

# ephemera

*theory & politics in organization*

© ephemera 2005  
ISSN 1473-2866  
www.ephemeraweb.org  
volume 5(1): 1-97

## volume 5, number 1 (february 2005)

### editorial

*Writing:Labour* 1  
Damian O'Doherty and Anthony O'Shea

### articles

*Marxian Critiques of Thompson's (1990) 'core' Labour  
Process Theory: An Evaluation and Extension* 5  
Stephen J. Jaros

*On the Possibility of Formless Life:  
Agamben's Politics of the Gesture* 26  
René ten Bos

*Writing Method* 45  
Rob Beeston

*Time, Fear and Suffering in Post-dualist Modes of Being* 53  
Peter McInnes and Nic Beech

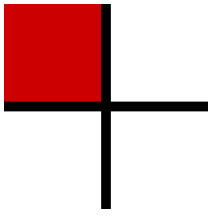
### note

*Internet Activism and the Democratic Emergency in the U.S.* 68  
David Jacobs

### reviews

*How Do I Love Thee?  
The England National Team and the Lovemark* 78  
Sarah Gilmore

*Pathology, Power and Profits...in Paperback* 93  
Edward Wray-Bliss



## Writing:Labour

Damian O'Doherty and Anthony O'Shea

Labour as struggle, as process. Resistance and strikes, demonstrations, protests and fighting in the streets; fire, incendiary devices, manifestos, pamphlets, internet activism and blood spilt through ink. Molotov cocktails in the streets of Milan; a burnt out car in the streets of Manchester, England; a window smashed and an effigy of George Bush suspended from the window of a burnt out gambling casino in Michigan, Ohio; pay cuts and military privatisation...bombs in Iraq. There is a sense of disquiet and unease, of frustration and irritation that seems to pervade contemporary social relations: accidents waiting to happen, sleeper cells, and viral mutations. Social relations seem to be informed and deformed by what we might call 'a "logic" of the spring' characterised by a volatility that creates the conditions for the rapid accumulation of cause-consequence leading to a hyperventilating rhythm of boom-bust, escalation and collapse. Small scale events trigger repercussion in a cascading domino-like effect of connection and disconnection, accretion and amplification, building fly-by-night or footloose organizations. Isolated and ephemeral events may appear disconnected by space and time, by issue and agenda, but given this new logic of the social all manner of bastard and heterogeneous organizations are surfacing through linkages and connectivity that sustains an agitated, volatile state of being. Organization seems suspended on the brittle tinder sticks of a contemporary 'nervous condition' (Taussig, 1992), compounded and compressed by a multitude of forces combining control, repression, subordination, subjugation and *ressentiment* with spontaneity, counter-insurgency, resistance, ever more bizarre escape attempts (Cohen and Taylor, 1993), and the insatiable desire for vitality and liberation.

It is difficult to catch our breath and take stock of these conditions, and grammar may well be a necessary casualty of contemporary political struggles. This edition of ephemera is preoccupied with different forms of 'writing:labour' engaged in struggles of this kind. From debates about the contribution of labour process analysis to the understanding of emancipatory struggles in organization, through to a treatise on the England national football team as a maternal 'breast' that turns spectators into consumers who begin to resemble new forms of labour, *ephemera* 5.1 assembles a series of apparently disconnected studies. In appearance only, because there is a multitude of ways of reading, extending, and connecting with these pieces that may build temporary alliances and heterotopia/utopias that give vent and courage to further acts of experimentation and liberation. We call this 'writing:labour' because we see

writing as possible forms of praxis. Indeed, all writing is practice on one level. And writing is what ties together all our contributors. They are first and foremost scholars, writers, researchers, academics, or employees of a university that compels them to write, or at least publish. Writing is, inevitably, a material intervention in the social relations out of which it has been formed and to which it seeks to represent or respond. Writing is a practice that intensifies experience, whether one is reading or re-reading Harry Braverman and the corpus of labour process literature – as Stephen Jaros does in his piece on the possible extension of ‘core labour process theory’ (cf. Thompson, 1990) – or rewriting ethnographic stories of employee ‘identity work’ that helps illuminate the possibility of post-dualistic states of consciousness and being, as McInnes and Beech suggest.

The move from Braverman to Krishnamurti that this edition of ephemeria proposes seems to form a line of flight that may be too fanciable for some. A whole series of questions and inconsistencies seem to emerge and call out for treatment and debate. For example, Jaros seems to operate with a highly focused and defined understanding of subjectivity and identity, which may be functionally essential in terms of his desire to develop a revised core labour process theoretical framework that can help make ‘a contribution to empowering employees’. McInnes and Beech, on the other hand, work from an attentiveness to the self-overcoming and transcendental dynamics inherent to human subjectivity that takes us beyond and outside of any pragmatic compromise that restrains Being as utility and employment. Our struggle with ‘time, fear and suffering’ may well be the motivation for this editorial desire to construct a linear narrative from beginning to ‘end’, from closure to openness in the treatment of subjectivity. Beeston in his contribution, however, helps us see how ‘to lean forward and write’ in ways that overcome, rather than simply dream of an escape from methodological inhibition, to realise a praxis of ‘writing’s hard labour’ that turns our insides out and opens spaces of intimacy and empathy between our Others. Between our Others is this heterotopia of writing that invites multiple assemblages, rerouting and rewiring, calling out for question, further debate, reversals, extensions and FIRE.

In ‘Writing Method’ one is taught to listen differently. Perhaps we may even begin to learn his ‘writing method’, or maybe even our own ‘writing method’ that compels a similar kind of subjective disappropriation to that of Krishnamurti, but in this giving up of the humanist self we may be leaning more towards that space of literature of which Blanchot speaks rather than the transcendentalism of certain strains of Eastern mysticism. Beeston writes in a rhythm of post-industrial angularity that merges fluidity with interruption, spasm and jump cuts with the flow of the iambic pentameter to challenge the deskilling and specialisation of methodology. Somewhere between a speaking and writing, or a ‘saying’ and ‘the said’, to cite Levinas – and therefore, until this moment (perhaps), to fail the ethical challenge posed by his writing – Beeston opens up a possible ‘3<sup>rd</sup> eye’ in organization and work. His writing comes from elsewhere and some may find it difficult or obscure. This would be a grave injustice to the clarity that is there, in the sonorous clanging, if we may call it thus, of the texture that he conjures, a texture which is ‘there’ on the cusp of awareness and self-consciousness, at the limits of our knowing in the undernourished ‘second sight’ of our impoverished (post)modern being. The implications for organization remain profound.

Ten Bos considers the 'possibility of formless life' in the writings of Giorgio Agamben and traces the labour process back to Plato. Like McInnes and Beech, Ten Bos finds way of challenging the teleology inherent to western thinking but goes back to Aristotle in order to uncover the tenacity of its hold on our traditional ways of thinking and writing. Teleological thinking arises in response to the comparative statics of Plato, and it is Plato who is arguably the first theorist of deskilling and the degradation of work. 'Quantity and quality are therefore more easily produced when a man specializes appropriately on a single job for which he is naturally fitted, and neglects all the others', Plato (1971) writes. He sought to banish time from the ideal state so that there was no development; the worker must stick to his task and specialised expertise so that every individual becomes a cog in the bureaucratized and Taylorized machine of the Republic. Aristotle offered some improvement on this reification and petrification. To ensure the realisation of virtue, vital to the integrity of society and its institutions, individuals were encouraged and 'cultivated' in ways that prompted them to strive towards the 'divine', instituting a kind of Maslovian journey towards self-realisation or, indeed, self-overcoming. Following this logic we arrive at that familiar humanist or human relations style injunction that individuals need a diversity of roles and tasks and crave the development of new skills and ever more complex activity within the context of a broad, ongoing challenge that is personal growth and maturity. However, this confines and disciplines individuals to the fate of a restrictive and teleological movement that maintains the means-ends utility that subjugates Being as labour.

In his writing and through his writing Agamben shows how 'the human' is part of a more extended mode of Being that insists upon the formless and constantly inspires the quest to break free of all utility and telos. It is perhaps through dancing that (wo)man recovers the formless as a condition of possibility for life and community, and in itself Agamben's writing is a form of dance that invites and provokes. Sarah Gilmore in her extended review of the 'England National Team and the Lovemark' might see the exclusion of dancing from the terraces of the stadium as part of a campaign to domesticate and discipline supporters so that they can be made customers of multinational corporate capital football. As customers they perform many of the functions associated with the traditions of labour familiar to students of the labour process. However, Gilmore shows how attachment and dependency is cultivated through group belonging, but this identification is ambivalent and is always at risk of spilling over into frustration, disappointment and violence. Her analysis is Kleinian in approach, but adds to our understanding of the complexity of forces at play in social relations and organization. Gilmore opens up ways of thinking about the complexity of subjectivity as a media of power and resistance, and retains an understanding of the unpredictability and volatility of the individual/collective as media and outcome of organization, as locus or trigger for assemblage and connection.

David Jacobs collects evidence of the rise of internet activism as a democratic challenge to the republican imperialism of mainstream American media and politics and in so doing adds to our sense of the (future) possibilities of struggle and resistance, particularly once we extend our awareness that anti-capital protest is not confined to a narrow segment of industrial labour. Finally, Ed Wray-Bliss reviews Bakan's *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* and finds there an accessible and insightful contribution to our understanding of the abuses of power

perpetuated by the modern corporation. Such a clear and non-technically theorised form of writing helps provide understanding to a wide and diverse audience of the way the corporation works, but also, therefore, how it might be challenged and changed.

Writing:labour comes in many forms and there are many transversal possibilities of connection across this collection of papers. Draw your own map, assemble your own coordinates. Labour is struggle, always in process. On the horizon of our thought and being we can perhaps glimpse what Agamben calls here the 'coming community'. Some workers may still make cars. Others may drive them to football matches. Yet others cause them to burn, torch them in celebration or anger, as a life-affirming, life-advancing gesture, or in ecstatic rage and *ressentiment*. One thing is clear: things have a way of getting out of hand.

**references**

- Cohen, S. and L. Taylor (1993) *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Routledge.
- Plato (1971) *The Republic*. New York: Penguin.
- Taussig, M. (1992) *The Nervous Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, P. (1990) 'Crawling from the Wreckage: The Labour Process and the Politics of Production', in D. Knights and H. Willmott (eds.) *Labour Process Theory*. London: Macmillan.

**the editors**

Damian O'Doherty is member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*.  
E-mail: damian.odoherty@mbs.ac.uk

Anthony O'Shea is member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*  
E-mail: tony.oshea@sunderland.ac.uk