ephemera: Critical Dialogues on Organization

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abstract

The paper argues that *ephemera* is likely to be a chimera consisting of three bestial parts. Taking each carnal piece in turn, it suggests ways in which critique, dialogues and organization might be understood and how reconciling their separate natures into one corporate identity will not be easy. It seeks to make the point that a celebration of those labyrinthine shambles where such beasts lurk, rather than of the straightforward bourgeois boulevades of typical academic theses, may be worth thinking about. Or possibly that 'thinking about' things is not visceral enough. It ends on a plea for *ephemera* to raise expectorations in its contributors.

This first electronic version of *ephemera* has been produced by its editors with some notion of a 'manifesto' in mind. This paper, however, is a personal 'take' on what 'critical dialogues on organization' might mean and should not be seen in any shape or form as a claim to represent the editorial policy of the journal. What I have done (and with profuse apologies) is to plunder previously published material mercilessly, in an effort to produce a very personal path through the labyrinth of terms and technicalities before us. It will not be to all tastes. So be warned.

For those undertaking any academic writing there is a real and present danger. It is not so much the constant fear of failure to complete or of the production of a complete turkey, (spectres which haunt almost all of us who have embarked upon that particular journey), that is so troublesome. It is the thorny question of 'Why don't we seek adventure in creative escape from the need to produce a straightforward thesis?' There is an argument which suggests that the English word 'thesis' comes from the same root as the name Theseus. The story of Theseus relates the son of the Greek King, Aegeus, being offered up as a sacrifice to King Minos of Crete. Theseus and Minos's daughter Ariadne fall in love and she offers him a ball of thread with which, once he has killed the Minotaur, he might find his way out of the labyrinth of Knossos. Having safely disposed of the monster deep in the darkness of the labyrinth, he reaches the light of understanding by following the line of argument allowed to him in retracing the thread. Thus he straightens out the turns and twists of the benighted shambles of a building in which he was placed. Ariadne had presented him with the means to find the light, but to do so he must first murder a being which was at least *half* human.

The Greeks' predilection for the straight line in their geometries of column and form reflects in part perhaps this concern for rendering visible that Other which prefers the

darkness. Even Euripides (1973) has the Bacchae conveniently acting in daylight so that they may be closely surveyed by the shepherd. The classical Greeks had a desire to produce public spaces in Athens in which not only is the speaker heard but is also seen and carefully observed. And as Nietzsche shows us, the Golden Age of Greece, both in sport and in debate, underlies much of the contemporary notion of 'civilization' which we promulgate in the West, yet it rests upon extreme violence of the body and of the tongue. For him, the effects of technocratic modernism with its baleful conclusion in 'the will to power' and murderous, anti-intellectual rationalism must be seen in terms of the genealogical roots within ancient Athens. And let us be clear here. Rationalism *can* be anti-intellectual in the sense that it seeks to degrade all talk of ethics, of aesthetics, of taste, of disputation and argument around qualitative matters. All is reduced to a quantitative calculus of ratiocination, of ratios and of rations, where the paring science of apportionment leads to the search for the right answer: the final solution. The Final Solution.

The typical academic paper becomes the task of killing the foul beast which inhabits the stinking pit of our minds by ratiocination and hence, all too often, apportioning blame and praise in cautious measured terms. Perhaps like Parsiphae we should love the beast rather than seeking to slay it. The written paper mayhap, should look like a monstrous machine for achieving impregnation by the beast. What, then, we might ask, is wrong with a complete turkey? What if it is the human in us which is the problem? Bearing this in mind (sic) what follows is more of a chimera, perhaps.

ephemera as chimera. *ephemera: critical dialogues on organization*. Critical. Dialogues. Organization. Three words in search of a home. Head, body and tail. Three attributes in search of a morphology. More words follow to emplace them firmly in the Marches. All along the watch towers. Disciplining. Diverting. Hemming in. Holding back.

Critical

In being social scientists, rather than let us say, management teachers in a stand-alone business school, perhaps we ought first to look at the ways in which the term 'Critique' has developed historically and then to look at how it had been used in our own discipline. The notions of critique and the adjective 'critical' themselves are a product of the Enlightenment (Connerton, 1976: 15). Although these terms were utilised in earlier disputatious inter-church rivalries, at the time of the Enlightenment the notions came into discourse at a demarcation line between Reason and revelation. Rather than referring to ways of settling the merits of differing revelations between religions, 'Critique' became seen as the tool of Reason in its anti-clericalist assault upon organized religion as a whole. After some time, however, the term changed meaning again and:

> the activity of critique became first indirectly and then directly, political. In salons, clubs, lodges and coffee-houses a new moral authority, the public, found its earliest institutions. Critique became one of its slogans and an endless stream of books and essays included the words 'critique' or 'critical' in their title. (Connerton, 1976: 16)

By the last two decades of the 18th century it appeared to thinkers such as Kant as if all was Critique. Whatever they read or listened to, apparently it was about debunking, opposing and unveiling the forces of the old world. For Kant it was now possible to reflect upon the conditions for obtaining human knowledge outside of the religious straitjacket. Thus, Critique became partially about asking how we know anything and what subjective forces lie behind our claims to know. This we might call the *epistemological* dimension to Critique. For Hegel, however, Critique is about the constraints which human beings impose upon themselves in organizing their lives and asks how this distorts the real meaning of humanity. Critique in this sense is about the possibility of an end to illusion and to the alienation of human beings from themselves. In this view of Critique, the detailed criticism of human thought and life gives rise to a new social order in which there is less illusion. Indeed the goal is to strip away all illusion. This we might call the *social revolutionary* dimension to Critique which first crystallized around 1770. Thus when scholars talk of critique and of the critical thought and theorising based upon it, they draw necessarily on a long history of the impact of the Enlightenment - particularly, it must be noted, upon the German nation.

Critical Theory, of course, has become synonymous with the Frankfurt School and Habermas. For Alvesson and Willmott (1996) even Foucault is allowed entry because we are told he does not differ much from Adorno and Horkheimer! Crucial to this version of Critical Theory is a tendency to adopt a bifocal vision of history. The first field of vision is the established order in all its tenacity. The second field represents the goals of humanity which Habermas identifies as a 'deep seated anthropological interest' in emancipation. These fields bound our knowledge and are always in tension. When the Frankfurt School undertook its Transatlantic peregrinations before and after World War II the focus shifted but concentration on the unmasking of ideology and the revealing of truth remained. We also have to say that Habermas's defence of the Enlightenment project and of the triumph of Reason now have a dated ring to those who see Modernism as a problem rather than a solution to the future of humankind. Why does Critical Theory have so little time for postmodernism and why is the feeling mutual? Clearly it would be a foolish postmodernist who saw the ideas of Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer and Habermas as irrelevances for the 21st century but these writers certainly are not central to our vision of Critique. But it would also be a foolish Critical Theorist who saw poststructuralism as in the same camp.

Here we might wish to part company with some others in our discipline. As prefigured above, Alvesson and Willmott (1996: 5) have attempted to introduce an understanding of an history of Critical Theory into Organization Studies. They claim to borrow directly from Critical Theory, meaning the work of the Frankfurt School and Habermas which, as we have seen, in turn draw directly and deeply upon the well of German Idealism. For them (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: 12-13), Critical Theory seeks to scrutinize contemporary practices and institutions and we are given the examples of the rationality that accompanies globalizing capitalism, of phallocentrism, of the ideology of individualism and of the concentration of power in the hands of an elite. In place of these institutional forms, alternative, more democratic, arrangements are possible which can be attained by emancipatory intent. Their approach then has both an epistemological stance and a socio-revolutionary one and draws directly upon some sense of Critique, even if not in a fully fledged Idealist way, through which to illuminate our discipline. Again in Organization Studies, Thompson and McHugh (1995) draw upon the label 'Critique' but owe less to the

philosophical Idealists of the Enlightenment than to structuralist Marxian thought. We are told that their "starting point is obviously critique itself: the identification of the weaknesses, limitations and ideological functions of orthodoxy" (Thompson and McHugh, 1995: 17). In this task they refer to the need to be self-reflexive and to challenge pre-existing attitudes such as to gender. They talk of the need to see organizations as embedded in a socio-political context and in a history constituted by the totality of capitalist society. Third, they identify the need to have explanations which are multi-dimensional and multi-layered. Individualistic explanations are seen as not enough. Fourth, Thompson and McHugh talk of dialectics and contradiction in which Hegelian and Marxist notions of the dynamics of capitalist society are emphasised rather than any focus upon stasis and stability. Finally, for them, to be critical means a desiring and thence a search to understand wholescale social transformation through the empowering of a wider range of participants. Within Management Education, Grey and Mitev (1995: 74-76) seek to launch a polemical attack upon 'management practice' rather than to sustain it. For them, 'critical research' is best seen in negative terms both in celebrating its rejection of managerialism and in its desire to expose the shortcomings of management. Grey and Mitev (1995) invoke the tradition of Critical Theory and Post-Structuralism in this endeavour which is essentially a distillation of the view that 'critical' means oppositional. They follow Noam Chomsky's (1969: 228) somewhat dated and certainly dubious assertion that, "It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies". Within Systems Theory and management in general, Mingers (1999) has also argued for a Critical Theory perspective. For him, the task of developing an undergraduate course which is based upon a critical understanding rests upon four critiques. These are the critique of rhetoric, the critique of tradition, the critique of authority and the critique of objectivity (Mingers, 1999: 16-17). Here there are resonances with Alvesson and Willmott, with Thompson and McHugh, with the Enlightenment tradition of political activism and with the oppositional stance of Grey and Mitev.

This short list of contributions which claim to be critical by no means exhausts the Critical Theory approach to Organization Studies and encourages us to look across the Atlantic. Thompson and McHugh draw heavily upon Benson (1977), for example, while, Alvesson and Willmott draw upon the work of Stan Deetz (1992) and John Jermier (1998), both of whom are American. Indeed, Jermier's (1998) editorial to a Special Issue of the journal, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, gives yet another variant of the meaning of the term 'critical' with a certain hemispheric spin on it. So, all in all, the reader by now should have the beginnings of some sense of the orientation taken in all this type of work .

So what do I mean by 'critical'? What do I want with Critical Theory? The need to define what might be taken from all of this background in social theory and organization theory becomes irresistible. The group of staff in Warwick who teach Organizational Behaviour (WOBS, 2000) see six strands identifiable within Critical Theory which are central to its defining argument. Of these six strands we accept and seek to develop the first four. We are much less happy with the last two. These first four strands are characterised here as:

The Political

This dimension to critique is perhaps the most central and refers to the concern for understanding the use and exercise of social power and ways in which political forces,

conceived very widely, shape, govern and even determine human life. Power becomes the key concept in analysis. Power, of course, is capable of being analysed in one or more of several different approaches. We are not committed to one view over any other but alongside radical perspectives which look at power as a structural issue we also see the relevance of Foucauldian approaches. Our aim is to more fully reveal and examine the exercise of power in organizational contexts. Without this goal of politicisation there can be no critique of a meaningful kind.

The Iconoclastic

Critique may be thought to involve some elements of iconoclasm where the aim is to break down the solidity of dominant imagery and icons. The presence of substantial and powerful sets of signifiers invites critique to investigate what it is that lies behind. In our field there are clearly potent symbols and imageries used in organizational life which need to be uncovered, unveiled and analysed. The notion of the leader, for example, is one such iconic notion which could be unmasked to show its role in the maintenance of the status quo. Other brazen images are also ready for demolition.

The Epistemological

Critique in this sense refers back to the Kantian tradition of asking ourselves to reflect back upon how and why we know something. Rarely do we stop to ask what bases our forms of knowledge rest upon. Critique is about asking what epistemological basis we have for scientific and everyday knowledge. It is essential to Critique to ask such foundational questions, for common sense and indeed the highly valorised practice of science itself, are seen as little more than epiphenomena of highly active political systems. They are based upon shallow, one-dimensional empiricism and the notion that the world is as it appears to us. To ask epistemological questions is to continually ask, as academics, upon what do we base our judgements and evaluations. Of course, it would be somewhat surprising if we did not then go on to ask why and how management make certain truth claims. The Panglossian meta-theory of 'all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds' has an obvious, fundamental conservatism locked within it. But it also, less obviously perhaps, encourages a shallow empiricism wherein what you see is what you get. 'Critique' here does not necessarily mean the encouragement of alternative searches for ontic depth but it does always imply, we believe, a suspicion of the superficial.

The Investigative

We see a tradition emanating from Critique which concerns the search to uncover and unearth what others may take for granted. This investigative approach comes from a concern to question the powerful and continually to bring onto the public agenda issues which ruling elites would seek to have unquestioned. In the early days of critique it was the life-styles of the clergy themselves which were investigated. Investigation concerned, and still concerns, the following up of leads through which we might deal with issues of deep human concern but which were and are often neglected because they are suppressed and excluded from the agenda. In more meaningful discussions of power, this is sometimes called giving consideration to the 'third face' of power (Lukes, 1974) - that which is most sedimented and hidden and not amenable to instant surface inspection.

These four strands then are the ones which might be seen as in keeping with the critical tradition. They have to be seen as interrelated and as intertwined in terms of their import and although they only form a partial expression of the tenets of Critical Theory, they still proffer a powerful way of approaching our discipline. As we have already indicated one might *not* go so far as to accept the fifth and sixth strands - for reasons which need to be explained at this juncture before we move on. We may want to differentiate the position *ephemera* wishes to take from that adopted by 'critical' organizational theorists such as Grey and Mitev, Alvesson and Willmott, and Mingers. Whilst one might seek to understand as best one can the German Idealist tradition and the context of the Enlightenment, neither a commitment to the Enlightenment values nor to the furtherance of the *Geisteswissenschaften* might appeal. Being a card carrying Habermasian is unappealing, possibly because one is unclear as to the mechanisms by which emancipation and the end to illusion will come about. The notion that a deeply entrenched ideology would be susceptible to collapse in the face of the revelation of truth offered by a scholarly elite sits uncomfortably with some. Empowerment of the masses suggests that it is within our power and our right to offer this benefaction. Thus, in the absence of the optimism of the Frankfurt School, perhaps it is open to us to reflect our pessimism and dystopianism concerning organizational solutions to the problems facing humanity in, through and around organizations.

Therefore, if one strips away these particular Critical Theory commitments to emancipation from ideology and sees thought in more relativistic terms, rather than as a duality of truth and ideology, we are left with something that you might find to be 'critical'. Namely, we are still committed to 'critique' as having an epistemological dimension and another based on socio-political change but are not wedded to the Critical Theory 'take' on the phenomenological basis of the former and 'end of ideology' basis of the latter. Because of this standpoint, the last two dimensions to Critical Theory are *not* very much in evidence in these musings.

The Revelatory
The fifth strand of Critical Theory is the notion that those theorists who profess it possess the key to unlocking alienation and repairing the separation of human beings from their potential. There is a fondly held belief that, by attacking illusion, there can be a concomitant demonstration of what is illusion and what is truth. This conception held sway for many decades but it is difficult in these postmodern times to hang on to what is itself an illusion that only a small group of intellectuals is in possession of the one and only Truth. This we find deeply problematic.

The Emancipatory
Similarly, there was the assumption often made that Critical Theory had the unfettered freedom of the human spirit as its ultimate objective. Many of us find this entirely laudable. But it is difficult to unravel the deleterious effects of any new organizational system of power from the supposed gains. In other words, we feel that systems of domination always involve control, even if they are couched and lived in terms of ultra-democratic and anarchist principles. Some powers are more equal than others, of course, but they are still political. Since power effects are everywhere, the myth of human liberty

is just that. Emancipation from something may almost certainly mean enslavement to its opposite. Emancipation always means enslavement for something or someone.

As stated above, we within WOBS are committed to the first four of these component strands but not to the last two. Thus, the stance adopted is to stress the *political* nature of organizational life, they are likely to be *iconoclastic* and debunking of conventional myths, they may well seek to *question what is knowledge* and how do we achieve it; and finally they scrutinise contemporary practices and institutions for how and why they operate as they do through *investigation*. What holds all four strands together is the fibre of *opposition*.

It is important to make clear that we are not optimistic about 'progress'. Indeed, we are deeply suspicious of the concept of progress at all. We see it, too, as myth - a comforting myth from which human optimism may spring 'eternal', or at least spring from the Enlightenment. We do not buy into the concept of Progress. It seeks to 'boil the carcass of the old order' and to engage in 'Negations' in an ongoing but ultimately doomed challenge to the present. We are anti-Panglossian and/but profoundly *pessimistic*. Non-paradoxically, it is a pessimism about which we may be very positive!

Caricatures are easily drawn and easily dismissed. But the sense of Critique here is one opposed to the orthodoxy in Organizational Behaviour. As there are serious scholars practising it, we must take the orthodoxy seriously. It is no use pretending otherwise. But from our recognition of the depth and breadth of academically located managerialism comes an energy and an enthusiasm to confront it. Opposition is energising and creative. Negations are positive. Contestation is life-affirming. Critique can even be fun.

Speaking now in a personal capacity, I believe that *ephemera* might contain material and have an orientation which is unlike the prevailing literature in the field with its implicit or explicit managerialism and unreconstructed scientism. *ephemera* will take the issues of power and gender seriously and highlight innovative material which would stimulate the serious student to think *about* their beliefs rather than with them. The material, in essence, questions 'common sense' understandings. A wide audience exists, I believe, for such an orientation. The ideological stance of much conventional literature, whether in the guise of 'managing change' books, of the plethora of 'Handy' management texts, of the strategic management area as a whole or of much of Human Resource Management, is sadly left unquestioned. There is room for, and a need for, literature which is self-reflexive and critical of the dominant orthodoxy.

So 'critical' is a contentious term and one which requires considerable reflection upon before embarking lightly on its utilisation. It would be surprising if the approach outlined above commanded widespread acceptance. What follows may be even more contentious.

Dialogues

What is said here is *deliberately* contentious. I do not believe that dialogues are necessarily a positive force. There are times and places where academic dialogue has deleterious impacts upon parties to the dialogue. But first let us see why dialogue has been valorised

so much as a notion. Disciplines within academia claim to be about dialogue but they are not. You may not wish to even contemplate let alone accept the notion that there are paradigmatic differences which separate scholars but at the level of paradigm workers there is little evidence of dialogue going on. Conversation and gossip possibly, but dialogue is eschewed. It is too threatening to those in positions of superiority. The crew of the Scientific Enterprise must be silent and keep no record of their own. The luxury of speech and record keeping is for officers. Otherwise those below decks can only expect to dance at the end of Sir Clowdsley Shovell's yardarm (Sobel, 1996) for their troubles. In what follows I draw heavily upon a piece entitled 'Linearity, Control and Death' (1998).

Manguel (1996: 42-43) tells of Ambrose, a cleric in the 5th century, who was said by that paleo-organization theorist, St. Augustine, to be an 'extraordinary reader'. What Ambrose did was to challenge the carnalized version of reading which was prevalent at the time. For as he scanned the page and sought out the meaning of the text, his voice was silent and his tongue was still. He *never* read aloud. The reader today sits, (which of course assumes the dressage of the chair which was not common in Western Europe before early Victorian times), with eyes scanning the page, tongue held still. Such forms of silent reading were not commonplace until the 10th century at the earliest. Prior to this, to sit in a library of the Middle East would have been to sit amidst a cacophonous din! Manguel gives other examples which predate Ambrose where extraordinary events reported on paper are read silently because of their impact; but it was not until the monasteries of the early Middle Ages begin to institute the regime of work and prayer and prayer and work (Noble, 1994) that silent reading becomes acceptable and as not rude and offensive. Before this, reading was an *oral* skill to be enjoyed by others as they listened, practising their aural skills. To read silently is to deprive others of both pleasure and access. As we are reading, left to right and top to bottom, we do not hear. We are expected to read authors in all their authority. It is how *they* see the world that is important. No-one is interested in our unspoken thoughts, unless of course we have the pips of the officer class marked upon us to give us access to the conch of articulation. Dialogue is about power. The articulation of Conchiousness.

Apart from *The Lord of the Flies* (1985) where Piggy's essential glasses are smashed, the key sensory device today and in many places is the eye, for visual perception allows the focus to be upon an object world. In perspective painting there is a unidirectional subject-object relation which is de-carnalized. The I is made up of the eye. The body then is pitted against the eye and there is a fetishization of the power of sight. Other organs of sense are downgraded and the emphasis is upon the optocentric. The emphasis is upon the world of appearance.

Of course, McLuhan (1962) produced a strong oversimplified account of the importance of writing made possible through the printing press. McLuhan argued that the greater the number of senses involved, the greater the chance the recipient of a message would be able to reproduce the experience of the sender. For him, the spoken word was the best of the possibilities for reproducing our mental states in others. The spoken word in a face to face interaction involves the full range of the human sensorium. Hearing is hotter than sight but the written word has achieved the status of a 'momentary diety'. Now whilst this impoverishment began with handwriting and manual copying, it accelerates tremendously with the development of the printing press. Thereafter, the McAdamised text allows the

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reader to rush along; for the surface has been tidied up and cleared of ambiguity. It is unobstructed by the personal potholes of the transcriber. Readers of this visual uniformity learn to inhabit a world of strict, logical, explicit and literal patterns. They come to live by timetables and are punctual, by tables of weights and measures and are productive and by formal instruction and are expedient. The discovery of printing more than writing is the original sin which industrial civilisation is now heir to. It has created a world of closely regimented text, of the notion of the author, of a fixed point of view and of the concept of proprietary rights over ideas. Typographic Man is Organization Man. And Typographic Woman is Organization Woman.

McLuhan (1962: 76) goes on to argue that "perhaps the most significant of the gifts of typography to man is that of detachment and non-involvement". Jay (1994: 67) suggests that the Greeks also possessed this 'gift' but that printing multiplied the number of its beneficiaries, including, most notably of course, René Descartes, whose campaign for a visually conceived cognitive project led to "the decay of dialogue" (Ong, 1958). But dialogue between speaker and the spoken to itself is not necessarily that which stands outside power. It is no momentary diety either. Conversation between two humans, steeped in power differentials happened even in the heyday of the auditory world. Consider just the power of 'the audit'. As Sobel (1999: 242) shows, the trial of Galileo which took place in the spring of 1633 contained a most interesting dialogue. We are fortunate to have a careful recording of the trial and it shows how the accuser uses Latin and the third person in asking questions of the great astronomer. The defendant's answers ring small and meek for they are in first person Italian. Thus:

> Q. (in Latin) By what means and how long ago did he come to Rome?
> A. (in Italian) I arrived in Rome the first Sunday of Lent, and I came in a litter.

This form of dialogue may be seen as highly unusual and as outside of the experience of most of us. In fact, to the contrary, one might wish to argue that it is not so unusual at all. Dialogue is a weapon of the powerful. Galileo has struggled long and hard not to come to undertake this process of inquisition. Once there, he knows that the range of punishments he faces are likely to be severe. But do not think that this is all because the dialogue is in the form of a trial. In everyday language and situations the use of formal and restricted codes, as pointed out by Basil Bernstein (1960), is central in accessing many political and educational resources. Most diplomacy, too, where stylized dialogue between representatives of States is highly prized, is about 'forcing' opponents to the negotiating table. The absence of someone to talk to is a source of great concern to the powerful. They seek named individuals to work upon and against. Where no leaders of the opposition are forthcoming there is a palpable sense of menace felt by the institutionally endowed. The cyber-terrorists using multiple, acephalous forms of organizing represent a refusal to engage in dialogue with the powerful. Dialogue occurs around the table and not in the street.

Let us not suppose then that dialogue is the highest form of human communication. The ideal speech situation envisaged by Habermas is a very interesting idea but its interest comes from its very unobtainability. Rather than seek out arenas of discourse where every nuance of power and salient of differentiation has been eradicated, the reality for the underclass may be the eschewal of all talk whatsoever. Silence may be preferable for the

powerless. Indeed, in the 1960's movie *Spartacus*, the eponymous hero refuses to answer to his name so that the Emperor cannot be sure of his death. The uncertainty arising from a lack of dialogue is a weapon of the powerless. Spartacus does not engage in intercourse with his oppressor. Except at the level of the hurling of sputum. Perhaps contributors to *ephemera* might wish to contemplate the expectoration of sputum as well as the espoused need to engage in discourse and dialogue. To spit in the eye is to use the mouth against the ocular. It is, however briefly, an attempt to undermine the present superiority of the seen over the spoken. One has Great Expectorations about *ephemera*.

Organization

History is so important to us that I feel it important to talk briefly about the ways in which the concept of organization may be seen (in one view at least) to have developed. In this I shall be concentrating not on the organization of production, but on the production of organization. It has to be understood that this is NOT a unifying story. It is tale of many cities. Of avenues explored and then abandoned. Of cul de sacs which become open highways. Of brute force and ignorance. Of possibilities and potentials. It is, perhaps, only in understanding its genealogy that can one appreciate how contested 'organization' is as an idea. It is a section which is written in a way to try and suggest these lines of flight. It is meant to appear a little 'disorganized'.

Raymond Williams in *Keywords* describes the origin of the term 'Organization' as thus:

> It is from the sense of *organ* as instrument or agency that *organize* and *organization* in their modern senses eventually developed, mainly from the late 18th century and early 19th century...*Organic* followed a different course and indeed by the 19th century could be used in contrast with *organized*. (Williams, 1983: 227; emphasis and the spelling of organization with a z in the original)

According to Williams (1983: 227), *organ* first appeared in English from the 13th century to signal a musical instrument; something like the modern organ, in this context appeared in the 14th century. Its immediate forerunner was the old French word, *organe*, derived from the Latin *organum* whose root word was *opyvov* in Ancient Greek. *Organon* meant an instrument or an engine or a tool. It could also refer to any being's form as an instrument for being and it could also be taken to mean bodily organs as instruments of sense (the eye as a seeing instrument, for example), to surgical instruments or machines of war. In Latin usage the focus came to be upon the last of these meanings as *organum* came to refer to engines of war. In late Medieval times, the meaning came back to concentrate upon church *organs* as instruments of praise to God (Cummings and Thanem, 1998). Within and after the Renaissance the complexities of meaning abound so let us pause here for a moment and reflect.

The search for ultimate origins is a difficult and fraught task. The degree zero of a term - its root - which Williams attempts to uncover can lead one back to positions which cannot be defended. The search for origin, the original, the mother term, the moment of conception is doomed to failure because of the complexities of phonemes and their linguistic transformations. The discovery of a written source does not mean that it is *the* source of the word. It merely means that due to some accident of storage or of ink

chemistry a piece of parchment or papyrus has survived longer than others. It does not mean that this older document is the founding source of the word. Nor does it mean that we can translate the term into the meanings that would have been attributed to it at the time. If 'meaning is use' as Wittgenstein would have us believe then there is no certainty that meaning can be accurately attributed today for yesterday's notions.

'The past is a foreign place. They do things differently there.'

If we are to concentrate upon histories it would be as well to remember Vico's strictures on the limitations of history: Do not search for origins. Do not dare to believe we see the world as those in the past did. Do not believe that the present is lying on the surface of the past for all to see its inevitability. Do not think that those who inhabit the past will see what we regard as the major issues of the day as their major issues. Do not hope that language has remained constant for it will not have done so.

Where to begin and what to consider? In the remainder of this section I will outline ways in which, historically, the concept of organization has been understood. This is not a unifying story, for it is, as one might expect, whispers of different uses. It is a tale of many cities.

Chaos and the Creation of Organization

The first thing to note is that chaos is not. In other words chaos was not the first thing that ever existed. We discover that, in the epic of Gilamesh, legendary King of Uruk, in the Sumerian civilization of 4000BC, he was searching close to the abyss for what lay behind death and the grave. Life came before the void. Chaos was the end of the world not at its beginning. Two thousand years later, the Babylonian epic of Enuma Elish tells of the daily battles between Marduk, the hero and the sea-monster Tiamat. Here, somewhat typically, one finds a myth of creation mixed with a myth of victory over disorder (Grant, 1989: 103). One finds it later, and more famously, in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In these versions chaos predates everything. It is not the telos to which we are all hurtling in the future.

These are important differences. For it is a set of disputations which raises a crucial issue. Is Chaos associated with a heroic story of order arising out of disorder and triumphing over it? Or is it a necessary concept in a story about the creation of things even if post-creation they are in a state of disorganized disorder? In these creation myths we seem to face a choice: on one hand from Chaos comes materiality; on the other from Chaos comes organization. Perhaps chaos gives rise to both creation and order as in the Bible of the Old Testament. As in popular parlance the second is the dominant view. But what if order gives rise to Chaos as in the Sumerian version? Here we would have to allow the separation of Chaos from creation and associate it instead with the End.

In the *Theogony* there is, in the beginning, Chaos, the gaping void, the primordial abyss (Grant, 1989: 103). But we are not talking about the Grand Canyon here. Imagine a space so vast that we travel down in it in pitch blackness. There are no stars. There is no sense of movement. There is no wind in our hair. We have no hair. There is no head. No eyes. No sense of self. No thought. There is no-one. All is void. There is absolutely nothing. We are talking about travelling at speed down into a chasm while the butterflies wear away the sphere of steel in imperceptible strokes and when, at long, long last, the ball has

completely disappeared from friction (and yet when eternity has not yet begun), we have yet to begin to fall into the topmost rim of the abyss.

Chaos is a big concept.

Haridimos Tsoukas (1998) has written upon the links between chaos and organization recently and in an uncharacteristic elision equates chaos and disorganization. As usual, the footnotes are the most interesting part of the paper. Quoting favourably from Castoriadis (1987: 341) Tsoukas says disorganization "is a concept which strictly speaking makes no sense" for "all coherent discourse and all action would be impossible" (Tsoukas, 1998: 309). Later in the text "we, as sentient beings, have no choice but to organize our world and our actions in it. The interesting questions are how we do it; what we do it for? (1998: 292). Notice here the rhetorical appeal to 'we' as sentient beings whose language is central to disorganization. The first difficulty with such an approach is its *anthropocentrism*. There is little question that many humans would adopt an unthinking humanism to most questions but when one is dealing with philosophical issues of some import it behoves us perhaps to 'get real'. In other words the nominalistic assumptions of Castoriadis and Tsoukas that we humans create the world through our language and there is nothing outside the text leaves the realist positon unassailed. Might there not be disorganization in the real world which we puny humans attempt to stave off by fondly imagining that there is the order within it that we have given to it. Umberto Eco has argued precisely this point - the only thing which makes the world terrible is our doomed attempts to treat it as if there was some underlying order in it. Thus unlike Tsoukas perhaps we would want to hang on to the possibility that chaos as disorganization does exist but outside of our lingiustic attempts to comprehend it. There must be room for the Other to organization. For without it we are forced into a Newspeak where good's opposite is ungood and not downright evil. I want downright disorganization to exist as a concept even though in mentioning its name and in labelling it I begin to strangle its existence at birth. For Tsoukas and the mathematicians and physicists upon whom he has relied, do strangle the world of chaos. Chaos in their hands comes to mean unpredictability, surprises, novelty, non-linearity, disorder, messiness and noise. Chaos in this view becomes seen as 'unstable aperiodic behaviour' which is explicable by 'dynamic systems theory'. Chaos is described in chaos theory by chaologists (*sic*) as "the behaviour of a system which is governed by deterministic laws but is so unpredictable as to appear random, owing to its extreme sensitivity to initial conditions" (Stewart, 1990).

But where does that leave any happy notion of nothingness - the nihilistic bottomless pit? What of "the classical Greek insight of *chaos* as the gaping void, the abyss, the *apeiron* from which cosmos - form - arises" (Tsoukas, 1998: 305, emphasis in original)? Even here one finds Castoriadis seeking a function for the void in that what chaos does is provide for the *ex nihilo* creation of new forms. From chaos comes order. And so we are presented with both in the form of chaosmos. Chaosmos gives us both creation and the void to give birth to it. Chaosmos makes life patterned yet indeterminate. Chaosmos gives the human mind a role in the infinite. And this last point is its very weakness. It privileges epistemology over ontology. The (Greek) human mind over the raw materiality of the universe(s). The microcosm over the macrocosm. As Terry Pratchett in the Discworld novels would put it, it privileges the observers in their brass bathospheres over what lies

beneath the rim. Put crudely, chaos becomes a product of those humans that have invented themselves.

Unsurprisingly, there are no cults of chaos "nor have they a place in developed or anthropomorphic mythology, since it is so difficult to imagine such lofty concepts" (Grant, 1989: 109). So chaos is rarely the starting point. Perhaps we should do a Martin Amis and imagine time in reverse. Perhaps the end of organization rather than its beginning is the way to conceptualise Chaos. Let us assume as the Sumerians did that we are moving in the direction of the formless void rather than away from it.

What would this say to us about organization?

Organizing in the Face of Chaos

Note the active tense here to suggest we are talking of a process not a fixed structure. The first history of the concept of organization should be one in which we deal with the formless void and its relationship to myths of creative *organizing*.

> The unnameable is the beginning of heaven and earth. (the Tao Te Ching)

Indian, Chinese and Biblical approaches to the topic could be incorporated into an overview of the ways in which the formless void figures in human mythology. The equivalent of Chaos and disorganization might be sought in several civilizations. We must note however that the relative precision allowed by the Romance languages is absent in Chinese ideographs which are context dependent and more elusive. So too might the stories around the first forms of organization be useful ranging from 'in the beginning was the word' to Pratchett's Discworld and the four elephants on the turtle's back (Pratchett 1983). In the treatment of this topic we may well come across what we think of in the Occident as the structure/process debate, male/female principles and their role in the creation of organization, and animalistic imagery. We will also need perhaps to consider geometries in the sky and the ways in which astronomy was developed to produce animalistic deities in the heavens as control over destiny. Such configurations of forces take place in hydraulic societies. Japanese notions in Shintoism, *Yin* and *Yang* and the creation myths of Confucianism are also relevant here. So too are Islamic notions particularly that of the 'zero-0'. To complete the overview would be impossible without some attention being addressed to Australian Aboriginal dream time and Sub-Saharan African notions. The danger of course would be that of superficiality and over-simplification, but in dealing with history we need to get geography into it somehow. Key sources here might be Michael Moorcock's *Dancers at the end of time* and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001* (the last chapter).

Organon and the Ancient Greek Contribution

A discussion might take place of the Greek Creation myths certainly, but it is important not to see Greece as the beginning of the story. The Greek philosophers approached these issues in different ways and whilst it is important to situate a discussion of Plato and Aristotle in this context we should not be blind to the role of mathematicians like Euclid in establishing an ordered universe for us. The tools as *organon* aspect also needs some detailed treatment. Moving on to the Roman approach to *organum* a discussion could be

developed of the Roman's approach insofar as it is different to that of the Greeks yet upon which so much of their culture was based.

Organum in the Medieval Church

A treatment which would deal with St Augustine, Grossteste and Bede, Occam's razor and the Cistercians would be useful in understanding the Western notion of organization. Focussing upon the concept of hierarchy, considerable attention could be paid to Grosseteste as a paleo-organization theorist. Francis Bacon's treatment of *Novum Organum* is essential by way of some consideration of the medieval cathedral organ.

Organons in the Renaissance

Building upon the work of Dale (1997) it would be possible to look at 16th century Venice as the place where organization as we understand it today began to take further shape. Here we would perhaps find the rise of the individual reflected in mass-produced mirrors, the development of the anatomical urge, mass production of galleys and galleons within the Arsenale and the printing presses of the Gutenburg Galaxy.

Meanwhile, as Cummings and Thanem (1998) show, in the English tradition the word *organons* appears from the 16th century. The earliest use of *to organize* which is a phonetic rendition of organons, appears during the Renaissance and means, harking back to the Greek, 'to endow with organs'. Cummings and Thanem (1998: 6) claim this reference appears from 1413 and dries up all together around 1870. It dries up because it is replaced with a similarly derived word - the organism.

L'organization in the French Revolution

Here the story becomes one of *l'organization.* The rise of rationalism at the foot of the guillotine brings Christianity into doubt. Anti-clericalism and the Encyclopaedists, Heilbron's material on St. Simon, Comte and Bichet, Diderot's tree of knowledge and so on could well be considered alongside the work of Figlio and Pickstone (see Hoskin, 1995). The story is one of *organicism* and the equation of the organic with a principle of organization found in non-living items. It represents a triumph of biologism. Also Hoskin and Macve's (1988) work on Whistler and Westpoint is relevant here to the French exportation of the concept of organization to the USA.

Organicism and the Pareto Circle

L.J. Henderson's role in the domination of American *organicism* borrowing from Pareto's Italian version (see, if you are interested, Barber, 1970) was of central importance to the development of organization theory. It is this meaning that Gareth Morgan takes to be the meaning of the *organic* metaphor. The Pareto Circle at Harvard with its possible Masonic connections consisted of Parsons, Merton, Barnard, Mayo and Rothlisberger with Whitehead thrown in for good measure. Their dedication to the 'Marx of the Bourgeoisie' - Pareto - has to be seen in the light of 1930s unrest and their patrician attitudes to social disorder. Why they were asked to undertake the Hawthorne studies when located 1000 miles away from Chicago's suburbs and there was very respectable sociology department already in Chicago itself seems a difficult question to answer. The dependence on the

organic metaphor comes from the influence of Pareto and is useful of course because of its emphasis on wholeness and the need for integration to ensure health and continued well being.

The Plane of Organization: Deleuze and Guattari.

The material on Deleuze and Guattari in which some consideration of the *plane of organization* is attempted would be very useful. The focus here could be on rhizomatic as opposed to arboreal metaphors but the weakness of Deleuze and Guattari in terms of using dualities should be emphasised.

Neo-Bergsonism and Self-Organization

Neo-Bergsonism has been characterised as Anti-Cartesianism, an emphasis on flow, process and Becoming, an emphasis on duration in structures, in a material movement *from* the external to the internal worlds (and a consequent anti-representationalism since that implies the reverse with the mind's role dominating) and the emphasis on self-creation. The focus within such a view is likely to be on self-organization. Take for example, Prigogene's brand of complexity theory with the notions of dissapative structures and self-organization. Autopoiesis and the work of the Chilean pair, Maturana and Varela might be identified and discussed in the light of their focus on a particular category of disappative structures. These are massive networks of very complex feedback loops which are able to create, reproduce (perhaps that should be 'replicate' cf. Dale, 1997) and adapt themselves. These structures are able to "structurally couple themselves" to their environment and form extensive assemblages of such structures. This is what is meant by self-organization. History is built into these structures as an ontological grounding.

Chaos out of Organizing

The importance of the production of organizing could be highlighted rather than the organization of production. The work of the Cooperians as in *In the Realm of Organization* (Chia, 1998) might be subjected to some critique for its dualistic orientation *à la* Deleuze and Guattari. Chia claims that Cooper's concerns are a commitment to an epistemology of process-movement, process and becoming, a logic of otherness (the lost void, technologies of representation, especially writing as the agent of inscription) and the immanence of human organ senses in products.

However, in Zen it is stated that "attempting to define it means you fall into that net of words wherein nothing can be said" (Sardar and Abrams 1999: 167). Organization is the search for everything being said and this is what the Cooperians seem to attempt. To speak of the production of organization everywhere and at all times is to speak for all. Following on from this, the 'chaosmos' approach of Tsoukas and Castoriadas too might be subject to critique.

The emphasis on chaos being suppressed by the void is suggestive of a possible periodicity of the notion of organization. At times when (Western) humanity seeks to invent itself as the focus of the universe perhaps the notion does gain credence. The development of a search for order may intensify at times when humanity seeks to believe that it can control and understand the world through ratiocination. As Dale (1997) has shown the links

between organization and rationality are very clear after the Renaissance and the burgeoning development of the anatomical urge. The first, organization, is the endowment of organs in the human body and beyond. The second, ratiocination, is the allocation of portions through the human mind. Organized rationality thus, is the allocation of portions of meaning through 'insight' into the human body and the human mind. The intensification of the search for rationality leads more and more to the suppression of the possibility of chaos and the quest for good order. Hegel himself said as much in the famous dictum that "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" (1967: 10).

The apportionment of the base origin of 'organization' to Greece places these concerns in the Occident. What we know very little of, is the views in the East of chaos and organization. As Said (1978) has shown, the construction of the Orient as the Other means that we have the impudence to believe that there would be only one inscrutable oriental way to conceptualise chaos and disorganization- even though we know not what it would be. Where attention is paid to even some branches of Indian and Chinese philosophy (excluding all that beyond) the assertion of or search for Greek influence is strong. For example, it has been argued that the Nyaya school of Indian philosophy which emphasises rational reasoning and logic looks and feels very similar to Aristotelianism and that there may have been some mutual influencing. But generally speaking, we can find dualistic theories, materialistic ones and so on if we choose to use Hellenistic ideas to interpret those from the East. However there are penalties associated with this assumption of an Athenian (in distinction to a pan-Hellenistic) starting point. It ties us to far too many constraining threads of argumentation.

Beyond Histories of the 'Production of Organization'

What I have tried to do in this long section of annotated thoughts is to suggest that the history of organization as a concept is a rich one but there are no easy answers within it to any thing like a consensus view of truth. It is a contested terrain. The focus *ephemera* seeks on organization is to reflect this varied history from varied parts of the world in varied ways. Cooper (1998) has written on the distinctiveness between those perspectives which concentrate on the organization of production (and obviously include much of the sociology of industry, industrial relations and so on, but less obviously, the vast majority of the management sciences), and those which focus on the production of organization. Here the concern is to understand how human beings, their artefacts and their language come to be organized and demonstrate systematic patterns of regularity. In *ephemera* it is hoped that both sorts of interest in organization will be evidenced. Papers on how production is organized might stand alongside those which discuss how organization is produced in different historical and cultural contexts. And certainly not just by those who owe a cultural heritage to the Atheneans!

I began with the myth of Theseus.

Let me end with it.

Closure and Openings

Theseus is etymologically connected to 'thesis', one might suggest and for most of us is associated with a linear argument with which to escape the benighted confines of the maze-like labyrinth (which itself is etymologically close to the name for lips – 'labia') Thus, Theseus is given the golden thread by Ariadne by which to free himself from the labyrinth once he has slain the unseen monster of the inescapable. Thereafter, the thread of the argument by which to straighten out the complex folds and pleats of a complicated world comes to us in the academic thesis. We can re-turn to the surface and allow others to see the enlightened argument which maps out the twists and turns of the subterranean. Today, the myth of Theseus whereby an Athenean subdues the spiralling labyrinth of the Cretans and its denizen is not without significance. The constraints of the labia are no more. Organization and rationality will straighten us out and provide the way through the underground passages of human fear.

But what about seeking out more shambles? More lips and less eyes? More labyrinths? More monstrosities? More irrationalities? More Bacchus? More Chimeras.

ephemera: *critical dialogues on organization* has a complex history of thought and counter-thought behind it as a set of terms, read in that particular order. What we mean by critical, by dialogues and by organization are all open to contestation. But we should not expect it to be any other way. *ephemera*, I earnestly hope, will not seek to straighten us out but to twist us and make us groan. There is a belief around at the moment which speaks of honouring the work of others. This is a worthy objective but too often it masks the need for real, visceral critique. Its good-intentioned liberal values are often seen as highly desirable. But I hope *ephemera* will spit in the faces of the powerful - and anyone else for that matter. As well as seeking to facilitate conversation and diplomatic treaty, one entreats that it will regularly retreat into the labyrinth and seek out the monstrous, not for execution but for wonderment.

It would be a real achievement if *ephemera* developed a reputation for being a chimera of the darkness. Benighted. Dark and dank in texture and feel. Foul not fragrant. Closed in. Closeted away. Yet open – as a wound.

Long may it fester.

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