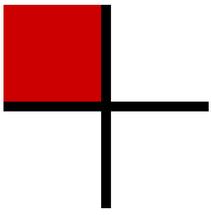


volume 3, number 1 (february 2003)

exhibits

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Exhibiting

Steffen Böhm and Campbell Jones

The ephemeral image of harmony in which goodness basks only emphasizes more cruelly the irreconcilability that it foolishly denies. (Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*)

Definitions

Show us your words. What do you mean? Brush away your sandstorms. They will pass. Clarity is a virtue, after all.

To exhibit: from *exhibēre*, from *ex-* and *hibēre* (from *habēre*). Meaning? To display, to show detail, particular features, to show publicly, to show a document or piece of art in an exhibition. Also: to hold up for inspection.

Exhibit, inhabit, ex-habit, *ex-habitus*: To go out of one's house, to take something out of one's house, to be thrown out of one's house, show what you've got in your house, open your house for visitors (and inspectors).

Habitus: condition, appearance, attire, character, habit.

Habit:

1. Bearing, conduct, behaviour, normal procedure.
2. The prevailing disposition or character of a person's thoughts and feelings, mental makeup.
3. The normal practice, behavioural pattern acquired by frequent repetition, a regularity.
4. Habitude, practice, usage, custom, use: these words, which are often celebrated today (i.e. this is how we do things around here), all have in common a sense of a way of behaving that has become more or less fixed.

In Latin exhibit, to show, to demonstrate, also means *monstrare*. Latin *monstrum*: evil, monster, monstrosity (probably from *monēre*, to remind, to warn). A monster warns us of something, it reminds us, it puts into question the natural and normal order of things.

Monster: one who shows a deviation from the normal in behaviour or character, animal like, a threatening force, an engulfing power. Monstrous: strange, unnatural, abnormal, also: prodigious, prodigy, proliferation. The monster as ex-habitation; the monster exhibits something unusual, unnatural.

An exhibition is not a representation – it is not the continuous representation of the normal, the habitual, the normal practice of *being*. Instead it is a re-presentation of something unusual, unnatural, deviant, subversive – a monstrous mutation.

Inhabit: to dwell, reside, have possession of, to have. The state of Being, the place where Being is at home. This is why Levinas has a problem with Heidegger: because the door to his dwelling is closed, or at least *too* closed for his liking – his dwelling is not becoming a monstrous mutation; his house is perhaps not mobile enough. (White trash Martin, not just strolling in the Black Forest, but in a caravan park, on the road again.)

Exhibit: to demonstrate something, to show how something works (or does not work). Exhibiting as de-monstration? De-monstrating: to show how something has become monstrous, to deface a monster. Make manifest. A manifestation.

Ex-habit: to leave the house and go demonstrating; to flee from the fixity of the dwelling and become more mobile. To demonstrate is to publicly protest against the couch potato in us all, a protest that might incite a revolt that exhibits (ex-habits) all that we take for granted in our own dwelling.

Problems

We say: Don't destroy nature! Of course we have a responsibility to respect nature and to save our habitat. But what is it that we should save? The nature of our world, the nature of our Being? How natural is nature? Is it natural the way we are, the way we do things? Is there not a need to exhibit, that is to ex-habit, to go against the way things are, the way things are practiced today, to depart from what is regarded as normality, to demonstrate against our *habitus*?

Maybe the responsibility to take care of our habitat, the world, the natural, does not imply the representation of 'the natural', the *habitus*, as something fixed, eternal, given. Maybe our responsibility is to question our normal habits, our normal Being. Maybe the responsibility for our habitat implies the need to invite monsters into our house, be hospitable to monsters, invite the Other to have dinner with us, or to have us for dinner. Maybe this also includes a certain cannibalism – maybe it is natural to eat (with) others – this is the invitation of the monster into our body, the invitation to change our 'natural' bodies.

What is our *habitus* today? Nature, the human, the body, freedom, democracy, organization – this is natural for us, we normally don't question these things. To exhibit could perhaps mean to question these very habits. Exhibit is ex-habit. To exhibit democracy is to put into question the way democracy is practiced today: to question the

normal 'goings-on' of democracy. To exhibit organisation is to put into question the way we organise the world today, how social organisation has become an irresponsible exhibitionism. To exhibit means to organise an encounter between democracy and its monstrous double.

Evil Intensities

The monster is evil, it is said. The one we don't understand, the one who is different is evil. We are scared of the monstrous Other. But today the 'axis of evil' spins on its axis.

Baudelaire's evil is different: he does not keep evil at bay but invites it into the 'here and now'. Hence 'flowers of evil'. Evil becomes something beautiful, something flowery, something natural; the 'evil' symbol encounters its monstrous double – the flower. Blanchot writes in *Faux Pas* about Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*: "it illustrates the nature of an inspiration that does not pretend to come from anything, to need only itself and to reject, as impure, study and meditation on already organized and thus conventional forms."

Baudelaire's flowers do not pretend to be natural, in fact they are artificial, they are made out of evil, monstrous material, material that is not conventional, material that has not been organised. The 'beautiful' flowers Baudelaire exhibits are not from this world, they are dead, undead. Vampires are intense, they are intensive suckers – they exhibit; that is, they ex-habit beauty, they suck blood out of the beautiful profanity of Being. So let us exhibit... Baudelaire.

You invaded my sorrowful heart
Like the sudden stroke of a blade;
Bold as a lunatic troupe
Of demons in drunken parade,

You in my mortified soul
Made your bed and your domain;
– Abhorrence, to whom I am bound
As the convict is to the chain,

As the drunkard is to the jug,
As the gambler to the game,
As to the vermin the corpse,
– I damn you, out of my shame!

And I prayed to the eager sword
To win my deliverance,
And have asked the perfidious vial
To redeem my cowardice.

Alas! the vial and the sword
Disdainfully said to me;
'Your are not worthy to lift
From your wretched slavery,

You fool! – if from her command
Our efforts delivered you forth,
Your kisses would waken again
Your vampire lover's corpse!

Charles Baudelaire, 'The Vampire' in *Flowers of Evil*

Encounters

To exhibit, to write, to present or demonstrate something, is to bring about a certain death. It invites evil to one's table. The writer as monster. To write is to suck blood out of that which we regard as natural and turn it into a mortified flower of evil. To exhibit something implies perhaps a certain monstrous friendship between the writer and evil: the writer invites the monster into the house – to make it ex-habitable, to turn it upside down, to change everything that has got its normal place, to 'translate' beauty into evilness. A writer can therefore never be alone. One cannot write for oneself. There is always the double of the writer's self: the monstrous Other. The use of language is an invitation to evil to come into one's house to destroy it. Language as an ex-hibition, that is, an ex-habitation.

When one says 'I am alone in this world, I am the superpower, I can do whatever I like, I do not want to listen to anybody' – then one does not only speak to one's self but also to the Other. One could speculate: does the total disregard of the Other really keep evil at bay; is this disregard not a denial of the Other, a denial that is another face of evil?

War has begun. Death. Killing. But this is not an encounter with the Other. It is the denial of the Other. By both? It is the wrong step. The wrong no. *Le faux pas*. (We are mourning.) Where does humanity end and monstrosity begin?

Can we put this aside today and proceed with business as usual? Let us protest; that is, let us exhibit, but let us not forget the hegemony of economic organization. The other day the *Birmingham Post* ran a story with the title 'First Casualty of War will be Tourism'. Without a hint of irony, the journalist John Cranage concluded that "Airlines and the tourism industry are likely to be the chief economic casualties of the looming war with Iraq, according to experts in the sector" (18 March 2003). The rush is on, then, to find out how the economy will fare in the face of this new threat. If we used to balance economics with human life, we might join Mr. Cranage and start counting the pain and injury that is clearly being felt by banknotes and gold reserves throughout the civilized world. Elsewhere, hang 'em high.

Out

What is the wealth of our collections? Counting barrels of oil, counting (on) our 'friends' or allies, counting the war material in our archives? Perhaps these archives do not need to be counted but exhibited; that is, ex-habited, de-normalised, turned into the monsters that they are. The intended 'life' of the normal archive needs to be killed and turned into material that cannot simply be counted; its normal Being, its accounting

standard, need to be subjected to bombing raids. It is not our task to count life – our achievements, monuments, moral standards – as if life is an archive that provides all the answers for our Being. Exhibiting life means to destruct Being: excavate lost material, search for forgotten traces, encounter the dead. Such exhibition defies any ‘normal’ language, a house of symbols. Such exhibition is an ex-habitation, a destruction of the house that we call our archival home, our bunker, our cave, which artificially protects us from the ‘evil’ outside.

To exhibit an archive does not mean to count its contents, or to say something profound about it, but to show its material and make use of it (Benjamin). To show is to quote: to make use of quotations. To write does not mean to ‘make sense’ and ‘say’ something – would this not simply refer to our habits, the house of our common language? To write is to exhibit, to show and quote text, which is to be thought as the destruction of text: the tearing of passages of text out of their original con/text – the *con* is separated from the *text*. This is the death of the text as context, as homogeneous and organised archive. The archive’s Being becomes something different – a collection of unorganised material, constantly mutating to become something else.

Is it not our task to exhibit the archive of Organization Studies in the same way? Is it not our task to quote, instead of endlessly rehearsing a language that only seems to defend an archive of established symbols? Benjamin says in *One-Way Street*: “Quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out, armed, and relieve the idle stroller of his conviction.” For him this killing of the text is the only way to redeem it, to save it from the linearity of ‘common sense’ history and make it available, as fragment, as dead material, to a project of re-reading time. In this sense one cannot say something about an author’s work, one can only pass through the fragments of someone’s text; one can only mention things in passing, as there is nothing essential or original to be uncovered about an author or a body of texts. One usually says: his body (perhaps Blanchot’s) might be dead but his texts will live forever. This is how historicity works. One tries to fix an event, a singularity, and save it for eternity. This is how we usually read. But to save history does not mean to preserve it; instead it implies the killing of an author’s work – to mortify its ‘reception’, to divide its body.

Mobile Divisions

This all calls up the prospects of separation, of division. Thinking, seeing, writing – this all implicates what Rolland Munro calls a ‘labour of division’. Such a phrase unsettles divisions in its very statement. In its exhibition, it remarks. Coming out of the house shows something about the state of dwelling within the divided house. This operates a critical function in two directions. First, through exposing the work that is done to construct the divisions that are already in place. Second, drawing us to the task of redividing, setting out the prospects for new divisions. Let us not think that a world without divisions would be possible. This is the dream of absolute integration that we also know as totalitarianism. But the critical task remains, which is one of staging a (re)division.

We are probably some way into the task of redividing Organization Studies. Its previous decisions laid out on the (kitchen) table; it is now Organization Studies that is ‘under the knife’ (cf. Karen Dale). These divisions are our problem, then, even if we know that divisionalisation is inescapable.

Let’s cut ourselves up then. In the past we had made a distinction between three genres of writing: *articles* (that perform scholarly arguments), *notes from the field* (that show what is ‘happening’ in various spaces of organization) and *reviews* (that summarize and scrutinize individual, or at best a group of, books or films). Let’s make a minor gesture, which is one of calling into question these divisions, even if we do this only momentarily in order to show what they conceal.

Could we imagine an argument that would scrutinize both the organized world and the organization of our discourses about it? Such would be neither empirical nor theoretical (as these terms are conventionally understood), neither comprehensive nor focused on a single source. Each of the exhibits that we have assembled in this issue might go somewhat toward showing how this might be possible. If it is. But this task does not imply an innocent dreaming (perhaps in the warmth of one’s bed). Instead it involves a doing, a taking out of the house. A demonstrating. A showing. A laying out of ones hand. An ‘exhibiting’.