



Organizing between a rock and a hard place

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We are told that postmodern organization theory is all about Otherness (Boje, 1995; Linstead, 2004), the right of Others not be authored by Others and the right of Others to be recognised as Other without being Othered. In Other words we are caught up (in these postmodern times) with the organization of Movement, with the transgression of boundaries between self, Other, us, them, in, out, this side, that side, different and normal, a process which is not aimed at demolishing brick walls, but at *reaffirming* them – painting them pretty colours and putting doorways in them so we can pop from one side to the Other when we feel like it. An Other way of putting this might be that we are engaged in a process of dis-placing things in order to place them. Between a rock and a hard place we might say.

Being between a rock and a hard place is to be in a non-place, a place where all ways out seem to lead to the same (undesirable) end. A parallax of sorts, where regardless of choice, one ends up in the wrong place. What better metaphor for contemporary life, where the notion of the one right way seems more and more mocking as it so obviously only taunts us with an impossibility? Displaced, the contemporary organized subject always finds itself right where it started, between a rock and a hard place. The displacements and transferrals, breaks and rifts, these are no longer optional extras of life, but mundane experience. Think of the attempts to make sense of taxation or the RAE, planning your life according to schizophrenic statements. Or navigating the grocery store, ‘choosing’ between four different kinds of Halen Môn – as if you actually knew enough about Welsh gourmet salts to make an informed judgement.

And isn’t organization theory itself increasingly stuck between a rock and a hard place? Instead of core competencies, functional units and divisional organization we have fractured identities, outsourcing in and insourcing out, virtual viruses messing up our interfaces and insane project managers desperately looking for that one controllable moment. Let’s just accept that we’re all displaced now, lounging in the airport-lounge (Augé, 1995), left at the station, and stuck in the K-hole of our choice (Warren, 2005). Let’s not mind. Fuck, let’s rejoice in this. Whereas classical organization theory was obsessed with boundaries and buffer zones, maybe the organization theory of tomorrow has to be a theory of borderlands and de-militarized zones (O’Doherty *et al.*, 2007)? No longer is organized man necessarily the man in the organization (or the woman for that matter), rather it’s a man (or an Other) who decided to tell the boss to take this job and

shove it, and went walkabout. There, not really anywhere, the gals from the fourth floor have set up a picnic (they're serving their old boss's kidneys, gently braised). A waiter, used to running between the organization of the kitchen and the organization of the dining room, quickly traverses the space, almost knocking over a recently fired but very happy man. And all the while, someone somewhere is torn apart from loving more than one.

Stuck, with nowhere to go. Sounds sweet, don't it? It's Waylon Jennings on the road, the fracture in the wall, the calm of the waiting room, the oblivion of post-coital silence. Limbo, suspension, it's the weightless pause as you bump off the end of the see-saw. It's not caring about the quality of your job, flicking through the channels (and there's nothing on), a match ending 0-0. It's knowing it's not your round yet, waking up to the fact that the boss isn't in today, pawing an arse without realizing it until the deed's done. In organizations, we find this being between a rock and a hard place in a number of places. They are the silences, the misunderstandings, the not-fucking-carings of everyday organizational life. They are, to follow the current vogue in organizational studies of misunderstanding Deleuze (and old Felix), the holes that makes the organization seem like a solid entity. An organization is always caught between a rock and a hard place, just as the people in it are stuck in their lives, controlled by the sloppy communitarianism of the workplace and the subtle fascism of family life. No wonder the highways are crammed with people pulling over, taking a break, reading the paper or furtively masturbating. And with organizations little more than thin, flimsy wrappers over a complex, interwoven set of fractures, break, parallax (Žižek, 2006) and various other displacements, who can blame them?

The collection of articles in this issue of *ephemera* reminded us of this function (?) of organization theory in lots of different ways, some serious and others, quite frankly, flippant – but even here we are playing with the boundary between the proper stuff of serious thought and the childish giggles of the academic playground. And more power to that. The theme of this issue emerged, as such things often do, out of the lack of a theme. There seemed to be very little that connected psychosis, masculinity, post-Fordism, cannabis and the issue of correct quotation practises, until we realized that these were all issues of displacement, cracks and being stuck between a rock and a hard place. They all pointed to a theory of breaks and being stuck, a Taussigian theory of displaced movement and being askew, and they all in their own way pointed to sticking points and cul-de-sacs (Stewart, 1996).

Our first paper, Burkard Sievers on his concept of the 'psychotic organization', is an excellent example. A psychosis can be described as a partial break with reality, being caught in a disjointed relationship between an inside and an outside world. Sievers is fascinated by the madness of the corporation – the psychosis of organizational action, the ridiculous, the utterly illogical and the outrageous *absurdities* perpetrated in and by organizations, and thus fixes the very nature of the organization as being both the rock and the hard place, with all of us caught in between. In his brief piece he introduces *ephemera* readers to the legacy of his thought on the matter, and elegantly conveys an alternative take on the rationality of the organization, one which goes beyond a mere critique and recasts the notion through the introduction of a psychotic break – a displacement at the heart of the organization.

The theme of displacement returns and comes through exceptionally well in our next paper, 'The Hours' by Asmund Born, Christian Frankel & Neils Thyge Thygesen. The paper plays with Foucault's notion of the 'event' to show us how time is fluid and there are no such things as 'best made plans' – both the writers and their subjects gang aft a-gley. Discussing the 2002 film *The Hours* (based on Virginia Woolf's novel) the authors remind us that past, present and future are not mutually exclusive and more co-dependent that we might casually observe in our studies of organizational life. We (for the most part) unproblematically conduct 'historical' document analysis, or 'life history' interviews with little regard for such data as necessarily constructed through and constituted by the present moment – with, of course, one eye on the future... what might these data say that we can use to draw conclusions some time hence? How could we possibly conceive of doing any meaningful task *now* without the hope that it will come to fruition in the future (cf. Bataille, 1987)?

From 'Time', we make a Heideggerian leap to 'Being' and perhaps one of the most salient forms of 'Being' of them all – gender. Fournier and Smith argue that masculinity, in particular, is at risk of becoming 'scripted' in the sense that some commentators' emphasis on the fluidity of gender identities is becoming formulaic and actually serves to strengthen an essentialist notion of (in this case) 'maleness' which would constitute its 'proper shape'. For 'masculinity' to be running about all over the place, dripping off ledges and forming in puddles as 'fluidity' implies, suggests to Fournier and Smith that these authors must have a clearer idea of what the solid state of masculinity is, with femininity always stuck between the rock and the hard, phallic place...

Giuliana Commisso's article stays with the concept of identity but this time arguing for a more developed understanding of the organized subject caught between individualisation and subjectification. Analyzing a post-Fordist car factory, she is able to show what actually happens when people, quite literally, get caught between a rock and a hard place. Interestingly, she presents us with a reading which would intimate that this might in fact be a position that creates novel forms of becoming, potentially even enabling an upbeat understanding of the same. Although she does not present us with an overly optimistic view, Commisso shows the complex possibilities inherent in a very common form of displacement, both connecting to and moving beyond the old Marxist hobbyhorse of alienation.

All of which brings us to our Notes section and to an interesting exchange of views between Karl Weick, Thomas Basboll and Henrik Graham. All academics are well aware of the complicated space we get into when we refer to other work. Reference too much, and you seem unoriginal; reference too little and you run the risk of being called a cheat, or worse – truly stuck between a rock and a hard place. As an example of this, we present a case of appropriating the Other – in a tale of academic integrity put in question. A displaced reference, returning in complex ways, and a question of what counts as proper academic conduct. In order to keep things interesting (always the drama queens), we start off with Karl Weick's response, and then delve into the case for the prosecution. The result? We're afraid that's up to you, dear reader.

After this heady debate, we move on to the reviews and continue our theme of rocks and hard places. Firstly, we get stoned with Beatriz Acevedo's review of James Mills (2003) book *Cannabis Britannica: Empire, Trade and Prohibition*. The book traces the history of cannabis: "...from the time that the British learned about the uses of cannabis in India until the establishment of national and international legislation on cannabis and other drugs in the 1920s" and shows how the economic potential of cannabis as a lucrative commodity coupled with the puritanical views of 'experts' dispatched to understand it, have combined to produce an ambivalent political relationship with the drug and its effects. Drawing on Foucault, Acevedo embarks on an interesting interpretation of the book, highlighting how the events of the past can help us to understand the current UK legal and political climate around cannabis and we would argue, drugs more generally (see Warren & Wray-Bliss, *under review*). Staying with the historical perspective, with the rock being a forge and the field the hardest place of all, Peter Fleming reviews John Landers (2003) book *The Field and the Forge: Population, Production and Power in the Pre-industrial West* reminding us organizational post-moderns that our industrial heritage rests very firmly on solid ground – agricultural ground to be exact. Fleming praises the book for its thorough treatment of historical evidence which paints pre-industrial life as a precarious balance between demography and the availability of natural resources to feed the population. Often accused by historians of ignoring the heritage of previous organizational eras, such volumes are a ripe source for critical management scholars seeking to understand how the discipline developed almost entirely from the need to command, control and defend natural resources. Both these reviews echo sentiments we have already encountered in this issue of *ephemera*: that history is read through the present and the present recreates history.

Finally, we end with Zhongyuan Zhang's commentary on Stuart Elden's (2004) text *Understanding Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*. Zhang's review reminds us of our theme in two ways. He begins with an allusion to the oft felt dilemma in a mish-mash discipline such as organization studies – how much of a writer's oeuvre must one read to avoid doing a disservice to her ideas when we steal them for our own purposes? Either we come up against the simply un-scaleable heights of 72 volumes of rock solid writing from Henri Lefebvre (Zhang, this volume) or we stay in the hard place, scratching our heads as to the meaning of one small part of them – worse still (?), simplistically appropriating a few short words to help our many grand claims. To be sure Zhang does not offer us a solution, but he does offer Elden's book as a zone of calm between the rock and the hard place, a good overview and introduction to understanding the thinker – in particular Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space, currently oh-so-*en-vogue* among organizational scholars.

All of which leaves us, as editors, stuck between this rock of an introduction and the hard place of the actual contents of the journal. And isn't this the usual place for the writing subject, always in a space between the solidity of what has been written and the difficulty of what is yet to come? We might in this vein say that even something as mundane as the end of an introduction becomes an event, a sticking-point in history, an alienated place where psychotic breaks may occur, where one can start questioning one's masculinity (of whichever gender), wonder if one has followed academic protocol... Oh, hell, pass that joint...

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