



## Hors d'oeuvre

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In spite of the fact that it is a liquid, milk should always be regarded as a food and not as a drink. It should be *eaten* rather than *drunk*. That is to say it should be sipped and swallowed slowly. Taken in this way, it coagulates in little fragments in the stomach, and these can be dealt with readily by the digestive juices. On the other hand, if it is gulped down it forms a large indigestible clot in the stomach, and the digestive juices have difficulty in breaking it down. For the same reason, milk is more digestible in the form of broths and porridges because, mixed with carbohydrates, the clot breaks up into fragments more readily. (*Larousse Gastronomique: The Encyclopedia of Food, Wine and Cooking*)

### Restrictive and General Economies of Organization

In the opening pages of *The Accursed Share*, Georges Bataille introduces a distinction between restrictive economy and general economy. The charge is clear: while economics has concerned itself with economic life, this concern has been manifest in relation to a restrictive economy which encompasses only a fraction of life. Against these restrictions Bataille sets out the project of empirical and historical study of the general economy, setting out an 'economics' which would not focus narrowly on production or even consumption of goods and services, but would open itself to all that exceeds that economy and is yet integral to it – waste, pleasure, sex, death, and all the other human activities that *are* life but that do not register under a restrictive conception of the economic subject as *homo oeconomicus*.

Without entering into a general critique of economics, we can see this distinction in even the most banal case of, for example, a child who gets up in the middle of the night to pour a glass of milk. This situation could be analysed in terms of the basic biology and the 'technology' of the body, although economics will not be content with (nor particularly interested in) these bodily functions; economics concerns itself with the circuit of production and consumption and its reproduction (on an ever increasing scale). By contrast, what we can take from Bataille's emphasis on a general economy is that there is a lot more to the economy of milk than assuring a constant flow of liquids from the cow to the refrigerator; there is a lot more to life than economy in this restrictive sense.

Beyond the dirty cup left on the kitchen bench, what of the sheer waste of food in the First World, objectified by the milk and butter mountains of the European Union? Or companies such as Nestlé, which make huge profits selling milk powder to African families who don't have access to clean water? Or the whole way agriculture is done today, the way it has become a global business, the way the global market demands 'fresh' food to be sent around the world in container ships, truck lorries and airplanes? What about the environmental and social costs of the restrictive economy of milk?

But general economy is not just about a cost/benefit analysis of the restrictive economy (although it will obviously include this too). This would itself imply too much restriction. What this 'general' points to is a testing of the limits and boundaries of economy as such. General economy can thus not necessarily be named, because it is at the limit of language; there is something unnameable, invisible and secret about the general economy, something that exceeds our 'normal', restrictive understanding of economy, something that is beyond, yet part of us.

Of course there are no simple dividing lines between the restrictive and the general. If this is not a 'binary' in the normal sense, this framing of the restrictive and the general might still help us to think about 'organization'. To simplify, we might say that the rules of discursive formation in Organization Studies, Organizational Behaviour, Organizational Development, Organizational Psychology and the Sociology of Organization have tended to privilege a restrictive economy of organization.

Against this restrictive economy of organization it might be possible to begin to designate a field of what could be called a 'general economy of organization'. This general economy of organization would not necessarily even mention specific organizations but would be more interested in organization as a basic social and political process. This organization hence both exceeds and makes 'organizations' possible. As a first approximation of the general economy of organization, we might speak of a process of what has been called the 'production of organization', although the risk is that even this is too restrictive. There is no point of generalising the concept of production if this leads us to a vacuous generality, one that is afraid to speak of the specificities of the concrete relations of domination that surround us today. The general economy of organization is, therefore, not simply one that speaks of generalities but one that names, specifies and resists these forces of restriction.

## **Danger**

Restriction brings comfort, of course. The comfort of home. Whenever we leave this comfort, this warmth of home, we risk the greatest of dangers. But is this true? Any sense of comfort that restrictions give us have at least the possibility of being shown up as illusory. Think of the violence of home, the repeated recurrent physical and discursive injury that is, for so many, the normal experience of home. If leaving home is risky, we should never forget that we can incur just the same risk of danger, and even greater ones if we stayed in, and more so if we don't have the option of getting out.

If we wanted to open out towards a general economy of organization then we face these risks. We don't want to stay in; that is for sure. But if we go out then we risk humiliation, misunderstanding, ridicule. Some will say that we are not even talking about organization any more. 'That's not *really* organization theory, is it!' Quite seriously, we don't want this to be the reaction. We *do* want to talk about organization, and even about organizations. But we think that a lot of what is done in the name of organization is too restricted. Hence the need for organization to be opened up, generalised as it were. But for us, a general economy of organization would not fall outside of what might 'properly' be asked of organization, but would, from the inside, test the limits of precisely that proper, restrictive, notion of organization.

There are practical questions here. If we set out our stall in relation to a general economy of organization, how do we know, as editors, what we should allow to be said? What do we publish? Isn't the first rule of democracy that there is no *a priori* disqualification of discourse, that is, that in a democracy, one must be able to say anything? But then, how do we balance this democratic demand for free speech with the obvious risk of letting anything go? Max Weber is clear in this regard: democracy and bureaucracy go hand in hand. The simple formula: no democracy without bureaucracy. And this is the bind that we face as editors who might want to open the question of organization beyond its current state within a restrictive economy. Should we publish anything that is critical, experimental or speculative, in content or in form, of the general economy of organization? The answer to this is obviously negative. But at the same time, we are forced towards a positive answer, insofar as it is our responsibility, the responsibility of the university, to forever engage in exactly this critique, experimentation and speculation.

Whenever we say, write or teach something, whenever we leave the house in the morning, there are innumerable dangers we are facing. But we *do* need to leave the house, we can't just stay in all day and watch TV. And in the process of leaving we face the danger that we might run into something unexpected. That's always the danger. We might have just popped out for a bottle of milk, but suddenly encounter something radically Other, perhaps in the form of fluids that we simply cannot comprehend. Unless we have the patience to try to understand. To stop. To listen. To think.

## Gulping It Down...

With *ephemera* we have always tried to pose the question of what is 'normal' in relation to the question of organization; perhaps there has always been something *unheimlich*, uncanny or unhomely, about what we are doing. So, this is not a new beginning, we are applying the formula once again. We might like to think of the pieces in this issue, despite their liquid appearance, as food, rather than drink. That is, the pieces that we have assembled here should not be gulped down for fear that they might form an indigestible clot, something that the digestive juices are not able to deal with. They are all fragments, fractions, pieces, parts; they are all on the 'limit' of organization in a restrictive sense.

To which we might add a further danger. By offering the contributions to this issue as small pieces, they might be all the more easily swallowed up and liquidated by the digestive juices of what we generally know as organization. While these dangers are real, we hope that the various contributions to this issue can, through their content but also their *form*, point to a general economy of organization: of work, of power, of subjects, of resistance; of texture, of fear, of joy, of change, of whispers, of language, of plots, of kinship, of secrets, of bodies, of limits and restriction.

We can say little more by way of a 'general' introduction.