Fearless speech: Practising *parrhesia* in a self-managing community*

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abstract

Through ethnography, this paper applies the conceptual themes of *parrhesia* to the contemporary setting of a self-managing organic farming community. A reading of Foucault's later work on *parrhesia* in classical Antiquity is made, following on from which the paper analyses the contributions put forward by individual community members in reaching agreement on how to farm organically through practices reminiscent of *parrhesia*. A combination of the different forms of ancient *parrhesia* are found to be re-enacted in a contemporary setting. These include political *parrhesia* as enacted in the formal Assembly of the Athenian democracies and informally in the meeting places of the *agora*; and philosophical *parrhesia* as enacted in the Epicurean communities through self-writing. Furthermore, in speaking out against the higher-status long-term residents, a newcomer re-enacts the scenario of monarchic *parrhesia* and some forms of philosophical *parrhesia*. For this Special Issue on governing work though self-management, the paper contributes by providing an empirical study of how consensus decision-making is enacted in a contemporary self-managing community.

Introduction

This paper applies the conceptual themes of *parrhesia* to an ethnographic study carried out by the author at a self-managing organic farming community. A reading of Foucault's later work on *parrhesia* in classical Antiquity is made and used to investigate communal decision-making in terms of how individuals organise themselves to speak out or keep quiet.

More specifically, the study examines how community members work together at farming organically without direct rules to follow. All commercial organic food producers are required by law to comply with a set of standards produced by an organic certification body. Since the community produces food for self-sufficiency rather than

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for profit, there is no obligation to comply with this requirement. The community offers an exceptional opportunity therefore to study how a group of individuals from varied backgrounds establishes communal organic farming practices when they do not have to defer to formal rules. Accordingly, the following research question is addressed: how do individuals in a self-managing community contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm organically through practices reminiscent of *parrhesia*?

Ethnography is used to conduct an in-depth study of the everyday life of a group of people as they discuss organic farming practices and related issues. Unlike those studies where the researcher investigates dozens of communities (Kanter, 1968; Sargisson, 2004), ethnography enables intensive study through 'the prism of the local' that permits the researcher to 'see the possibility of something quite different' (Miller, 1995: 13). For Miller, 'ethnographic observations are vital' if globally used terms are 'ever to be more than glib generalities' (*ibid.*: 9). Accordingly, this paper focuses on the globally used terms of 'organic' and 'self-management'.

Modern management in contemporary hierarchical organisations inhibits speaking out by employees (Donaghey et al., 2011; Milliken et al., 2003). This paper, in analyzing the contributions to decision-making made by members of a non-hierarchical community who live and farm together, turns away from the literature on modern work organisations to seek theoretical inspiration from Foucault's analysis of the ancient practice of *parrhesia*. Although *parrhesia* was practiced in communities in Antiquity, *parrhesia* did not form part of the initial theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the current paper attempts to operationalise the concept of *parrhesia* by evaluating negotiations in the empirical setting of a community in relation to the different forms of *parrhesia* that Foucault identifies in classical thinking. Whilst the analysis is comparative, I am not looking for precise reconstructions of these different classical forms of *parrhesia*. Instead, I seek to excavate from a contemporary setting the practices of speaking out that are reminiscent of the forms of *parrhesia* in classical thinking about which Foucault writes.

By studying a community, this paper contributes to management and organisation theory by presenting an alternative way of using Foucault in a field dominated by studies of work organisations that are orientated towards control through surveillance, the management of subjectivities, and the implementation of culture change strategies (see Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Styhre, 2001; Casey, 1999; amongst others). The current paper contributes to management and organisation theorists' understanding of Foucauldian concepts by analysing the contributions individuals make to the decision-making practices centred around the word 'organic' in terms of the various forms of the practice of *parrhesia* identified by Foucault as occurring in Antiquity. For this Special Issue on the topic of governing work though self-management, the paper contributes by providing an empirical study of how consensus decision-making regarding farm work practices is enacted in a contemporary self-managing community.

The paper begins by introducing ethnography as the most appropriate methodology to use for answering the research question of how individual members contribute to decision-making about communal farming practices. Next, to provide a conceptual framework, a reading is carried out of the different forms of *parrhesia*, or speaking out,

that are identified in Foucault's later texts as practices of Antiquity. The empirical section that follows comprises an outline of the decision-making organisational framework, followed by an in-depth exploration of how individual community members self-manage their contributions to the establishment of farming practices, analysed through the various forms of *parrhesia* practised in Antiquity.

Methodology: Ethnography at a self-managing farming community

The theorising of how individuals contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm organically through practices analysable as *parrhesia* was an unexpected finding from the research I carried out at a self-managing non-commercial organic farming community. Greenfields[1] comprises housing accommodation in self-contained units of varying sizes, together with communal areas and adjoining farmland. The community includes singles, couples, and families. Since start-up, members have joined and left at various times and the period of research activity includes one co-founder and several newcomers. Experience of farming organically or non-organically is not a prerequisite for newcomers.

The potential richness and depth to be gained from studying people in a communal setting that is a site for organising not only work but also home lives, families, social lives, and so on, seems to me to be best explored through ethnography. Because I was visiting community members in their own homes, I wanted to nurture relationships on the basis of friendship and cordiality. I wished to avoid feeling like an intruder. According to Coffey (1999), prolonged fieldwork entails developing rapport and the ethnographic research relationship is more personal than other qualitative research relationships.

The flexibility that ethnography offers in terms of both theory development and recourse to multiple methods is attractive. Regarding theory development, the research direction can be changed easily; ideas that occur during the fieldwork can be tried out 'and, if promising, followed up' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 24). In the initial stages particularly, I preferred to pursue the open-ended approach of 'Never say never', of letting the data 'speak' to me and finding a theory to explain the data, rather than mapping the data to a theory I had decided on before commencing data collection. I felt that this approach would support the explorative element of the research and was more likely to produce some unexpected outcomes (see Dalton, 1959). Regarding access to multiple methods, in retrospect ethnography enabled access to a wider range of insights than would have been available through interviews alone. I was able to hang out in communal areas and chat with community members informally. By listening, rather than asking questions, I could find out things I would not have thought to ask. Also, I was able to chat with some of the people who did not put themselves forward for interview. One communal area in particular, the Buttery, served as a hub for information-sharing via the blackboards on which messages were chalked up and the

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1   Greenfields is a pseudonym. To help preserve anonymity, I choose not to disclose the number of adults residing at the community.

noticeboards on which minutes of meetings, rotas for milking, and so on were pinned. Community members came in and out to keep up to date with changes and to pin up, mark up, or rub out their own messages.

I used a mix of observation, participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis of blackboards, notice boards, books, notebooks, ring binders of information, and minutes of previous meetings. Participant observation comprised participating in weekend work-gangs, attending social events, and having full access to the buildings and grounds, enabling walking around and chatting informally within the context of daily community life. I was also allowed to observe several Farm meetings. My key contacts were a community member and his wife who I had met previously at Christmas dinners held by the organisation that employs both him and my partner. Previously, my partner and I had visited the community at the summer parties held for families and friends. Access was agreed collectively at a community meeting; however individual access was not so easy to negotiate[2]. To get started, I conducted a pilot study for one week during November 2004. This allowed me to get chatting with some of the residents and arrange initial interviews. During the pilot study, I conducted interviews with five residents, had lunch with the Farm Chair, and spent a day with one of the original founders who told me about the history of the community and provided a guided tour of the communal areas and farmland. From the pilot study, it was clear to me that the community was a fascinating site for studying the self-regulation of organic food production. What I had not anticipated was the level of organisational infrastructure that supported decision-making at the community on issues central to farming and living communally.

Fourteen adult community members consented to an in-depth interview and some of the newcomers I interviewed twice with a gap of nine to 12 months between interviews. Four people asked to be interviewed as two couples. Hence, in total, I conducted 15 semi-structured recorded interviews, several of which exceeded two hours in length with the remainder of approximately one hour's duration.

Interviews were semi-structured and comprised open-ended questions. Interviews were held in private, except for those residents who I interviewed as couples. During the pilot study, I directed some interview questions towards information-gathering, asking about organisational issues such as 'How do the sub groups work?' 'Tell me more about any current outstanding issues' and 'How do you resolve differences?'. Several interview questions such as 'Why join the community?' were relevant throughout the research period. As the research progressed, I adapted some of the interview questions accordingly to pursue topics of interest. Sometimes, I prompted respondents by asking unscripted questions. Later on, events from my own experience of living at Greenfields helped me to ask more probing questions. As the research progressed, I became aware of the central role of the organisational framework for promoting debate and resolving issues to do with organic farming practices. Accordingly, I aimed more questions

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2   If you join a community, do not expect to have a rest! There is general agreement at Greenfields that each adult tries to commit 16 hours weekly to maintaining the farm and the communal areas. On top of this, a number of residents work full-time, including away from home in other locations. There are children to look after too.

around the negotiating and decision-making processes of the Farm meeting. The questions became more specific, for example 'Any thoughts on consensus decision-making and the way it is implemented in the Co-op?' and 'At Farm meetings, do some people dominate more than others?'

To provide a theoretical basis for the ethnography presented here of how individuals participate in directing and controlling organic practices through speaking out in a self-managing community context that is atypical of the modern work organisation, I turn now to the practice of *parrhesia* in Antiquity as identified by Foucault.

Conceptual framework: Speaking out through *parrhesia*

In the Collège de France lectures of 1981-2 (2005) and 1982-3 (2010) and the Berkeley lectures of 1983 (2001), Foucault locates *parrhesia* in texts from Antiquity ranging approximately from 500 BC-AD 500. Etymologically, *parrhesia* translates to 'telling all' (2005: 372) or 'saying everything' (2001: 12), although Foucault prefers 'franc-parler' which translates to 'speaking freely' (2005: 373). In Antiquity, the use of *parrhesia* is not available to everyone and, on top of this, employing *parrhesia* is often a risky strategy. For Jack, also, 'speech is never free' (2004: 121). Rather than 'free speech', therefore, I choose to translate *parrhesia* as 'fearless speech', the title under which the Berkeley lectures are published (2001).

In the early part of *Fearless Speech*, Foucault identifies several characteristics of *parrhesia* including frankness, truth, danger, criticism, and duty (2001: 12-20). *Parrhesia* is a way of speaking the truth or, more specifically, the speaker's version of the truth[3]: 'In *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks' (*ibid.*: 12). *Parrhesia* is characterised by frankness and 'an exact coincidence between belief and truth' (*ibid.*: 14). There is a direct correspondence between what one believes to be true and what one says for the *parrhesiastes* 'is the subject of the opinion to which he refers' (*ibid.*: 13). In short, being subject to what one is saying synchronises with being subject to one's belief in what one is saying: 'What authenticates the fact that I tell you the truth is that as subject of my conduct I really am, absolutely, integrally, and totally identical to the subject of enunciation I am when I tell you what I tell you' (Foucault, 2005: 407).

Foucault makes a number of distinctions between different forms of *parrhesia* employed in Antiquity. For the purposes of providing a simple conceptual framework to use in the forthcoming analysis, therefore, I choose to make a broad distinction between political *parrhesia*, as enacted on the political stage of the Athenian Assemblies and

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3   As is made clear at the start of *Fearless Speech* (Foucault, 2001: 13-15), Foucault is analysing truth-telling as an activity rather than truth itself (2001). In modernity, the notion of truth-telling in itself is problematic. Veridictions are based on truth-telling and are understood by Foucault to be 'the forms according to which discourses capable of being deemed true or false are articulated with a domain of things' (Florence, 1994: 315). Therefore, modern-day truth is constructed through veridictions according to specific rules of verification and falsification. More specifically, Foucault links veridictions inextricably with the government of ourselves and of others (Foucault, 2010: 3-5).

later on in the king's court, and philosophical *parrhesia*, which can take place in face-to-face encounters within any context and is related to care of the self practices (Foucault, 1984).

Political parrhesia

Political *parrhesia* emerges from a form of *parrhesia* practised at Delphi. In Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus* (428 BC), human beings talk to the gods in the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *genos* (birth). At Delphi, *parrhesia* is the freedom to speak one's mind, a 'civic right of the well-born citizen of Athens' (Foucault, 2001: 102). In *Ion* (c.418-417 BC), the site for *parrhesia* shifts from Delphi to Athens, where political *parrhesia* takes the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *nomos* (law). Political *parrhesia* is 'an essential characteristic of Athenian democracy' (Foucault, 2001: 22) where it is enacted on a political stage or a decision-making site such as the Assembly or the courts (Foucault, 2010: 340). Political *parrhesia* is used in two ways: firstly, by privileged citizens who are elected to speak out to the democratic Assembly where prospective legislation is voted upon and, secondly, between individual citizens in the public meeting places of the *agora*.

Euripides' *Orestes* (408 BC) identifies a crisis arising around the use of *parrhesia* in the Athenian democracies at the end of the Fifth Century BC. The function of *parrhesia* and its relationship to democracy are problematised, particularly regarding the effectiveness of allowing everyone the right to use *parrhesia*: 'Who is capable of speaking the truth within the limits of an institutional system where everyone is equally entitled to give his own opinion' (Foucault, 2001: 73). *Parrhesia* bifurcates into good, or positive, *parrhesia* and bad, or negative, *parrhesia*. Bad *parrhesia* is characterised by 'chattering', that is saying everything in one's mind 'without qualification' (*ibid.*: 13) thereby producing 'ignorant outspokenness' (*ibid.*: 73). A division occurs between those who think that everyone should be able to use *parrhesia* and those who think that its use should be restricted according to social status or personal virtue.

The problematisation of *parrhesia* produces two transformations. Firstly, with the demise of the Athenian democracies, political *parrhesia* grows and develops in the Hellenistic communities, centred on a personal relationship between a sovereign and an advisor to the sovereign (Foucault, 2001: 22). This form of *parrhesia* is referred to as monarchic *parrhesia*, where 'an advisor gives the sovereign honest and helpful advice' (*ibid.*: 19). The advisor's duty is to use *parrhesia* to help the king in decision-making and prevent the king from abusing the power invested in the role (*ibid.*: 22). Monarchic *parrhesia* is therefore quite different to the form of *parrhesia* exercised in the public arena of the Athenian Assemblies.

Secondly, *parrhesia* becomes related increasingly to 'the choice of one's way of life' (Foucault, 2001: 85), as philosophical *parrhesia*.

Philosophical parrhesia

Philosophy becomes a site for *parrhesia* during the fourth century BC. Philosophical *parrhesia* 'requires a personal, face to face relationship' (Foucault, 2001: 96). Philosophical *parrhesia* takes the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *bios* (life)

and is associated with care of the self. For example, Socrates assumes a *parrhesiastic* role in advising Alcibiades to take care of himself (Foucault, 2001: 23-4). With philosophical *parrhesia*, no longer does every citizen have the same right to speak as every other citizen. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* has 'something extra which is the ascendancy in the name of which he can speak out and undertake to lead others' (Foucault, 2010: 341).

Philosophical *parrhesia* reduces considerably the role of political *parrhesia*, but does not replace it (Foucault, 2010: 342). Philosophical *parrhesia* is no longer linked just to the Athenian Assembly or to the king's court; it can be used anywhere. Philosophical *parrhesia* can take the form of the interpellation of the powerful as criticism of the way they exercise power. Philosophical *parrhesia* is also practised in communities by the Epicureans in particular and also the Stoics: '*parrhesia* occurs as an activity in the framework of small groups of people, or in the context of community life' (Foucault, 2001: 108). Another way of using philosophical *parrhesia* is by means of interpellation of an individual or a crowd such as 'the Cynic and Stoic type of preaching in the theater, the assemblies, at the games, or in the forum' (Foucault, 2010: 345). Philosophical *parrhesia* is also used in the philosophical schools where students are trained to become philosophers. Another type of philosophical *parrhesia* is employed by Seneca, Serenus, and Epictetus in the form of an internal dialogue.

Parrhesia *post-antiquity*

In Antiquity, you were told the truth by another person who provided guidance (Foucault, 2005: 409); in Christianity, you obtain the truth by some other means such as reading a book. Modern philosophy retrieves *parrhesia*: 'maybe we could envisage the history of modern European philosophy as a history of practices of veridiction, as a history of practices of *parrhesia*' (Foucault, 2010: 349). Foucault uses Descartes' *Meditations* to demonstrate an act of *parrhesia* in that it is the philosopher who speaks, saying 'I'. 'You have the great resumption of the *parrhesiastic* function that philosophy had in the ancient world' (Foucault, 2010: 350).

In contemporary management and organisation studies, *parrhesia* is cited as a practice for the critical management scholar to adopt in order to engage actively in critique, rather than academic theorisation alone, to challenge those in power. Drawing on Jack (2004), Bridgman and Stephens (2008: 268) recommend that scholars learn from the practice of *parrhesia* by understanding critique as a personal ethic rather than as something located in specific institutions. In this way, scholars would be encouraged to engage more actively with critique as follows:

> If we were more frank by writing with greater clarity, if we were more willing to speak directly to those in power and if we were willing to risk the privileges that come through our membership of the university, we might come closer to fulfilling the emancipatory potential of CMS. (268-9)

Huckaby (2007) elaborates on the risks facing the *parrhesiastic* scholar who challenges oppression and hegemony in both research and teaching, including the impediment of tenure and promotion prospects and the potential for legislative action by students. Scholars must make choices about how they play the *parrhesiastic* game, particularly when considering whether to accept funds that would redirect their research in an

unwanted direction (Huckaby, 2007). Reference to the *parrhesiastic* game is also made by Tuck (2007) to examine dialogues between Inland Revenue officials and those responsible for managing the tax affairs of corporate firms.

The above analyses relate to bureaucracies, whereas the current study is investigating the alternative organisational form of a community through ethnography. The closest match is provided by Neiwirth (2004) who analyses the activities of the non-hierarchical cyber-publishing network Indymedia through participating as a member and conducting interviews, a survey, and document analysis of Indymedia websites. In seeking clarification as to how Indymedia operates in creating new forms of participatory media-making, in contrast with profit-driven corporate media organisations, Neiwirth draws on the five characteristics of *parrhesia* referred to earlier: frankness, truth, danger, critique, and duty.

What none of these studies do is to break down *parrhesia* into the different forms outlined in the previous two sections. In Antiquity, the various contexts for *parrhesia* show 'a whole range of modalities' (Foucault, 2005: 407). As Jack contends: 'These different contexts bring attention to the variety of ways in which fearless speech was practised in Antiquity and might continue to be practised today' (2004: 130). Often practised in Antiquity in communal settings, *parrhesia* might provide a more appropriate framework for studying a modern-day community than would theories centred on bureaucratic forms of organising, particularly in the context of speaking out. Correspondingly, to find out how individuals contribute to decision-making about organic practices in a self-managing community, I draw on the following sources where appropriate: firstly, the enactment of political *parrhesia* in the Athenian democracies and the Hellenistic communities; secondly, the enactment of philosophical *parrhesia* in the Epicurean and Stoic communities. In addition, I shall take into account the aforementioned general characteristics of the practice of *parrhesia* (frankness, truth, and so on) where appropriate.

In the next few sections, I analyse the enactment of *parrhesia* at Greenfields.

Analysis: The enactment of *parrhesia*

The decision-making framework

I begin by introducing the organisational framework maintained at Greenfields for decision-making about farming issues.

On the supermarket shelf, an organic apple looks no different from a non-organic apple except for an organic label. That label identifies a process rather than an end-product, certifying that a product has been farmed according to a set of organic standards. At Greenfields, food is not produced for profit and therefore the community is not obliged to farm according to the standards, or rules, of an organic certification body. Nevertheless, the word 'organic' provides a common reference-point for debating farming issues. To reiterate, and expand, the research question: how do individual community members at Greenfields contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm

organically through various forms of practices reminiscent of political and philosophical *parrhesia* identified by Foucault as being enacted in Antiquity?

Decision-making regarding farming practices at Greenfields is by consensus at the Farm meeting held once every four weeks during the school term. A proposed change does not go ahead until everyone agrees. A community member can propose a change to a farming practice by submitting a proposal to the next Farm meeting. Proposals and supporting information are attached to the Agenda which is pinned onto a noticeboard one week prior to the meeting. At the Farm meeting, the Farm Chair goes through each new proposal in turn. When a proposal is read out, the proposer has to be prepared to answer questions from those community members who are not willing to commit to a decision without finding out more. This may simply be 'How much will this cost?'. If perceived by all to be a sensible minor change with no potential repercussions, the proposal is quite probably accepted without further discussion. However, some proposals generate prolonged debate that has to be continued outside the meeting. In these cases, the proposal remains pending until the next meeting to allow a more prolonged debate and a temporary sub-group is instigated to collect further information in response to questions asked at the meeting. One person takes responsibility for organising the sub-group, deciding when to have meetings, researching the topic, and reporting back to a subsequent Farm meeting. The sub-group cannot make decisions on its own. I was informed that a sub-group generally comprises a mix of supporters and objectors.

In the Athenian democracies, *agoras* were the places 'where the people, the assembly, met for political discussion and debate' (Foucault, 2001: 67). According to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens[4], the *agora* in Athens was a large open square where citizens gathered together for various functions including markets, religious processions, and theatrical performances. The public buildings used for running the democracy were located on the edges of the *agora*. Proposed legislation was prepared by the *Boule* for presentation at the citizens' Assembly, the *Ekklesia*. The *Boule* met at the *Bouleuterion* almost daily and comprised 500 members, made up of 50 from each of the 10 tribes who were chosen by lot and retained office for one year. All male adult citizens had the right to vote on the proposed legislation at the Assembly which assembled every 10 days approximately in the *Pnyx*, a large area set into the Acropolis.

The Farm meeting, in providing a forum for individual community members to articulate their thoughts through speaking out whilst the community negotiates collectively current and prospective farming practices, is reminiscent of the Athenian assembly where prospective legislation was negotiated through political *parrhesia*. The sub-groups and other less formal encounters at Greenfields in which Farm meeting issues are debated through potential re-enactments of political *parrhesia* I take to be more reminiscent of the public meeting places of the *agora* outside the Assembly. Philosophical *parrhesia* could be exercised during Antiquity in any context; Foucault refers specifically to the communal settings of the Epicurean and Stoic groups and to

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4   Athenian   Agora   Excavations,   American   School   of   Classical   Studies   at
    http://www.agathe.gr/overview/, accessed 2 February 2011.

the form of self-examination used by Seneca. Finally, *parrhesia* can also be explored through the general characteristics of frankness, truth, danger, criticism, and duty.

Several Greenfields community members expounded the opportunities for discussion at the Farm meeting, compared with meetings held in their respective workplaces. For example, I was told:

> You know, in my line of work, meetings are just a formality. Meetings are just there to decorate a decision you've made already. But here, there's genuine discussion.

Another resident informed me that joining a sub-group also provides a 'chance to have an influence on the decision'. How do community members speak out about organic issues in a way that is reminiscent of the enactment of political *parrhesia*, in either formal Farm meetings or more informal encounters?

Persuading the assembly

I was told that consensus tends to favour maintaining the status quo because only one person is required to block a proposal for change. A newcomer informed me that residents who have lived and farmed at the community in the long-term resist new challenges initially, protesting 'But that's the way we've always done it!'. A long-term community member commented that some of the residents have heard the issues raised before: 'But it's been gone over three years ago or four years ago and, you know, oh Gosh, it's up again, for heaven's sake'. A Greenfields community member informed me: 'I think you've got to kind of expect a rejection first time round'. There was general agreement that, in theory, consensus gives everyone a chance to speak out but, in practice, not everyone does. According to a long-standing resident, engaging in consensus is a skill that newcomers have to learn:

> Some people just aren't as able to put forward their views coherently and neatly. So that's a skill and I think it's a useful skill that you learn here after a while. If you want to get anything done your way, you've kind of got to. And it is important to know how to use the process because if you discuss it with people in advance, put something up in writing that they can read, make them understand where you're coming from, almost always people say 'Oh, yeah, that's OK then'. But if it comes as a shock or it isn't explained properly, then you'll get blocked all the time. So it is really important to be able to use the meetings, you know, the whole system really, effectively.

On top of this, I found out that some residents also hold a managerial post in a work organisation and are more likely therefore to be well-practised in taking part in meetings. Others may not be so well rehearsed at articulating themselves. Indeed, I was told 'Some people find it much harder to say things in meetings'. Another resident expressed difficulty in speaking out:

> There's people that earn their living in committees and there's people like me that don't. You know, that's their life, committees and talking and stuff. So you've either got to learn or you've got to take their decisions. You've gotta get in there and put your point of view over. And I find it difficult, I do. It's a bit intimidating.

The way that the Chair runs the Farm meeting has different effects in terms of different individuals speaking up. At one meeting I attended, a new Chair asked each member who was present in turn to contribute their thoughts on a proposal. Afterwards, she told me that, since some community members are louder and get their voices heard more than others, she had set out to make sure that everyone present was able to make a statement. This tactic had not been adopted at the Farm meetings run by the previous Chair.

However, pushing a proposal through the consensus decision-making process is not just a question of obtaining the agreement of everyone else. There are other strategies involved in getting something 'done your way' that go on in the background of the Farm meeting that may or may not resemble *parrhesia*. Whilst the Farm meeting is a contender for re-enactment of political *parrhesia* in the Athenian Assemblies, informal negotiations around the subject of 'organic' take place in encounters outside the formality of the meeting that are more reminiscent of political *parrhesia* between individual citizens in the public meeting areas of the *agora*. One way of persuading other residents to accept your proposal is to chat to other community members informally outside the structure of the meetings. I found that the blackboards in the Buttery were a good meeting place because this is where people chalk up the latest news and update the rotas. Some residents employ lobbying strategies to try and persuade others to support their own point of view:

> Sometimes if you have a proposal, you go and talk about it to people. Some people go and talk to their friends. Some people go and talk to the people who they think will agree. Some people will deliberately go and talk to people they think won't agree, so they can raise issues and maybe you can deal with them ahead of the meeting … Sometimes those things are incredibly important. Sometimes people will come up with compromises outside of the meeting.

Clearly, speaking out to friends and in informal groupings in communal areas provides additional opportunities to win people over to your own point of view. Also, those who have difficulty in articulating themselves to a large assembly at the Farm meeting might be less intimidated by informal encounters. By persuading a few people to agree informally, your confidence might be sufficiently boosted to speak out effectively at the next Farm meeting. Also, if you convince your friends, then you might save yourself the job of having to speak out: 'Some people don't like to do it themselves so they try and get other people to put their ideas forward'. Couples have a probable advantage over singles in that they can provide mutual support. A resident told me how he would sound out ideas by discussing an issue with his wife before talking with other people. Also, I was informed, it is handy to have somebody to talk to late at night after a rather turbulent meeting.

Who can use parrhesia?

In all of Antiquity, it was considered inappropriate for certain people to engage in *parrhesia*. In Euripides' play *Hippolytus*, Phaedra avoids committing adultery with Hippolytus and the resulting dishonour because she wishes her sons to be able to exercise *parrhesia*, a practice that is not available to herself as a woman (Foucault, 2001: 30-1).

The Greenfields Farm meeting represents the Assembly of the Athens democracies where political *parrhesia* was enacted. On the political stage of the Athenian Assembly, the speaker must be not just a citizen, but 'must be one of the *best* among the citizens, possessing those specific personal, moral, and social qualities which grant one the privilege to speak' (Foucault, 2001: 18, emphasis in original). At the Greenfields Farm meeting, while each community member has the opportunity to speak out, both men and women feel silenced by other residents:

> You're shouted down … he just talks on and on and on. And he won't listen to what you say.

> Personalities always come into it obviously. It often depends who's at a meeting and who speaks loudest. I have to say that does happen. I think it's inevitable.

> And when you're sitting in the meetings, there are some people who can say 'No' with a very loud voice and they seem to have more votes in the consensus than people who say 'No' very softly. Or 'Yes' very softly.

If nobody disagrees openly, then consensus is assumed. This last quote suggests that, by not speaking up, one is perceived incorrectly as agreeing to a consensus. Therefore, some decisions that appear to go forward on consensus would have been challenged by individuals except that they lacked the *parrhesiastic* courage to speak out. One resident alluded to the inevitability of 'false consensuses' arising from time to time. Also, if everyone else is in agreement to a proposal, a single community member might withdraw their objection in order to achieve consensus and this is something that occurs at Quaker meetings also (Louis, 1994).

However, in using *parrhesia*, the speaker chooses truth instead of falsehood or silence (Foucault, 2001: 19-20). Exercising *parrhesia* requires courage as proof of the sincerity of the speaker (15). Speaking out fearlessly entails being brave enough to overcome one's feelings of intimidation rather than remain silent. Residents who have farmed organically before are more compelled to speak out about non-organic practices:

> So when we have noticed things that go against our feelings of what organic is, then we have tried to bring it to people's attention and get people to review it. But we have had some rather nasty shocks!

The context of the debate, including the area of farming under discussion, was said to have a bearing on which residents choose to speak out and on how loudly they speak out. For example, if you are involved heavily with caring for the sheep, then you are more likely to care about decisions made about the sheep. A number of residents said that speaking out is linked to how strongly one feels about an issue:

> Some people dominate more than others because they're involved more.

> But also if somebody feels very strongly about something, then they'll be more forceful. They may not even be particularly articulate, but they will be very forceful in how they put their point across. They'll put more emotion into it.

How can one be certain that those who shout out are any more courageous than those who are silent? Is caring more a form of courage? When Socrates tells Alcibiades that he must learn to take care of himself before he can learn to take care of Athens

(Foucault, 2001: 23-4), is this an act of courage or does Socrates care more for Alcibiades than the sycophants do? The words 'dominate' and 'forceful' used above imply that being involved or caring more gives a community member a political advantage in decision-making. A community member elaborates:

> There are other areas where people can become very territorial: 'This is the way it's done.' So discussion is muted, stopped. 'It's the way I do it!' And there will always be people like that move here …Most of us have the ability, I think, to think 'OK. Well, I can work with this. This isn't going to hurt me too much. I can work round it.' It's obviously really important to that person. But some people do feel really strongly about things and really do want them to change.

Passion is not something that Foucault provides a detailed elaboration of in relation to *parrhesia*. This emotional aspect of speaking out through *parrhesia* at Greenfields therefore enriches our understanding of *parrhesia* in practice. Emotions clearly contribute to speaking out at the Farm meeting, but are emotions harnessed deliberately to add weight to speaking out? Do some residents gain a greater leverage in the decision-making process by making out that they care more? One community member breaks the link between caring and speaking out, showing that reluctance to speak out is sometimes connected to something other than not caring about an issue:

> There are people who are not really talking and putting their point over, but they feel just as involved and committed as people that can talk and talk and talk and talk until 'Oh, Do what you want to do!'

The acquisition of status was also found to contribute to who speaks out and who is expected to speak out. Epicurean communities comprised artisans, small shopkeepers, and poor farmers (Foucault, 2005: 115). Members of these communities did not distinguish between poor and wealthy, high-born and obscure – 'there is no difference of status' (118). Applicants to join Greenfields are not discriminated against on grounds of religion, politics, or employment status and there is a mix of professionals, manual workers, and retired people, and of left-wingers and right-wingers. Nevertheless, community members can attain a certain status whilst living and farming at Greenfields through knowledge acquisition:

> There are key people who are key to the running of the farm and they cover lots of areas. So lots of us feel quite deferential to them because they know more. And my position would always be if somebody knows more then, unless I've got a very strong reason for objecting, I trust them to make decisions.

At Greenfields, longetivity of tenure counts most towards having the right to speak. Newcomers are not expected to speak out: 'But some people seem to want to make their mark immediately they come in. Which isn't quite so comfortable'. During the research period, most newcomers acknowledged their willingness to defer to those who have resided for longer at Greenfields. Because their experience of farming was limited, one couple was prepared to listen rather than speak out: 'I think I speak for Marcus too, we feel we're here to learn and so we'll listen to everybody else.' Another newcomer, who had farmed full-time non-organically was happy to defer: 'So who am I to come in saying "you should be doing it this way"'. Also, as one resident said:

> In the early days, you might not realise the implications of something. You know if something is going to happen, then that means that there might be a knock-on effect. There might be implied labour that's not made explicit by somebody's proposal.

The findings from this section show that in communal decision-making related to maintaining a communal 'organic', the ideological principle of consensus to provide each individual with the opportunity to participate equally in decision-making is problematised when applied in practice. Moreover, the notion of *parrhesia* as a truth-telling practice is mediated by how effectively a community member is able to put on a performance of competence or to employ an emotional outburst to walk over everybody else. The truth about 'organic' is something that is never achieved but is constantly negotiated and renegotiated.

Clearly, at Greenfields, newcomers have a lower status in the decision-making process than residents who are well established in the community. Because newcomers lack in-depth knowledge and experience of the farming practices carried out at Greenfields, they are not expected to speak out during debates on farming issues, as commented on by one of the more established residents:

> So he's come in and he's been quite vocal from an early stage. So other people say 'Who does he think he is? He doesn't know. He doesn't have a right.' And I have an issue with us saying 'When does somebody have a right to be vocal?' So most people who come in are deferential and do sit and think 'When I have more knowledge, I will.' But what if somebody comes in and they are really experienced? Well, actually, if they're paying all their contributions, who are we to say when they have a right to say or when they have a right to challenge?

What happens then when a newcomer arrives at Greenfields, having farmed a smallholding recently to organic certification standards set by the Soil Association?

The parrhesiastes: challenging those with higher status

Up to now, I have explored the possibilities for individual members of speaking out and having a say in the running of the farm at Greenfields community. In theory, every community member has an equal say. In practice, some individuals hold themselves back when they wish to speak out, some defer to those with greater experience of farming at Greenfields, and others defer to those who put more emotion into their utterances. Newcomers have a lower status in the decision-making process, although the co-founder explained to me that a newcomer can change people's minds: 'but you'd have to argue it strongly to convince us'.

When the Athenian democracies ended, political *parrhesia* went on to be practised in the Hellenistic communities between a sovereign and the sovereign's advisor in the form of monarchic *parrhesia*. With monarchic *parrhesia* and some forms of philosophical *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* provides advice to a person of higher status. In this section, I identify a newcomer who, in speaking out against the longer-standing residents, is particularly representative of this type of *parrhesiastes*. The newcomer, who from now on I refer to as the *parrhesiastes*, has a lower status at Greenfields than the residents with greater longevity. Nonetheless, he farmed as a Soil Association certified smallholder directly before joining Greenfields. Therefore, he can claim with validity to be an authority on organic farming. Greenfields, meanwhile, is maintaining a

version of organic that has been constructed over years of negotiation by various residents, each of whom came in with their own particular version of organic. Having taken up residence at an organic farming community, the newcomer observes farming practices that the Soil Association would not consider to be organic. He challenges some of these practices but, as a newcomer, he is not expected to speak out and therefore causes quite a disturbance.

First of all, he tries to remove a commercial udder cream from the farm. The udder cream is intended for application after milking to help keep the cow's udder supple, but the *parrhesiastes* is surprised to see milkers apply the cream immediately prior to milking: 'Putting a little bit on their hands and a bit on their fingers and they were using it to get a lubricated teat'. Two other people told me that the label on the udder cream instructs users to wash off the udder cream applied at the previous milking before milking again. Concerned at the risk of producing milk contaminated by the chemicals in the udder cream, the newcomer perseveres at achieving consensus to ban this particular practice. He rings up the udder cream manufacturer and speaks to a vet:

> I phoned up the company who made it and I asked the vet … 'look we're using this product for milking on the udders, is it OK? … And he phoned me back and said 'Well, no, if it gets into the milk, you have to throw the milk away'. He told me the chemical that was in it and he said 'Oh, you don't want to be eating that'.

Along with another person who has lived at the community longer and who has questioned the practice previously, the *parrhesiastes* consults a local herbalist who makes up a herbal version of the udder cream that can be applied before milking. By presenting an alternative, he manages to persuade longer-standing community members to stop using the commercial udder cream. This newcomer is a *parrhesiastes* in the sense that his status is lower than the more long-standing community members and he objects to a practice that the others have carried out long-term.

Secondly, the *parrhesiastes* succeeds in blocking a well-researched proposal by speaking out against the wishes of everyone else. The proposal that he blocks has been put together by another resident and comprises a request to spend £600 on enviro-mesh to protect field fodder crops from rabbits, pigeons, snails and flea beetles. An observer recalls:

> I thought this was a really interesting one because the person who objected to it is a vegetarian and he's only been here a year. Now he objected to it because he said the enviro-mesh costs £600, and he said 'But that's a lot of money when we're just protecting fodder crops for the cows; it's actually a luxury food item; it's not essential to their diet. So why are we spending £600 on enviro-mesh for animals?' … So those who objected, it wasn't really just about the fact that we didn't get the enviro-mesh. The objection was 'this is somebody who's only just arrived here and he's got a big mouth on him'. And actually, you know, he is allowed to say '£600 is a lot of money, I don't think it's an essential crop; and £600 could do an awful lot in the garden for human consumption, direct human consumption, rather than through the animal'.

The observer went on to say that the person who put in the proposal is particularly hard-hit by the negative decision because he is left with a massive amount of hand-weeding to do in the future. The majority of residents do eat meat and are prepared to pay £600 to save labour on producing crops for animal consumption. The *parrhesiastes*, who is vegetarian, is not bothered at all about protecting fodder crops that will be used to feed

the farm animals. He is committed not just to farming organically but also to sustainability. 'No one forces him to speak; but he feels that it is his duty to do so' (Foucault, 2001: 19). He cannot allow himself to be the one whose action, that of giving in and agreeing, endorses putting £600 towards a crop that is not being grown directly for human consumption.

When a community member engages in *parrhesia* at Greenfields, the risk taken is that of upsetting a neighbour. At Greenfields, community members not only farm collectively; they also live closely within the confines of two buildings. Speaking up within a group of people with whom one lives and works requires varying degrees of courage and this is more so if what one says goes against the majority. I was told by an occupant: 'You have to be quite tough to live here. To survive anyway'. Hence, some community members choose to avoid the risk involved in exercising *parrhesia*. To disagree, one has to stand up in front of everyone else and make a stand and not everyone feels able to do this, as expressed by one resident: 'I have definitely seen things … that I didn't agree with. I didn't feel it was my place to step up'.

By speaking out, one runs the risk of upsetting other community members to such an extent that life becomes uncomfortable enough either to feel one must leave the community or to remain there without a sense of collective belonging. One has to decide whether to say: 'This is the way you behave, but that is the way you ought to behave' (Foucault, 2001: 17) or to keep quiet and avoid the risk of offending a fellow community member. On the other hand, some community members risk upsetting a friend through *parrhesia* by taking a position of opposition during a debate, as a resident points out: 'I notice people that I am friendly with - they don't always argue on my behalf or in my favour in meetings. And I think that's very healthy'.

Knowledge management: Parrhesia *as self-criticism*

While criticism is a general characteristic of *parrhesia*, this can include self-criticism also, as Foucault points out: 'This is what I have done, and was wrong in so doing' (2001: 17).

The *parrhesiastic* practices that take place in the Epicurean communities are recorded in fragments of Philodemus' book *On Frank Speaking*, recovered from Herculaneum. At group confessions or meetings, community members disclosed their thoughts, faults, misbehaviours, and so on in turn (Foucault, 2001: 114). Compared with the Christian form of confession, the Epicurean confession is different. The object of the Epicurean confessions was for community members to provide salvation to each other so that they may lead good, beautiful and happy lives. Epicurean community members gave a 'detailed account of the faults one has committed which one recounts either to one's director, or even to others, in order to get advice' (Foucault, 2010: 345-6). At Greenfields, I found evidence of a present-day reproduction of the *parrhesiastic* practice of confession with a more practical objective: to learn from one's mistakes. Community members write down confessions of their farming mistakes, as these extracts from the Legumes and Root Crops ring-binders show:

Paul's Legumes 2002:

> The worst things I did – failed to keep beans wet enough in the late summer drought which caused early end to crop. Grew too many beans to keep picked.

Fennel Bulb:

> Varieties were Romanesco and Argos. 200 planted in Nodules in March and April. 100 planted in June.

> Suffered from slugs until established. I used to go out and manually pick off slugs in evening or early morning, keeping an eye on them for the first two weeks or so. Fennel tended to flower (bolt) early rather than really fatten up but was edible and tasty even when just bolted.

> Next time I would plant 50 every 2 weeks from Mid-March until June 1 (or 100 plants beginning of each month, April-June).

Roots – Sadia's Part of Plot 4 2000/2001:

> Generally a difficult year – very cold and wet early on, loads of tiny slugs nibbled up all the seedlings, I didn't rake the soil for the early sowings into a fine enough tilth and also I sowed the seeds too deeply. So I had to resow each bed about 3 times. Eventually the nodules in early summer were very successful.

The self-written ring-binders held in the Buttery contain declarations of how someone went wrong, what they did or should have done, and what they would do next time. Unlike the Epicurean communities where one confesses to obtain advice, at Greenfields written confessions are used as a form of knowledge management from which others can learn. They function as memory-joggers for the writer and other members and demonstrate a useful tool for knowledge sharing at a community.

Conclusion

The paper presents a study of individual and collective self-management at a contemporary self-managing organic farming community. The analysis of the paper, which addresses the question of how community members contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm organically, is framed round various forms of political *parrhesia* and philosophical *parrhesia* practised in Antiquity and identified by Foucault.

The practice of *parrhesia* in Antiquity, as referred to by Foucault (2001, 2005, 2010), informs the study of the contributions made by individual community members in bringing up and responding to issues about the organic-ness of certain practices by suggesting themes by which the findings can be analysed. These themes include risk, courage, status differences, criticism, and self-criticism which provide a rich analysis of the data. A combination of different forms of ancient *parrhesia* are found to be reactivated in a contemporary setting. The Farm meeting provides the setting for persuading the rest of the assembly that a proposal for a farming change should be pursued, thereby re-enacting the form of political *parrhesia* exercised in the formal Assembly of the Athenian democracies. Speaking out can also be used by other attendees in their support or rejection of a proposal. While theoretically everyone has a

chance to speak out, in practice some community members dominate more than others. In addition, the residents who have lived at the community longer and accumulated more knowledge are assigned a higher status than newcomers. Most newcomers defer and refrain from speaking out. Outside the Farm meeting, informal encounters take place that present opportunities for further discussion and for lobbying other community members into adopting one's own point of view. Such encounters are reminiscent of another form of political *parrhesia* practised in the Athenian democracies, which is the exchanges conducted between citizens in the public meeting places of the *agora*.

One newcomer engages in an interesting re-enactment of monarchic *parrhesia* and some forms of philosophical *parrhesia*, through which a person speaks out against those who have higher status. I identify this person as a *parrhesiastes* for he challenges the authority that has been established at Greenfields by the longer-term residents. Whilst engaging in *parrhesia* at Greenfields does not involve risking one's life, a significant risk is taken of upsetting people who live and work in close proximity to oneself. Furthermore, the *parrhesiastes* risks upsetting the currently held collective truth about how to be the good organic farmer. Through perseverance, however, a person of lower status can push through a proposal. Also, besides criticism of others, residents were found to engage in *parrhesiastic* acts of self-criticism. The *parrhesiastic* confessions typical of Epicurean communities are reactivated via the self-writing (Foucault, 2000) of community members in writing down feedback about their failures and successes in a form of collective knowledge management. Finally, and not noted earlier on, one resident was observed debating outstanding organic issues with herself in a communal area, in a form of self-examination reminiscent of the form of philosophical *parrhesia* practised by Seneca.

The current study adds to understandings of *parrhesia* by underpinning the impact of the emotional content of speaking out. Of the part that emotions had to play in the enactment of classical *parrhesia*, Foucault is vague. This paper shows how, in contemporary re-enactments of the practice of *parrhesia*, showing more emotion whilst speaking out gives some individuals an advantage in the decision-making process.

Currently, studies presented by management and organisation theorists are dominated by work organisations that are mainly bureaucratic. Organisation theory has been criticised for marginalising the rural peasantry (Burrell, 1997) and focusing instead on manufacturing and service organisations (Burrell, 1997; Egri, 1994). This paper makes a contribution to organisation studies by beginning to address these imbalances. Moreover, a turn is taken away from control through surveillance and the management of subjectivities that dominate Foucault-inspired studies to present the alternative approach of focusing on 'organising', as opposed to 'being organised', thereby assigning a proactive role to the individual in organisation studies. In doing so the paper adds also to a small collection of Foucauldian analyses of alternative forms of organising (see Mangan, 2009).

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