has become an abstraction. Once escaped from the hand of the producer and divested of its real particularity, it ceases to be a product and to be ruled over by human beings. It has acquired a ‘ghostly objectivity’ and leads a life of its own. ‘A commodity appears, at first sight, to be a trivial and easily understood thing. Our analysis shows that, in reality, it is a vexed and complicated thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.’ Cut off from the will of man, it aligns itself in a mysterious hierarchy, develops or declines exchangeability, and, in accordance with its own peculiar laws, performs as an actor on a phantom stage. [...] Things have gained autonomy, and they take on human features...¹

The age of globalization is the age of universal contagion.²

Disease and Capitalism

Since the 1970s and 1980s, contagious diseases spread as a cultural object across various media. AIDS cultivated political paranoia and the fears of the fragile body in the 1980s,³ these having more recently been perpetuated by EBOLA, SARS, Asian Bird Flu and various other vectors of contagion. The movement of disease seemed to reveal

1 Benjamin, W. (1999) *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 181 (G5, 1). Benjamin quotes Marx here.

2 Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 136.

3 Sontag, S. (2002) *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and Its Metaphors*. London: Penguin.

the paranoid interconnected vectors of globalization. Not merely a biological matter of fact, contagions became objects of cultural analysis where the aim was to contextualize, explain and interpret the spread of figures of disease.

The reanimation of disease was linked to phases of capitalism as well. Whereas plague was seen to correspond to the archaic and tuberculosis to the industrial phase of capitalism, cancer resonated with consumerist capitalism, as Susan Sontag noted:

Early capitalism assumes the necessity of regulated spending, saving, accounting, discipline – an economy that depends on the rational limitation of desire. TB is described in images that sum the negative behavior of nineteenth century *homo economicus*: consumption; wasting; squandering of vitality. Advanced capitalism requires expansion, speculation, the creation of new needs (the problem of satisfaction and dissatisfaction); buying on credit; mobility – an economy that depends on the irrational indulgence of desire. Cancer is described in images that sum up the negative behavior of twentieth century *homo economicus*: abnormal growth; repression of energy, that is, refusal to consume or spend.⁴

Contagions were not just diseases in the ordinary sense of the word but exhibited key traits of a cultural logic deterritorialized far beyond biological bodies. In a similar vein one can decipher the importance of anomalies in contemporary capitalist technological culture. One of the key figurations of such anomalies has been the virus, whether digital, biological or linguistic. It can be seen as a diagrammatic figure that expresses such key tendencies of network culture as communication, self-reproduction, transmission and de- and reterritorializing movement. The virus has imposed itself as a powerful trope, but its logic is not reducible to one of a metaphoric play of language. Instead, we can regard the viral as a specific mode of action, as a logic of contagion and repetition that can be used for questioning issues of assemblages of the object and the complex ontology of contemporary capitalist culture. This logic can be seen to apply both to distribution of ‘goods’ (such as commercial products and consumer objects) as well as ‘bads’ (such as computer viruses, terrorists or bird flu.)⁵ In addition, the viral can be seen as a mode of action inherently connected to the complex, non-linear order of network society marked by transversal infections and parasitical relationships.

Contagion as a logic connected to the mathematics of epidemics and network organization theories presents itself as a key tactic in commercial, security and technological contexts.⁶ Virulent objects are not encountered merely as objects to be

4 Sontag, S. (2002) *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and Its Metaphors*. London: Penguin, 64–65. For Thierry Bardini the virus is a postmodern form of capitalist organization, even though I would here connect the issue with post-Fordist capital in general, not making a distinction between capitalism of control societies and postmodern capitalism. Bardini does, however, note how, for example, Dawkins’ theory of memes is a product “of the same period, the second oil crisis of international capitalism in the mid 1970s.” Bardini, T. (2006) ‘Hypervirus: A Clinical Report’, *CTheory*, 02/02/2006 [<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=504>].

5 See Van Loon, J. (2002) *Risk and Technological Culture: Towards a Sociology of Virulence*. London: Routledge. The tools of social network analysis may be seen to apply to phenomena ranging from contagions to terrorists and on to organization management. See, for example, ‘Inflow – Social Network Software’ at <http://www.orgnet.com/inflow3.html> [site visited 22/01/2007].

6 See Thacker, E. (2005) ‘Living dead networks’, *Fibreculture*, 4 [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue4/issue4_thacker.html].

contained, as with common accounts of viral outbreaks such as in Michael Crichton's *Andromeda Strain* (1969) – one of the earlier virus descriptions from the 1960s.⁷

Viruses and the viral logic are cultivated in such a manner that the exponential mathematical logic of the viral is used as a powerful model of calculation and distribution. Mathematical epidemical analysis is in general based on factors such as reproduction capabilities, the proportion of susceptible carriers of disease and the possibilities these carriers can act as vectors for reproduction. Also, epidemics are seen in essence to be about mathematical series in relation to various environments, intervals, frequencies and probabilities.⁸ Mathematical patterns thus offer evolutionary models of networks and contagion that feed on themselves in a recurring fashion. Epidemics can be seen as a problem of mathematical simulation, as, for instance, in such basic visual examples as the Nrich.math.org-website where you can model various kinds of epidemics in a population grid. You can alter the length of an illness, the probabilities of death and infection and, for example, the immune responses.⁹ Epidemic analysis has traditionally been one of 'counting and observation', and it is in this sense 'natural' that the contemporary culture of digitality, based on the Turing machines of countable operations, also demonstrates an infatuation with contagious numbers as algorithms (ranging from digitally packed cultural products to network operations concerning security). In scientific uses, viruses are not objects to be expurgated but (also) valuable indices of the environment they occupy, revealing information about the population structure they inhabit. Similarly, as pathogens they can be used to get details of human migration patterns; examining viruses is seen to assist in tracking down interactions, movements and spatial distributions of wild animals, for instance.¹⁰ Viruses, then, are seen also as a kind of a memory of their environment and the ethology of their hosts. What they reveal are movements and connections.

In his *Connected, or What it Means to Live in the Network Society* Steven Shaviro maps the ontology of connectivity of the network age. For Shaviro, drawing from Deleuze and William S. Burroughs, viruses (and related concepts like memes) are paradigmatic of our network age. Selfhood is increasingly depicted as an information pattern, where the 'individual' becomes merely a host of parasitic invasion by information capitalist patterns of repetition:

I may describe this process that subtends my consciousness in several ways: as embryonic infolding, as fractal self-similarity, or as viral, cancerous proliferation. But the difference between these alternatives is just a matter of degree. The crucial point is

7 For an analysis of killer virus novels as emblematic of the bodily crisis in late capitalism, see Dougherty, S. (2001) 'The biopolitics of the killer virus novel', *Cultural Critique*, 48 (Spring 2001): 1–29.

8 See for instance Bailey, N.T.J. (1957) *The Mathematical Theory of Epidemics*. London: Charles Griffin and Company Limited.

9 Nrich.math.org-website [http://www.nrich.maths.org/public/viewer.php?obj_id=4489&part=index&refpage=monthindex.php. Site accessed 17/01/2007].

10 Biek, R., A.J. Drummond and M. Poss (2006) 'A virus reveals population structure and recent demographic history of its carnivore host', *Science*, 311(27 January): 538–541.

that the network induces mass replication on a miniaturized scale and that I myself am only an effect of this miniaturizing process.¹¹

Nonetheless, one can approach the issue from the viewpoint of the object: what is a viral ontology of the consumer object? Mass replication was deemed as the key characteristic of Fordist (cultural) industry already, and now such replicator processes are increasingly supplemented with the characteristics of contagion and the epidemic. This essay provides a tentative analysis towards such an ontology of the viral in contemporary capitalist technological culture. Whilst the body and the subject have had a fair amount of analysis in relation to post-Fordist capitalism, we also need thorough analyses of the nature of the *object* in distributed networks. The viral object is one that is found across various fields, from mathematics to biology, and on to technological platforms and conceptual analysis. My aim is to give a synthetic perspective that looks at the issue through the workings of abstract machines, or diagrammatics. Viral objects have spread from one defining context (originating in biological virology) across the whole social field. Diagrams are transversal movements across institutions, contexts, scales, and act as piloting machines for more concrete assemblages. They can be considered as displaying relations of force and mapping relations and intensities. Diagrams are not structures or frameworks or any kind of stable ‘background figures’, and in that sense they are not a priori of the concrete assemblages. Instead, they are wholly immanent to the actualizations, a peculiar mode of local phenomena stretching transversally in excess of that locality. The abstract diagrams are completely real and act as “non-unifying immanent cause[s]” within the concrete assemblages, “‘not above’, but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce.”¹²

I will here turn particularly to technological and informational bodies that exhibit contagious behaviour. This implies a focus on the material dynamics of such bodies, and a view to affects of non-human nature. In another context, I have called this approach media-ecology in order to emphasize that there are dynamic, active ecologies of various kinds that overlap and ‘parasite’ on each other.¹³ As Rosi Braidotti notes, the task of critical ecological analysis is to draw transversal links between various ecologies (psychical, social, media, etc.) in order to grasp the complexities of capitalist production of the real (with its objects, subjects, and relationships).¹⁴

11 Shaviro, S. (2003) *Connected, or What it Means to Live in the Network Society*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 13.

12 Deleuze, G. (1998) *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 37. See also Thacker, E. (2005) ‘Living dead networks’, *Fibreculture*, 4, [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue4/issue4_thacker.html].

13 See Parikka, J. (2005) ‘The universal viral machine: Bits, parasites, and the media ecology of network computing’, *Ctheory*, 15/12/2005 [<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=500>]. Guattari, F. (2000) *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. London: Athlone. Cf. Fuller, M. (2005) *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Whilst the term ‘media-ecology’ is of course used already by the so-called Toronto school of media ecology, e.g. Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman, my analysis is more akin to Matthew Fuller’s use of the term.

14 Braidotti, R. (2006) *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity, 125–127.

Mememes: Contagious Consumer Objects

In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri provide a very powerful analysis of the parasitical nature of the global capitalist Empire, which lives on the force of the multitude. In their take, the viral is seen in terms of the parasite, which is interpreted as a negative figure of leech-like quality. Their parasitical (abstract) machine can be characterized as an autopoietic machine that inverts even contradictory flows to benefit and maintain the system. The Empire is a parasite of sorts that draws from the vitality of the multitude, the active force, in a similar manner as a virus is often thought to take over the host and use its energies to produce further copies of itself:

Imperial power is the negative residue, the fallback of the operation of the multitude; it is a parasite that draws its vitality from the multitude's capacity to create ever new sources of energy and value. A parasite that saps the strength of its host, however, can endanger its own existence.¹⁵

The viral should not, however, be reduced to the negative figure of the parasite. Following Luciana Parisi, Hardt and Negri's ideas of the parasitical autopoietic machine of capital are in danger of succumbing to a mode of transcendence distinguishing the logic of Empire as a binary pair of the multitude. According to Parisi, Hardt and Negri assume distinctions of life and death, inorganic and organic in their notion of the open-ended system of parasitical capitalism. Parisi writes how

Hardt and Negri's critique of the Empire – the informatic structure of transnational capitalism – as a parasitic organism sucking and neutralizing the vital energies of the multitude – problematically recalls the Freudian thermodynamic cycle of death and life drives. Rather than engaging with molecular mutations, Negri and Hardt characterize capitalism through the negative qualities of destruction and parasitism as opposed to the striving, living qualities of the multitude. Empire misses the fluctuating coexistence of information trading and monopoly, markets and anti-markets. It reimposes the binarism between organic and inorganic, life and death, closed and open systems on multifaceted compositions.¹⁶

In this light, I want to emphasize a slightly different position to that introduced in *Empire*. Instead of seeing Empire as parasitical, negative and viral, I want to propose a more thorough look at the abstract machine of virality, or, in other terms, the diagrams of contagion that characterize not merely the anti-force of capitalism, but more generally, the key organizational models of action in a network society. The age of universal contagion, then, is not restricted to a negative notion of a vampire or a hostile virus, but rests on the notion that viral patterns of movement characterize the turbulent spaces of networks as a very primary logic.¹⁷ As Hardt and Negri themselves write in

15 Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 361. I use the terms 'parasite' and 'virus' throughout this article. I analyze viruses as the key objects of network culture, whereas the term 'parasite' is discussed in two modes: I try to move from the negative formulation offered by Hardt and Negri towards a more comprehensive look at parasitism as more a general systems characteristic as offered by, for example, Michel Serres. Parasites are no accidental feature of systems, but, rather, every system has them. Parasites are best understood as 'relations', meaning that priority should be given to analyzing systems through their parasites, their relations.

16 Parisi, L. (2004) *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Bio-Technology and the Mutations of Desire*. London: Continuum, 145.

17 Terranova, T. (2004) *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press, 67-68. Fuller refers to the abstract machine of replication "whose activity can be recognized across a range

Multitude, “the distributed network form [...] is typical of immaterial production”¹⁸, which begs the question of what kinds of forms of life does this specific mode of organization promote? In this text, the agenda is articulated first in terms of meme theory, followed up with digital objects, with concluding remarks on distributed networks and parasitism. All concrete assemblages also have distinct modes of operation, and I cannot claim to be completely comprehensive in their empirical analysis in this article. Instead, I want to point out the fruitfulness in a method of abstractification (which does not mean that the object of analysis would be any less real than a concrete object). Societies are composed also of abstract connections, and diagrammatic lines are a good example of those. I will return to this point as a method of parasitic media analysis (an analysis of relationships, starting from the middle, *in medias res*) at the end of my article.

Viruses jumped to the forefront of biological research in the 1950s. Soon, theories of cultural ideas and affects behaving like contagious actors followed. Richard Dawkins introduced his theory of the memetic nature of culture in 1976. According to Dawkins and his *The Selfish Gene*, memes were to be considered as cultural genes of a sort. Memes functioned as an explanatory aid to thinking units of cultural information, which could refer basically to anything from thoughts, affects, emotions and ideas to songs, audiovisions, texts, and phrases. Memes were seen especially as transmission units, and Dawkins’ meme theory tried to shed light on how cultural themes propagate and survive.¹⁹

According to the idea, culture is based on copying and imitation, which are governed by a process analogical to natural selection. As the term ‘survive’ implies, the theory has, since Dawkins, been underlined by a powerful neo-Darwinian emphasis on struggle and competition, which are seen as the basic forces of evolutionary differentiation. This resonates with neoliberal economics. Culture is a battle of individual units, where the least equipped drop out, and the most adaptable work through fidelity, fecundity and longevity of the replicator function.²⁰ Genes, as well as memes, work as selfish replicators. Neo-Darwinist views however dismiss cooperative behaviour and symbiosis, and produce a very negative path of memetic replication. Replication becomes too easily understood as competition of individuals for limited resources, which neglects the more subtle interactions between organisms and the environment.²¹

If we bracket Dawkins’ troubling Platonic and Neo-Darwinian undercurrent, the interesting point in meme theory is how it historically participates (although carrying

of material instantiations.” Fuller, M. (2005) *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 111.

18 Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2004) *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin, 115.

19 Dawkins, R. (1976) *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

20 Fuller, M. (2005) *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 112.

21 See also Speidel, M. (2000) ‘The parasitic host: Symbiosis *contra* Neo-Darwinism’, *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 9: 119-138 [http://www.warwick.ac.uk/philosophy/pli_journal/pdfs/speidel_pli_9.pdf].

very different political undertones) in the same discussion as recent years of post-Fordist philosophy. *The Selfish Gene* and the attempt to find explanatory tools to conceptualise cultural ideas and practices in an informational fashion resonates deeply with the turn towards post-Fordist production of affects and ideas. Interestingly, memes can be seen as objectifications of immaterial labour packaged as consumer-products – of the digital cultural industry, to be more precise. In Dawkins' example, memes can be “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches”,²² – where most of these examples given are consumer objects – or participate in the control capitalism of marketing and incorporeal transformations.²³ In addition, the politics of governing and control are removed from the evolutionary patterns of meme theories, which highlights its resonance with neo-liberal notions of self-governing and the emerging consumer sphere.

In general, consumer products work here as epidemic objects, or processes, where this is understood as having a connection to its ancient Greek roots: *epi-demos*, upon the people, as Marc Guillaume notes. Epidemics work on the social bond, and circulate via the communication channels of everyday nature:

Returning to the abstract model of *epidemia*, it becomes evident that this model can be applied to phenomena that have nothing to do with disease: the circulation of objects, money, customs, or the propagation of affects and information. Fashion, the circulation of violence and even rumours, those contagions passing from mouth to ear, are all epidemics.²⁴

Contagions, memetic processes, are at the centre of a media society of knowledge. The idea of general intellect adopted from Marx's *Grundrisse* states the idea, cultivated by Italian autonomists since the 1970s, of how knowledge becomes the principal productive force and thrust of post-industrial capitalism.²⁵ This is closely related to the idea of immaterial labour, which tries to grasp the change towards valuing affective, intellectual and other previously neglected forms of labour as key processes of knowledge society.²⁶ Hardt and Negri emphasise in *Empire* how science, communication and language are incorporated as production powers of the Empire leading to a new biopolitical or biopower agenda of capitalism.²⁷ As often noted in contemporary discussions, these ways of creating forms of life in the age of immaterial labour and post-Fordist capitalism adhere, then, to a logic of networks, which furthermore accentuates the need for analysis of what happens in such networks, and what kinds of logics of (inter)action the networks promote. In addition, one should note that these modes of life are not restricted to humans or the organic strata of the world, but increasingly address flows of non-organic life – the dynamics in matter and energy

22 Dawkins, R. (1977) *The Selfish Gene. Corrected reprint*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 206.

23 Cf. Lazzarato, M. (2004) 'From capital-labour to capital-life', *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 4(3): 187-208.

24 Guillaume, M. (1987) 'The metamorphoses of epidemia', in M. Feher and S. Kwinter (eds.) *Zone 1–2: The Contemporary City*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 60.

25 Virno, P. (2004) *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 100–101.

26 Terranova, T. (2004) *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press, 82–83.

27 Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 364–365.

of, for example, the computer mechanosphere.²⁸ The network is not a stable structure, but can be seen as an active principle of individuation, of assembling actors, which do not have to be constituted of humans but of various and varying agencies, as Bruno Latour has argued.²⁹

In any event, the term ‘network’ is in danger of remaining too elusive if not addressed more exactly. There are various kinds of networks, some more hierarchical, some more rhizomatic. Networks can be centralized, decentralized and distributed. It cannot be taken for granted that networks are democratic and politically radical. As Eugene Thacker notes, even though the contemporary body politic can be articulated in the resonating terms of networks (the technological model), swarms (the biological model) and multitude (the political model), networks are not directly translated as platforms for radical politics of the multitude.³⁰ As Thacker warns, it would be ‘ludicrous’ to suggest that there is a direct relation between, for instance, technological networks and genetic networks or between the mass-phenomena of the multitude and biological swarms. Instead of a direct causal link, Thacker points towards non-linear topological layerings where, for example, biological networks participate in transportation networks and communication networks and so forth. Not every network abides by the same rules, but still they are continuously connected and re-connected on various levels.

I will follow a narrower path here and look at how immaterial labour expresses itself in network objects of a contagious kind, a particular form of the contemporary logic of (non-organic) life as well, to use Virno’s phrasing. My focus here is on informational communication networks, and especially on how contagions and their vectors are increasingly immersed in informational calculus. This mode of networking, which will be more closely elaborated on later, does, however, continuously borrow from various other spheres, and also layers on various scales and topologies of networks. As a specific form of cultural industry, intellectual and affectual packages have achieved a certain life (a semi-autonomous mode of operation) of their own as distinct entities at

28 See DeLanda, M. (1992) ‘Nonorganic Life’, in Crary, J. and Kwinter, S. (eds.) *Incorporations*. New York: Zone Books.

29 Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

30 Thacker, E. (2004) ‘Networks, swarms, multitudes’, *CTheory*, 05/18/2004 [<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=422>]. According to Latour, the concept of network is used in its technical meaning to refer to electricity, sewage systems, the Internet, and so forth, but also as a term in the sociology of organization to refer to the different models of gathering organizations, markets and states. According to Latour, in Manuel Castells’ use of the term the meanings are unfortunately blurred when “network becomes a privileged mode of organization thanks to the very extension of information technology.” In a similar sense writers have seen the network as a key mode of contemporary capitalist production. Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 129. Felix Stalder, however, argues that Castells’ view on networks is more complex. Stalder highlights Castells’ closeness to Maturana and Varela’s autopoietic theories and complexity theories, which underline how systems are formed as a continuous process of coupling. The topology of network society promotes heterogeneous scales of space and time instead of the linear homogeneous rhythm of modern society. Stalder also argues that Latour and Castells have several affinities in their theories of networks. Stalder, F. (2006) *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 167–198.

least since Thomas A. Edison, who inaugurated the conveying of images, sounds, energy and affects into “measurable and distributable commodities.”³¹

In addition, this amounts not merely to the production but increasingly also to the effective *circulation* of such objects turned into units of information. Now, the fact that consumer production is intimately tied to the circulation of objects is nothing new. Instead, what is interesting is the emergence of what could be called ‘contagious modes of circulation’ where objects cling to and seek their consumers. Reading post-Fordist analyses of network production together with meme theory produces a key insight. Meme theory was born on the same epistemic layer as ideas of network society in the 1960s and 1970s, and shares also the implications towards non-human informational units that roam across networks in a contagious fashion. Conceptualising affective and intellectual ‘information units’ as the base monads of culture also provides an effective tool for capturing these processes as valuable units of production of value. More importantly, these units are endowed with a certain level of self-organization, an a-human level of complexity ‘ruled’ by a contagious ontology. What meme theory actually achieves is a viral theory of the consumer object and post-Fordist networks. As Maurizio Lazzarato notes, contemporary capitalism “arrives with words, signs, and images”, which precede factories and also machines of war – and more accurately these words, signs and images are contagious by nature.³² What is interesting in, for example, Dawkins’ take on culture as memetic is the key share allocated to replication; there is for Dawkins a basic ‘soup of human culture’ of ideas and immaterial brain objects that spread and evolve via imitation.

This field of memetic objects should be approached as a historically specific scientific way of capturing objects of incorporeal nature, and making them into standard objects for cultivation (which is done in the cultural industry in the form of consumer products.) Meme theory thus incorporates one key transformation of diseases or contagious processes into standard objects. It exemplifies well how, since the 1970s, contagions have not referred only to diseases and anomalies as such, but constitute a key standard object of network culture.³³ Such contagious objects as viruses and memes illustrate how metastability is not a system anomaly but something that can be considered a composite part of network culture. The power of memes is not valorized *despite* the fact that they are contagious, metastable and disease-like, but precisely because of these traits. In a similar vein to Dawkins, Susan Blackmore sees media technologies from photocopiers to the Internet (and viruses, to be more precise) as examples of meme evolution towards more efficient means of propagation, but we could more specifically and historically see this ‘evolution’ as also contributing towards more efficient consumer products that have such ideas of meme as their backbone.³⁴ Instead of seeing post-Fordist cultural objects as an evolved form of universal meme ontology, we could

31 Crary, J. (2001) *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 31.

32 Lazzarato, M. (2004) ‘From capital-labour to capital-life’, *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 4(3): 190.

33 On standard objects, see Fuller, M. (2005) *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 103-105.

34 Blackmore, S. (2000) *The Meme Machine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 204–218.

analyze how cultural products and memes share the cultural space towards contagious processes and work as part of the same abstract machine of viral networking.

Contagious processes can, then, be intimately linked to the shifts in capitalist production. Contagions and contagious objects as metastable entities are characteristic of non-linear systems and ways of action, which connect intimately with how post-Fordist society of immaterial labour or knowledge production has been characterised. Instead of imposing strictly defined homeostatic models to patch up flows deemed dangerous (like contagions), this mode of capitalism taps into the creative modulations and variations.³⁵ This is why 'the virus' is a perfect model of such systems that can be characterized as symbiotic (a difference from meme theory's neo-Darwinist undertones) and as turbulent. Yet, in a very relevant manner, Dawkins' meme theory purports to be read as a culturally and historically apposite idea of post-Fordist culture, where the shift is towards informational units of viral, evolving quality, a certain self-organizing level of consumer units of seemingly non-material nature. In other words, despite the informational nature of contagious objects of network culture, their roots can be found already in earlier modes of analysis of capitalist objects. Such an analysis resonates with Marx's notion of a phantom-like, self-sufficient consumer object, which 'leads its own life.' Aptly, such ideas from the age of the industrial machine find their target especially in contemporary forms of dynamic networks.

Viral Business Machines

Walter Benjamin analysed these ideas of Marx and connected them to his own pioneering theories of the object world of capitalist technological culture. In a way, Benjamin can be depicted as a key theorist of repetition, capitalism and technology, articulating the changing nature of the ontology of the object. Following Benjamin's writings from the 1930s, technical reproduction and the shift from human mimesis to artefacts copying artefacts show how the modern world began to be filled with technically reproducing images, sounds and texts.³⁶ Whereas 'mimicry' had remained so far a deeply human quality – even Benjamin reserved humans a special place as mimetic actors – now machines seemed to achieve a certain new level of self-reproducibility. Even if Immanuel Kant had argued during the early days of modern automata that there are no watches that make watches,³⁷ the changing episteme of

35 Parisi, L. (2004) *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Bio-Technology and the Mutations of Desire*. London: Continuum, 134. The theme of metastability comes to Parisi's work largely from Gilbert Simondon. Simondon analyzed metastable systems in terms of individuation and change. In his *Du mode d'existence des object techniques*, Simondon argued against the fashion of seeing technical objects as self-contained, and proposed to read them in terms of milieus and potential becomings. Also technical objects and systems can be metastable and open to future fluctuations. Simondon, G. (1958) *Du mode d'existence des object techniques*. Paris: Méot.

36 Benjamin, W. (1969) 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken. Cf. Benjamin, W. (2002) 'Über das mimetische Vermögen', in *Medienästhetische Schriften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 123–126.

37 Canguilhem, G. (1992) 'Machine and organism', in J. Crary and S. Kwinter (eds.) *Incorporations*. New York: Zone Books, 60.

technology (and of course, after Benjamin the Turing machines and Von Neumann architectures of computers) showed an opposite tendency. Machines do reproduce machines, and furthermore, artefacts seem to reproduce by themselves. Turing introduced in the 1930s his formal plans of the Turing machine that would continue processing data (and its own outputs) if no special halting-sequence was imposed, and Von Neumann turned in the late 1940s towards theories of self-reproducing automata. The ideas were continuously cultivated in various computer labs and research centres since the 1960s in the form of experiments with cellular automata, games of life and so forth.³⁸

Benjamin saw this new dream world in terms of surrealist images of kitsch, where the world of near autonomous objects lives by repetition and contagion.³⁹ Objects gained a life of their own, a theme that was used in various early cinematic experiments and surrealist art. While Leibniz had already imagined a machine that allows numbers themselves to do the counting, such images were re-addressed with automation and computerization. Such depictions produce a recurring theme of the twentieth century, already before computers. Manuel DeLanda sees this automation of tasks from the human to the machine as a key culmination in the birth of software, placing the focal point in Jacquard's loom and subsequently Babbage's interests in analytical machines and the transfer of control to machines.⁴⁰ Hence, in addition to surrealist art, modern work processes seemed also to incorporate a sense of uncanny automatism. In 1922, *Scientific American* prophesied how "strips of paper", that is, machines programmed with perforated punch cards would be taking control: "The time is coming when workmen will be largely supplanted by such strips of paper; when a walk through a factory will disclose hundreds of machines in operation with a mere handful of attendants fussing about. *In some uncanny way, things will seem to be running themselves* [...]."⁴¹

If this quotation marks a key passage concerning the age of mechanical machines (a logical supplement to the epigraph by Marx), then William S. Burroughs can be considered as the key writer of the virality of the control society. More accurately expressed, Burroughs defined the characteristics of language and communication in terms of virality. Burroughs, a relative of the founder of Burroughs Adding Machine-company, expressed the ontology of post-Fordist immaterial labour in terms of contagion:

My general theory since 1971 has been that the Word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host; that is to say, the Word Virus (the Other Half) has established itself so firmly as an accepted part of the human organism that it can now sneer at gangster viruses like smallpox and turn them

38 These themes are elaborated in my forthcoming study, Parikka, J. (2007) *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses*. New York: Peter Lang.

39 See for example the essays Benjamin, W. (1969) 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken and 'Traumkitsch', in *Gesammelte Werke* II.2, 620–622.

40 DeLanda, M. (1991) *War In the Age of Intelligent Machines*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 167-173.

41 *Scientific American* (1922) 'When perforated paper goes to work: How strips of paper can endow inanimate machines with brains of their own', December: 394, my emphasis.

in to the Pasteur Institute. But the Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself.⁴²

In Burroughs' world, media act virally, and without content. Both the Word and the virus are defined by external relationships, not internal substance (meaning or signified). For Burroughs, the idea of the medial virus stems from audiotapes that had entered the Western media sphere in the 1950s. They presented for Burroughs uncanny possibilities of mechanical (re)production and distribution of Words, which were acquiring viral-like capacities. This was the horror of pre-recordings as organisms that entered the bodies and brains as 'the Other half'. Here words *are* things: language functions as a material force, which enters the body-as-a-recorder "regulated by the principles that govern magnetic tape in its reproduction, erasure, and reconfiguration",⁴³ as N. Katherine Hayles writes. With this schizophrenic move, Burroughs was able to illustrate how modern technical media imposed themselves as material viruses, reproduction machines that were much more uncanny than the consumer cultural industry that, for example, Adorno and the Frankfurt School introduced.

Aptly, Burroughs' literary experiments were partly made possible by his family's fortune gained in early computers, and he himself became one of the key writers of network capitalism, of post-Fordist objects of contagious nature. Reading Burroughs in this context emphasises yet another key idea of the 1970s: language and general intellect as production forces are contagious entities that express themselves in a certain level of material self-organization – a Benjaminian sphere of objects breeding objects.

Yet, if Benjamin provided us with a theory of the state of objects in the age of mechanical reproduction, we need to develop concepts to grasp network objects, which act contagiously – they stick (or are addictive, another theme characteristic of Burroughs' texts). Language is merely one form of media, and it can be supplemented with a cultural analysis of other contagious media as well.

In the context of digital culture, network analysis software does, for instance, map the epidemic paths of sociality. From terrorists to contagious disease, from 'Leadership Development' practices to 'Network Vulnerability Assessment' such techniques provide ways to capture the complex flows of information in various registers and scales.⁴⁴ The issue of 'control' is underlined on the website of Inflow-software, which gives advice how "The best method to control something is to understand how it works."⁴⁵ Despite the incongruence of various networks from biology to company

42 Burroughs, W.S. (1985) *The Adding Machine: Collected Essays*. London: John Calder, 48.

43 Hayles, N.K. (1999) *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 213–214.

44 See 'Inflow – Social Network Software' [<http://www.orgnet.com/inflow3.html>, site visited 16.1.2007]. Most of these are commercial tools, but there is in addition, for instance, the Covgom Issue Crawler. See [<http://www.govcom.org/>, site visited 22.5.2006]. As Latour notes, information technologies can be used to trace the vectors of social forces by making visible such forces that resided virtual before. Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 207-208. Exemplary in this sense is Rogers, R. (2005) *Information Politics on the Web*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

45 'Inflow – Social Network Software' [<http://www.orgnet.com/inflow3.html>, site visited 16/01/2007].

structure or terrorist movements, these are all handled *as if* they all were at least isomorphic in their patterns. Networks and their objects are opened up to informational tracing, which is believed to give the best tools for predicting (standardizing) environments of action, whether military, corporate or human corporeal. What we are dealing here with are not anomalies in the traditional sense (as entities without series) but a new mode of serialization based on contagious metastable objects, working actively as network creators.

Put rather bluntly, capitalist production is increasingly able to capture such viral processes. As Lazzarato writes, this mode of production is not, primarily, as focused on creating objects *per se*, as in creating worlds that propagate consumer objects. Drawing on Gabriel Tarde, Lazzarato notes the nature of contemporary production of reality as one of creating worlds for objects and subjectivities – a very mundane event that happens when turning on the radio or the television, walking on the street in the midst of advertisements. Such events entwine the body with incitements and invitations towards certain habits and ways of life (certain patterns of repetition).⁴⁶ Lazzarato points to a crucial aspect of this contagious capitalism that infects the body (epidemic in the meaning used by Guillaume) to advertising and publicity:

Publicity constitutes the spiritual dimension of the simulacrum ‘event’ which the companies and advertising agencies invent and which has to be realised in the body. The material dimension of this pseudo-event, its realisation, takes place when the ways of living, eating, having a body, dressing, inhabiting a place, etc. get incarnated in the body: materially, we live among goods and services that we buy, in houses, among furniture, with objects and services that we have grabbed as ‘possible’ in the flows of information and communication within which we are immersed. We go to bed, we get busy, we do this or that whilst these codes continue to circulate (they ‘insist’) in Hertzian flows, telematic networks and newspapers etc. They double up our world and our existence as a ‘possible’ which is already, in reality, an order, a command, authoritarian word even if expressed as seduction.⁴⁷

Lazzarato describes here the machinic production of bodies of control society, where Hertzian waves pierce and capture bodies (as with Judge Schreber in the early twentieth century) in a contagious fashion. Reminiscent of Burroughs, this idea depicts the telematic, informational language of consumer products as clinging to the human host and insisting on it. This means a contagious doubling of the existence of the body, as Deleuze noted in his Post-Script to Control Societies.⁴⁸

These ideas can also be read from the cybernetic basis of control society. Not reducible to technological platforms, this virtual logic of doubling and repetition flourishes, however, in the Turing machine context of potentially infinite copying possibilities: The

46 Lazzarato, M. (2004) ‘From capital-labour to capital-life’, *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 4(3): 189. It would also be worthwhile to dig into Gabriel Tarde for early notions of epidemic social relations, working via imitation and repetition. See Tarde, G. (2000) *Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology*. Kitchener: Batoche Books. For a short intro on the theme of Tarde and memetics, see Marsden, P. (2000) ‘Forefathers of memetics: Gabriel Tarde and the laws of imitation’, *Journal of Memetics: Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, 4 [http://jom-emit.cfpm.org/2000/vol4/marsden_p.html].

47 Lazzarato, M. (2004) ‘From capital-labour to capital-life’, *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 4(3): 190.

48 Deleuze, G. (1990) *Pourparlers 1972–1990*. Paris: Minuit, 240–247.

Turing machine as an imitation machine. The Turing Machine, the formal model of every computer since 1936 when Alan Turing explicated his ideas in “On computable numbers, with an application to the *Entscheidungsproblem*”, is then a key diagrammatic link to this idea of viral ontology. Turing machines are actually also memetic devices, devised for simulating and copying other machines and functions. Like viruses, they are potentially able to stick to heterogeneous forms of life and create a simulacrum of those processes they cling to. In its ability to compute any computable sequence, the universal machine is then in itself potentially any machine – hence the name universal. This was meant by Turing to be achieved via feeding the instructions of any sequence that is expressible in real numbers and calculable by finite means. In this sense it can be conceptualised as a universal copy machine that can metamorphose according to its host, its desired function: a perfect post-Fordist machine in its ubiquitous flexibility, viral-like metamorphosis.

For Deleuze, the cybernetic machine was also accompanied by the viral. Deleuze sees the virus as providing potential for resisting communication, in a similar way that strikes and sabotage were earlier. Deleuze’s short passage can be, however, supplemented with a more thorough analysis showing that, actually, this virality is not merely a description of the forces of resistance (a logic of becoming and non-communication) but can be stretched to encompass the more general abstract machine governing a wider field of capitalist Empire. Instead of the stuttering resistance of the viral, we have also Viral Business Machines. This is not however strictly the same thing as the capitalist parasites Hardt and Negri formulate in their take. Parasitism does not assume only the negative forms of ‘vampirism’ but is to be seen as a more systematic quality of individuation, of turbulence that can be taken in different directions.

Viral Digital Code

Even though the logic of the viral is not reducible to its manifestations in any particular substance, whether biological or technological, a concrete example illustrates well the functioning of the viral logic. Even though there is a diagrammatic piloting working on various levels, this abstract machination works through concrete assemblages. Similarly, as Benjamin was keen on deciphering the contours of the modern technological culture from very mundane objects such as headdress fashion, wall posters or architectural details, we can approach viral organization from equally mundane objects of network culture. A computer virus is a specific class of computer software that often consists of three parts (or affects): 1) the copying routine which controls the self-reproduction of a virus; 2) a trigger, which triggers the viral code into active mode. This can be, as for instance with earlier viruses, a certain date or a certain number of computer boot sequences; 3) a payload, which is often the level users perceive. A payload can be something as malicious as reformatting the hard drive, or something less harmful, such as playing a tune or printing a piece of text, as the well-known PEACE-virus from 1988:

Richard Brandow, publisher of the MacMag, and its entire staff would like to take this opportunity to convey their universal message of peace to all Macintosh users around the world.⁴⁹

As I have analysed elsewhere, computer viruses have since the 1980s been dubbed as the key danger to information capitalism, presented as based on otherwise frictionless flows of information.⁵⁰ Especially since the end of the decade, viruses became mythical monsters that demonstrated potentials for “making banks sick”⁵¹ and annihilating the infrastructural basics of organized society.⁵² The intensity of the danger felt was due to the increasing importance placed on network technologies and digital computers. Technologies of knowledge and networking were being hailed from the 1960s on as the next key form of production of added value, but especially the 1980s with new personal computers, local-area-networks and, for example, the first versions of the ‘user-friendly’ operating systems promised that these ideas would not remain only the ideas of visionaries and computer scientists.⁵³

Yet, as demonstrated since the early 1990s, the so-called-malicious virus was captured as part of the heterogeneous machine of information capitalism. Unfortunately most popular reports of viruses and other more or less contagious malware programs shifted the attention from the *modus operandi* of self-reproductive software and emphasised the metaphoristics of the phenomenon. On a more fundamental level, there happened once again a translation and metamorphosis (not metaphors) of viral modes of operation from anomalies into standard objects. This deterritorializing movement characteristic of capitalism worked through a conjugation of contradictory, minoritarian, disruptive and even potentially revolutionary constellations into a new body reterritorialized on capital and capitalist software production. ‘Bads’ were quickly turned to ‘goods’ as computer viruses were captured as productive anti-virus products, security services, and the use of such anxieties recycled into media circulation as infotainment.

This reminds one of the joke of ‘politically correct viruses’ that do not call themselves ‘viruses’, but insist on being referred to as ‘electronic micro organisms’. In another fashion, the definitions blur when we consider the role played by e-mail virus warnings, which can also act as disturbing viral messages. With these, the virality is not coded into the software but more accurately emerges from the social dimension coupled with the network communication potentials. In other words, virality does not have to designate only the characteristics that are part of the viral program but can be seen as a more systematic element.

49 Virus Bulletin (1993) *Survivor's Guide to Computer Viruses*. Abingdon: Virus Bulletin, 26.

50 Parikka, J. (2005) ‘Digital monsters, binary aliens: Computer viruses, capitalism, and the flow of information’, *FibreCulture*, 4 [http://journal.fibreCulture.org/issue4/issue4_parikka.html].

51 Rosenthal, B.E. (1988) ‘Computer viruses can make your bank sick’, *Bankers Monthly*, October: 55–58.

52 See Cohen, F. (1984) ‘Computer Viruses – Theory and Experiments.’ DOD/NBS 7th Conference on Computer Security, originally in IFIP-sec 84, also as an invited paper in IFIP-TC11, ‘Computers and Security’, V6 (1. Jan. 1987), 22-35 [<http://www.all.net/books/virus/index.html>]. Site accessed 16/01/2007].

53 One early example prophesying national and world-wide network grids is Bagrit, L. (1965) *The Age of Automation*. Middlesex: Penguin, 33-34.

The hype concept of viral marketing is of course one obvious example of how contagious network processes work in the context of immaterial labour and capitalist production. Using social networks, this specific form of clandestine marketing is technologically most at home with Internet based applications. As marketers themselves define this practice:

[v]iral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions.⁵⁴

For example, Hotmail's self-advertising in outgoing e-mails, originating from the end of the 1990s, has been listed as one of the early examples of marketing that clings parasitically to non-commercial e-mails in order to extract potential profit from them. Similarly one can decipher web, e-mail, instant messaging and other communication technologies as susceptible to attaching commercial info as a nearly unnoticed part of other communication practices.

On an organizational level, viral marketing is based on the same logic as computer viruses in its ability to attach itself as part of the communication packets sent over digital networks. It is a perfect example of how turbulent systems (metastability) are taken advantage of for commercial purposes. The difference between the two is that the piece of information viral marketing adds to the message is supposed to bring in added value as well. Interestingly, several examples of such strategies employ forms of social networking. As the company ZN.be, for example, demonstrates in their Ecampaign tactics, viral marketing is about mapping the environment (social and technological, such as the Internet) and tapping into "what people are talking about on the web (newsgroups, communities, blogs, websites, magazines)".⁵⁵ This marketing strategy excerpt demonstrates how digital contagions also work effectively as social contagions – that is, they get their force from the qualities of interaction that takes place with communication networks – yet not being reducible to the technical qualities.

Another recent relevant example of viral software capitalism includes the Sony BMG incident (2005). Sony launched its new XCP copy protection software that actually used virus-like techniques and installed itself on a computer without the user knowing of it. The Root Kit routine of the XCP attached itself to the user's computer in order to keep track of copying processes but it could also be used to track consumer behaviour in a spyware-fashion.⁵⁶ This is an apt example of how parasitic routines are part and parcel of so-called 'normal' programs as well, making the issue dependent on a complex field where the ability to define material program routines remains a key issue. Again, the viral logic is identified as an efficient semi-autonomous process or a routine that is not reducible to any clear-cut idea of vandalism but demonstrates the powers in the idea of a universal viral machine, perhaps a new model for infectious media. To follow Nigel

54 Wilson, R.F. (2000/2005) 'The six simple principles of viral marketing', *Web Marketing Today*, [<http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm>, site visited 16/01/2007].

55 ZN.be Zeitgeistnet [<http://www.zn.be/>, site visited 18/05/2006].

56 See, for example, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) open letter to Sony-BMG [<http://www.eff.org/IP/DRM/Sony-BMG/?f=open-letter-2005-11-14.html>, site visited 16/01/2007].

Clark: "Computer viruses are predisposed to escape the jurisdiction of their creators, dispersed by integrated circuitry, capable of utilizing previously accumulated signifying material for their own explosive replication, and in these senses might be seen as the archetype of the superconductive event."⁵⁷

Superconductive capitalism: the capitalist mode of production and marketing has recognized how networks can be utilized as dynamic systems, which work on contagion and transversal, non-linear and multi-scalar vectors.⁵⁸ Hence, the movement of ideas and affects (the above mentioned memetic quality of general intellect) is reminiscent of viral patterns. Cultural products are increasingly efficiently linked and contagious, as for example the Matrix-product family with its films, video games, action figure-toys, soundtrack-music, Internet pages and so forth. Cultural products are able to endure as they double their rhymes and copy their existence in various forms across technological platforms and social categories.

Sounds, images and texts are not merely broadly sowed in search of the user/consumer (as perhaps with the Fordist broadcast-model) but they actively seek their targets. As the epigraph from Marx suggested, consumer products seem to live an uncanny life of their own which is furthermore emphasised in the age of self-directing computer programs. Virality, as its roots in Latin suggest, is a vector of both poison but also force and virility. It is not merely a form of sabotage and non-communication but also a key concept with which to grasp the qualities of network capitalism. Virality demonstrates the ability of transversal connections that move in intervals, between stable states. It is hence a molecular vector that increasingly describes the functioning of societies of control (perhaps even more accurately than a snake). As Parisi notes, control and capitalism do not operate by aiming at homeostasis but by cultivating turbulence and differential becomings, "by following the metastable equilibrium of parallel networks of communication".⁵⁹ Parisi relates her analysis especially to biocapitalism, but such organizational observations are pertinent in contexts of digital media ecologies as well, where ideas of symbiosis and parasitism are more accurate descriptions of the nature of such ecology than e.g. a (Neo)Darwinian focus on individual entities. This is of course the relative weakness of memetic theories of culture. Instead of individual competition, the network topology should be seen as a more symbiotic assembling between (software) objects and their environments (whether protocols, operating systems, hardware, etc.).

Parasitic routines demonstrate what Tiziana Terranova has referred to as the turbulent quality of network culture. Instead of having the possibility to think of the Internet as a frictionless channel for information units, for instance, which are occasionally disturbed

57 Clark, N. (1997) 'Panic ecology: Nature in the age of superconductivity', *Theory, Culture & Society* 14(1): 88. On universal viral machines, see Parikka, J. (2005) 'The universal viral machine: Bits, parasites, and the media ecology of network computing', *Ctheory*, 15/12/2005 [<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=500>].

58 See Sampson, T. (2007) 'The accidental topology of digital culture: *How the network becomes viral*', *Transformations-online journal*, forthcoming 2007 [<http://transformations.cqu.edu.au/index.shtml>].

59 Parisi, L. (2004) *Abstract Sex: .Philosophy, Bio-Technology and the Mutations of Desire*. London: Continuum, 134.

by parasitical and symbiotic entities, the whole architecture is a dynamic informational space “suitable for the spread of contagion and transversal propagation of movement (from computer viruses to ideas and affects).”⁶⁰ Whereas these patterns are increasingly also used in capitalist vectors, such as advertising or the network enterprise, they also include a potential for experimentation and becoming. Hence, my argument, combining on the one hand Hardt and Negri’s somewhat too negative account of parasitic Empire with Deleuze’s rather optimistic and straight-forward idea of viruses as a form of resistance, is that there is an abstract machine, a diagram, of viral networks across spectra (technological, social, affects, ideas). In my view, viruses act as a marker of a network structurings, agents that roam such non-spaces (temporal processes). They are not objects in the sense of quiet, stable and self-enclosed passive matter within a container-like network, but examples of the activity inherent in technological systems. Just like technological systems should be thought of in terms of potentiality, becomings and individuation (structuration instead of structure),⁶¹ contemporary networks susceptible to viral spread are examples of how turbulence presents itself in a system as an active force. They are ways of movement and specific packets of affects that express the qualities of the environment they are imbued in. Deterritorialized from the biological sphere they are, however, Real on this plane of consistency (where metaphors are merely secondary modulations). These contagious machines are not faint repercussions of the Real, but pilots and designs of a reality in process – a manufacturing.⁶² The viruses and examples above illustrate the concrete machinic assemblages that effectuate the abstract machine of virality.⁶³ These are the concrete movements of non-organic actors, or objects, across their habitat of capitalist technological culture.

Parasitic Media Analysis

There is a vast amount of media theory on networks in which they have been analysed as a form of turbulences (Terranova, 2004), as multi-scalarity (Sampson, 2007) or as ‘organized networks’ (as by Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter, 2005). Interestingly, Lovink and Rossiter’s take on networks places the idea of ‘networking’ at the centre of the organization, noting how “[n]etworks thrive on diversity and conflict [...], not on unity.”⁶⁴ Lovink and Rossiter’s notions refer to the potential of combining the organizational form of networking (as networking) with the politics of the multitude, a structure of multiplicity without one defining principle, a pack of singularities.

60 Terranova, T. (2004) *Network Culture. Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press, 67.

61 See Simondon, G. (1989, originally 1958) *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*. Paris: Aubier, 155.

62 Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 141–148.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 69–71.

64 Lovink, G. and N. Rossiter (2005) ‘Dawn of the organised networks’, *Fibreculture*, 5, [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue5/lovink_rossiter.html]. See also Lovink, G. (2005) *The Principle of Networking. Concepts in Critical Internet Culture*. Amsterdam: Hogeschool van Amsterdam [<http://www.hva.nl/lectoraten/documenten/ol09-050224-lovink.pdf>].

In another context Munster and Lovink warn of the inherent danger of succumbing to metaphors of nature as a self-governed emerging system, a play of rhetorics which should be responded to with an analysis of the real network events that are taking place.⁶⁵ As noted above, virality refers here to very concrete and real processes of network organization where emergence is one part of the play – and cybernetic designing and capturing another one. Talking of media *ecologies* does not mean taking network cultures as law-governed nature (or any other cybernetic versions of an Invisible Hand of Capitalism). Here, nature is defined by its unnatural qualities, and its open-ended potential towards something not done before. In other words, this kind of a stance is quite the opposite of naturalizing, for example, histories of the Internet or digital culture. Contemporary networks are to be seen as assemblages of hierarchical and heterogeneous parts, where centralised networks, decentralised networks and distributed networks are intertwined in complex actual constellations.⁶⁶ This is related to what Thacker has termed a topological layering, the coexistence and co-assembling of various forms of networks from biological to the political.⁶⁷

What is important to note, as Tony Sampson underlines, is that virality should be read in connection with its environment, that is, the network quality. Viruses do not equal heterogeneous rhizomes but often they bloom in aristocratic systems where the traffic is concentrated to a few highly connected nodes.⁶⁸ In other words, the viral cannot directly be translated as ‘rhizomatic’ or as a marker of political multitude, even though viruses as specific objects can be used to reveal hierarchies. This idea was also introduced by Albert-László Barabási in his popular science book *Linked*. According to Barabási, the model of scale-free networks is actually the most prominent example for phenomena as various as and ranging from biological viruses to distribution of ‘fabs’. Contrary to ideas of distributed networks, Barabási argues that we should consider most contemporary networks as scale-free with few key nodes having most connections across the networks. Such networks are modelled according to the 80/20 ratio, where 20 % of nodes have connections with the remaining 80 %, making the network very aristocratic. Further, the Internet is – according to *Linked* – a scale-free network defined, on the Web level, by certain key nodes (key websites with the most links to them, acting as switching boards of sorts) and, on the infrastructure level, characterized by the few root servers.⁶⁹ In addition to concerning himself with the dangers involved with and the ease of bringing down aristocratic networks, Barabási has been active in developing parasite models of computing that would take advantage of the linking potentials and the collective computing power of connected computers.⁷⁰ In several

65 Munster, A. and G. Lovink (2006) ‘Theses on distributed aesthetics, or what a network is not’, *Fibreculture*, 7 [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue7/issue7_munster_lovink.html].

66 See Galloway, A. (2004) *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 29–35.

67 Thacker, E. (2004) ‘Networks, swarms, multitudes’, *CTheory*, 05/18/2004 [<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=422>].

68 Sampson, A. (2007) ‘The accidental topology of digital culture: *How the network becomes viral*’, *Transformations-online Journal*, forthcoming 2007 [<http://transformations.cqu.edu.au/index.shtml>].

69 Barabási, A. (2003) *Linked*. New York: Plume. The internet now has thirteen root name servers that control the Domain Name System, or the translation of domain names into IP addresses.

70 *Ibid.*, 157.

regards, this is something that has already been done by the SETI-program searching for extra-terrestrial life with the aid of connected computers. One of the differences is that in Barabási's model, the consent of the computer owners would not be asked for beforehand. This is also where there risks of viral computing are most obvious.

Nonetheless, as Alex Galloway notes, viruses can be seen as tactical media tools that index homogeneous networks and proprietary systems: "Show me a computer virus and I'll show you proprietary software with a market monopoly."⁷¹ It is here that media analysis can become viral or parasitic: it can turn itself into a mapping tool and a cartographic machine that not only picks up the *has-been* (for example the existence of aristocratic, non-democratic networks) but also the *could-bes* (the kind of radical potential turbulent networks have).

Approaching the virality of networks is an attempt to start at the middle, at the parasitical moment of turbulent network space, where symbiosis is more accurately the rule, not the exception regarding the ontological status of objects of post-Fordist culture. Whereas capitalist production is able to take advantage of the continuous production of accidents and networking, we are also presented with a form of potentiality for network action. As theoretically noted by Simondon, Parisi and Terranova, for example, and technically by the turbulent network spaces and organisms of viral quality, metastability describes the potentiality for change of (technical) systems. This is a theme that transverses from the technicalities to something that can also be activated on the aesthetic-political level (although the actualization is not automatic, as Thacker has noted.) Here 'parasite thought' as has been outlined by Michel Serres over the years provides ways to analyze this '*in medias res*', in the middle, of turbulent systems. This marks the becoming-viral of media theory. In Serres' philosophy of systems, systems are always defined by relations attaching terms, not the other way around. Instead of a straightforward appreciation of communication and denouncing of miscommunication, Serres values the in-between elements of systems. Interference is not, bluntly put, 'bad' but rather a potential for creation. The parasite is noise, but only as a potential bifurcation point that can open up towards new systems.⁷²

Instead of describing virality, parasitism or symbiosis in terms of predefined positions (resistance or capitalist conformity), it should be approached as a virtual logic of action, which actualises in various registers. Drawing on concepts such as ecology or symbiosis

71 Galloway, A. (2004) *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 176.

72 Brown, S.D. (2002) 'Michel Serres: Science, translation and the logic of the parasite', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19(3): 1-27. Serres, M. (1982) *The Parasite*, trans. L.R. Schehr. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. This emphasis on the parasite might also be seen as a deliberate confusing of the object of study (network culture) with a method (reading through relations and networks.) This is what Latour warns about, yet there is a certain sense in tracing the objects and vectors of network spaces as constituted by an ethos towards connectionism. This parasitic analysis is methodical in trying to get a grip on how objects of network capitalism function. Cf. Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 142. Of course, it would be another kind of a study to trace in ANT-style the networks that are continuously assembled in the grassroots of networks such as the Internet. This kind of work is perhaps done with critical software tools such as the aforementioned Govcom.org's one's. See [<http://www.govcom.org>], site accessed 01/11/2006.

does not necessarily (although the danger is present) succumb to a rigid systems thinking where the dynamics of socio-technical systems are seen as linear and determined like 'natural laws'. Instead there is the potential for new cultural analytical perspectives to digital culture, something that has been taken more advantage of in practical assemblages. Resonating with Deleuzian themes, various media activists and theorists have hailed the powers of the viral as potential disturbances of the networks of Empire.⁷³ This is, of course, a continuation of the tactical media ideas in the wake of Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone or the interventions of the Critical Art Ensemble. One practical 'parasiting' example would be the on-going 'Google-Will-Eat-Itself' project (originating from 2005) by the 'digital actionists' Hans Bernhard, Lizvlx (both from the group UBERMORGEN.COM), Alessandro Ludovico (Neural.it) and Paolo Cirio (epidemiC). A form of digital cannibalism, or parasitism, the GWEI-project collects money by serving text advertisements to Google and uses the money to buy Google shares.⁷⁴ Of course, at the moment (mid-January 2007) it would take approximately 202.345.125,3 years before the project owns Google entirely, but instead of this simple goal, the fascinating part is how the parasitic potential is revealed by the project.

Following Terranova, such are perhaps examples of a logic of a turbulent ecology which cannot be apprehended beforehand but only by engaging in it, in the midst of these contagious objects from consumer products to viruses, to scams and junk mails: "There is no cultural experimentation with aesthetic forms or political organization, no building of alliances or elaboration of tactics that does not have to confront the turbulence of electronic space."⁷⁵ This space is also the sphere of Marx's phantom-like commodity living its own semiautonomous life, now turned viral in the age of memetics and networks, but it is also a potential space of innovation and creativity, of experimentation with virality.

Yet, as said, the issue should not be approached on the level of pre-defined terms, but of relationships. The post-Fordist network object, the contagious immaterial labour, moves on similar patterns of virality as do the media art viruses and tactical media interventions. Hence, the virtual diagram differentiates and actualises in various modes and these actualisations cannot be adequately judged beforehand. This should not, of course, be interpreted as a vanity of experimentation – on the contrary. Only through experimental practices are we able to decipher knowledge of the concrete affects of various kinds of parasites and contagious connections that roam the dynamic spaces of networks. This means a micropolitical position that starts its analysis from the middle to "pull out potentials"⁷⁶ from the midst of the parasitical relationships.

73 A good example is the Biennale virus from 2001. See Parikka, J. (2005) 'Digital monsters, binary aliens – Computer viruses, capitalism, and the flow of information', *Fibreculture*, 4, [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue4/issue4_parikka.html]. Figurations of a virus are also used by, e.g., VNS Matrix in their classic Cyberfeminist Manifesto. See Runme.org-website for examples of viral net art, forkbombs, etc. [<http://runme.org>, site accessed 08/06/2006].

74 'Google will eat itself' [<http://www.gwei.org>, site accessed 16/01/2007].

75 Terranova, T. (2004) *Network Culture. Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press, 68.

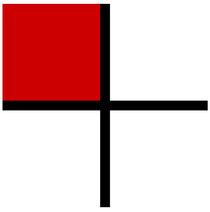
76 Parisi, L. (2004) 'For a schizogenesis of sexual difference', *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, 3(1): 84.

Entities of post-Fordist digital network culture are intertwined with their territories, and hence act collectively and inter-dependently. Following this paradigm we are enticed also to develop viral analytics that proceed from this complex state of contagious systems to an ecological and *ecosophical* mapping of the spaces, affects and virtual potentials of the contemporary terrain of capitalist media culture. This means approaching dynamics of network culture in terms of the excluded-thirds, the parasites, and offering new ideas to think (problematize) the state of objects in the age of digital reproduction and contagion. The task is also to update Benjaminian analysis of the mundane objects of mechanical media and capitalism in the age of cybernetic control machines and networks. Multi-scalar transversal mapping connects (parasitically) from technological platforms (such as computer viruses, and Turing machines) to ideas and affects, and on to social relations (*epi-demos*) in order to engage with the complex contagions of contemporary culture. It is here, in the symbiotic objects, contagious patterns and parasitic routines that one finds the crystallized but messy objects of the abstract machine piloting the production of (nonorganic) ways of network life.

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The Novel as a Vehicle for Organizational Inquiry: Engaging with the Complexity of Social and Organizational Commitment

Martyna Sliwa and George Cairns

abstract

In this paper, we seek to contribute to the development of the approach to organizational inquiry which employs the concept of 'lay reading' of literary fiction as a vehicle for exploration. We argue that this enables development of complex understandings of social and organizational concepts and phenomena. We illustrate our application of lay reading by discussing the notion of commitment as we identify it in academic literature, and in the fiction of Aldous Huxley and Milan Kundera. In considering the stories of individual characters, we point to attitudes towards commitment that exemplify complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence. We posit that the lay reading approach facilitates engagement with multiple theoretical perspectives, in support of students' and organizational actors' meso-theorising about relevant concepts and phenomena.

Introduction

In this paper, we seek to contribute to a development of an approach to critical engagement with concepts and phenomena in contemporary society by students of management and organization, and by organizational actors; one which is grounded in interpretation and meaning construction by them. The approach is that of 'lay reading' (DeVault, 1990, 1999) of the literary novel in order to facilitate the readers' processes of meso-theorising and critical reflection. In order to illustrate our argument, we address the concept of 'commitment' between individuals, and between the individual and social/organizational groups, as well as ways in which individuals are considered to demonstrate attachment to particular beliefs and values through conformance with, or rebellion against prevailing mores. We consider the range of theoretical frames and conceptualisations of commitment to be found in managerial and critical organizational texts, and seek a way of enabling students and organizational actors to reflect on them, and to relate them to a context with which they are familiar.

We show the possibilities of our approach through our own reading of Aldous Huxley's (1932/1994) *Brave New World* and Milan Kundera's (1984) *Unbearable Lightness of Being*. We refer to other readings of these novels and discuss the notion of commitment

through our interpretation of the representations of the lived experiences of the characters John and Lenina (Huxley, 1932/1994), and Sabina and Tomas (Kundera, 1984). In contrasting the coherent and consistent attitudes of John and Sabina with those of Lenina and Tomas, we argue that the approaches to life of the latter symbolise a 'postdichotomous' (Beech and Cairns, 2001) ability to reconcile ambivalent ways of thinking/acting.

In our discussion of the concept of commitment as interpreted through the novel, we draw contrast with much of the managerial literature. We argue that it is conceivable to live exhibiting neither explicit compliance with, nor opposition to, norms of behaviour generally accepted within society, or any other social group. Moreover, we observe the possibility of a simultaneous display of conformance and non-conformance. We posit that such an approach does not necessarily stem from apathy, disinterest, hypocrisy, or self-marginalisation, but constitutes a route followed out of choice by certain individuals in organizations and society in general.

We acknowledge that the use of literary fiction has been proposed, developed and problematised by a number of authors (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994/2004; De Cock and Land, 2006; Knights and Willmott, 1999; Phillips, 1995). We argue that the lay reading approach of DeVault (1990, 1999) enables students and managers to develop complex understandings and conceptualisations of phenomena through engagement with non-academic texts with which they are familiar, in order to "experiment in the use of personal response as part of an archive for analysis" (DeVault, 1990: 106), and to relate their personal, emergent understanding to a range of theoretical perspectives presented in management and organizational literature.

We recognise that the concept of commitment is comprehensively discussed in academic literature (e.g. Cohen, 2000; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1988, 1991, 1997; Morrow, 1993; Mulinge, 2001; Oliver, 1990; Weick, 1995). However, we find extant examples of engagement with it problematic on two grounds. First, managerial approaches tend to dichotomise individuals as either being 'committed' or 'not committed' to the organization (e.g. Mowday et al., 1982; Oliver, 1990; Schnake, 1991), and second; as Knights and Willmott (1999) point out; beyond the context of business and management education, critical academic texts are unlikely to form major reference sources for organizational actors attempting to make sense of their own environment. Hence, there is a danger that the thinking of those actors is likely to remain embedded within a paradigm of duality and exclusion.

We recognise the limitations of the proposed approach, in that "any representation is partial, selective, and constructed" (DeVault, 1990: 888). The pursuit of social and organizational inquiry through analysis of concepts depicted in literary fiction is also embedded in a literary tradition and framed within social, psychological and semiological boundaries. However, within the lay reading tradition, novels are seen to assist readers "in making sense of the world", as well as constituting "a basis for their own assertions about society" (DeVault, 1990: 888). Here, we employ our own 'lay reading' of the two novels to provide an illustration of how literary fiction might be

used to highlight the complex and ambiguous nature of commitment between individuals, groups, organizations, and society, as defined in normative terms.

In our teaching practice, we seek to inspire the development of a critical understanding of other concepts frequently encountered in management education and organization studies, e.g. 'culture', 'power' and 'structure'. We aim to do this by enabling the students to engage with a piece of literary fiction of their own choice, and to critically reflect upon their selected concept as portrayed within it, by reference to a broad range of theoretical perspectives.

The Literary Approach in Organization Studies

A number of authors (e.g. Butler, 1997; Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994/2004; De Cock, 2000; DeMott, 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1999; Phillips, 1995; Waldo, 1968) have advocated the use of the literary novel as a vehicle for social and organizational inquiry. References to literary fiction in the context of social sciences have a rich historical tradition (c.f. De Cock and Land, 2006). Phillips points to the relationship between social science and narrative fiction and suggests that whilst "social scientists discover things, writers make things up; social scientists observe reality, writers invent alternative realities" (1995: 626). According to Waldo, fictional "literature helps to restore what the professional-scientific literature necessarily omits or slights: the concrete, the sensual, the emotional, the subjective, the valuational" (1968: 5). Phillips states that "(n)arrative fiction provides organizational analysis with an additional point of contact in the everyday world of 'real life'" (1995: 635), while Butler suggests that the social scientist "can learn from the art and craft of the novelist, dramatist, journalist, film-maker, (and) soap opera creator" (1997: 945).

In their discussion of the relationship between the domains of literature and organization, De Cock and Land (2006) identify three 'modes of engagement' by which it might be characterised. In Mode One, they see this engagement through the application of literary theory to organizational literature in an attempt to "problematise organization theory, thus enabling it to reinvigorate itself" (Czarniawska, 1999: 12). Mode Two applies literary genres for the purpose of "production and presentation of organizational knowledge" (De Cock and Land, 2006: 520). Mode Three draws upon 'great' literature as an educational resource for the development of management knowledge and practice. We read Mode Three, as presented by De Cock and Land, as viewing novels from a realist perspective. Whilst we situate our own approach within the broad frame of Mode Three; the 'novel as resource'; we identify three levels at which application of this mode is exemplified in the extant literature.

At the first level, we find examples of novels employed as 'surrogate cases' (e.g. Boland, 1994/2004; McDaniel, 1978), read as 'truths' in the tradition of literary realism (c.f. Dickstein, 2005; Watt, 1957). At the second level, they are used as stories of organizing (e.g. Czarniawska, 1999; Hofstede, 1994/2004), drawing analogy between depictions and lived experience. Finally, at the third level, novels serve as vehicles for organizational analysis (e.g. De Cock, 2000; Jacobsson, 1994/2004; Linstead, 2002) for

complex engagement with phenomena at a higher level of abstraction. Having identified these three levels, it is within the third level that we locate our own approach to applying literary fiction.

As Guillet de Monthoux (1983/1991) exhorts academics to turn to the literary form of the novel in order to understand organizational decision making, here, we employ the novel to support our inquiry into the nature of commitment, specifically by drawing upon the writings of Milan Kundera and Aldous Huxley. We find references to the works of both authors in academic literature. For example, Kundera is cited in literature on organization (Knights and Willmott, 1999; Kostera, 1997; Linstead, 2002), and in the broader field of sociology (Gurstein, 2003). Huxley's term 'brave new world' is widely used by different writers, but is commonly interpreted as symbolising a fictional, dystopian society; and juxtaposed with problematic features (c.f. Daniels and Bowen, 2003), or contrasted with desired characteristics (c.f. Filley and House, 1970) of the 'real world'.

We choose our selected novels for two purposes. First, as a pairing, they complement each other through presenting contrasting ideological commitments by the respective authors. Huxley offers a satire on Americanisation and hyper-capitalism, whilst Kundera engages in critique of the lived Marxism of 1960s Czechoslovakia. Second, both authors go beyond realist representation of society. Kundera's text can be read as offering insights not only into "the politics of working under a totalitarian communist regime", but also, into "philosophical notions of what is 'really' of value in life" (Knights and Willmott, 1999: 9). Huxley's *Brave New World* is an example of a dystopian, rather than a realist novel. However, despite their transcendence of realism, we employ these texts, "not because they violate logic, but because they ruin the conventional order of the surface that is our life" (De Cock, 2000: 597).

We acknowledge that reading is an 'active process' (Tompkins, 1980), in that each interpretation of a text is a learned, socially organized activity (DeVault, 1990). Different approaches to reading novels constitute alternative constructions of meaning, which can adopt a variety of forms, such as: a naïve, child-like reading of a story; a more sophisticated theme and content analysis; or a specialised, professional interpretation, e.g. that of the literary critic (DeVault, 1990), which will frequently be grounded in the critic's personal political or theoretical agenda (De Cock and Land, 2006). In seeking to escape the confines of the 'expert reader'; whilst acknowledging that this will never be fully possible in the teaching or consultancy context; we turn to DeVault's (1990, 1999) concept of 'lay reading' of novels. This approach seeks to privilege involved actors' meaning construction and meso-theorising processes over those of the 'expert' reader, such as the literary critic or the organizational theorist.

In our analysis, we consider representations of commitment in the experiences of key characters in the selected novels, in order to illustrate the unproblematic nature of an existence not rooted in dichotomy to those thinking/acting it. We posit that this way of using novels as a basis for analysis can be extended to include other concepts, theories, and social and organizational phenomena.

Characterizing the ‘Lay Reading’ in Organization Studies

The concept of lay reading

DeVault’s (1990, 1999) presents the concept of the ‘lay reading’, as an alternative to ‘the interpretive traditions within which novels are written and read’ (DeVault, 1999: 133), such as the ‘expert reading’ of the literary critic. The term lay reading, however, must not be considered as implying a naïve mode of interpretation, devoid of critical analysis of form, content, and of the processes of sense-making. Rather, it is one which recognises “the situated character of reading” (DeVault, 1999: 105) in which “the readers’ genders, historical contexts, and purposes for reading” (DeVault, 1990: 887), along with other aspects of their personal acculturation, are seen to be integral to both the processes and outcomes of interpretation. Whilst we illustrate our use of *Brave New World* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* through problematising the commitment literature, we acknowledge that within the academic community, the same texts are interpreted differently. In relation to our selected texts, the different factors that influence interpretation may be found across the range of academic fields in which they are employed (cf. Daniels and Bowen, 2003; Gurstein, 2003; Sleigh, 2002). Here, we position our reading within the context of organization studies and we relate our interpretation to those of others in this field (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1999; Linstead, 2002; Parker, 2002).

In accordance with DeVault (1990, 1999), we view the lay reading approach as having possibilities both for use as a “personal/reflexive research strategy” (1999: 105), for critical comparison of different readings of a text within “reading communities” that encompass “widely varying political scenes and societies” (1999: 106), and as a means of opening up critical reflection on the diversity of theoretical perspectives presented in the range of managerial and critical texts, in relation to key organizational concepts.

Multiple lay readings of selected texts

In the central section of this paper, we offer a ‘negotiated lay reading’ of our selected novels, constructed by two authors who have differences in gender, nationality, age, professional and academic qualification, and in general experience of social and organizational acculturation. Our reading of the texts should be positioned as one of a number presented by a group “of readers with different experiences (who) can develop new frameworks for interpretation” (DeVault, 1990: 916). As such, like Guillet de Monthoux and Czarniawska-Joerges, we see the overall value of lay reading as “expand(ing) the space of shared meanings... to provide an interpretive scheme to readers interested in the theory of organization and management” (1994: 13-14). Whilst, within the confines of this paper, we cannot fully develop a critical comparison of our reading of the selected novels with those of other readers; whether literary, social, or organizational theorists; we provide examples of how the broader ‘reading community’ of organizational and management scholars draws upon and interprets these two novels “as a basis for their assertions about society” (DeVault, 1999: 106).

Within the field, the two novels are employed as vehicles for organizational analysis and exploration of a variety of concepts. For example, Linstead (2002) draws upon *The*

Unbearable Lightness of Being in his discussion of ‘organizational kitsch’. More closely related to our consideration of commitment is Knights and Willmott’s (1999) reference to Kundera’s text in order to explore notions of ‘identity’, ‘subordination’, and ‘resistance’. In his critique of contemporary managerialism, Parker (2002) uses Huxley’s *Brave New World* beside the work of Franz Kafka to discuss concepts of ‘rationalisation’ and ‘hierarchy’. *Brave New World* serves as an example of how, contrary to “much of the post-war organizational consensus... (t)he individual becomes the site of resistance against the corporation” (2002: 150). For the ‘reading community’ (DeVault, 1990: 106) of management scholars, we see that there is some relationship between the way both Knights and Willmott, and Parker use this work to challenge assumptions about concepts pertaining to organizations in mainstream literature and our engagement with the concept of commitment.

Problematizing ‘Commitment’ in Managerial and Organizational Literature

In our illustration of the application of the lay reading approach, we choose to engage with the concept of ‘commitment’. Whilst we could have selected any one of a variety of relevant concepts, commitment has “been of considerable importance in organizational literature during the past 25 years” (Gautam et al., 2004: 301). It is discussed in both mainstream (e.g. Ahmad and Bakar, 2003; Gautam et al., 2005) and critical (e.g. Hakim, 1995; Hancock, 1999) literature, and has its place in the teaching curriculum on organization and management. Linstead et al. point out that the notion of “commitment seems to be at the core of more modernist attempts to redefine motivation” (2004: 297). Whilst a detailed review of the organizational commitment literature is beyond the scope and purpose of this paper, here, we provide a summary of the main conceptualisations of, and approaches to the topic.

The term ‘commitment’ is defined (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, undated) as a “willing(ness) to give your time and energy to something that you believe in”. Building upon this notion, the term ‘organizational commitment’ is identified as the degree of attachment that an individual has to her/his organization (Arnold et al., 1998), and has been presented as a desired element of the relationship between the worker and the enterprise (e.g. Porter et al., 1974; Randal, 1990). Early organizational commitment research (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Wiener and Gechman, 1977; Mowday et al., 1982) was empirically synthesised by Meyer and Allen (1991), to encapsulate three components, those of: ‘affective commitment’ (Meyer and Allen, 1991), i.e. the degree of psychological attachment; ‘normative commitment’ (Allen and Meyer, 1990), i.e. the degree of obligation to stay; and ‘continuance commitment’ (Meyer and Allen, 1988), i.e. the employee’s assessment of the costs and benefits of staying or leaving. In empirical studies, the development of commitment has been linked to positive outcomes both for individuals and organizations, in contributing to higher levels of satisfaction, well-being and productivity, as well as to lower levels of staff absenteeism and turnover (c.f. DeCotiis and Summers, 1987; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997).

Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) argue that, as organizations have moved away from direct and coercive forms of control, they seek to increase employee commitment in order to foster the development of “more obedient, productive and stable employees” (Mulinge, 2001: 286). They proffer four types of ‘structural condition’ which contribute to the achievement of this desired state. The assumption here, and in other works (e.g. Cohen, 2000; Kanter, 1968; Morrow, 1993; Randall and Cote, 1991), is of organizational commitment as an instrument which can be shaped and used by managers in order to fulfil organizational objectives. Whilst commitment is seen as a positive characteristic, of mutual benefit to the individual and the organization, lack of commitment is portrayed in a negative way, whereby highly committed employees exhibit contempt for idleness and self-indulgence in others (Schnake, 1991). As a consequence of this dialectical discourse, individuals are depicted either as identifying and involving themselves with (Oliver, 1990; Van Dick, 2001, 2004) and forming affective attachment (Mowday et al., 1982) to social groups, or as detaching themselves from them. Where they profess either commitment or challenge to some set of mores, whilst simultaneously displaying behaviour that runs counter to their stated beliefs, people are likely to be branded as hypocrites. In the mainstream literature, there is little space for ambiguity and problematisation of the notion of commitment.

In contrast to the positivistic discourse of interlinked individual/organizational benefit through commitment, contemporary critical responses posit that these conceptualisations are problematic and gendered (Hakim, 1995). Hancock (1999) argues that the instrumental actions of management; aimed at developing highly motivated employees through the implementation of cultural management strategies; may result in “the production and reproduction of a deeply disinterested and enervated workforce; one which demonstrates enthusiasm neither for corporate goals nor indeed the furtherance of their own life-projects” (1999: 155). However, whilst critical discussions of the concept of organizational commitment address the complexity of issues related to it, they are unlikely to form part of the canon of practising managers, grappling with the day-to-day problems of organizational life (Knights and Willmott, 1999).

In proposing the approach outlined here, we advocate that reading communities of students of organization and management share their multiple lay readings in order to reflect on the different meanings of commitment in a way which goes beyond unambiguous interpretation. This, we hope, will open up possibilities for postdichotomous (Beech and Cairns, 2001) analysis; recognising that there is no straightforward oppositional definition of commitment/non-commitment, and associated terms of inclusion/exclusion, involvement/alienation, etc. We see this form of inquiry as a means of critical engagement with mainstream literature and, at the same time, as contributing to and complementing the body of critical management literature, as well as supporting the development of students’ and organizational actors’ understanding of and reflection on it.

Commitment in the Fiction of Kundera and Huxley

We now present an illustration of our contribution to the lay reading approach, through consideration of the representation of the concept of commitment as we find it in the literary fiction of Kundera (1984) and Huxley (1932/1994). Within a reading community but one of as many readings as there are members to the group. Like DeVault, we find it necessary to “quote some rather lengthy passages” from the selected novels in order to meet the “(s)ociological convention” of a “scholarly article” (1990: 892-3).

(In)consistency, complexity and ambivalence of attitudes towards commitment

In considering commitment, or its absence, in the relationship between individuals and society, we compare the consistency of attitudes exemplified in the actions of the characters Sabina and John with the ambivalence of Tomas and Lenina. To Sabina and John, the notion of commitment seems unproblematic at a theoretical level, although very much so at the level of lived experience. Sabina, an artist born and educated in Communist Czechoslovakia, emigrates successively to Switzerland, France and the United States during her lifetime. Symptomatic of her interactions and relationships with those she encounters on her journeys through space and time is the avoidance of all commitment. John’s story, on the other hand, demonstrates an ongoing desire for commitment to social norms, and for forming relationships with others.

In contrast to the coherence and consistency of attitudes towards commitment demonstrated by Sabina and John, in the stories of both Tomas and Lenina we find a more complex approach to involvement with, and attachment to individuals and society. Tomas, a surgeon in Prague, loses his professional position due to his confrontational engagement with the Communist regime, and moves through a succession of posts to become, first, a general practitioner, then a window cleaner, and latterly, a driver in an agricultural cooperative. During his life, he maintains relationships with a number of females: his wife Tereza, his ‘best friend’ Sabina, and various ‘erotic friends’. However, as we will seek to show, this apparent state of constant flux in Tomas’s relationship with society and individuals does not symbolise a lack of emotional commitment over time, or a hypocritical attitude. Similarly, the character Lenina, a ‘Beta’ employed in the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, combines a deeply-ingrained commitment to the impersonal societal norms of the World State with instances of expressed individuality, non-compliance and emotional attachment.

Sabina: avoidance and escape

The Czech society of the 1960s, home at the time to both Sabina and Tomas, exemplifies notions of commitment and fidelity to both family and the state. Sabina, however, does not subscribe to the values of fidelity and long-term attachment, and seeks to detach herself from all people and places that could be important to her.

After completing school, she went off to Prague with the euphoric feeling that now at least she could betray her home... Her longing to betray her father remained unsatisfied: Communism was merely another father, a father equally strict and limited. (Kundera, 1984: 87)

In her adult life, Sabina leaves her husband and deserts her lover Franz, who “assumed that Sabina would be charmed by his ability to be faithful, that it would win her over. What he did not know was that Sabina was charmed more by betrayal than by fidelity” (1984: 87). Until her death, Sabina refuses to commit to physical or emotional bonds, and in the same way she abandons individuals, she wanders nomadically through Swiss, French, and American society, remaining an outsider in each case.

For Sabina, “(s)eeing is limited by two borders: strong light, which blinds, and total darkness. Perhaps that was what motivated Sabina’s distaste for all extremism” (1984: 90). Sabina resolves the dichotomies of life neither through synthesis along some centre path, nor through accepting the simultaneous validity of both extremes. For her, the continuous and ultimately futile search for disengagement and detachment presents the only option. Towards the end of her life, Sabina reflects upon the notion of commitment, but “(s)he was well aware it was an illusion...Though touched by the song, Sabina did not take her feeling seriously. She knew only too well that the song was a beautiful lie” (1984: 249).

John: dominant desire

Contrary to Sabina’s efforts to avoid commitment to individuals and society, John’s life is dominated by the quest for attachment and emotional bonds. Born in New Mexico, John is raised by his mother, Linda; a ‘Beta’ from the World State who is accidentally left behind following an excursion to the Reservation. Within the New Mexican Indian society, John is seen as different because of his lighter complexion, and of the promiscuity of his mother, which goes against the monogamous social conventions of the Reservation. Although a stranger in the eyes of the community he lives in, John craves a sense of belonging and acceptance. His need for commitment to societal norms is so strong that, having been excluded from the ceremony for initiation to manhood, John follows the rituals alone. “‘I did it by myself, though,’ he added. ‘Didn’t eat anything for five days and then went out one night alone into those mountains there.’” (Huxley, 1994: 119). Taken back to the World State, where emotional commitment to individuals is proscribed, John not only refuses to break the ties with his mother, but also tries to build a long-term relationship with Lenina, eventually confessing, “I love you more than anything in the world” (1994: 168).

Whilst he seeks to build life-long commitment to Lenina, John also attempts to change the nature of society. As his mother lies dying in hospital, he becomes more and more frustrated by the lack of emotion and engagement displayed by the staff. Eventually, he tries to provoke the ‘Delta’ orderlies into revolt. ““(D)o you like being slaves?’ the Savage was saying...his eyes bright with ardour and indignation. ‘Do you like being babies? Yes, babies. Mewling and puking...I’ll teach you; I’ll *make* you be free whether you want to or not’”, he cries (1994: 186-7). Having failed in this provocation, John eventually seeks solace through becoming a recluse, but he is hunted down and taunted by the masses. He is initially irritated but, “(i)gnoring their (helicopters’) tiresome humming...(he) dug at what was to be his garden” (1994: 222). Gradually, his annoyance turns to anger, then to violence as he chases one of his tormentors and “slash(es) at her with his whip of small cords. Terrified, she (turns) to flee, but (trips) and (falls) in the heather” (1994: 227). As this scene unfolds, John finally engages with

the crowd, succumbing to the *soma* and hedonism, and joining in the 'Orgy-porgy'. Symbolic of John's inability to live with his own hypocrisy is the final act, in which he takes his own life.

Tomas: ambivalence and struggle

In contrast to the trials and tribulations of Sabina and John, Tomas displays ambivalence towards the concept of commitment and its importance in his life. In relation to women, he seeks to deny emotional attachment. "The unwritten contract of erotic friendship stipulated that Tomas should exclude all love from his life" (Kundera, 1984: 12). At the same time, towards his wife Tereza, he desires "to watch over her, protect her, enjoy her presence but (feels) no need to change his way of life" (1984: 12). In comparing these seemingly contradictory attitudes, we might question whether Tomas's behaviour symbolises notions of 'love' and 'commitment', and in so doing, we might consider him a hypocrite, as he simultaneously denies attachment in order to avoid deeper relationships. However, for Tomas, it is not a matter of either making conscious choices between opposites, or of hypocritically hiding one beneath the surface appearance of the other. Rather, "Tomas came to this conclusion: making love with a woman and sleeping with a woman are two separate passions, not merely different but opposite" (1984: 14).

Initially, he finds it difficult to accept the possibility of living simultaneously at the opposites of commitment and non-commitment. "At first he denied it. Then...he argued that his polygamous way of life did not in the least run counter to his love for (Tereza). He was inconsistent" (1984: 15). Eventually, however, Tomas learns to "carr(y) his way of living with him as a snail carries his house...the two poles of his life, separate and irreconcilable, yet equally appealing" (1984: 27). Tomas's ability to live a postdichotomous lifestyle in his relationships with others causes great discomfort to Tereza, who wishes to live at the pole of monogamous commitment, and is seen as weakness by Sabina, who thinks he lacks the courage to leave his wife. "He was in a bind: in his mistresses' eyes, he bore the stigma of his love for Tereza; in Tereza's eyes, the stigma of his exploits with the mistresses" (1984: 22). "Was he genuinely incapable of abandoning his erotic friendships? He was", but the key point is that "he failed to see the need... He saw no more reason for (giving them up) than to deny himself soccer matches" (1984: 20).

In his relationship with the political regime, Tomas exhibits similar ambivalence. He compares the behaviour of Communists in post-War Czechoslovakia to Oedipus's response to finding out that he had slept with his mother, and questions their sanctimonious cries "in defence of their inner purity... The analogy so pleased him that he often used it in conversation" (1984: 171). He develops his critique in a text which he seeks to have published in a newspaper produced by the Union of Czech Writers. When the article appears, Tomas finds that it has been shortened and emasculated by the editor. "Tomas was far from overjoyed" (1984: 172) by this.

When the chief surgeon of the hospital where Tomas works summons him, warning that the article represents a threat to his career, Tomas tells him that he does not see the publication as being of any great importance: "To tell... the truth... it couldn't be any

less important” (1984: 173). However, when the chief surgeon suggests that he retracts his words, he refuses, saying “I’m afraid I’d be ashamed” (1984: 174). This shame is not related to any possible negative response to withdrawal from his colleagues, but is directed inwards. The text is simultaneously of no importance and of the greatest importance to Tomas.

Throughout most of his life, Tomas struggles with decisions which he faces. In many cases, “(h)e was not at all sure he was doing the right thing, but he was sure he was doing what he wanted to do” (1984: 214). Latterly, Tomas finds comfort in his ability to see life as complex, yet to face it with apparent lack of seriousness. When they are living in the cooperative, Tereza tells Tomas,

‘It’s my fault you ended up here, as low as you could possibly go.’ ‘Low? What are you talking about?’ he responds. ‘Surgery was your mission.’ She sa(ys). ‘Missions are stupid, Tereza. I have no mission. No one has. And it’s a terrific relief to realize you’re free, free of all missions’. (1984: 305)

Lenina: unproblematic duality

As Tomas’s ability to live life at both extremes of (non-)commitment causes consternation to those he engages with, so too, Lenina confounds her colleagues. The social conventions of the World State require members to engage in non-committal sex with multiple partners, whilst unquestioningly devoting themselves to fulfilment of the motto of “Community, Identity, Stability” (Huxley, 1994: 1). At the end of work one day, Lenina asks her friend Fanny, “‘Who are you going out with tonight?’”, to which the response is ‘Nobody.’ Lenina raise(s) her eyebrows in astonishment” (1994: 32). To her, non-participation in the rituals of shared sexuality is to be challenged, yet, when Fanny later questions Lenina about her singular attachment to one individual, Henry Foster, over a period of three months, she responds, “No, there hasn’t been anyone else...(a)nd I jolly well don’t see why there should have been” (1994: 34).

Lenina later forms a similarly exclusive bond with Bernard, and joins him on the trip which results in him bringing John back from the Reservation. Thereafter, she develops a strong attraction to John. However, whereas John seeks exclusive commitment to and from Lenina, she considers it unproblematic to contemplate a relationship with him, whilst remaining polygamous within broader social circles. As she prepares to meet him at one of Bernard’s parties, she tells herself, “‘I shall be seeing him, talking to him, telling him... that I like him – more than anybody I’ve ever known. And then perhaps he’ll say...’” (1994: 151). When the imagined engagement with John fails to materialise, she has no problems accepting the Arch-Community-Songster’s invitation to leave the party with him, to return to his residence where, as “(t)he golden T lay shining on Lenina’s bosom, (s)portively, the Arch-Community-Songster caught hold of it. ‘I think...I’d better take a couple of grammes of *soma*’” (1994: 155), says Lenina.

The conflict between John’s desire for exclusivity in their relationship and Lenina’s ability to be both singularly devoted to John whilst openly engaged with others is shown to be beyond resolution when he tells her,

‘How much I love you, Lenina’... (T)he blood rushed up into Lenina’s cheeks. ‘Do you mean it, John?’ However, as he proceeds to expound, ‘in the Malpais, people get married’, she exclaims,

‘Get what?’ The irritation had began (sic) to creep back into her voice... ‘They make a promise to live together for always.’ ‘What a horrible idea!’ Lenina was genuinely shocked.’ (1994: 167-8)

Beyond Dichotomies of Commitment and Detachment

In discussing the nature of commitment to society and individuals through our interpretation of the characters Tomas and Lenina, we observe a lack of consistent and predictable levels of emotional attachment. However, we do not read the seeming ambivalence to social norms as indicative of a hypocritical and morally relativistic approach to life. Rather, we propose that the assumptions which underpin Tomas and Lenina’s being and behaving are not open to analysis according to externally imposed frameworks of meaning, whereby they might be read as inconsistent and self-contradictory when viewed through the lens of dichotomous ontologies (Beech and Cairns, 2001). We suggest that these characters live according to beliefs which do not confine actions and interpretations within a normative, dichotomous framework; of right/wrong, moral/immoral, committed/uncommitted. For example, Tomas lived his life at two “separate and irreconcilable” extremes of commitment and non-commitment, finding both of them “equally appealing” and not mutually exclusive (Kundera, 1984: 27). Similarly, Lenina demonstrates selectivity in her choices of when and how to conform to the social norm of universal promiscuity, whereby “one’s got to play the game. After all, everyone belongs to everyone else” (Huxley, 1994: 37). Lenina both excludes the concept of love from her thinking and declares that she cares deeply for John; she expresses her feelings for him whilst rejecting his declaration of commitment towards her. As highlighted previously, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tomas attaches great significance to his article for the Union of Czech Writers’ newspaper, to an extent that he refuses to retract it under pressure from the Communist regime and loses his job as a consequence. However, when questioned by his chief surgeon, Tomas indicates that, to him, the publication is of no importance.

Through our comparative analysis of the notion of commitment and related concepts, as represented in the novels, we posit that it is possible for individuals to find it unproblematic to adopt seemingly contradictory stances. The conceptualisation of commitment that we develop through our lay reading of the novels is one in which it is neither set in dichotomous and exclusive opposition to that of detachment, nor conflated with it.

In contrast to mainstream management and organization theories of commitment, our reading of the novels suggests that the examples of Tomas and Lenina indicate that neither psychological nor behavioural commitment can be guaranteed through instrumental means; by application of some simple ‘formula’ (e.g. Reis and Peña, 2001), through training (e.g. Ahmad and Bakar, 2003), or by reward (e.g. Eby et al., 1999). Some theorists (e.g. Gautam et al., 2004) argue that commitment is correlated with identification, which enables individuals to become ‘anchored’ and hence, “to persuade and be persuaded” (2004: 312). However, we do not view lack of commitment as a denial of identification with the principles of a given form of organization. For example, we see that Tomas identifies with the institution of marriage, but his own participation in it does not follow the generally accepted understanding of it in his

society. In relation to Lenina, it is clear that she identifies very strongly with the principles of the World State, yet this identification does not translate into unquestioning commitment and consistent behaviour in accordance with them. In contrast to Lenina's ambivalence, John's identification with societal norms and his vain search for some form of unproblematic commitment lead him to a state of confusion, and detachment from the very group that he wishes to be part of.

Whilst we argue against an instrumental view of commitment – and find ourselves agreeing that the contemporary world has “grown to be too complicated for the human subject to either comprehend or control” (Hancock, 1999: 171) – we do not see that this necessarily leads the individual to “find him or herself enmeshed in a web of indifference and enervation, resigned to their status as slave” (1999: 171). Rather, we see that Tomas and Lenina are both indifferent and resigned to much of what characterises their respective societies yet, at the same time, are engaged in acts of mental and physical rebelliousness. Like Hancock (1999), we see challenge to instrumentalism, not as a mere “dissolution of the very mode of subjectivity upon which such managerial ambitions rest” (1999: 171), but as “offer(ing) new opportunities as well as potential new problems” (1999: 172).

Thoughts on the Application of the Lay Reading

In this paper, we have sought to demonstrate the possibilities of an approach to social and organizational inquiry which employs the concept of lay reading (DeVault, 1990) of novels in order to explore phenomena and concepts within the context and thinking of involved actors. In the field of teaching management and organization theory, we see this as offering the possibility of an inclusive, pluralist approach to learning that allows reading communities of students to reflect upon a range of theoretical perspectives from a starting point grounded in their own a priori knowledge and understanding of the world, as developed through reading literary fiction. In the consultancy arena, we see it as enabling a trans-disciplinary frame of thinking, in that the novel can offer a starting point for “joint activities... in producing representations and the activities that develop from using representations” (1990: 889) that are not initially grounded in any particular disciplinary context. In both contexts, the nurturing and support of a climate of open exchange of views, opinions and critically informed argumentation is aimed for. Through an iterative and reflective cycle of engagements; that sees these various elements as separate but related, discrete but intermingled, and that deals with concepts at a level of theoretical abstraction grounded in concrete experiences (of reading, interpretation and interaction); we hope to promote critical exploration of the complexity and ambiguity of social and organizational life, such that the literature neither “becomes a prop to embellish organizational research... or, conversely, a means of demonstrating that the world is essentially impenetrable” (De Cock and Land, 2006: 529).

We acknowledge that the use of novels in teaching management and exploring organizational issues is not a new idea. Examples of how novels can be drawn upon in management education are to be found in extant literature; most notably, in their book

Management Lives, Knights and Willmott (1999) offer one such approach, based upon their own extensive teaching experience. However, there are key differences between their approach and that which we propose. First, whereas Knights and Willmott (1999) prescribe four texts, we advocate that students and managers be allowed to select their own example of literary fiction, in order to create space for the student/manager's engagement with novels belonging to her/his own canon, and for including texts set within cultural contexts with which she/he identifies. However, we acknowledge that this choice cannot be seen as completely free, since the selection may be influenced by the sources we necessarily use to illustrate application of the method. In our own teaching practice we draw upon George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and David Lodge's *Nice Work*; choices which are not without socio-political implications for the teaching (or consultancy) intervention.

Second; whilst like Knights and Willmott, we set out a 'menu' of concepts that the students must choose from; we see a key difference in the mode of interpretation. Knights and Willmott identify relevant extracts from their prescribed novels and offer their own analysis of selected concepts, not as illustration, but as a form of 'reality' (Knights and Willmott acknowledge the polemic nature of their text, but we posit that the reader might miss this disclaimer in any 'skim reading' exercise). In our application, we encourage students to draw out extracts which they use in analysing their selected concept and discussing it in relation to the academic literature.

Third, we propose that analysis and interpretation of the text be related to consideration of a wide variety of theoretical frameworks – with students/managers selecting, and justifying, their own preferred stance. By contrast, we would suggest that the range of theories that Knights and Willmott refer to shows a clear preference for those inspired by Marxian and/or labour process theory principles. Of course, in our teaching, not all theoretical frameworks are aired in the lecture theatre context, and whilst we seek to introduce the students to both mainstream and critical perspectives, we do not disguise our own interpretative preferences. Moreover, we realise that encouraging the students to choose conceptual frames they are comfortable with is, in itself, a political act.

We acknowledge that, despite the indications of our above comparison with that of Knights and Willmott (1999), our proposed approach is not fully liberating. We are aware that our own students (and managers we might engage with) are subject to our power/knowledge regime. However, we consider that, despite the unavoidable limitations of our own being within the project, the lay reading approach offers potential for "experiences between theory makers (to) be exchanged on a more equal footing" (Czarniawska, 1999: 57).

In the broad context of contemporary organization, we suggest that the lay reading approach could be applied in facilitating the processes of meaning construction and making sense of the world around them by members of various groups; such as 'flexible workers', 'knowledge workers' and 'McJob' holders. In privileging the interpretation of the lay reader, this approach offers an alternative to expert analysis according to the frames of explanation imposed by particular theoretical perspectives, and avoids reduction of complex concepts to simplistic and clearly definable managerialist terms. We see it as acknowledging that individuals use fictional accounts to make sense of the

world, and are capable of using literary texts in their processes of meso-theorising about concepts, contexts and experiences, and that the sharing of these accounts and their multiple interpretations enables collective sense making.

Finally, we believe that the use of the literary novel as a tool for analysis enables engagement with social phenomena “as a more personally relevant endeavour” (Phillips, 1995: 643). We agree with Czarniawska-Joerges (1994/2004: 318), that “the novel accepted and understood the paradoxicality of social life before the postmodern thinkers did”, and that critical consideration of representations of characters in fiction, as well as the symbolic meaning of their thoughts and actions, enables and supports creative discussion of the lived experiences of individuals in contemporary society.

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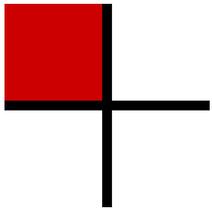
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The Polyphonic Effects of Technological Changes in Public Sector Organizations: A System Theoretical Approach

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abstract

If New Public Management (NPM) offers new tools for managing public sector organizations, then we must also attempt to observe the effects of these tools and address these observations to managers. This is the ambition of this article, which tries to shed light on some of the perennial problems associated with New Public Management. To this end it offers an approach based on Luhmann's system theory that directs attention toward organizational polyphony as an effect of technology. Using an illustrative case of goalsteering (MBO), it reveals how this technology constitutes a diversity of antagonistic images of the organization in relation to its environment. This effect, which challenges the very assumption of unity, has not been addressed within NPM, nor has it attracted much attention among the governance traditions. Each in their own way, these tend to emphasize unity and not polyphony. The contribution of the paper is therefore twofold; it is a proposed supplement to the governance traditions and an articulation of the crucial challenges of management in terms of the NPM paradigm. These two contributions are not conclusive, nor even fully elaborated hypotheses about organizational polyphony. This is an explorative essay. It is an attempt at the articulation of an approach for further development and a strong hypothesis in the need of further investigation.

Introduction

New Public Management (NPM) has established itself as the paradigm to watch when it comes to understanding changes in the public sector. It is generally agreed that the normative purpose of NPM is to improve the market orientation, public choice, competition, and cost efficiency of public administration (Lane, 2003; Ferlie *et al.*, 1996; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Bozeman, 1993). In order to achieve this purpose, NPM normally emphasises new steering technologies, largely adapted from the private sector and guided by the tautological maxim that "managers must manage" (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996: 9). What is called New Public Management, then, is the meeting of a particular set of *normative ends* with a specific set of *technical means* handled by managers who know how to manage. This causal set-up has undoubtedly contributed to

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the general acceptance of both means and ends since overcoming the obstacles can now be conceived of as relatively straightforward matters of implementing efficient technologies. The constitutive effects of these technologies upon the organization, however, are not adequately addressed in this causal set-up. This is only reinforced by the prevalent belief that technologies cause a strong unification in terms of, e.g., an increased correspondence between task and structure and an increased degree of adaptability in terms of market orientation. As noted by Scheytt (2005: 388) technologies are seen as neutral tools in the hands of strong managers which neither distort an organization's reality nor intervene in the context in which they are applied. What must be recovered is the sense in which the social effects of these steering technologies – specifically the array of technologies that travel under the banner 'management by objectives' (MBO) – pose new challenges for management, rather than being simply a set of technical means of achieving normative ends.¹

In order to move the discussion beyond a merely technical conception of MBO we will first characterize the anticipated function of technologies in terms of three traditional approaches to the question of 'governance': governance, government and governmentality. What unites these well recognized approaches is how they all direct attention toward the technologies and the formation of organizational unity: the unity of a strong public body (government), the unity of dynamic networks (governance), and the unity of conditions for action (governmentality). Thus, while these three approaches have the effect of shifting our attention towards the vital role of technologies, they tend to suppress the increasing polyphony of organizational life. Ultimately, they end up concealing what this article identifies as the most important consequences of MBO for management itself.

The main problem, then, is that the technical conception provided by NPM, along with the anticipated functions provided by the three governance traditions, fails to address polyphony as an effect of the new technologies and thus glosses over this too easily managerial challenge. In an attempt to recover the difficulty, this article first addresses the limitations of the three traditional approaches of government, governance and governmentality; second, specifies the contribution of an approach based on Luhmann's system theory; and, third, illustrates the potential of systems theory by providing a provisional analysis of the use of MBO in a Danish context. In short, what is offered here is a systems theoretical approach to the study of steering technologies and their polyphonic effects.

Before proceeding into the three approaches to the question of 'governance', it is important to note that the concept of organizational polyphony is not entirely new, and is related to other appeals to the variety of social experience. As such, modern living is often described as 'polyvocal', 'polycontextual' and 'polycentral'. 'Poly' of course invokes 'the many' as opposed to 'the common', 'the collective' or 'the unitary'. It has been referred to within a body of post-modern studies that derive largely from the work of Lyotard (1984), Bakhtin (1984), Ricoeur (1983) and Deleuze (1988). These rich

1 This idea was first popularized by Peter Drucker in his book *The Practice of Management* (1954), and the basics of MBO have not changed dramatically since that time; that is, management of objectives remains a two-fold process of formulating goals and monitoring achievements.

contributions have been emphasising polyphony as formation and fragmentation of power and knowledge (e.g. Miller and Rose, 1990), as multi-voices (e.g. Rhodes, 2000), as different narratives (e.g. Boje, 2002) and as the polyphony of polyphonies (Deleuze, 1988). But little has been done to relate organizational polyphony to the presence of steering technologies. Nor have we seen attempts to unfold this constitutive relation with reference to systems theory, despite the fact that this theoretical framework put emphasis on system-differentiation and systemic closures.²

From Steering Technologies Follows Unity

This discussion will address what is lacking in each of the interpretations performed by the three traditional approaches in regard to organizational polyphony. Special emphasis will be put on steering technology and the challenge of management.

Government

Government comprises the tradition of present political science (e.g. Hague and Harrop, 2004) and administrative law (e.g. Peters, 2001) which draws upon the strong ideological principles of Montesquieu and Tocqueville. In this context the function of steering technologies serves an integrative function. Especially the steering aspect of technologies draws upon the predictability of the calculus, which in recent administrative and political terms has been conceptualized as the parliamentary chains of control ensuring the unity of a strong political body. As such, the effect of steering technologies upon the organization is expected to manifest either as a consolidation or an improvement of the chains of control in which the manager is firmly positioned. The challenge of management, then, has been construed as a matter of prediction and control or, more specifically, as the causal connecting point between 'chains'. This challenge is not compromised by the recent celebration of liberalization through means of decentralization. It is merely extended, as management takes on a purpose so as to ensure a regulation of deregulation. Due to a firm belief in the integration of a strong public body, the recognition of organizational polyphony has remained almost absent as this (dis-)order is treated as a deviation from the sound norm of strong government. One should think that a critical opposition to this school would emphasize polyphony as a strong alternative as this opposition focuses strongly on resistance and emancipation on behalf of a deeper human rationality (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1969; Marx, 1962/1966; Marcuse, 1991; Habermas, 1982).³ Despite the fact that these grand analyses do not directly deal with the manager on a micro-level they have surely had a tremendous impact on politics and power holders, and have developed into normative principles of public management (e.g. Eriksson, 1999). The cost, however, seems to be a strong reification of the government approach bordering on paradox: in the act of constructing

2 One exception is Andersen (2003), which develops the hypothesis of polyphony in regard to system differentiation

3 This critique (of modernity) is foremost represented by Adorno and Horkheimer on the discussion of the dialectics between human technification; by Karl Marx on the discussion of exploitation, by Herbert Marcuse on the discussion of (one dimensional) subjectification, and by Habermas on the discussion of the liberation process away from a world of systems.

the critique, this body of critical literature acknowledges the object of criticism, that is, a strong unity based on prediction and control enabled by an instrumental regime of technologies and ensured by managerial authorities. Hence polyphony only becomes a remote wish if it is recognized at all.

Governance

While government conceives of the unity as a chain of controlled and controlling processes guided by a structural set-up, governance aims to observe the opposite, that is, the processes out of which the uniting structure of a network emerges (Kooiman, 2003, 1999; Kooiman, Vliet and Jentoft, 1999). Research, then, is pursuing the presumed fact that public boundaries cannot be taken for granted because networks emerge and demarcate themselves as new cross boarder processes. Probably the most complex, as well as the most encompassing notion of networks, has been developed within the traditions of Actor Network Theory (ANT) and The Social Shaping of Technology (SST). The former notably known to includes humans as well as the objects to be actants on an equal basis (Latour, 2005).

When it comes to the function of steering technologies they are considered to be an important contribution to the social shaping and dynamics of networks as opposed to predictability and control. To be more exact, technology performs a dual function of both being the media and effect of networks, thus enabling the circulation of ideas extending the manager from being an individual into being an arrangement of social ordering. Management is, so to speak, extended, spread out and distributed through the arrangements of technologies in the networks (Munro, 1999; Law, 1997). Along the same line, the steering aspect no longer conforms to the calculus as it is replaced with retrospect ascriptions of intentions. However, the unfortunate effect of this rich approach is that it fails to recognize organizational polyphony in a more radical sense. To recognize networks strictly foreign to each other might occur but it undermines the inclusive concept of network itself. Instead Bijker et al propose the notion of “A seamless web of society” (Bijker *et al.*, 1989: 3). Along the similar line Latour emphasize “the world-building capacities of social actors” (Latour, 1999: 20). However conflicting it might sound, this approach does not neglect the notion of successful management, despite the fact that the effects of management can neither be predicted nor guaranteed. With this proviso in mind, the challenge of management is presumed to be a matter of mobilization through enrolment and *interressement*. As Murdoch and Marsden suggest, the power of management is not a matter of how much one has, but to the number of actors that are involved in its composition (Murdoch and Marsden, 1995: 372).

Governmentality

The governmentality approach stems from the Foucault’s work on governing (Foucault, 1991). It is, among many others – foremost represented by Rose (2001, 1999), Miller and Rose (1994), Dean (1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2002) who seem to draw – though differently – upon the notion of governing as: “to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault, 1983: 221). Again, unity and not polyphony, becomes the object of study, and this time as the unifying conditions of actions.

In this context the function of steering technologies are considered to perform this structuring function. While the Foucault's analysis operates on a more grand scale – revealing how technologies as disciplinary arrangements links action to rationalized ideologies (Foucault, 1991), steering-technologies are often understood and analyzed as objectifying machines that leave subjects open for intervention and control. This approach, then, neither confines the analysis to the chains of control (government), nor to the translating and distributing processes within a network (government). On a generalized level the subject becomes the study of subjectivation while factual objects are turned into the study of objectification dealing with the question of how we are constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations. This concept has been especially influential, illuminating a variety of different constitutive effect of steering-technologies upon organizations (e.g. Law, 1991).

Again, we are faced with unity, and not polyphony, but this time it turns up as the unifying conditions of different actions. One might think that some insight into organizational polyphony was within reach considering the great differences between the constitutive effects of technologies. However, the study of co-existing technologies is recently taking another direction, moving toward the intertwining of managerial practices. Unity, then, seems only to emerge on another level, especially as this intertwining is comprehended as relays, assemblages and apparatuses (*dispositifs*), all serving as the unifying mechanisms of the (intertwining of) patterns of practices (e.g.. Raffnsøe, 2006, 2003; Townley, 2004; Lemke, 2001). This approach is without a doubt not an attempt to address the challenges of management, as it operates with an explorative, descriptive or critical ambition in mind. Nevertheless, we have seen attempts to do so in ways strongly relating to the reflexive competencies of management and what Weick (1995: 114) calls “premise control”. That is, the control of assumptions and definitions that are taken for granted and guides practices.

Unity on behalf of polyphony

Two questions were posed in order to address the limits of the governance traditions: How does each approach observe the function of steering technologies upon the organization and, accordingly, address the challenge of management? And what is lacking in each of these interpretations in regard to organizational polyphony? The following figure reflects these questions.

	The function of steering-technologies	Assumed effect upon the organization	The challenge of management?
Government	Integrative function	Position Authorization of the unit's positions	Calculation & control
Governance	Processual function	Relation The social shaping of networks	Enrolment & interesement
Governmentality	Constitutive function	Condition The emergence of new domains of control	Reflexivity & premise control

What seems to unite the government, governance and governmentality approaches is the way steering technologies serve as a uniting mechanism. That is, the function of chaining a strong public body together on predictability (government); the function of mediating and structuring processes eventually emerging into networks (governance); and the function of setting out new and unifying conditions for action (governmentality). Each approach, in other words, fails to address polyphony as the effect of technologies and thus bring this important matter to light as a managerial challenge. An approach based on systems theory is an attempt to do so.

A Systems Approach

Systems theory perceives the differentiation of social formation in terms of closed systems and hence offers a way to observe the nature of polyphony. Within this context, polyphony is defined as the co-existence of systems within organizations that remain closed to each other, while steering technology is observed as to how they constitute this formation of polyphony.

Systems theory

Before proceeding into the two leading concepts of the proposed approach – technology and steering – a brief account of Luhmann's theory of social systems theory will be offered. Our account here draws on *Social Systems* (1995) and the concept of 'differentiation' (1982, 1990a), but it inscribes itself in, as well as draws upon, existing introductions recently offered by Seidl (2005), Seidl and Becker (2005), Bakken and Hernes (2002) and Kneer and Nassehi (1993).

Luhmann makes a sharp distinction between social systems and psychic systems: *social* systems reproduce themselves on the basis of communication while *psychic* systems refer to human beings and reproduce themselves on the basis of thoughts. This, however, does not exclude concepts such as 'mind', 'person' and 'action', but exactly allow these constructs to emerge as different ascriptions performed by the communication of systems. Luhmann also suggests that we speak of *autopoiesis* whenever the communication of a social system is reproduced by communication itself. This is done in either of two ways: on an operational level, communications obtain their relevance only through following communications that refer to them, or on the level of reflection, when communication according to the same logic addresses the communicative premises on which the communication rests. This construction forms the de-ontic basis of social systems theory: Communications does not represent facts, but solely to previous communications. This is not to say that social systems are mysterious flows of communication. As Luhmann put it, communication communicates but demands are put on individuals to communicate in ways that are guided by social expectations of programmes (premises) set out by systems. In relation to technology, the expectations of benchmarking direct attention toward the achievement of collective legitimacy through resemblance. In regard to the SWOT model, the opposite happens. Expectations direct attention to the marked and encourage an engagement into fierce full competition on the basis of uniqueness and core competencies. As Vos argues

(2005, chapter 17), the ultimate point of reference is either constructed as the outside (legitimacy and resemblance) or the inside (uniqueness and core competence). By no means does system theory claim a deterministic relation between communication and action. Lots of organizational practices do not correspond with the expectations set out by programmes. But expectations are exactly what enable the recognition of accepted behaviour as opposed to deviating behaviours and hence allow steering, control and sanctions to take place on a communicative basis. Third of all, communication is an act of *observation* as any communication is the indication within a distinction. Communication is, so to speak, not able to communicate without this basic operation, thus systems are operationally closed but cognitively open. This leads to the recognition of how systems construct their own *environment* in the act of communication. This is to say, that the environment is not an ontologically given state of affairs outside the system. On the contrary, systems each in their own way indicate the environment according to a distinction, which could have been different. As we recall the technologies of benchmarking and SWOT just mentioned, the construct of an environment emerged relative to each technology in use. In relation to the concept of organizational polyphony, one might state, there are as many environments as there are systems. Fourth of all, organization is a social system consisting of decision communication of which one of the functions is the ability to decide upon the premises for further decisions. It will exceed the aim of this article to proceed with the consequences to be drawn from this definition of organization. What is important to note is how the function of decisions allows for the observation of technologies in two ways and that this article looks at the latter. Either the observation of how decisions organize the appearance of various technologies. Or how present technologies, and the related programmes, works as highly different premises for further decisions. This has become a familiar distinction (Scheytt, 2005: chapter 18), i.e., how technologies can be considered as constitutive of, as well as constituted by, the decisions of the organization.

Finally, we use the distinction between first and second order observation as a guide: if one observes in the first order mode, one puts oneself in the position of the organization and tries to observe what it observes while observing. In contrast to that, the mode of second order observation implies a critically distanced position towards the organizational observations. The researcher observes the way in which the observational, and hence communicational premises are programmed due to the presence of (various) technologies. The aim is to observe what systems cannot observe due to the specific way in which they observe. In other words, the blind spots of social systems.⁴

Technology and steering

Drawing on these basic notions of a systems-oriented approach, two concepts are proposed in order to observe the polyphonic organization: ‘technology’ and ‘steering’. These were originally proposed by Niklas Luhmann, who defined ‘steering’ and

4 This emphasis on observation has become a core trait within the politics group of the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School (e.g. Andersen, 2003, 2006; La Cour, 2006; Renningson, 2007).

‘technology’ in relation to observation and suggested a strong interconnectedness between the two concepts.

From the perspective of second order observation, technology is a selection of specific causes and effects ... These considerations strongly suggests reformulating the concept of steering. It cannot mean to produce the intended state of the system, certainly not in the long run. Instead, it means (in the sense of cybernetic control) to reduce the difference between a real and a preferred state of specific variables (for example, the rate of unemployment) ([Luhmann, 1989]). But reducing differences also means producing differences. You never get a system which no longer deviates from expected values ... In this sense, steering seems to be a selfsustaining business. (Luhmann, 1990a: 228, emphasis modified)

Systems theory can help us to understand technology because it gives an account of how the causal relation between system and environment emerge on the basis of technologies. When it comes to steering, systems theory provides us with an account of how to observe the reproductive closure of systems by guiding observation toward the reduction of deviations from the calculus provided through the systemic mechanisms of feedback. That is, the concepts of technology and steering enable the observation of multiple systems caused by the presence of multiple technologies, hence the formation of polyphony.

Technology

“Seen from the point of view of second order observation,” Luhmann notes, “technology rests on the attribution of causality, on the selection of some out of many causes and some out of many effects” (Luhmann, 1990a: 228). This selection and connection forms a causal setup that is basic to management, and highly dependent on which technology is being used. If we consider the widely recognized technology of value-based management, which in a Danish context has been realized under the heading ‘value-based steering’, the ambition is to a great extent to establish a causal connection between the inner character of employees and their external performance (e.g. McKinlay and Taylor, 1998; Townley, 1998). This is why character and motivation become so important. The interesting issue, however, is not to what extent it happens or not. The inside of the employee is unobservable anyway. The important contribution of systems theory is the insight that this particular technology structures the observation of management, and hence communication, as it makes the inside of subjects visible as objects of outside control. *In short, technologies work by constructing a calculable reality for managers to be observed.*

As such, technology is the mechanism that not only offers a distinction of possible indications, but also relates expectations to the calculation so as to guide the communication of management. In fact, technology dissolves the distinction between reality and fiction, so far as the fiction of cause and effect constitute both the ‘reality’ and ‘sense’ of observations. Technologies, then, are not innocent and neutral tools in the hands of strong managers. They can define the boundary between the self (management) and context (environment) and hence condition what it means to govern. A comparison with the overall function of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) provides another example. It seeks to compute the worker as a function of movements, while value-based management seeks to investigate the opposite question: What moves the worker? This shift from the observation of ‘outer’ to ‘inner’ (always implicit in

value-based management) brings the question of personal character to the fore and turns it into one of the most important objects of calculation. *Both examples illustrate how the connection between cause and effect is contingent to each technology.*

This calculus is not only expected to be reliable but also repetitive, and technologies have therefore become especially attractive among managers as a means to relieve the burden of decision under complex conditions. Institutional theory has used this notion to explain the diffusion and isomorphic traits of management and organizations. The systems-theoretical point, however, is different, as the repetition of functions works as an enhancer of expectations into solid premises of communication and simultaneously makes new technologies worth referring to. Technology neither exposes a proven relation between cause and effect nor is the repetition of the calculus proven. Instead, technologies relate to expectations of communications (Luhmann, 1990a, 1993). It is for the very same reason, that technologies simplify the complexity in ways that seem manageable. This is the case as technologies offers the possibility of relating recognized effects to previous decisions or present decisions to anticipated effects. In other words, this structuring of expectations enables the ascription of decisive action to persons if not managers in particular, as opposed to, e.g., ecological changes, which takes place within a longer timespan (Luhmann, 1993). Technology, then, is a time-compressor, and this might be one of the reasons management so often celebrates itself as the cause of organizational success by referring to technified measures. *Technology, then, offers the observation of management as expectations and in particular expectations of having a high impact upon the organization.*

Steering

Causality has so far been treated as the defining trait of managerial technologies. This leaves the environment of the system to be observed, and thus spoken and acted upon, in a manner that is open to intervention. The perception of causality is the expectation of an opportunity for intervention. But how does technology enable management to continue on its own terms? How is the reproduction of the system enabled? As we will propose, the system theoretical concept of steering helps us to observe this self enforcing feature of technologies.

“All steering,” Luhmann tells us, “uses distinctions admittedly with the specific intention of reducing differences that are themselves distinguished” (Luhmann, 1997a: 45). To recall BPR, this tradition with its standardization and reconfiguration enables the observation of the employee as a locus of actions which can be compared to explicit standards. This comparison posits a difference to be minimized in order to achieve greater efficiency and output control (movement/standards). With value-based management a whole new distinction to be minimized is brought to the fore, namely, that between character and performance. Inasmuch as steering consists in the reduction of differences, it can be understood as a communication process and even a reproductive one. The ideals inherent in the (perfect) calculation of actions (BPR) or inner character (value-based management) work as a motor in the steering process because the nature of the ideal exactly enhances the production of deviations along with various beliefs in its corrections. Too much resistance to prescriptive standards (BPR) or a blameful character behind performance (value-based management) is both

deviations according to the related ideals. *Steering is the minimizing of a difference between calculation and deviation.*

Does systems theory then remain aloof to the issues of resistance to hegemonic order that governmentality approaches so rightly emphasise (e.g. McKinlay and Starkey, 1998: 8)? The shorts answer is that it does not. Since the context is produced within the system, the observation of resistance along with other deviances only underscores the need for further steering. Resistance, so to speak, neither erodes managerial accomplishments nor expresses a failure of steering. On the contrary, resistance feeds management, as it provides the basis of further reproduction. And in fact, still more refined feedback procedures such as control, evaluation and auditing surely add to this reproductive process. They enforce the fiction of the calculation while in fact producing observations of deviations that push the steering process into ever more refined reproductive loops. This concept is very much in line with Hughes, who states: “A crucial function of people in technological systems is to complete the feedback loop between system performance and system goal and in so doing to correct errors in system performance” (1989: 54). Steering, in other words, takes us deep into the reality of management and shows us one of the core reproductive features of this discipline. *Steering, then, is the reproductive process of managerial communication.*

Systems, finally, are operationally closed. The decisive discovery within traditional cybernetics, with its paradigm of a thermostat, was the feedback mechanism that steers the system by comparing inputs with principal goals. Systems theory does not leave this basic notion, but emphasises the reproduction of the system as the regulation of what is outside by the internal distinction between system and environment. Thus, steering becomes a self-effecting mechanism or, as Luhmann puts it, “steering is always selfsteering” (Luhmann, 1997a: 46). System theory, then, builds the limits of steering into its account because order cannot be understood as the result of steering, nor do systems have the capacity to affect other systems according to a specific purpose. *Instead, systems theory exposes the full potential of observing the selfsteering possibilities of systems foreign to each other.*

Observing polyphony

There are now two important issues to address. One is how these concepts of technology and steering together add to the observation of organizational polyphony by means of observing differentiation and reproductive closure. The other is how they allow this relatively abstract observation to take place in a very concrete manner, as the presence of steering technologies is the lead to follow. This suggested approach is displayed in the following table:

Concept	Technology	Steering
Function	Selection and connection of cause and effect (calculus)	Reduction of a difference
Observation	Cause/effect	Calculus/deviation

The *concepts* of technology and steering can ground the observation of polyphony. The status of the concepts, along with the definition is crucial as the observed phenomenon

is co-constructed through the concepts that are being put to use. Any observation must leave out other observations, which could possibly offer other insights. In this case one important matter has been left out that would nevertheless change the object of analysis and the scope of the article. This is the issue of how systems of management act as co-constructors of polyphony deciding upon the variety of technological premises for further decisions. This reflexive, or strategic capacity is left out of the picture in order to specifically follow the lead of present steering technologies and uncover the constitutive and polyphonic effects.

The *function* serves as the operational definition of these two concepts. As touched upon, polyphony is observed as a matter of systems relating to their own environments by means of different technologies. This situation is observed as each technology offers a different calculus, that is, the formation of different expectations to the environment. And the steering aspect inherent in each technology offers the mechanisms of reproductive closure though registration and minimization of deviances from this calculus.

Observation is a condensation of the concept as an indication within a distinction. Technology offers the observation of how cause and effect are related and hence point out the way in which the system relates to its own environment. Steering operates with the distinction calculus/deviation and hence points out the way in which the system reproduces itself. This suggested programme, then, observes how polyphony follows the differentiation of steering technologies.

Goalssteering – a case of organizational polyphony

We have now arrived at a more systematic and empirical illustration of the proposed approach, that is, how steering and technology direct attention toward organizational polyphony as an effect of goalsteering as opposed to the anticipated function that is promoted by the three traditional approaches to government and not at least the instrumental character proposed by the NPM paradigm. This case of goal steering draws upon the Danish PhD case study conducted by Thygesen (2002), a recent anthology on the development of the public sector (Pedersen, 2004) as well as the work of Andersen (2003, 2005, 2006) and Renninson (2007).

Goal-based technologies structure observation according to the distinction between present and future. Goals are expressed in the present but refer to a future state, hence goals serve as present futures. This distinction is not only one of observation but of causality (technology) and minimization (steering). Goals based steering offer a causal construct in which elements of the present is treated as a means to future ends. Steering is a matter of minimizing this difference, on the assumption that elements of today should resemble tomorrow as much as possible.

Goalsteering has developed in three stages in Denmark since the 1980s: first-order goalsteering, reflexive goalsteering and second-order goalsteering. The two first stages represents the transition from managing others to modes of self-management, hence turning public organizations and related institutions into an collection of self-managing

enterprises acting strategically while determining which means to put into use. The third stage is meant to set out binding premises for the choice, configuration and use of other technologies, that is, an attempt at re-unification to support a present effort toward a common future. However, the simultaneous presence of each stage construes the organization mono-contextually, and therefore, taken together, constitutes a polyphonic order. This is to say that the environments emerge differently within each system as references accordingly are directed toward 1) an iron cage of rules, 2) a sectorial whole in which you are an active/integrated part, and 3) a re-entry in so far as you are expected to cause yourself as an effect. There is, so to speak, neither a single subject, nor a supreme technology present or capable of bridging, reducing or transforming this diversity into a unity; hence, the growing polyphony of the organization. What follows is a brief account of each stage.

Three stages

Before the Danish public reform in 1970, technologies of goal assessments were already considered to be the prime technology. Goals and means were set by the central administration and the municipalities were expected to act accordingly, that is, to show rule-following behaviour. This was the case for pensions, social welfare, assessment of taxes, etc. In effect, planning involved no social expectations of the clerk to transform customer needs into organizational change. In fact, they relieved organizational pressure and complexity as the function of the clerk was evaluated by reference to rules to be followed, not rules to be changed.

Technologies of goal assessed planning thus erected a cage of causality around the clerk. The town clerk and the local municipality were expected to be the media of decisions already taken and calculations already conducted. One might conclude, then, that the process of steering remains absent. However, this is not entirely true according to systems theory. Steering became a matter of reducing the difference between set rules and own practices in order to achieve correspondence. This sets out a dynamic of reproduction where rules not only caused deviations to be observed as practices, but in particular practices imbued with such common human traits as innovation, learning, ethics etc. Hence the self imposed need for more rules.

The first Danish public reform took place in 1970. It was sweeping and comprehensive, reducing more than 1200 municipalities to 273 bodies. The introduction of new principles of goal assessed decentralization grew out as a relief to the overload of rules. This reprogramming transformed observable reality (i.e., the observability of reality) in two different ways. First, it became the task of the central administration to define overall goals (of effectiveness) while observing municipalities as means of achieving them. Second, sectorial themes – education, social welfare, infrastructure, elderly care – now cut across each municipality as ways of maintaining the big picture. This change in programming set out a new causal relationship. The municipalities were no longer a medium confined to an iron cage of rules. On the contrary, the municipalities were now recognized as, and expected to be, an active participant in the causal set-up, as they were to define the means by themselves, thus enabling the public to be both a unity and divided at the same time. In other words, the new technology of goal assessment was bridging the double contingency of two participants by the designation of means and

ends. Accordingly, steering was a matter of reducing the difference between part and whole. And this practise was fed as well as accelerated heavily by a growing number of controls, evaluations and audits; all providing feedback loops and hence a massive load of information to be handled only by adding the need for enhanced steering. As an effect, coordination between all levels – and coordination of coordination – became the preferred means to prevent any single body to take any private strategic direction, not least accounted for by the infinite number of meetings and planning sessions. Not surprisingly the semantics of communication changed in line with the change of social expectations. The ‘town clerk’ became ‘the chief executive’ and was now expected to be the causal connecting point between whole (sector) and part (municipalities). The manager became the ‘meeting manager’, so to speak, among other ‘meeting managers’ or, as system theory would have it, the social expectation of communications was to engage in more communication.

The second Danish reform of the public sector took place in the mid 1980s. In this case the number of municipalities was not reduced. Critics were now concerned about the growing bureaucracy caused by coordination accelerating into coordination of coordination. Again, goal-based steering was reprogrammed. Technologies of empowerment were introduced and this ‘enforced liberation’ was a matter of defining means according to own goals. In fact, the increase of self technologies gained momentum throughout Scandinavia and England from the beginning of the 1980s and was sustained by the ideal of a public sector showing adaptability on all levels. Again, this change of programmes within goal based technologies provided a shift in the very semantics of communication as ‘institutions’ became ‘firms’ now stressing the strategic capability of each; as ‘meeting’ turned into ‘dialogue’ maintaining freedom on each side and as ‘coordination’ became ‘vision’ now being considered the prime principle of integration. The environment, now seen from the perspective of each ‘firm’, changed from the overall and encompassing sectors toward causing one self as an effect. This shift from an outside reference (sector) toward self-reference is what Mitchell Dean (1995) also calls “the obligation to freedom”.

This change of technology sets out new conditions for causality and steering, and hence reproduction of communication. Before the reform, the notion of causality was linear. But the ‘self’ of the technologies has turned causality into a circular matter as the organization, or any other actor performing the art of management, is expected to take responsibility for own future goals, own present means and derived matters of self control. In effect, the common organizational division between authority and authorized, or formulation of goals and execution of means, has vanished and now evolved into an integrated matter within the notion of empowerment and self management. This introduces what might be called the schizo-dynamic of management, which is now both expected to imagine what is in the light of what to become, and to become what it will become in the light of what is.

Steering, then, became linked primarily to time. In fact, steering is a matter of observing the present in the light of the future and hence minimizes this difference. What follows can be seen as two reproductive mechanisms. One was the introduction of an accelerating number of future-telling technologies – e.g. statistical and emphatically techniques uncovering future needs – all turning the contingency of futures into a

believable/fixed reality causing the demand for immediate action and new goals to follow. The other was a reproduction process according to yet another configuration of time. Logically, the social expectations of being “proactive” is nonsense as it set out demands of being ahead of future or, commonly phrased, ahead of time. But the performativity of this steering cannot be underestimated as it accelerates self-transformations of organizations toward being ahead of what cannot be achieved. In any case, one might term this reproduction the ‘self-positioned organization’, as each institution mirrors itself as an organization-to-come and the environment as future changes to be acted upon.

The three system-stages of goal based steering – 1. order, reflexive and 2. order – are displayed in the following figure.

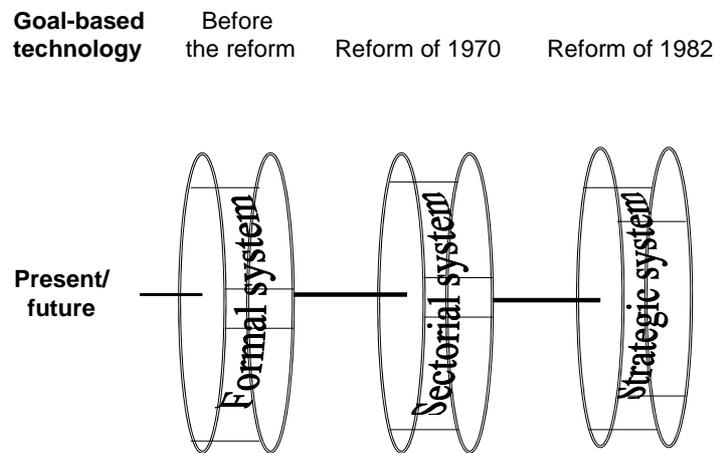


Figure 1

Two effects merit attention in relation to polyphony: first, the way the presence of each system remains closed to the others (technology) and in the way the reproduction of operations are enabled through feed back mechanisms (steering); and, second, the way polyphony eventually leads into the polyphony of polyphony due to an increase of subtechnification. Each effect will be elaborated in the following.

Closed systems

Environments emerge differently within each system. As already noted, it depends on whether they are oriented by 1) an iron cage of rules, 2) a sectorial whole, and 3) re-entry. Thus, polyphony starts to show as the independent acquisition of means that do not correspond with rule following behaviour just as the strategies of one self do not comply with the achievement of goals set by others. Not only do we witness antagonistic references to different environments but also the ways in which the different systems (re)produce this observation. This is to say, that 1) the distinction between system and environment is reproduced as pre-given boundaries as communication is expected to exhibit rule following behaviour while questioning formal rules is observed as a deviance, and 2) the sectorial system the formal boundaries between system and environment is implicitly at stake as this system is

expected to reflect and decide upon itself as a contingent mean to achieve fixed sectorial goals. This happens when the communication selects between what might be our means and what is not. In this process the boundary of the system is implicitly (re-)arranged. But still, questions concerning the whole are perceived of as deviations while questioning the function of how to be an effective and contributing part now emerges as an expected communication. This leads us to the operations of 3) the strategic system where it becomes a distinct feature that the system is able to reflect upon and (re)configure as strategy covers a re-entry of the system within the system in order to perform this expected self-transformation.

Taking the different ways in which the configurations of boundaries takes place, one organization, in the classical sense, is not equal to one system believed to integrate the parts within a whole. On the contrary, observed from the point of view of systems theory, they each cause the organization to emerge as different images. In particular, it compromises the pressure and importance put upon management by NPM when considering the apex as the ultimate cause of this integration to happen. From a systems theoretical point of view, this is not the case, as steering only adds to the autonomy of different systems and not to the predictability of the manager.

This is not to say that relations between systems do not take place. Luhmann speaks of 'structural couplings' because systems cannot talk *to* each other but only speak *of* each other (Luhmann, 1997b: Chapter 6). The formal system shows features of ignorance or responds to the other systems in terms of rejection or irritation. Contingent goals of others cannot contribute to a system largely guided by what is right and what is wrong. But the strategic system commonly observes the former as a strategic resource, that is, as a means to its own ends. This happens, for instance, when certain rules are either interpreted or singled out in order to legitimate and enhance the achievement of own goals. In this case, the relational capacity of systems does not correspond with the modern belief in consensus so commonly expressed by managers. On the contrary it shows the incommensurability of systems, as they relate to each other according to their own logics.

Subtechnification

The strategic system consists of social expectations causing multiple futures to emerge according to the differences between strategic choices. As such, the system displays a self-imposed dynamic of being in a state of becoming, that is, leaving itself as a present state while yet not turning into what it is set out to be.

What is interesting in regard to polyphony is the fact that this variety of self-transforming identities by management is perceived of as an incalculable complexity which has to be reduced through yet another reprogramming of goalssteering. This has caused a technology of the second order to emerge that displays attempts to construct a unifying technology for the use of a diversity of technologies. However, as opposed to this initial purpose, this adds to the growing polyphony in two ways. First, and recalling the stages of public sector reform, this technology is just another contribution to the contingency of the organization. Second, as different technologies now refer to the supremacy of goals, they have successfully materialized into the goal-assessed

configurations of a diversity of sub-technologies. This includes, among many other things, the use of goal-based benchmarking and goal-based SWOT. Taken these two technologies into consideration, two different environments emerge on behalf of an observation that values each side of the distinction collective/unique, that is, one observation decoding the environment as a space of collective acceptance and another one as a battle among uniquely marked positions. Futures, then, relate to such opposing ideas as achieving collective acceptance among friends (logic of appropriateness) as opposed to engagement into war like situations with enemies (logic of competitiveness). The figuration between system and environment, and not at least the reproduction performed by mechanisms of steering in each case construes the relation between the organization and environment mono-contextually and therefore, taken together, constitutes and reproduce a diversity of antagonistic images of the organization and its relation to environment. In effect, polyphony presently seems to accelerate in the name of unity as the desire of one achievable future not only multiplies into futures but also relates to further system differentiation caused by the multiple technologies offering different distinctions of observation, different causal configurations between system-environments, and different ways of reproductions. The stages subtechnification is displayed in the following figure:

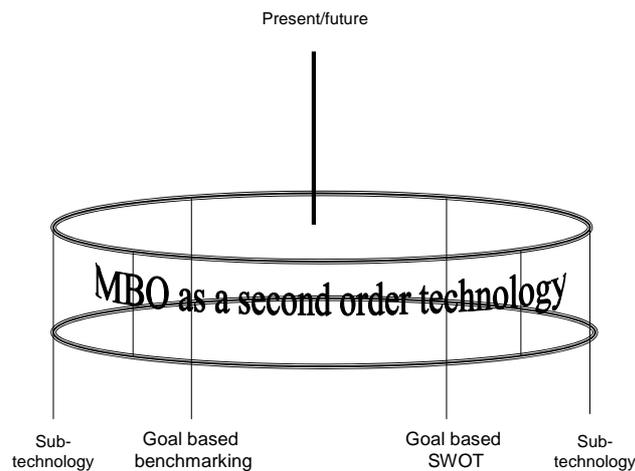


Figure 2

The simultaneous presence of three developmental stages, ultimately supplemented by this stage of subtechnification, indicates how the penetration of a single technology (MBO) neither unites the organization nor is a technical means to achieving normative ends; rather, it constitutes and diversifies the organization to such an extent, that it leads to the emergence and differentiation of systems. The analysis of goalsteering shows that this paradox does not cause the organization to freeze when faced with a merely *logical* impossibility. On the contrary, the productivity of this paradox is evident in the way it leads managers to believe in the image of unity while polyphony is all the while rapidly growing. Hence polyphony is not the opposite of unity. Along with unity, polyphony shapes the very paradox that causes the organization to progress. In this case, goalsteering has produced the need for its own reprogramming as complexity grew out of control. According to this logic, goalsteering does not reduce complexity, as

it is meant to do. It has produced complexity and hence the need for its own reprogramming. This has not only led to the development and incommensurability of systems, it also calls the assumption that managers are in control of a governing body into question. Could it be that control itself emerges as a bi-product of goalsteering?

Conclusion

The systems theoretical approach allows for the observation of the polyphonic effects of technologies upon organizations, rather than presuming a formation of unity. From the brief analysis of MBO that has been offered, we can draw two general conclusions. First, the historicity of the organization is not necessarily to be conceived of as a linear and successive string of events leading toward an even stronger unification of the organization, but as the present existence of systems derived from the progressive stages of MBO, hence the formation of polyphony. Second, this progression eventually leads to subtechnification, causing polyphony to accelerate in a quest for unity. But it is the very presumption of unity or one existing organization that must be questioned as each technical leap removes the limits of the once unknown and convert this domain into new observable environments.

It is tempting to think, then, that this approach is announced as the counter-concept to unity. But this is only partly true. In the quest for polyphony, systems theory only reverses the relation between the parts and the whole; that is, the organization is represented as an image in each system leaving the governmental body as a contingent choice of systemic communication. The governing approaches all seek to explain how technologies unite the parts into a corpus and it is the contribution of systems theory to observe this relation reversed.

New managerial challenges now emerge that compromise, not least, the NPM notion of technologies as means to achieve normative purposes once they are put into the hands of strong managers. In the future, two problems must be addressed. How is it possible to manage 1) as polyphony sets out the conditions of steering and 2) the whole emerging within each part? In this context, this would at least force NPM to consider a managerial leap away from 'management *by* technologies' toward 'management *of* technologies'. The latter referring to the observation of how the observations (and reproductions) of different systems in relation to the environment is made possible by each technology that is put into use. This tentative contribution should not be confused with a critique of NPM. The proposed approach is meant as a feedback loop as it observes the constitutive effects of new steering technologies upon the organization and is thus meant to feed implications of polyphony into this paradigm as a crucial challenge for management.

In principle this ambition is stressing the need for organizations to interpret themselves. In this case a system theoretical approach has specified 'how' in at least two ways. On a structural level neither the environment nor the organization has to be treated as the ultimate point of reference. Instead, what needs to be observed is how technologies constitute as well as enable the reproduction of this distinction, hence offers a clue for subsequent 'informed' action about the polyphonic order of the organization. On an

operational level this approach provides comprehensive insights in how technologies affect patterns of communications in organizations and hence, how reality emerge contingent to the presence of technologies into multi factual areas of communication.

However, as Vos notes (2005: chapter 17), the fact that social systems fail to see through their existence does not imply that self knowledge is impossible. It merely indicates that self-observation is a highly contingent affair, in the sense that the identity of a social system is something that appears to be entirely dependent on the way the system identifies itself. In this case technology has been proposed as the point of entry.

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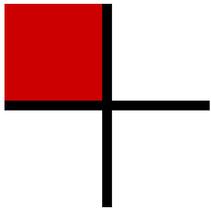
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Dialoguing Play

Pat Kane

In discussion with Steve Linstead and Rob McMurray. With additional questions by Andy McColl, Sebastian Bos and Ed Wray-Bliss.

abstract

In 2004, Pat Kane published *The Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living* (Macmillan), which went into mass-market paperback in September 2005. Pat's commitment to bridging boundaries between the arts, sciences and social sciences to open up new possibilities for working, living and creating futures together struck a chord with the Department of Management Studies at the University of York, who appointed him Visiting Fellow in 2005. To inaugurate the appointment, on October 5th 2005 Pat presented a 90 minute overview of the ideas in the book, followed by a 90 minute seminar discussion. The questions and responses taken from the discussion were edited, reworked and updated by Pat (in between writing and recording a new *Hue and Cry* album) and the resulting text is presented here.

Rob McMurray: Before I start, I'd just like to thank Pat for presenting his ideas in *The Play Ethic* and make the point that for me the book's great strength is its commitment to bringing together sharp observation of contemporary socio-economic-cultural phenomena and new developments in science with a sustained and wide ranging effort to respect theory and ground its deliberations in philosophical reflection that has been historically worked through from classical formulations to current cutting edge challenges.

Steve Linstead: I'd like to echo that. I think it is this respect for scholarship, rather than just empiricism or method, that differentiates this book from so many others that will populate the bookstores of airport terminals – Gibson Burrell's 'Heathrow Organization Theory' – and gives us valuable material to work with and from as it challenges us to develop a new and meaningful approach across the social sciences. It's an important project and it will mean that the book continues to be discussed, seriously, for some time to come – which is what it merits and why the University of York's Department of Management Studies are happy to welcome Pat and his vision.

My first question, Pat is one about point of view. It's a common assumption that play is a luxury, something we can do when we can afford the time, the toys, the tools and technology or the investment in skill or sociability required. Accordingly, reflecting on play and adopting a subject position that allows us to read, narrate or even author the world in terms of play implies a degree of privilege – perhaps a Western, middle-class

perspective. The question then is ... can play be relevant at all to child labour in 3rd world sweatshops, those dying of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, the victims of 4th world famine, the global underclasses identified by Bauman and Castells that appear to be the necessary fallout of capitalism, those oppressed not just by totalitarianism but by the everyday terror of genocide?

Pat Kane: For me, it's very important that before we begin to situate play's 'relevance' to a range of pressing political and economic issues, we examine some of those 'common assumptions' about play. For one thing, play conceived as a 'luxury' needs to be related more deeply to its socio-biological function. The greatest contemporary scholar of play, Brian Sutton-Smith, notes (in *The Ambiguity of Play*) that the purpose of play for advanced mammals is as a form of 'adaptive potentiation' – that is, as a generator of possible worlds and actions within defined times and places, an activity that helps the organism prepare and rehearse itself for the dense and manifold interactions of the wider social environment. So in a sense, play's luxury is our literal birth-right, by virtue of the developmental role that it has not only in our childhoods, but (increasingly today) in our post-patriarchal, post-bureaucratic forms of adulthood too. The 'privilege' of play, from this perspective, is the right to continue that balance between sufficient material security, and self-chosen risk and experiment, that characterises the development process of childhood.

My argument in *The Play Ethic*, however, is that this continuance of a playful spirit and mentality in our lives isn't just about a kind of internal recovery of 'childness' (the gambit of many New-Age oriented advisers and consultants in the world of organizational reform and change), but requires a political take on how the supporting conditions for human play can be politically and institutionally secured. In short, we are both players in the playground, and conscious designers and facilitators of the playground. Now, in the richer parts of the world, my call for us to be 'active players' in our societies and economies undoubtedly benefits from post-scarcity, affluence and the excess capacity of techno-culture – we have the means, tools, times and places to be players. To me, the essence of a play-ethical perspective is to keep asking, 'who gets to play? What does it mean to play? Who does it benefit and harm?' I'll develop this later, but my hope for a rich discussion about the nature of play in Western societies is that it gets us to reckon with the civic responsibilities that come with our semiotic and communicational freedoms. If we have that privileged moment of autonomy, self-realisation and self-awareness called play in our developed-world lives, what are we doing with it? How are we using its 'world-imagining' potentials to shift towards a less unjust and exploitative world?

SL: Partly what you're saying is that play is ontological, and that it unites mammals as simply engaged with reality as Gregory Bateson's otters and reflexively critical about how that reality is represented as Jacques Derrida. Our question then becomes: how do socio-political conditions distort its forms and possibilities? Is play a potential source of emancipation, of resistance, of stimulating human potential and bridging the ontical and the metaphysical – and if it is how best can we possibly attempt that?

PK: I think the ontological nature of play is fascinating, but in no way automatically implies an emancipatory potential. Recently, I've been interested in the use of ludic and

playful language in military and diplomatic discourse. There is a long and enduring tradition within military elites of using simulation and game-based strategy – from the Chinese and Indian precursors of chess in the 9th century, to the Bush cabal and their ‘game-changing’ rhetoric in the middle-East.¹ The Pentagon ‘adaptively potentiates’ its manoeuvres in the ‘war on terror’, deploying a whole raft of strategies that partake of various modalities of play – including game theory (as a rationale for pre-emptive strikes), multi-user networks coordinating troop activity (these explicitly modelled on computer game culture). The simulatory moment of play is needed in all these activities – that suspension of reality, of ‘taking reality lightly’ as Schiller put it, which enables mass destruction and disruption to seem like ‘the great game’ of global war. Yet it strikes me that the response to this cannot be an anti-ludicism – some reassertion of solidity against fluidity, or even of solidarity against networks. We need to think our way through a possible ‘play ethics’ in order that we can identify what the emergent ‘counter-game’ against the top-down games of imperial power might be. The societal ontology of play is, to me, very well explained by the slogan given by Hardt and Negri in *Empire* – that is, ‘there is no outside’. We are in an agonistic world composed of ‘networks of networks’, a planetary ground of play and interaction, where the means of counter-organization are entirely within our grasp. The political priority is inventiveness, initiative and energy in the face of this global-societal field – enacted by a growing mass of self-conscious political players, who wish to use this systemic instability to create their own counter-publics and even counter-realities. We are already at play and in play – our emancipation depends on our activism. I’m beginning to realise that the tradition of agonistic political philosophy refined by Foucault, Laclau, Deleuze and Guattari is very congenial to a play-ethic perspective.

RM: Could [I] come in here and I press you then to be a bit more specific on how do we enable those at the bottom of the corporate ladder to realise their capacities and selves through play? Even in organizations that are creating the new play commons (such as the BBC) there are armies of cleaners, often immigrants, whose lives are not in-play when it comes to organizational and wider life except in the sense that they are subject to the fates of commercial gods. They are un-empowered and may be working for a subsistence wage. In the absence of an immediate economic or technological revolution what can a play ethic offer them?

PK: Glad to get back to organizations! To begin with, I’m pretty traditionally left-wing when it comes to securing proper wages and conditions for those in service work – the trade unions still have a primary function here, and have to continually evolve their reach in the face of immigrant and part-time labour conditions. (My favourite story of the relationship between playful organizations and service work is that of Las Vegas, one of the most tightly unionised cities in America²). But on a wider perspective, I still agree with the post-industrial utopian Andre Gorz when he identified that the central problem of an equitable post-work society is – who does the chores? And I agree that there’s a huge bogusness about places like the BBC whose staff self-consciously pursue a creative, playful ethic, yet leave the Morlocks to come in and clean up after the Eloi’s

¹ See my article for the Guardian’s *Comment is Free* site, [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/pat_kane/2006/08/the_dangers_of_gamechanging.html]

² See Marc Cooper’s 2004 article in *The Nation* [<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20040524/cooper>].

cavortings.³ I think the horizon of ‘who gets to play?’ has to be consistently addressed, in every realm, and at every level in an organization: I would go so far as to propose a combination of self-service practices, as part of every employee’s daily duties (it’s an expression of collective care to leave your desk in a state of cleanliness and tidiness), and an agenda for the robotisation of cleaning (nowadays a matter of office design and technical investment, rather than SF fantasy).

These would be practical responses arising from a re-conceptualising of the role of care and service in our entire lives – something I try to address in the book, when talking about the ‘play-care continuum’, a continuum of ‘response-abilities’. I think it is clearly possible to conceive of care and service as a gratifying response to the contingencies of our complex lives – and that there might be those (already well evidenced in the ‘caring’ professions) whose ‘response-abilities’ might be more attuned to the finitude of needs and standards (care), and less attuned to the infinitudes of horizons and possibilities (play). (Though in my view everyone has their own parabola, makes their own shape, around both ends of this continuum). The ‘art of care’ – perhaps better termed the ‘craft of care’ – could possibly be realised for some in the labour market as a positive identity, if we had a collective narrative for ourselves as ‘players and carers’ (rather than ‘workers’ and ‘lifers’).

In this ‘play-care continuum’, the right of creative activity would be balanced by the responsibility of maintaining its conditions of possibility, part of which would involve the inclusion of weaker players and the restoration of fatigued or broken players. The social apartheid implied by the time-poor/money-rich phenomenon can be addressed at root here. In a situation where self-care, mutual care and automated care increases, as an aspect of the social organization of playerhood, the ‘cleaner’ or ‘maintainer’ becomes someone for whom ‘cleaning’ is, in a real sense, a holistic or poietic act (in the way that carpentry, or teaching, has a vocational or self-realising force). I’m aware that this is a highly speculative vision of play and care as a dominant moral continuum in society. However I tend to agree with Frederic Jameson in *The Seeds of Time* that it often seems “easier to imagine the end of the earth and the end of nature than it is to imagine the ends of capitalism”. To imagine a society of players and carers is to think on the other side of currently existing capitalist society.

SL: Which then raises the question of subjectivity – the relation of play to self and identity. One of the shadows cast over our modern understanding of the character of the player identity is Kierkegaard’s outline of the aesthetic life as a style of disengagement in part one of *Either/Or*. For Kierkegaard’s Don Juan type of character, the point of the aesthetic life was to refuse all commitment, but also to take no responsibility for that – the triumph of the player gliding through relationships was not simply to seduce, but to then unsex the lover into breaking off the relationship and being happy to do so, so

3 The Morlocks were a humanoid species of below-ground dwellers, whilst the Eloi lived above ground, in H.G.Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895). The original proletarian Morlocks, who serviced and provided infrastructure for the Eloi, were sinister and cannibalistic, and used the aristocratic, placid and dissolute Eloi as a dietary staple. The terminology has since been widely applied to the distinction between hierarchically divided communities. *Wikipedia* offers a fascinating summary of the post-Wellsian acceptations of the terms, including the *X-Men*, *Doctor Who* and a scooter gang in Berlin. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/> ; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eloi>]

that the player could slip free without any guilt being attached for the betrayal or break-up. Sartre sought to combat this bad faith through angst, Levinas through reconfiguring alterity, but neither was a player as such. How can we combat or address the power of the received 19th century prejudice against play as being superficial and evasive and present a vision of play as a practice of ethically responsible subjects?

PK: That's a lovely historical reference. And that characterisation of the feckless, irresponsible player is strongly taken up by Zygmunt Bauman in his books on consumerism. In terms of Sutton-Smith's and others' spectrum of discourses and paradigms generated around the human propensity to 'adaptively potentiate', Kierkegaard's power-player and ego-player (spurning the social and developmental elements of playerhood) is particularly recognisable, and particularly male also. My answer to this prejudice is to emphasize the diversity of purposes and relationships that playful activity can and does encompass – the collectively-affirming identity of play-as-sociality in carnival and ritual, the nurturing and educative power of developmental play, the possibility for projective empathy in play-as-imagination, the sheer surrender of ego and agency involved in the 'play' of fate and the cosmos. In short, you counter Don Juan with Indra's Net, or Shakespeare, or Froebel, or the Notting Hill Carnival. To me, a play 'ethics' is almost – as Bauman says very clearly in *Postmodern Ethics* – the very definition of ethical choice itself. Play is activity that can be characterised as operating at the very extremes of both agency and structure: when faced with this diversity of praxis, we are forced into concrete and urgent arguments about how forms of play might shape and develop the good society or the good person. Not that this is easy to do. My fall back on a workable 'play ethic' is the distinction between finite and infinite games as outlined by the theologian James Carse – corresponding roughly to zero-sum and non-zero-sum games: play aimed at victory, against play aimed at continuing the play, gaining enlightenment from its development and mutation. Don Juan plays for the victory of seduction, which then has to come to terminus, in order that another victory might be secured: a finite player. Perhaps Casanova, or the participants in the Kama Sutra, are infinite players in this respect?

RM: I'd like to come in on this question of authenticity if I can. Pat, you talk about authenticity being a construct. You note that once we realise it is a construct we no longer have to be constrained by it. Could not *The Play Ethic* itself be read as a tract on authenticity – albeit fluid and multiple – but a prescription (Pat Kane's prescription?) for authenticity nonetheless?

PK: I'm tempted to go along with my Buddhist friends on this one – that is, we live in a state of reality that is in a state of permanent play, mutation and change (identify that at whatever level you wish), but that we can only survive and make sense of this through specific and contingent forms of identity (*samsara* is their term). So yes, the ontological emergence and fluidity that play discloses allows the constructs of authenticity to happen. But yes, fair cop: to be able to intuit, and then live with, change-as-permanence – even in the midst of a samsaric existence – is itself a claim to a deeper 'reality' about our lives. I find the same 'normativity about norm plurality' in Deleuze's writings – asserting strong claims about the processual nature of social reality as against a much stiffer and more authoritarian model, yet never quite aware of (or owning up to) the

progressive nature of this claim. If ‘authenticity’ means ‘being true to the non-dual nature of the universe’, rather than to yourself, then I’ll happily endorse authenticity.

SL: Somewhat relatedly to this discussion, a question you yourself initiate in the book is the question of audience, of play as display, and I’d like you to expand on that theme a little if you would. Guy Debord made the situationist position clear in arguing that we live in a society of the spectacle, where Marxist alienation is not merely from the objects of production but from the unfolding of reality itself, from which we are largely unattached and look on. Baudrillard took the point further arguing that we don’t just look on at reality because we cannot know what it is independently of our being in it and acting it out – but such a reality is merely a simulacrum of signs, symbols and information that elicits us to participate in particular ways that realise its illusory aspects. We might be alienated, but we aren’t alienated from anything knowable, and we are engaged in reproducing simulacra. So for Debord spectation is important, and for Baudrillard it is more like spectaction – but the point of both is that we perform, that play is play *for*, that there are audiences even if they are only other players. Perhaps the sort of reality TV that is *Big Brother* captures this simultaneity. But the question is, if play is performance, how do we arrive at an ethics of display? If play is performative, is it just another form of work that takes us back to a modified work ethic?

PK: I have been focussed in answering this question by a superb essay from the technology critic Alexander Galloway, ‘*Warcraft and Utopia*’. Let me quote from it:

Adorno argues [in *Aesthetic Theory*] that play activities are forms of repetition, and on this many agree, but he goes further to assert that “in art, play is from the outset disciplinary [and] art allies itself with unfreedom in the specific character of play.” For Adorno, play has been co-opted by the routine of modern life. “The element of repetition in play is the afterimage of unfree labour, just as sports – the dominant extra-aesthetic form of play – is reminiscent of practical activities and continually fulfils the function of habituating people to the demands of praxis, above all by the reactive transformation of physical displeasure into secondary pleasure, without their noticing that the contraband of praxis has slipped into it.” Thus, in the work of Adorno, play is not a vacation from the pressures of production, but rather the form-of-appearance (‘afterimage’) of that mode itself, with repetition, displeasure, and competitive interaction being but symptoms for deeper social processes. [<http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=507>]

I agree with Adorno and Galloway that sports is an example of a culture of display, of spectation, smuggling in a ‘modified work ethic’ – particularly in the spectacle of football, where all the tendencies of the new capitalism (disloyal, hyper-individualised employees; performativity as a self-subverting cult; results-driven, visionary management; the tensions of living out and up to a ‘brand’ culture) are served up as daily narrative entertainment for the viewing millions. It’s almost perfectly ideological – the ‘repetition, displeasure and competitive interaction’ of football as the ideal ‘after-image of unfree labour’. Galloway makes the salient point that, in some multi-user online synthetic worlds, the dues and routines that means you ‘stay in the game’ of *World of Warcraft* are almost indistinguishable from the kinds of unfree labour that constitutes an ‘offline’ life. As he puts it, “networks are the establishment and play is work”. Galloway’s other brilliant point is that perhaps we don’t need a labour theory of value, but a play theory of value, given how central play is becoming to information capitalism.

Yet I'd resist the notion – which I think constantly recurs in invocation of play in these kinds of arguments – that play has to be confined to a particular combination of elements in its spectrum. This is how Galloway describes play, as an

irreducible, heterogeneous, unquantifiable, absolutely qualitative human endeavour. Conventionally speaking, play is entirely divorced from any kind of productive activity. Play is defined as a negative force that is often a direct threat to production. Play is leisure; play is the inversion of production. Play is an uncapitalizable segment of time. One may return to Friedrich Schiller on the play-drive: the play-drive is a pure moment, and it is a very necessary moment, Schiller would claim, for man's development, but one that is entirely outside the formal, or the abstract, or all the kinds of human drives that lead to the creation of society as a whole.

What's interesting here is how badly Galloway misrepresents Schiller's play-drive. As Terry Eagleton adroitly points out in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, in the 'Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man', Schiller actually interposes the play-drive as a *hegemonic* term, mediating between the 'form-drive' of rationality, and the 'sense-drive' of irrationality – historicized by Eagleton as Schiller's horrified response, in 1794, to the unholy alliance of the *philosophes* and the mob in the spectacle of the French Revolution. And play as display and performance – the active and shaping 'aesthetic education' that would provide for an integrated model of citizenship and social involvement – was very much Schiller's ideal, what he called the 'aesthetic state'. It's extremely tempting in the age of *Big Brother* to revive Schiller's notion: could the concepts of 'aesthetic' and 'state' ever be brought more appropriately together? And it's an easy step to identify the hegemonic aspects of *Big Brother* as a form of performative play. Just as immaterial labour (in the Italian autonomists' sense) becomes aware of itself as a driving force in the development of society, the spectacle moves into to depoliticize, privatise, and trivialise it. Even more hegemonically, we can see *Big Brother* as orchestrating movements across the dividing line between passive spectation and active participation with consummate ease – a simulation of the opening-up of the spectacle. Slavoj Žižek (1989) has called this 'interpassivity' as opposed to interactivity – a simulation of interaction, guided by existing yet subtle commercial scripts for behaviour.

Is there an irreducibly open, primordial aspect to play, the sheer *difference* celebrated by Derrida, driven by mammalian adaptive potentiation? Yes. And if so, then that provides the 'adjacent possible' within any social system (as the complexity theorists put it) to imagine different forms of display than those which currently canalise the energies of the informational multitude. I'm sure that we'll participate and spectate in some form of 'reality TV' show at some point (Little Brother? Big Sister? Average Activist?) which, as Galloway says, will imagine a life after capitalism "through a utilization of the very essence of capitalism." I have, like Hardt and Negri, a degree of optimism about the mobility of power-flows across a thoroughly networked planet to think that this expressive possibility will be realised, at some point by some group of activists, and create a different form of display that will 'pierce through' the spectacle it participates in. Which leads us to our next question...

SL: ... which is the inevitable one of technology. We are used to the dualism characterised by the sort of technological determinism that disturbed Marx on the one hand, and the utopia of technological possibility that excited the same Marx on the

other, as you note in the book. We have perhaps become used to a more modified prostheticism that sees us extending human capability by means of artificial enhancements rather than by revolution, but such a cyborg vision does raise the question of what it means to be human and whether we are becoming post-human. Social-technological change as studied, for example, by actor-network theorists argues that objects have agency and that humans are part-objects themselves. If we are going to play with technology, are we thereby compelled to play with what it is to be human and non-human? And in working that boundary, is the play ethic a *messy* ethic, as John Law might put it?

PK: You're right to suggest that a play perspective brings us quickly to consider the post-human condition. There is no reason why 'adaptive potentiation' as a necessary flexibility, redundancy and excess in the developing mammal, would not begin to include those potentiations that might result from those extraordinary human 'play-tools' of the bio- or neuro-sciences. One of the truly futuristic tendencies in contemporary theory is exactly those post-human networks/rhizomes of affect and movement identified by thinkers like Latour or Deleuze. The mind-wrenching nature of their insights – that there might be lines of change and transformation which pass through machine, human, nature, which may be only retrospectively comprehensible, but which in the meantime liberate us into creative action comfortable with the idea of no predictable outcome – is anticipated by the sheer diversity of definitions of agency and determination represented by 'play' in our cultural archive, and across many cultures. That is – to use Sutton-Smith's typology – play can signify being caught up in agonistic networks, or being surrendered to the inhuman play of the universe, or being involved in the 'technology of improvement' that is education, or entering into a cognitive space both within and without the self known as the 'play of the mind', or even allowing the very integrity of selfhood to be subverted by humour, trickery, idiocy. Or it can be a combination of these rhetorics, and many others. Indeed, as the etymology shows, the root of play in English is *-dleg* from the Indo-European – meaning, literally, movement, motion, energetic engagement. Deleuze's 'line of flight' is very congenial here.

So I'm sympathetic to Law's notion of a social theory that can cope with ontological 'messiness'. My own concern is, precisely in terms of play and the post-human, who assumes the power and vision to create post-human hybrids from the 'mess' of the crucibles of bio-, info- and nano-technology? Our cautionary metaphor in this is always ludic – who has the right to 'play God' with life? Coming out of computer games culture, the answer is 'everybody'. Witness the forthcoming successor to the Sims game, *Spore*, jokingly known as 'Sim Universe', where the player literally evolves an organism from cell, to species, to civilisation, to planetary and then interplanetary expansion. If this habituates a generation of millennials/GenY'ers into believing they have the right to shape and tinker with evolutionary inheritances, then the question is truly open as to what a 'play-with-biology-ethic' might become. The most illuminating debate on this, in my knowledge, is the dispute between Peter Sloterdijk and Jürgen Habermas in 1999 (summarised by Brown at [<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/archive/5/brownannotated.htm>]). It's too involved to go into here, but I think Sloterdijk's request at the end of his essay 'Operable Man' is worth attending to:

How can one repeat the choice of life in an epoch in which the antithesis of life and death has been deconstructed? How could a blessing be conceived that could overcome the simplified confrontation of curse and blessing? How could a new covenant under conditions of complexity be formulated? Such questions as these are inspired by the insight that modern thought begets no ethics as long as its logic and ontology remain obscure. [http://www.petersloterdijk.net/international/texts/en_texts/en_texts_PS_operable_man.html].

I think that a 'play ethics' is the appropriate response to a clarified logic and ontology of the present, and is necessary for those 'conditions of complexity' that mark the post-human condition. I hope that it follows Sloterdijk's assumption that the very informational density and complexity of genetic understanding ultimately implies a less violatory attitude towards 'matter' and 'nature' – no longer 'raw' nature, but informational, coded nature, speaking to us of its complexity and emergence. Sloterdijk uses provocative language in this quote, but I agree with his trajectory:

Biotechnologies and nootechnologies nurture by their very nature a subject that is refined, cooperative, and prone to playing with itself. This subject shapes itself through intercourse with complex texts and hypercomplex contexts. Domination must advance towards its very end, because in its rawness it makes itself impossible. In the inter-intelligently condensed net-world, masters and rapists [S's characterisation of traditional uses of technology by power elites] have hardly any long-term chances of success left, while cooperators, promoters, and enrichers fit into more numerous and more adequate slots.

SL: Despite Sloterdijk's optimism here, and I have some sympathy with it, when we turn more directly to specific organizing and management practices, it is disappointing to find that in the past extremely promising critical analyses have foundered against the problem of changing large organizations – the dominant-hegemonic still seems to be winning out, for the moment at least. Even in flat organizations, perspectives such as feminism and gendered critique have struggled to avoid becoming part of a new discursive regime of more sophisticated exploitation and control as part of what Hardt and Negri and some of the autonomists, as you mentioned earlier, call immaterial labour. As a result it is often argued that approaches based on such critical thinking are only possible in small, organic organizational forms, or slower moving public sector bodies where market pressures are not so powerful as to prevent the occasional eddy forming. Is this true of the play ethic? Can it work in large organizations and the private sector without becoming another fad or fashion to stimulate short-term market creativity?

PK: It was something of a revelation to me to read Richard Sennett's *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, and his useful history of the genesis of the modern organization in Bismarck's military shaping of German bureaucracy – the human pyramid, in whose divisions of labour many could find their narrow but secure working identity. (Sennett is also clear about the extent to which this was a response to proletarian radicalism at the time – a need to find 'a job for everyone'.) That legacy explains a lot to me about the recalcitrance of the large organization in the late twentieth century, in the face of critiques from environmentalism, feminism and recently a playful informationalism.

Is that changing? To be sure, and as many in critical management studies have pointed out, the ideology of play is alive and kicking at executive and strategic levels of large organizations, in forms of leadership development, and as a rationale for certain kinds of culture-change programs. Players at this level are 'game-changers' who see the

opportunity (often afforded by a pragmatic understanding of complex-systems theory) to change certain ‘iterations’ or ‘narratives’ of occupational practice, in order to foment ‘healthier’ and ‘more generative’ organizational cultures. (These players, of course, have their correlate in militarised organizational forms as well, in terms of strategy and visioning – which I discuss in my previously mentioned article on the *Guardian Comment is Free* site, ‘The Dangers of ‘Game Changing’). The best examples I know of this are IBM’s embrace of the Linux/hacker community, and General Electric’s Ecomagination rebranding – attempts by large organizations to embrace elements of the hacker and environmental counter-cultures, as an act of ‘adaptive potentiation’ to extend their own corporate health and vigour. Though I might agree with Immanuel Wallerstein about this being the Di Lampudesa strategy – everything must change, in order that nothing changes... [see <http://www.binghamton.edu/fbc/iw-vien2.htm>].

I’m a bit sceptical that the play ethic is any more realisable, though, in either more capacious public sector environments, or in ‘more organic’ small-scale enterprises. Certainly the public sector has what I’d call a robust-enough ‘ground of play’, in terms of progressive policies on paternal leave, professional development, flexi-time, etc, to support the ‘multitude of purposes’ in a properly play-oriented organizational culture. Yet despite much rhetoric in recent years about moving away from an overly accountable and auditable management model for public services, in my experience there is little appetite for the kind of playful spaces and practices that might be seen as ‘wasting money in the public purse’ (except for, as mentioned above, the BBC).

I am also sceptical that smaller enterprises with less or no organizational legacy (other than that which their founders bring to them from previous experiences) will fully realise a play ethic on their own either, for precisely the converse reason – that they have no or little ‘ground of play’ that could sustain levels of frenetic ‘start-up’ energy and inventiveness. (Andrew Ross writes about this well in his study of Silicon Alley digital companies in the late 1990s, *No Collar*). I find more promising shifts in political culture – coalescing around the ‘well-being’ and ‘happiness’ agenda, and currently peddled by all three mainstream parties in the UK. This might result in a round of market regulation (specifically, the reduction of overall working hours, social dividend schemes, democratic and equitable parenting rights) which genuinely increases the zones of autonomy and self-determination in British citizens’ lives. With Andre Gorz, I believe that it is only genuine experiences of existential self-determination conducted in free-time and free-space – not the pseudo-experiences provided by much organizational culture – that allows workers to perceive either the alienations of their existing job, or the lineaments of a new and better occupation or practice. I go along with Hardt and Negri at the end of *Empire*, where they conclude that “the generality of biopolitical production” – where every aspect of our lives, communicational as well as physical, is needed by capital – can only be justified if an equally general system of social support is provided – what they call a “social or citizenship wage”.

Players – or what I call in the *Play Ethic* ‘soulitarians’ – are well aware that their effective participation in contemporary capitalism requires their full psycho-somatic commitment. And thus aware, they will struggle to establish non-market spaces wherein that commitment can be measured and mitigated. The question of how soulitarians

become a class *for* themselves, rather than just *in* themselves, is of course key. I concur with Paulo Virno on the difficulties of this:

Contemporary capitalist production mobilizes to its advantage all the attitudes characterizing our species, putting to work life as such. Now, if it is true that post-Fordist production appropriates “life”—that is to say, the totality of specifically human faculties—it is fairly obvious that insubordination against it is going to rest on the same basic datum of fact. To life involved in flexible production is opposed the instance of a “good life.” And the search for a good life is indeed the theme of ethics. (Brown, 2005: 35-36)

Here is at once the difficulty and the extraordinarily interesting challenge. The primacy of ethics is the direct result of the material relations of production. But at first glance this primacy seems to get away from what, all the same, has provoked it. An ethical movement finds it hard to interfere with the way in which surplus value is formed today. The workforce that is at the heart of globalized post-Fordism – precarious, flexible border-workers between employment and unemployment – defends some very general principles related to the ‘human condition’: freedom of language, sharing of that common good that is knowledge, peace, the safeguarding of the natural environment, justice and solidarity, aspiration to a public sphere in which might be valorized the uniqueness and unrepeatability of every single existence. The ethical instance, while taking root in the social working day, flies over it at a great height without altering the relations of force that operate at its interior.

Whoever mistrusts the movement’s ethical attack, rebuking it for disregarding the class struggle against exploitation is wrong. But for symmetrical reasons, they are also wrong who, pleased by this ethical attack, believe that the latter might put aside categories such as “exploitation” and “the class struggle.” In both cases, one lets slip the decisive point: the polemical link between the instance of the “good life” (embodied by Genoa and Porto Alegre) and life put to work (the fulcrum of the post-Fordist enterprise). [<http://info.interactivist.net/print.pl?sid=06/01/17/2225239>]

SL: An important theme post-Fordist theme in the book is the developing information age, to borrow Castells’ terminology. I’d like to focus on one aspect of that now. If it is true that new network forms of communication can lead both to new distributed forms of surveillance and control but also to new distributed forms of authority and democracy, how can the play ethic help us to avoid the one and embrace the other as we play across technological forms? And as the role of leadership is going to be significant for managing any transition in formal organizations as we currently know them, does this imply a new style of leadership with a new skill set for which we should be training and developing managers – a sort of open source leadership?

PK: I think, to pick up from the previous answer, that a play ethic can help to make that polemical link between ‘the good life’ and ‘life put to work’. That is, the vernacular, quotidian experience of play – as a zone of qualitative autonomy, as Galloway puts it – provides a surfeit of consciousness that can keep networks operating in an expressive, inclusive and open-ended way. Unlike Galloway, I don’t think that, for example, the entire experience of computer-gaming – now a major defining articulation of the Gen Y demographic – is simply a kind of mimicry of unfree labour. There are non-linear, symbolic, exploratory, emergent gaming experiences now appearing – *Spore* is just one, but *Katamari Damancy* might be another – where I’m convinced that a different epistemology is being developed by the user in the game-play. I think the astounding

vigour and variety of current expressions of social software – from blogging to *MySpace* – that arose from the Dot-Bust of the early oughties, and the exponential increase in broadband internet, show that consumer-citizens are demanding to be semiotic and communicational ‘players’, a demand which is clearly driving network development. So the ‘playspace’ of current informational culture is, I think, the crucible for that link between ‘good life’ and ‘life put to work’, between ethics and aspirations and the managerial strictures of the organization /enterprise, to be forged.

As for leadership in this environment, I think the terms ‘followership’ or ‘servant leadership’ – however ghastly their previous uses – may well be coming into their own here. Leaders within organizations who recognise, as Negri puts it, the “production-through-communication” of the multitude (and that section of it which comprises their workforce), are surely compelled to re-examine their strategic and executive function. An ‘open-source’ leadership would be one which, to extend the metaphor, opened out the kernel of its authority to tinkering, adaptation and improvement by an engaged community. The idea of ‘leader-as-narrator/chief-storyteller’ might be an effective realisation of this – someone who listens more to the operational stories of a workforce, than its metrics of performance, as an indicator of the real value of the company, and as a better guide to its strategic direction in the marketplace and society. Yet the skill-set required by that is more akin to the lead conductor in an orchestra (or the lead musician in a rock-group!), or a psychotherapist, or a good story-maker (fictional or journalistic), than to the McKinsey model of system-steering, number-crunching, and corporate-culture managing. The self-proclaimed business revolutionary Ricardo Semler – author of the *Seven-Day Weekend* – would seem to run Semco in this narrative-based mode.

Other than that, I was impressed by the 2003 Demos paper by Paul Skidmore on ‘Leading Between’, a vision for managers in the network age [<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/File/networklogic07skidmore.pdf#search=%22paul%20skidmore%20leading%20between%22>]. Skidmore’s headline recommendations at least hint at the softer, more open imperatives of a manager of players in a productive network, in that “network leaders”: lead from the outside in; mobilise disparate supplies of energy; foster trust and empower others to act; help people grow out of their comfort zones; are lead learners not all-knowers; and nurture other leaders.

SL: The point about nurturing recalls your earlier point about the possibility of an ethics of care. You’ve hinted in what you’ve said here that in talking about the work ethic we are in fact invoking a multiplicity of work ethics, and that the play ethic may itself have multiple dimensions. But for the moment I’d like to stick with the opposition implied between the two. In the book you expand a little on the Care ethic, that you see operating more alongside the Play ethic in your own life than the Work ethic. But perhaps it’s my old-fashioned sense of structural equilibrium that suggests that if this is so, with a play-work opposition and a play-care continuum, there must be an antinomial ethic operating to suppress it in the present. What then is the opposite of care? I’d like to suggest that you given us the answer already – some of the other comments you’ve made earlier are actually observations of the existence of a War ethic, one that underpins the idea of legitimate war, that allows allies to invade a country that hasn’t attacked them, and that renders terrorism illegitimate whilst simultaneously rendering pacificism unpatriotic. Of course, such an ethic works hand-in-hand with the

work ethic in the military industrial complex as you've also hinted earlier – and if this is true it both gives us an idea of the size of the task of inaugurating an episteme in which the play and care ethics might have the upper hand, but also underlines the importance of such a project. Would you agree?

PK: Absolutely – to underline what I said earlier, I thoroughly agree that the stakes are extremely high, in these militarized times, around the uses and powers of play. If an ontology of play reveals the processual, contestable nature of reality, then to some extent a 'war ethic' – particularly as practised by the current Anglo-American junta – is a move upon the surface of, and exploiting the openness of, the play of reality itself. I am reminded of the quote from the Bush aide in 2004, who claimed that "we are an Empire, and when we act, we create our own reality". This is as monstrously playful as it gets: my Guardian piece above suggests that there are other ways to playfully 'create your own reality', of course, than the exercise of imperial power. At the very least, information about the amoral behaviour of this empire – from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo, their evidence often gathered and disseminated through new technologies – can still produce visible cracks in the spectacle of its dominance. This is a counter-game, one that is fully enabled by our networked world of bloggers, cameraphoners and activists. It is the more positive side of our unstable and chaotic world order.

Galloway's point in his piece on networks and play, quoted above – that the mobile and mutable power of networks is now an instrument of imperial power, in the form of the Full Spectrum Dominance of the US Military – is well taken. Add to this a developed play consciousness – at least in its agonistic and egoistic modes – and it could easily seem that an anti-play position might easily formulate itself politically. Yet if the terrain of struggle is as immanently networked as Negri and Hardt claim, then it strikes me that the only tools available for counter-power – or at least ones that value a genuine emergent interactivity, as opposed to terrorist or state-terrorist uses of the spectacle to traumatize passive viewers – are those derived from a different part of the play spectrum. And it will be these, rather than some revived-Enlightenment vision of rational will-formation (as in the Habermas model), which rejects the generativity and messiness of informational networks for a kind of transparent, linguistically-Puritan public sphere. As Deleuze and Guattari (1996: 108) say, "we do not lack communication, on the contrary we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present.*"

That dangerous power of play – to simulate reality, to take it lightly, to open out a space of potentiation within the very fixity of species-being itself – is an element of that resistance to the present, indeed might well be its necessary psychological and cognitive resource. Yet the point about the 'care' end of the play-care continuum is to create a kind of humanising polarity whereby the sheer responsiveness and febrility of play can be tempered, through a recognition of the costs of play upon those without the strength, energy and resilience to participate in its social forms. My 'play ethic', in any case, tries to establish a continuum between the 'response-abilities' that play and care both draw on – and which means, in essence, an emphasis on social, developmental, imaginative play, a downgrading of agonistic and egoistic play, and a re-inversion of cosmic play: not the Gods of American Empire playing with our reality, but an utterly interdependent

and evolving universe, where creative action has fruitful but unpredictable consequences.

RM: If I could back up a little to return to the relationship of the play ethic to that of care, it is certainly one of the most interesting aspects of the book from a social policy perspective, especially with regard to our altered perception of the latter once it is moved from the realms of imposition and work. Specifically, the idea that care may form part of the subjective expression of self in-play offers a very different perspective on the role of the carer and the processes of caring. Yet, as a responsibility (within your own scheme), and thus potentially an imposition, can individual subjectivities be fully at play in most care relationships and processes. I'm think, for example, of: the husband left to care for the partner with dementia, the prison officer for the offender, the parent for the unwanted child, the nurse for the abusive patient...?

PK: Again, I'll reiterate that care is as open to contingency and unpredictability as play, if it is done well – that is, if it is truly open in our response-ability to the Other in need. But the carer arrests the *virtuality* of human experience – does not impose the expectations of semiotic freedom, fecundity and expressiveness in the cared-for – and responds to the *actuality* of human need and weakness. Care of course has its own infinitudes of gentleness, incremental improvement, listening to and encouraging narratives of self-determination. I think we're already moving into an era where qualitative human relationships – whether exploited as biopower in the Negrian sense, or not – are becoming the primary act that constitutes society. My hope is that we can reap the benefits of post-scarcity and allow our lives to be composed of reciprocations that can arrange, counterpoint and overlap the modalities of play and care. The further we move from the absurd mechanistics and semi-military structures of the 'working organization' – following schemes of social dividend that decentre institutional work from our lives – the more that we will come to value the act of care for a demented husband, or young miscreant, or angry patient, the in-care child, as yet another form of response ability. Care reminds us of the essential fragility that subtends, and gives dramatic richness to, the life of vigorous, creative, potentiating play. In a strong sense, my play ethic is akin to a communitarianism that recognises the ethical bounties of affluence: the right to play, balanced by the responsibility to care.

Ed Wray-Bliss: It seems to me that you are doing something similar with the idea of the 'play ethic' that Marx did with the concept of 'labour'. For instance Marx used 'labour' to signify and celebrate a process where human beings sought to explore their potentiality and creativity, to stretch themselves and make themselves anew. He criticised the alienation of people from this sense of their own potentiality, the way that labour in capitalist organizations became colonised by and limited to the reproduction of capital rather than the creation or realisation of 'self'. And your concept of the play ethic seems to celebrate the same sense of human agency as a celebration and recreation of human potentiality – and this is very welcome. A difference however seems to be that where Marx, by using the concept of labour – a term also rooted in economic or organizational realms – directed his critique at the need to transform capitalist organizations such that all labour could be unalienated, you seem to clearly separate 'play' from 'work' and see them as separate realms. My question is where does this move leave us politically? Is the Play Ethic to be pursued (only) outside of the work

organization context? Does this risk leaving the ‘work’ context unchallenged? And if so – if ‘play’ only happened in the spaces left after ‘work’ – wouldn’t this undermine opportunities for individuals to explore and express their potentiality?

PK: I think play is closer to what Marx conceived of as ‘unalienated labour’ than work. Eagleton makes the point in the *Ideology of the Aesthetic* that Schiller’s evocation of the play-drive as a synthesis of form and sense, rationality and irrationality, in an aesthetically-pursued life, actually inspired the young Marx in his theories of alienation – it gave him a sense of the richly realised self that he identified capitalist organization as repressing and preventing. For me, play cultures and practices today are capable (though it’s not inevitable) of giving people that sense of self-possession, and of their activities as acts of *poiesis*, of authored creation, that the Romantic poets and philosophers first evoked in their responses to industrial modernity. But the challenges that these play cultures pose to existing organizational forms, precisely in their formation as sites for the exchange of wage-labour, is profound. Yochai Benkler’s new book *The Wealth of Networks* shows brilliantly that the open networks of the information society are producing a new economic logic of ‘social cooperation’, supplementing those forms of exchange conducted under private-managerial or state-bureaucratic systems of production, distribution and allocation. It’s a matter of record that the pioneers of these forms – the hackers and net-entrepreneurs who enrich the information commons with their social software (open source, blogs, MySpace, online games, friendship networks, etc) – are happiest operating very much outwith the recognisable environs of ‘work’. And the services they offer are intended – in their emphasis on the sharing of culture, music, community – to appeal to those blurred spaces between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’, a kind of general ‘activism’. Play, in its more cooperative and mutualist forms, is very much the sensibility driving these developments. In answer to your question about whether this abandons existing work cultures politically, I feel that there is such a radical re-thinking of our purposive and passional lives implied by the play ethic (and the network society that it seeks to influence and direct), that the best location for an informational politics is not within the workplace per se. Although I don’t share their labour-movement vocabulary of the ‘social factory’, I do agree with the Italian autonomists that it’s the organizations that emerge from the ‘general intellect’, or the ‘multitude producing in its communicational generality’, that are worth the watching. My experiences within existing consulting contexts have made the limits of modernist organizational structures very clear to me!

Andy McColl: With apologies, Pat, this is a comment and a two-part question! My questions come from a concern that the ‘play ethic’ may be something that is real for people in the cultural industries, but would have little resonance in many other sectors, and with the real problems of access to ‘play’ in the information age ...

... *PK:* which I share... and I hope that many of my previous answers have pointed towards what I consider to be the high-stakes of a ‘play ethic’ – our need to cope with our capacity to challenge and transcend limits, in areas of war, bioscience and our affective lives.....

... *AM:* ... OK so the first question is.... you claim that the play ethic is realisable in a ‘post-scarcity’ society in which the internet can be seen as an enabling medium.

However, the argument could be made that scarcity was largely overcome with industrialisation in the 19th century, and it would be more accurate to describe the western industrialised democracies as an example of ‘planned scarcity’ where one’s access to the resources of society is dependent upon where one sits in the socio-economic hierarchy. In this scenario the play ethic in one sense is not generalisable, and the medium of the internet takes on a darker tone as a form of control premised upon old forms of industrial organization – workers, vans and warehouses! How do you overcome these kind of objections?

PK: The rise of mass advertising, as a response to stagnating inventories and the need to increase the appetites of a satiated proletariat, has always fascinated me, particularly when I discovered the pivotal role of Edward Bernays, the psychology-practising nephew of Sigmund Freud, in its creation.⁴ My point is that post-scarcity is as much about an abundance of subjective as much as objective resources. Indeed, the very crisis of advertising (particularly in the late 20th-early 21st century) is that it faces a majority population in the richer countries for whom – post-feminism and environmentalism – the claims to a ‘better life through consumption’ is at least open to question from alternative, yet accessible, counter-factual knowledge cultures. The question of socio-economic hierarchy in these conditions – which is more about the acceleration and aggrandisement of knowledge elites, than about the decline or immiseration of those below – is actually directly addressed by forms of play, at least in terms of the ungovernability of younger generations as subjects of labour: those Asbos/workshy/wannabe celebrities, wearing their playful raiment of sports gear and Kappa suits, that raise the ire of the *Daily Mail*. Their evident unwillingness to mount the vans and stock the shelves of the service society, as currently arranged, is to me perfectly understandable – given the sheer utopian splendour that capitalist promotional culture holds out to them, via every screen at their disposal. Young ‘players’ are some of the most self-conscious rebels against the work ethic. Our huge challenge as a society is to respond to the imaginative and passionate deficit revealed by their sheer rejection of the work ethic – a challenge which implies changes in welfare provision, marketplace regulation and public services barely even thinkable at present.

AM: The second question isn’t really a question, but you’ve previously made reference to scenario planning as a form of play drawing upon some of the experiences of companies like Shell etc. In fact, scenario planning (as far as I’m aware) developed out of military contingency planning and was later picked up by the oil companies. Given the continuing close relationship between guns and oil as illustrated in the Gulf War, doesn’t this seem to lend further support to your arguments on the crossovers between war and play?

PK: Yes, I think it does! Emphatically.

Sebastian Bos: I wonder if you could focus on the ethical issues of the play ethic in areas where ethics has perhaps had a higher and more specific profile such as gene-modification and stemcell research, which you mentioned in passing earlier. Do you

4 A brief summary of Bernays’ contribution and some key references can be found in Linstead et al. (2004: 304-305; 319).

believe that the role of play should be limited in such areas where ethical standards have not yet been agreed on?

PK: Sloterdijk's optimism about how the knowledge of the biological complexity of life might engender a different, more benignly playful form of science, is one I share. Of course, he and I could be horribly wrong on this... Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is the downside view on a society in which an ambition to be utterly in control of the bios has disastrous consequences; Iain M Banks' culture novels (e.g. 1992) represent a jollier, more pragmatic upside of society with full nano-and-bio-mastery. I am also in sympathy with the posthuman democratic socialist position of James Hughes in *Citizen Cyborg*.

SB: Could I follow up on that, and ask you to be more specific, because many managers of bio-tech companies find themselves operating in different cultural settings with various culturally relative ethical standards. What implications do such variations have for a play ethic?

PK: That is a huge question, particularly in spiritual settings like Buddhism and Hinduism, where a post-subjective or post-human universe is presumed. You've identified my next burst of research! This is going to be in the direction of these darker and more demanding aspects of a 'play ethic', so let me take a pause on answering that question till later.

RM: Finally, can I take advantage of my position as Chair and steal the last question which I suppose is the big one – how do you prevent the notion of play ethics becoming more than just a potentially lucrative guru fad?

PK: I hope by subjecting myself to rigorous symposia like this one!

RM: Pat – on behalf of us all can I thank you heartily for that subjection, and say how much we are looking forward to the next such occasion.

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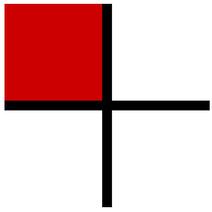
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Making the 'Res Public'

Bruno Latour and Tomás Sánchez-Criado

abstract

A philosopher, a sociologist and an anthropologist, Bruno Latour is one of the most important founders of *Science Studies* and, more specifically, of *Actor-Network Theory*. Throughout his entire career he has been trying to reconfigure the links between Science, Technology, Society and Politics doing ethnographic and empirical research on scientific, technical and legal controversies. This interview took place at the press presentation of the exhibition 'Making Things Public' [<http://makingthingspublic.zkm.de/>] at the *Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM)*, Karlsruhe (Germany), March 16th 2005. The exhibition was co-curated together with German artist Peter Weibel and follows the insights of a previous one called 'Iconoclasm: Beyond Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art' on iconoclasm and how to solve it, in which they reflected upon the importance of mediation in these three domains. Crucial to this new exhibition is the notion of *ding* or *thing*, as an effort to resurrect the common Germanic root for 'things' and 'parliaments' or 'assemblies' (e.g. Thingstätten), to give back to 'things' and 'objects' their status of 'cases' in a juridical sense, of political formations and aggregations. In a way, the exhibition as conceptualized by Bruno Latour is an extension of the argument and the project of 'political epistemology' originally developed in his book *Politics of Nature*.

Tomás Sánchez-Criado: Could you please talk about the rationale of the exhibition? To put it bluntly, why 'make things public'? What are the aims of the exhibition and why have you curated it?

Bruno Latour: There is something I would like to say beforehand. The show is inspired by my thought, but it is a bit different from it. There are lots of people implied in it. Once this said, I curate it because I like to explore new media. With books and lectures you can do a certain type of thing, but with exhibitions you can do many more things, including more experiential, experimental stuff that people can go through. People and visitors that are not intellectuals can get inside and it's a different sort of medium. And also because this place here, the ZKM, is a unique place. The topic of this exhibition is a consequence derived from another exhibition I co-curated three years ago called *Iconoclasm*. But *Iconoclasm* was not about politics. It was about iconoclasm and the crisis of representation. So I decided that the next exhibition had to be about politics, because politics is usually the subject about which people are easily iconoclastic. People criticise politics and debunk politics and this makes more difficult, I think the most difficult thing to do, to make a show on politics which is not a critical show, which is not a critique of politics. So, what we are trying to do is to reinterest people in the techniques of representation. The show I did three years ago had the same theme, which is basically revolving around what I call 'mediation', the 'respect for mediation'. So it's

not a political show, it's a show about politics. It tries to see the public space in a very practical way, which is what I call 'atmospheres of democracy'. Now, 'atmospheres' is a concept borrowed from Peter Sloterdijk. This atmospheric argument takes the invisible and palpable of what a space is. So, when people say 'the public space', our way to talk about it is to mention where it is housed, how it is lit, its architectures, how people are organized, where they sit, how they bring issues... And that is what the show is about. The show is about the techniques of representation.

TS: What things does this exhibition show and what do they make us reflect upon?

BL: Well, it's an assembly of assemblies. So imagine a huge tank where we would have gathered different ways of assembling. Lots of people have assembled different things. Firstly, we show assemblies either of the past or of different traditions than the current European one. This is the historical and anthropological part of the show. Lots of other people have assembled or 'dissembled' differently. The question is, 'what can we gain of that?' Then, in a second huge part, there are represented all of the places where we actually assemble now, and which I think are political: supermarkets, Law, natural disputes, scientific disputes, technical disputes, which are very bizarre but very interesting I think. There is this third part in which we talk about parliaments in the technical and local sense of the world: vote systems, congresses, parliamentary technologies and buildings. And what we want to do is to compare all of these spaces: the parliament itself and those other quasi-parliaments. There is also a fourth part about what I call 'the new political passions': all the new technologies, web-based technologies, all the new ways of representing the public in original ways.

TS: What would you say to people who think that politics is mostly restricted to the act of voting?

BL: That they should come to the show or at least read the catalogue. And if they do it, they will see that this is not correct because politics is largely about things, about what I have called 'matters of concern', that about what people might have issues. So politics is not only limited to voting, although it might be based on voting as it is normally understood. For instance, shopping in a supermarket is voting whenever you buy, in a way. Of course, the question is 'what are the official assemblies, the means of political representation, of all these other quasi-parliaments?' On that we do not offer a particular answer. It is not a one-sided show. We say 'let's compare these techniques of representation'. To develop an argument is the visitors' duty. What we want to say is that there are plenty of other ways of doing politics. Those techniques of representation in economics could be of interest to deal with the questions on nature. Laboratory techniques might serve to deal with issues of markets, and so on.

TS: In the opening paper of the catalogue¹ you introduce a transition from 'Realpolitik' to 'Dingpolitik', from politics based in matters-of-fact to a thing-based democracy. In fact, this transition envisions substituting or creating a new way of treating a common

1 Latour, B. (2005) 'From realpolitik to dingpolitik or how to make things public', in Latour, B. and P. Weibel (eds.) *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy*. Karlsruhe and Cambridge, MA: Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe and MIT Press.

topic to all the Social Sciences and mostly Political Science, 'activity' and 'agency', commonly attributed to humans. You are using this concept to refer to artefacts, things and so on. What changes does Politics suffer if we think differently what 'an actor' is?

BL: Well, an actor is whatever makes a difference. Imagine this example from the show: we have a river represented here. Rivers make a difference, especially now; For instance, in Spain where the politics of water is very important. It makes sense to say that rivers are important political actors. On two conditions: one of them is that the river has to be made to speak through plenty of techniques of representation. The question is 'what is the speech of this river?' And the second one is 'what is the role played by the river speech where people in charge of water management talk about it?' Compared to these two important matters the questions such as 'is the river a real actor?' are uninteresting. Distinguishing living from nonliving entities was interesting for pre-revolutionary Kantism somewhere in the 18th century, but we are now living in the 21st century. I think there are lots of more interesting questions such as 'how can we represent all these nonhumans?' That is what the show is about. The humans are attached to plenty of things. To seek to distinguish between humans and other entities is something very respectable, but I don't think is topical now. Not all the questions are simultaneously interesting. I am not saying that this is not interesting at all. All I am saying is that it is not topical. It is not about what a show like this one is about.

TS: Who then is the 'new citizen' in this *Dingpolitik* you propose?

BL: Things. Rivers, for example. Why not? And now the new questions that are very interesting and critical to the show are the ones such as 'how to make a river speak?' For instance, we show a scale-model of a dispute in the Alps about the coexistence of humans and animals. All of these things are very difficult. They are real problems. And it seems to me that they are much more topical than differences between intentional humans and non-intentional objects. Especially if you think that the whole show is a whole *Ding*, or both *Causa* and *Cosa* in Spanish, in which what we gather are matters of concern.

It is useless to tell humans from nonhumans in them. They are things we need to assemble around in order to solve cohabitation with. And that is a very important political question. To distinguish between humans and nonhumans would not solve what I am interested in. If you tell me any question in which distinguishing between humans and things clarifies anything I would be convinced, but which one? Kant is very interesting but Kant again is from the 19th century and we are in the 21st century. The whole humanistic argument – and I am not against humanism – was about the question of 'how can we have freedom, given that Nature is a conceptual necessity?' This question is completely outdated now, because the fundamental thing is that we have to survive among all of these nonhuman beings to which we are attached.

What the show says is that the classical question of politics 'how to represent humans?' is not the only topical one. Of course we have to talk about electing systems and voting technologies. But there are lots of other questions we have to solve as well, which turn around this *Ding*. People are now talking about power, energy, climate, landscape, food... everything that is precisely not just human.

TS: You have talked many times of the importance of technical mediation for the constitution of ways of life. In the wake of the new technologies we live by, hasn't politics already changed?

BL: This is something we are not trying to solve but to present in slightly different ways. We say, let's compare. First, let's take politics in its techniques of representation, which is 'parliaments'. How big are they? How are they built? How do you listen to people when they speak? How do you organize Law? Then we take all the other cases where we have similar problems, supermarkets and so on. And of course technical objects, such as your computer-recorder, we have analyzed and showed in the past as socio-technical networks in *Science Studies*. And third, the question is, and the show does not solve it, 'what are the assemblies which correspond to these assemblages?' Yes, the technology is an assemblage, but there is no politics of its situation, because all of these technical devices are made by few people for reasons which have nothing to do with what is discussed in parliaments. There does not exist a big parliament where everything would be cased, all of the parliaments, all of the technologies, supermarkets and so on. So, not everything is political, if you were expecting that answer. But everything is about techniques of representation, and then the show says, let's compare them and see what is transportable from one sphere to other. So the first thing to solve is: technology is a sphere of politics. Economics is a sphere of politics. Law is a sphere of politics. Nature is a sphere of politics, and a very important one. And then, let's see what parliament we can get out of all of them. Maybe it will work, may be not. It's up to the future. We need to map the correspondences between spheres from the very humble point of view of techniques of representation.

TS: What role do scientists play in the show?

BL: In this show, the scientists are asked to live as part of the political sphere instead of thinking they are out of it. But not much stress is put on this, but on the laboratory assemblies, scientific assemblies, because they give voice to objects and also because they invent a lot of tools to speak about the matters of concern that they have developed. They are an important model for political assembling. I am not saying 'you scientists are doing politics'. I say 'you make nonhumans speak'. 'You assemble in congresses and meetings to speak about what concerns you'. 'You have invented lots of instruments, you have devised lots of systems for visualizing them', so 'you should be in the show, because in the Parliament of Parliaments the scientists are very important'. In this show we don't do more. In other words, and this can be more specifically found in my book *Politics of Nature*,² I have developed how to get the scientists in democracy, but that would be too long a topic now.

TS: In that sense, would we need to change our theories of knowledge if we change our notion of politics?

BL: That's for sure. The whole political philosophy has always been connected to an idea of knowledge and science. It's true of Rousseau. It's true of Hobbes. It's true of

2 Latour, B. (1999) *Politics of Nature: How to bring sciences in democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Marx. I came to this question from my work on science, not from my work on politics. All the trials to modify politics need to modify at the same time the notion of knowledge and science. These things I have tried not to maintain separate in many, many books. This is what I call 'political epistemology'. For me the show is interesting precisely because of that. It tries to modify both the status of politics and the status of things, through presenting a new theory of knowledge and a new political science. Some people might say that this is ridiculous because we will never escape the boundary of modernism. Some other people might say that this is a nice trial to get away from both modernism and postmodernism. We will see. For me it tries to build on what I have called non-modernism.

TS: Being a little bit more specific. In what ways do you think human and social scientists could take the proposal of the exhibition?

BL: I think the interesting thing for human and social scientists is the number of ways in which their own data could be represented. And here there are at least twenty scholars working hand-in-hand with artists to produce installations for this show. So it tries a little bit to wake up the social scientists: we are in 2005 writing still the same boring books. Wake up! There are lots of other ways of presenting your data. There are lots of ways of collaborating with artists. Let's organize new connections, as I did for example with Peter Weibel [co-curator of the show]. I think there is plenty of stuff interesting for social scientists.

TS: Moving on to another topic, it seems to me that the main distinction in the show is made between assembly and assemblage. That would certainly make some people think that you remain tied to an ideal of liberal democracy.

BL: That's true. In the American sense, isn't it?

TS: Yes. The question is 'what about other ways of assembling?'

BL: That is a very good question. We say that it is possible to assemble people. This would have a main liberal democratic inspiration. Now, there are other ways of doing the assemblies. A little bit of this is shown in the anthropological part and in the church-religion part. The answer of the show to this question would be 'even if you disagree with the way we make assemblies, what are the techniques of representation you offer?' So, show basically the techniques, the atmosphere, how it is bounded, how you bring an issue to talk about' and so on. The classical repertoire of liberal democracy's arguments, such as expressed in Rorty or Habermas, stresses the role of humans sitting at a table speaking with a rational basis and having a nice key-composition. In my sense, I don't think this is a liberal democratic ideal, because for me it is much more material, and much more situated and it specifies the conditions of representation. As we do see in the show, there are other ways of doing the assemblies. But that is a very good question, because the show started with a very simple-minded idea 'how can you assemble ways of assembling?' and not only assemblies. So we could also assemble ways of disassembling. People don't have to agree and they could feel aggressive against the sort of setup we have arranged. As you see, it's not Rorty's liberal democracy.

TS: Take for instance New York's 9-11 and Madrid's March 11th terrorist attacks. How do you think this show could contribute to settle down things or to solve these problems of 'dissembling'?

BL: Not directly. We don't say almost anything about that, because this was much more the topic of the previous exhibition *Iconoclasm* on iconoclasm. We treated there the problem of fundamentalism as the opinion that we would be much better with no mediation, with a direct contact to God, with transparency. So they say 'let's get rid of all the mediations, of all the techniques of representation'. So much for *Iconoclasm*. For this new occasion we said 'fundamentalism is an absurdity'. I don't think there is anything in the preparation of this show about Mr Ben Laden we have learnt from. One way to submit ourselves to terrorism is to be obsessed by their questions. They are not important enough to influence our intellectual life. This show has nothing to do with it. We lean on mediation. We hope that mediation is the way and not the argument of transparency. In that sense, this is an anti-fundamentalist show.

TS: How could we redefine the anthropological Other? What concerns do you think current Anthropology or Cultural Studies should face in the wake of this show?

BL: The idea of the Other in Anthropology is largely a confusing artefact so I would not be able to answer that now. It would take time. In the setup of the show the Other is there as a warning. Politics as is usually thought is only marginally important for most anthropological studies. Many peoples would say 'we are not interested in politics'. And that is the first thing you see in the show. 'No politics please'. We need to get out of the argument that everything is political in the traditional Western sense of the word. My first decision for the show was: let's show that this is wrong. So the exhibition starts with an interesting agonistic encounter among the Achuar in the Amazony showed by Philippe Descola, because they don't want any sort of political assemblies at all. The Other is here, but from nowhere in particular. The Other has certainly to reconfigure politics around things. Especially in what refers to cosmopolitics, the different politics of *cosmos*. Cosmopolitics is a word borrowed from Isabelle Stengers. Cosmopolitics is our future. The Others are our future and we are the future to the Others. That's a good question. I think the Others have a key to our notion of politics as cosmopolitics. It is the best way to define *dingpolitik*. But it has a more restricted sense because *cosmos* means harmony. The thing is that to which you assemble either because you agree or disagree. It does not require harmony. Of course I don't think many visitors will get this picture. I think it is my confusion and I do not want to force it on visitors.

Well, certainly the anthropological part is there not as a sort of a sight-seeing, but it is the first part of the exhibition to show that we are already there. We are already dealing with nature, parliaments, water, markets... And they are already there as well. We live in the same global cosmos, excepting that there is no globe. I should modify something I previously said. You tricked me with your question of liberalism. It is not a liberal show at all. Because the liberal argument is that everyone, basically humans, gather inside this huge sphere of conversation among rational beings. This is not what the show is about. We assemble around things and we disassemble. And what can connect us are the techniques of representation but not the globe, taking Sloterdijk's arguments.

TS: Going back to our tradition, how do you think the show treats the notion of power?

BL: It tries not to speak so much about power. Of course power and politics have been linked. But this is only one tradition in political philosophy, although a very important one. It links to sovereignty, to arbitrary actions. We try not to centre in power but in cohabitation. How can we cohabit? Of course the problem of sovereignty is behind it, but we wanted to think other things first. Because when you talk about power it is sometimes interesting, but other times it is not, as when people mean something else which is 'behind politics there is society and power' and want to detect it directly. I think this is wrong. If you want to detect power, again 'what are your techniques of representation?' So let's suspend the obsession with power when we talk about politics and let's see what alternatives we have. If you want to talk about power, you have to talk about your techniques of representation and assemble how you do it. It tries to shift the conversation about politics away from power. But, this is risky of course. People might say this is a naïve, typically socio-democratic, vision. Now, you can also say the opposite. You can say it's a communist exhibition. It talks about how to deal with the common. It's about 'making things public' after all. This is what communism as a historical phenomenon has said. What do we have in common? And how to produce the common with certain techniques of representation?

TS: Are there any specific proposals in the show for achieving different types of orderings?

BL: No, it's not a political show. It's a show about politics. We have not been commissioned by the European Union. It is very open. People can leave this show saying 'all of this is thing is completely absurd' or 'let's go back to politics as usual'. I call this show a *Gedankenausstellung* [thought exhibition] in the same way as people talk about *Gedankenexperiment* [thought experiment]. It is a *Gedankenausstellung* in the sense that it tries to present a problem. It's a conceptual point: can we think of politics in other terms than usual ones, by turning to things? In what would politics turn into without centring in human opinions? But it's a show anyway. People will come for fun in here.

TS: It is not a kind of a manifesto, is it?

BL: Well, the catalogue is indeed a bit of a manifesto a thousand pages long [laughs]. But yes, exactly it's not a one-lined manifesto. We think that politics is so boring. People talk about it in so critical ways. Can we for once think of politics otherwise? This is something only an exhibition can do.

TS: Which are the intellectual references for this show?

BL: John Dewey and Walter Lippman. So, pragmatism. Not Rorty. The great tradition of early pragmatism. I think one of the main interests of the show is to bring pragmatism to Europe in an experiential way. We keep talking about Lenin and Rousseau... let's take other traditions which do not start with the importance of notions such as the state. Lippman and Dewey debated around the notion of public and they are crucial to this show.

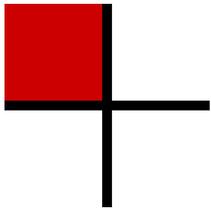
TS: Just to finish. This is something you surely have been asked lots of times: how would you define yourself in terms of discipline?

BL: This is something I never know how to answer. I think of myself as being a sort of philosopher. I use ethnography as a means of doing philosophy. But officially I am a sociologist. I teach sociology and I will always teach sociology.

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What is Corporate Social Responsibility Now?*

Stephen Dunne

review of:

Philip Kotler and Nancy Lee (2005) *Corporate Social Responsibility – Doing the Most Good for Your Company and Your Cause*. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. (HB: pp. 307, \$29.95 US, ISBN: 0-474-47611-0)

Harvard Business Review (2003) *Harvard Business Review on Corporate Responsibility*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing. (PB: pp. 231, \$19.95 US, ISBN: 1-59139-274-8)

Adrian Henriques and Julie Richardson (eds.) (2005) *The Triple Bottom Line – Does it All Add Up? – Assessing the Sustainability of Business and CSR*. London: Earthscan. (PB: pp. 186, £18.99, ISBN: 1-84407-016-6)

Introduction

The majority of today's Fortune 250 organizations are actively pursuing Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives (CSR) (KPMG 2005). Surely we can allow ourselves to be impressed by the fact that larger corporations are sitting up and taking notice of their critics? Finally, can't we be pleased by the scenario wherein those with the greatest means are currently setting a progressive example for all to follow? Perhaps, but with the likes of Joel Bakan (2004) (see also www.thecorporation.com), Charles Handy (reviewed here), Al Gore (see www.climatecrisis.net), David Cameron (2006), and Philip Kotler (reviewed here) all singing from the same hymn sheet, one cannot but wonder whether things have gone somewhat awry somewhere along the way. In any case, whether or not things do in fact add up is to a large extent beside the point. The critic may grumble 'oxymoron' to their hearts content (Crane, 2005); such an assertion has fallen upon so many deaf ears so long ago. CSR today "means something, but not always the same thing, to everybody" (Votaw, 1972: 25) and wayward path or not, it is

* Discussions with Armin Beverungen, Gerard Hanlon, Stefano Harney and Steen Vallentin as well as detailed suggestions from Nick Butler, Campbell Jones, Eleni Karamali, Sam Mansell and an anonymous reviewer have hugely aided the development of this review. Special thanks to Sverre Spoelstra for everything.

making its presence felt. The very lack of clarity regarding what CSR means has perhaps become its single greatest strength: without any formal determination or widely accepted definition, CSR has come to mean so very much.

Now in many ways, this is exactly the scenario which William Frederick, author of the recently published *Corporation be Good! The Story of Corporate Social Responsibility* (2006) encouraged, however inadvertently, almost thirty years ago. Writing what was to become a seminal work in the Business and Society field, in 1978 Frederick made the observation that the epoch of CSR₁ (Corporate Social Responsibility) was being gradually replaced by that of CSR₂ (Corporate Social Responsiveness). The evolution, he argued, was of profound importance. No longer were CSR's concerns of an abstract and impractical nature (as was the case with CSR₁). They were, in the spirit of CSR₂, becoming increasingly focused upon the real issues at hand. The guiding question was no longer 'what is CSR?' but 'how can CSR be done?' No longer were people puzzling over what is to be done in the name of CSR, they had already reached the stage of doing it. On the one side, Frederick positions the apparent abstractions of moral philosophy insofar as they are applied to the question of what CSR is or might be. On the other side he opposes the inherently practical concerns of how to actually do CSR. Refusing to absolutely prioritise one side over the other, Frederick suggests, in a not altogether undialectical fashion, that each side might one day resolve the shortcomings of the other, forming a general synthesis of particular contradictions that will henceforth be referred to as CSR₃ "which will clarify both the moral dimensions implied by CSR₁ and the managerial dimensions of CSR₂" (1994: 162). In 1994, the piece was republished as a 'classic paper' in *Business and Society*. No other article has had the influence upon the historical framing of CSR as has Frederick's.

Taking its lead from the twin demands for rigour and relevance derivable from Frederick's celebrated distinction between CSR₁ and CSR₂, the focus of this review is placed upon the manner in which each of the volumes studied conceptualises CSR from the point of view of what it is, from the point of view of how it is to be done and in terms of how the trade-off/synthesis between definition and direction is made. The focus of the review is hence placed upon the question of what CSR means as found within some of today's most well-known texts writing in its name.

CSR: Just Do It!

Philip Kotler is by no means a latecomer to the discussion of which extra-fiduciary values, if any, should undercut corporate operations. As far back as the early seventies he co-introduced *the social marketing concept* (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971), a concept which went on to appear in many of the oversized texts he has been involved in producing throughout the years. As with Kotler, this social marketing concept has become part of the staple diet of many the marketing graduate. And just as the present volume is by no means the first instance of Kotler's work on CSR related issues, nor is it the first project he has undertaken with Nancy Lee. Not too long ago the pair co-authored *Social Marketing: Improving the Quality of Life* (Kotler et al., 2002). Whilst the earlier work seems to have been principally geared towards the needs of third-level

students, the volume reviewed here has a different audience in mind. Chances are, Kotler and Lee say, that their reader is more than likely involved in some aspect of corporate strategy, whether it be marketing, product or sales management, public relations or some aspect of corporate philanthropy (p. ix). For, as they are wont to underline from the get go, “this [*sic*] is a practical book” (p. 1). As such, the book will surely be of interest to practical people. The authors, it is clear, are very fond of such practical people, recruiting over twenty-five of them to each write up their own unique takes on the essence of CSR.

Apart from a two page excursus on the question ‘What is Good?’, which draws its inspiration not from Aristotle and Kant but from the websites of Fortune 500 corporations (p. 2-4), it is clear that the authors aren’t particularly concerned with thinking about whether CSR might be anything other than an element of corporate strategy in need of elaboration. They care about results, about the fact that company X did plan Y and achieved result Z. The logic of the book in its approach to CSR is as follows: there is CSR because corporate representatives say there. Since these people are the proof of the fact that CSR exists, they are naturally the ones most capable of describing what it is and how it is to be undertaken. The book hence mirrors itself in a very bizarre way. Reports are gathered from CSR practitioners in order to be sold back to them. On this the authors say:

This book has been written to support managers to choose, develop, implement and evaluate corporate social initiatives such that they will do the most good for the company and the cause. (p. 235)

This task is addressed over ten chapters. In chapter one ‘the case for doing at least some good’ is made before ‘six options for doing good’ are outlined in chapter two (Corporate Cause Promotions, Cause-Related Marketing, Corporate Social Marketing, Corporate Philanthropy, Community Volunteering and Socially Responsible Business Practices). Chapters three through eight address each of the six options for ‘doing good’ in turn by following a set formula. They first of all define the option in question and distinguish it from its five alternatives. Next, typical examples as well as their associated benefits and concerns are outlined. Each chapter closes by outlining keys to success, describing when a given option should be considered and indicating how an associated campaign should be developed. The penultimate chapter offers a review of twenty-five examples of CSR best practice whilst the final chapter offers advice to those seeking corporate interest in their cause on how to do so. Over three hundred and seven pages, the reader is treated to a variety of testimonies from representatives of corporations such as Coca Cola, Kraft, McDonalds, Microsoft, Nike, Starbucks and Wal-Mart, as to what CSR best practice means. The past scandals with which each of these corporations has been involved are rarely discussed. When we do hear of them, they are presented as preludes to happy endings; so many barriers overcome and problems rectified. Throughout the duration of the book, CSR is posited as that which makes the transition from adversity to righteousness possible. The potential (or current) CSR practitioner, it seems, would do well to learn from a collection of such been there-done-that accounts. This book is exactly that.

Disagreeing with the various positions adopted by the authors or attempting to find holes in the argument or deficiencies in the manner in which CSR is set up ultimately

proves futile. This is not to say that any of this is impossible, far from it. The point is that Kotler and Lee seem more than comfortable with the fact that their account of CSR might well be contentious or disingenuous from the point of view of definitional rigour. This is a set of project blueprints, a CSR manual; it doesn't require its reader to consult twenty or so more books and it presents the question of what it is that corporations should be doing as already solved puzzles that can be dipped in and out of over the course of a business class transatlantic flight. It is precisely on account of *not* having rigorously clarified what CSR is that the authors put themselves in a position to write so much about it. Ignoring how their ideas might be in opposition to already existing writings on CSR and proceeding to define the world of CSR according to how they and their corporate co-writers see it, something of an argument arriving at CSR is produced nonetheless. Justifying their ignorance of other positions for the sake of practical/strategic demands, Kotler and Lee submit their definition of CSR to the test of how they themselves have already defined it (in terms of how corporations doing CSR say they have done it). It may be a circular sort of reasoning but, once it is allowed to get going, it is very difficult to derail.

The Challenge of CSR

Whereas Kotler and Lee's engagement with the classical texts of the CSR literature is quite minimal, the same cannot be said of the *Harvard Business Review on Corporate Responsibility*. Here the reader finds eight articles on CSR and related issues previously published by the *Harvard Business Review*. But these are not any old Joe Soap and Bubbles co-authored articles. With pieces written by the likes of Michael Porter, Charles Handy and Coimbatore Krishnan (alias C K) Prahalad, the book offers nothing other than the big ideas of the big hitters, conveniently gathered between two covers. In essence, this is the mandate which the *Harvard Business Review* paperback series sets itself; to create a platform for the reflections of the business and management greats upon the most pressing issues of today. CSR, by virtue of the existence of the present offering, has clearly become one such issue.

The essays each ask big questions: What is a Business for? (Handy) Can a Corporation have a Conscience? (Goodpaster and Mathews Jr.) Can the World's Poor be served by corporations in the long run? (Prahalad and Hammond) Could Corporate Philanthropy become a means towards cementing Competitive Advantage? (Porter and Kramer). Unlike Kotler and Lee's approach to CSR, each author constitutes the problem of CSR by inquisition rather than exposition. This may not be very practical, according to Kotler and Lee's own understanding, but these authors simply aren't interested in providing checklists and blueprints. Whereas in the case of Kotler and Lee, CSR is to be judged by its practical effectiveness, here the case has to be made for CSR *before* such codes of best practice can be implemented, benchmarked or even conceived. Each chapter focuses upon how it is possible for CSR, in whatever form it might assume, to assume any form whatsoever. They seek to illustrate how and why CSR has become an issue for contemporary corporations. Exemplary in this regard, Charles Handy argues:

We cannot escape the fundamental question, whom and what is a business for? The answer once seemed clear, but no longer. The terms of business have changed. Ownership has been replaced by

investment, and a company's assets are increasingly found in its people, not in its buildings and machinery. In light of this transformation, we need to rethink our assumptions about the purpose of business. (p. 71-72)

There has been significant shift in the methods by which capital circulates. Living labour is central to the valorisation of capital. There must be a radical revision of the manner in which business practice is mandated. In this case, these axioms are posited not by a critical management theorist but a world renowned management guru. One might be tempted to speak of how this demonstrates capital's remarkable ability to assimilate its critics, thereby managing them towards its own ends. In this regard, what is perhaps most interesting about each of the articles published in this volume is the fact that their authors are, without exception, concerned with very similar problems to those which many self-professed radicals or critical theorists of organization take as their own. These mainstream/orthodox theorists attempt to embrace the challenge of considering some of the most pressing issues facing contemporary human kind rather than 'apologising' for the existing state of affairs (as they are often accused). To cite Handy again:

We need to eat to live; food is a necessary condition of life. But if we lived mainly to eat, making food a sufficient or sole purpose of life, we would become gross. The purpose of a business, in other words, is not to make a profit, full stop. It is to make a profit so that the business can do something more or better. That "something" becomes the real justification for the business. (p. 72)

Yet even with such stark similarities, there are of course distinctions to be made. I will underline two. First of all, and perhaps most obviously, the destination towards which the arguments are taken by each of these authors in terms of what is to be done is a place most radicals would not even think of going. Handy, for example, says that, unless what he terms 'enlightened capitalism' becomes the norm,

talent may start to shun it and customers desert it. Worse, democratic pressures may force governments to shackle corporations, limiting their independence and regulating the smallest details of their operations. And we shall all be the losers. (p. 82)

Of course, whether this is in fact the case depends upon how one first of all understands the ontological nature of 'talent', 'democracy', 'independence' and 'loss'. Handy neglects to make such clarifications, preferring to keep them cloaked in the garb of self-evidence. This means of argumentation is used throughout the book with the trajectory more or less unrelenting: in the world of business there are a few bad apples to be plucked from the trees but in general, the roots are strong. Not one of the articles goes so far as to ask whether a bulldozer should be driven through the orchard or whether the orchard itself should be burned, ground and all. The authors reach the point of discussing the technical specifications of the pruning sheers and stop there.

The second, and perhaps more significant distinction to be made between this appreciation of what corporations are for, and that of an anti-managerialist persuasion, is on the issue of reception and audience. The simple fact of the matter is that the former group has the ear of corporate executives and legislators. Those confident in the inevitability of revolution need only sit and wait for it to happen; the truth of matters such as these hardly warrants their consideration. Their day will come. As for those who aren't so confident of revolutions' imminence, the ability of books like this to affect

matters of corporate policy will surely be a concern. To ignore such a book is to ignore the significant influence it has. To challenge it is also to challenge its material influence. Not only is it closed minded for critical scholars to ignore these kinds of books, it is also counter-productive.

Without doubt, the work of authors such as Negri, Deleuze, Foucault and Žižek offer more challenging, sophisticated and rewarding reads. But surely there is something to be said for the critical scholar who reads what they oppose, exactly because they oppose it? Certainly Marx was of such a persuasion. Despite the *Harvard Business Review* signet, despite the guru posturing and despite the managerialist content, there is still much for the critical scholar to take from this book. They may not like it, much less agree with it, but since when has scholarship, critical or otherwise, been about consensual agreement?

Challenging CSR

John Elkington undoubtedly had something of this in mind when he coined the idea of 'The Triple Bottom Line'. Elkington, co-founder and current chairman of SustainAbility (see www.sustainability.com), as well as a leading figurehead in the green consumer movement, argued throughout his highly influential turn of the millennium manifesto *Cannibals with Forks* (1997) that the profit for its own sake model of capitalism (supposedly championed by the likes of Milton Friedman) required urgent realignment (see also Elkington, 1994 for the inauguration of the concept of the Triple Bottom Line). The Triple Bottom Line was hence posited as a means toward that end, insisting that corporations must be held responsible not only for the maximisation of shareholder wealth but also for the achievement of long term environmental security *and* the creation of egalitarian living standards between all human beings, for generations to come.

Elkington attempted to show that many corporations were already responding to these three fundamental calls made upon their operations. He was convinced that with enough pressure this trend will only increase with the passing of time, paving the way for a more sustainable global business model. In the face of such optimistic clairvoyance, Henriques and Richardson's edited collection sets each of its contributors the task of asking whether Elkington's thesis actually makes any sense. Offering sixteen essays in all, (the first being a reflective and speculative piece from Elkington himself) the volume assesses the Triple Bottom Line historically (esp. Adams et. al.), formally (esp. Oakley and Buckland), methodologically (esp. Shah), technically (esp. Baxter et. al.) and many other which ways besides. The editors are not introducing the Triple Bottom Line, they seek to interrogate it.

To do this we are presenting the views of a number of the key practitioners and academics in the field. The book is organized into a number of chapters that cover the history, background and theoretical issues; a critique of how the metaphor is being used, including an account of some tools based upon it; and, finally, some examples of how it is being used to good effect in practice. (p. xx)

Each individual essay takes up a particular Triple Bottom Line issue and works it through something of a critical examination. Is each of the bottom lines quantitatively measurable? (Richardson) Is the CSR reporting process mis-leading? (Doane) Are there contingencies and mis-fits between the Triple Bottom Line and corporate governance? (Bennet and van der Lugt) Are environmental issues best addressed by an accountancy logic? (Howes) These are not arbitrary questions but questions which Elkington and advocates of the Triple Bottom Line must address if their ideas are to be taken seriously. To this extent, the book surely accomplishes part of what it set out to do.

But as to whether or not the Triple Bottom Line does in fact add up, the reader is left guessing. Not one of the essays actually sets itself the task of proving or refuting the idea itself. Instead, each essay lowers the stakes somewhat; either an aspect of the Triple Bottom Line is yet to be clarified and tested or, alternatively, something of the way businesses operate today blocks the possibility of a ubiquitous Triple Bottom Line mentality becoming the case. It seems that the question posed in the title isn't to be taken too literally. For sure, the book is first and foremost concerned with the Triple Bottom Line as a problem for both theorists *and* practitioners, as a model that is anything but well developed. It cannot be said of any of the contributors that they dogmatically accept the Triple Bottom Line as some sort of divine prophecy. That said, if the case isn't made for the Triple Bottom Line and if an argument isn't made for why one should concern themselves *with* whether or not the idea of the Triple Bottom Line adds up, then all the clarification work in the world will not make the blindest bit of difference.

As the editors, authors and Elkington himself will no doubt be well aware, this volume hardly represents the first time the Triple Bottom Line has ever come under critical scrutiny. For those of a Friedmanian persuasion, it fundamentally misunderstands the entire premise upon which their school of thought is based, proposing a self-contradictory, misguided and ultimately dangerous social model in its place. As for disputes coming from the far left, Elkington's alternative simply isn't radical enough, placing too much faith within the unbridled prevalence of capitalist philanthropy, an oxymoron at best. In either case, the answer to the question of whether the Triple Bottom Line adds up remains an emphatic no.

That the proponents have not taken opportunities such as this volume to respond to their critics casts their ideas into serious doubt. If the Triple Bottom Line is to gain the world-wide recognition it requires in order to be able to affect the changes it predicts, its advocates cannot avoid engaging their staunchest of critics. If criticism prospers then the idea should be laid to rest. If not, then the necessity of its convictions will show themselves to have been well founded. But to have missed the opportunity to engage in debates such as these is to have missed the opportunity to make an argument for the Triple Bottom Line. The Triple Bottom Line is not the only version of CSR and, for as long as it neglects the task of convincing its opponents, they will remain unconvinced.

Conclusion

It might be said that Kotler and Lee care less about CSR than marketing, or that the *Harvard Business Review* authors care more about big business than CSR, or that the Triple Bottom Line suffers from too much blue-skies thinking and too little CSR. It might also then be tempting to suggest that these volumes do not actually represent *real* CSR, thereby dismissing them along with their supposed significance. For sure, many would relish the opportunity to discount what they see as apparent pretenders to the throne. Yet ‘marketingy’, ‘big-businessy’, ‘blue-skiesy’ or not, such characteristics do not, in themselves, once and for all de-legitimise the claims each of these volumes make towards contemporary theories and practices of CSR.

Characterised, as it has been, by the likes of the ‘shareholder/stakeholder’ debate, appraisals of the possibility of corporate self-regulation and discussions surrounding the role that should be given to Non-Governmental Organizations and the State, the relatively short history of CSR has been nothing if not contentious. The diversity of starting positions adopted by the three books reviewed here, taken together, reveals yet more contention. On account of the somewhat indeterminate nature of CSR, so called frauds can hold little fear of being exposed. The temptation may well be to expose the impostors and parasites, to banish them from the territories they seek to exhaust without replenishing. But there is nothing that presently justifies such policing. Transcendent refutations of this or that account of CSR are off limits, the grounds of CSR are nobody’s property. To react to a particular cultivation is to react to a violation of one’s own idea of how cultivation was supposed to have been undertaken. The affirmed spirit of CSR₂, and the promised epoch of CSR₃, seems to have been ignored; at least if the current face of the CSR literature, on the present showing, is anything to go by.

A lack of generally acknowledged conceptual givens creates confusion as to any field of inquiry’s direction and purpose. Without a sense for direction and purpose, any event of thematic knowledge accumulated, or not, will forever remain epistemologically under clarified. Hence, in order to be in a position to undermine the claims the likes of Kotler and Lee, the *Harvard Business Review* or the Triple Bottom Line make upon CSR, one must first of all possess the truth of CSR as a measure which each of these fail to live up to. At the moment, there exists no such measure. This is to the detriment of clarity, the field, and its potential for progress. This is not to suggest that nothing seminal has been written in the name of CSR or that every account of CSR is something of an arrogantly relativistic starting all over again. CSR has its classics, its cohort and its canon – this is occasionally recognised by each of the three volumes reviewed here. Nonetheless, it is equally the case that the characteristic disparity of the CSR literature creates the situation wherein rigorously formal arguments remain at a premium.

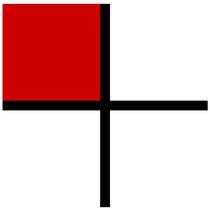
This in turn brings us back to the point from which we initially started; a point where we wondered what it is that CSR is today whilst at the very same time wondering how this indeterminate it has become so prevalent. A review of these three volumes leaves us wondering further.

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On a Genealogy of the Emotions from a Rhetorical Perspective*

Nader N. Chokr

review of:

Daniel M. Gross (2006) *A Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Pp. ii + 200. £ 22.50/ US \$ 35.00. ISBN-10: 0226309797; ISBN-13: 978-0226309798).

The 'democratization of emotion' over the past two centuries or so is still incomplete at best and a model of distraction at worst (Gross, 2006: 5).

Rhetoric always represents the possibility that things might be otherwise (Gross, 2006: 15).

By telling the story of our psychophysiology of emotion and by showing at what cost it emerged, I hope to provide access once again to the rich rhetoric that still quietly shapes our emotional world for worse and for better (Gross, 2006: 20).

Who has (or not), who can (or not) have which emotions? When? Where? How? Under what conditions and constraints? And why?

Introduction: On the Surging and Exploding Interest in the Emotions

We have been witnessing in recent decades a renewed and substantial interest in the (study of) emotions from a variety of different and divergent perspectives. This surging and exploding interest obviously makes a long overdue correction to what had been an otherwise unquestioned status quo or neglect – in which the emotions only rarely, if at all, figured in their own right as serious and worthwhile objects of inquiry – philosophical, scientific, or otherwise, from a new and fresh perspective. It was not long ago that they were viewed essentially as 'climate-like internal events', as non-rational,

* As always, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Li Xiaolin, my one and only muse, whose 'siren-song' keeps me enchanted, engaged, and productive. I also would like to thank one of the members of the Editorial Collective of *ephemera*, Sverre Spoelstra, for a helpful suggestion regarding a previous draft of this review.

discrete and inchoate interior ‘states’ which might or might not provide an environment for thought, and might somehow connect, incline, propel or shape thought in some directions. However, it was commonly assumed that emotions and thoughts, feelings and reason/rationality were contrastive terms. Whenever the emotions were mentioned, they were quickly dismissed or brushed aside in the same breath in favour of reason and rationality, the presumed distinctive and essential feature of human nature. Alternatively, and in line with age-old traditional perspectives going back to Plato and the Stoics, they were viewed as ‘disruptive,’ ‘a kind of excess,’ or invariably as a ‘source of irrationality’ to be tamed and controlled.

Nowadays however, hardly a week goes by in the academic world without reading or hearing about a colloquium, conference, or workshop being organized on one aspect or another, one approach or another, one theory or another of the emotions.¹ A quick search of the literature on the subject and related matters would quickly bring up hundreds and perhaps thousands of references. The sheer quantity of studies and inquiries within and across different fields (e.g., in literary studies, intellectual history, philosophy, anthropology, political theory and organization studies, psychology, not to mention the neurosciences) and even across different cultural and philosophical traditions² (e.g., East vs. West) certainly bodes well for the better understanding of the emotions and a more sophisticated appreciation of their place and role in our individual and collective lives. This dramatic surge in interest and attention does not of course preclude the persistence of certain widespread misconceptions based on questionable assumptions and methodologies. In other words, it does not guarantee that we will develop the proper and most useful conception, or even come to understand them fully in their diversity and complexity.

Daniel Gross’s book (2006), is however a welcome and important new addition to the growing literature on the subject on emotions. It is an ambitious attempt to undertake *a genealogy of the emotions from a rhetorical perspective*. Its aims as its title indicates is to bring out a hidden, obscured or covered up history, stretching back from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*³ through early and late Modern philosophy and literature to contemporary neurophysiology and political liberalism. He contends that it is bound to change our

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- 1 This week – as of the writing of this review, May 28, 2007 – and to mention only one instance, it has been announced that a one-day conference organized by the Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature will be held on June 1 at the University of Warwick on the theme ‘Modernism and the Emotions’. As we shall see, this theme is squarely situated within the central concern of the book here under review, and its author would be, if I may suggest so, a good keynote speaker.
 - 2 See McLemee, S. (2003) ‘Getting Emotional’, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 21, in which he points out that the study of emotions and feelings, once the province of psychology, is now spreading to history, literature, and many other fields. In the field of political theory and organization studies, see for example, Fineman, S. (ed.) (1995) *Emotion and Organization*. 2nd Edition. London: Sage; Hochschild, A. R. (1983) *The Managed Heart and the Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; see also the latest issue of *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 7(1), 2007, in which ‘Immaterial and Affective Labour’ is explored in the context of a presumably transformed capitalism with a concern for the possibility of resistance to Capital’s global hegemony. For East/West comparisons, see Marks, J. and R. Ames (eds.) (1995) *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy*. New York: SUNY Press.
 - 3 Aristotle (1991) *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. and ed. G.A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press.

misguided views, put to rest our misconceptions, and possibly point us in the right direction, or at least in a more fruitful and promising one. Rather than seeking to understand the emotions in their biological, psycho-physiological and evolutionary underpinning and significance, or in terms of their relationship to reason and rationality or cognition, we are better off focusing on their socio-historical-cultural construction. That is to say, on how the emotions are constructed differently at different times in history, differently for different individuals or groups, and in different social and cultural contexts.

I don't know how 'secret' is the history that Gross seeks to disclose. It seems to me that some inquirers were already in on it, at least in part, but perhaps not with the kind of deliberate focus and sustained critical assessment of its implications that Gross displays. My aim in this critical review is to bring out the main thrust of his analysis, situate it to some extent historically and philosophically with respect to other projects on the subject, and evaluate briefly its contribution.

Caveats and Preliminaries

First, however, it would be helpful to address a number of preliminary questions in order to take a measure of the motivating force behind his project.

'Why have 'emotions' emerged in recent times as a subject of importance in a diverse range of fields and traditions?' Could it be, at least in part, because our inquiries into their nature, their place and role promise access to a domain of 'proto-reason'? That is, to 'a different kind of reason' (perhaps as in Pascal's well-known statement "the heart has its reasons that Reason itself cannot comprehend"). Such a 'different kind of reason' is nowadays, we must admit, more widely recognized, and as a result, emotions are not viewed as necessarily or always the antithesis or antipode of reason and rationality – or even cognition-evaluation, and knowledge itself.

In this regard, it is worth noting the view defended by Nussbaum (2001),⁴ according to which emotions have cognitive-evaluation dimensions as they are "suffused with intelligence and discernment," and somehow "contain in themselves an awareness of value or importance." This "awareness of value" means that ethical discourse must take account of the emotions; and that morality cannot be reduced to a system of principles to be grasped somehow by a detached intellect. Subsequently, a central part of articulating and developing an adequate ethical theory must consist in articulating and developing an adequate theory of the emotions.

Could it be, at least in part, because we would thereby gain a better understanding of what motivates and moves us aesthetically, morally, and politically? Such a domain was obviously obscured or viewed as somehow beyond access for most of our history, Gross believes, because of long and widely held dubious assumptions and questionable

4 Nussbaum, M. (2001) *Upheaval of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

methodologies which have been perpetuated well into modern and contemporary philosophy, science, the humanities at large and the human sciences in particular. He points for example to *rational-choice theory* in the latter area, and *linguistic analysis* in the former.

Surprisingly, very few scholars in either the human sciences or the humanities have adequately focused on *the rhetorical tradition* for insights into the emotions, and this despite the fact, duly noted by Gross, that “rhetoric was the first, and remains the richest, resource for such an inquiry” (p. 9).

‘What does Gross mean by ‘rhetoric(s)’? What advantages or benefits accrue to his approach from being thusly focused?’ To paraphrase Cicero (in *De Oratore*), one could say that for Gross, ‘rhetoric’ is certainly an endeavor far broader and far richer than is commonly thought. It is sustained by all sorts of social, cultural, political considerations, institutional facts, discursive as well as non-discursive practices. And as such, it implies a broader and more comprehensive perspective that can only be achieved through a synthesis of some sort. Like other classical terms, it refers at least to a concrete practice, a theory, and a discursive quality. It is at once (a) an embedded cultural practice and (b) an inventive attitude, which enables us to reflect critically upon those very same cultural practices (p. 10). In its distinctly modern vein, it is critically reflexive with respect to its own historical situation, and can serve to characterize “how things might be otherwise” (p. 13). In other words, historical rhetorics reminds us that, however consequential and real they might be, the institutions and practices (discursive as well as non-discursive) that help shape us and, as Foucault would say,⁵ constitute us as individuals, and as members of different communities, are ultimately of our own making, and therefore subject to un-making and change.

Generally speaking, then, one could say that rhetoric always represents the possibility that things might be otherwise – despite being embedded in relatively stable institutions and practices, at least for a time.⁶ In Gross’s view, it even carries with it the potential for *theory* and *education*. It is not surprising therefore that some philosophers interested in heeding Marx’s injunction to transform the world (rather than merely continue to interpret it *ad nauseatum*) have stated, in a rather non-Marxian way, that we must begin by changing our language, the language in which we describe and talk about our world and ourselves. For Gross, “rhetoric is an inventive attitude toward language and the world, where ‘emotion’ names one important way in which language and the world connect” (p. 15). In this sense, it is diametrically opposed to the entire philosophical tradition that posits language as a *mirror* of nature – to use an expression from the title of Rorty’s groundbreaking book (1979).⁷

‘What does Gross mean by ‘emotions’? Is his working definition tenable?’ For Gross, emotions are best understood as defining “the contours of a dynamic social field

5 Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House.

6 See relevant discussions of the contributions of Nicholas Caussin (1619) and Giambattista Vico (1725) (pp. 11-15).

7 Rorty, R. (1979) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

manifest in what is experienced or obliterated, imagined and forgotten, praised and blamed, sanctioned or silenced, etc” (p. 15). Though they are obviously materialized in brains, faces, bodies, and even objects and architecture (e.g., tombstones, amusement parks), emotions clearly exceed the merely ideal. But neither are they essentially material, he believes. Instead, taking his cues from Heidegger’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, he contends, quite rightly, I believe, that the most appropriate way to approach emotions is phenomenologically – that is, by starting with the concrete manifestations of emotions *in a meaningful world*, as opposed to a world of mere matter.⁸ In such an endeavour, Gross claims, rhetorics would obviously come to occupy a leading place, over and beyond the practices of the ‘hard sciences’ that are focused on matter and biology.

‘Is “emotion” however a coherent or useful category?’ For one thing, we must recognize that ‘fear’, for example, differs from ‘jealousy’ not only in terms of its physiology, its place in evolutionary biology, but in terms of its purpose. For another, the term may contribute to obscuring particular histories of particular emotions, such as shame, guilt, melancholy, love, humility, apathy, pride, etc. Gross is aware of some important and relatively strong arguments to this effect (by literary and cultural historians as well as neuroscientists), but he chooses to disregard them and use anyway the generic term of ‘emotion’ (and its relative, ‘passion’) primarily in contrast with reason.⁹ As he notes (2n2), he uses the terms ‘emotion’ and ‘passion’ without invoking a strict distinction. However, the more familiar term ‘emotion’ signals in general a contemporary perspective, while that of ‘passion’ indicates a more historical and antiquated perspective, or alternatively, vehemence and excessiveness in the expression of one’s emotions. In his discussion of the ‘emotion-reason *topos*’ (pp. 55-65), Gross argues that giving up the broad category of ‘emotions’ completely would make some important theoretical work and even some historical work impossible. He may be right in this regard – despite the well-taken points raised previously.

On the Emotions from a Rhetorical Perspective – Main Thrust of the Argument

As mentioned earlier, Gross’s genealogical-historical approach to the ‘emotions’ is anchored in rhetorics (his primary field of interest, training and expertise), and as such, it puts *the question of politics* (and therefore of *power*) at the forefront and squarely at the centre of his inquiry (p. 6). In so doing, it purports to remedy a deficit diagnosed in both the humanities and the human sciences that has so far been left unanswered in his view.

For this purpose, he seeks to reconstitute by way of a critical intellectual history a deeply nuanced, rhetorical understanding of emotions that he claims prevailed prior to the triumph and dominance of the psycho-physiological understanding and the liberal,

8 See Gross, D. and A. Kemmann (eds.) (2005) *Heidegger and Rhetoric*. Albany: SUNY Press.

9 As we shall see in due course, this will enable us to situate his inquiry within the contemporary context of research and investigation, construed in a broader and more general way.

humanist and universalist approach. He also wishes to show by way of literary and philosophical examples how this rhetorical perspective can help us read anew “the emotional complex of modernity” – whether early or late. In this sense, Gross’s genealogy of the emotions constitutes in the final analysis a new *critique of modernity*, one that is bound to be enlightening and instructive for our *postmodernity*.

According to the story that Gross tells us, the Aristotelian political rhetoric on the emotions, which he believes to be on the right track for the most part, was rediscovered by early Modern authors in the 17th century (e.g., Hobbes). He locates the heyday of the explicit recognition of emotions as fundamentally psycho-social in the mid-17th century, and claims that a dramatic new possibility opened up for it when the ancient discipline of ‘rhetorics’ was adopted in Early modernity. It was in fact pursued later in different ways by different late Modern authors in the 18th century (e.g., Hume, Sarah Fielding, William Perfect, and Adam Smith). However, these authors’ contributions have often been misinterpreted in the direction of a moral universalism and generalized psychology, and were subsequently lost again in the 19th century, during which rhetoric was largely reduced to the study of figures and tropes, or the art of persuasion. As a result, emotions (such as anger, apathy, vainglory, pride, humility, and compassion) that were once overtly rhetorical, socially construed and constructed, and therefore political, are now construed as natural, equally shared, and somehow best explained in psycho-physiological terms. This is the belief that has obviously come to dominate in the 20th century up to the present. And we have tended to read back such a belief into (late) Modern texts. The emotions, that once were treated as externalized forms of socio-political currency and worldly investments that are always already caught up in a given socio-historical-political matrix characterized by social differences, differential powers, and uneven distribution (i.e., ‘emotional injustice’), have been sucked into the brain and have come to be seen as hardwired to the human nature we all share equally.

The main targets of his criticism include: (1) the reductive psycho-physiological emotional Cartesianism which has come to inform both [a] romantic expressivism and [b] latter-day sciences of the mind and brain; (2) liberal humanist theories of emotions and of universal human dignity (e.g., those of Richard Sorabji,¹⁰ Martha Nussbaum), as well as (3) neuro-scientific theories such as Joseph LeDoux’s¹¹ and Antonio Damasio’s¹² – to mention only two of the most prominent today. While the former is, as he shows, clearly situated within the problematic Cartesian framework, Gross argues that the latter is in fact also still trapped in a reductive neuro-physiological framework. And this, despite his diagnosis of *Descartes’ Error* and explicitly looking up to Spinoza for an answer as to how to best characterize the mind-body relationship, or the nature, place and role of ‘emotions’ (or ‘passions’) in our mental, rational or social life.

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- 10 Sorabji, R. (2000) *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 11 LeDoux, J. (1996) *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 12 Damasio, A. (1999) *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. New York: Harcourt; Damasio, A. (2000) *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Quill/HarperCollins. Damasio, A. (2003) *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. New York: Harcourt.

For Gross, emotions are not simply constituted in the biology, nor even in the liberal humanist notion of human dignity all humans are supposed to share equally, but rather in relationships of inequity and differences in power. Following Aristotle's view, Gross contends that the emotions (including those that are more obviously social such as 'love' and 'jealousy' and those that are supposed to be hardwired such as 'fear' and 'disgust') require "a series of enabling conditions," which are commonly obscured by our widespread and all-too-often unquestioned platitudes about biology and universal human dignity. These include: (a) *a public stage* – rather than private feelings, (b) *asymmetrical power relations*, (c) thoroughly *psychosocial presumptions* – rather than our familiar psychological, individual expressions of feelings. In other words, an emotion is not merely or most crucially the expression of an individual's opinion, as the Stoics and some contemporary philosophers have argued. And finally, it presumes (d) a *contoured world of emotional investments* where some people have significantly more liabilities (or opportunities) than others (p. 2-3).

Gross argues in effect that the contours of our emotional world have been shaped by social practices and institutions that simply afford some people greater emotional range than others; and as such, they have nothing to do with the inherent value or dignity of each human being and everything to do with the "technologies of social recognition and blindness" (p. 4). In a way that is clearly reminiscent of Foucault once again (1988),¹³ he states that one of his aims is to study how these 'technologies of emotion' work.

In his view, the last point above (d) can serve to establish a direct link from Aristotle to early Modern psychologists, such as Hobbes, late Modern authors such as Hume, Sarah Fielding, William Perfect, Adam Smith, and even all the way to a contemporary philosopher such as Judith Butler. He recognizes, however, that brilliant though they were, Aristotelian rhetoric and Hume's elitist theory of emotions, for example, were not 'right' in some metaphysical sense. Nevertheless, they have characterized the emotions in terms of a '*political economy*' based on '*scarcity*' rather than '*excess*', and marked fundamentally by an uneven distribution. In so doing, he claims, they did provide us with a lucid critique of power that reminds us that "the democratization of emotion" (p. 5) over the past two centuries or so is still incomplete at best, and distracting at worst.

For this reason, Gross undertakes to look at the rhetoric of uneven distribution in a number of cases, stretching from Ancient times to the Enlightenment and beyond. These cases include: Aristotle's angry King or apathetic slave, Seneca's angry tyrant, Hobbes' vainglorious and resentful preacher (chapters 1 and 2), the 'shadow economy' of apathy, passivity, and humility during the English Civil War now characterized in terms of a radicalized later Modern *active/passive* dyad, masculine political agency vs. a diminished femininity (chapter 3), Hume's proud property owner or humble woman, Sarah Fielding's humble hero (chapter 4), William Perfect's insane and emotionally troubled patients, and Adam Smith's compassionate spectator (chapter 5). He hopes thereby to recover a critical tool that has been obscured by the science of emotion, and that, he believes, is still underdeveloped in literary and cultural studies.

13 Foucault, M. (1988) *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with M. Foucault*, ed. L.H. Martin, H. Gutman and P.H. Hutton. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

As suggested earlier, and by his own admission, Gross's approach bears some obvious affinities to the genealogical work of Foucault (1980).¹⁴ But it also seeks to extend it and go beyond – by showing how early Modern theories of emotions in the Aristotelian vein (esp., Hume's) can inform Judith Butler's project (1997) seeking to integrate politics and psychoanalysis in an effort, as he puts it, "to think a theory of *power* together with a theory of the *psyche*" (p. 7).¹⁵

Consequences of a Genealogical Approach

What conclusions or lessons does Gross draw in the end from his genealogical-historical analysis? Though Aristotle and like-minded psychologists of early Modernity (17th century), such as Hobbes and Hume, have demonstrated how emotions are strategic, always already caught up in a differentiated socio-political-cultural context, they have all failed (except for Sarah Fielding) to theorize properly how emotions can be turned against the powerful. Nevertheless, he contends that their unblinking critique of power has made this last step much easier.

For one thing, he argues, Hume's theory for example can help us do what Judith Butler's project (1997) urges, namely, as I pointed out above, "to think a theory of power together with a theory of the psyche," and inform thereby "our most suggestive psychoanalytic theory of emotion." In Gross's view, both Hume and Butler challenge the notion of "autonomous free-will" and "psychological universalism." They ask instead "what losses are compelled by culturally prevalent prohibitions (notably for Hume, *patriarchy*, and for Butler, *hetero-normativity*) and what culturally prevalent forms of psyche result" (p. 7). How does this affect undoubtedly the emotional life of individuals and communities?

In any case, Gross believes that the work of modern rhetoricians makes it much easier to take the last desirable step than the alternative and competing approaches: those of the brain sciences as well as those of "liberal, humanist, universalist theories of human dignity." In both cases, he detects an "evasion of rhetoric" that calls for a deconstructive approach. That is why he subjects the work of Antonio Damasio (as a prominent representative of the former approach) and that of Martha Nussbaum (prominent representative of the latter approach) to a severe, and possibly at times unfair and excessive, deconstructive critique.

14 Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books.

15 Butler, J. (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 19. In this regard, Gross remarks that "instead of contrasting psychic phenomena that are internal, personal, and physiological to political phenomena that are external, impersonal, and social, Butler asks us to consider how particular processes of internalization fabricate 'the distinction between interior and exterior life'. Reinvesting a Foucauldian analysis of power with psychoanalytic questions about *how we come to desire our own oppression*, Butler interrogates the mechanisms of law and language that regulate our passionate attachments" (2006: 78; italics added).

Against the theory of emotions proposed by Damasio (2003),¹⁶ his critique consists in pointing out the “evasion of rhetoric” that somehow writes itself into his scientific research, and the subsequent neglect of the irreducibility of the social and cultural dimensions of the emotions. He objects to the reductionism of his psycho-physiological approach. More specifically, he objects to his questionable experimental assumptions, the dubious presumptions he makes about the social in its relation to the natural or the biological, about the ability of the neuro-physiological sciences to address in a satisfactory manner irreducibly social and cultural phenomena such as ‘ethnic hatred’, ‘gay pride’, or ‘the anger of the white male’, for example. Gross does not share Damasio’s optimism in seeing someday anti-social emotions disappear like a tailbone. More specifically, he is not sure how Damasio can overcome what he calls “the paradox of the observer”: “How can one adequately characterize an abnormal emotional brain when one’s study might be designed within *a sick culture* or at least in a culture affected by *maladaptive biases* inherently unidentifiable and therefore uncontrollable from within the scientific study?” (p. 37; italics added).

Gross recognizes various merits to Nussbaum’s approach (2001). She breaks up the traditional dichotomy emotions vs. reason, defends the intelligence of the emotions, underscores the social, cultural and even political dimensions of the emotions as well as the necessity of taking a narrative approach to the emotions and enlisting the help of literature for better understanding how they operate in particular lives, our own and other peoples’ lives. In the end however, he believes that she somehow missed an opportunity. In his view, such a failure is also due to “an evasion of rhetoric” in the liberal, humanist and universalist theory she favors and upholds, and that she believes could perhaps be supported and validated in some fashion by the results of the latest scientific results in the neuro-sciences. In other words, it seems to be still committed to questionable (metaphysical and scientific) assumptions about human nature, human beings, and what ‘human flourishing’ entails from the standpoint of ‘emotional justice’.

Historical and Philosophical Context

Let us now take a few steps back and try to situate the approach exemplified by Gross within a broader and more general framework. We might ask for example: ‘How have the class of mental states commonly referred to as ‘emotions’ generally figured in philosophical inquiries in the past and in more recent times?’ The story we could tell in response to such a question can obviously be told in several ways. Here are at least two.

16 See McGinn, C. (2003) ‘Fear Factor’, *New York Times*, February 23, for a devastating internal critique of the central claims made and defended by Antonio Damasio in support of a theory of emotions which he claims to be radically new. McGinn contends that in fact it is merely “old wine in a new bottle,” and therefore unoriginal, and what’s worse, outright false and therefore untenable. According to McGinn, one can easily show how to refute such a theory. It represents a standard chestnut of psychology textbooks, a staple of old-style behaviorist psychology, with its emphasis on outer behavior at the expense of inner feeling. It is also known as the James-Lange theory, for having been developed independently by two psychologists in the 1880’s, William James and Carl G. Lange.

(1) One consists in looking at the philosophical history of the *emotions* in terms of the relation they (are said to) have enjoyed, over the course of the past two thousand years or so, with *reason* or *rationality* itself. From this perspective, we might say that emotions have appeared in philosophical inquiries primarily in terms of their ability to influence and affect (mostly negatively) our ability to reason and be rational.

Thus, for the Stoics (and many other ancients and modern philosophers) for whom philosophy is primarily or even exclusively an exercise in rational deliberation, the aim is to overcome the detrimental and disruptive effects of the emotions. For Hume, however, reason has been shown to be powerless in motivating moral behaviour, and only our passions or sentiments are capable of motivating us to right and wrong action. More recently in time, the logical positivists' 'emotivism' in value theory led to the dismissal of moral and aesthetic statements as meaningless, or as unable to be scrutinized by traditional rational decision-procedures because they were merely expressions of emotions. In this whole line of philosophical inquiry, the focus (and its most notable feature) is on the power the emotions can have over our rational thought processes and vice-versa. The examination of the emotions-rationality relation seems to have been centered around the question of determining 'who is in charge?' so to speak, – the emotions or reason? Despite, or perhaps in contradistinction to Hume's famous argument that 'reason' is in fact more accurately viewed as 'the slave of the passions', the philosophical tradition has for the most part had a tendency to view the emotions as the more hostile and disruptive part of the 'master-slave' relationship. Though in this regard, Gross would most likely take side with Hume, he would not, I believe, uphold the view that 'emotions' and 'reason' are necessarily antithetical, and that the former are devoid of cognitive-intentional-evaluative dimensions.

(2) An alternative way of telling the story of the emotions-rationality relation, which has been developed in more recent times, starts from a question about (the best way to characterize) the nature of emotions, rather than persisting in the examination of the dominance relationship one is said or presumed to have over the other.

The dramatically increased and exploding interest in the emotions over the last three decades or so can perhaps be explained, at least in part, on the basis of the following considerations. The focus of this approach is on the *cognitive* base of the emotions, and the scepticism it entertains about the idea that reason (or rationality) alone is the source of knowledge and understanding, and that the emotions simply motivate. The idea that 'reason' and 'emotions' are not to be conceived as always antagonistic and somehow working against each other (a conception sometimes referred to as 'the myth of the passions' or 'Descartes' error') but rather as interacting and perhaps even complimentary, is not in fact entirely new or original. We find as far back as in Aristotle's work that the distinction between rationality and the emotions is not invariably as heavily underscored as in many other, more antagonistically oriented, later accounts – esp. after Descartes. What is distinctive and noteworthy about recent approaches, however, is not merely an insistence on the need for a revisionary account of the emotions-reason relation away from the inherently hostile, disruptive, and antagonistic one, but an emphasis on the possibility of combining the *affective* and the *cognitive* aspects of emotions themselves.

On this question, we can distinguish at least three different approaches. First, there is the one (discussed earlier) endorsed and adopted by empirical psychologists, which is based on William James' idea that 'emotions are (bodily) feelings', and as such, they are not under our rational control. Second, there is the approach developed principally by Robert C. Solomon (1993)¹⁷ and Martha Nussbaum (2001), according to which "emotions are appraisals or value judgments", which are not always misguided ones as earlier philosophers had us believe. They may even have cognitive-intentional-evaluative dimensions, and are best apprehended through a narrative articulation. Third, there is the approach, exemplified by Peter Goldie (2000),¹⁸ which has received much attention from the philosophical community lately, and for which 'emotions are complex'. According to the latter approach, what we need is to retain a theory of the emotions that allows them to be rationally assessed, yet does not ignore the fact that they also involve feelings. In effect, it seems to be interested in finding a way to reconcile the two previous approaches in some plausible sense.

In this context, Gross's work can be situated along the axis taken by Solomon and Nussbaum, but with some crucial qualifications. Concerning the former, Gross acknowledges that his approach does overlap with Robert C. Solomon's influential work on emotion as constitutive of experience, but it diverges from his cognitive perspective that collapses at crucial points into a kind of *decisionism* that forecloses adequate historical and political analysis of emotions. For Gross, Solomon addresses the right topic but in the wrong way. He contends more specifically that Solomon's perspective obscures the *social* institutions of 'judgment' built into the legal system, for instance, which dramatically constrain individual decisions about all sort of matters, including, for example, matters of equality and inequality (3n3).

Concerning Nussbaum, as I pointed earlier, what Gross basically objects to is her 'evasion of rhetoric', and the subsequent 'missed opportunity' she had to elaborate an ethical-political theory worthy of the literary sensibility and political sensitivity that she displays otherwise in her work. Such a theory would focus our attention onto the social, cultural and political context of emotions – i.e., onto 'the politics of emotions'. In addition, he also objects to her excessive and at times uncritical endorsement and adoption of the universalist assumptions of liberal humanism, as well as those of the scientific and reductionist approach of neuro-physiologists, such as Damasio. As Gross points out: "In fact, Damasio's main purpose in *Looking for Spinoza* is to show how 'an understanding of the neurobiology of emotion and feeling is a key to the formulation of principles and policies capable of reducing human distress and enhancing (to cite Nussbaum) human flourishing.'" And he adds further: "Despite Damasio's poetic sensibility and good intentions, one shudders to imagine what such a society might look like" (p. 35).

In all fairness however, perhaps a more judicious, though not uncritical, appraisal of Nussbaum's contribution might be in order. The classical Greek version of cognitivism is one in which emotions somehow ascribe to things and people outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own existence and flourishing. For

17 Solomon, R.C. (1993) *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.

18 Goldie, P. (2000) *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nussbaum, the neo-Stoic, cognitivist theorist of emotions, in contrast, they are best approached from a narrative point of view because they are *eudaimonistic* in character. They take their cues from the person's conception of flourishing, and this includes her scheme of ends, plans, and goals, and so on. And as such, they require a narrative articulation – so too does the person's history of attachment and commitments to others, values, and the world of objects in general. Nussbaum seeks in fact to amend and elaborate the classical Greek picture sketched out above in many ways. She wants for example to provide a detailed account of the role of *imagination* in various emotions, to distinguish between emotions and cognate phenomena such as *moods*, *appetites*, and *motives for action*, as well as between general and particular emotions, on the one hand, and between 'situational' and 'background' emotions, on the other.

As in all her work, the civic dimension is critical, and her neo-Stoic account proposes a rich reciprocal relationship between agents and the powerful forces of "social construction" that provide and make possible certain *repertoires of emotion* in a given culture. Nussbaum wants to be able to account for variations in these repertoires across cultures, and show how certain developmental patterns in agents' histories might predispose them to normative civic emotions like compassion (as in Adam Smith), to forms of ambivalence, to asocial or anti-social emotional orientations. When and where dispositions and emotions are distorted, disordered, and undermined by ambivalence, or lack of appropriate social attunement, some sort of 'therapy' may offer us hope. Since the emotions are constitutively evaluative, they are opportunities to re-align individual evaluations, and thus emotions, with rational social norms. Nussbaum's *eudaimonism* is Aristotelian in its attempt to align personal flourishing with civic virtue. And in this sense, if anything, it should have agreed with the political view defended by Gross.

Besides, in her effort to characterize emotions as having rich cognitive-intentional content, as being (always/often/ more often than assumed) 'about' something rather than self-sufficient events, she shows that their 'aboutness' is mediated and articulated by the (constituted and possibly self-constituted) subjectivity of the individual concerned. She thus tries to introduce a richly subjective intentional component into the cognitivist approach. We can easily read her numerous evocations of her own 'grief' (at the death of her mother) as a kind of (autobiographical) phenomenology of the emotions. And again, in this sense, Gross should have seen in her approach a more kindred perspective.

Finally, with regards her presumed 'evasion of rhetoric', the following must be noted. When she considers how different literary genres – including tragedy, romance, melodrama, the realist novel, and some types of comedy – can only function through rich *eudaimonistic* connections to their audience, she approaches various texts through a version of Boothian rhetorical analysis. Such a rhetorical analysis is one that focuses on readerly emotional responses to characters, to the implied author, and to the reader's emotions toward her own possibilities. Once more, Gross's criticism in this regard may be too strong and in need of further qualification.

In the Final Analysis

Nevertheless, Gross does have a valid point in seeking to undermine the undisputed and widely accepted, yet problematic universalist and humanist assumptions built into a number of approaches to the emotions. For this purpose, he emphasizes the social constructivist approach – grounded in rhetorics – that he favours, and that I have briefly characterized above. However, he seems at times to go perhaps a bit too far in his indictment and rejection of those approaches generally grounded in contrast either in biology or in liberal humanism.

It should be clear to anyone who cares to make such assessment that the emotions must be apprehended in their complexity, in their various dimensions and from a variety of judiciously articulated perspectives. These would include: the social, cultural, historical, biological perspectives, as well as that which is, more properly speaking, political, and which could be articulated from the standpoint of a universalist, normative conception of ‘emotional justice’. The political goals that his approach can help us achieve can also be advanced in some other ways or rendered easier to attain by the potentially illuminating theories of emotions that could be put forth by both scientists and liberal humanists of different stripes and persuasions, whose work is underwritten by a normative, moral, universalist thrust. Our study of the emotions is bound to be advanced further by a broadly construed multi-disciplinary effort.

In the end, however, one must recognize Gross’s remarkable achievement – both in terms of the economy of language he displays and the scope of his argumentative thrust throughout his relatively small book comprising only five short and tightly woven chapters. His main argument is complex, weaving as it does several threads covering a long period of Western history, and taking aim at the respective construal of the emotions of several prominent protagonists (ancient, modern and contemporary) in a fairly succinct yet effective way. His text is judiciously referenced, and suggests a strong and nuanced command of the relevant literature. It is dense and qualified, and yet, it remains fairly easy to read. Its plot and structure, mirroring that of a good detective story, makes it even a page-turner, something that can hardly be said about most academic works today.

Gross is essentially raising the following crucial set of questions: ‘Who has (or not), who can have (or not) which emotion(s)? When? Where? How? Under what conditions and constraints? And why?’ In so doing, he is inviting us to consider why emotions are best understood as social phenomena through and through, over and beyond their psycho-physiological and biological underpinnings. He is also considering how things might be otherwise, or different from a rhetorical, and therefore political, point of view, and finally how the distribution of emotions could be done more judiciously with a little more equity. Though I am generally sceptical of works that propose to reveal a secret, I believe that his book brings out effectively a history that has been obscured and lost, and which therefore deserves our attention.

the author

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